



## **Speculation in Fixed Futures**

### **An Ethnography of Betting in between Legal and Illegal Economies at the Delhi Racecourse**

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## PhD thesis

Stine Simonsen Puri

# Speculation in Fixed Futures

An Ethnography of Betting in between Legal and Illegal Economies  
at the Delhi Racecourse



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# Introduction

## **Betting on a dead horse**

For the very first time I entered the Delhi racecourse. In the company of an acquaintance, Rajeev, a regular at the racecourse, we walked through the rusty iron gates. The grounds appeared run down, yet lively and joyful. Ballroom music was emanating from the loudspeakers, and men were walking with brisk steps towards the betting ring. There were men with turbans, others wearing jeans and colorful shirts, and some in formal suits. The smell of horses was mixed with the odors of sweat and cologne.

Rajeev took me directly into the members' room. Behind a counter was a large television screen showing the horses getting ready for the race. Before I had the chance to sit down, Rajeev asked me "so, do you want to bet?" I realized that this was somehow an important moment. Should I hold back and observe, or should I take a risk? "Yes, I will bet." I noticed that Rajeev was betting 1000 rupees, so I took out the same amount from my purse. Rajeev informed me that this was a "safe bet", and that I would not get a large return if I won. He steered me towards the favorite horse, ORIENTAL SPEED, and made his own bet on a "long shot". Together we handed our money over to a young man who ran outside to place the bets for us.

Before I realized it, the gates had opened and the horses were running. The music was replaced by a commentator speaking quickly in English with a British accent. It was impossible to pick up what he said because of the tempo of their speech and the scratchy sound of the speakers. As the horses entered the final turn, horse number four was in the lead. It dawned on me that this was "my" horse running well in the lead. My attention focused on the horse; he looked strong and I felt a rush. "You are winning!" Rajeev told me enthusiastically. He put his hand out towards the runner who had placed the bet for us and asked him to give me 2000 rupees. I became excited. Just before I won, something happened.

It was as if the horse had been struck. His speed suddenly decreased and he tumbled forward as three other horses quickly sped by. ORIENTAL SPEED finally fell to the ground, only a couple of lengths before the finish line. He was dead.

I was in complete shock. My initial thought was to that this was my fault, that I had somehow cursed the horse by betting on it. My next thought was that this is a sign of bad luck for this study, and that maybe I should choose to study another venue. I held back my tears.

My companion, on the other hand, was laughing. “You lost,” he said – he had also lost himself. Rajeev told me that someone had probably secretly paid someone to drug the horse in order to manipulate the outcome and profit from betting. We went outside, the music started playing again and the dead horse was moved to the side of the track and covered with a dark blanket. The people around us started discussing the upcoming race.

My intention for revisiting this experience at the Delhi racecourse in October 2009 here is to set the stage for a study on horse betting in which the horses, paradoxically, are not the central actors. The example I have given above reveals a practice of speculation involving the people behind the horses – many of whom are believed to be oriented towards the betting markets and, subsequently, concealed monetary transactions.

### **Aim and argument**

The goal of this thesis is to examine the dynamic of speculation in betting on horses in illegal and legal betting economies in India. The research is based on six months of fieldwork at the Delhi racecourse from September 2009 to March 2010, as well as a short follow-up research trip in October 2011. In the thesis I ask these questions: How is contingency imagined at the racecourse and acted upon through betting? In which ways do illegal and legal economies coexist? I argue that bettors interpret the Delhi racecourse as a site of deception, and that betting is a speculation in concealed economies. An ethnographic study focusing on the racing betting market enables an examination of speculation in an economic microcosm of contemporary India, tied both to specifics of Indian economy as well as to global developments in technologies for betting and finance.

Horse race betting is one of the only legal forms of gambling in India. Despite this there is a larger parallel market for illegal betting operating inside its racecourses. This predominately occurs because unwanted taxation is an inherent part of the legal betting system. But there are numerous other reasons to place a wager in the illegal betting market, one of which is the distrust in the legal betting channels considered to be subject to corruption. This means that in Delhi only miniscule amount of money collected through established channels is put towards the racecourse’s maintenance, upkeep and prizes. This lack of resources does not just result in a decaying racecourse – it also creates fewer incentives for the horse owners and jockeys to win.

At the Delhi racecourse it is commonly speculated that poor jockeys living in the slums surrounding the racecourse are easily paid off to follow instructions to lose a race. This is the

economic ground upon which the bettors shape their wagering intentions, assuming that the main goal of all agents is money, and that this money is to be made from the betting market and not necessarily from winning a race. There is no prestige to be gained from backing a winner. Losing a race with a favorite horse is thus more lucrative than winning with the same horse.

Furthermore, the racecourse is visited by the wider public only once a year during the Derby. It is usually frequented by regular bettors who come daily or weekly to bet on the same horses running again and again. Therefore, the likelihood of fixed races or attempts to control the outcome by various actors is always present. In the case described above, this was done by drugging the horse. But cheating is most commonly believed to occur by holding the horse back to prevent it from winning. Betting is thus not carried out in the traditional sense of betting on the potential of horses. Instead it is done on the basis of how the bettors believe people are controlling the outcome. So on the one hand betting is a speculation on the intentions of people considered to be untrustworthy and driven by monetary reward. On the other hand this speculation is an investment in a betting market existing in between illegal and legal economies.

At the Delhi racecourse, potential deceptions are acted upon, and concern for human greed is expressed. Rather than being subject to a system of dishonest men ready to use all available tricks for their own profit, it is still possible to engage actively with this system and attempt to take advantage of it. From the ethnography I suggest that the idea of fixed futures does not provide a threat to the betting industry, but rather, it is part of its attraction. The idea of manipulated races, where it is not only the old elite horse owners who have an influence on the future, opens the racecourse as a speculative space to a public of people from different socio-economic layers prone to betting.

In this thesis, I work with betting from an anthropological approach to gambling, in which gambling is explored as a social, cultural and economic practice rather than as a pathological phenomenon (Jansbøl 2009, 83; Cassidy 2010, 139). I am not claiming that horse race bettors at the racecourse are not having major social and economic problems as a consequence of their betting. Nevertheless, the Delhi racecourse is not approached as a site of distortion and disorders, but as a site tied up with local and global economic and social structures. The racecourse thus offers a compelling place to study practices in a speculative economy on the fringes of global financial capitalism.

With the title concept of fixed futures, I am making a link to the financial market for futures as a form of derivative through which one can speculate in developments in prices of products.

Furthermore, I want to emphasize the future existing as a product to be wagered upon by the addicted gambler. At the racecourse, where the majority of bettors come daily to ease their addiction, not only do they speculate on the possibility of the future being fixed – the fix of the addiction also lies in the future. This is to say that the main excitement is not simply winning, but the possibility of winning in a space by predicting a fixed future before it happens. It is about revealing the deception at work.

In my approach to betting I work within the framework of economic anthropology, but also I try to bring together existing research in the subfields of anthropology of gambling and the anthropology of finance as I work towards an anthropology of speculation, focused on how knowledge, value and relationships develop in a speculative space in between legal and illegal economies. I have chosen to describe the ethnographic field through a focus on three bettors, their bookmakers and friends. The study follows them in their daily routines at the Delhi racecourse as they socialize at the racecourse, place bets in the hectic betting ring, laugh over wins and losses, and, after the racing day is over, gather for food and drinks at bars or in their homes and discuss past and upcoming races. Furthermore, I explore the legal history of horse race betting, the developments in betting technologies over time, as well as the spatial organization of the Indian betting industry as a whole.

The chapters in the thesis illuminate how ideas of deception in economic systems frame gambling legislation (chapter one), predictive procedures among bettors (chapter two), friendships among bettors and bookmakers (chapter three), the generation of economic value through odds (chapter four), and the distribution of money in legal and illegal economies and the use of and neglect of technologies for betting (chapter five).

### **Wagering methodology**

The results of the study are primarily based on participant observation among bettors at the Delhi racecourse over six months. This was a method which, first of all, gave insight into engagements with contingency (chapter two), betting practices with bookmakers (chapter four) and with the betting platform of the totalisator (chapter five). As part of the participant observation, I entered the racecourse as a visitor paying the daily entrance fee. I was vocal about my purpose of being there both to bettors, the race club management and bookmakers. Nevertheless, participating in the

betting game by placing bets myself allowed me to be positioned as a bettor and not only an observing researcher.

In existing studies on gambling in anthropology, it is not always clear whether the researcher has been participating in the wagering. An exception is the work of David Hayano, who, as part of an ethnographic study on poker players in the US, discusses his own participation at the card tables, which he argues was a mode of access to the illegal gambling field (Hayano 1982, 143-158). That being said, he did not announce his purpose for participation, which not only represents an ethical problem. It may also have limited his use of various research methodologies, such as interviews and surveys, as it locked him into the position of a gambler. Kåre Jansbøl emphasizes his own position as an observer, despite noting that he had previously been a regular gambler. He argues that being an observer of gambling games is a position shared with gamblers who spend a long time watching others play, and that observing is therefore also a kind of participant observation (Jansbøl 2009). I agree that being an observer can be an informative position. But on the occasions when I was not betting at the Delhi racecourse, where most people bet on all the races, I was not included in conversations with others as what was shared at the racecourse depended on the assumption that everyone had a stake in the upcoming races. In other words, participation meant betting and not merely observing the races. So as part of an ethnographic study on gambling and betting, it was an advantage to be able to position myself in various ways – as a participant in the betting, as an observer in the background and as a researcher with various questions.

Firstly, wagering helped me to establish rapport with my research participants, encouraging them to share ideas with me that they would have been reluctant to had I stood outside these activities as an observer. This was especially important considering the moral judgment there is on gambling in India. As a bettor I positioned myself as morally neutral towards betting, and in doing so became a complicit bettor, which opened up some alternative moral spaces. Secondly, spending time figuring out what to bet in the company of bettors and placing wagers allowed me to understand various ways of betting which were otherwise unmentioned or invisible, especially in terms of the relationship between bettor and bookmaker.

As part of my participant observation, I bet on the majority of races with amounts ranging between 100 and 3000 rupees. By wagering myself, I could get first-hand information on illicit money transactions. It was an example of how the method of participant observation could reveal something otherwise untold. That said, I became aware that as a bettor I was also positioned in accordance with the amount I was betting. For a period of time I would bet a maximum of 500

rupees on each race. One day I decided to bet 1000 rupees and was automatically charged a lower betting fee due to the fact that bookmakers tend to tax bets below 1000 rupees, leaving the rest of the wagers unreported. No one had informed me of this difference, neither the bettors nor bookmakers, yet my own stake revealed an insight into the existence of different terms for betting depending on the amount wagered. Betting participant observation therefore also depends, to some degree, on the funds available to the researcher and/or the success of the wagers themselves, which perpetually fund the betting expenses.

When I arrived in Delhi in 2009 to do fieldwork on gambling in India, I wanted to get an overview of the various existing forms of gambling in Delhi before making a decision about which form to study. Among other things, I was considering a study of cricket betting as well as legal and illegal lotteries. After a week of researching the different fields, it was the opportunity for embedded fieldwork that led me choose the racecourse. The racecourse was a site where I, as a participant observer, could be part of a daily routine extending over a period of six hours, which was not the case with the illegal lotteries hidden in the streets of Old Delhi and cricket betting, which occurs mostly via cell phone. The racecourse was also a site where I could look into the concurrent existence of legal and illegal betting markets.

My initial research questions were inspired by my insight into the existence of gambling in various Hindu myths. Based on the mythology, I wanted to look into how gambling practices of the present were tied to notions of destiny. My working title was initially “Gambling with destiny. An anthropological study on gambling and ludomania in India”. When I entered the field, I quickly came to realize that fate and other related Hindu concepts were not the most pertinent contexts in which to understand betting at the racecourse. On the contrary, gambling was considered a distortion from what one was given in life and what one ought to be doing – an individual act beyond moral parameters. Gambling myths did have an interpretative role in the understanding of the racecourse, yet the bettors themselves specifically pointed towards aspects of deception and cheating in the mythology. I realized that thinking of future outcomes in terms of otherworldliness was closer to my own preconceived framework of evaluation than the more immediate concerns of the bettors. As a result I revised my research queries and asked more open-ended questions oriented at how bettors understood and engaged with contingency through betting.

When I described my project to Rajeev on ‘the day of the dead horse’, before he took me to the racecourse, he told me “No one is going to talk to you. They [the bettors] are busy”. It was true that they were busy. At the racecourse, I had difficulty speaking with bettors for more than ten

minutes at a time. Just as I was starting to ask questions about their family, their beliefs, their work situations and so on, they would get up and leave me alone as they went to bet. Whereas I in the beginning saw it as a methodological limitation to my focus on participant observation in the field, I came to understand it as being central to the sociality of the space, which is framed by the rhythm of the racecourse.

As a bettor I could become part of the tempo of the racecourse, in which there was a race every 30 minutes. Rather than starting fragmented conversations about their lives outside the racecourse again and again, I engaged in conversations related to betting on the races that were about to come, while leaving the other conversations to less distracting environments outside the racecourse or conducting them as interviews. As a bettor, I myself became oriented towards predicting the future whilst doing the calculations and speaking with people (chapter two), evaluating odds (chapter four), and making the needed connections to bookmakers (chapter three), all of which were required to be part of this field.

During my fieldwork I spoke daily to a large number of bettors from various backgrounds. However, in this thesis, as mentioned, I have chosen to mainly concentrate on three bettors, Rajeev, Abi and Bobbi<sup>1</sup>. The three informants are selected as they represent three different economic and social backgrounds. They also exemplify three different positions inside the racecourse in terms of their predictive procedures, the spaces they use in the racecourse as well as the betting platforms and types of odds they prefer. They cover a wide spectrum of existing betting practices and social relationships at the racecourse. Focusing on these three bettors, and their bookmakers and friends, enables me to create more coherence in my ethnography.

I gained access to all my informants, except for Rajeev, through the racecourse. My informants were not people who had subsequently let me into their life of betting after I had established a relationship of trust with them outside the racecourse. Rather, I met them at the racecourse and then, gradually, some of them let me into their lives outside the racecourse. From the vantage point of the racecourse, the daily lives of the bettors seemed secret and hidden (chapter three). Yet, through our daily companionship at the racecourse, and my insistence to talk about more than the upcoming races, I gained access to settings that were more intimate, including their homes. In these spaces I was able to better comprehend the boundaries between the two environments.

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<sup>1</sup> All names in the thesis are pseudonyms

I also spent time with groups of bettors outside the racecourse. Being in the company of my informants in their homes as well as with others in public spaces, such as membership clubs, cafes, discotheques and hotel rooms (used for watching cricket matches while betting over the phone), allowed me to explore the friendships of bettors beyond the racecourse, and to understand the kinds of favors they do for each other and their patterns of consumption beyond the racecourse (chapter three).

I went on shorter field trips to racecourses in Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mysore, Mumbai and Pune, and further afield to off-track betting centers in Mumbai and Meerut. These trips allowed me to understand how the racecourses varied and how this was tied to economic structures as well as regional stereotypes. This also enabled me to understand how the racecourses were interconnected.

I visited bettors and other people working in the industry from the village next to the stables surrounding the racecourse. From there I was able to speak with jockeys, horse owners, trainers, seizers, riding boys, 'runners', 'cutters' and the staff at the race club. Yet, the subject of my research from the outset was specifically betting and not the racing industry. Had I focused more than I did on horse owners and trainers, as well as breeders, the horses may have had a more significant role in my thesis. With a focus on bettors, I came to realize that it was the dynamic between bettors and bookmakers that was central to understanding the speculative economy of Delhi racecourse, and not the role of the owners, trainers or breeders in the racing industry.

The language at the racecourse was a mix between English and Hindi, yet the regulars were predominantly Hindi speaking (75%). Whereas my adequacy in conversational Hindi allowed me to speak with the majority at the racecourse, those I spent the most time with also spoke English. The more detailed conversations I was able to have with the bilingual informants allowed me to get a much more nuanced understanding of their betting practices and lives than I could glean from the bettors who primarily spoke Hindi. As language is often tied to class, my varied communication with Hindi and English speaking informants ultimately results in a bias in my study in which the middle and upper classes are represented more than the working classes. I could have overcome this limitation through the use of an interpreter, however, this would have created a distance, especially considering the guardedness tied to moral stigma around betting.

## Surveying the grounds

In order to get an overview of the betting population as a whole, and for the purpose of triangulation between methods (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), I developed a survey of 20 questions during the fieldwork, which I asked an Indian female anthropologist to conduct verbally. She gathered information from 109 respondents. From the survey responses I collected information on the characteristics of the bettors as well as the betting practices. I used the data to conduct a quantitative descriptive analysis, cross-tabulator analysis and regression analysis, which, among other things, enabled me to identify patterns of betting tied to class (chapter five).

When working with the data I became aware of things I could have done differently in order to improve the quality of the survey data. Some of the questions could have benefited from being in the form of multiple choice. Furthermore, there were a number of elaborations that I did not address in the survey, as I only came to know their relevance when working with my data after the fieldwork. These involve making a differentiation between licensed and unlicensed bookmakers, betting on credit or cash, as well as the amount most often bet rather than minimum and maximum bets. This could have enabled a better estimation of the extent of the illegal economies at the racecourse (chapter five). The qualitative research enabled me to identify exceptions in the survey data, such as ‘cutters’, who are people from the working class betting for people from the upper class. They could also impose a bias in the survey, as in their answers they were in fact representing two persons in one: themselves and their clients.

Another bias was tied to the methodology. One of my close informants told me in secrecy that he had given the wrong information to my assistant in response to three out of the 20 questions so his identity could not be revealed. On the one hand this pointed towards potential problems with the validity of my survey. On the other hand this information made me confident that the fieldwork was vital and had enabled me to establish the kind of relationships through which I could create a situation of confidentiality.

During the fieldwork, I decided to do less formal interviews than I had originally planned as I felt that, as with the survey, the informants would attempt to hide themselves in fear of being discovered since part of what I would be recording involved morally and legally condemning practices. So in total I recorded seven semi-structured interviews, two of which were done with an interpreter. In one interview I had established what I thought was a confidential atmosphere, but I was still requested to erase parts of the interview where the bettor had said something that he did not want disclosed. After I had turned off the recorder, we continued to converse in more informal

manner and he said: “I am telling you as a friend; I am being honest with you – I have only given you 30% of the truth”. Honesty was not a matter of telling the full truth, but just a small part of it.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I could not help but question how much of what I had been told was in fact true. I had been studying a practice of interpreting possible lies and concealments, while being witness to how bettors were hiding information from each other and their families. I started doubting my informants and was suspicious as to whether the more rousing details they told me about their lives were really just a thrill-seeking way of capturing my attention.

I had dealt with this mostly by avoiding the interview as a method, and thereby positioned myself as a witness and an accomplice. Looking back upon the fieldwork, however, the potential lie was not simply a bias to be avoided, but actually a key object of my study. The ‘truth’ was often a semi-truth; the rest was hidden. What came to interest me in my work with the data was not so much compiling truths as it was examining the speculative realm of concealment and possible deception. The validity of the information in such a space, therefore, is not simply considered in terms of the accuracy of the facts. The information, whether true or not, partial or exhaustive, is information on a speculative space in between the known and the unknowable. Using a variety of methods, while moving in and out of various spaces, enabled me to understand what information and truths existed and were foregrounded in which situations.

### **A risking position**

Prior to the fieldwork I had spent close to two years in Delhi: one year as a student at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, seven months of fieldwork at a Bharatanatyam dance school, and two months organizing my own wedding to an American of North Indian descent. This meant that I had incorporated some general codes of conduct, which made it easier for me to enter the racecourse. More so, as a woman married into a Punjabi upper class family from Delhi, I could to some extent position myself in relationship to existing social categories. In the field I was carrying the marriage symbol of the *mangal sutra* and mostly wearing *salwar kameez*, the traditional clothes for women in North India. Yet, my position as a woman married into an Indian family only had little significance, as what defined me was that I was to be found betting at the racecourse and that I was a white woman.

At the onset I was primarily spending my time with a respected bettor, Rajeev, in the members’ room, and people appraised me as a British horse expert. As I started talking to more

men, I was also perceived as a potential girlfriend. Eventually I realized that it was speculated that I was married into an Indian family, yet a prostitute, making money from sex for the sake of betting in the guise of a researcher. The potential for deception in their relationship to me thus did not have to do with betting but with sex. The few other women that came to the racecourse could be counted on one hand at a time (1% based on the survey), and all were accompanied by men, except for a divorced woman, a madam, a prostitute and me. The idea of me being a prostitute did not just reflect a predominantly male gaze; the females at the racecourse also asked me about whether I had male friends, which was another way of saying ‘sexual relationships’ and were surprised and also suspicious when I insisted that I was faithful to my husband.

The racecourse was not considered a proper place for women and the friends at the racecourse who I became close to, and knew I was not a prostitute, tried to protect me, for example, by providing me access to enclosed areas such as the members’ room at the Delhi racecourse and to VIP areas when I went to other racecourses around the country. The few female bettors for the most part had ‘runners’ do all of their betting transactions for them, so they could remain sitting in less hectic spaces. I, however, was walking around all corners of the racecourse.

My position represented a disadvantage during my fieldwork. The challenge was that at times I felt that I had to protect myself from bettors who were showing interest in talking to me, as I was unsure of their intentions. During the fieldwork I was somewhat guarded and therefore behaved differently from the usual approach a fieldworker adopts, defined by an openness to let the field guide the direction of the study. Again and again I was offered rides home from the racecourse and people would ask me for my cell phone number, which presented opportunities for new information that I nevertheless often chose to dismiss.

On numerous occasions my own intentions were misunderstood. This was despite my years of training in India to send the right signals in terms of dressing, body language and avoiding eye contact. With each of my key informants who I came to spend time with outside the racecourse, I had to go through awkward moments: a hand on my thigh, attempts for a kiss and presents in the form of money or a mini-dress. I had to confront them consistently in order to reinforce my position as a researcher. At the racecourse I had a tendency to spend more time with elderly men above 70, as I thought that at least the age difference would put me in a different category, which it did, but only to some extent.

So throughout the fieldwork I had to walk a very fine line in order to protect myself. Yet, coming from what was considered a respectable Indian family – which bettors primarily referred to

with questions related to the home-address of my mother-in-law, which is a marker of class in Delhi – I did feel somewhat protected. In the end I was considered to have the connections needed to harass anyone who wanted to do anything unpleasant to me, which is an important parameter for personal security in Delhi.

My gender also provided me with a distinct advantage. First of all it gave me insight into aspects of the morality of betting tied to gender (chapter three). It also gave me an opportunity to speak with a number of bettors' wives who were open to talking with me, as well as the small proportion of female bettors who were surprisingly more closed about their personal lives than the male bettors. But, more importantly, my gender and ethnicity also provided me with the advantage that everyone wanted to be able to give me something that I wanted so they could be seen in my company – and what I wanted was information. I was privy to information not shared with others at the racecourse and was told secrets outside the racecourse that I was aware neither their families nor their betting companions knew about. Thus, not only was I aware of the partial truths, I was also positioned in such a way that people sought out information on races and other people through me, as they assumed that I was well informed, because everyone was eager to speak with me.

### **The Delhi Racecourse**

The Delhi racecourse was founded in 1940. Whereas the beautiful and grand Calcutta Royal Turf Club, built in 1820, stands out as a legacy of British power in India (Frith 1976), mentioned in today's guidebooks as a remaining social center of the city, the Delhi racecourse, on the contrary, almost seems like a monument to this declining power. There is absolutely no prestige associated with it, which led people to question again and again why I would do a study on Indian horseracing in Delhi and not Kolkata or Mumbai.

In spite of this, the Delhi racecourse is the center for horse betting nationwide. The Delhi betting scene provides the best odds because of the competition between bookmakers doing untaxed business. At the racecourse there are 'cutters', who bet for people in absentia from beyond Delhi, bettors who they are in contact with via cell phone. Many of the largest wagers go by way of the Delhi racecourse. The Delhi racecourse is also considered to be the racecourse with the largest number of fixed races.

The Delhi racecourse might have little prestige both nationally and internationally, but it has all the elements needed for a game to be manipulated with. There are the inequalities of the surroundings of both the economic elite and the slum, which enables poor jockeys to be easily paid to manipulate the outcome of the races. There are the second-rate racehorses, with little pride attached to them by either the bettors or owners, which enables them to be used as pawns in the game. There is the disproportionately low prize money<sup>2</sup>, mostly because of illegal bookmaking, which creates little incentive to win a race in comparison with the money that can be won from betting on a horse with long odds that was not supposed to win. There is the loose regulation of the sport and the suspect absence of police. There is the competing private bookmaking system, which has been banned in many other countries in order to avoid their role in race-fixing. There is the lack of media coverage and public awareness to keep the sport in check, and there is the location in a city with institutionalized political corruption that in part feeds a larger black economy of concealed money.

The Delhi racecourse is located directly across the street from the Prime Minister's residence, its other neighbors are the Indian Air Force, the police headquarters, an upscale shopping market and an elite membership club. The wide, heavily trafficked road to the racecourse is dotted with military guards with machine guns perched on lookout stands in front of the Prime Minister's residence. Neither they nor the neighbors from the police pay any attention to the racecourse.

Knowledge about the existence of a racecourse on that street mostly stems from the fact that the Prime Minister's house is on the address "7 Racecourse Road", which is a popular phrase not unlike the use of the term "White House". Despite the positioning of racetracks more or less in the backyard of his house, at the time of my fieldwork the Prime Minister had never paid a visit to the racecourse. Horseracing, which in the past was a sport of the British Raj and the Indian royalty, is considered by those in Delhi who know of the racecourse as a place for degenerate gamblers.

The Delhi racecourse does not even make it into the local newspaper. Horseracing is given little public attention compared with other colonial sports. For me it was a daily struggle to get to the racecourse by rickshaw. In some cases the driver did not even know that there was a racecourse there. In other cases it was outside their imagination that I, as a relatively respectable white woman, wanted to go there, and they would instead take me to the Gymkhana Club next door<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The total prize money paid during the season 2008-2009 was 49.501.270 rupees (Delhi Race Club Ltd. 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Since the time of my fieldwork "Racecourse Road" has come to signify the new Metro stop, which opened in late 2010.

Looking at the Delhi racecourse from a bird's-eye view, the racetracks only form a U shape. As with other racetracks in the country, it is a yearly struggle to maintain a lease over land, partly because of governmental resistance to gambling, and partly because of the racecourses being situated on some of the most expensive pieces of land in India. At the Delhi racecourse, which was built long after the heydays of horseracing in India and during the declining British power in India, there was never any more land allocated than a U shape, which sets a natural limit on the more prestigious long distance races such as the Derby, which is shorter in Delhi than at other racecourses.

To get to the entrance of the racecourse, you get of the trafficked road and drive or walk up a small bumpy dirt road with people selling cigarettes as well as the day's racing programs in between the parking lot full of auto rickshaws and well-kept cars. At the end of the road you see a rusty iron gate with a hand-painted sign which reads 'Delhi Racecourse Ltd. 1940'. On both sides of the entrance there are lines of people. On one side is the line for purchasing entry tickets, which cost approximately 40 rupees, and on the other side is a line for the deposit of cell phones.

On the road leading to the racecourse there is no sign referring to the racecourse, but a large sign that says 'Jaipur Pologround'. This is because inside the racetrack the land was used as a more well-known polo ground. When there are polo matches, in-between the races luxury cars could pass the tracks. Even though the polo matches were well covered in the media, they could only be attended by invitation (for the social elite). Inside the racetrack was yet another sporting ground, a golf course with access restricted to members of the Indian army. The Delhi racecourse on the contrary was open to the public, and was surrounded by a very different atmosphere of anticipation compared to the polo ground where there is no organized betting.

Based on the information from the survey of 109 respondents, approximately 3000 bettors come to the races from all corners of the city and beyond Delhi every day to bet amounts ranging between 10 rupees and 500,000 rupees per bet (see Appendix A). The majority was from the middle classes (45% with a middle class income between 17,000 and 83,000 rupees – 73% when including lower and upper middle classes as well). Overall it is a masculine space, with less than 1% of the crowd being women. Mirroring the variety of class, there is also a relatively equal distribution of the four categories of castes, with a slight majority of Kshatriyas. Among the bettors 75% are from Delhi, and 13.9% travel to the racecourse from outside the city in Greater Delhi and beyond. The majority of the respondents between 13 and 80 years old have been coming to the racecourse for more than 10 years. The attendees were regulars and all of the respondents came a minimum of

once a week, with 54% coming to the racecourse every single day. The largest age groups were in their 30s or above 60.

Among the regulars are a variety of attendees. Some are upper class elderly men who live in the expensive residential area around the racecourse. There are also men from the middle classes, some of whom have been working in the air force or other governmental jobs through which they have been exposed to horseracing. In addition are the young *nouveau riche* men betting large sums of money acquired either from real estate or the black market, as well as lower-middle class shop owners betting relatively small amounts. The entry ticket of 40 rupees keeps the poorest away. As with the Delhi population, they are predominantly Hindu, however, with a slightly larger proportion of Sikhs compared to the overall public.

Inside there are a few concrete buildings with yellow paint chipping off, broken plastic chairs, hand-painted result boards, and old, poor quality televisions hanging about. The first thing visitors see inside the racecourse is the paddock, a fenced round space where the horses do a couple of laps, where the bettors can assess their condition, and where the jockeys mount the horses and receive instructions before the race. Only very few people make it to the paddock and they usually choose a space close to one of the televisions. Some even prefer to follow the live races in front of the televisions rather than walking over to the general stand to watch. Delhi hosts live racing approximately 50 days of the year, most often on Tuesdays, with a break between May and August during the months of high heat and humidity. However, the racecourse is open almost every day of the year (except during June and July) for betting on the over 3000 races held annually in India. During this time races from Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, Bangalore, Mysore or Hyderabad are shown on the closed circuit televisions suspended around the racecourse. The Delhi and Mumbai races are the most popular days, with the Kolkata and Mysore races drawing smaller crowds.

Once inside, one follows the cycle of races over a period of approximately six hours between noon and 6pm. There are races every 30 minutes, each lasting less than two minutes. During the intervals the bettors hang out, most often in groups, at various corners of the racecourse. There are three general stands on which spectators can sit on one of the many broken red plastic chairs, and a small members' room inside the racecourse with air conditioning and heavy curtains in front of the windows. There is the modern café with comfortable booths and tables, coffee and pizza. There are chairs in front of the street kitchens *dhabas* serving the typical North Indian fare, and there are the benches placed around the racecourse, usually in front of television screens.

It is only possible to bet 20 minutes prior to the upcoming race with bookmakers, and the bettors break away from their groups during this time. The betting ring consists of a large covered area in which it is possible to do fixed odds betting with bookmakers from either one of the 25 bookmaking booths that form a circle, or from unlicensed bookmakers walking on the floor of the betting ring. Ten minutes leading up to a race, the betting ring becomes saturated and most bettors can be found here at this time, eagerly moving around in search for good odds.

In addition to the betting ring there are 10 operating totalisator booths spread out across the racecourse. Inside each booth is an old PC and an operator who types in the wagers and returns a printed receipt. The totalisators are less popular and if there is a queue, it is usually short. At the racecourse, the vast majority of betting is done through the bookmakers (according to my survey 93% bet with bookmakers), who only report a small percentage for taxation.

After each race is over, the bettors can collect their money if they have been successful with their wager. Simultaneously, there are photos taken of the winning horse, jockey, trainer, seizer and the horse owner on the racetracks, and in some cases prize ceremonies behind the paddock, which overall are of little interest to the bettors. The prize ceremonies, in which members of the elite are sometimes invited to pose along with the horses and winning parties, are just seen by bettors as merely a show to mask the real economy of betting.

Most of the racehorses running at the Delhi racecourse are living in stables together with their caretakers in the slum area adjacent to the racecourse. The horses rarely travel to run at other racecourses, and thus it is the same horses running repeatedly<sup>4</sup>. The stables are located in what is referred to as the “BR camp” or just “the village”. Aside from the horses and their caretakers, this space is mostly inhabited by families involved in the racing industry, such as jockeys and ex-jockeys, riding boys, trainers assistants, people operating the totalisators and drivers for wealthy bettors. Most of the village inhabitants are from the rural area of the state of Bihar and Rajasthan. The structure of the village consists of clay houses with tin roofs, which have been there since the 1940s when the racecourse was established, housing people employed in the upkeep of the Prime Minister’s home as well as the race club. Of those present at the racecourse, a little more than 10 percent are from the village.

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<sup>4</sup> At the Delhi racecourse in the season of 2008-2009 there were a total of 240 races and in these a total number of 336 different horses running (Delhi Race Club Ltd. 2009).

## **A galloping economy**

India's economy for the past decade has been consistently reiterated as an "emerging economy" with an impressive growth rate, which peaked during my fieldwork in 2010 at 11% (World Bank 2013). This is a development associated with the change towards neoliberal economic policies instituted since 1991 through which the economy has become more privatized and open to international corporations and investment (Kapila 2007). Foreign actors are increasingly opening their eyes to the possibilities inherent in the Indian market with its vastly growing middle class. Despite the integration into the global economy, the Indian economy seems to remain a mystery. Part of this is tied to the fact that the vast majority of the economy – and capital equivalent to 500 billion US dollars – is hidden from statistics and documents and exists as part of the "black economy" (Kumar 2002). Furthermore, most economic transactions exist as part of the informal sector, estimated at 86% of the total economy (Corbridge and Shah 2013). India rates high on corruption measures and low in terms of the level of trust in political and economic systems (Fels 2008).

Delhi today is one of the leading economic cities in India. Delhi became the capital of India in 1911 after the British colonial administration moved from Calcutta (Dupont, Tarlo, and Vidal 2002). The city was situated in an area of existing villages and had also been the center for previous empires. New Delhi was planned by British architect Edward Lutyen and consisted of an area of broad boulevards and white bungalows which were built to house both the political and military organizations as well as residencies for the British inhabitants. A new residential area developed around 'Lutyen's Delhi' both for the well-educated Indian middle and upper classes, and for people of the rural areas from the surrounding states who came to the city in search of work (Dupont 2002). It is in the heart of New Delhi that the racecourse is located.

As the capital of India, Delhi houses nearly all of its major government institutions. Industries are increasingly moving to Delhi – both Indian companies and international companies outsourcing their services – which is reinforcing the city's status not only as a political center, but also as an economic center. The mega-city is growing beyond the borders of the Delhi district and, with approximately 22 million people, it is now considered the second largest city after Mumbai. In Delhi the Indian elite lives in close proximity to India's poverty. It is a migrant city and few of its inhabitants identify themselves as being from Delhi, partly because in its current incarnation Delhi is a relatively new metropolis. A common image of Delhi is as the center of corruption in India.

In India, the popularity of horse race betting is increasing at a greater pace than the national GDP growth. In India the reported turnover for horse race betting has increased by 100% in the past ten year period, with a total reported turnover of 455 million US dollars in 2010 (International Federation of Horseracing Authorities 2013). Yet these numbers only count the small percentage, which has been channeled through the legal economy. In the same period betting through illegal channels, I hypothesize, has also been on the rise in part through the use of the cell phone, which has enabled wagering to increasingly exist independently from the racecourses' economies.

There are eight operating racecourses in India as well as approximately 40 betting outlets located in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. These sites represent some of the only legal outlets for betting. State lotteries are also legal according to the Indian constitution, yet few states choose to offer them, as gambling is a politically and morally controversial topic (Palai, Mishra, and Das 2006). Yet, as policies are state-based, two progressive states, Goa and Sikkim, have recently started allowing casinos to operate due to arguments about there being an increasing need for entertainment to cater for the growing demand. Previously Indians had to travel to Katmandu in Nepal to visit casinos. In addition to this there is a large market for various forms of betting, for example, on cricket, rainfall and cockfighting, run by illegal bookmakers in both urban and rural areas. Lotteries run by the mafia are also popular, especially in cities such as Mumbai and Delhi. The illegal betting market in 2009 was estimated at 30 billion dollars by British investors interested in entering what they saw as a fast growing market (Thompson 2009). The popularity of betting on horses goes hand in hand with a galloping economy of white and black money along with the popularity of other modes of betting.

### **An ethnography of betting**

Organized gambling in contemporary India has barely been a topic for ethnographic examination. What comes closest to it is the work of Ellen Oxfeld Basu, who as part of a study on the Chinese community of Calcutta in India has examined Mahjong Mahjong gambling within these families (Basu 1991). However, with the analytical framework being oriented towards Chinese culture, entrepreneurship and migration, the study does not bring insight into economy in India nor other existing forms of gambling in India. Apart from that I have come across a study on the socio-economic impacts on lottery and horse betting based on a survey conducted in the 1970s

(Thimmaiah 1979). However, this study, as far as I am aware, is the first ethnographic study in India focusing on gambling alone.

This, however, is not the first ethnographic examination of horse race betting. Studies have been conducted in England (Cassidy 2002, 2012, 2007, 2010; Fox 1999), in the United States, (Scott 1968; Cassidy 2007; Zola 1967; Herman 1967; Allen 2006; Rosecrance 1988; Rosecrance 1985) and Scandinavia (Jansbøl 2009; Binde 2011), some of which are based on research on racecourses and some on betting outlets. I have, however, not been able to locate a single ethnographic study of horse race betting outside a Western setting.

Rebecca Cassidy's insightful study on Newmarket in England (Cassidy 2002), considered to be the headquarters of horseracing, is the most thorough ethnographic study of horseracing. With a focus on the racing industry as a whole, of which the betting economy is a part, her informants consist not only of bettors and bookmakers, but of horse owners, breeders, jockeys and the 'lads', all actors influencing demand in the racing economy. The racecourse, for her point of view, represents the supply side of racing where ideologies concerning kinship and class, both in relationship to humans and animals, play out. I purposely focus on the racecourse and pay little attention to the racing industry and the economy of it, which is neglected by bettors and bookmakers, as this is considered to be marginal in relation to the betting economy. This puts into focus how a speculative market can exist in a relatively dissociated way from conditions concerning the production of racehorses. Thus in this study I have chosen to focus specifically on the betting economy from the vantage point of bettors and bookmakers.

In the thesis, I have not only drawn on existing research on horse race betting but also on the anthropology of gambling. Tendencies in the anthropology of gambling may be roughly categorized along a number of dominating (overlapping) approaches following trends in anthropology at large, as well as changes in the organization and legal status of gambling. In the 1960s, with the first attempts at approaching gambling as a sociological and anthropological field of study, the research was dominated by questions concerning the social function of gambling, as well as patterns of interaction among different categories of players (Zola 1967; Scott 1968). An exponent for the studies of gambling in the 1970s is Clifford Geertz's seminal text on betting on cockfighting, which sees betting as a representation of society open to symbolic interpretation (Geertz 1973). In the 1980s, gambling was examined in relationship to systems of exchange (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 56; Zimmer 1986; Hayano 1989; Goodale 1987; MacLean 1984). In the 1990s and into the 2000s studies on gambling became an entry to the study of change, risk and uncertainty, rather than stable

societies and cultures (Verdery 1995; Malaby 1999; Malaby 2003; Jansbøl 2009). The newer anthropological studies of gambling mirror a growing interest in Western settings, with a focus on modern institutionalized forms of gambling, and are concerned with legal and technological processes of change in the field of gambling tied to large scale changes in societies (Cassidy 2010, 2012; Schüll 2012; Malaby 2012; Sallaz 2006; Cattelino 2008).

Inspired by the above work, I discuss the racecourse from various angles: in terms of engagements with uncertainty (chapter two), systems of exchange (chapter three), the relevance of Geertz' study of a betting ring (chapter four), and the legal (chapter one) and technological developments (chapter five).

Yet, the body of anthropological literature on gambling and betting only takes me part of the way. Even though such ethnographies have been located in illegal economies, it is interesting to notice that gambling and betting has not been used as an entry point into systematic studies on illegal economies in the anthropology of gambling. Nevertheless, the distinction between legal and illegal economies is a focus of study dealt with in histories of gambling. Historians have used legal documents as a source to understand the concurrent existence of legal and illegal forms of gambling and how this distinction has been set in moral and fiscal historical contexts. It is for this reason that studies of the history of gambling and betting in India and elsewhere have been another source of inspiration for this thesis (Birla 2009; Chazkel 2011; Rogers 1991; Birla 2009; Munting 1996; Chinn 2004; Fabian 1999).

There has been a tendency in the anthropology of gambling to focus on the connection between gambling and communities to the extent that the monetary goal has often been neglected. The reason for this, I believe, is that the theoretical basis for understanding gambling has been sought in research on games and has been influenced mostly by the work of Johan Huizinga (Huizinga 1955) and Roger Caillois (Caillois 1961). Huizinga argues that games have been central to the development of civilization, and of *homo ludens*, and thus have an integrative property associated with them. Caillois built on Huizinga's assumptions and argued further that games have to be understood in contradiction to work. These two ideas combined mean that the ethnographer has tried to define 'the goal of the game' in a community sense in terms of its integrative properties rather than in monetary terms as a mode of profit seeking. An example of this tendency is in influential texts by authors such as Clifford Geertz, who argues that part of the betting at cockfights was to be understood as 'status gambling' rather than 'money gambling' (Geertz 1973). In the analysis, the purpose and significance of gambling and betting has thus been found beyond the

economic realm. This, however, is changing with newer research on gambling emerging, which partly involves an exploration of new sites for research beyond local small-scale communities.

When the anthropology of gambling has been situated in the field of economic anthropology it has been framed by a substantivist approach (Polanyi 1957; Dalton 1961). At the establishment of economic anthropology as a separate sub-discipline in the 1950s, the so-called *substantivists* challenged the *formalist* approach to the study of economic systems. Formalism worked on the assumption that people in gambling were acting as maximizing, calculating, profit-seeking individuals. But substantivists characterized these people as acting within social norms and along goals which were not individual and material, but integrative and collectively oriented. This approach is particularly evident in the work on gambling in the 1980s. George Dalton, as an exponent of the substantivist approach, nevertheless suggested that games represented an exception to a substantivist economic foundation oriented at the integration of communities, as the players in such setups demonstrated calculating and self-maximizing behavior (Dalton 1961, 7). Whether or not the human being can be analyzed according to the assumptions inherent in formal economic theory<sup>5</sup>, my point is that at the Delhi racecourse the bettors understood themselves and others as self-interested money driven men seeking to profit at any cost – even at the cost of lasting relationships. The economic system is thus encapsulated by an interpretation of man, which resembles some of the assumptions of the *homo economicus* rather than of *homo ludens*.

The interpretative frame of gambling is different if we move to the field of economics. In economics, betting is seen as a category of economic decision-making, which provides insight into the process of economic decision making, for example, through game theory (Williams 2003; Bruce and Johnson 2003). Game theory is an approach to the study of rational decision-making based on the assumption that the human being naturally acts as profit-maximizing individual, and it correlates with the concept of *homo economicus*, which is basic to classical economic theory (Neuman and Morgenstern 1944; Davis 1970). Examining horse race betting markets has been of interest to researchers examining decision-making under uncertainty, as the betting markets have been considered as “simple and complete” markets through which one can understand more complicated financial markets (Peirson and Blackburn 2003, 5; Bruce, Johnson, and Peirson 2012). I agree that betting markets may convey something about more complex financial markets existing

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<sup>5</sup> I suggest that the interpretation of the foundation for gambling is tied to the scale at which it exists and the kind of economic system in which it is set. There is thus a difference between playing cards with money among friends in the forest of Papua Guinea and betting with a bookmaker at a horse race in urban India. As Dalton suggested, *homo economicus* is tied specifically to the development of market economies (Dalton 1961), and the racecourse can be considered an example of a market economy for risk products.

on a larger scale. That said, betting markets are not that simple and not all markets can be easily encompassed by statistical analyses, especially in the case of markets in between legal and illegal economies.

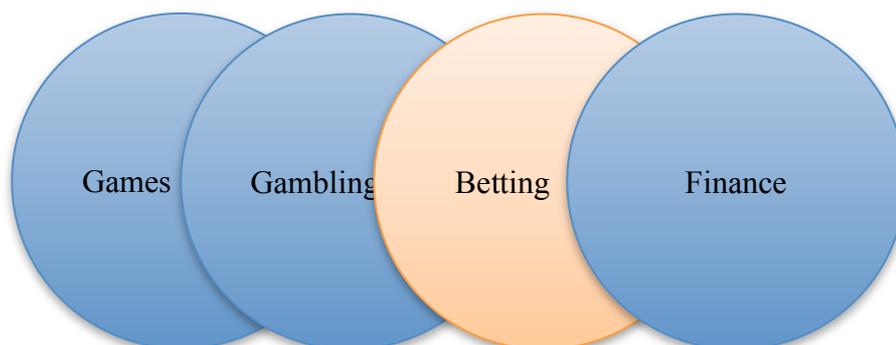
The point I want to emphasize here is that to support my analysis of betting at the Delhi racecourse I had to look beyond existing research in the anthropology of gambling towards studies on economy. The analytical frame for understanding the field beyond what was narrowly understood as gambling, was partly inspired by the way the bettors perceived horseracing. They first insisted that betting on horseracing was “not gambling”. This assertion was tied to the moral condemnation of gambling, including the fact that gambling for the most part is illegal, and to the perception in India that horseracing is a “game of skill.” Bettors the on one hand used the word “play” or, in Hindi, *kelna* for betting, and on the other hand they also called betting “work” or *kaam*. The bettors continually drew parallels between the betting market at the racecourse and the stock market. Rather than predefining betting in the framework of gambling, I define it as a mode of economic profit seeking with an element of ‘play’ to it.

Betting may be categorized as a mode of gambling, however, it is specifically defined in terms of a wager put on a game that you are not allowed to take part in yourself. Whereas the etymology of gambling is tied to games, joking and having fun, the etymology of betting derives from the act of getting involved or supporting someone else’s, potentially illegal, actions. In horseracing the word “backing” is also used, which means placing support behind a player or horse. It is thus defined by the connection one establishes with someone playing a game, rather than being defined by playing the game itself. In other words, betting is a wager put on an unpredictable future outcome of a game, which demands skill in predicting what determines the outcome rather than the skill of playing the game.

Gambling thus cannot simply be considered a natural comparative category (Rizzo 2004, 278). Rebecca Cassidy has argued that new forms of gambling are increasingly being “gamified” with the boundary between social games and games for money becoming blurred (Cassidy forthcoming). I, on the other hand, am interested in the blurred boundaries between betting and finance, which is another direction in which the gambling industry is going as part of the expansion of the gambling domain (Loussouarn forthcoming). Rather than working with the category of gambling, I work more specifically with the category of betting as a form of gambling defined by the placing of wagers in a market of risks, which resembles trading in some financial markets. Taking the category of betting as a starting point opens up other frames for comparison, in which horse race betting is

closer to financial speculation than playing poker at the casino or adding stakes to a computer game. It brings betting as a form of gambling beyond the distinctions between work and play.

### **Model of forms of risk taking**



The tendency to understand gambling in opposition to play has to do with the understanding of gambling in relationship to capitalism. A dominant perspective has been that gambling can be seen as a kind of resistance to capitalism, because it has been perceived as danger to the establishment of workforces. This resistance has been noted in relation to national economies (Malaby 2003; Papataxiarchis 1999; Zola 1967), economic governance (Hardgrove 2005; Rogers 1991), the capitalistic ethos and modes of production (Allen 2006; Bjerg 2011). Conversely, it has also been suggested that gambling can be seen as the ultimate representation of the ethos of capitalism, representing the attempt to profit from doing the least amount of work possible and the eagerness to consume (Reith 2007). The understanding of where gambling stands in relation to capitalism is, on the one hand, tied to the categorization of gambling in opposition to work and, on the other hand, the forms of capitalism in focus. In horseracing in the US the existence of “professional bettors” has made Rosecrance challenge the opposition of gambling as non-work, as he argues that betting is in fact work (Rosecrance 1988). If we think about gambling in relation to financial capitalism, rather than capitalism being tied to modes of production, betting can be seen as a work of risk and a manifestation of speculative capitalism oriented at deriving value from risk and movements in prices, as opposed to value from production.

The anthropology of finance (Zaloom 2006; Miyazaki 2013; Ho 2009; Hertz 1998; Tett 2009; Riles 2011; Maurer 2005) has approached finance at the level of participant observation in embedded financial workplaces. The focus is on the dynamics of knowledge production, devices *and*, to some extent, social relationships in market places framed by developments in legislation and technology. This approach to finance has been an important inspiration for this thesis, as it not only enabled me to see clear parallels between betting and finance, but it also provided me with a theoretical framework on which to anchor my analysis. The anthropology of finance is oriented towards other social science disciplines attempting to understand speculative markets, especially science and technology studies (Callon 1998; MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu 2007; Callon, Millo, and Muniesa 2007; Beunza, Hardie, and MacKenzie 2006). This orientation has drawn my attention to the significance of technological developments (chapter five) to understanding how the betting market functions and how value is generated within it at various stages of technological advancement. As mentioned, this is a context, which is of increasing interest in studies of gambling in anthropology. However, as with the studies on finance, when it comes to the understanding of technological developments in gambling, the focus remains on the developments occurring within the framework of legal economies (Schüll 2012).

### **Speculation in economies of concealment**

The work on the anthropology of finance has inspired me to consider the mode of knowledge production at stake at the racecourse as an entry to understanding the kind of economic calculations that direct the betting market and how this is tied to the existence of both legal and illegal economies.

Thinking of betting as a mode of speculation first of all reveals a connection between profit-seeking and knowledge production within the interpretive frame of deception. Speculation is a form of knowledge without firm evidence. The etymology of speculation likens the concept both to a watchtower and a ghost, referring to the practice of observing visible realities and otherworldly forces (Uncertain Commons 2013). One could say that there is an inherent paradox in the concept, as it entails a blend of positivism and fantasy. Yet, it is precisely in these contrasts that the space for speculation can be found, between the known and the unknowable, the visible and the concealed. The spectacle, which is projected out, is only considered at the forefront of a hidden reality. In speculative spaces, neither the route to success can be easily found, nor can the reasons for success

easily be determined. But I assert that in economic speculation there is an insistence on finding patterns in the world existing in between what is revealed and what is concealed (Miyazaki 2006; Zaloom 2003).

Examining betting as a production of knowledge tied to the hidden and unknowable leads to an understanding of how future contingency is imagined and dealt with. Thomas Malaby has thus suggested that gambling is a particularly interesting field in which to study engagements with contingency (Malaby 2003; Malaby 2002). In this study, I extend the concept and explore how engagements with contingency through betting are reflected in what may be called market behavior. The engagement with the future has long been conceptualized as an engagement with “risk and uncertainty” (Knight 1921; Beck 1992; Douglas 1992). Appadurai argues for a review of how uncertainty is constructed, rather than working with uncertainty as a condition, which is an important part of understanding the ethos behind the calculative practices of finance (Appadurai 2012). Therefore, to understand how speculative markets work, we need to understand the nuances in the ways in which contingency is framed. This enables us to understand how and why market actors act as they do.

As part of the interpretative frame of deception, the future imaginary at the racecourse is defined by its possible pre-determinacy. The future of the Delhi racecourse is not simply about probable risks or the mysteries of uncertainty, but about possible certainties. This means that the racecourse is a speculative space for predicting possible fixed futures of men and their money, rather than potential forces of nature in a deceptive game. Contingency at the racecourse is not about the innate unpredictability of horses, but the possible predictability of the actors behind the horses. The concept of contingency differs from uncertainty in a similar way to how possibility differs from potentiality, as what we are dealing with is not a dispositional open-ended future yet to be realized, but rather a possible future scenario that cannot fully be predicted.

Facing a possibly determined future in a deceptive space, the object of orientation is concealed money. In this thesis I am, on the one hand, concerned with the understanding of decision-making among bettors and how it ties to ideas of concealed economies, and on the other hand, I am concerned with the operation of a market in between legal and illegal economies. I call the type of economy existing at the racecourse an economy of concealment. This is an economy in which interpretations, value and demand are generated through speculation on invisible money. This is partly tied to the fact that the market for betting itself exists mainly in the illegal realm and

therefore in itself is concealed from procedures of transparency. The thesis thus gives insight into economic calculations in a predominately darkened economy.

I approach economy at the level of speculations about money. This is a speculation, which involves an assessment of the perceivable and the invisible. Speculation at the racecourse is oriented towards concealed economies of bribes, the market for inside information, and unlicensed bookmaking. I am specifically concerned with economy in terms of its existence as a sign (Maurer 2006; Zaloom 2009). With the movements of odds being interpreted as signs of hidden money, I show how the idea of deception is not only an existing interpretation of the economy of the racecourse, it can also be generative in terms of how the economy of the betting markets operates. This bears resemblance with the performativity approach to finance in which financial markets are believed to act in a self-fulfilling way in accordance with theories about the financial markets (Callon 1998; MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu 2007). The theories that generate the economy of the Delhi racecourse are not mathematical models, but the interpretative frame of deception and methods for figuring out existing concealed monetary transactions. Focusing on the procedures for prediction in an economy of both illegal and legal economies, I am concerned with the speculative space that the predominance of an illegal economy existing beyond technologies of visibility and access enables.

With a focus on speculations on signs of concealed money I try to move beyond a clear distinction between what has been termed formal and informal economies (Hart 1973; Harriss-White 2007; Breman 1999) or regulated and unregulated economies (Roitman 2005). The hidden economy is not located in the black economy per se, but it is believed to be a defining factor in the operation of white economy at the racecourse. Licensed legal bookmakers work around taxation and the legal modes of betting are considered subject to corruption. Concealed money is believed to reveal itself in the form of odds in the predominantly illegal market of bookmakers and not in the legal economy, which is considered to lack transparency. While distinguishing between legal and illegal economy, I also try to map how speculations about concealed economy weave into these economies. The distinction between legal and illegal economy is not an emic distinction, in that this distinction is not made by the bettors as it is assumed that all economies, legal or not, are deceptive by nature. I use the concepts of legal and illegal economies to emphasize the differentiation, as a historical one. It is a differentiation tied to economic law and the development of capitalism and national economies (Birla 2009). In this process, clear lines are drawn towards illegal economy existing beyond reach of the state economy. I show how the legal economy is marginalized in

relation to the illegal economy, despite the racecourses being some of the only grounds for legal betting in India. The thesis thus stands as an example of speculative practices in an illegal market partly enabled by the formation of a legal economy.

### **The elements of the thesis**

In the thesis I approach the engagement with contingency and the existence of legal and illegal betting economies from various spatial and temporal angles, necessary to understand the complexity of betting at the Delhi racecourse. I will do so by both following people as well as technologies central to betting in time and space. I will both move inside (chapters two-five) and outside (chapters one, three and five) the Delhi racecourse, while approaching the racecourse both in isolation and through its real and imagined connections to other sites inside and outside India. I follow developments in technologies of law and betting from past to present (chapters one and five), as well as personal histories (chapter two and four). I focus on various points in the daily rhythm of the racecourse before (chapters two and three) and while betting (chapter four and five). Through these movements in time and space, I approach the temporalities and geographical scales of the speculative space of horse betting.

I start out with a diachronic view of the field. In the first chapter *Unstable Grounds: History of Horseracing and Gambling in India*, I examine the history of horseracing in India from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today with a focus on the development of betting markets and the legislative and popular debates concerning these. Horseracing as a colonial sport foregrounded a hierarchy of ethnicity and class. I argue that whereas horseracing in the past stood as a representation of hierarchy through, among other things, teaching jockeys the principles of fair play, the racecourse today stands as an arena in which predictable hierarchies are undermined by the unpredictability of fixed futures. The significance of horseracing has thus gone from a site in which the prestige and power of the elite could be performed, to a place subject to the threat of expanding betting markets potentially buying jockeys out. The racecourse thus stands as an arena for deception tied to the concealed economies in the betting market of the masses. Through a focus on the connection of sports and betting, I thus emphasize the role of economy in the interpretation of games.

The following chapter, *Predicting People: Speculations on Knowledge, Connections and Class*, enters the Delhi racecourse and gives an introduction to the place and some of its people. This chapter focuses on ways of predicting the future and studies three bettors, looking into both the similarities and differences in the procedures they take in engaging with the contingency of the future. I connect the differences in their procedures to class and the kind of knowledge systems and connections available to them. Yet, what stands out is the similarities in their approach to the future in terms of the way in which the possibility of fixed futures frames their methods of prediction. Therefore, I argue that in the game of prediction, with a few exceptions, it was not the horses that mattered, but speculation on the people behind the horses controlling the outcome. As part of this argument, I point out similarities to speculations in financial markets.

In order to get a better sense of the atmosphere at the Delhi racecourse, in the third chapter called *Eating with Friends and Enemies: Ambiguity of Gambling Relationships*, I focus specifically on the types of relationships established between bettors and the ways in which they are tied to various forms of exchange and consumption. I examine how the exchange of loans, tips, food, drinks and favors among bettors is imbued with suspicion as it is perceived that every man at the racecourse is deceptive and driven by self-interest and greed. I argue that bettors do not bet to socialize and develop friendships, but socialize to gain access to the bookmakers, information and credit that enable their betting. The bettors live a double life in which their betting friends are concealed from their families and their families remain hidden to the bettors. In accordance with the separation of these two facets of their lives, the bettors also distinguish between the money they mark for betting and the money they put towards consuming women and alcohol in the company of friends. The view of the racecourse as a deceptive environment is therefore not only reflected in the bettors' perceptions of others at the racecourse, but in their own practices of concealment in their everyday lives. In this sense, this chapter highlights speculative aspects of friendship as being central to how sociality is understood as part of the economy of the racecourse.

The fourth chapter *Signs of Odds: Bookmakers and Bettors in the Betting Ring* moves back into the heart of the racecourse, focusing specifically on the activity, which take place in or are connected to the betting ring. I do so through a focus on how betting odds, and people suspected of 'knowing' the future are monitored. I argue that odds are developed based on their potential to reveal concealed economies and possible fixed futures in a complex market in between legal and illegal bookmaking. Odds are examples of numeric objects that are speculated upon and animated in accordance with human intentions.

In the last chapter, I turn towards a second betting platform, the totalisator, which is relatively neglected in contrast to the betting ring. In *Deceptive devices: The totalisator and Parallel Economies* I first identify patterns in the use of the totalisator. Second, I look into the history of the totalisator and how it is entwined with attempts to establish a legal economy in India. I argue that the totalisator, as a manifestation of legal economy, is neglected because it is not trusted. This creates an incentive to bet through illegal channels beyond digitalized betting technologies. The technologies which fuel this kind of market are not computer technologies based on programming, but communication technologies enabling information to exist and travel beyond the legal market. The racecourse is thus an example of a speculative market on the fringes of modern economies and set up for the commoditization of risk. The racecourse's economy is partly integrated and standardized, historically and operationally, along global technologies for risk markets, while the vast majority of its operation exists beyond the reach of modern technology, which makes it different from global finance.

In the thesis I show how the interpretation of the Delhi racecourse as a site of deception frames current legal discussions on betting in India (chapter one), models methods of prediction at the racecourse (chapter two), structures the sociality of the racecourse (chapter three), determines the betting odds (chapter four), and creates preferences for illegal channels of betting (chapter four).

I conclude the thesis by summarizing the results presented in the thesis, and suggest how further studies of risk taking in between legal and illegal economies could be carried out in the future. Furthermore I reflect on the kind of knowledge production, which this thesis is based upon.



# Unstable grounds: History of horseracing and gambling in India

## Introduction

Gambling on the race-course is, so far as I am aware, an importation like many other importations, from the West, and if I had my way, I would withdraw the protection of the law that gambling on race-courses enjoys even to the extent it does... The Congress program being one of self-purification... can have nothing to do with income derived from any vice... it is useless to hope that the unwary public will not copy the bad manners of the so-called high placed people... Many princes spend lakhs of their people's money on buying race horses" (Gandhi 1952, 164)

In this chapter, I examine the history of horseracing in India and how it is connected to the development of betting markets, betting technologies and gambling legislation. I explore the shift in India from horseracing being linked to hierarchies of ethnicity and class, as well as notions of fair play, to being perceived as a distorted arena fuelled by the possibilities of cheating, deception and unfair play. I also examine parallels in the histories of horseracing and cricket in order to identify how various developments in political, legal, technological and economic realms have effected the conditions and understanding of these two sports.

My emphasis on examining the history of a colonial sport through the lens of betting was influenced by my informants (the three key bettors) who pointed me towards the aspects of the past they thought were worth examining when it came to understanding the historical background of India's racecourses. The bettors recalled the history of the racecourse in terms of the gambling that had taken place there rather than the races themselves. Among the bettors, there is no consideration given to the British and royal legacies of the sport, and the past is mainly thought of in terms of legislation and technologies for betting and the mythic history of gambling in India. The existence of myths on gambling thus provides another temporal scale through which the racecourse is interpreted as a ground for trickery and deception today.

The literature providing the historical background for this chapter consists mainly of documents on the history of horseracing, especially at the Calcutta and Bangalore Racecourses, texts written on the history of gambling legislation in India, and recent newspaper articles and blogs dealing with the threat of betting markets on the integrity of sports players. I commence with a history of the Indian racecourses in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I then shift my focus to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, moving away from the racecourse as I look at the betting legislation, which has enabled the racecourses to exist as legal sites for public betting, as well as debates challenging this jurisprudence up to today. Towards the end of the chapter I furthermore look into the significance given to Hindu mythology among bettors today as part of an understanding of the racecourses as linked to a long history of gambling in India.

This chapter contributes to the ethnography of Indian sports, in which horseracing has been overlooked. In the existing literature, Indian colonial sports have been framed in terms of identity politics, nationalism and globalization (Mills 2005a; Appadurai 1996; Nandy 1989; Sen 2005; Werbner 1996; McKay 2005; Mills 2005b; Dimeo 2005; Guha 2005; Mills 2005c; Parkes 2005; Heitzman and Srinivas 2005), which mirrors the trends in the anthropology of sport more broadly (Besnier and Brownell 2012; Moore 2004). In my research, what comes into focus is not linked to identity, but to global currents of betting legislation and technologies which have framed the grounds for wagering and tied the racecourse to the history of gambling in a Western context (Chinn 2004; Reith 1999; Munting 1996). The colonial setting, in this sense, has simply meant that this process has developed in a specific way (Birla 2009) (Birla 2009; Rogers 1991; Hardgrove 2005). When sport is viewed as a ground for betting, the possibility of deception challenges the significance of sport as an arena for identity politics as traditional sport is seen as being manipulated, first and foremost, by markets controlled by self-interested actors.

The Delhi racecourse's history is tied to a long history of betting and is therefore interpreted as a place of deception in which horses are not given equal chances to win and jockeys' intentions to win are not to be trusted. With this chapter I want to establish a historical understanding as to why racecourses have become some of the only legal sites for gambling in India, whilst emphasizing attempts to coming to terms with the existence of illegitimate transactions behind the scenes.

### **Breeding segregation: An early history of horseracing in South Asia**

The first example of horses being used for competitive racing in India was documented in 1501 (Pant 1997) when Barbur, considered the founder of the Mughal Empire (and a descendant of Genghis Khan) and a commander named Qambar Ali raced each other on horseback. Mughal conquerors had brought Arabian horses with them to the Indian subcontinent from North Africa primarily for warfare from as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Following the disintegration of the Mughal

Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Arabian horses had become sought after among members of the British East Indian Company, which was fighting against the princely states of the subcontinent. The princely states had mainly been importing horses mostly from Central Asia (Gommans 1994, 241; Cassidy 2003, 17). The increase in the demand for horses for warfare also put greater demand on local breeders of so called “country-bred” (or “Indian country-bred”) horses, consisting of a mixture of ponies from the Northern regions. This influx raised the number of horses in India to between 400,000 and 800,000 towards the end of the century (Gommans 1994, 238). Having a surplus of diverse horses enabled a transition in the horse’s functionality from combat to leisure.

The development of horseracing in its contemporary form started in England at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the first race meeting, organized by Queen Anne, held in Ascot, in 1711. The rules of the sport were standardized through the establishment of The Jockey Club in 1750, which was set up by aristocratic horse owners (Cassidy 2002, 1). Apart from the race of Barbur, the first records of racing in India are from the areas surrounding the residences of officers of the East Indian Company in Calcutta in 1769 (Chettiyappaya 1995, 11; Frith 1976, 6). Along with the increasing popularity of the sport in England, horseracing also became a pastime in India around the cantonments. The first three-day meeting was held in Calcutta in 1795 (Frith 1976, 6), and the first racecourse was established in Bombay in 1800 (Chettiyappaya 1995, p11). In 1801 the Turf Club was also formed, which marked the beginning of organized and controlled racing (Frith 1976, 19). Horseracing grew in popularity and by 1830, there were races held in the cantonments of 23 cities around India (Chettiyappaya 1995, 11).

Prior to British racing, horses in South Asia were already being used for sport. Buzkashi, which has become the Afghani national sport (Azoy 1982), was originally played between nomadic people of Central Asia, and the horses were used for various purposes beyond the game such as trade along the silk route. Polo is a sport with ties to Buzkashi, and it was discovered and modified by British army officers in the North Eastern parts of the continent (Parkes 2005). In its original form Polo was played by the local nobility at village festivals, and was a form of royal procession demonstrating regal authority and their relationship to the public.

Horses, as well as elephants, were important in parades as another kind of spectacle in the princely states of India, illustrating the connection between land, people and power centers (Fihl 2009; Dirks 1993). Horses therefore had an important role to play in this rather mobile way of demonstrating power to people in the public sphere. In contrast, the colonial method of demonstrating power was through its control over territories (Heitzman and Srinivas 2005), and

racecourses stood as monuments validating the possession of large pieces of land. The racecourses were not only set up in the cantonments, but were also built on prime property in the heart of the largest cities in South Asia. Unlike the horses used in the parades, the racehorses were not on public display as access to the racecourses was limited to the societal elite.

1847 is another significant time in the history of horseracing in India, as it was the year the first race club was established. Located in the capital of the East Indian Company, Calcutta (Chettiyappaya 1995), the race club was set up to regulate racing in Calcutta and beyond (Frith 1976, 31)<sup>1</sup>. With the establishment of a club, the stage was set for horseracing to be integrated to the colonial *gymkhana club* culture in India, which became – and remains to some extent – central to the social life of the elite in India. The gymkhana club is a colonial version of the British gentleman's club, with an exclusive institution of membership by heritage and nomination only (Dimeo 2005). The race clubs, as part of the gymkhana club concept and jurisdiction, were grounds for recreation incorporating a blend of sport, food, tea and alcohol. With the establishment of race clubs, horseracing now had an individual existence beyond the British military. There were still army officers in the clubs, but also British East India Company employees and their families. From the 1860s onward, the Indian royalty entered the horseracing field and horseracing became known as “*sahib log's tamasha*”, which can be translated as ‘the spectacle of the upper classes’<sup>2</sup> (Chettiyappaya 1995, 17).

The disconnection from the army was further emphasized when horses bred specifically for racing started to arrive in India. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1868, thoroughbreds bred in England were imported and, in some cases, exported to other countries of the British Empire such as South Africa (Chettiyappaya 1995). Whereas Buzkashi and polo were played with locally bred horses, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, horseracing became tied up in a global - imperial economy of horses (Cassidy 2003; Gommans 1994). This meant that there were four different kinds of breeds used in horseracing: the Arabians from Africa, ponies from Central Asia, country-breeds and thoroughbreds.

From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, handicapping became an important component of horseracing as a grounds for betting. Handicapping is a method of classifying horses and theoretically equalizing their chances of winning by regulating the weight put on their saddles. A superior horse would be

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<sup>1</sup> For comparison, the first cricket club was established in 1792 and the first polo club in 1863 (Parkes 2005).

<sup>2</sup> *Tamasha* means a spectacle or an event with bustle and excitement. It has both connotations of play and theatrical entertainment. It can be used in a positive context to describe a fun activity and in a negative context to convey a deceptive show (as commonly used to describe Indian politics). The use of *sahib log's tamasha* points to the idea not only of a sport *for* the elite, but also a sport *staged* by the elite.

given an extra load to help balance its chances of winning in comparison to a weaker horse. This created a more dynamic market for betting, as the outcome was no longer a foregone conclusion. It also enabled the weaker horses to maintain a career in horseracing. But it also made the risk market less dependent on the horses' inherent attributes<sup>3</sup>. In India, handicapping was first determined based on horse breed. Arabians, Central Asian ponies and the "country bred" horses were seen as inferior to the thoroughbreds, so when the thoroughbreds arrived from England, and later also from Australia, they were segregated from the other breeds and ran in separate races (Frith 1976, 129).

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian royalty, who were also in the possession of horses, started to enter horseracing (Chettiyappaya 1995). At this time there may have been racial segregation among horses, but not among people, and the spectators were of both British and Indian origin - mainly of upper classes. The sport at the level of the spectators represented a class hierarchy, and at the level of the horses a racial hierarchy.

The Indian royalty in the Hindu and Mughal states had ponies from Central Asia as well as Arabians. They complained that the sport was favoring the imported thoroughbreds, which were good at short distances, and maintained that if longer races were held, the Arabians could easily compete with the thoroughbreds (Chettiyappaya 1995, 11). Indian racing enthusiasts also bemoaned the distance of the race as unfair. The argument was that the native horses were not given an equal opportunity to be competitive, as the structure of the competition had skewed the odds in the favor of the horses that had migrated from Britain. Furthermore, the stake money won on country-bred horses was far less than the money won on imported horses (Frith 1976, 129).

During the early history of horseracing in Indian, the hierarchy in the classification of horses was symbolically entwined in colonial policies. Once the thoroughbreds had thoroughly commanded the sport, and started being bred in India, the possibility of unfairness in the sport became oriented around issues connected to class – which subsequently shifted the focus to the men behind the horses.

### **Riding risks: Developments in horseracing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

The development of horseracing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also had implications for the people riding the horses. Competitive racing had started out as a competition between officers and horse owners

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<sup>3</sup> At the Delhi racecourse the vast majority of all races are handicap races as opposed to non-handicap races, where the strengths of the horse are tested against each other beyond their classifications.

(Chettiyappaya 1995, 16), but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century horseracing developed into a spectator sport, where officers and horse owners could watch the horses being ridden by jockeys, who also acted as trainers. Horseracing went from being a competition between officers to a competition between jockeys employed by horse owners. Horseracing thus utilized a division of labor, differentiating the jockey from the owner. Originally, jockeys were predominantly from the British military, but in the 1820s professional jockeys began to travel from England to India for the specific purpose of racing (Frith 1976, 23). Also there were “native jockeys” of Indian descent, who were recruited for approximately half the salary of their British counterparts (Chettiyappaya 1995, 16).

Employing jockeys allowed the horse owners to socialize at the race clubs during the sporting events. Food was served at the race meetings and parties were held at the end of the day (Frith 1976). The expertise of the owners could also be actualized through betting, which meant that the objective of racing horses went from testing one’s physical strength and military assets (through the horse), to testing ones knowledge about the horses through predictive calculations in the pleasant company of equals.

Arjun Appadurai (1996), in his chapter *Playing with Modernity: The Decolonization of Indian cricket*, examines how cricket developed in India from being a British sport embodying upper class British Victorian values to being a sport associated with strong national sentiments. He argues that cricket is a “hard cultural form” which does not change easily, but changes those who practice it. Despite this, the basic ethos of cricket in India has undergone a major transformation (Appadurai 1996, 90). As a sport played among the British elite, cricket initially represented the values and ideals of manliness and vigor, team loyalty and fair play (Appadurai 1996, 93).

A comparison of horseracing with cricket serves as an interesting way to examine parallel developments in sports tied to colonialism and post-colonialism, as well as differences tied to the role of betting. Appadurai’s study illustrates how the organization of a colonial sport is related to issues of morality, class and community. It is worth considering the developments in cricket identified by Appadurai in order to get a better understanding of the social context in which horseracing developed as a sport. Horseracing can also be considered a hard cultural form, which was nevertheless transformed because of betting.

Cricket was initially connected to club culture, as in the case of horseracing, and was an exclusively British pastime. Eventually lower class Indians were invited as players to do the “subaltern work” of winning games without challenging the gentlemanly atmosphere among the British (Nandy 1989, 19-122’ in Appadurai 1996). In this process, the British considered the sport

as a method through which Indians could be socialized along the values associated with cricket. On the physical level, cricket was considered a means of overcoming the problem of Indians being considered lazy and enervated (Appadurai 1996, 93). On a more social level, playing together provided a ground from which to produce new loyalties. Cricket was thus a way in which the Indian loyalty to the British Empire could be strengthened, as cricket could solidify alternative bonds beyond that of ethnicity and religion. Thus, Appadurai tells the story of how the ethos of cricket in an Indian setting transformed into a national sport involving both elite and working class India.

Similar to cricket, horseracing started out as a pastime exclusively for the British and, eventually, Indian jockeys were invited to join in the racing. Horseracing went from being practiced by military men to a sport with paid British and Indian jockeys. The ideal jockey is not large and robust, but small and thin, as the small weight of the jockeys enables the horse to run faster. Therefore, lower class Indians were more likely to fit the bill as jockeys than the upper class. To compensate, three pounds were added to the saddles of the “Native jockeys” (Frith 1976, 45”). With the advent of paid jockeys, loyalty became critical – not to the team or community, as in the case of cricket, but specifically to the owner and sometimes even to the trainer<sup>4</sup>. Riding in horse races is, in this sense, not simply a display of masculine strength, but a degree of submission set in the context of a class society.

Horseracing contained a social paradox, similar to what Appadurai identified in cricket, as it both confirmed class and created sporting modalities that transcended class in a colonial context (Appadurai 1996, 92). In the case of horseracing, the small Indian jockeys, some of whom were Anglo-Indians (Mills 2001), on the one hand manifested submission and inequality. The jockey who had to follow the orders of the horse owner, and did the risky job of riding, could only win a miniscule amount of money in comparison to the owner. But on the other hand, these jockeys were given new opportunities to enter a mainly British upper class domain. In addition, the jockey had the possibility of supplementing his income by using his insight into the condition of the horses for betting. The jockey was not only in a position where he had valuable knowledge of the horses, he also had the power to affect outcomes. Hence, examples of this started to emerge, including the story of one of the first successful Indian jockeys, Jaffar Khan, who in the 1870s was riding for a British military man, but eventually lost his job as it was said that he was too much into betting and

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<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Cassidy has described how a hierarchy between the owner and jockey is manifested in the paddock of Newmarket in recent times (Cassidy 2002, 49-65). Not only is the jockey physically smaller than the owner and trainer, through his body language he expresses submission to the orders of the owner.

selling stable information (Frith 1976, 45). Later in his career, he became a trainer for the Prince of Patiala, as trainers after 1884 had a separate license from jockeys (Frith 1976, 45).

Central to horseracing was the notion of fair play, as with cricket. Fair play was defined in terms of the conduct of riding, ensuring equal competition. As part of the rules jockeys were, for example, not allowed to block other horses or use the whip excessively. The concept of fair play in horseracing not only existed as an ethos of the sport, it was also enforced based on the rules of the Jockey Club. As part of the regulation, judges were appointed by a race club committee and were to ensure that the correct procedures were followed. This involved a monitoring of the weight of the jockey as well as the jockey's style of riding. Based on the rules laid down by the Jockey Club in England, the racecourse was a ground from which a specific juridical procedure was enacted (Frith 1976, 31). Along with the ethos of fair play there was also a juridical system and the infrastructure to enforce it through interrogation and fines, both of which were directed at the jockeys.

There is another level at which jockeys could threaten the rules of fair play. This was not in terms of using every trick at their disposal to win a race, but, on the contrary, it was their role in not pushing the horse to its fullest ability. The jockey could partake in two parallel games, as for them, there were two stakes to be won. The overt prize was what the jockey would earn from winning a race in the legitimate sports economy and the concealed, potentially more lucrative reward he would get from winning a bet in the speculative economy, or from selling information on the likely result of the race. This was also the case for those involved giving directions, the horse owners, yet attempts to avoid this through regulation were initially only focused on the jockey.

In the club rules of Calcutta from 1886, jockeys were banned inside the racecourse and precluded from betting (Frith 1976, 79). This marks one of the first attempts at dealing with the threat of the betting market. Two years later, in 1888, a point was added to the rules stating that an owner who had more than one horse running in a race was not allowed to prevent one of the horses from winning in order to win with the other (Frith 1976, 74). Yet, the owner as well as the trainer could continue to bet. The fact that it was the jockeys that were held away from the racecourse and not the horse owners reflects the continuation of the racecourse as a setting for the socializing of horse owners. It also shows that the threat of betting on the sport was primarily dealt with as a threat coming from the jockeys. The risk of the jockeys was that they could be seen as serving their own interests by being bettors and informers rather than the interests of the horse owners for whom they were employed.

For the vast majority, being a jockey did not provide them with an opportunity to become a national hero, as became the case in cricket, but the opportunity to have an income. In racing records from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, information is mostly provided on British and royal owners, and selected stewards. The jockeys were primarily racing under the names of the owners and horses (Chettiyappaya 1995, 21)<sup>5</sup>. In the important races most of the winning jockeys had British names, yet some of them could have been of Indian descent, as Anglo-Indians were part of racing just like in several other colonial sports.

It is has not just been the breeding and domestication of horses which has been central to horseracing, but also the disciplining of jockeys. As long as the jockeys made their money from winning a race along the values of fair play, they could be considered trustworthy. However, as the betting market developed it came to represent a threat to the jockeys' loyalty. This role of the jockey is central to the notion of the racecourse as a site of deception and of jockeys double-dealing in the prize economy and the betting economy. Horseracing, in a similar way to cricket, transformed its values despite being a hard cultural form, yet for different reasons. In horseracing, the ethos of the sport became tied specifically to racecourses as grounds for betting.

### **A public offering: Horse race betting enters mainstream**

As horseracing became more widely popular among 'Britishers' and Indians alike, the expenses of horseracing could not be upheld through royal and aristocratic patronage alone, and inviting the public marked a new model for financing the sport through the entry fee as well as through betting fees. It marked a new stage in which the club became more business oriented and professional, measuring success by generating profits, some of which went to its stakeholders and some of which also went to "charity" in the form of support to the British army as well as the Red Cross (Frith 1976, 121). In England, an act had been passed in 1813, which deemed racecourses public grounds for those who could pay the entrance fee. In India, the racecourse remained a closed arena for much longer. It was not until the betting market inside the racecourse had become standardized, providing the ground for an ordered way of betting ensuring an income to the race club, that the racecourses were opened the public without requiring membership.

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<sup>5</sup> There are some examples of celebrated jockeys, some of whom are from the Parsee community, yet they represent a minority of jockeys.

At the Calcutta Turf Club in 1880, the construction of a general stand was built, which was to enable a larger spectatorship separate from the members (Frith 1976). This marked part of the transformation of the racecourses as a closed social club to a public space. Furthermore, in 1886, the Calcutta Turf Club rules were separated formally from the rules of the gymkhana club (Frith 1976). Whereas the Gymkhana Club rules were mainly social rules directed at codes of conduct along Victorian ideals of proper dressing, the Club rules were oriented only towards correct racing and betting behavior.

When the public was invited in at the Calcutta Turf Club, there was still a natural selection along class lines marked by the entrance fees (Hardgrove 2005, 14) while club membership existed as a parallel mode of entry. According to Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge \in their conceptualization of public culture in India, the entrance fee is not just a mode of gatekeeping, but a defining feature of the public culture of India which has been formed alongside modes of consumption (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995). Inside the racecourse what was being consumed was newly established risk products through betting. Betting was done in separate areas with the public separated from the members.

A photo of spectators at the Calcutta racecourse in 1880 shows a majority of Britishers, whereas a photo of the racecourse in Hyderabad in 1892 shows a majority of Indians, all following the explicated dress code of the gymkhana clubs. The photo of the Hyderabad racecourse shows the members' area (as is also the trend in the photo documentation of racecourses today) and therefore the spectators who belonged to the higher social classes. The photo documentation in both cases shows a mix of men and women, suggesting that it was a place for family leisure.

As horseracing became more popular with the wider masses, more spaces were made inside the racecourses, with separate entrances. At the Calcutta Turf Club in 1916, the racecourse opened a third enclosure with an entrée fee of one rupee (Frith 1976, 126). The wider public may have initially been attracted to the racecourse as they wanted to witness and be a part of the upper class people's social life or "*tamasha*" as a way to, in the words of Appadurai, "experiment with the mysteries of English upper-class life" (Appadurai 1996, 93). But from the 1880s the trajectory of horseracing was different from the trajectory of cricket. Whereas cricket became tied to national consciousness enabled by, among other things, media and sponsorship of working class players, as documented by Appadurai, horseracing became tied more specifically to new forms of risk commodification. What was being consumed inside the racecourse was not a sport linked to communities or identity politics, but risk as an intricately social experience.

In the case of horseracing, I suggest that the experiment with the mysteries of English upper class life was done through betting. Betting was done on the basis of knowledge systems in which the British and the Indian royalty had an advantageous position as they, as horse owners, knew of the condition of their horses. Attempts at regulating the public's access to inside information was done by banning their access to the racecourse and stables the day before a race (Frith 1976). The racecourse was a site where a certain hierarchy was manifested through the organization of space, regulation and the kind of knowledge system betting was based upon. Yet, the racecourse also represented the fragility of control, among other things, because of the threat of the jockeys and the betting market, which may have intensified when the racecourses became public betting grounds and as new betting products developed. To grasp these changes, I will focus on the kinds of betting products that developed inside the racecourses.

### **A legal course: Developments in betting technologies**

When racing started out in India, betting was done through personal wagers between individual men (Chettiyappaya 1995). As the race club culture developed, "Lottery dinners" were organized on the night before the races for members. At these events, people could buy tickets for a fixed sum on a particular horse. The tickets were then up for auction, and could be sold for even more depending on the popularity of the horse, and were put into a barrel (Frith 1976, 18). The winner would be the ticket drawn with the right horse number and the prize was the total pool of ticket money. This form of gambling was thus a fusion of lottery and betting, and the tickets were eventually sold outside of the racecourse and its members. When this form of betting peaked in 1920 at the yearly race, the Calcutta Sweep, the tickets were sold as far away as in the London Stock Exchange and the barrel holding the pool of tickets was worth 125 million rupees (Frith 1976, 146). At the time there were syndicates buying up shares in the tickets that had originally been sold by club members. There were significant problems with fraud tied to payments, which made this form of betting difficult to handle, and its popularity decrease, as other forms of betting took over (Frith 1976, 18).

The lottery was, in principle, not available to the public, but only to the members of the race club and those they were in contact with. Here I want to focus on the racecourse as a public place for betting, which began in the 1880s. Concurrently with the inclusion of the public, there was a standardization of betting systems, initially controlled by the British, which was compatible with

Western methods of capitalism. Before new buildings were built, new betting platforms had been introduced. In 1872, pari-mutuel betting was launched at the Calcutta Turf Club (Frith 1976).

The pari-mutuel system of betting was invented in France just five years prior to its introduction to India. It is a method where the calculation of odds or payout ratio is not determined until after the race. This allows the bet providers to take a share or a 'house take' of the total pool of wagers before the rest is divided among the winners. Unlike the betting lotteries, there could be many more than one winner of a bet.

In 1881, the first two bookmakers in India, of British descent, were given a formal permission to operate at the Calcutta Turf Club (Surita). By 1890 there were eight British bookmaker firms operating in the club (Chanda). In 1899, there were also Bengali bookmakers operating inside the racecourse, and companies from foreign countries such as Australia tried to get a license as well (Frith 1976, 129). According to Carl Chinn, bookmaking as a methodology of betting was invented at the end of the 18th century in Newmarket in England (Chinn, 2004 #482). It was a method through which an agent could profit from an ongoing adjustment of odds depending on bets taken in, while creating a slight inherent advantage to the bookmaker himself in the odds offered or a fee taken. Towards the 1840s, bookmaking was becoming a popular option of betting outside the racecourse in the streets of London (Chinn 2004; Munting 1996, 89; Ashton 1968, 186).

At the Calcutta Turf Club, bookmaking was only allowed *after* the introduction of pari-mutuel betting, which was different from the situation in England, where the bookmaking institution had become so powerful that bookmakers, together with people working against gambling overall, managed to keep the pari-mutuel betting system at bay (Chinn 2004). Yet in India, the pari-mutuel betting system seemed to reflect a sought after model for economic ventures in India, as something transparent, manageable, centralized and open to taxation, which I will discuss more in chapter five.

The pari-mutuel system was different from the initial bookmaking systems where payout odds were offered before the race. In a bookmaking system, it was more difficult to control the risk involved for the bookmaker himself, as when setting the odds one could not fully predict how betting would be distributed on the different horses, and therefore there could be situations where an outcome would mean a loss of profit. In England, distinctions were made between bookmakers working with the methodology of risk neutralization through the hedging of risks and those taking risks, who were compared with gamblers. In other words, as part of the debate concerning the legitimacy of bookmaking, parallels were made to gambling in the sense that bookmaking itself, depending on how it was done, could be seen as a form of gambling (Ashton 1968, 212). The

introduction of bookmaking to Indian racecourses coincides with a development of a more mathematical and systematic approach to betting in England (Chinn 2004, 32). Bookmaking had been refined in such a way that bookmakers could more easily control their profits and be distinguished from gamblers.

After allowing bookmakers inside the racecourse, the race clubs were facing problems with people acting as bookmakers without a license by copying odds. As part of the race club's jurisdiction, a rule was made in 1913 to limit all betting activities for a demarcated area (Chanda). Thus betting was only allowed in the areas in which the licensed bookmakers were working. The rules reflect the attempt at the time to maintaining control of the betting market inside the racecourse. Although horseracing was defined as legal by the law, inside the racecourse there was a differentiation between legal and illegal modes of betting.

When the racecourses were opened up to the public, systems for betting had developed which enabled the race clubs to have a steady income through technologies for betting that had been developed in a Western setting. Concurrent to the development of the betting technologies inside the racecourse was a legal debate, which had been fought beyond the racecourse, which ensured that horse betting was a legal activity as opposed to other existing forms of betting. Now I will leave the racecourses, as I turn towards the legislative history, which enabled the racecourse to exist as a public betting ground.

### **Junctures of opposition to gambling**

After 1857, as the Indian subcontinent had gone from being an area dominated by the British East Indian Company to a land subject to the British crown, the British introduced criminal law to the Indian states as a new mode of governance (Birla 2009). As part of this, the first act targeting gambling was introduced in Bombay in 1867, called the Public Gaming Act (Sethi 2009). The Act similar, to the English Acts from 1845 and 1853 (Munting 1996, 20), was focused on locating the gathering places for criminal classes, on the ground of public disorder – which in the case of India were in the 'bazaars' of the colonial cities (Birla 2009). The forms of gambling that were targeted were games of dice and cards held in what was defined as "public gaming houses" (Sethi 2009).

Before this legislation, gambling had already been defined as a subject of concern for the state in the Indian subcontinent. In the *Manusmriti*<sup>6</sup> (*Laws of Manu* in English), a Sanskrit text from 100 BC with moral and operative guidelines for states, gambling was defined as a human vice (Manu 1991). Some of the first signs of gambling in human civilizations have been found in South Asia. Proof of flourishing gambling traditions around 1000 BC (Price 1972) have been excavated by archeologists in the form of dice (Possehl 1996; Reith 2006) and game boards of Parcheesi (ludo) and chess (Brown 1972; Hildebeitel 1987). In one of the eldest scriptures of South Asian civilization, the Rig Veda, written in around 1100 BC, there is hymn called the Gambler's Lament, which is written as a monologue of an addicted gambler who plays dice games. There are also vivid mythological stories of gods gambling (Handelman and Shulman 1997). The Laws of Manu show that not only was gambling flourishing, it was also subject to legal and moral guidelines.

In the Manusmriti gambling was not just represented as a human vice, but as one of the worst of its kind, along with drinking, women/being with prostitutes and hunting/eating meat, and stealing, of which gambling in itself was considered a form (Manu 1991).

The king should ban gambling and betting from his kingdom, for these two vices put an end to the reign of the kings who possess land. Since gambling and betting is open robbery, the king should make a constant effort to oppose them (Manu 1991, 222)<sup>7</sup>.

Avoiding vices such as gambling was an important part of the call for self-purification, which Gandhi emphasized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when warning against horse race betting, as presented in the introduction to this chapter. In the Laws of Manu, as well as in the text of Gandhi, the danger of gambling is not simply located with the lower classes, but also in the elite (Manu 1991, 133-134). Gandhi points to the expenses of horseracing rather than the expenses of betting, but nevertheless refers to the misuse of money by the royal classes in racecourses. In the Manusmriti, the vice of gambling is particularly devastating if it is possessed by a king, and according to the Manusmriti the king himself specifically should refrain from gambling.

This perception of gambling is different from the way gambling legislation was later framed in British and Indian colonial settings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where gambling was not defined as

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<sup>6</sup> There are also guidelines concerning the regulation of gambling in the *Arthashastra* from around 300 BC, which is a Sanskrit text on state governance and economic policies.

<sup>7</sup> In the Manusmriti a distinction is made between gambling and betting based on whether or not animals are involved. Betting is thus placing a wager on an unpredictable game of animals, whereas gambling is a game between people (Manu 1991, 222).

problematic per se, but certain forms of gambling that were popular in particular class settings became problematic. According to sociologist Gerda Reith in her book *The Age of Chance. Gambling in Western Culture*, gambling had been morally condemned in England throughout history for different reasons: during Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a sin related to the contrast to the Protestant ethic of hard work and during Enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as a threat to rationality and reason (Reith 2006, 134). It was during the industrial revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that gambling became more than a moral problem, as it was criminalized on the ground of public disorder in urban working class settings (as with the first Indian gaming Acts), with the concern for its effect on a labor force, now essential to modern capitalism (Reith 2006, 136).

I have not been able to make a similar historical analysis of shifting moral grounds in India since the Manusmriti, so what I want to emphasize here is that prior to colonial legislation the focus had been on gambling as an inherent human vice that was to be tamed and only done in moderation. This focus, however, changed during the debates concerning gambling legislation led by the British Raj<sup>8</sup>, when a classification of forms of gambling and a differentiation between the legal and illegal were noted. Following trends in England gambling was not targeted among the elite, but further down the economic hierarchy.

As part of an anthology of different forms of resistance to the colonial rule in South Asia, John Rogers argues that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the struggle over gambling was fought in the juridical system, and was in fact a struggle over values (Rogers 1991, 202). According to Rogers, the long history of anti-gambling sentiments and laws in England was not the primary force behind the gambling legislation in Ceylon (Rogers 1991, 181). It was instead the efforts made after the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to create a disciplined and productive society compatible with modern capitalism in the colonial setting (Rogers 1991, 182). Rogers argues that the development from a subsistence-based economy to a cash economy had resulted in increased gambling in Ceylon. The problem with gambling, he believes, was the fact that it was a popular form of recreation, which meant that it was time spent away from work, and therefore a loss of revenue for British businessmen as well as the Sinhalese elite. Rogers' perspective, in which the legislation is seen in relation to the need for a productive workforce, is in line with the context of the morality of

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<sup>8</sup> The term used for the British rule succeeding the British East India Company between 1858 and 1947.

gambling at the time, as outlined by Reith (Reith 2006, 136)<sup>9</sup>, where the need for gambling legislation is tied specifically to the problem of gambling in the working classes.

Unfortunately, while mentioning horseracing as a legal form of gambling, Rogers does not go into further detail about the debates over the distinctions between legal and illegal forms, as he only focus on the gambling forms that were banned (Rogers 1991, 177). In order to understand the context for the gambling legislation in India more accurately, I believe it is worthwhile focusing specifically on debates concerning the boundaries of legal and illegal forms of gambling and forms of speculation. An investigation of these boundaries will illustrate how gambling legislation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in India was tied to both global and local contexts, and represented different concerns than those expressed both in the Manusmriti and in laws in England. To understand this we need to take a closer look at the colonial context out of which the law grew.

### **Speculative law: The banning of vernacular betting markets in late 19<sup>th</sup> century**

In addition to the work of Rogers, two more studies have focused on gambling legislation in India in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hardgrove 2005; Birla 2009, 2009b). They not only offer an extremely interesting perspective from which to investigate colonial encounters and the process related to the legal standardization of British colonies, they also provide an insight into how racecourses became one of the only legal grounds for gambling in India. The gambling laws developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century are still more or less intact, and are therefore still have an important influence on how betting is organized at the racecourse today.

In her ethnographic and historical study focusing on the image of *Marwari* businessmen who have historically been associated with gambling, Anne Hardgrove discusses the introduction of a the first gambling act of 1867 in which a differentiation between legal and illegal forms of gambling was drawn according to the categories of ‘games of skill’ and ‘games of chance’. This was a distinction also made in England in 1853, which made betting on horseracing popular among the upper classes, not only because it was defined as legal, but because predicting the outcome of horse races was seen as an activity that demanded skill. This was opposed to other forms of gambling, such as card games and betting on cockfighting, considered games of chance, which were popular

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<sup>9</sup> This perspective of gambling in contrast to work is also reflected in the influential analytical framing of games, sports and gambling by Roger Caillois (Caillois 1961).

in working class environments (Chinn 2004). This was a differentiation that was entwined with class ideologies, particularly in England where it originated. But in an Indian setting, according to Hardgrove, it also became infiltrated with questions of ethnicity. In India, the skill associated with horseracing did not just demonstrate the skills of a certain class, but a certain ethnicity, as horseracing at the time was still a closed arena for primarily Britishers. According to Hardgrove, the legislation was “outlawing of one community’s form of gambling without disturbing gambling in the European community” (Hardgrove 2005, 35). It was not gambling that was a problem per se, but certain kinds of gambling associated with different social categories.

Ritu Birla, in her book chapter *Hedging Bets: Speculation, Gambling, and Market Ethics, 1890-1930* focus on the second stage of gambling legislation starting in the 1890s, when the racecourse became increasingly open to Indians as well. Rather than seeing this legislation as being tied to communities, she places it in a broader context of legal economic policies introduced from the beginning of the British Raj. In her book *Stages of Capitalism: Law, Culture and Market Governance in Late Colonial India*, Birla makes a fascinating analysis of the connection between the legal system and the establishment of an Indian economy subject to colonial rule, in which gambling legislation stands as an intriguing case of economic legislation linked to the existence of markets for speculation (Birla 2009). She argues that the gambling legislation in India should not be solely interpreted as a way of outlawing modes of gambling preferred by certain social groups, but as a way of indirectly regulating against existing markets for speculation, in which the *Marwaris*, who acted as bookmakers, played a prominent role. Therefore, to understand the context of the legislation that favored horse race betting, we need to look beyond the racecourses into the narrow bazaars of the colonial cities in which there was vivid betting activity.

The Marwaris were a community of people from Rajasthan, many of whom had migrated to the larger cities of North India during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While maintaining their ties to farming, they came to develop large trading networks. As part of their connection to trade, they set up places in the cities where it was possible to trade in futures contracts and bet on price fluctuations. Thus, the Marwaris allowed for speculation in price development, or *satta*<sup>10</sup> trading, beyond the established futures markets, where the prices of opium, cotton and jute became

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<sup>10</sup> *Satta* was one of the forms of futures trade without delivery, which enabled speculation on the rise and fall of prices with similarities to financial derivatives. Today *satta* is also used as a term for mafia-run lotteries or, more broadly, for something done illegally.

particularly popular (Birla 2009; Bayly 1983; Yang 1998)<sup>11</sup>. The fluctuating combinations of the last digits of the price cotton were even used as a method for “drawing” numbers used for lotteries<sup>12</sup>. The types of betting markets the Marwaris offered, in this sense, blurred the distinctions between finance and betting.

As migrants the Marwari were also in a position where they could establish communication links between the commercial centers of Calcutta and Bombay and the villages of Northern India (Hardgrove 2005, 10). Initially price figures were communicated through a system of flashing mirrors from hilltop to hilltop (not unlike the initial communication of prices at the New York Stock Exchange from the tall buildings of lower Manhattan to New Jersey). However, as more and more post offices and telegraphs were set up by the Colonial government after 1870s, the figures could reach most of the country through telegraphs by the 1880s (Birla 2009). The train system was also used, by which figures could be written on the trains with chalk and driven through the country.

So whereas the gambling legislation from 1867 reflected attempts to keep order in the bazaars, the legislation from the 1890s onward targeted betting that potentially existed on a very different scale beyond the local markets. The new legislation was indicative of a particular time in history in which traveling figures could potentially be the grounds for a far reaching speculative economy – as well as lotteries – beyond the British controlled market for speculation. Whereas the early legislation had only targeted “gaming”, now “wagering” and “betting” were added as illegal categories. Focus shifted from games of dice and cards in gaming houses to betting on outcomes and numbers existing beyond local spaces (Birla 2009).

The concern over differentiating between legal and illegal markets for speculation beyond those set up by the elite was not unique to India. According to Birla, the legislation on gambling in India first of all reflected an overarching concern in Europe, as well as the United States, about distinguishing legitimate market practices from gambling methods. Because of this, clear distinctions were drawn along lines of class, separating methods of speculation on stock markets from speculation systems which were mimicking traders and commission agents of stock markets (Birla 2009, 146-148). The legislation in India may be seen as an extension of the anxiety over how to draw these boundaries. However, in India the distinction was further problematized in attempts to govern and to some extent criminalize what Birla calls “vernacular capitalism”, as practiced by the

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<sup>11</sup> This phenomena was also known at the time in America (Fabian 1999) and bears some interesting resemblances to the modern online form of spread betting (Loussouarn forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> This method became especially popular in Harlem in the 1920s (White et al. 2010, .)

Marwaris, from the modes of capitalism in the British markets. In this context, the battle over the right to sell the future was fought within the realm of gambling law.

Birla does not take the distinction between gambling and what has been termed finance for granted. In her examination of gambling legislation she explores practices of betting existing in between gambling and finance, and she believes the gambling legislation mirrored attempts at governing markets for speculation. Considering the analytical task of this thesis, in which I integrate research on gambling and finance, I find this case especially compelling, as it is an example of the historically blurred borders between betting and finance, which nevertheless through legislation were clearly differentiated into legal finance and illegal gambling. And in this, a space was made for horse race betting, which at the time, and with the developments in betting technologies, offered a governable market for popular consumption of risk products.

The problem of the new betting markets was therefore not linked to problems of production in capitalism, as argued by Rogers, nor to politics of discrimination, as argued by Hardgrove, but to problems of regulating markets for speculation and the development of financial capitalism. So rather than the gambling laws in India simply banning betting practices among Indians whilst allowing them among the British, the legislation can be seen, as Birla pointed out, as an attempt to create a framework for a legal economy in which only some forms of gambling could fit into. This meant creating spaces for certain speculative practices rather than just avoiding them. More broadly, it was about setting the rules for speculation beyond what was considered to be the deceptive practices of indigenous markets.

The Marwari traders/bookmakers were targeted specifically because of one of the many forms of speculation that they offered, namely the speculation in rainfall, which was defined as a game of chance and was therefore illegal according to the new laws. Yet, in the legal debates, the possibility of manipulating results became another central point from which to contest the legitimacy of the various forms of speculation in future outcomes.

### **Legal resistance to laws of chance: Manipulation of rain and racing**

Debates concerning gambling legislation both inside and outside the courtrooms provide a thoroughly documented ground from where to examine how the possibilities of deception and manipulation have been thought about and dealt with. In this section, I give an example of how existing rain betting markets were represented as open to manipulation in the court rooms, and then

focus more specifically on how Marwari bookmakers responded to such allegations by establishing comparisons with horseracing, thereby challenging the distinctive position horse race betting was given as a game of skill devoid of manipulation.

The focus of the debate on existing betting markets in Calcutta was on the existence of rain betting markets and, in particular, a betting site that was referred to by its address in the commercial areas of Calcutta, 'Cotton Street 67'. This was one of several popular sites for betting on rainfall situated inside courtyards or *havelis*. Inside the open space during the months of the Monsoon (June and July), a number of agents offered odds on outcomes determined by the amount of rainfall measured three times a day (Hardgrove 2005, 1).

In the public debates over rain betting, the betting sites were represented as a closed hidden system controlled by shrewd Marwari businessmen – a system which would seem confusing to an outsider. The problem of rain gambling was emphasized as a lack of transparency with the potential for manipulation. The betting system provided by the Marwaris was believed to be open to manipulation in terms of, among other things, how the rain was measured by the rain gauge. Descriptions of the betting sites were used as representations of “bazaar economy” embedded in kinship and caste structures. This was in contrast to the economy of modern capitalism, which was represented as something transparent and disconnected from culture through law (Birla 2009, 163). The betting economy of pari-mutuel betting inside the racecourses was an example of betting in the economy of modern capitalism.

The Marwaris responded to the claim of manipulation in their markets by arguing that horseracing, unlike rain, was in fact open to manipulation through the use of a whip or by the jockey controlling his own weight in order to improve his chances of winning (Hardgrove 2005, 11). This fuelled discussions around the legal distinction between games of chance and games of skill. With their ties to farming, the Marwaris argued that to predict rainfall also required important skills (Birla 2009), and at that time books were even published on how to predict rain. The Marwaris did not object to the differentiation of skill and chance. Rather, they tried to use the differentiation as a way of acknowledging alternative knowledge systems and betting traditions connected to farming rather than warfare and aristocratic lifestyles.

The Marwaris also compared betting at the racecourse with other forms of financial speculation such as forward contracts, whereby a product is bought with the intention of reselling it at an agreed time in the future. In such a transaction the product was not delivered to the purchaser, and during the period between the purchase and resale it was uncertain whether the price would rise

or fall. Marwaris thus emphasized that speculation on the price development of jute, for example, was similar to betting on horses in the sense that it was not a practice that involved an actual exchange of anything besides the exchange of risks. Horseracing and finance in general was thus compared and put in a similar category of gambling, thereby challenging attempts at differentiating some forms of finance from gambling.

When the gambling law was challenged in the courts, the legitimacy of the foundation upon which colonial law was established was also challenged. During colonialism, the Laws of Manu, which set moral standards and guidelines for correct behavior, had been integrated into family law. But gambling legislation fell under criminal law, which was differentiated completely from existing legal/religious texts. Yet, in the debate, it was argued by Marwaris that it was up to moral education, and not the law, to intervene in gambling (Birla 2009, 167). In the Laws of Manu the problem of gambling was framed as a problem of immoral behavior or an individual vice, which aside from being bad for the individual also had consequences for the broader community. In colonial law, however, the focus was not so much on issues of individual morality, as it was on attempting to define and classify different forms of gambling and spaces for gambling, as well as deciding on the methods of identifying them as legal or illegal modes of profit seeking.

In the debate the argument was raised that if rain gambling was banned at the sites in question it would reemerge somewhere else in some other form. The very argument of the importance of transparency in gambling economies was used against proposals to ban gambling, because illegalization was thought to bring gambling underground into economies of “secrecy” (Birla 2009, 162). According to Hardgrove, the ban on rain betting and following raids on rain betting sites reoriented the markets for betting. Thus in Bombay, the Rain Gambling Act, introduced in 1893, led to an increase on speculation in jute and cotton (Hardgrove 2005, 10). In Calcutta, after rain gambling was banned in 1897, other forms of gambling arose which were possibly operated by the same brokers and dealers (Hardgrove 2005, 12). As the banning of vernacular betting markets happened concurrently with the opening of racecourses to a betting public, the Gambling Act could have had the effect of not only banning popular forms of betting, but also channelizing betting enthusiasts towards the newly opened public racecourses.

The above debates shows that in the courtroom, the special position given to horseracing as legal was targeted by way of challenging notions of knowledge, fair play, the category of finance as something differentiated from gambling, distinctions between legal and illegal economies, as well as the superiority of law over the morality of religious doctrines. Therefore, the validity of not only

the law, but horseracing as a sport as well as the modern betting economy, was disputed as potentially unfair and deceptive.

To sum up, in the Indian context the anxieties expressed over gambling in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century did not just focus on gambling as a human vice, as represented in the Manusmriti, or the need for a productive working class workforce for capitalism, as it has commonly been argued (Rogers 1991; Reith 1999), but the possibility of different forms of manipulation in existing betting markets beyond the reach of a transparent, British controlled economy.

### **The moving line: Shifting debates on gambling since India's independence**

As the previous section illustrates, the history of horseracing has been entwined with important political and economic developments – and it continued to be after the end of British colonialism in 1947. Following Indian Independence, the attitude towards horseracing became entwined with post-colonial policies attempting to redefine the British heritage. The advantageous position given to horse betting cut to the core of cultural discriminations perpetuated through British colonialism, and therefore racecourses became grounds for ideological battles of post-colonialism. As racecourse land was transferred to the newly established government, similar to other sports grounds' (Dimeo 2005), many racecourses closed down, while the main ones in the large cities such as Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Bangalore and Hyderabad, as well as in the previous colonial summer residencies of Pune and Ooty, remained.

In the years following Independence, perspectives on gambling were cast along pre-colonial moral law, similar to the beliefs of the Manusmriti. In this context, horse betting was emphasized as a vice imported by the British. As part of the economic independence from the British Raj cultural independence was also sought, and Hindu moralities were subsequently foregrounded. Gandhi, who led the national ideological and political movement, thus targeted horseracing as an example of a British import the young nation of India ought to get rid of (Gandhi 1952). He proposed that horse race betting should be illegal just like any other form of gambling.

In the years following Indian Independence there were signs of resistance to the legislative advantage given to horseracing in case laws (Sethi 2009). Horse race betting was banned for a short period in Bombay between 1952-53. In the state of Madras in 1949, horseracing was classified not as a game of skill, but as an example of gaming or gambling, whereby it was illegal (Chettiyappaya 1995). This definition, however, was challenged in court while the racing continued, and it was not

until 1975 that the case was brought to the High Court, in which it was declared as a game of skill (Sethi 2009). The case was eventually brought all the way to Supreme Court, and in 1996 horseracing was defined as a game of skill in contrary to other forms of gambling that were defined as games of chance. This case represents the legal grounds on which horseracing rests today<sup>13</sup>.

Since the 1970s the public debate concerning horse betting has been focused on the management within the racecourses. In Bangalore, the season of 1984-1985 was called “the winter of discontent” (Chettiyappaya 1995). Two incidences in which the judges of the races had annulled the winners resulted in an uproar from bettors, who believed that the stewards were serving their own interests as horse owners and bettors as opposed to the fairness of the race. The incidence led the government to ban owners from functioning as judges for a period of time. As bettors engaged in public debates elaborating on the problems with the political organization of the race clubs, the race clubs became fraught with political controversies over allegations of corruption and deceptive economies.

In the 1990s, the political debates focused on lotteries and the state’s role in this type of activity. In the Indian Constitution of 1949, lotteries were declared legal as long as they were provided by the state (Sethi 2009). When this law was challenged, Sanskrit texts on gambling were again used, this time by the Hindu nationalistic party in power, *Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)*, as the basis for the argument that it could corrupt people in a manner not unlike what Gandhi had identified<sup>14</sup>. The Indian National Congress’ argument for state lotteries was opposed to this as a way of ensuring jobs for those millions of people employed in the industry, from salesmen to ticket printers. They used estimations from states that did not offer lotteries, thereby showing that four million Indians were employed in the illegal lotteries alone (Palai, Mishra, and Das 2006). I heard the same story from various people who had been employed in the lottery business who explained the reasons behind the ban to me. They were convinced that once an influential BJP politician had stopped getting a bribe from the lottery providers, he became so upset that he started a campaign against the lotteries. Therefore, it was not only in horseracing that assumptions concerning

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<sup>13</sup> This is a distinction that is used among horse bettors themselves today. Paradoxically, the case for the declaration of horseracing as a legal game of skill was fought and won by a horse owner who is seen as the ultimate personification of the deception and corruption of the horseracing industry today, and who is believed among bettors in Delhi to be involved in fixing the majority of races at the Madras racecourse.

<sup>14</sup> The analysis is based on interviews with people from two lottery association in and around Delhi working for the reintroduction of state lotteries in Delhi, as well as documents presented to me during the interviews. See also (Dandekar 1970).

corruption and other forms of deception was central to ideas of its operational logic, it was also the case in other gambling forms, such as the lottery, and also cricket.

Indian states have been divided overall on the issue concerning state lotteries, and lotteries are currently allowed in 12 states and banned in 17. Online gambling, however, challenges these variations between state laws, and Sikkim is the only state which allows an online state lottery, which can also be accessed nationwide. Sikkim, despite offering online gambling licenses, has not issued any online platforms for betting to date, nor has any other state (Mehra 2010). First of all, offering online gambling options is a controversial move. Furthermore, online bookmaking is not believed to be able to compete with the odds offered by easily accessed illegal bookmakers over the phone, who run their businesses beyond the payment of licenses and taxes. Online betting is also prevented by the Information Technology Act of 2000, which prohibits access to information on the Internet that can “corrupt” people, which so far has also included information needed for betting.

In the 1990s, the Indian National Congress, the second of India’s two largest political parties, used the argument that employment could be created through the lotteries. This is a justification for lotteries, which can be seen to be in line with a socialist political ideology, among other things concerned with employment rates and economic growth through the state. At the beginning of the new millennium, neoliberal policies began to frame the debate on gambling policies more clearly in terms of the possibilities for revenues as well as the need for modern entertainment. A need for profit rather than moral standards set a new tone for the debate. In 2002, the first Indian casino opened. Casinos are still only legal in the states of Goa and Sikkim. The argument behind legalizing casinos in Goa was the demand for more entertainment options for tourists to ensure Goa continued to be a popular tourist destination. The need for entertainment is increasingly being raised as an argument in states other than Goa. However, it is not only to appease the wealthy tourists, but also the Indian consumer who had an increasing amount of money in their hands (Unnithan 2011).

When discussions about horseracing emerge in public debates today, they concern issues related to real estate. State governments are giving shorter and shorter leases to the race clubs sitting on prime land, and some grounds are allocated only a year at a time. These policies create a sense of the racecourse existing in a temporary space. Regulars at the racecourse in Delhi are convinced that these conditions do not threaten the existence of the racecourse. Rather, the short leases are meant for politicians to get bribes from the racecourse management. The issue around land leases is thus one of the many indications that concealed economies have infiltrated the racecourse economy.

Different stages in the debates over gambling legislation from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today correspond with different stages in India's politics and economic situation. One of the later shifts from an emphasis on job opportunities for the poor to a focus on the needs of Indian and international consumers reflects a development towards neoliberal policies directed at a growing Indian consumer class and India as a global economic player. Yet, the most vivid debates concerning gambling legislation in newspapers and blogs today do not concern casinos or lotteries, but the issue of sports betting and, more specifically, cricket betting.

### **The threat of the bet: Concerns about foul play in cricket**

The public debate concerning fraud in cricket mirrors the interpretative frame in which the racecourse is interpreted. In the section above, I have argued that when the racecourses were made legal grounds for betting, the histories of horseracing and cricket went off in separate directions as horseracing was tied to the field of gambling and cricket to Indian nationalism. In the new millennium, however, concerns about betting markets and their involvement in fixing futures have brought the two sports closer to each other again. Only little public attention is given to horseracing, and it is not covered by national media. But cricket is in the spotlight as the national sport, so the threat of betting to the sport is a subject of great public concern. With both cricket and horseracing believed to be subject to methods of fixing futures, this represents a major problem for the integrity of these sports.

Writing in the mid 1990s, Appadurai observed that cricket was entering what he called a post-national phase, which was characterized by, among other things, commercialization driven by sponsors and media. In this process, cricket was not only the setting for national sentiments to be displayed, but also modern consumerism and the desire for money and fame (Appadurai 1996, 109). Since that time, cricket has gone through another stage of commercialization – not as a spectator-driven consumer product, but as a product for betting.

An expanding betting market can reorganize the sport at two levels. First of all there is a shift in the loyalty of spectators. As a spectator and bettor, putting your money at stake on a team or a player does not just create opportunities for winning money, it also creates new bonds between spectators and sports practitioners beyond loyalties to the community or nation or personal celebrity heroes. An Indian who places 1000 Indian rupees on Pakistan to win a game of cricket against India is more likely to hope that Pakistan wins despite it conflicting with their nationality. If the odds

change the bettor is equally likely to shift their allegiance back to the Indian team. Pnina Werbner has pointed out that in a global context, cricket can transcend national boundaries. In Great Britain, cricket can thus be a ground from where to explore a common identity (Werbner 1996). However, what I am suggesting is not a development from national identities towards transnational or global identities, but rather towards a lack of the importance of identity and community in the engagement with the sports. In betting, the connection between the sport and its spectators is defined as a speculative relationship.

Yet there is second level at which betting may threaten the sport, which does not concern the loyalty of the spectators to their communities, but the loyalty of players to their teams and by extension communities. This is a threat involving the role of the illegal betting market in fixing future outcomes. An exploration of the existing public debate on cricket in newspapers, blogs and Internet discussion forums, brings insight into the kind of control that illegal bookmaking is considered to have over sports in India today.

Despite horseracing having been declared a legal form of betting which may exist within the legal economy, the horse race betting market inside the racecourses is still linked to larger illegal betting networks with ties to the Indian mafia. When the cell phone was introduced to India in 1995 it made illegal betting markets less dependent on legal sites for betting, such as a racecourse, and made bookmaking more easily accessible.

In 2000 the police in New Delhi released transcripts of taped conversations between cricket players and national and international bookmakers revealing match fixing. Since then, theories of fixed matches and even deaths of players involved with mafia-controlled bookmaking have flourished in the public debate. In 2010, some months after my fieldwork, concerns about the state of cricket made international headlines after a match between India and Pakistan in which it was believed that key players of the Indian team had been paid to avoid getting any runs. The bookmaker involved, a British citizen of Pakistani decent married to an Indian woman, and with connections to Indian and Pakistani cricket teams, was sentenced to 32 months in jail for “conspiracy to make corrupt payments” and “conspiracy to allow others to cheat at gambling”. The bookmaker had been caught selling information, for no less than £150,000, on how some parts of the match would play out enabling spread betting on single events in the game. Whereas this could have been a ground on which the Indians could question the Pakistanis’ morals as part of the battle between Hindus and Muslims in India, it was the conditions of the sport rather than the old

Pakistani-Indian fight that was up for debate. These concerns about match fixing prompted an argument for new betting laws:

India and Pakistan, the two countries that drive both the passion and the business of cricket, don't have legal betting markets. Pakistan can't have them for religious reasons [betting is illegal in the Quran]. India, however, should allow professional bookmakers to price sporting outcomes. Until that improvement takes place, mobsters will keep collecting bets through illegal bookies from Mumbai to Kolkata. And they will keep running the business according to their core competence, which is to try to control some results by bribing or intimidating players (Chakrabarti in Indian Express September 3, 2010).

The quote above is one many that ties the idea of controlling the betting market with the need for new gambling laws that could reorganize the betting market. As the game of cricket can go on for days, betting can be carried out as a constant act of buying and selling bets along with changes in odds, not unlike trade in financial derivatives. Betting is not only done on teams as a whole, but on the performance of single players. Consequently, it is believed that it is increasingly difficult to keep the betting market's hold on the sport in check, as manipulations of results can be limited to small sections, also referred to as "spot-fixing".

Match fixing in cricket is thus an important ground from which gambling laws are currently debated. The debate is neither oriented at the consumer class, nor issues of morality. Rather, it is more directed at market governance through legalizing illegal sectors. The problem of match fixing is that it is often controlled by illegal betting rings involved with the mafia instead of by "professional bookmakers" operating on the right side of the law. The argument for legalizing sports betting is not simply to channel revenue from the underworld to the state, but to protect the sport itself from being corrupted.

Similar concerns about the corruption of sports stemming from the betting market have also characterized American debates on gambling legislation (McGowan 2008). However, considering the amount of money that American sportspeople make from performing well in the traditional sports economy, the betting market of the speculative economy is not thought to be as enticing for them. In the US and other Western countries today, debates over deception in sports focus on performance enhancement through the use of illegal drugs, in cycling for example, rather than undermining performance for the purpose of winning in betting.

Concerns about the betting market do not only cut to the core of existing parallel economies, they also challenge the basic understanding of what sport is. Is it a competitive game organized by a set of rules in which the best man, team or animal wins? Or is it a game of deception, where what is being performed is not the collective force of a community or natural ability, but a deceptive play choreographed in order to make money in concealed markets for speculation? At the Delhi racecourse, and increasingly also among cricket spectators, there is no doubt: it is a game of deception.

Before moving on to the presence of the Delhi racecourse in chapter two, I want to take one step closer to the racecourse and introduce the interpretative frame of the racecourse today, which nevertheless also involves a long step back in time into the mythic ages of India.

### **Games of deception: A mythic history of gambling**

During my time in Delhi doing fieldwork mainly at the Delhi racecourse, when I told non-bettors from various backgrounds who I interacted with outside the Delhi racecourse that I was researching gambling in India from the vantage point of the Delhi racecourse, the first thing I was told was to look into the *Mahabharata*.

The Mahabharata is one of India's two great epics written in around 400 BC. Despite it being tied to Hinduism, Indians of all religions become familiar with the Mahabharata through cartoons they read as children, through plays in which the story is re-enacted and today through the widely popular television programs reenacting the story.

The Mahabharata describes the war between two families, the Pandavas and the Kauravas (Narayan)<sup>15</sup>. The war eventually leads to major destruction and the beginning of the *kali Yuga*; the age of vices, which according to Hindu cosmology is the age that we live in now. This crucial war basically starts as a consequence of a game of dice. One of the two players in the game, Yudhishtra from the Pandava family, is represented as the epitome of righteousness and even temper. The dutiful Yudhishtra is, nevertheless, challenged by his cousin Duruyodhana (an incarnation of the demon *Kali*) of the Kaurava family, to play a game of dice. The game, more precisely, is a game of *Pachisi* similar to ludo. Sakuni, who plays the game of dice in the place of his cousin,

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<sup>15</sup> The Mahabharata is also used as a source for insight into the history of warfare horses in India (Pant 1997).

Duruyodhana, is nevertheless cheating in the game in which Yudhishtra is rightfully playing by the rules. Yudhishtra is losing and, swept up in the game, he keeps betting more and more of his assets. Eventually he loses his entire wealth, his kingdom, his clothes and even his wife and he is forced to go into exile in the woods (naked) for 13 years before he is ready to come back and fight for his kingdom.

For non-bettors, the story of the game of dice first of all shows that “gambling is in our genes”, as I was often told. This was even brought up in the debates in the 19<sup>th</sup> century described above concerning gambling legislation in India as an argument against the banning of rain betting (Hardgrove 2005, 10). The story of the Mahabharata is thus often interpreted in India not simply at the level of myth, but as part of the early history of the subcontinent.

Apart from the work tied to archeological investigations and the history of gambling law, gambling in South Asia has been dealt with in the field of Indology, dealing with the presence of gambling in Sanskrit texts (Handelman and Shulman 1997) (Bhatta 1985) (Thieme 1962). Apart from the Mahabharata, there is another important myth involving a game of dice between Shiva and his wife Parvati, in which they both cheat. This story is linked to the tradition of gambling during Diwali, as Parvati says that whoever gambles on Diwali will be prosperous<sup>16</sup>. Diwali is an important yearly Hindu festival, which is a festival of lights and prosperity in which gambling is done in homes in the time leading up to the festival, and especially on the day of *dhanterras*. In Delhi the tradition has grown in scale, and large gambling parties are held on large estates where hundreds of people come to play with large amounts of money. The game of dice in the Mahabharata and the tradition of gambling during Diwali are important factors in the perception of gambling as part of the genetics and heritage of Indians. Part of the reason why non-bettors suggested that the Mahabharata should be part of my research was the idea that contemporary gambling was a continuation of a long history of gambling in India.

It was not only the non-bettors, but also the bettors who pointed specifically towards the Mahabharata as a significant story to understanding how betting was carried out at the racecourse. Their interpretation of the story went further than the belief that gambling was in their genes. According to Rajeev, who we met in the opening vignette of the thesis, “it shows you that you

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<sup>16</sup> In the game between Parvati and Shiva, Parvati lets Shiva win in order to ensure order. The practice of letting someone else win in games has been used as part of rituals for the inauguration of a victorious king, in households ensuring the male patriarch’s superiority (Handelman and Shulman 1997) and, as I was told by a politician in Delhi, also as a way of giving bribes to politicians.

cannot win because the game is rigged". I was presented with similar interpretations of the Mahabharata by several bettors. They saw parallels between the conditions for the game of dice played between the Kauravas and the Pandavas and the game betting on horses at the racecourse: in both cases the game was manipulated and the future was fixed. In a way, the betting game was a reenactment of the manipulated cosmic games of playful gods and semi gods.

In Bollywood movies on gambling, such as *Race*, *Teen Patti* and *Jannath*, deception is portrayed as the condition for any game involving money. Such movies replicate the themes of the Mahabharata in terms of the use of trickery as a condition for all games, as well as the devastating consequences, especially for women, who are literally and metaphorically put up as wagers in the game. The existence of trickery and cheating in games is thus part of a larger body of stories told about gambling at various scales. The temporal scale on which bettors understood the racecourse was not the scale of a British history of horses, prizes and princes, but a human – and godly – history of gambling which existed beyond the rules and jurisdiction set up by the British in India.

Johan Huizinga in his seminal work *Homo Ludens*, argues that play has been central to the development of civilizations and defines cheating as a trait of the past. In his work, Huizinga on several occasions refers to play in Hindu mythology and also notices the existence of cheating in stories such as the *Mahabharata*. He writes:

To our way of thinking [in our time], cheating as a means of winning a game robs the action of its play-character and spoils it altogether, because for us the essence of play is that the rules are kept - that it is fair play. Archaic cultures, however, give the lie to our moral judgment in this respect... Many of the heroes win by trickery or by help from without... the Kauravas in the Mahabharata win by cheating at dice (Huizinga 1955, 52).

Huizinga approaches the Mahabharata historically, in the sense that on the one hand it is used as proof of the importance of gambling in archaic civilization, supporting his overall thesis of the connection between play and the generation of culture, and on the other hand it is understood as a pre-modern form in line with his evolutionistic approach to games. He thus emphasizes that the newer games have been developed in such a way that cheating is no longer a normal condition for the game. On the contrary, the condition is that the rules are followed, as part of the purpose of the game is that it creates order, which enables togetherness.

The Mahabharata may say something about an Indian past; however, the story is nevertheless interpreted today in terms of continuity when it comes to the basic conditions for games as being potentially subject to manipulation. Today, in games such as horseracing and cricket

there may be fixed rules, but there are also just as likely to be fixed futures. Rather than the rules determining actions, playing the game is stretched beyond the rules as the rules themselves are being manipulated with in order to win. If we were to follow Huizinga's thesis of the connection between games and civilization, the deceptive game challenges the very foundation of not only the game, but the ground on which civilization and communities rests. Yet, it also may be seen as a central condition for the interpretation of contingency in modern economies.

In line with Huizinga, in the anthropology of games and sports, the interpretation of the significance of games has been sought in the rules of the games and the practices they enables, rather than in the manipulation of the rules by economic actors seeking profit rather than togetherness. Sports have been seen as grounds for challenging political orders, rather than grounds for individuals seeking profit. The above summary of the history of horseracing nevertheless sets horseracing in the context of betting markets and emphasizes the concerns about fairness and deception it evokes.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I commenced with a focus on horses and finished with a focus on betting. Through the popularization of horse race betting in India, the horses, once symbols of class, political and military power, eventually became pawns in a game of speculation and deception. Horseracing was initially tied to British colonialism, the military force of the East Indian Company as well as the organization of the social lives of British people living in India. However, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the racecourses became public betting sites. This was enabled through gambling law, which at the same time banned other forms of gambling and speculation beyond the demarcated financial markets. The historical formation of the Indian racecourses weaved the racecourses into global developments in speculative markets, as well as local concerns over the legitimacy of rules of games, law and economy. The history of horse betting in India reveals processes of capitalism tied to the commercialization of speculation enabled through developments in technology and law.

When a sport like horseracing, as any other sport, is interpreted through the lens of betting, the game of the sport becomes blurred with the game of the betting, which destabilizes the very foundation of the sport and its rules. The concurrent economies in which the same sport is played out, formal prize awarded to the winner(s) and monetary returns awarded in the betting economy,

make it unclear which game the different actors are actually playing. In this unresolved space between the game of racing and the game of betting, the game as a whole is interpreted as one of deception in which the focus is on speculation on the intentions of players in the field, who are understood as being self-interested money-seeking individuals driven by vices and greed.

# Predicting people: Speculations on knowledge, connections and class

## Introduction

“Stine, which horse do you fancy?”

“I am not sure. Which do you like?”

“I am thinking of backing number three.”

”Why?”

“I don’t think the favorite is on the job [not trying to win]. That owner has two horses running, and I think he will have number three win even though number five is better so that he can make some money with long odds.”

- A bettor 20 minutes before a race.

In this chapter I focus on the procedures for predicting the future among bettors. I argue the procedures for prediction at the racecourse are oriented towards predicting people rather than horses. This is tied to the dominant idea that a large proportion of races are fixed or somehow manipulated by people. Examining procedures for prediction, defined as a method of managing information, can reveal something about how contingency within economic systems is imagined. Part of the contingency of horseracing is thus not just tied to the horses, but weaved into imagined economic systems of transactions of money and information from the jockey, the bookmaker, the owner, the mafia and those close to them. These are the economic systems of concealed economies bettors speculate about. In this chapter I show how the rationale behind the predictions related to how concealed economic exchanges were imagined to exist. It is important to note that I am not working from the assumption that there are manipulated races in the Indian racing industry, as this is something I am unable to determine. Rather, I am looking into how the idea of manipulation structures procedures for prediction and the information systems that grow out of them.

The focus of the chapter is mostly on the time before going to the betting ring to bet. This is a time oriented towards deciding what to bet and socializing with other bettors. During this time there is a relaxed atmosphere, music is playing and information available on the upcoming races is read while people chat with each other in small interchangeable groups. In the chapter, I describe three different bettors whom I followed over longer periods of time. First is Bobbi, who uses his cell phone to get inside information from someone inside the industry – information he pays for. Second is Rajeev, who practices “handicapping” by using statistics on previous races to predict

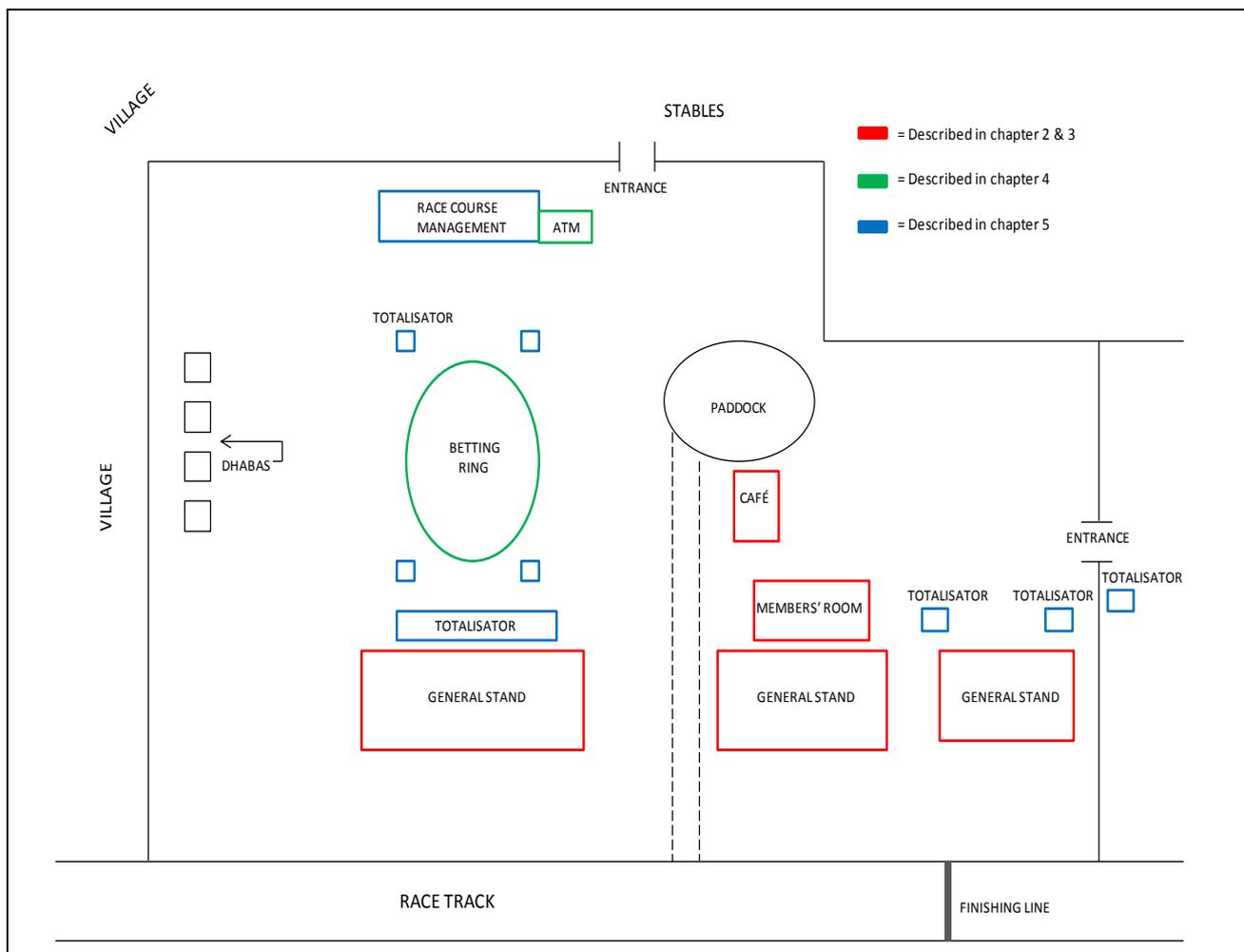
future races through mathematical calculations. Third is Abi, who is attentive to tips from fellow bettors on what to bet and follows the free suggestions from experts printed in booklets available to all bettors. Whereas these procedures represent different sources and methods of seeking and managing information tied to different socio economic classes, what they have in common is that they are oriented at predicting a future in a system that they consider to be deceptive.

The three bettors dwell in three separate spaces at the racecourse open to different socio-economic classes. There are the marginal areas of the racecourse, where the poorly educated and nouveau rich, such as Bobbi, can be found using cell phones to pay for secret information. Then there is the segregated members' room, where Rajeev sits in the company of other elderly well-educated men making individual studies of the horses' statistics. And then there is the cafe where tips are shared among men and women of the middle and upper middle classes. Methods for speculations in the future were determined by access to information, which in turn depended on one's socioeconomic position.

Gambling is a compelling point of entry to study how contingency is imagined. Gerda Reith, in her historical examination of gambling in Western civilization, has traced a development from Imperial Rome until today in terms of how outcomes were believed to be determined. This is a development from an idea of divine powers interfering with nature to the dominance of chance as part of laws of nature (Reith 1999). But I want to challenge this developmental dichotomy from the sacred to laws of chance. What I found at the racecourse was neither a belief in divine powers, nor a belief in probabilities. The future imaginary at the racecourse was tied to a belief in human beings with what seems as almost divinatory powers – strategic, economic and muscular – to determine outcomes. Therefore speculation on fixed futures was neither oriented exclusively towards statistical probabilities, nor towards ideas of divinatory interferences of luck, fate or destiny. Rather, the focus was on the possibilities of human manipulation of outcomes, which blur ideologies of chance and magic, and the predictions were in between calculation and foresight, or the visible and the concealed.

With the chapter I hope to contribute to the existing debate on modes of economic calculation and prediction dealt with both in the anthropology of gambling (Jansbøl 2009; Oldman 1974) and the anthropology of finance (Appadurai 2012; Miyazaki 2007; Zaloom 2003) by shedding light on how modes of prediction are tied to the economic system and its surrounding as well as to class. The Delhi racecourse is the setting for this analysis.

## Map of the Delhi Race Club



### Bobbi's cell phone: "This is very secret information"

The first of the three bettors I will introduce is Bobbi. I met Bobbi a month into my fieldwork. He came up to me while I was standing alone looking at the horses in the paddock. The horses were walking some rounds while their owner and trainer gave instructions to the jockey, after which the jockey got up on the horse and rode out to the racetracks. Bobbi came over to me without looking at the horses and told me to meet him "just after the fifth race over there [he pointed to where]. I have some information for you," he said. Then he left. I never turned up where he suggested because I had been busy talking to another bettor, Sachin, with whom I was betting that day. After the sixth race Sachin and I had lost big – 400,000 (approximately 8000 dollars at the time) and 1000 rupees

respectively. Bobbi came up to me next to the betting ring, his face red with excitement. He told me that he had won 500,000 rupees in the previous race after he had bet 50,000 on the horse TRUSTED FRIEND<sup>1</sup> with the odds 1/10. At the same time he made the point that he was upset that I had not taken his advice to meet him. Bobbi said:

I have really good contacts. We have the cell phone. I could not give you the information when I met you in the ring because this is very secret information. The information was only after the horse had taken its round in the paddock.

I was excited for him. He did not seem like a man I would have thought had that kind of money. His English was poor and the way he carried himself did not command much respect. I could not help but be amazed at how his money had multiplied. When I came to the racecourse the following day I looked for him, curious to know how he was getting the information. I found him with a large group of friends who were all attentive to what he was going to play in the next race. He told us that he had more information and asked whether I wanted to bet. I gave him 1000 rupees and told him to bet whatever he was betting. A couple of minutes later I was 3000 rupees richer.

Bobbi was excited for both of us. He said that he thought he had finally found a reliable source. He had never met the person who gave him the information. According to him it was his friend's brother, a petty trainer. This trainer was a friend of a big trainer in Mumbai, who apparently owed Bobbi's brother's friend a favor, and for which reason he provided him with information. Bobbi called his source in the morning and found out which horses he should consider placing a bet on. When he entered the racecourse, instead of depositing his cell phone, he paid the 2000-rupee fee it cost him to bring a cell phone with him. He expected his source to confirm the information approximately 10 minutes before the race, when the final decision on how the future was to unfold had been instructed. Sometimes the confirmation was a sign given by the jockey in the paddock. For example, if the jockey held his whip in his left hand when he got on the horse in the paddock, it would mean that his horse would win, and if he held it in the right it meant that it would not be win. Bobbi gave 10% of what he won from betting to his source after each race for which he had received correct information, which the day before had reached 50,000 rupees.

Next race was ready to start. Bobbi asked me if I wanted to "roll" the money, which meant that I should bet all that I had just won, and I agreed. The race was on and soon "our" horse was

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<sup>1</sup> All horse names are names of horse running at the time of the fieldwork, however, I have changed the names around in the specific cases.

running ahead of all the others. We won again, and so did all of Bobbi's friends who had followed his tip. Bobbi was excited. "I just won 200," he said, and then whispered "thousand" to me and laughed. The next couple of weeks I mostly played on the information I got from Bobbi. Bobbi was a jovial man in his thirties. He had a very open and searching look in his eyes. He wore jeans, a T-shirt and trainers and had his hair slicked back with wax. He was often smiling, which emphasized his puffy and reddish cheeks. Depending on what time in the day it was, whether there was a race about to happen or not, he would either walk very slow or very fast. Bobbi was living in a small rented barren room rather close to the racecourse in an urban village popular with students. His family owned a large piece of land in a rural area which, with rising land prices peaking in 2006 had meant that they had a yearly income of approximately 10 million rupees, and therefore had the money to support Bobbi, as the oldest son, in setting up a business in Delhi.<sup>2</sup> His parents were providing him with large sums of money, several million a year, thinking that he was involved in some real estate business in Delhi. The money, however, was spent at the racecourse, and had been doing that for a couple of years now. His East Asian wife, who he had met while working for some years as a truck driver abroad, was living in her hometown outside India. When he was there, he would bet regularly at cockfights, however he had recently been robbed after having won large sums of money, and now he felt that he had to stay away from the area for a while for his own safety. Bobbi had many extreme stories to tell about his life, involving large sums of money, politics, abductions and an abundance of women. He clearly lived to the extreme, and would come to the racecourse betting anything between 100 rupees and 500,000 depending on the kind of money he had at the moment. At times, when he had won large sums of money, he would go buy a car or a motorbike, which he would have to sell not too long after once he had run out of betting money.

Despite having (periodically) large amounts of money in his hands, Bobbi was not sure whether to categorize himself as a middle or upper middle class citizen. The wealth his family had derived from land put him in the category of an upper class citizen. However, at home he and his wife had little money. He was from a *Kshatriya* landowning caste, and coming from the countryside he had almost no education, which is another determining factor for how class is conceptualized in India. At the racecourse, Bobbi was considered as part of a group of "new money people" (also called *nouveau riche*), a term used for uneducated people getting money from the black market – most often from real estate businesses.

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<sup>2</sup> My survey revealed that a relatively large percentage of regular bettors were first sons, as they had more access to family wealth. 43% were first-born sons, which is a relatively high number considering the large proportion who were from a group of more than four siblings.

Bobbi always had a group of friends around him, with whom he could share his information and also the joy and disappointments after the races. The group would dwell in between the races in marginal area of the racecourse on beat up chairs and benches. At the racecourse the marginal area was ironically at the general stand, set up for people to watch the live races. As races were only held once a week, these structures were rather empty on other days, as they were far away from where the betting was done. The general stand was a simple construction built in concrete, with orange plastic chairs, most of which were broken. Dwelling in the marginally quieter area allowed Bobbi to focus on his cell phone reception as well as his friends. For Bobbi his decision-making was tied to his cell phone, and when he did not have an information source he became bewildered.

Bobbi was dependent on having a source, and for that reason was also quite faithful to it and willing to go to great extents to hold on to it even if it cost him a lot of money. This was also the case of one of the few women at the racecourse, Sheila, who also did most of her betting based on information. Her informer was a jockey from one of the other racecourses. She told me that she had gone and stayed with him in his house for a week. During that week, she saw how the jockey would tell different information to his different “punters”. A punter, which in English is the term for bettor, was at the racecourse also translated as “a follower”; this could be a follower of a particular bookmaker, but also a follower of someone from whom one was paying for information. What Sheila noticed was that the jockey would tell only one half of his punters to bet on him only if he held his whip in the right hand and the other half to bet on him if he held his whip in his left hand. In that way, no matter what would happen, he would ensure himself an income by giving these information. Knowing about these types of tricks, Sheila and Bobbi were suspicious of their information sources, but nevertheless gave them the benefit of the doubt, as they did not want to bet any large amounts without them.

Even after what Sheila had witnessed, she still stuck to the jockey as an informer, as she believed that he was giving her the right information. And even though the information that Bobbi was given was not always true he would also stick to his source. When the information turned out to be wrong, both Sheila and Bobbi reasoned it with the logic that in horseracing one could never know what would happen in the end. For Bobbi, getting information on a fixed future that was potentially true was the main excitement of betting. When I was betting with Bobbi I won quite a lot, and could not help but feel that there was something to it. When the horses that we had betted on were winning, it felt as though we were witnessing a future that had been decided unfold, like witnessing a play after reading the script.

At one point I was away from the racecourse for two weeks as I was visiting other racecourses across the country. On my journey, Bobbi had given me phone numbers of people to call for information in the cities I was visiting. These were people who were supposed to have ties to jockeys and trainers. When I called and referred to myself as a friend of Bobbi, I was given free tips, which did not bear any fruit. When I came back from my journey, Bobbi was in trouble. He had lost large amounts of money while I was away and had now given up his information source. As he owed his bookmaker money, he had to stay away from the racecourse and asked me to make small bets for him until he went to his family to get more money.

For Bobbi the outcome of a race was not evaluated along the line of whether or not there had been cheating involved. He did not explicitly distinguish between a reality that was naturally determined and one that was manipulated with. There was no clean reality so to say; just a reality that one could have an insight into through people considered to have a foot in the industry. When he lost he did not put it down to the race having been fixed. Rather, he just evaluated it as a sign of a weak source. Winning, on the other hand, was taken as a sign of acquiring unique information. “This shows that the information was right,” he would say excitedly after having won based on information. At times he would not even talk about betting on “information” but on “confirmation”. When he got a tip on what he was betting he considered it as a tip on a future that had been confirmed by those controlling it.

I have described above how, for Bobbi, the method for engaging with the contingency in a manipulated system was by seeking inside information by using a cell phone. This is one of several methods, which, as we will see, are built around the idea that the future is potentially fixed and for that reason it is known to some people and not to others.

### **The magic of manipulations**

To understand how these modes of prediction are both unique to the Indian setting and may also bear resemblances with other settings, in which the idea of information as being something kept secret frames approaches to the present and the future, it is worth comparing the Delhi racecourse with other studies on prediction in gambling. Kåre Jansbøl argues that people who gamble act in between the idea of outcomes being subject to chance or intentionality, and bases his argument on ethnographic fieldwork in a number of gambling settings in Denmark (Jansbøl 2009). In the forms of gambling Jansbøl examines, gamblers assumed that the future was not just determined by chance

(Jansbøl 2009, 114). The strategies that the gamblers applied to several cases in his study were used in order to understand the human intentions behind the game. This involved paying attention to various actors in the card clubs and casinos of Copenhagen. Jansbøl's analysis touches upon something central to the Delhi racecourse, namely the idea that aspects of the future are known and kept secret by somebody, which means that what comes into focus is people's intentions.

The only reason why information on the future can exist as a commodity to be sold to someone like Bobbi is that it is assumed that people have specific intentions for the races and the means to enforce them. Therefore, the races are not framed by the idea of chance where everything can happen in the in the heat of the races; the races are controlled by people who know things that – for the most part – they choose to keep secret. But there are differences in the types of secrets people keep. In Jansbøl's study, a secret can separate individuals from each other (not unlike the way that Simmel has conceptualized secrets in modern societies (Simmel 1906)). Conversely, the secret of the racecourse was always a shared secret. Thus the work involved in figuring out the intention of people did not lie in face-to-face interactions, as when playing a game of poker. Rather, the secret was believed to exist in information networks of people in the industry and extending out to bettors. It was an information network based on favors and information sales, which was closely tied to the betting economy.

Jansbøl built his argument not only on the observations he made at card tables, but also around a roulette wheel at a casino. Roulette, as with lottery, may be considered as game of pure chance, where there is a stochastic selection of numbers. Jansbøl highlighted how part of the decision-making process about which numbers to place a wager on was often influenced by speculation on how the croupier throws the ball – and how they *intentionally* throw the ball. This type of attention paid to croupiers' movements, or other people or players affecting outcomes, is also documented in analyses of American (Oldman 1974, 419) and South African casinos (Sallaz 2009, 11), lotteries in South Africa (van Wyk) and American card clubs (Hayano 1982). Unfortunately Jansbøl does not apply his method of analysis to the field of horseracing, even though the betting outlet is one of his many sites of inquiry, as it could have been an interesting point of comparison. But, judging from two short fieldtrips to a Danish racecourse, I did not identify similar ways of perceiving the intentions of people behind the horses, as the primary focus seemed to be more directed at the potential of the horses than the hidden intentions of the jockeys and horse owners.

An examination of how people pay attention to the intentionality of other people brings to light how contingency is imagined and engaged with. At the racecourse contingency was imagined to be part of a parallel economy existing in horseracing linked to the possibilities of various players winning from betting and bribes. And for someone like Bobbi, this contingency was engaged with by way of paying for information otherwise not accessible to him. As part of his analysis of the interpretation of human intentionality, Jansbøl refers to a text by Michael Taussig which discusses magic and shamanism (Taussig). What Taussig suggests is that the power of magic does not depend on a belief in the truth of magic, but lies in an inherent nexus of belief and doubt. This is because magic is basically encountered as a trick, and the potentiality of the magical trick relies on the ability of the trickster to conceal his trick. Magic is thus not simply defined by a belief in divine interferences in earthly matters, but is intertwined in human tricks and modes of concealment and blurs distinctions of something real and something hidden, as well as of technique and cheating<sup>3</sup>. Encountering magic is a movement in the space between the revealed and the concealed, and therefore shares some characteristics with speculative knowledge. Bobbi was oriented at revealing the magic or trick behind the races, and part of the excitement of betting was the engagement with magicality of witnessing a trick, which had been revealed to him. Both Jansbøl and Taussig focus on concealed knowledge about the reality of things. This correlates with the deceptive element in horseracing at the Delhi racecourse, where deciding what to bet often involved attempting to figure out the tricks of humans and the knowledge about these tricks, which was being kept secret. The predictive procedure directed at inside information at the racecourse drew attention to the magical elements of this particular kind of knowledge production of the future. Taussig draws parallels between the trickster, shaman and the gambler (Taussig, 155). Yet, when it comes to betting, it is not the bettor himself who acts as a trickster, but betting entails finding one's own method of revealing the secret, which in the case of Bobbi was through buying information.

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<sup>3</sup> In an Indian setting, a similar understanding of magic has been observed by Mills based on a study of witchcraft in Ladakh (Mills 2013). Mills argues that Evans-Pritchards text should not be read in relation to rationality, but to personhood and how human beings perceive intentionality (Mills 2013, 31).

## **The idea of deception and the wild connectivity of inside information**

In the above section I identified similarities in other settings in how prediction and decision-making developed through a focus on the assumed hidden knowledge of others. Yet, it is also worth considering how ideas deception is connected more specifically to an Indian economic setting. Jonathan Parry, in an article on corruption in India, explores how the overriding idea of corruption “in chai-shop and Gymkhana Club alike” affects economic exchanges that grow from this idea (Parry 2000, 28). He is interested in how an imaginary of an economic system of hidden bribes creates certain kinds of economic exchanges within it. I am interested in something very similar in this thesis, namely how the idea of a system that is manipulated and immersed with concealed economic transactions creates particular kinds of economic exchanges, one of which is the exchange of information on future outcomes.

Parry describes the bribes involved in the recruitment process at a steel company in the state of Chhattisgarh, and how such transactions are motivated by the dominant notion that bribes are the only possible route to a future job offer. How the system works on this assumption of corruption can be illustrated through the role of the *dalal*, a middleman or “commission agent” who is bribed in order to improve the possibilities of getting a job for the bribe payers (Parry 2000, 36). Contact to a dalal was established through the extended networks of both parties, and consequently, the dalal for the bribe payer was positioned in between a stranger and a friend, and someone who was both trusted and under suspicion. The idea of corruption, nevertheless, put the dalal in a lucrative position. If the bribe payer gets the job – for no matter what reason – it is interpreted as a consequence of the bribe. If the bribe payer does not get the job, it is simply a sign that it did not work out as intended, because the dalal as a middleman is in the end not the person in complete control. The position of the dalal is not unlike the position of the cell phone informer in horseracing. The informer at the Delhi racecourse was also positioned in between a friend and a stranger. Bobbi – and Sheila’s – contact was mediated through an acquaintance and was put into the category of a friend, or at least a friend of the family, which framed the relationship as a relationship with the potential for trust. Nevertheless, there was always an awareness that the informer might be cheating and giving away inside information, even though he did, in fact, not have any. Yet, because of the idea that the system of horseracing in itself was deceitful and manipulated with, for them there was no alternative but to trust the informer – as in the case with the dalal.

Bobbi kept with his contacts for months at the time. When he won, he interpreted it as “correct information” and if he lost based on the information he told me that it was never certain, as

one could never know what would happen in racing. This slightly inconsistent view on the value of the information was reflected in the money exchanges attached to the information. Bobbi would pay 10 percent when he won based on the information given, but would not in return be paid for wrong information, but would just be given the (wrong) information for free.

Parry's analysis shows how an idea of corruption also enables bribes and parallel economies, and, similarly, I will state that the speculation on the deceptive racecourse enables the existence of an economy of information, as the information on fixed futures is so valuable, regardless of whether or not the races are in fact being fixed or not. Jockey's alone can thus profit from selling information on races from on the assumption that there is race fixing. Inside information is in such great high demand, that it does not threaten their sale if the "information" turns out not to be untrue.

Thomas Blom Hansen in his article on the underworld of Mumbai, argues that certain people in the city are associated with unique and even magical forms of agency. He uses the concept of "urban specialist" associated with "urban infra power" to describe a particular kind of figure sought in the postcolonial city (Hansen 2009, 20). He writes:

These figures are supposed to be in the "know", supposed to have access to resources and knowledge that are not readily available to ordinary people. The magicity of these connections derive from their extra-local connections to centers of power – a gangster king, powerful elite figures, high level politicians, high ranking bureaucrats (Hansen 2009, 16).

What I wish to explore are the similarities in terms of existing ideas of how people are in the "know", as I see parallels between the informer and the urban specialist. Hansen describes figures that he suggests are central to the citizenship of urban dwellers, whereas I am specifically concerned with figures that have value in the world of racing. What Hansen points at, which is shared with the informer, is the magicity tied to being connected to those in power. Hansen points out that the form of organization around such figures, unlike what is the case in many other contexts in India, are not tied to the organization of kinship systems, caste or religions. Rather, what is defining is that the figures are immersed by unpredictability, and it is out of this unpredictability beyond systems of social categorizations that the magicity arises.

Some of the figures that Hansen describes seem more charismatic and higher ranked than the informers I dealt with, who were more often further down in the hierarchy, such as friends of a trainer who might know someone important. But their power was derived from someone else's power over the future. The value of the informer thus becomes an extension of the power that horse

owners have over the future, as a person who is supposed to dictate what jockeys should or should not do.

According to Hansen the ultimate embodiment of the kind of “urban infra power” he is describing is the taxi operator with his “wild connectivity” (Hansen 2009, 21). The taxi driver’s power thus lies in his connection to people and places. At the racecourse, I came across a bettor whose source of information was a rickshaw driver in Bangalore. The rickshaw driver supposedly took a horse owner to the Bangalore racecourse every day and as part of his daily route got information from the owner on what would happen in the races. The rickshaw informer was then paid by the bettor in Delhi for information on races going on in Bangalore, and he could also be used for races at other racecourses, since the horse owner apparently knew people from Mumbai and Hyderabad with whom he shared information. This is an example of the way that a driver can become an urban specialist, or at least a race specialist, from being connected, not emotionally or by way of kinship, but just through a physical presence with powerful people who could know and/or manipulate the future. The only driver I got to know at the racecourse was Rajeev’s driver, Shiv, who lived in the “village” adjacent to the racecourse. Rajeev, who I first mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, never gave any tips to Shiv. He purposely tried to discourage him from betting because that would distract him from keeping an eye on his white car during the (approximately) six hours Rajeev was inside the racecourse. Still, I came to learn that Shiv was a passionate bettor, as was the case with most who carried out various services for the wealthier bettors. And, based on his ties to the racing industry via his job as a horse owner’s driver, as well as the connections to his neighbors from the racecourse village who worked as jockeys, he shared information with people at other racing centers in India, and sometimes asked me if I wanted him to call his connections in Mumbai to get some tips. Therefore, being in a position in which he was considered connected, whether he was in fact getting inside information or not, enabled Shiv to be part of a large information network.

The bribe-receiving dalal described by Parry, the wildly connected driver described by Hansen and the informer in Indian racing thus have something in common. They derive their power – and their money – from their connections as well as the demand for their services, which are valuable in a system in which people are considered to have power over the future. The informer at the racecourse has a considerate role to play in the construction of knowledge in a system that is considered to be a system of deception, despite an awareness of the informers’ potential to be deceitful. The way that the economy of information existed at the racecourse was tied to

assumptions of corruption and concealed payments, as well as the underworld deriving their powers from their connections with those in control of the future. This interpretation of how things worked inside the racecourse was an extension of an understanding of how the economy works at various settings outside the racecourse as well.

### **“It is all about math”: Rajeev’s handicap**

Now I will turn to the second of the three bettors I will describe in this chapter, Rajeev. Rajeev was known at the racecourse as a good handicapper. Handicapping is a method of calculating probabilities based on previous performance of horses and present conditions. The word handicapper in fact describes the person who decides how to handicap the horses. It is this person employed with the race club who decides which class there are 5 classes) they should be running in and how much weight they should be carrying. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is in order to create a somewhat equal opportunity for the horses. The handicapper uses statistics on the horses to determine the handicapping of the horses. It is this part of the job that is parallel with the method of the bettor who is described as a handicapper.

Central to the method of handicapping is the information given in the “BOL” (trans. “speak”) or one of the other booklets with information on the days races sold from approximately 20 hours prior to the races outside the entrance of the racecourse. The BOL was sold for 15 rupees and printed on thin paper. It was filled with small letters and numbers providing all kinds of information that can be relevant for someone doing handicapping. This includes the class of the race, the distance, the age of the horse, the weight it was carrying, the breed, the timing and length of its last race, what shoes it was wearing, whether it was covered around its eyes, as well as the jockey, trainer and owner, whether the jockey was carrying a whip, and so forth. A handicapper can take all these things into account when deciding what to bet.

I was first introduced to the racecourse via Rajeev, and he was right there next to me when I placed my very first bet. The dead horse I bet on in my early experience as a bettor cum fieldworker had Rajeev questioning the grounds on which the races were conducted, as he thought the horse had been drugged. As previously mentioned, in some way this was an exceptional case. I never heard of the idea of a horse being drugged again. I had heard of horses being held back by jockeys, having nails put up their shoes and being starved before races to prevent them from winning. But the

presumed drugs the dead horse had been on were more to do with performance enhancement rather than inhibiting performance. Nevertheless, the only way that the exceptional occurrence could be explained within the logic of a race that was being manipulated with, was that it had been drugged. When it happened, I was surprised by the lack of sympathy Rajeev showed for the horse, considering he was a horse owner himself and after the day of the races we went to the stables to feed his horses carrots. Of the few horses Rajeev had, TEQUILA and SHAKIRA gave him a certain status at the racecourse as someone with knowledge about horses. Rajeev had been coming to the racecourse daily for the past 40 years, and throughout that time he had owned a small number of horses. Rajeev was in his sixties. He had melancholic tired eyes and wore dark heavy glasses. He was short with a strong build. He always walked with brisk steps, but his shoulders were slumped. He wore beige khaki trousers and a pastel-colored short-sleeved shirt and around him was a smell of cologne. Rajeev was unmarried and spent most of his time either at the racecourse or in his small bedroom covered with romantic posters of horses, a number of prizes from past races and a large television on which he liked to watch American sitcoms.

Rajeev would most often bet a couple of thousand rupees per race, but his monthly betting budget allowed him to have a betting range between 500 and 10,000 rupees on each race. His enthusiasm about his own horses was limited and, according to him, he kept them mostly for nostalgic reasons. For Rajeev, going to the races was about betting. He would only occasionally go to the stables to check on his own horses and he seemed slightly estranged and nervous when he was doing his ritual of hand-feeding them carrots. But one of the biggest problems with keeping a horse, he believed, was that he did not trust his trainer. Being fooled by trainers and jockeys, who would go behind his back and “pull” his horses, had made keeping horses “such a pain”.

Pulling a horse, which was the most common manner in which fixed futures were imagined, could be done by a jockey as a way of refraining it from winning by, for example, holding it back with its rope. The logic behind it was that it was considered in the interest of the bookmakers for the favorite horses, on which a lot of people had bet not to win. Therefore, it was considered a common practice at the Delhi racecourse for the bookmakers to pay the jockey or trainer to do something in order not to win. This was not only a problem in terms of being a horse owner, but also as a bettor whose task it was to predict the outcomes of the races. Rajeev would voice to these worries on a daily basis.

Rajeev was not only known to be a good handicapper; he was also known by his home address, which was situated close to the racecourse in one of the most expensive residential areas of

Delhi. He came from a family, which owned a respectable business, from which he retired and lived from its profits. His socio-economic class had enabled him to become a member of the race club, where one had to be invited to join by the existing board of people from the upper classes. Rajeev was not only known for his home address outside the racecourse, but also his dwelling place inside the racecourse, which was the members' room.

The members' room was small and a bit dingy. It was darkened by heavy curtains and lit with blue tinted fluorescent light. There were white plastic chairs lined up facing a big flat screen television that had recently been installed. The chairs were empty most of the time. Not many more than ten members visited the room daily, and they spent a considerable amount of their time outside where the betting was happening.

The ones who spent time in the members' room were mostly elderly men aged between 55 and 75. Most of them sat at a round table at the back of the room, where chai and food were shared after the races, and chatted. Rajeev was the only one sitting on the plastic chairs at the front of the room where he could better see the horses on the television screen. Just in front of him was a bar table where he had his tea and food, brought from home in a tiffin box, served by an dark, thin elderly man in a white uniform from the racecourse village. Inside the members' room was a chubby younger man who was a "runner" employed by the race club to place bets for the members in case they wanted to remain in the members' room. This runner, like most employees and people doing services, was also an active bettor himself.

Handicapping was basically a time consuming methodology. Rajeev at times brought a thick book of results from the whole previous season, which were available at each racecourse, so that he could "study the performance" of each horse in detail. The level of calculations that went into him picking a horse meant that he had very little time to chat compared with most other people, and he kept mostly to himself. He would sit in the same chair every day in the members' room watching races both in Delhi and in other parts of the country and remain seated until the horses were taking their round in the paddock. He was one of the few that would go to watch the horses to see "their condition" and stand silently next to a small group of men, also known as "handicappers", casting their eyes from the horses to their BOL and back again.

Despite his limited social interaction, most people at the racecourse knew of "Mr. Rajeev" and were aware of his handicapping method. They would describe him as someone who has "knowledge". The handicapper will let you know again and again that "it is all about math", and that handicapping is considered to demand a level of education and skills. Most often it will be

upper-middle and upper class elderly men who are associated with this method and the knowledge needed.

Rajeev was particularly interested in spotting the horses no one else was betting on. According to Rajeev, “you are bound to lose if you play favorites”. “Why?” I asked. “The odds are poor and the jockeys don’t make money on the favorite winning, but from pulling it for the bookies”. Rajeev mostly bet on “long shots”, which is the term used for a bet on a horse considered unlikely to win, but which has a good payout ratio. This method did not lead Rajeev to bet on the horses which, according to his calculation, were most likely to win. Instead he bet on horses which seemed least likely to win, but which he had thought had underestimated potential. For the same reason, Rajeev in fact rarely won. According to him he only won on three-four days a month. But when he won, he would go out of his normal comfort zone and tell everyone in the members’ room with a loud voice his reasons for picking the horse. Often he would point out how he had noticed how the horse had looked in the paddock, as if he had a special eye for the horses, giving him an extra variable from which he could measure the horse’s probabilities. When he won with long odds, people would know all about it, not only in the member’s room, but also outside when the workers would spread the word.

Handicapping was highly respected as a marker of the educated class. In the words of a bettor: “These people have their own horses; they bet according to their own calculations, they read books and then they bet accordingly.” People would let me know, in his presence, that “Rajeev is a great handicapper” and he would clearly enjoy the compliment. When talking to bettors alone, some would tell me to only follow the advice of Rajeev and preferably not talk to anyone else. Yet, it was not considered solely to be a methodology from which one could make money, so others would say that “Rajeev is knowledgeable, but he often fails... Poor Rajeev, he keeps losing”. The limitation of Rajeev’s method and knowledge, among other things, was tied to the existence of fixed races where knowledge about horses was not enough.

The method of handicapping employed by Rajeev was a respected method as it implied a certain mathematical education as well as an insight into horses, for example, through owning. However, the idea that a number of races are fixed and manipulated with challenges the method of knowledge production and the future tied to a mathematical education and time spent with horses.

## Forecasting failure

As I got to know Rajeev a bit better, I learned that he had a method through which he, through handicapping, tried to take the possibility of fixed futures into account. One day when I visited him at his home, he showed me a notebook that he never brought to the racecourse. In the book he made a note every time he noticed something dubious that made him think that a horse might have been pulled. Before going to the races, he would take these notes into account when estimating these horses' chances in upcoming races. He also paid careful attention to the constellation of the owner, trainer and jockey and looked for patterns in how and who were fixing futures. Through this method, he was not only assessing the horses but also the people behind the horses.

As part of handicapping, I noticed that pedigree was never considered to have a major affect on the horse. This was in contrast to the ideology of how people were viewed outside the racecourse, where kinship was very important in determining their value and potential. Inside the racecourse, genes and family heritage were not used to measure the horses' potential for success – not even among handicappers. Rajeev, however, noticed another factor of kinship, which had to do with the acquired “family” of horse's owner and trainer. He evaluated the trainers' skills of deception and the probabilities of them trying to manipulate the horses' result. The lack of trust he had for his own trainer was also reflected in his handicapping assessment, as he believed that the trainer could even be manipulating results behind the owners' backs.

He also carefully examined the owners. One day when his horse TEQUILA lost, he told me: “This guy Mr. Arora [the owner of the winning horse] bribes the other jockeys. My horse was running second. Why would he [the jockey] suddenly pull it for no reason?” I noticed how he suggested that it was not just favorites being pulled, considering that his horse was far from being the favorite. Sometimes it became hard to see the distinct pattern behind his theories. He relayed countless different versions of how horses were being pulled, by whom and for what reasons.

The extent to which he integrated the possibilities for fixed futures into his handicapping method was something he kept to himself, and when winning he only pointed out the kind of statistical calculations as well as his sight for the horses that had made him pick the horse. After winning he excitedly told me and the other men in the members' room: “I saw the horse in the paddock. It was shining. I knew it was going to win”. This kind of announcements reminded everyone that, unlike them, he had made it to the paddock to have a look at the horse. This story emphasis on the part of his method, which involved an observation of the horses, confirmed his

image as someone educated with knowledge about horses. However, secretly, he in his predictions was also focused on figuring out possibly fixed futures.

How people are associated with a particular betting method is not just a question of what is done before a race, but also is located in the post-race narrative reasoning one's success or failure with a particular knowledge or connection. When Rajeev won he would let everyone around him know what he saw in the horse that made him make the decision. When Bobbi won, he would put it down to having the right information source. Winning was tied to skills or connections. When either of them lost, they emphasized the possibility that the race had been fixed and that someone had had their own plans for the race beyond the reach of science or the information source at hand.

The predictive procedure was not only directed forward towards the future that was to be predicted, but also was situated in the evaluation of the past. Michael Jackson's theory of narrativity has emphasized narratives as means of empowerment, as through narratives people are not just passive victims of their own lives, but active participants in the unfolding of the past and future (Jackson 2002). Similarly at the racecourse, post-race narratives were ways in which bettors emphasized a level of control. By emphasizing that they knew what had been going on, even though they did not win, they acquired agency in events that were out of their control. As part of the narratives they were also positioning themselves along classifications of knowledge. Part of the reason why Rajeev was known as a handicapper was because he narrated his method of handicapping after the races.

Not only is handicapping respected, it is also central to the legal status of horseracing. Horseracing is legal based on the argument that skills are needed – skills based on knowledge of horses (Birla 2009; Hardgrove 2005). The legal definition for a game of skill in the Supreme Court ruling of in 1996 is as follows:

A game of skill, on the other hand – although the element of chance necessarily cannot be entirely eliminated – is one in which success depends principally upon the superior knowledge, training, attention, experience and adroitness of the player (Supreme Court of India in *K.R. Lakshmanan v. State of Tamil Nadu*) (Sethi 2009).

The idea of handicapping as the basic practice of calculation in horseracing thus brings legitimacy to the races through being associated with the educated classes. Despite the fact that the kind of handicapping tied to a “superior knowledge” of horses may only have been practiced by a minority at the racecourse, it was central to the image projected outside the racecourse. In my very first interaction with the race club management I was told: “This is scientific, it is not gambling.

One can predict who will win. It is not like the lottery, which is just gambling.” Handicapping therefore epitomizes the idea of betting as a science.

Handicapping is thus a respected and needed method which brings legitimacy to horse betting both in terms of class and law. Consequently, Rajeev emphasized handicapping in his narrative of his method, even though his decision-making was not only oriented at the horses but indeed also speculations on the intentions of people, and the possibility that the future was fixed. The possibility of fixed futures represents a crucial problem to the idea of handicapping as a science based on stochastic probabilities. However, manipulations do not completely rule out the method of handicapping, which has the capacity to integrate manipulations as a variable in the calculation of probabilities.

### **Calculating trust**

Whereas the younger generation of bettors, like Bobbi, are oriented towards insider information and speculating on manipulations, the older generation are mainly associated with handicapping. According to Rajeev, the morality of the racecourse was in decline, as the bookmaking market was increasingly taking over the sport. He was quietly aware of the limitations of his own knowledge and skills, and he seemed slightly timid when I told him that I had won based on inside information from Bobbi.

Examining the way that the knowledge is produced for forecasting at the Delhi racecourse, and the idea of shifts in the knowledge needed to succeed, I see some interesting similarities in methods of forecasting described in ethnographies of financial markets. In an article based on studies of financial firms, Hirokazu Miyazaki and Annelise Riles describe the current time in finance as a stage that manifests a “failure of economic knowledge” (Miyazaki and Riles 2008, 320). They identify a turn in the knowledge orientation where Japanese traders have gone from reading economic books to reading books on social relations and how to read other people’s minds (Miyazaki and Riles 2008, 326). This is because the knowledge needed for predicting markets is knowledge about the people in the markets, not the products. Caitlin Zaloom has observed a similar shift in American and British futures markets, from “interpretative analysis” based on economic models towards a focus on what other people are doing in the market (Zaloom 2003). Similarly at the racecourse, there was now a failure of horse knowledge.

In his book *Arbitraging Japan: Dreams of Capitalism and the End of Finance* (Miyazaki 2013), Miyazaki breaks this shift in the knowledge production of finance into three stages which he identified through an ethnographic study of a single person, Tada, who worked in a Japanese financial securities firm over a period of approximately ten years. These are stages that are characterized by different kinds of knowledge Tada relied on. Tada started out in his job with a methodology stemming from logics and mathematical calculations and models (Miyazaki 2006)<sup>4</sup>. From a mathematical calculation of his own future he realized that he could not reach his goal of early retirement, so he shifted to a strategy of following inside information. This strategy meant taking bigger risks, and as a result he became ever more dependent on the honesty of his sources. Eventually he abandoned this strategy after having had tremendous losses, which he blamed on the lack of reliability of his connections. He then shifted to a third strategy, which combined the previous two, and developed a system of calculating people's trustworthiness using a combination of inside information and statistical calculations. To carry out this method Tada developed complex accounting sheets which he used to predict various outcomes.

A parallel can be drawn between the shifts in Tada's methods and changes in the methods of betting at the racecourse in terms of the knowledge applied in order to predict the future. Handicapping, in which mathematical skills are combined with knowledge of horses at the racecourse, mainly exists as an idea of a method that well educated bettors may be using. Wagering on the future based on inside information is similar to the method of Bobbi, for whom the reliability of the source is central to his success. The type of method for prediction that Rajeev is applying when he marks down signs of manipulation in races, combining this knowledge with an estimation of the horses' abilities and patterns suggesting how certain constellations of people are manipulating outcomes, is about calculating the intentions and trustworthiness of people. He is trying to forecast the future by setting up probabilities connected to people's intentions, and the extent to which they can be trusted to try to win and not be double-dealing. As part of his evaluation of past races, he is trying to calculate the possibilities for deception in future races.

I would argue that most predictive methodologies involve a version of Tada's third strategy, oriented at calculating the trustworthiness of people. These calculations have implications for the people in the racing team, as well as the various informers. For Bobbi the calculation of trust is not only a question of whether the key players in the racing industry can be trusted to play by the rules,

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<sup>4</sup> In horserace betting there are also attempts at creating algorithms similar to those used in finance (Edelman 2003)

but also a question of whether what he is buying can be trusted. He evaluates outcomes in terms of whether his source was telling the truth or not. When his calculations indicate that he can no longer rely on his information source, he goes searching for a new source.

In an examination of the history of poker, Ole Bjerg has identified a number of shifts in the methods of playing poker, which he links to bigger changes in capitalism (Bjerg 2011). He singles out a shift in the early 1970s from using mathematical skills to calculate the odds of drawing particular cards, to a focus on being able to understand the human games and characters behind the cards. He connects this shift to the development of financial capitalism from the 1970s onward, in which capitalism has increasingly developed as an economy of signs. According to Bjerg, shifts in the economic systems and ways in which value are generated are thus reflected in the game of poker. In the case of the Delhi racecourse, I am not able to identify parallels between shifts in methods and shifts in India's economic system, as I do not have data on betting beyond the fieldwork period extending between 2009 and 2011. But I did hear from the elderly bettors about a noticeable change from the beginning of "New India" in 1991, when new economic policies tied the Indian economy to global finance, and an even greater change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with increasing privatization and an expanding middle class. The predictive methods at the racecourse reflect current ways in which economic value is generated and linked to a speculative economy, as well as the ways in which the actors operating in this economy are perceived. Rajeev would say, "Today all everyone cares about is money". He would juxtapose this with an undefined past in which there was space for a passion for horses.

Tada puts the knowledge systems manifested in the different work strategies into context, presenting two images of the successful businessman. He links the strategy of mathematical skills to traditional work ethics and the image of a loyal employee, and he links the strategy of inside information to a new neoliberal image of the smart young player who is able to generate profit through innovative methods (Miyazaki 2006). Similarly, the difference between handicapping and the method of seeking inside information represents different versions of what it takes to become successful in India. Handicapping at the racecourse is tied to people of "old money", who are educated and achieve success by working in large family businesses and possessing land (and maybe even horses). Inside information as a strategy is tied to people of "new money", who have benefitted from the growth of the Indian economy mostly by partaking in the parallel black economy that the "new economy" has fostered. Whereas one image of success is linked to ideas of superior knowledge, the other image of success is focused on maneuvering a system considered as

being deceptive. As in the case of Japanese traders, the predictive procedures at the racecourse were situated in relationship to two differing images of the procedures for profit.

Rajeev's personal method of handicapping gives insight into how knowledge of a manipulated future can be sought through a mixture of figuring out the intentions of people and mathematical calculations. This exemplifies speculation as a form of knowledge production in between calculation and suspicion. The assumption of the races possibly being fixed was shared by Rajeev and Bobbi, however, they employed two different procedures for predicting the possibly fixed future.

### **Coarse accounting**

Rajeev's method may be seen as an example of animated statistics, in the sense that he fuses statistical models with interpretations of people. Jansbøl distinguishes between these two methods, defining the first as pure mathematics and the second as intuition (Jansbøl 2009). The use of intuitive methods is thus tied to the idea that people influence outcomes, whereas the use of statistics is for those who believe in laws of nature and chance. But I have shown that it is interesting not only to identify diversions in statistics, but also to examine how statistics are used creatively to predict futures beyond a belief in stochastic outcomes. The use of statistics therefore does not necessarily represent a universal surrender to laws of nature, but it can also indicate an active engagement with a context-specific interpretation of contingency. Rather than thinking of statistics as a mathematical method differentiated from more interpretative methods, we can consider what Appadurai has called the "ethos of calculation" as an entry point to an understanding of "uncertainty imaginaries" (Appadurai 2012) and, further, to interpretations of contingency.

So before turning to the third of the three bettors and methods I describe in this chapter, I want to stay with the question of ways through which the possibility of fixed futures are incorporated into methods involving statistics and math through a focus on how Rajeev and other bettors held accounts of wins and losses at the racecourse. What I noticed was that accounts of wins and losses were noted among bettors in such a way that their betting strategies, for example the use of a particular information source, could be evaluated in relationship to each racecourse.

I came to learn that the method around which accounts were made on wins and losses was 1) built up around the racing season, from September to May, and 2) divided across the different racecourses. These accounts were either written on accounting sheets at home or retained by memory. Bettors would keep approximately six separate accounts concurrently and would, for

example, separate them into Delhi races, Mumbai races, Bangalore races, Hyderabad races and Kolkata races. This way of structuring the past through their profits enabled the bettors to evaluate their strategies not simply by the total number of wins and losses, but by wins and losses set in the different socio-geographical settings in which the races were happening. For example, Rajeev, who kept a written account, would say, “I am in minus in Mumbai and Mysore, but I am in plus in Delhi”. Bobbi, who kept a mental account, would say upon winning a large amount, “Now I am back in Delhi races”, which meant that he was now on the plus side of his Delhi races account.

When trying to understand the patterns of the races, the bettors were not only looking at the horses, but the centers in which the races were taking place. Horse owners, trainers and jockeys generally stick to a single racecourse, except for at cup or invitation races such as the Derby. Therefore, each Bangalore race, for example, almost always involves the same actors. Some horse owners are known to pull their horses more than others, or a specific combination of jockey and trainer may be considered to be a constellation whereby the likelihood of a horse being pulled is taken into account based on assessments of previous races with that team. Keeping accounts of a specific center is therefore a way to keep track of economies and relationships that determine the race results.

Accounts are kept on each individual center, as each racecourse is considered to have distinct economies and ethics influencing the conditions of the races. People’s perceptions of the Delhi racecourse are the same, whether you talk to a regular in Delhi or a bettor at one of the other racing centers. In the words of a bettor at Mysore racecourse: “In Delhi you don’t use handicapping; handicapping is not enough there. At Delhi racecourse there is a lot of pulling [of horses]”. He thus used different methods at different centers, emphasizing that handicapping as a method did not work for races held in Delhi because inside information was needed in that setting.

The Mumbai racecourse, conversely, is considered to have the most races with people actually wanting their horses to win<sup>5</sup>. “In Mumbai the owners are very rich; they don’t need the money, they just want to have their picture taken,” Abi said. That said, the mafia is believed to be

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<sup>5</sup> Alfred Gell in an examination of an Indian market place argues that hierarchy can be identified not only within markets, but also between market places, and it is not coincidental what days the different market places are open (Gell 1982). If we consider racecourses as markets for odds, the fact that Delhi races are held on Tuesdays and Mumbai races are held on Sundays creates a certain pragmatic frame around the different spaces as Sunday is a day for leisure where the racecourse with its live races can become a place for the family entertainment in contrary to Tuesdays, which is a workday. According to the Vedic calendar Sunday (*Ravivar*) is a day for coronation, bravery, auspicious works and trade. Tuesday (*Mangalvar*) on the other hand is considered to be an unlucky day according to Hindu astrology associated with killing, lying, thievery, and war (Gell 1982, 119). There was no direct connection made to the Vedic calendar among bettors, yet, it mirrors a perceived difference between the two racing centers.

more involved in Mumbai than at other racecourses, which means that the possibility of fixed races is still looming in the background. Regional stereotypes of greedy “Delhi-wallahs”, fame-seeking Mumbaiites involved with the mafia, was thus reinforced and acted upon at the racecourse, from which the basic system on which the racing existed was attempted to be decoded.

Hyderabad racecourse is considered the most “developed” center compared to the ways in which racing is conducted abroad. Its status is due to the fact that it is the only racing center which actually owns the land on which the horses are running. This racecourse, unlike the others, was not situated on the same piece of land on which it had originally been established (in the middle of the political power center), but on land that had been bought by the race club at the margins of the city. Bettors therefore considered the racecourse to be more independent from politicians, who usually provided the race clubs with the leases, and to have better finances considering that it did not have to pay the leases – and more importantly, bribes. Hence, the image people had of the racecourse was that it did not suffer from corruption as much as the other racecourses. The club could also offer some of the highest prizes for the winning horses because of its good finances. Therefore, in Hyderabad it was considered more likely that the people behind the horses would aim to win the races instead of making money at betting.

Overall, this makes the Hyderabad center more “dependable”. By dependable, the bettors meant that it could be trusted, that the races that were held were not easily subject to manipulation from the betting market. What is interesting, however, is that the Hyderabad races are not more popular than the Delhi races and the Mumbai races at the Delhi racecourse. The reason is that if all horses are trying to win a race, it may be more difficult to predict the race, as was pointed out to me: “When the stakes [winning prizes] are high, at least six or eight horses will try.” This is different from other races with low winning prizes, where many of the horses running are considered “not on the job”. When horses are not on job they are not running to try to win, but only to create a situation where they could win with good odds a later point by being handicapped in such a way that their chances for winning are improved. During races where many horses are thought to be on job, and the horses are allowed to show its true abilities, bettors are dependent on predictions on the horses alone, prediction that do not take into account the human intentionality. This changes the focus from the people to the horses.

Whether based on ones calculative skills or an information source, keeping an account of wins and losses divided on the different racing centers allows bettors to evaluate their own strategies in relationship to larger economic systems in which the races are taking place. Thus, the

extent to which the possibility of a race being manipulated depends on the racecourse, and therefore the method of prediction is adjusted according to where the races are taking place. Betting methods are thus not only tied to the possibility of deception in horseracing at large, but rather it is located in local economies. Therefore, statistics are not just used in order to predict horses through handicapping, but also in an attempt to evaluate the patterns of each racecourse's economy.

### **“You tell me what you know and I will tell you what I know”: Abi's tips**

Now I will turn to the last of the three bettors and predictive procedures described in this chapter, namely Abi and the method of seeking free tips. Abi stands somewhat in between the method of handicapping as practiced by Rajeev and that of inside information applied by Bobbi. His methodology is neither dependent on his own complex statistical calculations nor on money to pay for tips, but consists rather of following suggestions available to him from the printed media based on handicapping as well as from the immediate social surroundings. He gets tips either from the BOL or acquaintances among those in the café, which was his preferred spot to be at the racecourse between bets.

Abi was short, thinly built man in his early seventies. He was always wearing a black suit that was slightly too big for him, yet his white hair was neatly combed and he walked elegantly at a slow pace. Abi was a playful character and always had a twinkle in his eyes. He said he had been a “gambler” since the age of six, when he started to place bets on a game using ceramic balls from soda bottles in the streets of a Pakistani city. When his family had fled to India after Independence in 1947, his father worked on the railways, while his mother took care of Abi and his seven brothers and sisters. They had very few material possessions. Abi told me that through public education and “a bit of luck” related to Indian war politics, he managed to get himself into the air force, which opened up a new world to him. While in the air force, he was exposed to horseracing as many racecourses were situated around army and air force land. He started betting on horses when he was 23 years old when he was posted to Southern India<sup>6</sup>. When he was posted far away from any racecourse, he would do his bets over the phone with illegal bookmakers. After retiring he spent most his time and money (he received 30,000 rupees in pension a month) doing some form of gambling. Besides his daily trips to the racecourse, he also bet on all major cricket matches and

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<sup>6</sup> According to the survey of the Delhi bettors, the mean of the age that the bettors had started horse betting was 26 years old.

played cards with stakes in the evenings. From his previous employment in the air force he had earned a membership in the prestigious Gymkhana Club situated next to the racecourse, where he often went straight after the races to play cards.

I first met Abi during the first month while I was still spending most my time betting with Rajeev in the members' room. That day one of Rajeev's two horses, TEQUILA, was running. He was sitting and watching a slow motion replay of the previous race on television when he offered me a cup of coffee. After a while, he said to me, "If you tell me what you know, I will tell you what I know," referring to the insights I might have had into the status of TEQUILA. I told him that Rajeev had not told me much. He turned it around and told me to wait until *he* provided me information on what to bet. After having gone and come back he told me to bet on TEQUILA. TEQUILA came second, and Abi insisted that he would make sure I would get my money back through a better tip on the next race.

The café was a cheerful spot in which bettors sat around tables chatting about upcoming races. Now and then a bettor would order a soda, a cup of coffee or a snack, from the rather sparse refrigerated counter. The café resembled that of the coffee chains that had become central to middle and upper class public life over the past decade in urban India. Unlike the members' room, the café was, in principle, open to anyone. Yet, not everyone entered. The ticket to enter the café was that of modern consumption. Here you could buy a coffee for 26 rupees as compared to eight rupees for a chai in one of the *dhabas* close to the betting ring. The café was where many of the few women stayed, as it provided them with a more secure place to sit and a comfortable seat.

Spending time in the café I was intrigued by Abi's cheerful and ironic approach to himself and his surroundings. He got away with constant flirtatious remarks surrounded by a lot of self-irony. There were no barriers and no pretensions, it seemed. He had the ability to break down reality, as he experienced it, into single, almost lyrical sentences, which were always followed up by contagious laughter. One of the first sentences he said to me was, "Here you find rich [people] who want to be poor and poor [people] who want to be rich [laughing]". As we were watching the previous race in slow motion, before we were going to bet on TEQUILA, he proclaimed to me: "I just lost. The horse was 'not on job'". Like Bobbi, Rajeev and anyone else I spoke to at the racecourse, Abi evaluated races through speculations in concealed economies. However, his method was different from Bobbi and Rajeev's. He neither had the money to pay the daily fee of 2000 rupees to bring a cell phone, nor the knowledge needed for handicapping.

On the very first day we met in the café, Abi told me about his method of “picking a winner”. On most days he would bet between 500 and 1000 rupees per bet. Mostly he would choose between the three horses that were listed as likely winners in the BOL. These were his “safe bets”, but they were also horses running with short odds, meaning that he would only win small amounts from his bets. The horses listed in the BOL had been picked by a man working as a “handicapper”, who, based on the statistics of the horses alone, would select the most likely winners.

Besides the safe bets Abi was also on the lookout for “risky bets”, or horses running with longer odds, and received tips from fellow bettors or his bookmaker (a practice I will return to in next chapter). Abi did not pay for information, but nevertheless sought it out from his social relationships at the racecourses. With his outgoing personality, Abi knew a lot of people and never sat alone. He would ask fellow bettors what they thought about the safe bets he picked based on the printed tip from the handicapper of the BOL. He would phrase his questions as, “What do you fancy?” or “Have you got something?”, trying to squeeze out potential inside information in a friendly way.

Abi would also happily tell others what he was betting and his greatest joy seemed to be when he had not only won himself, but also had given me a tip which I had followed so we could be winners together. When Abi had received a tip from a friend on a race that might be manipulated he would say: “Don’t tell anyone, also not your uncle [Rajeev]... I am telling you as a friend, because I want to give you something nice and make you have a good time in India.” Abi saw the value of inside information as being connected to secrecy and relationships based on confidentiality, which was also the case for Bobbi.

Abi’s collaborative method of selecting a horse is representative of what I see as the most common procedure for prediction at the racecourse. Whereas handicapping was mostly associated with the elite and the cell phone methodology used by the young nouveau riches, the method of trying to figure out what fellow bettors were betting was central to the middle and working class bettors at the racecourse. This procedure in many ways defined the sociality of the racecourse as a place with where people had a consistent awareness of what others were doing.

Despite his extravagant lifestyle, Abi, coming from a poor background, was able to share vivid stories of the experience of being in need and the poor conditions for love and sympathy in his upbringing. Despite being good-natured, he had a very cynical perspective on human nature. On the one hand he thought that everyone was acting out of greed, including himself, but he was also particularly aware of people who he believed to be acting out of need, as he related their situations

to his own experiences of fighting for survival. He always pointed out hard working people from the lower classes around us, and commented on the conditions under which they had to make a living. When he was deciding on what to bet, he paid particular attention to the jockey. He emphasized the economics behind the races that involved the jockeys, who would only get 7% of the total prize money, which often was less than 100,000 rupees. Therefore, the manipulated races, from Abi's perspective, were simply a reflection of the human need of the jockeys living in slum-like conditions. Based on the fact that the bookmakers could pay them much more to pull a horse, Abi saw it as a natural consequence that the races were rigged. It was simply a pure combination of the bookmakers' greed and the jockeys' need. Therefore, Abi's interpretation of the racecourse as deceptive was tied into the betting market inside the racecourse, the living conditions outside the racecourse and his personal history, facing both a history of need and his own greed for money.

Besides the printed tips given in the BOL, priced at 15 rupees, there were also advertisements from single people selling tips, also called "tipsters". These advertisements highlighted the racing centers for which they were giving tips and the odds that previously tipped horses had given. It emphasized handicapping as the methodology and themselves as authors of books on horseracing (which I could not find). The advertisements would also promise something like a "hot tip at the appropriate time", which also implied that the tipper had connections to inside information. The advertisements were thus both promoting handicapping and inside information.

A third source of tips could also be found in the café, which consisted of the people from the surrounding village. These were men who worked as runners by placing bets for bettors who wanted to remain seated inside the café. The runners consisted mostly of ex-jockeys and riding boys, and some presented themselves as assistants to jockeys, trainers or horse owners. The runners were not only doing the service of running to place bets, they were also providing suggestions on what to bet. They were paid when the people they were working for won, and their daily income from the winnings was often about 100 rupees.

The runners, as with the tipsters advertising for their services in the BOL, framed their expertise in giving tips both in terms of their knowledge about horses, due to their current or previous job, and their insights into what was going on in the stables. The racecourse villagers had access to the backstage of the racecourse and had contacts to other jockeys who could be sharing their role in fixing futures. The runners were on-site information providers, as opposed to information sources Bobbi used.

Abi did not distinguish between the tipsters advertising their services and the runners from the village. According to him all tipsters were “cheaters”. For Abi, tipping was central to the social relationships he had established at the racecourse and existed beyond money exchanges. Tips were something he was seeking in people around him and that he was also happy to give – secretly – to others, including me. As part of Abi’s method of betting he was always focusing on what others were doing, both in an attempt to do the same as them and to influence what they were doing. As with Rajeev and Bobbi, betting implied a focus on people, but unlike Rajeev and Bobbi, Abi’s focus on people was attention given to those in his immediate presence.

Because of the presumption of fixed futures there is an extensive market for information which stands in an oblique relationship to existing systems of knowledge. Parallel to that, there is also a system of exchange of tips beyond market transactions. The information flowing around the racecourse is somewhat ambiguous in the sense that it can be unclear what kind of expertise or insight it grows from, be it an understanding of horses or a knowledge of fixed futures – or whether it is based on anything at all. This overload of vague information is a central characteristic of the racecourse as a speculative space where the future is sought in between reason and fantasy.

### **Following the herd**

Abi’s method turns the focus to another salient practice of the Delhi racecourse, namely imitation, also termed as to “follow” someone. This is a procedure for prediction independent from the exchange of written or verbal information and of the processing of information given. Imitative betting could be executed simply by observing the actions of other bettors. This is a method that was especially popular with the working class bettors, who sometimes waited at the entrance of the café and the members’ room waiting for bettors to come out. They would follow these bettors so they could figure out what they were betting or ask them directly what they were betting. The people doing mere imitation did not carry the BOL with all the information on the horses and the racing teams, but a yellow sheet of paper. This paper was handed out at the racecourse for free, and included only basic information on upcoming races without the details used for handicapping and without a selection of likely winners. The imitative bettor neither has the information needed for handicapping, nor the money needed to buy tips or buy a cup of coffee in the café, which would enable them to socialize with those who might have some insight into the various races. Thus the

access to information, and therefore also the method for prediction, was dependent on class. An exception to this are the working class bettors who live in the racecourse village.

Once he got outside the members' room, Rajeev was often asked what he was betting by people he did not know. He was aware that he had a "tail" trailing after him, which he found amusing. I also got used to being bombarded with questions about which horses I liked. Many bettors thought that I had acquired good tips on what to bet considering all the different bettors I was interacting with throughout the day, and also because they believed that, as a woman, the bettors probably wanted to please me with the gift of a good tip/money.

One day, a horse called COPENHAGEN was running. I was planning to bet on this horse for no better reason than the fact that it was the name of my home city. As always, I was asked what I was going to bet by a number of men who I barely had the chance to look at before they ran away to place a bet. Before I arrived at the betting ring I had been talked out of betting on COPENHAGEN by both bettors and bookmakers who told me that there was no way it was going to win. I instead bet on COPENHAGEN to place second.

COPENHAGEN won in a close race. I regretted that I had changed my mind, as the unusually long odds had meant that my winnings would have been 70 times my bet. I tried to find comfort in the fact that practically everyone at the racecourse had also lost, as no one else had bet on it. Later in the day, however, a man who I did not recognize came over to me and thanked me endlessly for "giving" him the horse. He had asked me what I was betting on early and had become 7000 rupees richer from his 100 rupees bet.

The imitative method of prediction is linked to spatial practices and the organization of knowledge in space. Knowledge of the future is situated in the members' room as well as in the café, and because I spent a fair amount in these places, I was also considered to be "in the know". Furthermore, part of the method is the idea that knowledge is not something that one as an individual can internalize, but something that exists in the external world. The practice of imitation, as with Abi's method of following tips, is based on the assumption that others have the skills, connections or money needed to know which horse is going to win.

The methods of Rajeev and Bobbi represent two extremes. Whereas Rajeev produces knowledge himself, Bobbi seeks knowledge from outside the racecourse. Abi also sought outside knowledge, but looked for it within the premises of the racecourse. That said, Bobbi and Rajeev were also, to some extent, paying attention to what others were doing, especially when they bet at the racecourse, which I will explain in chapter four. Abi's procedure of prediction comes closest to

what can be considered as the dominant method used at the racecourse, by which seeing the racecourse as a deceptive environment and speculating on concealed economies directs bettors' attentions towards other people who might have some insights into a possibly fixed future.

### **Classified betting methods**

Above I have described three methods for predicting outcomes in the races and located them in social spaces as well as in domains of knowledge. At the racecourse people were categorized by bettors along their predictive procedures. What is worth notice, is that the main categorization did not concern the amounts bet, but the method of obtaining knowledge on the future. The methods existed as central identity markers, tied to categories of people, and were hierarchically ordered. Therefore, examining modes of classifying bettors brings insight into existing hierarchies of knowledge.

In 1967, sociologist Irving Kenneth Zola, in the first edited book with sociological and anthropological approaches to gambling, wrote a chapter on betting based on observations of an illegal off-track betting shop in an unspecified city in New England in the US (Zola 1967). Zola argues that inside the betting shop a hierarchy related to betting strategy operated independently from whether one was winning or losing. At the top of the hierarchy was the method of "handicapping", similar to Rajeev's method, yet without the integration of measuring manipulation in races. Second in the hierarchy was what Zola calls the method of the "hot tip", which is similar to Bobbi's method, yet without the use of a cell phone.

The third method in the hierarchy was a method Zola calls the "hedge". In this method the explanation behind why a horse is picked to win is not given until after the race. Based on my fieldwork, I would not classify this method as existing at the same level as the other methods he mentions, as it is a narrative and performative strategy existing post race, rather than a method of prediction pre race. I would say that "hedging" can be part of all predictive methods, as it consists of ways through which one's knowledge of the future, which is now the past, is interpreted. Yet the hedge is most often performed as part of the handicapping methodology, through which personal skills are emphasized. An example of this would be the way in which Rajeev would talk about how he had picked a winning horse only when he had won.

In the hierarchy of the strategies in the betting shop, Zola places the "hunch", or what sometimes also is called a "women's bet", at the bottom. This is a procedure defined by seemingly

random choices, which, for example, can be based on the name of a horse (not unlike the bet I made on COPENHAGEN). I became somewhat known at the racecourse as “the one who had bet on COPENHAGEN”, despite never having bet on it. At times I was asked how I had decided to bet on it. I mentioned that I had only picked it to come second, and explained that my interest in it had stemmed from the name of the horse. When I clarified this, I noticed that the conversation ended instantly and that the bettors were somehow disappointed, not so much due to the fact that I had not bet on COPENHAGEN, but because of the reasons I had for intending to bet on it. By pointing out the name as the determining factor alone, I did not recognize that there was a system behind the game that needed skills or connections. What I witnessed then, and on other occasions, was a sanctioning of the approach. The women’s bet threatened the ground on which betting was considered to be an active engagement with an economic system which was to be deciphered. The women’s bet degraded horseracing to a game of chance; a game where no skills or knowledge were needed. This made horseracing closer to the kinds of games which by law were not allowed, and more importantly, which ridiculed the otherwise time consuming and, for some, expensive activity of prediction.

Zola defines his site of research as a lower class setting. He explains that part of the popularity of betting is that social recognition can be achieved through betting. He argues that success is sought through betting among other people, who may not have had successes in their lives outside the racecourse either (Zola 1967, 31). But as the Delhi racecourse was a ground for all economic classes, one’s position inside the racecourse was inherently tied to class identities outside the racecourse.

The Delhi racecourse allowed me to examine how class and methods of prediction were connected. Rebecca Cassidy has argued in her ethnographic study of the racecourse in Newmarket that class ideologies are central to the racecourse as well as the racing industry as a whole (Cassidy 2002, 79-83). She differentiates between two existing ideal types of bettors, the “mugs” and the “professionals”, who organize betting methods and social class hierarchically. The mugs are from the working class, come to the racecourse in large groups in which alcohol is consumed, and are of the belief that racing may be fixed. Professionals are associated with the upper classes, come to the racecourse individually and emphasize their intellectual approach to racing. Cassidy observed that the mugs were overall less focused on the horses than the professionals<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> For another example of the classification of betting strategies based on observations of a Swedish setting, yet without classifications tied to economic classes, see Binde (Binde 2011, 126).

The procedures of prediction linked to class at the Delhi racecourse were related to the kind of knowledge that was available to people of various socio-economic classes. The methods exist as ideal types according to which people classify both themselves and each other. A similar hierarchy to that described by Zola could be observed at the racecourse, but it was organized along an existing hierarchy of class, similar to what Cassidy had observed in an English setting.

To illustrate this, I apply a Bourdieu inspired field approach to a study of hierarchies as I divide the predictive methods in relation to economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 216).<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu himself had an interest in games, as part of his theory of praxis derives from the idea of social games and the capital invested in them. According to Bourdieu, games played among people with only few economic resources take the players away from real resistance, as they give the illusion of having power in the games without having power in real life. Bourdieu also mapped playing games and sports along the classes. Based on his insight into French society, he showed that preferences for various forms of competitions reflected a class structure. Horse riding and chess (“or the claim to play it” as he writes), for example was more popular with those with more symbolic capital (upper classes), illustrating, according to Bourdieu, whereas football, and watching football, was more popular among those with less symbolic capital of the working classes (Bourdieu 1984, 128-129,216-217).

Horseracing is often associated with the upper classes, however the ethnographic studies described above have also highlighted its popularity among working classes. This is reflected at the Delhi racecourse, where all classes were represented. If we look at methods of prediction inside the racecourse, it is possible to map the most common methodologies for prediction along economic, cultural and symbolic capital, similar to the chart Bourdieu has become known for. This type of chart is more related to knowledge regimes than physical ideals, as betting on racing is an activity located in the mind rather than in the body. On one side, bettors with a lot of cultural and economic capital (such as Rajeev) would be doing some version of handicapping. This was tied to their own physical educational background in which they were, or at least had the option, of being taught costly sports like horse riding in one of the city’s sports clubs or maybe even from owning a horse themselves (not for the purpose of becoming a jockey, but for the purpose of leisure). On the other side, those with little cultural capital and more economic capital (such as Bobbi), and without first-

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<sup>8</sup> Joan Allan has written an article in which she discuss Bourdieu’s theory of praxis in relation to horse race betting in the article “Playing with Hope and Despair. Bourdieu and the Habitus of Horse Betting”, in which she talks about gambling generally rather than applying ethnographic data to horse race betting as part of her argument that horse betting is a form of resistance to capitalism (Allen 2006).

hand experience of horses were dependent on the knowledge of those owning horses – knowledge which had economic value. Then there were those with some cultural but little economic capital (such as Abi), who would also following the advice of handicapping experts as well as those in his social circles, without having had the economic means to get a first-hand experience with the horses. Those with neither economic nor cultural capital blindly followed what others were betting. They were dependent on picking up tips from someone through mere imitation, as they are not part of the social circles which exchanged information, they did not have the economic means to buy information.

The classification system at the Delhi racecourse therefore extended beyond Bourdieu's class-based diagram in that the upper class male was associated with handicapping, the *nouveau riche* was placed somewhere in between the lower and upper middle class with inside information, and the lower middle and working classes relied on imitation. This is not to say that people from certain classes always follow specific procedures of prediction. For example, I came across a number of working class bettors who were doing handicapping<sup>9</sup>. But as a general rule, there was a tendency for people from certain classes to be classified in accordance with particular methods.

The possibility of fixed races challenges the superiority of the knowledge available to the educated classes. People who have not had a "proper" education can still be "in the know" in this type of contingency. Handicapping is still valued as a sign of class. When Rajeev integrated calculations of people's intentions, he generally kept this part of his methodology a secret, as in the end it challenged the fundament on which the authority of the handicapping method rests, where knowledge of horses is valued. But handicapping was not considered to be the method of winners. Whereas forms of knowledge are ranked along the lines of existing classes, they are not clearly ranked as a sign of future insight.

This does not mean that racecourse is a site for class reversals, as Kate Fox has suggested based on her ethnographic study of British race goers, where people can simply play with their identities (Fox 1999). Rather, it is a space in which differing notions of what is needed for economic success in contemporary India is foregrounded, as predictive methods bring out contested values associated with education, money and social connections. The racecourse is a site in which the value of these assets is speculated upon.

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<sup>9</sup> These bettors were nevertheless categorized as "jackpot bettors", who had to pick five consecutive winners with only 10 rupees staked, which in some ways made the method closer to lotteries a form of gambling also popular with the working classes in India.

## **A Picture of status**

I have identified three procedures for prediction, which differ in their methods of finding out the future, but have similarities in terms of how the possibility for fixed futures and the attempt at understanding the economy of concealed money around the races guide their procedures. Before concluding the chapter, I want to shed light on exceptions to the above evaluative frame of the racecourse, which sheds further light on how assumptions of deception are woven into the economics of handicap races and the lack of prestige in the majority of races.

An exception to the racecourse being a site of deception and concealed economies is during the occasional “cup races” or “invitation races”, most of which are held in January and February. During such races there are people present from outside the betting community, including sponsors of races, social elite with special invitations from influential people in the racing industry, the regular bettors’ families, the occasional Bollywood star, as well a small number of British jockeys visiting India while there is no racing taking place in Great Britain. What I noticed is that during these events, not only was there a different atmosphere, but the methods of prediction also changed. During the invitation races, the bettors were more inclined to assess the horses that were running. They called the horses by name rather than number, discussed them more than usual.

Unlike in the day-to-day handicap races, the bettors were not convinced that the races were manipulated, as they assumed that the owners and jockeys wanted to win the races more than they wanted to try to make money from not winning. Hence, there was another interpretative frame around the racecourse on such days. The difference in the ethos at the racecourse was, according to the bettors, because on the one hand there was more money to be made from winning, and on the other, with people present beyond the betting community, there was prestige associated with winning.

At the Delhi racecourse, the bettors did not think that fixed horse races were unique to India. However, they thought that it was a much more common phenomenon in India than in other places. Rebecca Cassidy in her study on the British horseracing industry indicates that there was an idea among bettors that the industry was corrupt, but it was not their primary concern. Among bettors at the Delhi racecourse, the differences in the economic structures that the horseracing was situated in brought about a different extent to which fixed futures were imagined, and thus British jockeys were believed to pull the horses less as they could make more money from winning. This is because there was more money in the horseracing industry compared with the betting industry in England.

Bettors such as Rajeev were of the opinion that the betting market was smaller in England. He said: “Horsereading was invented by the British, but they were only playing with coins; they were playing small amounts”<sup>10</sup>.

Fixed futures were considered to be more prevalent at the Indian racecourses because of the relatively small fines given to jockeys, which could easily be covered by other actors. The assumption of the deceptive race was thus tied into an Indian economy of poor official payments, and a drive for money rather than recognition. As one bettor put it, “Here it [fixed races] is part of the system”. Differences between British and Indian racing were therefore on the one hand determined by differences in legal and economic macro structures, and on the other by the value of money versus the significance of recognition.

Rajeev, who always preferred to bet on any horse other than the favorite, thought that “at cup races it might be worth playing the favorite, because everyone wants to win a cup”. He differentiated the cup races from the everyday races, where the horses running were just “pawns” in a game of people attempting to win at betting.

Whenever there was a British jockey taking part in the races, Abi would bet on him. “They don’t cheat,” he said. “They have come here to win and to get a name”. He bet on the British jockeys not because he saw them as superior jockeys in relation to the Indian jockeys. However, the game for the Indian jockey of a working class was, for Abi, a different game which was directed at survival. Therefore, the Indian jockey was interpreted in the context of an Indian working class economy, with which Abi had personal experiences, and differentiated from the British jockey, who did not act out of need, and therefore could focus on the official prize to be won. Thus, just as the idea of fixed races were framed by the racing centers in which the races were taking place, also it was tied to nations, in terms of the economies in which the actors were situated. At the cup races, the Indian racecourses became entangled with global economies of horseracing, and was interpreted less as a mirror of Indian economy.

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<sup>10</sup> In an article on gambling in different national contexts, different “cultural codes” are examined in a comparative light in order to understand how gambling was categorized in various cultural settings (Latour et al. 2009). The study looks into how games are introduced in early childhood. The authors argue that the code of the US is that of a “winner”, the code of France is “mastery” and the code of China is “distinction”. They identify literary work in which these cultural codes are best exemplified. As an example, the basic idea behind the code of the US, according to the authors, can best be found in Horatio Alger’s description of the American dream, which reveals the idea that anyone can potentially become a winner, which has also been discussed in Jackson Lear’s study on Luck in America (Lears 2003). I find the idea of identifying a single code compelling. The code I have identified is the code of deception, and it is best exemplified in the story of the game of dice in the Mahabarata. This code represent the frame out of which predictions are made at the racecourse based on ideas of the conditions for the game of horse racing.

After the Delhi Derby had ended, five minutes before the Mumbai races were to start, Munty, a friend of Abi's, said, "Today all favorites [horses] have won. It is their gift to the punters; today they want punters to be happy. There are people coming from outside so they cannot pull [the horses]... then for the Mumbai races they [the bettors] will have their funeral [lauging]". But betting on horses' potential to win races was not a method the bettors felt so comfortable with, and they complained that "clean" races were difficult to predict. The bookmakers informed me that there was less betting during the Derby. On these occasions they thought the spectators were more interested in watching the horses and the women present than in betting. Thus, it was not that races considered less deceptive and free from parallel economies were popular in terms of betting – in fact it was the contrary. This supports my thesis that part of the attraction of betting is tied to the speculation in concealed economies, and to revealing the deceptive game played out at the racecourse.

According to Rajeev "invitation races", where the horses, spectators and jockeys had been asked specifically to join the festivities, were all about "prestige". During such events, the racecourse appeared more clearly as a ground of class in a segregated sense, where members of the Indian elite were present in the enclosed VIP areas. It came closer to something one could call "sahib log's tamasha", which as mentioned in chapter one can be translated into a spectacle of the upper classes.

Clifford Geertz's text on Balinese cockfighting and betting stands is the most widely known example of how to create an analytical link between gambling and a surrounding society (Geertz 1973). For Geertz, what is at stake in betting on cockfighting is not only money, but also social prestige (Geertz 1973, 173). In that sense, the meaningfulness of the betting game is tied to the political orders of the surrounding society. According to Geertz, the prestige at stake is what compensates for the economic costs involved. Yet, at the Delhi racecourse, day-to-day horseracing is rather detached from issues of status outside the racecourse as well as social relationships existing beyond the racecourse. This did not mean that there were not horse owners considered to be placed high up in a social hierarchy, however, their power was only relevant in terms of the monetary power of betting and their role in affecting outcomes. Their knowledge of horses may have been respected, but it was not necessarily considered the route to success. The racecourse was not simply reflecting a hierarchy, but rather, because of the manipulation of races tied to the betting economy, it was challenging it.

For Geertz, animals are extensions of the wild male ego and sexuality. This could also be said about horses. However, at the racecourse, except during the invitation races, the animals were

understood more in terms of the domestication and control over them. When comments were made about the sexuality of the horses, it was mostly done in reference female horses (fillies and mares) and the male control over them. Many of the names given to the horses, such as TEQUILA, HIDDEN PLEASURES, TAKING OVER, THE LADYISSHADY, DECEPTION and FRAUD, point towards the role of the horse in the male-controlled deceptive game surrounded by illicit lovers, alcohol and temporary money.

My purpose here is not to challenge Geertz's analysis of the Balinese cockfight, which has received a fair amount of critique for its interpretive methodology (Shankman 1984; Roseberry 1982; Wikan 1992). Rather, it seems as if the cockfights, which unlike the horse races were not held daily, were more integrated into the social orders of the local society than horseracing is in the everyday life of urban India. The cockfights Geertz describes are closer to the invitation cup at the racecourse<sup>11</sup>. Many modern forms of gambling, however, best exemplified by the casino, are designed in such ways that outside life is completely excluded (Schüll 2012). Gambling practices in these types of places are thus more disconnected from local orders than forms of gambling documented in the anthropology of gambling in more rural areas around the time of Geertz's writing, which extended to the 1980s (Riches 1975; Hayano 1989; Zimmer 1986; MacLean 1984; Goodale 1987; Mitchell 1988). Conversely, the horse race betting Delhi is an example of a betting form in an urban setting, in which there was no direct connection between social position inside the racecourse and outside the racecourse at the day-to-day level, and betting, in Geertz's words, was defined by "money gambling" aimed at making money and not "status gambling" aimed at winning prestige in society (Geertz 1973, 434).

At an everyday level at the Delhi racecourse, bettors actively deconstructed the symbolic significance of the races as a game of status. Money was emphasizing the status at stake, but money itself was considered the source of status. They insisted that the wish for money was the driving force behind the racecourse, and that to understand the races one had to understand the betting economy and not the prize economy. Except for during the invitation races, where there might be men of big egos with well paid jockey running their horses, this idea of the basic ethos of the racecourse formed the basis for their predictive procedures.

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<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Sallaz, based on his studies on modern gambling industries, argues that the significance of the cockfight as a market of traditional social status has to do with the fact that it was illegal, and thus came to represent a point of resistance to post-colonial nationalism and an alternative representation of authority to the nation state (Sallaz 2008, 11-12).

At the racecourse, there was a tendency for the older generation of bettors from the upper classes to complain about the movement of the racing industry away from a passion for horses, while the new generation of nouveau riche bettors found the racecourse an exciting place to figure out and engage with the underlying dynamics of a deceptive economy. The racecourse therefore exemplifies a site of contemporary India where prescribed systems of status are challenged by the economic forces coming from below.

## **Conclusion**

The future at the racecourse did not exist as an unknown event that was to unfold, but as a possibly kept secret. The idea of the races being possibly manipulated directed attention to the people behind the horses rather than the horses themselves. The possibilities of a horse winning were not related to the horses' capabilities, but to different people in the industry's control over the horses. Not only was the future unfolded by people, the secret of the future was kept and shared between people. Knowledge of the future secret cut across class as well as geographic boundaries. Betting was a speculation on the possibility of fixed races, both in terms of the future of upcoming races and the evaluation of past events. Each race was framed by the possibility of deceptions tied to an interpretation of the economy of the racecourse and its players, and it was this possibility that defined how the future and the past were interpreted. It was a possibility which could never fully be known and which made the racecourse a speculative space where predictive knowledge developed in between calculation and imaginaries of concealed economies.

The idea of a future that is possibly manipulated prompts a distribution of knowledge about the future, where those who know the intentions of people rather than the inherent capabilities of the horses have an advantage. Out of this grows a complex system of information. This makes the racecourse a space for a particular kind of sociality where people become each other's informers through relationships framed either around the idea of exchange among friends or around monetary exchange. This is a situation which both supports and challenges class hierarchy as a dominating principle of the racecourse. It is only in exceptional circumstances that the racecourse becomes interpreted as a ground for games of prestige – otherwise it is interpreted as a site for commodified speculation using all possible means.

In the following chapter, I will examine the racecourse and the three bettors further through focusing on the kinds of relationships regular bettors establish at the racecourse. I will show how

the assumption of deception not only frames predictions, but also the friendships established among bettors.

# Eating with friends and enemies: Ambiguities of gambling relationships

## Introduction

“My friends are all gamblers and among gamblers you cannot be friends.”  
– Bettor sitting in the café at the Delhi racecourse

In this chapter I focus on male friendships at the racecourse. I examine how the assumption of deception shapes social relationships among bettors. I do so through focusing on my time spent in the company of bettors inside and outside the racecourse and the exchanges of money, tips, favors, food and alcohol. I argue that among bettors friendships are built upon mistrust with the possibility for trust.

Every day inside the racecourse bettors introduced me to other bettors as “my friend” or “mera dost”. These “friends” would spend a lot of time together – both in and outside the racecourse. Yet when alone, my informants would say about the same person they had introduced to me as a friend: “He is not a good friend. I have no friends here, money is my only friend... money is my beloved” or “I have no friends at the racecourse. I don’t trust anyone there. We are all enemies”. Friendship was something that was vocalized and even performed among friends, but the relationship would be redefined when the “friends” were apart. Friendships at the racecourse were not about establishing a long-time bond, but about sharing moments tied to racing and the consumption of betting money. Friendships at the racecourse were fragile and I did not hear about any that had lasted much more than a couple of years.

The mistrust in friends at the racecourse is linked to the bettors’ gambling lifestyles, which involve concealment from their families. Concealment is not only thought to be fundamental inside the betting game, it is also part of the practice of keeping betting separate from their family lives. In this chapter I describe how a gambling space is brought outside the racecourse, when the betting money is spent with friends away from the bettors’ families. The interpretation of other people as deceptive mirrors practices in the bettors everyday lives. Secrets and lies are part of a practice of protecting the betting space and economy from the family sphere in order to maintain a separate moral space for gambling.

In the anthropological literature on gambling and betting, there has been a tendency to see the establishing and maintaining of friendships and alliances as part of what defines the sociality of gambling (Zola 1967; Binde 2005; Herzfeld 1988; Malaby 2003; Papataxiarchis 1999). Gambling has thus been approached as an activity between friends or an activity that has the possibility to build friendships or alliances. This has been to such an extent that cheating has been interpreted as a method of creating alliances or even distribution of money among bettors aiming for equality in the relationships (Herzfeld 1988; Goodale 1987; Flannery and Cooper 1946), rather than as a foundation for mistrust and enmity. Cheating could thus be done to ensure others to win and not only oneself to win, and cheating could thus not simply linked to self interest. This assumption of gambling and betting as grounds for the possibility of friendship has been challenged in more recent studies (Schüll 2012), Rebecca Cassidy has observed among horse bettors in betting outlets in England that punters generally like to stick to themselves (Cassidy 2012). At the racecourse, most bettors could be found chatting in groups, but this did not simply mean that it was a space for affinities.

In this chapter, I look into the idea of the “friendship” as something that enables betting and which may be considered as part of a gambling lifestyle rather than as being part of the goal of the game. In doing so, I hope to contribute to the anthropology of gambling and betting through an exploration of the sociality tied to mistrust in a game played among both friends and enemies. I also hope to append to research in the anthropology of friendship broadly aimed at examining the plurality of friendship types (Desai and Killick 2010; Bell and Coleman 1999), by focusing on a kind of friendship, which is located in a speculative setting directed at making a profit. I want to emphasize the problematic influence of betting on friendships, in that relationships are defined not by emotion and goodwill, but by their usefulness. Betting is not done to establish friendships, on the contrary, friendships are established to enable betting and the kind of consumption patterns that is involved. The problems of such friendships are tied to a basic lack of trust in the people at the racecourse considered self-interested double-dealing individuals. The possibility for deception among “useful” friends does not rule out friendship as a social form at the racecourse, but shapes it in such a way that the category of friends encompasses one’s potential enemies.

## Dinner with friends

One day at the racecourse, Bobbi invited me to come to his place in the evening for dinner and drinks. Bobbi had also invited three of his friends, as well as a Danish friend and an anthropologist, who at the time was staying with me. Bobbi lived just a five-minute walk from where I lived, and his small room had become a hang out for him and his friends both before and after the races, where they talked about past and upcoming races as well as women and parties, in the absence of their wives or families.

When my friend and I arrived, the mood was cheerful and Bobbi and his friends had already started drinking Kingfisher beers and Old Monk whiskey. Bobbi had had his house employee cook a chicken and lamb dish with chapatis for us in the tiny kitchen. The food was served on top of the bedcover laid out over Bobbi's double bed, which filled out most of the room. I sat down on the bed, and my friend in one of three red plastic chairs set up next to a heavy laptop computer showing the indiarace.com website with information on the next day's races. We quickly joined in the eating, drinking and talking.

I asked the usual question about how their day had been. Bobbi had "eaten [won]" 70,000 rupees on HIDDEN PLEASURES. His friend called 'My Name is Shah' (a nick name given to him after a Bollywood movie playing at the time) had lost an amount he would not tell. According to Bobbi, My Name is Shah had lost because he had not followed Bobbi's information, which he had paid for. My Name is Shah was a short man in his late thirties who always smoked and had a slightly reserved and worried look on his face. He had a steady monthly income of 30,000 rupees was made from smuggling electronic devices through the airport customs. He had started this business after he had been kicked out of a lucrative family business of providing false visa documentations for people wanting to migrate to Europe for using the profits from the business to bet on horses.

The second friend, Sachin, had a 10% share in a bookmaker firm, which meant that 10% of the weekly profit went to him. He told that he had "won" just a small amount at the racecourse, which was from his share with the bookmaker. I asked Sachin how he got into bookmaking. He told me that a friend he went to school with had taken him to the racecourse and in the first race he had won: "I came and sat down and ate a *kurma* (minced meat dish) and I won 4500... then I was like, 'I want to eat more money'". He said that he had started as a bettor and eventually lost 450,000 rupees. He was then offered a share with a licensed bookmaker in return for providing it with cash

flow, and now he referred to himself as a bookmaker, even though he was still also betting. According to him, his betting losses still were still outweighing his bookmaking profits.

The third friend of Bobbi's, whose name I never got to know, had become a bit too drunk to share any reasonable information. Digging into the delicious chicken dish, I asked whether on a day like today the person who had won would pay for the alcohol and food. Bobbi told me that they split their expenses and added, "but the money for an old monk [an Indian rum] is nothing compared to the money at the racecourse".

My name is Shah's cell phone rang, and on the screen it said "*Pareshan* [trouble] calling". It was his wife. He said that he did not want to pick it up, as they had been in a fight over money. He had just got a new phone after having thrown his old one the floor in anger while talking to her a couple of days ago. Everyone laughed about it.

I asked Sachin whether his bookmaking firm was involved in fixing races as a way to make money. He smiled to me enigmatically in a way that seemed to suggest something in between "off course" and "I cannot answer that". Then he said, "That is my professional life; even when I am drinking I am a professional", while looking himself in a plastic framed mirror on the wall with a self satisfied look.

Bobbi took over and started talking about a horse from a couple of days ago, which he, as usual, remembered not by its name, but by its odds. He had heard a nail had been put up its shoe to prevent it from winning. Everyone agreed that it was the mafia that was involved in such methods, which were considered to be beyond the relatively accepted methods of pulling a horse by holding its rope. They agreed that it had been the mafia from outside Delhi, maybe Mumbai or even the Middle East, which meant that they did not need to emphasize Sachin as a potential enemy involved in race fixing at this otherwise joyful evening.

My Danish-Indian anthropologist friend, who I had encouraged to ask questions while I was sitting writing in my notebook, got right to the point: "So, were you friends before or do you know each other from the racecourse?" "We know each other from the racecourse," Sachin replied, and Bobbi added: "We have been friends for the past two years". "But can your friendship not be jeopardized?" she asked. Bobbi continued, "We are true friends; we will borrow some money from each other when... we trust each other". Sachin touched himself at the heart and looked up towards the sky.

Bobbi told that he had recently invited all three men present to Bangkok after having won a large amount of money at the racecourse. He had paid for everything during the trip, which had added up to 200,000 rupees. He had eventually got the money back from Sachin, but not from his friend My Name is Shah or the drunk man. He told me this in a semi-quiet voice and then laughed with a double-edged smile. When I asked Bobbi the day after about his friends at the party he told me, “With them I just pass time, have fun. They are interesting characters.” He then emphasized My Name is Shah’s cash problems.

The above case gives a sense of the kind of space existing for friendships beyond the racecourse among bettors as well as bookmakers. This is a space in which there is talk about betting and a joint consumption of leisure, alcohol and food. It is also a space for debts. Despite the vast time spent with “true friends,” – often than the time spent with wives and children – the relationship to fellow bettors was surrounded by an ambiguity as the trueness of the friendship was coupled with doubt. In the following three sections, I will focus on three kinds of exchanges between friends. These are namely exchanges of favors, money and information, which brings insight into some of the problems tied to the uncertainties of friendships.

### **Friendly favors of affliction**

One defining feature of friendship among bettors is the exchange of favors. Friends are considered “useful” in the sense that they enable betting by providing each other with the needed infrastructure in terms of transportation to and from the racecourse and the handling of money. Part of the problem with these types of is that betting is at the same time a source of joy and distress for the bettors, and therefore the one that enables the betting is both a comrade and rival.

When betting large cash bets with an unlicensed bookmaker, Bobbi would keep the money in Shah’s car: “If it’s too much (money) I give it to my friend to put in his car. I can trust him... and he is useful”. According to Bobbi, because there was no safe parking outside his house, My Name is Shah would have Bobbi’s car parked at his place. My Name is Shah would come to pick Bobbi up at his home in the morning and drop him off in the evening when the races were over. During the time of my fieldwork the vehicles changed a number of times. Only two weeks after Bobbi had bought a new car, he crashed it after having been drinking. The next car he bought, he was forced to sell when he was short of funds. Some months later he bought a motorcycle instead. When Bobbi

owed too much money to his bookmakers inside the racecourse, he would wait at the entrance outside the racecourse standing alongside bettors from the racecourse village who could not afford an entrance ticket. In between the races My Name is Shah would come to the fence and Bobbi would let him know his bet. Abi was similarly dependent on help from Munty. Munty was a tall, fluffy man in his late thirties who was married and had a young son and an export business. He lived in the same apartment complex as Abi and would drive him to the racecourse in his car. Abi did not want to bring his own car, because he knew he would be drinking later in one of the membership clubs where he was playing cards. Munty was also going to be drinking, but he felt confident drinking and driving and had set his car up in such a way that there were cold beers in the trunk, a homemade bottle holder next to the driver's seat, and a secret compartment in which to hide the alcohol in case there were problems with the police. On days when there were cricket matches, Abi ordered a room for Munty at the Gymkhana Club just opposite the racecourse where he was a member, from where Munty could watch the match and make ongoing bets by cell phone and drink either alone or with Abi and some friends. This way he could bet without his wife around, which he found stressful. Munty, who was busy during the day managing his export business came irregularly to the racecourse, and at times had Abi bet for him in his absence.

Not everyone had friends like My Name is Shah and Munty. Rajeev kept mostly to himself both inside and outside the racecourse, and emphasized that those at the racecourse were his competitors and not his friends. He shared his apartment with a childhood friend and the friend's wife, but spent most evenings alone in his room watching sports and his favorite American sitcom "Friends". Rajeev told me that he had had a close friend at the racecourse in the past, but that the friend had deceived him. Rajeev was in a pending court case with this friend, after the friend had tried to forge a signature stating that Rajeev had sold his half of a horse that they shared the ownership of. Rajeev was not looking for loans considering the financial safety he had in his property inheritance and his ability to keep within his monthly betting budget. He did not need help with transportation or betting in his absence either, as he had his personal driver take him to and from the racecourse every single day. He was very concerned about my relationship to other bettors, especially to Bobbi, and asked me to pay close attention to all the money exchanges between us when I was betting through him, as he might be cheating me. He consistently offered to pick me up at my home and take me to the racecourse in his air-conditioned car, but also encouraged me not to bet too much.

At one point a friend of Abi's said: "When I was young my father told me that there are two things I shouldn't do; gamble and go with prostitutes". "You failed at both!" Abi said and everyone around laughed. He continued: "He told me what to do to one's worst enemy; to take him to the races, and let him win." Most bettors at the racecourse had originally been introduced to the racecourse by a friend. They would have vivid memories of their very first bet, which in most cases had been a bet where they had won, as was the case of the story told by Sachin at the beginning of this chapter. The first bet had often been based on a suggestion from a friend.

Many bettors I met spent most of their waking hours either at the racecourse or elsewhere talking or thinking about the races. From a Western medical point of view, I am quite certain that most of my interlocutors would fall in the category of having gambling disorders. The diagnosis involves lying to family members, being preoccupied with gambling, needing to gamble with increased money, trying to cut back on gambling without success, getting restless when trying to cut back, using gambling as a way to escape problems, committing illegal acts for the sake of gambling, as well as turning to others for money.

Any kind of friendship which causes or enables a gambling addiction is problematic simply because the gambling addiction in itself is problematic. Most of the time spent at the racecourse and during evenings with bettor friends are joyful, however, when talking to the bettors individually, they emphasize all the problems they have because of their "addiction" to or "habit" of betting. This was especially a problem expressed by the older generation, who had become aware that they could not stop even if they wanted to, and that betting was an expense and not a potential profit. Yet the majority of bettors, most of whom came to the racecourse daily, would state that the objective for betting was either "time-passing" enjoyment, passion or to earn money. Bobbi was still living in hope of making money from day to day, however, on a couple of occasions, I would get a text message in the middle of the night saying, "I cannot sleep. There is a devil inside me. I have to stop". At the racecourse the next day everything was back to normal, and his attention had switched back to the upcoming races and he was encouraging me to bet based on the information he had been given.

Losing large amounts of money in groups of friends was a strange source of joy. Everyone would be laughing and joking, including the one who had lost. Sometimes it seemed as if losing was more celebrated than winning, which meant that losing was not so problematic inside the racecourse setting. The joking about losers continued outside the racecourse in the company with friends. Yet, once alone, losing could become a problem. Bobbi told me, "Sometimes when I have

lost I have a hard time falling asleep at night. I cry. I worry for my wife". Nevertheless, such statements were rather exceptional, as I as a betting friend also took part in the fun of winning and losing with bettors eager to support me in my betting by providing me with short term loans, taking me to the racecourse or, on days when I was not present at the racecourse, place a bet for me.

Abi used the story of the Mahabharata, described in previous chapter, to express his own concerns for himself and his family. In the Mahabharata, the king gets so caught up in gambling that he wagers and loses his wife, Draupadi. Draupadi later tries to challenge the validity of the wager in court. Abi told me: "Draupadi asked a very intelligent question in court. She said: 'Did you [her husband] lose me after or before you lost yourself?'". Draupadi – and Abi when citing her – was referring to the idea that you lose yourself in gambling.

At the racecourse I was interested in identifying stories that were told over and over again, and was expecting to hear stories about people who had won a lot of money. On the contrary the story I heard again and again was about what seemed to be an almost mythical character at the racecourse. This was the story about a bettor who used to be a neighbor to Rajeev, who had lived in a large house and lost everything he had, including his family, by betting at the Delhi racecourse. According to the story he was now living on the streets of Connaught Place selling incense sticks for tourists. There were various speculations of his state and whether he could be expected to return to the racecourse or not. Somehow it seemed as if this man not only represented Yudishtra from the Mahabharata, who was trapped naked in the woods yet to return, but also potentially represented part of the bettors' own destinies, as it uncovered the consequences of the conditions of partaking in a deceptive game in which you can only end up a loser if you get too caught up in it, as you have all odds against you.

The experience of the game as merged with deceitful untrustworthy players only interested in their own winning, is not only directed at others, but it mirrors the bettor's self-understanding. Thus the interpretation of the conditions for the game at the racecourse becomes defining for their own life, full of lies towards their families, driven by an obsession for winning quick money and not being able to trust themselves because of the control the addiction has over themselves. Especially the elder generation of bettors, including Abi, was keenly aware and expressive of how the impulse to bet had a control over their lives.

Part of the ambiguity in the relationships between all the seemingly friendly people at the racecourse, I suggest, has to do with the ambiguity of one's relationship to the betting addiction itself as both tantalizing lover and punishing demon. Part of the mistrust inherent in the relationship with friends is the fact that they cannot easily be defined as friendly or hostile, as they are part of what has caused and continuously enables the addiction. Receiving betting favors can thus both be perceived as receiving a good deed from a friendly soul and a poisonous gift from your worst enemy.

### **Indebted friends**

Another kind of exchange that is central to some of the difficulties of friendship among bettors has to do with credit. Among the bettors there was an obligation to give interest free loans. This enabled them to bet consistently, as bettors could not depend on a steady personal income. It also meant that there could be considerable debt between bettors, as in the case of the friendship between Bobbi and My Name is Shah. The possibility for loans in times of need, which at the racecourse can happen to the poor as well as the rich, creates certain incentives, but also is problematic for the friendships.

Most bettors had one person with whom they spent more time both inside and outside the racecourse, and with this one person there would be an ongoing exchange of loans. For Bobbi, this one friend was My Name is Shah. Despite his smuggling business, sometimes My Name is Shah was short on money, and he would ask Bobbi for help. Bobbi had told me that My Name is Shah owed him 200,000 rupees in total which had added up over the years. However, he would not ask for it. Sometimes My Name is Shah would give Bobbi 50,000 after winning consistently over a period of time, but he would come back for the money again after not too long, when he had lost again. Bobbi kept account of how much My Name is Shah owed him, however, he doubted whether he would ever fully repay the debt. Regardless, Bobbi still wanted to remain friends with My Name is Shah.

Loans were not easily differentiated from bets, as they were given and repaid in the form of bets. For example, My Name is Shah would bet for Bobbi when he was away from Delhi visiting his family in rural India in order to get more money. Bobbi would walk long distances for cell phone reception to get the information on the races in order to inform My Name is Khan about which races he wanted to place bets on. Therefore My Name is Shah could partly repay his loans by

betting for Bobbi in absence. It was common for loans to be given and repaid as bets, rather than in the form of cash. This meant that there was a fluidity of the actual amounts exchanged, as the exchange depended on the outcome of the race. During the times when Bobbi was away he would also give me a call now and then, if he thought that the information was not to be missed, and would at times ask me to place a bet for him. When I had bet for Bobbi, he would only owe me money if he did not win, whereas I would owe him money if he won. Loans were not always easily differentiated from favors, as it was a way to enable other people to bet.

Friendships with bettors could be problematic, because along with the friendship came an obligation to lend money. As in the words of Abi: “A friend of mine would say ‘give me some money’ and I knew he was a bad pay master. I would give him money and he would not return it to me. But I still used to love him. I told him ‘I love you very much. But I love my money more than you’.” The obligation to hand out loans seemed to be a bit of a dilemma, because in the end it was the money and not the friendship that was the purpose of the game at the racecourse. Giving money to someone while not fully trusting that the money would be returned was not done with pleasure. The emotions were situated in the relationship to money and not to another human being.

Lending money between friends was important as the bettors wanted to avoid having to go to the moneylenders. The small group of moneylenders sat on a stone bench at the margin of the racecourse. They wore colorful shirts with large collars and pointy leather shoes. Unlike the bettors they were neither looking in the BOL nor for information from other bettors. They sat down relaxed looking straight ahead with a stern look in their eyes. The moneylenders gave minimum loans of 10,000 rupees for which the interest rate was 100 to 200 rupees a day. The bettors characterized the moneylenders’ business as a way of cheating and stealing. Furthermore, they, according to Bobbi, had killed six people over the past ten years. Bobbi, as well as Rajeev and Abi, told me on several occasions the story of a man who had his arms and legs broken by the moneylenders at the gate of the racecourse not long before I had come to do my fieldwork, and who had died three months later in the hospital. But in Bobbi’s eyes, the worst thing about the moneylenders was not their violent procedures, but their interest policy. “It is a very bad thing being charged interest,” he said<sup>1</sup>. In contrast to the disgraceful moneylenders, who were not taking part in the betting themselves, his friends were willing to lend their money without interest.

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<sup>1</sup> Communities of interest-taking moneylenders in India have historically been associated with immorality (Rudner 1989), similar to the moral attitude in the history of Christianity and Islamic Finance today (Maurer 2002).

Interest free loans among gambling friends are not unique to the Indian setting, but have been documented in various ethnographic settings (Hayano 1982; Papataxiarchis 1999; Wang and Zabielskis 2010; Gill 1999). Based on ethnographic fieldwork on card gambling in rural Greece, Euthymios Pappatixarchis argues that giving loans to fellow gamblers among the villagers was a way to overcome the potential problems of gambling being connected to something based on self-interest as opposed to an ethics of sharing. Giving loans was thus a procedure through which competition could exist within a sharing community. Pappatixarchis captures the significance of loans to the establishment of friendships among competitors and the ambivalence around the gambling setting of both leisure and contest.

Pappatixarchis gives equal importance on clinging to friendships and the competing desire for profits. Part of Pappatixarchis' argument on the importance of interest free loans given among gamblers in the coffee houses of rural Greece is the importance of a friendship existing beyond the gambling setting defined by affinity. In rural Greece, card game players may live side by side. Similarly, in an article on gambling among friends and business partners in Macau, known as the Asian Las Vegas, Wuyi Wang and Peter Zabielskis note that among business partners in China friendships could be lubricated in gambling settings through mutual exchange of gifts and favors, in the form of drinks, food, and ultimately a trip to Macau (Wang and Zabielskis 2010, 135). The informal debts involved in such transactions were paid back in a non-gambling context, where the sanctions for reciprocity were considered stronger than inside the gambling context because of the need to uphold honor while preserving the relationship. For Pappatixarchis and Wang and Zabeilskis, both establishing and nursing friendships are of great importance.

This was not the case in the urban setting of Delhi, where I found that the desire for friendship was not aimed at establishing relationships outside the racecourse, in a realm where there was honor at stake. Rather, part of what defined the friendship was that it existed in a space excluded from that realm of everyday life. The incentive to pay back was thus only an incentive to be found within the gambling context. Being indebted to a friend at the Delhi racecourse was not tied to an emotional bond of generosity and gratitude between two human beings wanting to remain friends.

Both in the literature on gambling and in the literature on friendship, there is the assumption that friendship in itself is a goal. Simon Coleman argues that notions of friendship in the literature on friendship in anthropology have tended to be influenced by a Western middle-class notion of friendship as something private and personal, which stands in contrast to family as well as market

relationships. For that reason, there has been a tendency to focus primarily on the emotionality of friendship, as basis for understanding what friendship is about (Coleman 2010, 198). Friendships has often been seen as standing in contrast to relationships built on economic resources. But to understand the different ways of friendship, it is important not to take the assumption of the “purity” of friendships defined by emotionality as the natural starting point (Coleman 2010, 198).

The racecourse friendship can be contrasted with other ways through which friendships are constructed in India, as described by Amit Desai for example (Desai 2010). Desai describes ritual friendship in rural India, which are ritualized through the exchange of gifts such as *prashaad* or *mithais*, which are sweets considered auspicious offerings. In the context of the ritual friendship, according to Desai, emotionality and love is emphasized as the foundation for the friendship as a way to contrast it to the ideologies of kinship, which also exist as economic units which can cause disputes over money and inheritance among brothers.

At the racecourse, I noticed that bettor friends never used kinship metaphors by referring to each others as brothers, or *bhai*, which is otherwise a very common mode of categorization outside the racecourse as a category used both for long-term and temporary friendships, and also a mode of categorization used among bettors in England (Cassidy 2010, 145). The category of friendship at the racecourse defined by its trueness was different from the category of a brother-friend. It was instead a friend to whom one could turn for help. The friendships did stand in contrast to families, however, not in terms of the absence of potential monetary disputes, but because they were situated in a different moral sphere.

At the racecourse, bettor friends did not exchange ritual food, such as *mithais*, but meat, alcohol and money. In addition, money, rather than emotions, bound the bettors together. The only existing form of love at the racecourse was, in the words of the bettors themselves, the love for money. Friendships among bettors therefore did not stand in contrast to market relations, but were located in a market setting. The goal was to gamble and the friendship helped to enable it, among other things, through loans.

## Relationships against the odds

A third problematic form of exchange defining friendships at the racecourse has to do with information on the upcoming races. This was information which was given freely among friends, but could nevertheless be met with suspicion and was not always followed.

The problem with the type of information given is connected to betting odds. In principle, a tip can be given in order to improve the odds of the horse that the giver of the tip was intending to bet on. By giving a false tip, the odds may drop on the horse that you have told a friend will win, while the odds of the horse you think will win will increase, creating the potential to make a larger profit. Depending on how much a friend is betting and with whom the person is sharing the information, the odds can change considerably as the information gets out. The tip, also called to “give a horse”, could thus be given out of self-interest to increase profit, rather than for sharing profit between friends. I did not hear of or witness anyone with this strategy, however, I heard about the suspicions towards people potentially giving false information.

According to Rajeev, the owners, for example, would tell everyone that their horse was going to win – a tip which would often be followed – and then make a deal with the bookmakers. He would then arrange for the horse to be pulled and in return to get half the income from the bets placed on the horse from the bookmaker. Odds at the racecourse thus resulted in speculations on the trustworthiness of people. It is not that this kind of manipulation of odds through friends is a common practice, yet the awareness of the dynamics of the odds creates a space in which the gift of a tip is an ambiguous one, reminding us of the nature of the gift described by Mauss, which can potentially be turned into poison (Mauss 1954, 63).

Among friends giving favors, odds can also be problematic when they are betting for someone who is not present. Since no record is made of the odds as they fluctuate before a race, a friend could get away with reporting the wrong odds and make a profit from the margin. For that reason most bettors do the actual betting transactions themselves despite the presence of a large number of men from the racecourse village ready to place the bets for them. What separates true friends from “friends” is that friends you choose to trust will give you the correct odds. At one point, when talking to a middle-aged bettor, I asked, “You said before that you do not trust people. Why is that?” He answered, “Trust in what sense?” and then went on to distinguish between trust in money matters and trust in terms of telling truths, as well as keeping secrets.

The Hindi word for trust, *vishvaas*, contains both meanings. At the racecourse, what was important was trust in money matters, and this was the way in which both Bobbi and Abi defined

trust in relation to My Name is Shah and Munty – that they could trust them to handle their money. Yet, they were not necessarily trusted to be telling some kind of truth. “One thing you have to remember in horseracing [is that] nobody tells the truth,” another bettor told me while his friends were standing next to him.

Following someone’s tips at the racecourse was a way of performing a social bond beyond suspicion. Bobbi’s friends at times followed his tips given directly from the cell phone from Hyderabad. When they chose not to follow his tip and he won, he scolded them. Both Bobbi and Abi were eager for me to follow their tip and were always a bit disappointed when they had won and I had not followed their tip. I got so many tips from all over that at times it was difficult to remember who had given me which tips. Yet, Bobbi, Rajeev and Abi reminded me happily when I had won after following their suggestion, which I could not help but see as a joy of giving – or the joy of possessing something, namely an insight into the future, which was valuable and sought after. Interestingly, they did not express that they expected something from me in return.

Jonathan Parry has examined the kinds of gifts (*daan*) given to priests in India (Parry 1986) in a re-reading of Marcel Mauss’ concept of gift and reciprocity (Mauss 1954). Part of the ethos of gifting in an Indian context, he argues, is not defined by reciprocity in this life, but reciprocity in another life. This is part of a Hindu belief in reincarnation, and is also similar to notions of reciprocity in other world religions, such as Christianity, which operates with a difference between this life and something otherworldly. Therefore the gift does not need to be repaid, as reciprocity lies beyond this world. In an Indian religious context, he found that the gift may also transfer the sins and impurities of the givers. This kind of gift challenges the idea of gift exchange as central to alliances and the establishment of communities based on reciprocity, as emphasized both by Mauss and Malinowski (Malinowski 1922). Parry argues that the modern “pure” gift given out of disinterest and generousness is dependent on its differentiation from a market sphere (Parry 1986). But what defines the gifts at the racecourse is that they are given in a space existing both as a ground for community pleasures and for market exchange, and as part of that there is a suspicion around gifts, which are interpreted as potentially being given out of self-interest. The gift of information is ambiguous, as it is unclear whether it is given from a friend or an enemy.

The interpretation of the gift of a tip was situated in a speculative economy. The higher the amount a bettor was betting, the more suspicious he became about tips being given freely. When I first met the bettor Amit (who later offered me a job of promoting a casino in Goa, which we visited together) his opening line was: “People won’t invite an elephant into their house, but they will

invite a rabbit.” I asked him what he meant. He said that what he meant was to say was that people would only share real tips with those who were not betting with large sums of money. He himself, an elephant, bet up to 500,000 rupees on each race, and for that reason he was seldom given any tips he could trust by fellow bettors. He asked me how my season was going and whether I was in plus or minus in all the racing centers combined. I happened to be in plus at that time. He told me that he was not surprised that I was winning as he thought that a lot of people would want to be my friend and give me the right tips. He told me that when he was occasionally given a tip from one of his friends who owned horses, he would not follow it.

Not all tips were given as free gifts among friends, as information also existed as a priced product. The potential for Bobbi to trust his source was expressed by placing him in the category of a friend. Not only was his source his friend, he was also described as the best friend of a best friend of Bobbi. Between Bobbi and his informer there was no fixed agreement on the terms for the exchange. Bobbi said, “As a gift he gave him the information”. Bobbi would share it with him by giving him 10% of the betting profit. There was no fixed price for information, but rather, as with the payment of debt, paying for information was done by way of placing a bet for the informer. The exchange was therefore not conceptualized as a money monetary payment, but as part of a betting currency. This was a situation where there was a mutual profit, as the tipster could only benefit from a correct tip. Therefore the tip from an informer who expected to be receiving a share of the profit was considered less problematic in comparison with a tip given freely at the racecourse, which could potentially be given only for the sake of their own profit not shared.

There was a spatiality of trust tied to odds, which meant that tips given from people at distance were to be trusted more than the tips given locally at the racecourse. This was not only because the tipsters themselves could benefit from the tips, but because they were located in different odds markets. Thus, there is a reason for tips being sold across centers by cell phone. The point is that inside information primarily affects the odds locally. So in theory if a jockey knows that his horse will be pulled, he can share the information with bettors at other centers without the local odds market being immediately affected by it. Thus information given from an informer in Kolkata to a Delhi bettor should not affect the odds negatively in Kolkata, if the jockey himself, for example, was betting on a different horse. The economy of trust was thus tied to the spatiality and temporality of odds. The further away one’s informer was, the more trustworthy these “friends” never met were considered, as they could not clearly be defined as potential enemies, as was the case with close friends. Trust was not simply something built up over time. Fellow bettors at the

racecourse shared their everyday lives and trust was also located in temporary relationships afar, such as with a tipster from Kolkatta. Distance was thus a more inherent and cherished part of friendships than closeness, which was more toxic.

According to Irving Zola, clients at a betting outlet in the US in the 1960s did not constitute a group “in a formal sense” (Zola 1967, 21). Similar to the observations of Cassidy (Cassidy 2012), he observed that people in the betting shop would, to a great degree, stick to themselves. Nevertheless, Zola registered a change in the social interaction around ten minutes before a race, where punters would start talking about potential winners. At this time they would flock together in front of the televisions and then just after the race they would exchange comments on winners and losers, after which they would return to their own spots. Based on these observations, Zola argues that the patterns of interaction show the bond that betting creates between men who are otherwise strangers (Zola 1967, 20). At the Delhi racecourse, the temporal patterns for interaction were in many ways reversed in comparison with the Zola’s observations. Thus there was a certain rhythm of the sociality of the racecourse, where bettors would be very friendly and chatty away from the betting ring long before a race was to start, and shifted away from the groups once it got close to the beginning of the race. The closer bettors came to the betting ring, the less talking there was among close friends, while there was more asking for tips among strangers who met inside the betting ring. The racecourse therefore existed as both a social gathering place for friends and a site for individual betting among strangers.

What I noticed further, was that whereas inside the racecourse everyone would call other bettors “friends”, and once they were outside the racecourse they would emphasize these friendships as “true” or “good” friendships. Neither Bobbi nor Abi spent much time with My Name is Shah and Munty inside the racecourse, and I did not realize the extent of their friendship until I saw them together outside the racecourse. Inside the racecourse, they were close whist keeping slightly apart. It was as if the racecourse was, per definition, challenging to their friendships, so inside the racecourse absence was needed to help maintain the friendships over time.

### **Unknown fun friends and wondering wives**

The ambiguity of friendship does not simply mean that there is an unclear differentiation between friends and potential enemies, which is emphasized in the various forms of exchanges among bettors. It also alludes to a blurred differentiation between friends and strangers. At the racecourse

there is a specific way people can be known. In Abi's words: "We know everyone here: who owes money; who has lost..." Knowing someone at the racecourse was framed specifically in a betting context which was different from knowing someone outside the racecourse.

After a long day at the races, I passed the Racecourse Road to walk over to the Gymkhana Club to meet Abi in the card room. Whereas gambling was not officially allowed there, betting chips were still used as substitutes for cash, enabling a kind of casino without a house take to exist in the heart of Delhi. The Gymkhana Club, only a two-minute walk from the racecourse, was a popular location among those few with a membership and their friends as a venue to continue the fun of gambling. Through my family, I was fortunate also to have access to the Gymkhana Club. The day I met Abi there, I was planning to ask him a lot of questions. At the racecourse, conversations were often focused on the game only, so I saw the different setting as an opportunity to get further insights into his non-gambling life. Upon meeting him in the card room, I realized that he had other plans, as he invited everyone around the table to join us in the bar once the game was over. As we sat down at a table, Abi introduced me to the group: "You have all kinds of gamblers here, all backing [betting on] horses as well. Shiv there who is gambling on selected races only, Ajay who is doing handicapping and Alok who plays on information". Alok then introduced Abi, "and Abi is a gambler who either plays favorites or 'eats' [bet against] them." I had become used to this form of introduction, stripped of all information except that which referred to the people as bettors. This was in contrast to the introduction rituals I had become accustomed to through my Indian in-laws, who I sometimes met at the Gymkhana Club, where a long time would be spent on describing who was related to whom, the location of one's home, the occupation of one's father, as well as various kinds of achievements.

We started talking about the next day's races. After a while, I asked them what they would normally talk about when they were together besides horseracing. Abi said that they would tell jokes. He suggested that we could do a round of jokes, and I was asked to start. Totally unprepared, I tried to tell a joke about the Norwegian language, which fell totally flat. Abi told a joke on the penis sizes of men from different countries; Alok followed with a "Punjabi joke" mocking Punjabis for being unintelligent, despite most of them being Punjabis themselves. Ajay ended the round with an anecdote about the most influential horse owner in India, who was also known to be part of the Indian mafia, involving a situation in which he was humiliated by an Italian mafia boss when he was asked to masturbate 12 times before he was given the permission to take the Italian's daughter for a ride. Everyone was laughing, I, a bit hesitantly. I had become quite accustomed to the sexist

undertones as part of the bettors' everyday language. The horses were also used as subjects of jokes about the sexuality of males and females, which marked the space as a male dominated space, which I also mentioned in the previous chapter.

The bettors themselves saw joking as part of an overall characteristic of all gamblers as “fun lovers”, where their love for gambling, women and alcohol was of this fun. Fun was put in contrast to everyday life, which was considered to involve a lot of problems, especially when it came to family finances and dissatisfied “nagging” wives, who were nevertheless made fun of at the racecourse as well. This was the only format through which life outside the gambling context could enter the space for friendship. Jokes were not just fun because they could make people laugh, they also were central to a specific framing of friendships, and the kind of information they expected to know about one another.

When I asked Abi about his friendship with Munty, he started joking about him. I realized that Abi in fact knew very little about Munty, including his business and his family history. I had come to learn these details during a road trip to Merut racecourse three hours outside Delhi. Abi gave me the impression that he was neither aware nor interested in any details about Munty, who I never heard him call anything else but “naughty boy.” This was despite the fact that he drove with him for an hour several days a week to get to the racecourse.

The above situation illustrates a general trend among bettor friends. Whenever I would ask about the private lives of bettors, they would show what I interpret as a willful ignorance through joking. Roy Dilley argues that ignorance cannot only be understood as lack of information, but should also be seen as a “willed and intentional stance towards the world” (Dilley 2010, 177). In other words, ignorance is not just the opposite of knowledge, but also something that is being “played out” in social relations. At the racecourse, there was hardly any mention of prescribed identities related to caste, family background, occupations and so on. Bettors would most often go by nicknames, or first names, without mentioning last names which pointed towards caste and class. The regular norms of asking “How is your family?” was replaced with the question of “How is your day?”, referring to whether one was winning or losing. This does not necessarily mean that they were not aware of other bettors' identities, however, they were not relevant for the social space of the gambler which is defined as a scene for joking about oneself and others.

It was also difficult for me to get in touch with the bettors' families and wives. I had encountered many girlfriends, but few wives. Whereas I got various invitations to join bettors in the

company with other bettor friends for drinks, I was rarely invited home. I could only cross that barrier with ones I had become very close to, such as Abi, Rajeev and Bobbi. This was a barrier that was not crossed between bettors, but I purposely pushed my way through it. In the last month of my fieldwork I finally managed to meet Abi's wife, Shonali, first for dinner in their apartment, and later alone in the café of the Gymkhana Club. Shonali started out telling me that her husband was a bit of a mystery to her. She thought that "gamblers are per definition a kind of a mystery, since they live out of a box". Shonali had met Abi around the time he started betting on horses. They, as a relatively large number of the bettors at the racecourse, had a so-called marriage based on love as opposed to an arranged marriage<sup>2</sup>. She confided in me that shortly after they were married she realized the extent of her husband's "poor habits", which did not only involve gambling, but also a lot of women and alcohol. Abi had told me that he spent very little time with Shonali and their son. His son had studied business and wanted to get into the internet gambling industry, and he said that he had realized the kind of "loyalty" the gambling customers had to each other by observing his father.

After answering many of my questions, Shonali asked *me* a question: "This Munty guy who is a friend of my husband's, who is he? Do you know him?" She said that she did not know anything about any of her husband's friends. Most of them she did not want to know about, however Munty had struck her as a nice person. I asked why she had not asked Abi herself. She looked at me and said: "I would never do that. I don't like to nag. I am also sure that you are not the kind of person who would ask questions, are you?" I said I was not sure about that. She went on to tell me about Abi's sister, who she clearly thought of as of belonging to a lower class than herself, and who would ask questions all the time. She mentioned an occasion when her sister-in-law had made a scene when her husband had not come home at night. Shonali looked disgusted. "I don't like those kinds of people nagging." This example intimates that concealment in between gambling and non-gambling life is not only practiced by the bettors, but may be reinforced by their families. Shonali, to some extent, showed an unwillingness to know about her husband's gambling life, which she translated into a question of class and manners.

At times when I would question the bettors whether they considered it okay to gamble, they would proudly tell me how they had managed to keep it a secret from their wives, which to them meant that it was not a problem. The point is that secrecy is not simply considered a question of

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<sup>2</sup> According to my survey, 22% were in a marriage based on love. In India as a whole, 90% of marriages are arranged.

dishonesty, but can also be considered a moral act. Asking a Sikh female bettor whether she was allowed to gamble according to her faith, she told me, “No, but as long as one keeps it a secret one can gamble”. The separation of gambling and non-gambling life through secrecy was thus not a blind ignorance of existing moral frameworks. I see a parallel based on a smaller study I have conducted on sexuality among middle class young females, where women would show their parents respect by way of lying about their pre-marital relationships with men. They let me know that it was very likely that their parents knew what was going on, however, they made sure that the two lives were kept completely separate so as not to put their parents in a difficult position (Simonsen 2004). Similarly, rather than attempting to redraw moral lines, bettors kept religion and family at a distance from their betting practice (Puri 2012b, 2012a). Such modes of concealment enabled a kind of double or parallel life of the bettors.

Visiting Abi in his home with his wife and son, I saw how he completely changed as he lost his playful characteristics. Sitting his own couch, it was as if he literally shrunk in front of my eyes as his body became heavy and slow. The self-confidence that he showed at the racecourse also disappeared. His wife told me that she sometimes thought Abi was living in the past; that he had not been able to follow the time, which was passing, as he was mainly only living for gambling. Abi himself confided in me that he did not feel at home in his own home. He seemed most happy when he was with friends.

Outside their homes, the bettors’ wives would always be characterized in a way which emphasized them as being in opposition to what was associated with gambling, as when asking Abi about Shonali: “She is very pure. She doesn’t smoke, drink, eat meat or gamble.” The emphasis was on purity as an absence of what was framed as “vices” by bettors. Abi’s description created the image of the typical, idealized Hindu housewife, as described in the literature on gender in India. This is an image of the female central to the moral order of Hindu cosmology (Puri 2011; Raheja and Gold 1994; Mankekar 1999). I got the image of Shonali as a woman fully supportive of her husband, spending most of her day preparing food and caring for their child. Therefore I was quite surprised when I found out from her that she was a financial adviser in a bank with expertise in mutual funds and was away from home for most of the day. According to her she covered most of the household expenses with her salary, while Abi used his 40,000-rupee monthly pension primarily for betting and everything it involved. In this sense the moral frame for betting and gambling was gendered, and as part of that it was important to keep wives separate from bettors, which meant that bettors were never introduced to each other’s families.

Friendships among bettors remains in a rather enclosed moral space consisting of bettors, alcohol and “girlfriends”. Part of the premise for the friendship is concealment from ones other life – the non-gambling life. Thus, the premise for a friendship that is practiced in a gambling space is a friendship in which you cannot expect a full persona or a full truth. Erica Bornstein, as part of an examination of philanthropy in Delhi, argues that in India mistrust is an evaluative frame from which those one knows are separated from those one does not know. Trust, or the potential for trust, is, according to her, tied to knowing people, whereas mistrust is tied to not knowing. Part of the mistrust of fellow bettors is associated with them knowing only parts of the truth about the others. The scattered information on the life of bettors means that friendships are subject to speculations about other people’s life situations and the intentions behind friendships among known strangers.

### **“Generous” bookmakers**

Another aspect which frames the ambiguity around friendships at the racecourse is that it is unclear who the real competitor is. Part of the reason for this is that bettors value their relationships with bookmakers, who can otherwise be thought of as their enemies. At the racecourse, it is therefore unclear who the real competitor is.

As part of an article on day laborers in urban Japan, Tom Gill describes the laborers’ extended time spent on horse betting with bookmakers (Gill 1999). Gill argues that horse betting was a preferred mode of betting over other forms of gambling, such as cards, where the laborers would compete against each other partly in order to avoid debt between one another, and partly because it enabled them to gamble without being each other’s competitors. This is an argument in line with John Rosecrance, who claims bettors at the American racecourses do not act as if they are each other’s competitors, despite competing for each other’s money (Rosecrance 1985, 85). The point is that one bettor’s win does not simply translate to another bettor’s loss, as betting exists at a scale where several bettors can win at the same time, unlike a game of cards. Therefore, the competitor in the game is identified as the bookmaker. Zola argues that the bookmakers were the personification of the system bettors was trying to beat (Zola 1967, 25). In this section, I wish to challenge the idea of the bookmakers as the clear enemies in the game, enabling a commensality among bettors. I do this by looking into the kinds of exchanges between bettors and bookmakers.

Abi, with his usual poetic sarcasm, continuously conveyed that he saw gambling as a dreadful fight between gamblers and bookmakers: “The bookmaker wants to cut your throat and you want to cut theirs”. Abi furthermore considered the bookmakers to be “professional cheats”, which was a concept sometimes also applied to jockeys, trainers and horse owners. The bookmakers were considered cheaters on two accounts: because they were involved in fixing races and because they were charging betting taxes and fees. Nevertheless, as professionals, they also were respected for being trustworthy, good businessmen.

Some of the bookmakers’ employees sat in the café just after a race, when the betting ring had not yet opened up for bets on the upcoming races. Despite Abi’s rather hostile representation of the bookmakers, he would sit at the table with the employee of his preferred bookmaker, Mr. Arora, who he called his friend. Abi, as with some of his other bettor friends, would throw a couple of jokes at Mr. Arora, and on occasion offer him a cup of coffee. Mr. Arora was a middle-aged, strongly built and slightly reserved man. His father had been a bettor, and based on the insights into the kind of money at stake and the industry they got through their father, Mr. Arora and his brother started a bookmaking company, which they had been running for ten years. Mr. Arora would sometimes sit at the table and do his personal accounts, as he was not only working for the bookmaker, but also had his own unlicensed bookmaking business.

Mr. Arora acted as Abi’s bookmaker as well as his informant. As a bookmaker, Mr. Arora could give Abi suggestions on what to bet, based on his insight into what horses had been backed by whom. Mr. Arora could therefore have valuable information. Abi asked Mr. Arora to share his tips to me as well, in order to make me happy. Abi told me to always follow Mr. Arora’s tips: “He only gives the right info. It is not in his interest to give the wrong horses. As long as you keep betting, that is what is in his interest”. In that sense, despite being a dreadful bloodthirsty enemy, the personal bookmaker could be trusted because in the end it was in his best interests to keep the bettor alive. Tips given by bookmakers thus tended to be valued more than tips given by friendly bettors.

The trustworthiness of a bookmaker was about more than truthfulness; it was also about credit. When betting on credit, the bookmaker had to trust the bettor to pay at a later point, and bettors had to trust the bookmakers to pay them their profit when they won, which, depending on the cash level of the bookmaker, was not always paid immediately after the race. The licensed bookmakers who had a concrete betting stall were considered more reliable in that regard than the unlicensed bookmakers who were spread out across the racecourse. Whereas the unlicensed

bookmakers were poorly educated and had fought their way up through change in real estate prices and speculation in black markets, the licensed bookmakers had good English skills and business degrees. That said, what I want to emphasize here is not trust tied to honorability and class, but trust tied to repayment. The bookmakers who had the needed cash were to be trusted because it was considered in their interest to pay, as only then would bettors continue to bet with them. The licensed bookmaker had the opportunity to hold more cash, as they could keep it safely inside the bookmaker's booth, unlike the unlicensed bookmakers who could only keep it in their pockets. The unlicensed bookmakers were more likely to provide payment outside the racecourse after the races were over, which made the credit time was prolonged. Both in terms of tips and loans, licensed and unlicensed bookmakers seemed to be more trusted than fellow bettors.

The bookmakers were also the largest providers of credit at the racecourse. Loans between bettors were mostly given when the credit limit with one's bookmaker had been reached. A lot of betting is thus done on credit. At the racecourse there is an ATM, but for the most part it stands completely empty. In the words of Munty: "If you go to the bank you have to stand in line. At ATMs there is a 25,000 limit. Also there is the limit on the amount on your account (laughed). In racing there is no limit." Betting on credit with the bookmakers meant that the various wagers could be tallied at the end of the day as a single payment to the winning party. Credit could also be extended when one was low on money and in that sense, the bookmakers acted as providers of interest free loans. The bookmakers not only acted as information providers, they also, similarly to bettors, acted as providers of credit, which was dependent on the kind of relationship they had built with a bettor.

Bobbi did not have the advantage of betting on credit with one of the licensed bookmakers, as he had not established a relationship of trust with any of them. However, the unlicensed bookmakers, who were to be found all around the racecourse and often operated at the racecourse for shorter periods, were more open to giving credit based on a short relationship. Bobbi mostly bet on credit with one particular bookmaker who stayed close to Bobbi in the area of the general stand. However, when Bobbi lost more than 100,000, which was his credit limit with the bookmaker, he turned to cash. The credit went both ways between Bobbi and his bookmaker. After winning the third race in a row at good odds, the bookmaker could only pay part of the money won, and owed Bobbi 200,000. "That is trust," Bobbi commented.

Bookmakers had more to offer besides reliable tips and credit; they also had the power to adjust the betting fee as well as the odds to one's advantage as a bettor. The official betting tax was

17%, however, bookmakers only charged 9% for bets placed off the record with bettors they had established a relationship with. To establish such a favorable relationship to a bookmaker, one needed to be introduced to a bookmaker by someone. Abi had asked Mr. Arora to give me a “student’s discount”, which in that context meant betting with a 9% betting fee. Rajeev also introduced me to his two preferred bookmakers who he had asked to provide me with “market rates”, which are the highest odds offered by any bookmaker, and can be higher than the odds offered by the individual bookmaker at that moment. I was further introduced to an unlicensed bookmaker by an ex-jockey-cum-informer from the racecourse village, who I was told was a “generous man”. The generosity was tied to the fact that he was willing to charge only a 5% (illegal) betting fee.

Rebecca Cassidy, noticed how the older generation of bettors in London remembered the illegal bookmakers, before betting outlets were legalized in 1961, as trustworthy men who were part of the bettor’s extended personal network. This perception of the bookmaker was different from the perception of the legal bookmakers who came later, who were considered as outsiders taking resources out of the community (Cassidy 2010, 145). In Delhi the bookmaker was neither part of one’s extended network in the local society, nor an enemy coming from the outside. Rather, the bookmaker was standing in between as a potential friend without ties to the local society.

Overall, bookmakers could not clearly be differentiated from bettors. They were considered to be smart players in the game, also termed “big gamblers”, who managed to make a profit from a structural advantage in the game, which meant that they could make money from charging a fee. At the dinner party at Bobbi’s place featuring Sachin, the bettor with a 10% share in a bookmaker firm, the dynamic between the friends present conveyed an indirect hierarchy in which Sachin, as a pseudo bookmaker, was on the top. The bettors were aware that the bookmakers were by and large winners in the game. When talking about one of the most popular bookmaker firms in Delhi, Bobbi said, “they are so rich they have stomachs full of food”. Bobbi conveyed that his dream was to quit gambling and become a bookmaker one day in the future. This was a dream shared by many bettors. Bookmakers thus did not simply represent an enemy to defeat, but also a future dream.

A friendship with an admired bookmaker involved a favorable “tax” rate, a potential for inside information, credit or interest free loans, and was therefore a sought after alliance despite them being framed as the enemy. Abi’s bookmaker was trustworthy both in terms of credit and the validity of the information he gave, so the only problematic part of the relationship was the fact that he was charging tax as well as being potentially involved in fixing races – and the fact that in the

end he was winning over him. As with friendships among bettors, the bookmakers were seen as being both the enemy and a potential friend.

### **Eating horse and money**

In the above cases I have mentioned two uses of the verb *to eat* in the context of betting. At the dinner party, Bobbi said he had “eaten 70,000” rupees and Abi was also introduced by his friend to me as “someone who eats” bets. The use of the eating metaphor sheds light on the kind of moral space that the betting economy is integrated into, as well as the blurred distinction between bookmakers and gamblers. The verb used for winning a bet can either be *jeetna*, which can be translated as winning, or *khaana*, which can be translated as eating<sup>3</sup>. For the same reason, bookmakers were called *khaanawallahs*, which can be translated as people selling food.

One day I was offered *mithais*, auspicious sweets, by one of the bookmakers in celebration of his Guru’s birthday. I gladly accepted, but noticed a couple of other bettors who demonstratively rejected the mithai without showing any sign of gratitude. This was different from the way I have observed exchanges of mithais elsewhere, which were considered an offering of goodwill not to be rejected – at least if the relationship between the giver and the receiver was valued. The problem of the mithai emphasizes the kind of moral space the racecourse is set in, and the dual role of the bookmaker as a friend and enemy. The word mithai is in fact also used for a bribe, and by rejecting the mithai an ambiguity around the gift of the bookmaker was played out, as something between a gift of generosity and a bribe (a bribe given to link bettors to one bookmaker for the purpose of making money). As mentioned, I never observed an exchange of mithais among bettors, as the exchange rituals defining for their friendship were not in a mithai realm.

The point is that the racecourse is not considered a place for the virtues of sharing. Understanding the significance of the eating metaphor in betting, I believe, is emphasized through its opposite, which in this context is not starving, but sharing. According to David Graeber, the symbolic significance of food is stressed as a way of articulating differences between friends and enemies (Graeber 2011, 101). Friendships are articulated through food, but not just any kind of

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<sup>3</sup> Records of gambling places from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in India shows that *khaana* were back then also used as a verb for betting or placing a wager (Birla 2009, 165).

food<sup>4</sup>. The kinds of friendships we are dealing with here are more about the fun of eating sinfully delicious meat accompanied with alcohol.

Levi-Strauss categorizes gambling as a kind of act that can be compared to giving a feast or a ritualization of surpluses (Lévi-Strauss 1969). Gambling is seen as the ultimate form of sharing in times of excess, and a way to demonstrate and create hierarchy and integration. In this context he compares gambling specifically with rich food as opposed to the kind of food that is eaten to survive. I do not think of betting at the racecourse as a mode of potlatch, as betting was not oriented at enhancing ones prestige in contexts beyond the racecourse, and was not simply based on surplus but on credit. Nevertheless, there is a consumption pattern among bettors, which has potlatch-like features, in the sense that they act as if they have a surplus when they exchange rich food and alcohol, and metaphorically the understanding of winning money is a matter of consuming them.

At the Delhi racecourse, the concept of eating money as a mode of winning was not always spoken. Often it would just be shown with a hand gesture, putting their fingers on their right hand together, as if holding food, and then towards the mouth shaking them back and forth a couple of times. This was a gesture which outside the racecourse could both mean “Are you hungry?” or “Come and have some food”, and among beggars “Please give me money for food”. However, at the racecourse the gesture meant “I have won”. It would be performed in a slightly different manner from outside the racecourse, neither with reverence nor despair, but with a glint in the eye. There was something naughty or illegitimate about this form of eating.

The money eaten at the racecourse was about more than need; it was about greed. The metaphorical meaning of eating at the racecourse has to do with the kind of “food” that was consumed. It could not be compared with chapatis and vegetables, but with meat. Meat is a relatively expensive food item in India separating rich from poor. Hunting for the purpose of eating meat is considered one of four human vices or sins according to Hindu moral law in the *Manusmriti*, besides gambling, prostitution and drinking (Manu 1991). Hindus are known to be vegetarians, however, there is a growing appetite for meat, especially in the cities, which is entwined in divergent moral systems and which means that meat eating can be both a sign of class and of moral decay.

Per Binde, as part of an attempt to develop a comparative model for categorizing different exchange systems tied to gambling inspired by Marshall Sahlin’s model of reciprocity, points out

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<sup>4</sup> In India, in particular, food is loaded with symbolic significance varying dependent on the context for food exchange (Appadurai 1981; Khare 1992; Osella 2008; Parry 1985).

that whereas gambling in some societies is associated with honor and sharing, in other societies it is associated with theft (Binde 2005). At the racecourse, gambling was morally associated with theft, in contrast to gambling during Diwali between family and family friends. When I attended Diwali card parties in Delhi during my fieldwork, which were held in the homes of family friends, there was an exchange of food and mithais, and players were continuously sharing their profits with other people present. This mode of sharing money was not practiced among bettor friends. In Abi's words: "At home it feels good to share, but at the racecourse we don't want to share."

When Abi told his life story, a defining moment was when he first came as a refugee from Pakistan to India. He went to a temple in which they were serving *langa*, an offering in the form of free food in the Sikh temples. He had been standing in line for four hours when he finally got two chapatis with some dhaal (lentils), after which an older boy came and kicked him on his legs and took his food. This was a story he told me a couple of times, often in contexts in which he was trying to convey his understanding of people as basically greedy creatures.

The point I wish to make is that food and food metaphors existed as a lens through which questions of morality was dealt with and expressed among bettors. Bettors agreed that people at the racecourse, including themselves, were driven by a greed for money, which was individually eaten, rather than spend on someone else or converted into wheat for their wives to make chapatis. The metaphorical understanding of winning in betting as a form of eating money set the act of betting in a morally loaded context

The second use of the verb eating at the racecourse, was for a particular mode of betting, called "eating bets". I came to learn about the practice of eating bets through Abi. This was a method of betting he used quite often. However, I first became aware of it one day when we, on Abi's suggestion, had decided to bet "in partnership". I have never come across this mode of betting since, not even between kinsmen or spouses, as betting was primarily an individual act. But on that day we decided to share all of our wins and losses. At one point after a race I realized that there was one bet that Abi had not shared with me, where he had won 1000 rupees from "eating a bet". I was a bit bewildered that he had not shared the profit with me, as he seemed so eager to maintain a good relationship with me.

The method of eating a bet is when you as a bettor bet against the favorite horse. You do so by placing a wager with a bookmaker on a horse *not* winning. This was a mode of betting that the bookmakers offered on the favorite horse when they had taken in too many bets, which they were willing to sell off as a method of hedging risk. Furthermore, the bookmakers could make a profit

from adjusting the odds slightly in their favor. If a favorite horse was offered at 1:1, the “eating odds” would be 90:100, which means that the bookmaker would make a 10% profit from the exchange. Bettors could only eat bets with bookmakers with whom they had established a relationship of trust. Of all the bookmakers Abi bet with, he only ate bets with Mr. Arora’s bookmaking firm. When I told Abi at a later point that I would like to try to eat a bet, he seemed a bit reluctant to introduce me to this approach. He told me: “If you want to eat you should let me know and I can do it for you. You should not eat as a woman because it is illegal.” Whereas betting with a bookmaker was just considered bad for a woman, eating a bet was specifically defined as *illegal*. Illegal here seemed to emphasize something more than “just” illegal, which the majority of betting was done beyond taxation. This form of betting was moreover something illegitimate, which was the reason why he had not included this kind of betting in our common pool when betting in partnership.

Abi continued: “We are not bookmakers, but we can do the job of the bookmaker. When you eat a horse, you should not go public with it. Be discreet.” After we had both won while most other bettors lost Abi said with a soft voice: “We played along with the bookies; against the punters”. He gave me a handshake and inside it was 800 rupees that I had just won. Despite the secrecy, I decided to be public about it on another day when I was waiting outside the ring while Abi did the eating-betting for us. When the first person came to ask me what I was betting, as was common in between races, I told them that I was “eating the favorite”. The man said: “People are eating chapati and rice and you are eating a horse. Are you hungry?” Eating in this context was tied to greed, the mixed morality around meat eating, as well as the problem of illegal forms of betting, which meant less money went towards improving the horses’ conditions.

Michael Taussig, in a text on peasants of South America, describes how money is fetishized in such a way that there is a belief that money is illicitly baptized in order to grow, simultaneously stealing the child’s ability to grow (Taussig 1977). The fetishism of money in such beliefs, he argues, is an analogy for the role of money introduced to the local society, as the economy is first of all oriented at making more money even at the expense of growth in the natural environment. The fetishism of money at the racecourse, where money was represented as something to be eaten, represents the opposite analogy representing the kind of exchange at stake, namely the individual digestion of money which is not given the chance to grow. The metaphorical language around the digestion of money and horses is thus an analogy of the kind of consumption patterns and economy

that the money is tied into. This involves consuming money as if it was paper and consuming horses rather than supporting their growth and speed.

One reason for the sanctions around eating a bet for a bettor, I suggest, is that it blurs the distinction between bookmakers and bettors. When eating bets, fellow bettors more clearly become each other's competitors, and the practice of eating as a way of betting becomes framed more clearly as a greed for meat –horsemeat – not shared among bettors. This is a greed which involves eating money rather than enabling growth. The morality of the consumption of money inside the racecourse is tied to how it stands in contrast to the moralities around eating and consuming outside the racecourse.

### **Marked money**

Money coming out of the racecourse was entangled with what I saw as two separate economic spheres: one connected with gambling, gambling friends, prostitutes, alcohol and travel, and another which was tied to wives and gold. The first sphere was concealed from the bettors' families, and the second sphere was all about sharing within families.

Whereas winning is called eating, betting is called "*jeet-hara*" in Hindi (literally meaning winning-dying), and in England bettors defined betting at the racecourse as "winning-losing". Betting in Delhi was not conceptualized as the possibility of getting money to enable a life change, but as a constant undulation of wins and losses. I heard "sometimes you win, sometimes you lose" several times as the description of the basics of the game. Still, the reason for betting is termed as something more like the "thrill of quick money". This does not mean that it is necessarily motivated by the wish of mobilizing money, as much as it is the speed of the money coming and going. The thrill of winning may be extended into the thrill of spending the money as quickly as it comes, either through more gambling or through other kinds of prodigal spending: eating a meat feast, buying a car, going on a vacation and getting drunk.

Paul Bohannan has identified three economic spheres of exchange as a part of his work with the Tiv economy in West Africa, describing different categories of goods (Bohannan 1955). An economic sphere of exchange is when certain types of objects are classified as interchangeable. These spheres exist partly through the moral sanctions separating these systems of exchange from one another. The spheres can be hierarchically ordered in terms of how they are valued, and there

may be incentives to convert some objects to an exchange sphere higher up in the hierarchy. On the bottom of the Tiv economy was the sphere of food, in the middle the sphere of metals and on the top, the wives.

In an article on card gambling among the Gende in New Guinean highlands, Laura Zimmer argues that gambling was a way to mark money for investments in new ventures. According to Zimmer, money won in gambling was thus taken out of the everyday economy and channeled through another economic realm oriented at future ventures, and in that sense gambling money was part of a separate economic sphere (Zimmer 1986). Conversely, at the racecourse, money won in gambling funded by parents, employment or hard working wives, was channeled into an economic sphere of shared leisure, such as drinking alcohol, traveling to gambling destinations and spending time with women other than their wives. Money won in betting was what Viviana Zelizer has termed ‘special monies’ (Zelizer 1989) marked for more betting and fun with friends and women.

Among bettors, buying gold and giving money to wives were ways in which betting money was converted into an economic sphere different from the gambling sphere. However, there was no one-sided moral drive in this conversion. Bettors would keep the majority of their betting profit within the gambling economy, which included paying for meat and alcohol among bettors, buying drinks for women at bars, or paying for prostitutes. Still, they would also feel an obligation to convert some of the money to the exchange sphere of their wives and the household economy. Abi told about how his wife had been asking him for some money when she was going away for some days. He had told her that he did not have any money to give her, despite just having won close to 10,000 rupees. Afterwards he felt guilty and gave her a signed blank check.

There was another category of women that Abi liked to spend his money on, namely prostitutes. At the exit of the racecourse stood a mother and daughter from the racecourse village at the gate offering sex for money to the working class bettors. Inside the racecourse was a mam called Sunita who I was told “deals with flesh”, offering women to the upper class bettors, as well as a young woman, Rita, who was financing her own betting from sex offered mainly to middle class men. Abi at times paid 1000 rupees for an evening with Rita in a room at the Gymkhana Club. There was no fixed price, and on days when Abi won he would give her 2000 rupees. The extra money the bettors won therefore often contributed to an economy of prostitution.

Bobbi, on the other hand, insisted that he did not spend time with prostitutes: “I don’t go with prostitutes, I don’t do drugs, I don’t do anything illegal for which police can catch me, and I don’t kill anyone.” Nevertheless, I heard endless stories about girls he had been involved with, and

also caught him one day with a half naked girl in his bed. One former girlfriend committed suicide, an act that her parents blamed Bobbi for because he could not reciprocate her love towards him, which really disturbed him and meant that he sent some of his profits to her family. He always emphasized to me that he loved his wife and all these women were not important to him. But he was happy to spend money on them. However, when Bobbi won 500,000, after spending half the money on two trips to Thailand, and a car that got destroyed in a crash two weeks later, he put 30,000 rupees into his wife's account. "That means that the money is safe," he said.

Alcohol was illegal and not easily purchased at the racecourse, but Abi liked to spend a lot of money on drinks for friends after being at the racecourse. When I spent time with him outside the racecourse he wanted to order too much rather than too little, which meant that he always ensured that there was a minimum of two drinks on the table in front of me. Abi's friend, Munty, while we were driving in his car, told me that he would sometimes buy gifts for his wife and mother when he won at the racecourse. The gifts would always be gold. "I like heavy gold, but these days I cannot carry it myself", he said. He was also very generous to me, giving me food and drinks. He told me he had been in an argument with his wife after she had picked up his separate cell phone, which he kept for everything that had to do with betting, and after that she had thought I was a secret lover of his. On several occasions among bettors, money was compared with a female friend or lover, such as when saying "I have no friends here, money is my only friend. Money is my beloved".

On one of my first days at the racecourse I spoke to a middle-aged girlfriend of a male bettor who had been coming for the past seven years to the racecourse, which had become the couple's illicit meeting place. While her boyfriend was in the betting ring, she could be found reading a romance novel on one of the benches. She said: "Your husband lets you come here? All the wolves are here! Like they say in India: don't trust anyone besides your husband and your brother." When I went on a trip to Mumbai, she asked me to keep an eye on her boyfriend who she did not fully trust to not try to be with other women. On that trip to Mumbai, I met him in company with the mam, Sunita and a young prostitute, and as the evening after the races progressed, I found myself entangled in a situation where both Sunita and the boyfriend I had promised to keep an eye on, where in a subtle way trying to figure out whether I was open to sell sex.

Whereas I had been emphasizing my marriage as an attempt to position myself clearly as another man's wife, I had kept my own family away from my field for practical reasons. One day when I decided to bring my two-year-old daughter to the racecourse, I noticed that the people who would normally come up to me and ask me how I was doing, or gave me a tip on what to bet, kept a

distance from me. When I entered the café, where I would normally be invited to join some of the people at their tables, I did not get a single look or smile from the crowd; I was simply ignored. I had become socially dead and got a clear sense of having done something wrong by bringing her. I came to realize later that children were formally not allowed at the racecourse. However, considering that the most basic rules of the racecourse were not followed, the thought of me breaking one rule alone could not explain this awkward situation. It seemed as if my position as a mother simply did not go hand-in-hand with my position as a betting woman, who was regarded as being in the prostitute or potential girlfriend category. My presence as a mother reminded bettors of a social category and moral economy that they tried to separate from the betting economy they were engaged with inside the racecourse.

During the legal debates in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of the arguments raised for the banning of betting was to protect women from being drawn into prostitution (Hardgrove 2005, 13). The argument was on the one hand based on the assumption that females who were betting would have to resort to getting money through prostitution. But there was also the assumption that the husbands could wager their wives by forcing them into prostitution in order to finance their own betting addiction. This shows a tendency to think of females as victims of gambling, and as women tied up to gambling or as women entangled in prostitution. This was also the perception of most women present at the racecourse, including me. Therefore, on a day-to-day basis I was not understood in terms of the category of “wife”. During the fieldwork, I was positioned in the economic sphere of betting, illicit lovers and consumption with friends.

David Hayano in a study on card playing in the Awa in the New Guinea highlands argues that there is a difference between gambling money and non-gambling money in the Awa village. Non-gambling money is “given and taken, earned and spent, borrowed and lend in numerous long-term, social transactions involving obligations and debt” (Hayano 1989, 241). Gambling money, on the other hand, is money that is “quickly consumed and digested within a web of fellow card players, not the entire society at large” (Hayano 1989, 241). Money won in betting at the racecourse was also money made for consumption in a small group, rather than something invested in the society outside the racecourse.

Bettors at the racecourse expressed that there was a difference between value of money inside the racecourse and outside. For example I was told: “Only outside the gates [pointing towards the racecourse exit] you realize the value of money”. At the dinner party at Bobbi’s place, he neglected the significance of who paid for the party, as he emphasized that the money it cost to have

the party was nothing compared with the money that was at stake inside the racecourse. Thus the betting economy took part in defining the value of money, also outside the racecourse. The value associated with the money inside the racecourse stood in contrast to the value of money outside the racecourse. But rather than converting the value, the money was kept within the value system of play money, through modes of consumption with other people with a similar play attitude to the money at hand.

Ole Bjerg argues that in gambling money is momentarily de-sublimized, stripping it from the metaphysical properties that bestow money with value, and therefore gambling can be a kind of parody of capitalism which rests upon the idea of money having value (Bjerg 2009, 49). In gambling, money loses its sign value in a capitalist economy and becomes just what it is: a piece of paper. According to Bjerg, the de-sublimization of money can have a traumatizing effect on gamblers, which distorts them as subjects of capitalist society by changing their relationship to money (Bjerg 2009, 50). This was part of what I saw happening to the money leaving the racecourse; that they had lost their value in relationship to the non-gambling economy. It was this de-sublimization, which enabled the money to exist in a separate exchange sphere and be marked specifically for the consumption of gambling money outside the racecourse in the form of expensive women, getaways and vehicles.

The friendships of the racecourse are tied to a specific economic sphere, namely that of betting money. Part of the ambiguity around the bettor friendships is that it is morally ranked lower than the economy of gold and wives. Friends take part in the betting economy and are complicit in refraining the transfer of money to the economic sphere of the household. Bettors thus stand in a problematic relationship to the family economy, and may be compared with the diverging relationship to a secret “lover”, who wants jewelry, as opposed to the faithful wife. Bettors are thus to some extent torn between the incentive for conversion of money and the incentive to consume money with friends, yet they tend to let the drive towards consumption of money win.

### **Stealing luck**

There are other reasons to spend time with friends, which have to do with luck. Luck at the racecourse was framed as something existing in the space between two people, and something which could be gifted as well as stolen. I became attentive towards this perception of luck after seeing a mediocre Hindi movie called “Luck”. The movie was about a young man who had

continuous luck in his life and was kidnapped by a mafia gang who wanted him to gamble for them so they could win from stealing his luck<sup>5</sup>. The day after a songs from soundtrack was stuck in my head: “Asma Luck Asma”, meaning “try your luck, try it”. So when a horse called ASMA was set to run in the upcoming race, I decided to try my luck on it. It won and I won with the odds 7:1 after which a man that I had told what I was betting came over and thanked me.

The movie showed methods for the transfer of luck. Part of the reason why Bobbi was eager to have me betting with him and for him was because he was convinced that we were bringing each other good luck by betting with each other. He had been losing while I was away on a fieldtrip at Kolkata racecourse for some days, and had lost large amounts of money. Before that we had been betting and winning together, and when I came back again he won a number of races again. He told me: “Maybe my luck is with you or maybe your luck is with me... Maybe I was lucky because I played with your money.” This idea of luck as something that can be transferred from one person to another through money bears resemblance to the transfer of *hau* through objects (Mauss 1954, 12). On days I was not coming to the racecourse, Bobbi began to put money on horses for me without asking me, providing me with “loans” I was not even aware of, and thus converted some of the money he was wagering to my or our joint luck.

A belief in luck is common in any gambling setting, however, what is interesting is not just luck as a general concept defining a way of engaging with future contingency, but the specific qualities of luck – and the kinds of luck that are not there (Malaby 1999). Giovanni da Col and Caroline Humphrey emphasize that ways in which luck is distributed and imagined varies considerably in societies (da Col and Humphrey 2012), thus it is worth paying attention to the uniqueness of how luck was understood and practiced at the racecourse in Delhi. At the racecourse luck was something attached to persons, as outcomes were determined by people. Thus there was little talk about lucky times, lucky numbers and lucky places, which are otherwise the typical modes of luck in other gambling settings (Reith 2006, 169-174). At the racecourse, there were lucky people, and to get lucky one should seek their presence or connection.

In his examination of poker players in the US, David Hayano, observed how personal luck was being controlled or managed through individualized actions, such as choosing a seat (Hayano 1982). This was a way through which the poker players tried to engage with future contingencies, by making a link between the individual, an object (the seat) and the game. Choosing a seat was

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<sup>5</sup> In this there are parallels to what Giovanni da Col has written on fortune stealing in Northern India (Col 2012).

also part of a management of luck at the racecourse, where it however, was not so much about the object of the seat in which one was sitting, but more who one was sitting next to. When betting with Rajeev, he wanted me to sit on his left side, which he thought might bring him luck. The luck thus existed in the space between him and me. Neither relationships nor luck at the racecourse were considered everlasting. Good luck, as well as bad luck, at the racecourse was understood as something that would come in periods of time, similar to how relationships with bettors or informers were not thought to be lasting. Talking with Abi about how much money I was winning with Bobbi, he told me to continue betting with him “until the luck ends... then you should leave him”.

Belief in luck has been categorized as either external, as something existing in the world outside, or internal, as something attached to the individual (Chiu and Storm 2010, 207). However, what I wish to emphasize is the association with luck as something that exists in between the internal and the external, namely in social relationships, when betting with each other’s money or when spending time in each other’s company. It may be seen as paradoxical that close contact to bettor friends is both avoided and sought after at the racecourse. In both cases, it is the affect of people on future outcomes that is central to the engagement with contingency and the understanding of people as the prime forces in determining future outcomes and profits at the racecourse.

Luck at the racecourse, was not tied to destiny, determining the allotted share in life (Guenzi 2012). Conversely, it could enable one to take more than what they had already been given in life, and for that reason it was imbued with an ambiguous morality. At times when bettors were given information on fixed futures, I heard the use of the term “fixed luck”. Luck was thus entwined into ideas of human control over futures. The idea of getting luck from a future that is fixed is different from an idea of luck as tied to the individual destiny as well as to a divine gift. Jackson Lears has shown how luck in US has historically been tied to the idea of the individual being chosen, in sync with a Weberian capitalistic ethos, which has not only driven Americans to engage in hard work but also to try their luck in gambling and search for extreme profits in other spheres of life (Lears 2003). Whereas in the US luck has to do with being elected, at the racecourse luck had to do with being connected. And whereas luck in America, according to Lears, is tied to a gift from the divine, at the racecourse it is tied to a gift (in the form of a tip or transferred luck) from a temporary friend not to be trusted.

Luck at the racecourse was gendered. I do not consider it a coincidence that not only Bobbi, but also Abi and Rajeev, explored the idea that I was their lucky charm. Watching movies on

gambling in Hindi cinema from different decades, I noticed how the role of women in such movies was not her being a gambler herself, but someone brought by men to the gambling sites to bring them luck (e.g. in *Teen Patti* from 2010). These women were not wives, but girlfriends, and someone like Sachin kept horse race betting a secret from his wife, and when betting at home on cricket over the phone he also made sure that she was not in the room, as he thought she brought him bad luck in betting. Not all wives considered unlucky in India. The female deity of luck in money matters in India, Lakshmi, is considered the perfect wife. Yet, Lakshmi is not a deity who is worshipped among the Hindu bettors, as is the case during the time of Diwali. At the racecourse, wives and gods were kept at distance as a method of separating the gambling and non-gambling moral spheres, as I have argued above (Puri 2012a).

Bobbi not only sought out good luck through me, he also avoided bad luck, and did not want to entangle his betting with another friend, the drunken man from the night of his party, who he considered unlucky. He was careful not to share his tips with the unlucky friend, as he thought that if he bet on the horse it would end up not winning. His friend's lack of luck was not enough to end the friendship, and Bobbi thought it was quite amused to witness his failures. At times he also bought him some food or drinks in pity. He liked to spend time with the unlucky friend, while being cautious for his luck not to interfere with his. This conceptualization of luck therefore emphasizes the ambiguity involved in friendships and the reasons for both creating alliances and maintaining distance.

## **Conclusion**

Part of the problem of the friendships at the racecourse was that they were founded on an ethos of self-interest and greed. In this chapter I have looked into the social organization at the racecourse by looking at friendships. Looking *through* the friendships (Coleman 2010), what becomes evident is that there is a particular sociality of mistrust tied to the idea of the racecourse as a deceptive place, made up of money hidden from families and where no one is to be trusted.

Friendships at the racecourse were established and maintained through various forms of exchanges of food and alcohol, money, favors and information. Yet, the exchange was imbued with ambiguity as the gifts given were not clearly given out of goodwill for the purpose of establishing a long-term emotional bond. Rather, gifts were given in order to enable betting and to have someone to share a gambling life with, which is otherwise kept completely separate from family life.

In the opening line of the chapter, a bettor states that all her friends are gamblers and that gamblers cannot be friends. I want to emphasize that she used the word *and*, not *but*. In the above I have tried to show how the two parts of the sentence are not exclusive of each other, as both statements are right. It is not a paradox, but it defines the ambiguity of friendship at the racecourse, where friends are something in between friends and enemies, team players and competitors, friends and strangers, and are therefore both wanted and unwanted. They are known strangers and partly trusted cheaters who are in the category of competing allies. Friendships exist in a speculative space defined by the possibility as well as impossibility of friendship.

Understanding the role of friendship is central to the understanding of the basic ethos of the racecourse. It was not only the people behind the horses, such as the jockeys, trainers and horse owners, that were cheating; no-one inside the racecourse was to be trusted. This does not mean that betting is not a social activity and that true friendships cannot develop among bettors. But friendships develop out of suspicion in a morally challenged space. The idea that everyone, both rich and poor, is a cheater does not necessarily have a disintegrative quality. Bettors establish friendships with friends under suspicion, friends who they choose to trust.

In the above, I have shown how the relationship to a bookmaker seemed to be more valued than a relationship to a bettor, which was tied to the access to credit as well as inside information. In the following chapter, the role of the bookmaker will be examined further through a focus on the betting ring and odds. The chapter will show how the odds also are set and interpreted based on assumptions of deception.



# Signs of odds: Bookmakers and bettors in the betting ring

## Introduction

A loud bell rings and in the background I can hear the voice of a commentator announcing that the horses have left the stalls and are off and running with TAKE A CHANCE in the lead. I am stuck in the midst of a throng of men, crammed together in front of a bookmaker's booth, eager to bet on the horse PRIVATE EYE, which has emerged as the favorite. The bookmaker has just adjusted the odds from 90/100 to 80/100, further reducing the return on the investment. Still, the men in the group are determined to bet on this particular horse, and do not at any point turn their heads to the television screens to see how the horse is actually running: their focus is on the bookmaker and the odds.

In the five minutes leading up to the race a large majority of those present at the racecourse are inside the betting ring. The betting ring is not just the location to get the odds on a horse, it is also a place to get information on what others are betting. This information was sought both by witnessing other people betting and by observing the odds, which were constantly being adjusted. In the ring, there was no chatting. One reason was simply that the noise level did not allow for it as bettors were constantly shouting at bookmakers to place their bets. Yet in the ring it is the odds that do most of the communicating. Binoculars are a well-known piece of equipment at racecourses worldwide and are mostly used for observing the horses. However, at this racecourse, known in India to be the center for betting, binoculars were only used in the betting ring to observe the spectacle of the odds.

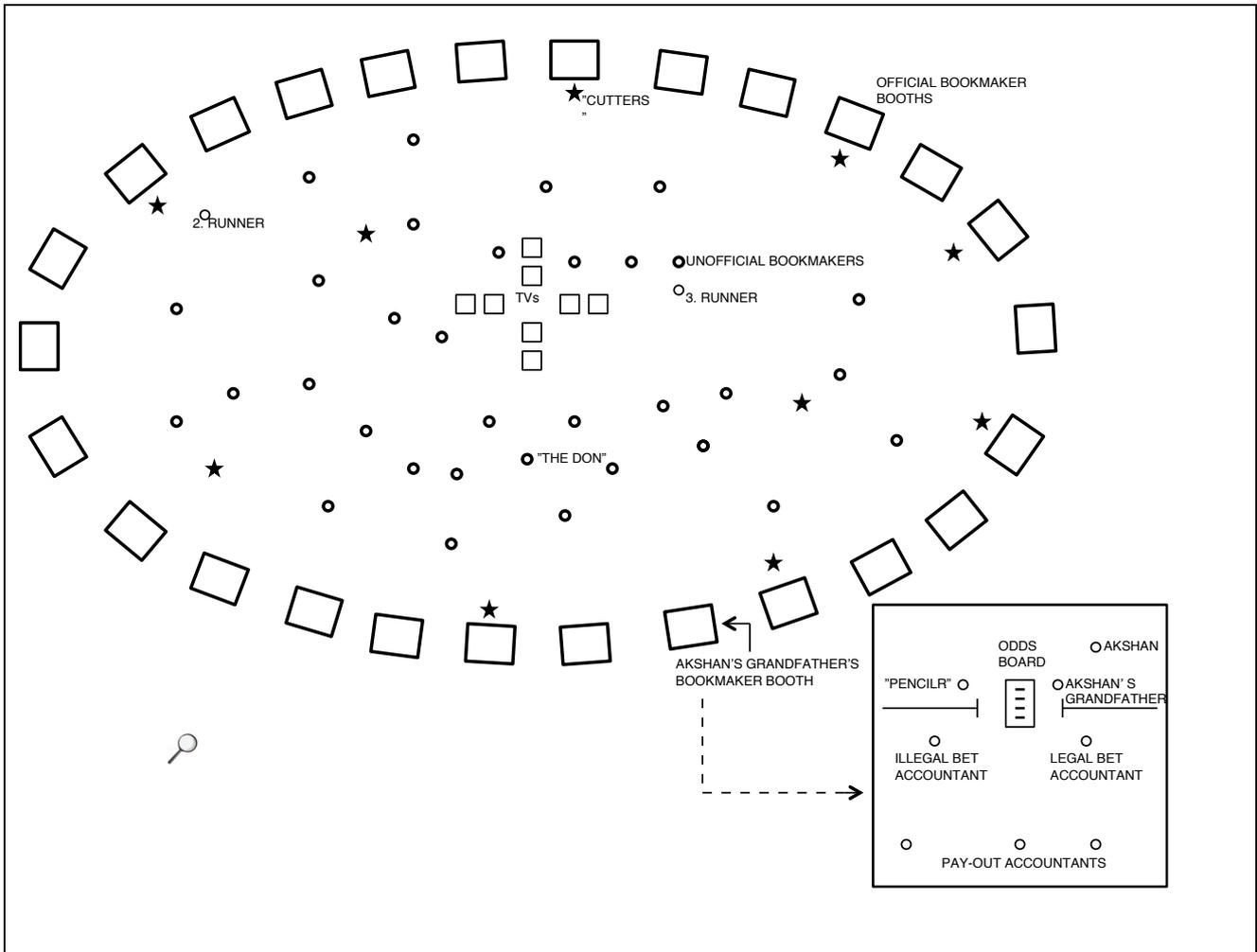
Betting rings are a unique feature of the racecourse and represent another mode of betting than what is described in the literature on betting outlets. In the existing anthropological literature on racecourses (Cassidy 2002; Fox 1999; Scott 1968; Rosecrance 1988; Herman 1967; Allen 2006; Binde 2011), with the exception of a short paragraph by Cassidy, I have not come across any study which examines the betting ring itself. Part of the reason for this lack of attention may be that fixed odds betting, another term for betting with bookmakers, is illegal in the majority of jurisdictions, and therefore there are many racecourses worldwide without betting rings. Yet, the betting ring offers a unique site for the exploration of an embedded market for speculation, with clear similarities to those financial markets still existing beyond the computer screens.

Following the suggestion of Clifford Geertz (Geertz 1973) based on the betting ring of a Balinese cockfight, a focus on odds offers a unique entry to the understanding of the connection between economic value and social order. With this chapter I first of all want to contribute to the ethnography of racecourses by focusing on the betting ring as a central site for the generation of economic value. Furthermore, I hope to contribute more broadly to an anthropology of money (Hart 1986; Maurer 2006), and high finance (Zaloom 2006; Zaloom 2009) by focusing on the role of economics, namely the visual representation of money (Kaplan 2003). In this case odds, as signs for money in markets for speculation, are of relevance to our understanding of the generation of economic value both in betting and in finance.

The predictive procedures I described in chapter two do not necessarily lead bettors to bet on one particular horse. In fact, there is a second round of decision-making which goes on inside the betting ring, which concerns an interpretation of the odds. In this chapter I examine the betting ring with a special focus on odds. I argue that the betting ring offers bettors, as well as bookmakers, grounds from which to speculate on possible fixed futures. This is because in the betting ring odds are considered to reveal concealed money and are therefore interpreted and generated as signs of a possibly fixed future. I approach odds as a token of value and, through examining the generation and perception of odds, I try to grasp ways in which value is produced in between real and imagined transactions in a speculative space considered deceptive. I do so by following the odds sold inside the betting ring in detail as part of an analysis of the social life of odds (Appadurai 1986). In the chapter, I describe how betting odds come into being in the interaction between licensed and unlicensed bookmakers and bettors. I look at how the odds are produced, interpreted and traded, which provides an insight into processes through which a contingent future is not only imagined, but also priced.

Despite the focus of this thesis being on the bettors, an analysis of the betting ring also demands a description of the bookmakers who set the odds. By focusing on bookmakers, I found parallels in terms of the methods bookmakers use to try to predict the future. Similar to the bettors, bookmakers integrate predictive procedures which are not alone tied to mathematical calculations, but also to the monitoring of people as part of the idea of deception and the existence of concealed economies.

## Map of the betting ring of the Delhi Race Club



### Looking to bet

Walking inside the betting ring, also called “the ring”, before a race, I was hit by an intense noise from people shouting out bets to the bookmakers, a rise in the temperature from the density of people, as well as literally being hit by people running frantically around. The betting ring at Delhi racecourse consisted of an oval dirt area covered with a tall tin roof, encircled by 26 bookmakers’ booths looking like small cages made of iron rods. The booths were raised above the crowd on platforms. Attached to the front of the booth was a blackboard on which the odds were written down with chalk. Each of the 26 licensed booths in the betting ring employed up to ten people. The owner sat on the outside accepting bets and adjusting the odds. Next to him was the “penciler” who would write the potential payouts on betting cards. With the licensed bookmakers, bets could either be made legally, paying a 17% betting tax, or illegally, with only a 9% unreported betting fee which

went straight into the bookmakers' pockets. The percentage paid depended on the amounts bet and whether the bettor had established a personal relationship with the bookmaker, which also was a deciding factor as to whether or not one could bet on credit, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Inside the booth were two clerks writing down bets with pens in large account books, one handling the legal reported bets and the other handling the illegal, unreported bets. At the back of the booth were another three clerks who worked out winning payouts, which were handed over through the iron rods of the booth.

There could also be up to three "runners" attached to each booth, who I will call "bookie runners" in order to distinguish them from the men of the racecourse village who provide the service of betting for bettors in the members' room and the café. The bookie runners had several responsibilities. First, they monitored the development of odds among other bookmakers. Second, they monitored the betting of certain people who were considered to have inside information. And finally, they went to place bets with other bookmakers to hedge their business risk.

Despite being an outdoor location only covered by a roof, the air was different in the betting ring and during the cold mist of the winter months I would go there to keep myself warm from the collective body heat. In the hot months, the betting ring provided shade from the sunlight and a spot to catch a breeze moving from some of the dirt-covered fans hanging from the ceiling. Under the ceiling, light was coming in from the sides, but it was mostly lit up by blue-colored fluorescence lights.

The betting ring was a dense, intimidating place, where I, similarly to the other few females present at the racecourse, was often advised not to go. Placing a bet could involve pushing your way through the crowd to the bookmaker's booth before the odds of the horse you were interested in fell or before the race started. It could also involve waiting anxiously for the odds to improve before you could jump in on a bet.

As chaotic as it may seem at first, once you started to get to know the betting ring, you could observe clear patterns in the movements of people which were determined by how, where and in which direction the odds fluctuated. If the odds on the horse they intended to bet on suddenly started to decrease, the bettors ran to another bookmaker who might not have made a similar adjustment yet. In the background, you would hear the commentator over the loudspeakers. Because of the poor sound quality and the noise level you could not actually tell what he was saying, however the intensity in his voice along with the intensity of the ring gave an indication of how much time there was before the race would start. While people simply moved faster, adapting to

faster moving odds, they also tended to flock around the bookmakers who provided the best odds on the favorite horse, and who could, as a result, have a hard time taking in all bets before the race started.

Unlike the procedures of prediction prior to betting, as described in chapter two, the actual placing of a bet was generally not a group activity. People might go into the ring together, yet once inside they would split up. Even Abi, who was constantly on the lookout for tips from people around him and also just loved to hang out and talk once inside the ring, would leave me. As for Rajeev, who was otherwise slightly withdrawn yet always polite, he bumped forcefully into me several times on his way to a bookmaker, fixated on the odds, without taking any notice of me. In the ring, my objects of study, the bettors, transformed into a mass in movement, where it seemed impossible to follow single bettors and get an idea of the organic life of the odds from their perspective, as there was no time to talk.

The odds, are not just something enabling calculations, they also are objects of affect. The ring is an exciting site and betting is an experience in itself. Observing the movement of the odds can be as exciting as watching the races themselves. I suggest that placing a bet, and the time leading up to it, represent a peak in the betting experience. Leaving the betting ring, bettors are elevated. Part of the thrill of betting thus lies in betting itself, as an embodied action, and not in the events that determine outcomes as well as the consequences of the bet. Entering the betting ring, one experiences the immediacy of the market, which demands a focused attention and action.

Clifford Geertz articulates the mood of the Balinese betting ring in ways that bear resemblance to the Delhi betting ring. In his grasping of the kind of social organization at stake and describing the mood of the betting ring, he refers to Goffman's concept "focused gathering" and what he describes as a sense of "flow" (Geertz 1973, 424). A focused gathering, according to Goffman, is when a number of persons are organized around the same activity and relating to one another in a common flow (Goffman 1961, 9-10). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has later defined flow as the merging of action and awareness when we act with total involvement (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988). Another description that captures a similar ambience is Zaloom's ethnographic study of the pits at the Chicago Board of Trade for futures trades<sup>1</sup>. Zaloom describes entering the Chicago Board of Trade as a matter of entering a "zone" characterized by a particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Future contracts are the right to buy or sell commodities (mostly without delivery) at a future point, enabling a profit from price developments.

intense presence (Zaloom 2008)<sup>2</sup>. Zaloom argues that trading in futures contracts was a bodily experience in a localized market entity. Traders in this market did not focus on an abstraction of the market, but on each price movement individually. Along the line of Zaloom and Geertz, I suggest that what creates a focused gathering is the existence of odds. Zaloom states that when traders ran for prices they acted as if they were tracking animals (Zaloom 2009, 264), which supports the idea of economy as animated or spirited. Here I am thinking of Keynes' "animal spirits" (Keynes 1936) and Appadurai's "ghost" in finance (Appadurai 2011), which define the dispositional beliefs and ethos behind human economic behavior. In the Delhi betting ring, that the animation of the odds was not tied to animals but to people. Bettors and bookmakers in their orientation towards the odds were not acting as if they were tracking speedy horses but deceitful people and their hidden money. The betting ring as a place for odds thus offered another site for the examination of how the assumption of deception and concealed economy framed the engagement with contingency at the racecourse. This was done through a speculation on the causes of the movement of odds.

### **Studying the odds**

When entering the betting ring, the odds, and not the horses or the information given on them, were the primary point of attention. Often the bettors would go to the ring having made up their mind on what to bet, and therefore for them going to the ring was about buying the bet at the best price, meaning at the longest available odds giving the best payout. At other times, bettors go to the ring with a couple of horses they are thinking about betting on, and they will make their decision only after having "seen the odds" in the betting ring. Abi would say, "I think I will bet on horse number two, but I just want to go and take a look at the odds".

The reason why seeing the odds are of importance to the bettors, is that they are interpreted as a sign of concealed money and intentions. Odds are not considered fixed estimations of the inherent probabilities of a horse winning, but are set according to what is bet and by whom. On one hand, dropping odds are seen as a sign that the horse has been backed by someone with information on possible futures, and on the other hand short odds are risky. With short odds, as the horse owner gains little money from a win, the horse is considered likely to be pulled. Bookmakers may also have an interest in having the horse pulled if they receive a lot of bets on the horse, and therefore

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the word "zone" is also part of Natascha Schüll's understanding of gambling spaces as a specific affective space designed for gamblers to spend more money (Schüll 2012, 3)

they could be making a deal with the jockey. Odds are thus used as important indicators for interpreting the deceptive game of the racecourse.

Odds represent another interpretive element that can contradict decision making prior to seeing the odds. In the words of Rajeev: “The problem is the seduction of the ring.” For Rajeev, who preferred winning with long odds, part of the seduction was the promise of a large payout. Bobbi told me: “Sometimes in the ring I get confused.” The confusion comes from questioning one’s decision based on the signs that the odds are giving. The odds in this sense told stories, which at times led Bobbi not to follow the advice of his information source when it was not what he classified as confirmed information. Bets are thus not just an extension of the procedures of prediction, as the final decision-making is based on an interpretation of the odds once inside the betting ring as well as a preference for different kinds of odds. Seeing the odds is an important part of the experience of betting and is central to the engagement with contingency through betting. Rajeev at one point told me: “People in wheelchairs come here, instead of betting over the phone. Why? They want to see the odds.”

The importance of knowing the odds and seeing the odds and how they move in the betting ring, was not only evident in decision-making processes of picking one bet over another, but was also important in how the odds were narrated. On leaving the betting ring after having bet, the bettors rarely asked each other how much money they have wagered, but they were happy to share information about the odds on which they had placed their bets and how the odds had been moving. The different odds position the bettors in relation to each other as well as to the perspective of the market as a whole. Getting a bet in on long odds on a horse before the odds drop is a point of satisfaction. If the horse wins, not only have you potentially won more money than those who have had shorter odds on the same horse, the chances of the horse winning are also considered higher, as dropping odds are interpreted overall as a sign of a better chance of winning.

When Rajeev, Abi and Bobbi went to the ring to “see the odds” they were looking for the movement of odds based on which they took a decision on what to bet. If the odds of a horse started to go up, they could decide to change their decision on what to bet, as it was a sign that the horse had not been backed. In the betting ring, Rajeev, Abi and Bobbi could attempt to catch a bet on a horse when the odds were just starting to drop, before they dived completely. If the odds of the horse started to go up, they could change their opinion as it was a sign that the horse had not been backed. The bettors therefore acted on dropping odds as sign that the horse had potential which had previously been concealed. The movement of odds was thus a ground for speculating on futures as

well as evaluating the past. The introductory example of this chapter with bettors standing in front of bookmakers just before a race was included as it shows a tendency at the Delhi racecourse for an accelerating demand for the favorite horse.

Abi asked just before a race was to start: “Did you see the odds of [horse] number four went from three to less than one? This must mean that the owner or the jockey backed [bet on] it. I should have backed number four also.” If a horse won with long odds it was interpreted as a situation where the people behind the horses had successfully managed to keep the potential of the horse a secret in order to get good odds. A bettor, Amit, similarly said after losing a large sum of money on a favorite horse: “Did you see the odds [of the winning horse]? That must mean that they have been working the horse in the dark.” Speculations on reasons for movements in odds were numerous and part of the everyday exchange of market information between bettors. A central method of the racecourse was the method of “studying odds” through the act of seeing odds more so than the method of studying and watching horses. Odds could reveal possible futures hidden in the dark, which would otherwise only be known through good contacts or by paying a large amount of money to get a tip from a jockey. Before I go into more depth about how odds are not only interpreted but also produced, I want to study the odds in existing anthropological literature.

### **The depth of odds**

Clifford Geertz’s seminal text *Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight* (Geertz 1973) marks the first and only in-depth ethnographic examination of a betting ring. Whereas Geertz’s text has already been discussed in the anthropology of gambling in terms of how he establishes the interpretative link between gambling and society (Malaby 2003, 22-24; Sallaz 2008; Schüll 2012, 11; Cassidy 2010), here I want to focus specifically on the section of the text called *Odds and Even Money*<sup>3</sup>, in which he tries to identify a logic behind the odds that is about more than mere economics. He tried to understand odds as a reflection of aspects of the Balinese culture. His observations of the odds in the betting ring are relevant in taking this anthropological approach to odds further, by exploring parallels and differences between the betting ring of the Balinese cockfight and the betting ring of the Delhi racecourse. In my case, what I found at the Delhi

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<sup>3</sup> This is a section which has not been given as much attention as the rest of the text, and is even omitted from a popular textbook on anthropological theory for students of anthropology (McGee and Warms 2000, 504).

racecourse was that the odds did not reflect Indian culture as such, but the interpretation of the racecourse economy as deceptive.

At a first glance, the betting platforms and odds patterns that Geertz describes may seem very different from the Delhi racecourse. However, looking closer, what Geertz is identifying is, first, the tendency to situate knowledge of the future with the owners of the animals and their allies, and, second, the role of their bets in determining the developments in the odds. What is noticeable is that in both the Balinese and the Indian betting ring, the odds are dependent on the owners' and their allies' bets, and profit-seeking is thus directly related to their social position. In this sense, he is also describing a socio-cultural understanding of risk, where the assumed knowledge of these actors, rather than the birds themselves, becomes central to the development in prices for risks through odds.

Geertz commences his section on odds by describing two betting platforms, the *toh ketengah* existing in the center of the ring of the cockfight and the *toh kesasi* in the periphery (Geertz 1973). *Toh* is the word used for odds, which among several things can also mean a stain, mark or a collateral. Whereas the center bets are done in coalitions between cock owners and their allies, in an orderly manner, the side bets are more chaotic and done between individuals. Yet, what he is particularly interested in for his analysis is the pattern of the odds. At the center among cock owners the odds are always even money (1:1), whereas on the periphery the odds are unevenly balanced between the two cocks, which is what he identifies as a formal asymmetry. He writes:

This formal asymmetry between the balanced center bets and unbalanced side bets poses the critical analytical problem for a theory which sees cockfight wagering as the link connecting the fight to the wider world of Balinese culture (Geertz 1973, 429).

Geertz identifies the pattern of odds as something reflecting more than mere economics, and something that can be identified in social and symbolic values existing in the Balinese society. Therefore the odds are an empirical object which presents an analytical entity through which the risk market of the betting ring and the context of the Balinese culture are interlinked. What he noticed was that the ratio of the odds of side bets were dependent on the amount bet in the center. Geertz observed that the higher amounts that were bet in the center among the cock owners and their associates, the more betting was done in the margins or side of the betting ring among the spectators. This is why the odds would come close to even money. This means that all bettors

would have what is known as short odds. Geertz writes about the differentiation between center and side bets:

The two betting systems, though formally incongruent, are not really contradictory to one another, but are part of a single larger system in which the center bet is, so to speak, the “center of gravity,” drawing, the larger it is the more so, the outside bets toward the short-odds end of the scale. The center bet thus “makes the game;” or perhaps better, defines it, signals what, following a notion of Jeremy Bentham’s, I am going to call its “depth” (Geertz 1973, 423).

In the above paragraph, Geertz first of all identifies odds as a sign. Furthermore, this is where Geertz first introduces the notion of depth, which is central to his article and part of the title. The notion of depth, according to Jeremy Bentham, is something which cannot be explained alone through ideas of the utilitarian rational economic actor of formal or classical economic theory. What is particularly compelling is that he tries to identify some larger value systems in Balinese society in the quantifiable system of odds, and thus Geertz’s text is indeed a text on economic anthropology. It may be worth thinking of this paragraph in his text as a part in which he links his older engagements in economic anthropology (Geertz 1963) with his newer turn towards an interpretative and symbolic interest. Geertz states that in the betting activities that go into settling odds and choosing amounts, especially in the side bets, they act as rational actors along the line of formal economic analysis. However, this does not mean that the social structure does not determine their bets, as it is part of what creates the value assigned to the cocks as revealed through odds and betting volume. What Geertz argues is that even when following the theories of rational actors, social structure takes part in defining the economic values and prices, and in doing this he in some sense balances a formalist and substantivist approach. What Geertz is doing may be termed a thick description of risk (Sallaz 2008), in the sense that he situates betting behaviors and risk products in a socio-economic context through which he gets to the depth of the odds and a theorization of value both within and beyond the economic theories of the rational actor.

In his text, Geertz draws parallels between horseracing and the stock markets. In terms of the methods of settling of odds, he sees analogies with stock markets. Furthermore, he uses the word “handicapping” to describe the method by which cock owners at the center try to level the probabilities of the cocks by creating certain advantages for the weaker ones (Geertz 1973, 429), similar to what is done in horseracing when extra weight is assigned to particular horses to create equal chances of winning. This suggests that the owners were willing to decrease the chances of

their birds winning in order to level the competition, which is important for a betting market to exist. Only the betting allowed it to be a fight over status for those doing “status gambling”, as there was no separate prize economy, and the bet was the prize for winning. Betting was thus not an extension of a fight over status – it was the fight.

Geertz does not pay much attention to what he describes as the *umpire*, who may be seen as a kind of bookmaker<sup>4</sup>. With the umpire, what he seems to be describing is a similar mode of betting to what was the case in horseracing before the invention of bookmaking (Chinn 2004), where the bookmaker acted as a middleman enabling a bet between two bettors. Despite the fact that Geertz took notice that the umpire took 10% of all betting, his role was interpreted as a protector of the honor of the bettors (Geertz 1973, 426). I would say that this interpretation of the role of the bookmaker fails to understand the bookmaker as a potential economic player in the game.

Geertz can be critiqued for his focus on the Balinese elite, as he sees a fight between cocks owned by an elite as a text of the society as a whole. Whereas he focuses on the significance of the cockfight as a game of status, he nevertheless ties this game to what he calls “money gambling” where the search for profit is the determining factor. Geertz can also be questioned both within general anthropology for his interpretative style (Roseberry 1982; Shankman 1984) and in the anthropology of gambling more specifically for, among other things, his neglect of the addicted gambler (Cassidy 2012, 270; Puri 2012a). What I want to focus on is how his understanding of odds balances his focus on status, as he tries to show how symbolic power is reflected in an economic unit such as odds, through which the game of status between cock owners opens up to a game of money for the public. Status gambling and money gambling can thus exist parallel to each other. Nevertheless, at the racecourse, what drove the odds in one direction was not the idea of horse owners having status at stake, but, conversely, that they had money at stake in the first place. Horse owners’ betting was thus a sign of their special insight, which could mean they either knew the capabilities of their horses or of its future destiny in a possibly fixed race. Therefore their bets, as center bets, were central to the development of the odds, as in the case of Geertz. In the following, this similar dynamic will be illustrated first from the point of view of an American racecourse in the 1960s and later from the work of a bookmaker in the Delhi betting ring.

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<sup>4</sup> Recently it has been reported that cricket bookmakers are entering the market for cockfight betting in rural India through the use of cell phones (Bhaskar 2013).

## **Stages of odds**

Around the same time that Geertz was doing participant observation at the Balinese betting rings, sociologist Marvin Scott conducted participant observation at a number of unspecified American racecourses (Scott 1968). In his study, Scott also deals with odds and how they developed and determined the interactions of people at the racecourses. Scott did not see the odds as providing a link to the surrounding culture or society, but interpreted the racecourse as a closed market where the management of information was of central value. As in the above section discussing Geertz, in this section I will examine similarities as well as differences in terms of the kinds of odds at stake. This will bring further insight into the type of speculative market existing at the Delhi racecourse and how it should be understood as a product of a time, where developments in technologies play a part in shaping the racecourse as a site for speculation.

As a student of Goffman, who had himself been interested in using gambling to understand human interactions (Goffman 2006; Sallaz 2007), Scott saw the racecourse as a stage where people were involved in “impression management” – a method of concealing information and influencing others (Scott 1968, 1-9). At the racecourse, impression management was not intended to conceal one’s true self (Goffman 1959), but more specifically it was to conceal one’s intentions to manipulate the future, which, according to Scott, was known particularly well by the trainer. The trainer knew the horse’s fitness and could decide whether he would instruct the jockey to try to win, just let the horse have a run or even prevent it from winning. At the Delhi racecourse this was phrased as a question of whether the horse was “on job” or not.

When not putting a horse “on job”, as a way of concealing its true ability, two things can happen afterwards. First, it can be assigned less weight to carry in its next race, on the basis of its bad performance, which then improves its chances of winning later. Second, if the loss was convincing, it can run with long odds in its next race, thus increasing the returns from betting. Scott recognized that the main objective of the main actors was not necessarily just to win a race, but to win at the right time and with good odds, considering that one would be betting on ones own horse. This leads Scott to call horse betting an “information game” (Scott 1968, 4). For Scott, the information game was not based on an assumption of race fixing, but on what he calls information management, which is a method of managing the kind of information on horses in order to control the odds.

Scott captures the odds as a determining factor for the understanding of human action within the racecourse. What he sees is that horseracing is not a game about knowledge (about the horses), but about information (about what was done with the horses). In this game the needed skill for winning money among jockeys, trainers and horse owners was in the management of information on the horse through a management of information on their own betting. What I am focused on is not so much how it is done, but how speculations in how it is done affect the odds.

Scott explains that a trainer, who is often monitored when betting, could send a “front man” who could bet on his behalf in order to prevent other bettors from imitating him, which would result in a drop in odds (Scott 1968, 5052). To understand this method of managing odds, it is important to note that the betting technology of the racecourses that Scott is describing is that of pari-mutuel betting, which I will discuss in a thorough manner in the following chapter. The pari-mutuel odds are, unlike the fixed odds betting with bookmakers, not sold at an agreed price. At the racecourses Scott examined, the odds were adjusted on large boards according to what people were betting, however, they were not determined until after the race, when the pool had closed. In pari-mutuel betting the more people who bet on the same horse, the shorter the odds became regardless of what time they have bet. The more bettors that end up betting on the winning horse, the less the bet is worth, as all the bettors betting on the winner will have to share the betting pool among them.

Conversely, in fixed odds betting what happens after you have placed a bet does not affect your payout because your odds are locked. This potentially opens up to more sharing of information, as for someone who has already placed a bet, his odds cannot be affected by anyone else’s betting. I suggest that the economic system under which the odds exist determines how information is shared and odds are interpreted.

At the Delhi racecourse, cutters, like the “front men” Scott mentions, bet on behalf of other people. Cutters are not simply used to conceal betting; they can actually be sent to place a bet to affect the odds through their visibility. For example, when working in teams of three cutters – sometimes three brothers – they could place bets, which were only meant to raise the odds of a particular horse as a way of bluffing the bookmakers. A cutter could be sent to make a bet on one horse at 100,000 rupees (2000 US dollars), after which the odds for that horse would drop while the odds of other horses would rise. Then, after a while, another cutter working in the same group for the same bettor could go and place a second bet, the “real” bet, of 500,000 on a different horse, for which the odds had just gone up. This could be a horse which was fixed to win, and, thus, the first

bet was only made in order to improve the odds of the real bet. Akshan was aware of this dynamic. According to him, this practice posed a great challenge to bookie runners and demanded understanding not only of odds but of people, to the extent that he had to “get into their minds” to work out their true intentions.

By approaching the betting game as an information game, Scott emphasizes a similar focal point as identified by Kåre Jansbøl in his study on Danish gambling settings, namely the idea of secret knowledge (Jansbøl 2009). Yet, whereas Jansbøl emphasizes the use of intuition as a way to reveal the secret, at the racecourses described by Scott as well as the Delhi racecourse, the odds provided a ground to work with more than mere intuition, as the odds were interpreted as signs that could potentially be revealing the secret.

Comparing the American horse betting described by Scott in the 1960s to that of the Indian racecourses today, there are differences in the structures in which the odds exist. Understanding the differences can sharpen an understanding of the specific conditions of the Delhi racecourse, which enable the odds to be more speculative. Part of the differences has to do with changes in the kind of technologies available. These are changes which have made the betting markets more complex as they can more easily be integrated into larger geographical scales. This, on the one hand, changes the foundation on which knowledge and power is imagined in the social realm, where key actors, such as the cutters, become substitutes for people thousands of miles away. On the other hand, it changes the foundation of the economics of the betting markets, as the local markets are tied up to external markets. I suggest that as part of this transformation, imagined economies have a more significant role in the generation of value.

Developments that have occurred since Scott produced his works on betting, include cell phones enabling betting through cutters, and inter-venue betting allowing bettors at the racecourse to bet on races going on in different locations. This means that bookmakers offer odds daily on races happening all over India. This has changed the scale of the information game. This means for example that it is not just the trainer at the local racecourse, who one has to pay attention to, but a trainer shown only on television screens. The cell phone has also created opportunities for people at other racecourses to be indirectly present. In many ways this has made the information game more complex as more people and locations are involved in the game than in the situation described by Scott. Not only is the betting technology different at the Delhi racecourse compared to what is described by Geertz and Scott, also it is worth thinking of it as being a different stage, historically speaking, where information technology structures betting markets in new ways.

Despite the technological differences which structure the information game in different ways and the scale for concealed economies, Scott describes a similar technique of monitoring the odds to what I have identified at the Delhi racecourse among bettors – and as we will come to know, also bookmakers. Basically, what Scott captures, similar to Geertz, is the way that odds are used as signs.

For Scott, besides observing when instructions were given from the owner and the trainer to the jockey in the paddock (understood as a “stage” as defined by Goffman), the only way of knowing their intentions was by interpreting the odds. This was done through a comparison of what he calls the “objective probabilities” and the given odds shown at the boards (Scott 1968, 85). For the bettors, according to Scott, the objective probabilities were based on the subjective calculations of the expected utility of the horses along an evaluation of its past performance and the present conditions under which it was running, which is basically the methodology of handicapping. When the given odds were shorter than the bettors expected from their calculations of the objective probabilities/theoretical odds, it indicated that it had been backed by the trainer and owner who had succeeded in concealing its true potential. To understand this use of odds, where the odds become signs of money, it is worth looking a bit further into odds as a numerical unit.

### **“What are the odds?”**

The question “what are the odds?” or in Hindi, “*bhav kya hai*” is one of the most uttered phrases at the racecourse, in addition to “what have you got?”, “what do you fancy?” and “how is your day?”. The frequency of the question asked shows the orientation towards the odds. However, it is also worth asking the question at a more analytical level. So, what are the odds? There is both a theoretical and empirical side to odds. The system of odds in the betting ring was different from the system of odds described by Geertz and those of Scott. In Hindi the odds in the betting ring are called *bhav*, which means price in English, a word also in use in England for odds (Cassidy 2012, 276). “Price”, I suggest, is in fact a more apt description of betting odds than “odds”, as it is a price put on the future rather than a reflection of probabilities.

Erving Goffman, based on participant observation at a casino, has described the difference between what he calls theoretical odds and given odds. He writes: “With theoretical odds and given odds, somewhat the same term is used for two radically different ideas” (Goffman 2006, 226).

Theoretical odds are used to reflect the likelihood of an event happening. Such odds are also at times referred to as “true odds” (Goffman 2006, 226), or in horseracing “objective probability” (Scott 1968, 85). For example, if you roll a dice, the theoretical odds of the dice showing 1 is 1/6. Goffman calls it theoretical odds, as it is more an abstraction than a reflection of an actual probability in a reality where it is difficult to eliminate all possible biases completely. In horseracing, as opposed to the probabilities of a neatly constructed dice, theoretical odds can, in theory, not be known. However, with the method of handicapping, the horse’s capabilities can be evaluated, based on which probabilities can be subjectively estimated. These subjectively determined theoretical odds can both be used by bettors to determine what they want to bet, and by the bookmakers to set the initial odds, also known as the “morning line”. Once odds are products offered by a bookmaker, they are given odds.

The given odds are quoted on the bookmakers’ boards as “odds against” as opposed to odds in favor of. That means that if the likelihood of an outcome is considered to be one sixth (as is the case of an outcome with a dice), then the odds are written as 6 or 6/1, and are verbalized as “six to one”. If horse number two wins, for example (or number two shows on a dice), then you will win six times the amount you have wagered. The odds 6/1 are considered “long odds” with a good payout as opposed to odds closer to 1, which are called “short odds” with only a small payout.

Given odds in horse betting does not simply reflect distributions inherent in theoretical odds. First of all, part of the business model of bookmaking is setting odds so that the bookmaker has an inherent profit, or a “take”. In the case of the dice, this would mean that instead of having a given odds of 6/1 on a particular outcome on the dice, the odds by the bookmaker could, for example, be 5/1, which in this case would give the bookmaker a 20% “take” or profit in the case that there are six bettors each betting the same amount on their numbers. The take is dependent on an equal distribution of bets at the different outcomes, which is rarely the case.

Whereas the opening odds in bookmaking may be set according to probability odds based upon which a take may or may not be inherent, as soon as wagers are received another method of calculating odds is in use. This is when odds go from being a measure of theoretical odds to a product to be sold and priced according to demand. Once the odds have become part of a market, the odds of one horse are determined by the betting on that horse as well as on the other horses. Thus, if a bookmaker is receiving many bets on a particular horse, the odds of that horse will go down, whereas the odds of other horses will go up, despite what may have been estimated as the

theoretical odds of the horse (Williams 2003). Through this method of setting odds, the goal for the bookmaker, in principal, is that any outcome will involve a similar payout, which will result in the bookmaker profiting from the take alone.

Thus, the calculation of odds in betting does not involve knowledge of the theoretical odds based on which given odds are created by incorporating a take. Rather, it involves accounting methodologies, which enable ongoing adjustments of the given odds depending on the bets already received, which allows bookmakers to take in bets on all horses, as they are not dependent on an equal distribution of bets on the various horses. In finance, this is what is called Martingale probabilities, where prices or indexes are not determined by a knowledge of the past, but instead reflect a present observed value of a product as a consequence of demand (MacKenzie and Spears 2012). In the following, however, when examining the work of a bookmaker, we will see how the odds at an Indian racecourse are far from a simple case of Martingale probabilities. Rather, the odds are in themselves speculative, as bookmakers through the setting of odds, speculate on future outcomes. A determining factor in their speculations is the possibility of fixed futures, as in the case of bettors themselves, as we found in chapter two.

What the ethnography of the Delhi betting ring shows is how the abovementioned method of bookmaking is combined with yet another method where bookmakers stand in between attempts at managing risks by adjusting the odds with accounting techniques, and attempts of figuring out potentially fixed futures outcomes. Rather than working with a differentiation between theoretical and given odds, I would call the kinds of odds at the Delhi racecourse speculative odds, as they involve an attempt to figure out the future based upon which chances are taken. In the following I show examples of how bookmakers can speculate in odds through methods of monitoring bettors and through hedging and arbitrage.

### **Binoculars in the betting ring**

In the next two sections I will describe the betting ring from the vantage point of Akshan, who was employed as a “bookie runner” by a licensed bookmaker. The case will show how economic value is generated in the intersection between bettors and bookmakers, working with similar economic imaginaries as the bettors, for which odds become signs of concealed money and potentially fixed futures.

Akshan was a young man in his late twenties employed by his grandfather who owned one of the oldest bookmaking firms in the Delhi ring. He was often seen standing next to his grandfather in front of the booth on the platform above the crowd. Frequently, Akshan could be seen with binoculars. He used binoculars to watch the odds on the boards of the other licensed bookmakers. From that, Akshan would let his grandfather know the “market rate” of the odds, namely the odds that the other bookmakers were offering. By adjusting his own odds in relation to the market rates, Akshan’s grandfather could attract customers to the booth, for example, by setting his odds lower, and manage his exposure to risk, for example, by setting his odds higher than the market rate.

With the binoculars, Akshan was also on the lookout for people with cell phones. The cell phones at the racecourse were not only used by people to get information from outside, as in the predictive procedure of Bobbi, but also they were used to connect the racecourse to other bettors from outside. Thus, when Akshan was looking for cell phones, he was specifically looking for “cutters” who used cell phones to communicate the odds to people not present in the betting ring and to bet on their behalf. Cutters were present at the Delhi racecourse, as the Delhi bookmakers who were reputed to be ready to take higher risks by giving better odds and fees. This meant that bettors from all over India were attracted to the Delhi betting ring, which they could access in absence through cutters. The cell phone charge of 2000 rupees per day was also the lowest in the country, which made Delhi the cheapest racecourse in India to bet in absence.

The cutters were so named because they were believed to make most of their money by taking “a cut” or a share from the bet. They could do so by reporting slightly different odds or fees, thereby creating and exploring a difference in the price of odds. Cutters were primarily betting for large-scale bettors, in some case horse owners who, with their connections in the horseracing industry, were expected to have inside information or, in some of the cases, at least the capacity to bribe jockeys. Furthermore, cutters could be betting for trainers and jockeys from Delhi as well as various centers, who were not allowed to bet as part of the racecourse jurisdiction.

Despite carrying expensive cell phones, cutters were not normally part of the rich elite but were often their service providers. Some cutters, approximately 80, were sent by their bosses, mostly from Mumbai, and were paid up to 8,000 rupees a month to do the daily betting. Others, approximately eight, were from the surrounding village and were working for bettors in Delhi who did not go to the racecourse themselves to bet, as well as for jockeys from the village. Cutters were differentiated from “runners”, who would go place a bet for people themselves present at the

racecourse. Runners would only be worth monitoring during races held in Delhi, where they could be betting for some of the horse owners who were also present. During the Delhi races, owners of the horses running, such as Rajeev, were also on the radar for Akshan and other bookie runners. In such cases, bookmakers could also choose to offer Rajeev what was called an “owner’s bet”, such as double the market rate of odds, as a kind of payment for the information on the chances of his horse winning. The point is that inherent in Rajeev’s bet was information on his horse depending on what and how much he with his insight was betting.

Cutters, as with runners, were basically considered untrustworthy because of their cutting techniques, but their services were nevertheless in demand. For Akshan, it was not the cutters and their internal finances that mattered, but the person for whom they were betting, as these individuals were perceived to potentially have inside information. When a cutter was spotted at a particular bookmaker, Akshan would take notice of how the odds were affected by his actions. As these bets were put on credit, there was no physical money to observe; instead the odds (and the way they fluctuated) provided the visible sign that the money, or its promise, had been exchanged. After a short verbal exchange or a signal given between a bookmaker and a cutter, the odds on a horse would reduce, indicating that it had been backed. A heavily backed horse could be considered as a sign that a race had been fixed or that someone had concealed the true ability of the horse at an earlier point. Either way, it would be taken as a sign or in Akshan’s words an “indication” that the probabilities of the horse winning were higher than expected.

When Akshan reported such an incidence of dropping odds based on a cutter, his grandfather could, among other things, choose to shorten/lower the odds on the chalkboard of his booth while lengthening the other horses’ odds regardless of the number of bets he had in fact already taken on that particular horse. This meant that the bookmaker would expose himself to risk, in the sense that he would be betting on that one horse to win, by putting himself in a position where if another horse would end up winning then he would lose money. In doing so, however, he had to be careful and make sure to control demand by balancing the odds along the market rate.

The problem was that once the odds were lowered they could attract a lot of bettors since both bookmakers and bettors saw dropping odds as a sign of inside information, which in turn, could cause a run of bets on the horse, and would eventually make the odds drop even further. Contrary to the market for fixed odds betting in for example England, where bookmakers seek to attract customers by lengthening the odds (Chinn 2004), short odds on horses could attract more business as they suggested that the outcome was already determined. For that reason, bookmakers

would most often end up having an imbalanced book, with a proportionally high number bets on the favorite horse. They rarely rejected bets on the favorite, which is another method of creating a balanced book, as they tried to make the money from the illegal betting fee, which they would get regardless of whether a horse won or not. This again is different from England, where since 1986 there has been no betting tax on the racecourses, only at betting outlets (Munting 1996, 121), which means that they have used other methods to generate profits. At times the odds would go below 50/100, which meant that if 100 rupees were wagered and the horse won, the profit would only be 50 rupees and there would still be bettors on this favorite. In the words of another bookmaker: “Bookmakers never want the favorite to win.” Bookmakers can thus come out as winners from just two or three favorites in a day not winning. Still, bookmakers in Delhi are known to go in and out of business due to this method of accepting all bets.

Odds in the context of the Delhi racecourse, did not only become a sign of possible deception, the assumption of deception also became manifested in odds as they were acted upon as signs. Odds were acted upon both by bettors and bookmakers as signs of concealed money. Odds are thus not simply a mathematical calculable unit; they are also animated signs where the center bets (of horse owners or their imagined allies) become determinants for the terms of side bets offered to “regular” bettors.

### **“Playing with money”**

When Akshan’s grandfather’s book had taken in too many bets on a particular horse, Akshan could be sent to place bets with some of the unlicensed illegal bookmakers. Unlicensed bookmakers were usually positioned inside the betting ring. Standing on the floor they could not easily be identified, as they mingled with the crowd of bettors. Often they would just be holding a piece of paper and a pen with which they would write down the bets. Unlike the odds of the licensed bookmakers, which were visible to everyone, the odds of the unlicensed bookmakers were invisible and could only be agreed upon verbally. The approximately 100 unlicensed bookmakers working at the Delhi racecourse, of whom 10-20 were from the surrounding village, entered the racecourse as visitors. One unlicensed bookmaker estimated that 10% of the total betting in the ring was done with unlicensed bookmakers. Overall, the licensed bookmakers were preferred by large-scale bettors and horse owners because they were considered credit- and trustworthy. In order to compete with them, the unlicensed bookmakers had to charge a lower betting fee.

When Akshan placed bets with one of these unlicensed bookmakers, he would be doing what is called “laying off” bets, which were made in order to protect his licensed bookmaker firm against too great an exposure to risk. This method of hedging consisted of neutralizing the risks of some bets by placing the bets received with another bookmaker; if the horse won, the money needed for the payout to the winner of the bet could be obtained from bets placed with the other bookmakers.

As odds were constantly changing, and as betting fees varied, laying off bets could also become a source of profit. This meant that one could both buy and sell risks in the form of odds and make a profit from the differences in price. To Akshan, the unlicensed bookmakers did not only represent competition, but also an opportunity to gain profits by laying off bets. For example, by laying off bets where a 9% betting fee had been paid with an unlicensed bookmaker charging a 5% fee, Akshan’s grandfather’s book could make 4% from the bets just on the difference in the betting fees. This can be seen as a kind of fee arbitrage, where profit stems from fee difference alone. Akshan called this “the numbers’ game”: “So even if he wins or loses, I still have the 9000 with me.” If in addition there was a difference in the odds between the two exchanges, this could even become a ground for odds arbitrage, which is a method of profit-seeking basic to derivative traders, who not only explore price differences in different markets concurrently, which is how arbitrage is theoretically defined, but also explore price movements over time, which blurs its distinction from speculation (Miyazaki 2007, 52). Odds arbitrage has already been examined as a method of betting among professional bettors (Adams, Rusco, and Walls 2002)<sup>5</sup>, but not bookmakers.

The way that Akshan described the practice of hedging and/or arbitrage is: “I am just playing with money.” Interestingly, Akshan, when laying off bets, potentially also became a person to be monitored by others in the betting ring. He told of an incident in which his grandfather had sent him to lay off a large amount of money as they had taken too many bets on the favorite horse. This was a simple act of hedging risk for him. However, for the bettors this was read as a sign of inside information. “But it was nothing,” Akshan laughed. He told how everyone copied what he did and the odds eventually dropped. The incident illustrates that even when movements in the odds were generated by attempts at risk management, they were interpreted by other bettors as a sign of inside information. At Delhi racecourse, as mentioned, bookmakers were further imagined to be influential actors who did not only put a price on the future, but also had the ability to affect the

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<sup>5</sup> In Europe, odds arbitrage is increasingly accessible through odds comparison websites like Oddschecker and betting exchanges including Betfair and Betdaq.

future through their economic leverage over the jockeys. This was not a conduct of his grandfather's bookmaker firm that Akshan would admit to. Yet, just as the bookmakers are interpreting the bettors, the bettors are also interpreting the bookmakers.

Akshan believed that apart from the information he could retrieve from monitoring how odds are affected by cutters, the only trustworthy information he could get was from one individual he called "the king of downstairs" (downstairs referring to the betting floor as opposed to the licensed bookmaker's platforms upstairs), also called "the Don" by bettors. "The Don" was an unlicensed bookmaker who, by being connected to the mafia, possessed three great business advantages. First, he had access to informal credit networks from which he could handle large money transactions across India, and because of which he had insight into individual horses that were being heavily backed across the country. He was the only bookmaker who could consistently charge a 12% betting fee, 3% more than Akshan's grandfather, because he was the only one who could receive very large bets above 500,000 rupees (approximately 10,000 US dollars). Second, he had access to muscle power. Therefore, if anyone was to share inside information with him it was assumed that they would only tell the truth, because of the threat of physical force, whereas under other circumstances such people could not fully be trusted. And third, tied to his access to both cash and physical power, he was imagined to be someone who could not only predict but also make the future, since he was believed to force or pay the jockeys to lose races if the amount of money at stake was sufficiently large to warrant this intervention.

For all of these reasons, when Akshan received a notice from "the Don", even his grandfather who, according to Akshan, did not take many risks, would "follow it blindly" and organize odds and bets around it. In Akshan's words: "That means that my luck is fixed." Akshan was also experimenting with bookmaking on his own by accepting bets beyond his grandfather's firm, while on the floor of the betting ring. His grandfather was well aware of his side business and was encouraging it so he could get the needed experience, as long as he was not betting but just accepting bets. An uncle of his had earlier been thrown out of the business because he had bet himself. With his own business, Akshan was more focused on inside information through which he took chances on outcomes, a method he calls gambling, as well as the method of "playing with money" as a form of fee arbitrage. This was in contrast to his grandfather's business model, which, according to Akshan, was primarily based on the mathematical skills of calculating odds in ways to secure against risk, a skill he thought that his grandfather had, but he did not. Akshan's grandfather

would tell him: “Follow my formula of working and then you will survive... I [Akshan] also tell him, it’s not the same racing which you operated a couple of years back – it has changed.”

Akshan noticed that more and more bookmakers were working with what he called a “pure gambling” approach to bookmaking and were therefore “killing the odds”. The odds thus neither reflected the theoretical odds of the horses, nor the distribution of bets on the horses, but rather a speculation on the future by the competitive market makers – the bookmakers themselves. According to Akshan, in order to survive in the competition, one had to take more risks, while seeking out more insider information than his grandfather was willing to do.

Akshan as a matter of fact wanted to work for the Don once his grandfather retired, because he thought he could make more money that way. While working for his grandfather, Akshan received a daily salary of 500 rupees, which he told me only barely covered his daily expenses, including trips in the auto rickshaw to and from the racecourse, coffee with friends at some of the new cafés spread out in the city and trips to the cinema here and there. In addition, he had a share in the book, meaning that he would get a percentage of the profits, which also enabled him to go on a yearly trip to Goa with his friends over Christmas and New Year. However, he would also have to cover losses when too many bets had been taken in on a winning horse at too long odds.

Outside the racecourse Akshan did not call himself a bookmaker, but a “Turf Accountant”, which he felt was a respectable occupation, as it was one of “skill” and not gambling (similar to bettors emphasizing betting as a game of skill with indirect references to the Supreme Court ruling of 1996 (Sethi 2009)). However, he was not fully satisfied. His dream was to start his own nightclub and the money he would need to bribe the officials and the police would not be covered by his salary and the profits from the book run using his grandfather’s methods. Therefore, his plan was that when his grandfather retired, he would work for “the Don” in order to “learn how the downstairs market [unlicensed bookmaking] works”. Based upon this knowledge, he would start his own bookmaking business.

As with the predictive procedures of the bettors, there are different positions in bookmaking in terms of how they produce the knowledge needed to set the odds. Akshan’s grandfather’s technique may be thought to come close to the method of handicapping used by Rajeev, using a combination of mathematical skills and an orientation towards signs of potentially fixed futures. Akshan’s ideal method for a successful business involved following procedures closer to those Bobbi used, which aimed at getting inside information. In both cases, it is the younger generation

who are giving up modes of knowledge tied to calculation in favor of inside information, relying on sources to reveal details that are not immediately observable.

From looking into the work of a bookmaker in the above two sections I have shown how odds capture and conceal conditions of many kinds. As theoretical odds, they are to reflect the ability of horses. As given odds, they can reflect the betting patterns of bettors, some of whom may have received inside information. Furthermore, they can manifest practices of risk management and speculation of bookmakers. Consequently, it becomes almost impossible to ascertain the foundation for the odds. However, even when the odds are unshackled from horses or the betting market, and produced by risk work alone, they never escape their social significance as signs of human knowledge and behavior. In the end, an important part of the logic from which the odds are interpreted and produced is that of racing as a sport of deception and the possibility of the future being fixed beforehand. The generation of value thus came into being in a fuzzy space between calculation and a divination of odds in between legal and illegal, visible and invisible economies.

### **Concealed money in motion**

To understand the attention focused on odds, as well as the speculations on the reasons behind their fluctuation, it is pertinent to understand the connection between odds and money, real and imagined. In the following, I will describe some observations concerning the materiality and immateriality of money at the racecourse, of relevance for the understanding of the role of odds.

Bill Maurer has advocated for new approaches to understanding money. He suggests that rather than understanding money in terms of semiotics, as a signifier for something else (a value), the anthropology of money should be paying even more attention the “indexicality” and “performative” aspects of money by looking into how money is *interpreted* as a numerical sign of something existing at a different scale than the number itself, and what it does instead of what it narrowly refers back to (Maurer 2006, 26-30). A focus on odds representing both a price and a possibility for money, enables an understanding of the performative element of imagined money, which lies in between the materiality and immateriality of money. Odds thus exist as a performative sign of possibly concealed money.

At the beginning of the day at the Delhi racecourse, approximately one hour before the first race when only a few bettors had arrived at the racecourse, the clerks of the licensed bookmakers started arriving at the betting ring holding old, square leather suitcases. A bookmaker told me that in

the suitcases there could be about 800,000 rupees in cash. As a lot of betting was done on credit, this amount only covered a small part of the actual turnover in the game. Besides this assumed money in the suitcases, I did not see that many Gandhian faces, which are printed on all the Indian money bills, appearing at the racecourse. Most of the time, money would either be hid away in pockets, in a car outside the racecourse, or in the hands of bettors who hid them under the table while counting the bills. Settlement of accounts was normally done after the final race or at a later point outside the racecourse, where bookmakers would have men employed to go to people's houses once or twice a week. Those betting only in cash would keep their money well hidden.

Odds are inevitably tied to money, yet it is as much about the imagination of money and money exchanges than money in its material form. Before I turned towards a methodology of tracking the odds, I was oriented at tracking the money. The closest I could get to a record of money, as I was not given access to the bookmakers account books, was the betting cards. The betting card was a hard piece of paper, referred to as a "card", that was given by the licensed bookmakers upon betting as proof of the bet exchange. On the card was the pre-printed name of the bookmaker firm and the governmental seal. When placing a bet, the "penciler" of the bookmaker wrote the horse number and the payout, in case the horse won, with numbers not always easy to decipher. The amount bet was not written on the card. Instead it was the possible payout that was recorded, showing no sign of the actual wagered money. The value of money thus existed as a possibility for profit. The card was given for all taxed bets as well as some of the non-taxed bets; in that sense the taxed and non-taxed bets could be materialized in similar ways with the licensed bookmakers, with both types carrying the governmental seal.

The majority of these cards were seen lying on the floor of the betting ring, discarded after having lost their value after a race. I collected several of these cards in order to try to get some documentation on the betting exchanges, as the race club management would not provide me with their numbers and also I knew that most betting was done unreported. Another attempt at capturing the intangible money at the racecourse was by collecting receipts lying on the ground by the ATMs positioned next to the betting ring. From these receipts I got a glimpse into the kind of funding available to bettors and the amounts taken out for the races. However, knowing that far from all economy goes through the banks, I could not justify this as a valid source of information on money. The point is that the money for large credit bets was neither taken out from bank accounts, nor was it necessarily recorded on a betting card, and the bookmakers and racecourse management were not

prepared to show me their records of the betting taking place either. The betting was thus, at many levels, part of a concealed economy.

This difficulty in tracking money at times made me think that I did not get to the bottom of understanding gambling as a form of economic exchange, which was basically about money. Yet, I came to realize that what seemed a to be research limitation was in fact central to grasping the field. The difficulty of working out the concealed money is therefore not just a problem for the ethnographer, but for the bettor as well as the bookmaker. The fact that it was difficult to follow the money nevertheless opened up to an alternative way of understanding one of the main objects of the field, namely the visible representation or materiality of the odds, which were speculated to tell only part of the truth of the economy of the betting market. The odds were thus visible manifestations of revealed and concealed monetary transactions, and the movement of odds came to reflect the imagined movements of money. Part of the role of concealed money for the odds had to do with the scale at which the odds economies existed, and to understand that we will need to move beyond the racecourse.

### **Odds outside in**

As part of my shift in method from following money to following odds, I not only became interested in how odds were entwined in such methods as arbitrage, I was also questioning how the initial odds were set before the betting activity started, in an attempt to identify the full trajectories of the odds and some kind of beginning and end to these trajectories. In England, these first odds are called the “morning line”, which are the odds set by a handicapper with insight into the horses. However, at the Delhi racecourse, such initial odds did not have a conceptual category on their own, and were just called odds like any other.

In Akshan’s grandfather’s bookmaking firm, the initial odds were simply done by copying the first odds of another bookmaker. This man was a licensed bookmaker who was known to have contacts with the other racecourse and to take bets from people in the racing industry, such as horse owners and trainers, even before the betting ring had opened. When I asked Akshan why the initial odds were set this way he said: “He [the bookmaker] has bettors from outside”. However, he could not specify this in terms of who and how. Neither Akshan nor the other bookmakers or bettors went into detail about how this one bookmaker got his information, beyond the agreement that the odds

were set based on him having “information from outside”. What is important to notice is that even the initial odds in the betting ring are based on imitation rather than calculated probabilities. Initial odds are thus taken as an indication of which horses have already been backed and a speculation on concealed money transactions, and consequently there are hardly any odds reflecting estimations of the theoretical odds, as odds are always taken as signs or indications of someone’s betting.

Part of why the initial odds are set based on outside information is because of the existing betting market beyond the racecourse. “Off-course betting” done through bookmakers over the phone already starts the evening before the day of the races, between 9 and 11 pm, and starts again in the morning from 10 am. According to some bookmakers approximately 60-75% of all betting was done beyond the racecourses through telephone-based bookmakers. Yet, the betting ring was tied up with this telephone-based betting market in a number of ways. One way was through imitating the odds of this one bookmaker, who was known to be involved in telephone-based bookmaking and thereby had insight into this market. Another man, Vijay, who I came to know through the members’ room, also acted as an off-course bookmaker. He took bets in the evening, as well as in the morning, over the telephone in his house in one of the expensive addresses of Delhi, after which he went to the racecourse to lay off these bets and make money from odds and fee arbitrage. This is an example of a mode of speculation in odds, closer to the way that speculation has come to be defined in financial terms, where profit is made from market/odds movements alone. Because of Vijay’s ties to the off-course betting market, Akshan and other bookie runners monitored Vijay in the betting ring. I noticed how his presence in the betting ring would always have a major affect on the odds.

Whereas off-course betting would demand a study of its own in order to get to the bottom of it, what I wish to emphasize here is the way that the speculations on betting existing beyond the racecourse have a central role in determining the odds on the racecourse. Thus, the single bookmaker who is known to work both in off- and on-course betting sets the odds of the whole betting ring, as everyone imitates the opening odds of this particular bookmaker. The basic foundation for the odds is thus an imagination of markets that the bookmakers themselves do not take part in. In this way, an important part of the generation of value does not just lie in the visible market of the betting ring, but also in the ungraspable and concealed markets of off-course telephone-based betting.

Another example of how value is generated in the ungraspable, geographically de-centralized markets is reflected in the role of what is called the *daba*. The *daba* are telephone services which

provide subscribers with nationwide odds. The daba thus calculate the average odds based on the information they have on various telephone based bookmakers, who they themselves are in contact with by telephone. Abi's friend Munty, who preferred cricket betting over horse betting and also bet on horses from outside the racecourses, kept three separate cell phones: one personal, mainly used for his job and to call his wife, one with which he could call the daba, and one with which he could immediately call his bookmaker after being updated on the going rates of the odds. His subscription to the daba cost him 3000 rupees a month, but there were other services costing down to 500 rupees a month.

The dabas enable more than off-course betting. They can also be used as information sources inside the racecourses. I came across a bettor at the Mysore racecourse, also a former bookmaker, who would call a daba while inside the racecourse. Through this he could "by studying the odds" figure out whether the race was fixed. If the daba odds for a horse, for example, were much lower than in the Mysore betting ring, this could be seen as a sign that the horse had been backed and was likely to win. It was thus a platform that allowed for a comparison of odds at a more national level. In the Delhi betting ring, however, I did not come across bettors who would seek information from outside, as it was assumed that bets were placed from all over the country in the betting ring. Therefore the Delhi betting ring was considered to carry important information in its own right, as even the off-course betting market present through someone like Vijay.

The word daba refers to a lunch box in Marathi (a language spoken in Mumbai), but in the betting context it was translated as a "black box". A black box is a term used for a device which can be viewed in terms of its input, output and transfer characteristics, yet without any knowledge of its internal workings. Thus it is defined by its function and not by an insight into its operational structure, which is opaque. The success of the black box lies in its ability to operate and not to prove its results (Latour 1999). The black box of the horse race betting market worked because it provided a platform from which to get odds, which could be copied. Details about how the odds were calculated were in principle irrelevant, as long as there were odds in movement. Whereas the odds of the Delhi racecourse were linked to bettors and bookmakers in the local market, the daba odds existed beyond local space. Despite its disconnection from the racecourse, the daba was thought to carry important insight about how the horses had been backed, as large scale betting of amounts above 500,000 were considered to exist only beyond the racecourse through bookmakers working over the phone from whom the daba got their information on their odds. I never succeeded

in meeting one of these mysterious bookmakers. But this example is further proof that information on horses is believed to exist in concealed economies which are far removed from the horses.

Even though the betting ring exists as a closed, physically embedded market for odds, it is difficult to frame the borders of the market clearly. The initial odds from one particular bookmaker, the cutter doing arbitrage with bets from off-course betting, and the large bets placed with “the” Don whose odds are not visible as they are not displayed, makes the market something that is characterized both by its areas of visibility and its areas of invisibility. On the one hand bettors and bookmakers take decisions based on signs of concealed economies. On the other hand, bookmakers at the racecourse also set the odds in a market that they do not comprehend in its totality. Akshan thus thought that despite his grandfather having worked in the betting ring his whole life, he did not really know the ring today. Akshan himself also felt the need to shift position in order to get to “know the market”, which was still partly a mystery. In the end the essence of the market experience was this mix between the visible and the invisible tied to the possibility for deception. Out of this mystery, patterns become visible.

### **Odds and orders**

Inspired by Geertz, in my analysis I looked not only at methods through which odds were created and bets were settled, but also at patterns in the movement of odds. Above, I have described tendencies in the ways through which odds were adjusted from the initial odds while the betting was going on. But what Geertz recorded was that the movement of the odds always went in a particular direction. What he recorded was both the direction of the odds and the final odds. This represents another compelling approach to the understanding of odds. What was typical of the Delhi racecourse was a tendency for the odds to gradually become more polarized, with one horse having an odd below 1 and the others with odds above 3, with the majority around the odds of 10 and above. Such polarized odds were considered unique to Delhi, and was especially prevalent during the Delhi races where dropping odds were interpreted as a clear sign that a future was fixed, which only meant that more and more bettors would bet on that horse.

Rajeev told me: “You are bound to lose on favorites because the jockeys will pull them.” But at the same time dropping odds were seen as a sign that the horse was going to win. This duality meant that there was more than one favorite over the course of the 20 minutes leading up to a race. There was the favorite, which was the horse that started out with the shortest odds, and

which according to the handicapping calculations was most likely to win, and then there was the “people’s favorite”, which was the horse that would end up with the shortest odds when the race was about to start. Bobbi sometimes bet on two horses. At times when he saw that the odds of a horse was dropping, he would bet on it on top of the bet he had already made in order to make up for the loss he could potentially have with the other horse he had bet on with longer odds. Short odds can both be interpreted as a sign that a horse is going to win, because it has been backed by someone who has the power to control the future or insight into the controlled future, and it can be interpreted as a sign that a horse will be pulled, because neither the horse owners nor bookmakers can make money from it winning. So there is an ambiguity around how to read the odds.

Scott in a similar vein noticed that when odds started to drop, the bettors would interpret this as a sign of a concealment of the true abilities of the horse and would then start to bet on the horse, causing the odds to drop even further and creating a “bandwagoning effect” (Scott 1968, 58). Whereas the pari-mutuel odds, which were the odds at the racecourses Scott was describing, reflect all bets received, the odds of the betting ring, through the work of the bookmaker, as described above, are speculative in themselves as they reflect the interpretation of the future of the bookmakers as well. This, I believe can create a situation where a bandwagoning effect is intensified, as at times it is not only the bettors but also the bookmakers who bet on a particular horse which has become the favorite. This may even be thought of as an escalation in value tied to the idea of deception. This in the end results in extremely polarized odds, where the people’s favorite would end at odds as low as 40/100 and the long odds would be 20 in the betting ring, and as high as something equal to 100 at the totalisator (written as 1000). But how can we understand this polarized pattern at a more symbolic level?

Anthropologist Jane Guyer, in a short article called “The Eruption of tradition”, has examined a certain tendency in ranking systems in the United States (Guyer 2010). She identifies this as a “parabolic curve”, which is characterized by only a few units with a very high value at the top, descending in a curve to many units of comparably low value at the bottom. Interestingly, she identifies this pattern by comparing the salaries of CEOs (chief executive officers of American corporations) with a diagram of the price on racehorses in the US, and notices that they have a similar curve. The point she is making is that animals and humans are both ranked in such a way that a small number of beings are considered on the extreme top, far removed from the rest. She believes this is an example of how a symbolic order, similar to the religiously founded hierarchy of

the great chain of being<sup>6</sup>, can exist in modern systems of ranking. According to Guyer, a classification system close to a religious classification system can be identified in salaries as well as in prices on horses. What lies behind the process of ranking, she notes, is close to what Bateson has called “schizmogogenesis”, which is the continual reproduction, confirmation and intensification of difference (Guyer 2010, 4). I also identified this as being behind the escalating effect on odds when bettors and bookmakers were acting out of the possibility for a fixed future.

Out of all the hectic work of the bookmaker and the running around of frantic bettors at the Delhi racecourse, an order appeared with a clear people’s favorite on top, which was similar to the ranking order of the parabolic curve identified by Guyer. I did not realize the uniqueness of the pattern until I visited other racecourses. From observations I made during short fieldtrips to the Belmont racetrack in the United States and *Klampenborg Gallopbane* in Denmark, the odds seemed much more balanced, showing that bets had been divided more equally among the horses. At these racecourses, which had totalisators and no betting rings, there was no extra layer of speculation through the bookmakers’ setting of odds, as there was at the Delhi racecourse. But, it seemed, there was an idea that each horse had somewhat equal chances of winning, or at least that they were given equal chances of winning.

The idea of a single person having the power it takes to fix futures, or at least a special insight into the future, structures the odds in a hierarchical and parabolic way. When odds start to drop, and bookmakers and bettors read this as a sign of someone having a clear idea of what is going to happen in the future, it intensifies a hierarchy in odds, where a single horse has much shorter odds than the vast majority. The odds pattern in Delhi thus became a sign not of the innate possibilities of the horses, but of the ideology of a potentially deceptive game in which a single *person* had the power over the future. At the Delhi racecourse, the hierarchy of odds did not reflect a tendency to classify animals in such a way, but a tendency to classify people. The odds reflected this hierarchy of people in terms of people having or being in contact with the – almost divinatory – power over the future.

In this process through which the odds start dropping, whether a consequence of the work of a cutter or of risk management among bookmakers, value is attached to a system of ranking beyond the individual’s assessment of value. Thus the order of the odds, even when part of complex market

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<sup>6</sup> In the Great chain of being there is a single god on the top, above a few angles, and after that a larger number of human beings, and at the bottom animals in great numbers.

transactions in between formal and informal economies, can be seen as a social process related to a way that the social world is ordered, rather than the way single people, animals or objects are ordered.

An analysis of the pattern of the odds shows how hierarchical orders exist in an Indian market setting beyond orders associated with prefixed identities, for example, as in relationship to class and caste. It is a system of ranking which is based on assumptions of someone already knowing the future either from having the power to bend it, or from having the insight into it by having information on what others are betting. The ranking at the racecourse is linked to the power to bend the future. At the very top is the mafia involved in bookmaking at a large scale who can pay or force a jockey at any time to create an outcome. They are associated with divinatory forces, with an almost magical presence at each moment, working beyond the limitations of geographical distance and in full control of the course of destiny.

The idea of the existence of theoretical odds has been important for the understanding of pathological gambling, in which one of the defining features is an unrealistic belief in the chances of winning. Attempts have therefore been made to identify gambling addiction in the assessment of probabilities in laboratory tests. Pathological gamblers can thus be identified by the biases in their calculation of probabilities, as they systematically make unrealistic assessments of what their chances are of winning.<sup>7</sup> What I am suggesting, however, is that probabilities cannot be detached from social contexts. Probabilities in gambling are not simply tied to laws of nature, but to embedded social games. Understanding. Therefore, it may be worth thinking about where to find good laboratories (which is what I came to think of the betting ring as) to examine biased probabilities. The pattern that I have identified in the odds could be seen as reflecting a bias in how probabilities are assessed, yet this is a bias which is tied to how the future in this particular Indian context is imagined to be linked with existing inter-woven economies. Whereas biases of calculated probabilities in clinical laboratories may point towards levels of addiction, the biases in the Delhi racecourse pointed towards a shared understanding of the socio-economic system of the racecourse defining for future outcomes. In that sense I am identifying orders in something that could be in other contexts be called biases.

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<sup>7</sup> This methodology has certain parallels to the approach of economics, also focused on identifying objective biases, yet in their cases for the purpose of profiting from them (Law 2003; Shilony 2003).

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have dealt with odds not as a measure of future probabilities, but as a products to be bought and sold in a market place. At the level of bookmaking, this is a market place which gives rise to hedging, arbitrage and other kinds of secondary market activity, which takes part in the generation of economic value. In contrast to the idea that odds are set based on accounting as the calculative technology upon which bookmaking was invented, I have shown how odds reflect on one hand attempts to divine the intentions of human beings and on the other hand risk management in a complex market in between legal and illegal economies. I have shown how the economically calculable value of the odds set by bookmakers and acted upon by bettors is generated based on ideas of deception and concealed economies in racing. The chapter demonstrates how social hierarchies, lack of compliance to economic regulations, as well as information technology all play a role in creating value from this contingency.

I have also shown how bookmaking in Delhi, without networked computers or corporate systems, but linked to racecourses nationwide through cell phones, created a system open to speculation. In this game, odds provided a kind of commentary or speculation on the social realm of information as well as the assumption of concealed money. Regardless of how they had come into being, the odds became not just a value put on the future, but a sign of the future, which became generative of how the various future outcomes were priced. In this chapter I have shown how price and economic value are generated in the concealed, and that market value is not tied to observable money exchanges, but to imaginative money.

In this market for odds, we cannot simply make a distinction between risk providers and risk takers. Both bookmakers and bettors bet on outcomes, and therefore the odds come to reflect much more than mere betting behavior. They also reflect an extra speculative layer of value. In order to understand the odds, I have focused on both bettors and bookmakers. I found that bookmakers make interpretations of the odds in movement that are similar to bettors and, like the bettors, the bookmakers orient themselves and act between legal and illegal economies. Central to the excitement of the racecourse is the spectacle of the odds in the betting ring, enabling a speculation in concealed and revealed economies central to the generation of value.

The chapter has shown how the idea that the racecourse is a site of deception is reflected in the odds. It gives insight into how a concealed market of unreported betting exists, and how an awareness of the possibility of concealed money and fixed futures plays a part in the generation of odds, both by framing the bookmakers' methods and by affecting betting preferences.

The betting ring, I believe, represents the center of the racecourse and the majority of all actions, economies and social relationships are tied to the betting ring. In the next chapter I turn towards another betting platform, the totalisator, which represents a totally different system for odds, and which, for reasons I will explore, is not even close to being as popular as betting in the betting ring.

# Deceptive devices: The totalisator and parallel economies

## Introduction

“In order for fair play there has to be a tote!”

- A Bettor from the members’ room walking towards the betting ring to bet.

In this chapter I focus on the totalisator, also called the ‘tote’. The totalisator connects computer technology to the way in which bets are registered, with machines issuing tickets documenting the bet and television screens showing the given odds being automatically adjusted based on the betting. The totalisator is a compelling betting platform to examine, as unlike the bookmaking system in India, it is a regulated computerized system of betting subject to state taxation. A focus on the coexistence of bookmaking and the totalisator thus offers an approach to understand parallel economies, legal and illegal, in terms of history, perceptions and practice.

According to statistics from 2010 provided by International Horseracing Federation based on the information provided by the racecourses in India, 94% of all betting in India was done via the totalisator<sup>1</sup>. In contrast to this, a survey I conducted at the Delhi racecourse the same year indicated that less than one percent of betting was done on the totalisator! The discrepancy between the official statistics and my survey reflects a substantial hidden economy, which is out of reach of not only the statistics but also of the national economy subject to taxation. What I will examine in this chapter is in fact not so much the totalisator, as it is the neglect of the totalisator. I argue that the neglect of the totalisator is tied to the perception of the totalisator as something deceptive. The totalisator represents a materialization of what is termed legal economy, thought of as opaque and concealing, and the mistrust in the totalisator represents mistrust in the kind of economic governance that the totalisator economy epitomizes. So, whereas in chapter three I examined inter-relational mistrust, in this chapter I will also focus on institutional mistrust.

Paradoxically, the totalisator, is seen on the one hand as a possible way out of the problem of fixed futures, since the totalisator, in contrast to the bookmakers, makes the same money no matter which horse wins. On the other hand it is perceived as a deceptive device part of modern economic governance, which is subject to manipulation and corruption. As a consequence of the

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<sup>1</sup> According to the statistics the use of the totalisator has been on the increase since 2000, where it amounted to 81% of all registered betting transactions (International Federation of Horseracing Authorities 2013).

mistrust in the totalisator, most betting is part of a hidden economy of unreported bookmaking, which exists independently of the totalisator odds. Instead of enabling fair play at the racecourse, the totalisator was thought to facilitate unfair play for the bettors, as it was believed to manipulate with the allocation of economic resources. One might tend to think that regulated economy was associated with fair play and unregulated with unfair play. But at the racecourse this was reversed.

To understand the basic differences between the existing bookmaking economy and the totalisator economy, it is useful to think of these differences in terms Clifford Geertz' distinction between the "pasar-type" and the "firm-type" economy (Geertz 1963). Geertz first makes this distinction in his book from 1963, *Peddlers and Princes. Social Change and Economic Modernization in two Indonesian Towns*. What characterized the "pasar-type economy"<sup>2</sup> was "1) a sliding price-system, 2) a complex balance of carefully managed credit relationships, 3) an extensive fraction of risks and, as a corollary, of profit margins" (Geertz 1963, 32). The "pasar-type economy" is juxtaposed with the "firm-type economy", which is characterized by 1) fixed prices, 2) impersonal relationships, and 3) carefully managed risk based on long-term goals. I suggest that the bazar-type economy captures the characteristics of the bookmakers' economy in the betting ring, as identified in previous chapter, and the totalisator mirrors the firm-type economy, basic to the development of corporate capitalism and what has been termed formal economy. This is a form of economy, which, unlike the bookmakers' pasar-type economy, is subject to a certain kind of critique connected with the political culture and economic law of which this type of economy is a part.

Thomas Malaby, in a study situated in a Greek village, has examined gambling as an engagement with the contingency of villagers subject to an unstable state economy. Part of his study involves contrasting the perception of local illegal poker clubs with legal state lotteries. In his analysis, Malaby parallels the suspicion towards the state with the suspicion towards the state lottery, based on the understanding among the villagers that the state was not only fundamentally unpredictable, but also attempting at making money from them as citizens. Card players were thus directly mocking the lottery advertisements and rejecting the games provided by the state, which they saw as a means of oppression (Malaby 2003, 113). Gambling away from the game that the state had set up, such as playing poker, was a way for the villagers to cheat or outwit the state similar to other daily attempts at tax evasion. Gambling thus became a ground for resistance to not

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<sup>2</sup> In a later article he calls it bazar economy (Geertz 1978).

only to formal economy, but state-governed economies and the state's role more broadly in determining human destinies in Greece. Similarly, in this chapter, I focus on the connection between the suspicion and neglect of the totalisator and the perception of legal computerized corporate economy entwined with the fiscal policies of the state.

The totalisator, in contrast to the bookmakers, uses computer technology to calculate odds. Computer technology is often associated with transparency, and as part of this, as a tool against corruption. Developments in technologies are thus interlinked with a movement towards more transparent societies. The idealization of transparency as a concept and practice, understood as a window to an otherwise hidden reality which represents freedom from constraints for the individual and the route to good governance for officials, has also been challenged based on fieldwork in various ethnographic settings (West and Sanders 2003; Strathern) including India (Peisakhin 2012; Bear 2013). By focusing on the totalisator, I will show how practices and devices historically established and produced for the sake of creating transparency at the Delhi racecourse have come to represent opacity and deception. The totalisator in the eyes of the bettors is thus closer to a tool of corruption than a tool against corruption.

In the chapter I locate the imagination of deception in machines of legal betting. This is an imagination that creates an incentive to bet in the illegal market. In doing so, I hope to contribute to debates concerning the concurrent existence of formal and informal economy (Hart 1973; Roitman 2005), by emphasizing how the history of technological developments and the perception of such technologies in a political context shape preferences for either legal digitalized or illegal non-digitalized markets. In doing so, I furthermore hope to contribute to newer research in the anthropology of gambling and betting inspired by an Actor Network Theory approach (Schüll 2012), by extending the focus beyond the machines produced for legal gambling, as I focus on parallel technologies enabling developments in the illegal betting markets.

### **The total of the fringe**

To begin with, I want to provide an overview of the physical presence of the totalisator as well as its users. When I was about to enter the racecourse next to the line for depositing cell phones, I noticed there was a hole in the wall, inside which was a tiny room with two men and an old PC linked up to the totalisator system. Here people could place bets without having to pay the entrance fee.

Everyday there was a group of approximately 40 people standing close to the totalisator. The

majority of them had walked there from the racecourse village, where they lived. They included a relatively large number of children, down to the age of 12 (children were not allowed into the racecourse until they were 18). There were also rickshaw drivers, as well as personal drivers, such as Rajeev's. As a replacement for a television showing the odds and races and speakers from which to get the results, was a man who was running in and out of the racecourse gates to provide these bettors with the needed information.

Unlike the market for non-digitalized fixed odds in the betting ring, the totalisators did not need a physical center where the variety of odds could be seen. They were spread out over the racecourses and were all offering the same odds, as they were linked together through computer technology. Except for the one booth outside the racecourse, a television was hanging above each totalisator, which alternated between showing the given totalisator odds and the total amount of money staked in the betting pool.

Once inside the racecourse, the first totalisator was in a small shack. It was not easily identified because of the absence of any sign. Surrounding it was sweet, hay-like smell coming from the men who were working in the stables. This totalisator was only used by one segment during the races held in Delhi, namely by the horse caretakers, who stayed in this marginal area while waiting for to take the horses to the stables after they crossed the finish line.

The first sign, handwritten, that said totalisator was on top of a booth just outside the members' room. At this totalisator were people from the VIP area and the members' room, such as Rajeev, as well as their runners. Surrounding the betting ring there were four small dens, also with "totalisator" signs, which were not in operation. In addition to that there were eight operating totalisator counters lined up at the backside of the general stand. These totalisators had relatively short queues in front of them consisting of bettors coming mainly from the lower and lower middle classes.

At the Delhi racecourse, the totalisator offered a quiet, ordered way of betting. As opposed to the ring, where you had to push your way through the crowd to get a bookmaker to take your bet at a particular odd, at the totalisator you had to stand in line. The line, like most places in Delhi, is negotiable, and often I, as a white woman belonging to the Indian upper class, would be offered to jump the queue. Behind the counters stood a relatively large number of female cashiers. It seemed that the majority of females present at the racecourse were there working at the totalisator.

The totalisator counter marked a sharp divide between bettors seeking a profit from the future outcome and employees working to earn a monthly salary. This was different from the more

blurred boundary between the bettor and the bookmakers' employees, who would have a share in their corresponding firms' profits. Unlike the bookmakers, the staff at the totalisator did not play an active role in the game. They were receiving money and typing the bet into the PC. There was no space for negotiations of odds or taxation, which was calculated by the machine. There was no option to bet on credit either. Therefore, there was no need to have a personal relationship with the employee of the totalisator. In exchange for the wagered money the bettor got a silk-thin piece of paper stating the amount of money put on which horse – or horses – printed with ink which faded easily.

It is possible to divide the users of the totalisator into two groups. The first group consists of the urban poor as well as the lower middle class. Most of these bettors bet relatively small amounts, down to ten rupee per race. Whereas the minimum bet with the bookmakers is 40 rupees, with the totalisator it is only ten 10 rupees. In that sense, for some in this group, the totalisator is the only available platform for betting on the races considering their economic situations. At the racecourse these people are simply categorized as “tote-bettors”, which in some cases is also used as a synonym for an economic class.

The second group of totalisator users is at the other end of the economic hierarchy, the upper and upper middle class. These bettors are located either in the VIP area, café or the member's area, betting primarily at the totalisator positioned just next to the members' room. Among these bettors are the people invited specially to attend the more prestigious cup races. Despite being among the wealthy segment of the Indian population, many of these VIPs, who come just one or twice a year to watch the races and to socialize, bet relatively small amounts between 100 and 500 rupees.

Also in this group are regulars from the upper and upper middle classes, who occasionally use the totalisator for the sake of convenience. First of all, the totalisator is easier to get to, and second, they can send runners to bet for them and remain in their seat. Runners cannot bet for them as easily in the betting ring, because they might not get the same tax rate, and because the bettors are concerned whether they will give the correct information on the odds. Unlike betting with a bookmaker, the terms of betting are not dependent on the person you deal with at the totalisator. Therefore totalisator betting is intertwined with a service economy, as opposed to betting with bookmakers in which the personal relationship is central to the terms for the bet, which is agreed upon verbally.

The totalisator offers a kind of betting not offered by the bookmakers, such as the forecast (betting on both the winner and the horse that finishes in second place), quinella (the first two

horses in any order) and tanala (first three horses in any order). These are betting methods which are mostly popular with those doing some form of handicapping, as the focus is not just on the possible winner, but on more complex modes of prediction. Since these betting methods are tied to handicapping rather than inside information, tips and odds interpretations, it was mainly those from the upper classes at the Delhi racecourse doing some form of handicapping who were at times using the totalisator for betting combinations not offered by the betting ring.

The above classification of the totalisator users stems from observations at the racecourse. The survey I conducted enabled another overview of the totalisator users, providing more precise information on the patterns in the use of the totalisator through cross tabulation analysis. My survey first of all showed that whereas 73.8% used only the betting ring, only 6.5% bet on the totalisator, and 19.6% used both (see Appendix B). The cross tabulation analysis, where I combined the variable on the betting platform used with other variables, showed that the longer the bettors had been coming to the racecourse, the more they were betting with the ring exclusively (see Appendix B). It was mostly those from the middle classes that used the ring exclusively<sup>3</sup>. The smaller amount they were betting, the more they were using the totalisator exclusively, which supports my own observations that the totalisator was used by the lower classes exclusively, and occasionally also by the upper classes. The totalisator also had a relatively large segment of users (36.4%) coming from what can be classified as the lowest castes in Indian society, the “Scheduled Castes” and “Other Backward Classes”, which mirrors the tendency in the pattern of class.

Based on this data, I have found that whereas 7% of the respondents were using the totalisator exclusively, less than 0.2% of all betting money is estimated to go through the totalisator. This number is far from the national statistic of 94%<sup>4</sup>. This on the one hand indicates that less betting is done on the totalisator at the Delhi racecourse. But it also indicates that most of the betting done with bookmakers does not show up in any statistics, as it is done beyond taxation. Such statistics based on accounting practices may themselves be considered deceptive, as they are founded on assumptions of statistical data being able to grasp conjectures of economic totalities in settings where the vast majority of transactions happen in an economy existing beyond these methods of accounting.

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<sup>3</sup> This tendency also proved to be significant in a regression analysis where it was tested against relevant variables which could have had been affecting the correlation, such as age and betting amounts.

<sup>4</sup> According to the statistics the use of the totalisator has been on the increase since 2000, when it amounted to 81% of all registered betting transactions (International Federation of Horseracing Authorities 2013).

It is important to note that in terms of the totalisator's popularity, the Delhi racecourse is not representative for all Indian racecourses. I only really got to grasp the importance of the limited use of the totalisator at the Delhi racecourse after visiting racecourses such as Hyderabad and Bangalore, where there are much more totalisator counters than bookmaker booths. In front of the totalisator counters were long lines. This partly had to do with the time at which I visited the racecourses, which coincided with the Derby and other invitation cups, which meant that the proportion of VIPs, who were only there this one day a year, was higher. And as mentioned, the totalisator was the betting platform that those who were not regulars at the racecourse used. But the many totalisator counters were also a result of more progressive policy in some of these other states, where the betting tax of the totalisator had been set very low in order to encourage betting on the totalisator and thereby also avoid betting with bookmakers beyond taxation. The bettors of the Delhi racecourse were aware of this difference, with one saying: "What the Delhi [totalisator] does in six months Bangalore does in a day. Not that there is more betting in general, but there they encourage gambling with totalisators." Thus, Delhi specifically had more betting with bookmakers<sup>5</sup>.

Considering that a minimum of all betting inside the betting ring is reported for taxation, even among the licensed bookmakers, who according to Akshan report only 10% of all betting for taxation, this means that the payment of tax is dependent on class. Thus it is primarily the lower income classes, who wager below 100 rupees per bet, who pay the betting taxation, which finances, among other things, the upkeep of the racecourses and the prizes for the winners of the races. This explains part of the poor conditions at the Delhi racecourse for the horses and the prize economy. The totalisator therefore represents close to the total part of the betting that goes through the regulated economy. This is however only a total of a margin of the lower class bettors who cannot afford to enter the betting ring, and the upper class bettor who show up for special events and do not want to mix with the public in the frenzied betting ring. Ironically, whereas the racecourse was cast as the only site for legal betting in India, the racecourse today is a ground at which illegal betting can exist beyond without interference in the shadow of the totalisator, national statistics and betting taxation.

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<sup>5</sup> Despite various attempts throughout my research at getting the statistics from the Delhi racecourse management, I have not been able to get the numbers. Therefore I can only compare my survey with the numbers from the national statistics.

## **A history of the totalisator and economic governance**

An examination of the genealogy of the totalisator makes it possible to locate the totalisator in the history of capitalism in a colonial and post-colonial setting. It brings insight into the kind of economic governance that the totalisator represents, which is relevant for the understanding of the overall neglect of the totalisator as something part of a resistance to this historically located mode of governance.

The betting machine of the totalisator is based on what is called the pari-mutuel betting system, also described in chapter one. This is an accounting system invented in France in 1867 by the perfume shop owner Pierre Oller, who had an interest in horse race betting (Conlon 1997). He figured that instead of wagers on horses being done between just two people, he could make a pool of bets where he would take 5% of the pool and the rest would be paid out to the winners. The method did not demand insight into the probabilities of horses, but rather just simple accounting skills, which Oller had acquired as part of his work in the perfume business.

Pari-mutuel betting was first introduced to the Royal Calcutta Turf Club in 1872 and by 1890s, when the racecourses were opened up to the public, it was the only legal betting platform (Frith 1976). Pari-mutuel betting was first of all developed as a method of ensuring an income to cover the expenses of running a racecourse in addition to the entrance fee, which was needed at the time in India, as horseracing was facing a period with declining patronage from the British and Indian elite. Yet there was more to it than mere management of internal finances. As mentioned in chapter one, pari-mutuel betting was introduced comparatively early to India. In France, where the system was developed, pari-mutuel betting was not legalized until 1887, and in England lobbying bookmakers combined with anti-gambling sentiments kept it illegal until 1927. As also discussed in chapter one, Ritu Birla has argued that gambling legislation in India was a ground on which attempts of economic governance were established, by differentiating between legal and illegal markets for trades in futures (Birla 2009). Her argument becomes even more compelling when not only looking into the forms of betting, which were banned, but also the forms that were allowed, and how they were tied to developments in the technologies for economic governance of betting economies in India.

Examining the technologies available for governing gambling markets, I argue that pari-mutuel betting, developed in a Western setting, epitomized the capitalistic model of establishing an economy subject to colonial governance when it was introduced to India. This was a model whereby economy was independent from kinship and pre-established personal relationships, in

contrast to the vernacular capitalism of India at the time (Birla 2009). This was also an economy which enabled an abstraction of economy existing as a calculable totality, which was central to how economy was to be defined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century beyond an Indian setting (Mitchell 2005). This is because the terms for pari-mutuel betting was not done between decentralized parties, but was based on a single pool in which all transactions were centralized and subject to equal standardized terms. Pari-mutuel betting thus concerned the monopoly of economy itself, as economic value was not determined in the transactions between bettors and bookmakers, but developed centrally through methods subject to transparent bookkeeping. A certain abstraction of economy as a singular centralized unit in which everyone has a stake was enabled through this value generation. In this pool economy there should be no differentiation between what is visible and what is invisible, as it is characterized by a totalizing visibility as all bets exit in one single pool. This is fundamentally different from the model of bookmaking, defined by the lack of information on the market as a whole.

Pari-mutuel betting furthermore created a numerical pool of money from which a ‘take’ for the racecourse administration and a tax for local governments worldwide could easily be subtracted based on accounting techniques. Taxation of betting was not a new idea introduced by the British. According to K.R. Sakar, based on a reading of the *Artha Shastra*, which is an ancient treatise of statecraft and economic policy from approximately 300 BC, the state was to regulate gambling through the payment of a 5% state tax paid by the winner of games (Sakar 1978). This was to be done in state authorized gambling dens for dice gambling, and also dices were to be bought only by the authorities and fines could be given for deceptive practices within these premises. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was no such tax collection or regulation of existing “gaming-houses” in India popular for card gambling or regulation of betting sites, such as the sites for rain betting (Birla 2009). So at a time when vernacular betting markets were illegalized on the grounds of potential cheating by bookmakers and betting on mere chance, the introduction of pari-mutuel betting in the Indian racecourses enabled a regulation of betting (based on skill) and a mode of tax collection based on a radically different model for the management of risk commodities.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as pari-mutuel betting became part of both American and English racecourses, the problem of corruption within the pari-mutuel betting system was rising. The problem was that as the payouts were calculated by hand, those people operating the pari-mutuel betting systems could easily manipulate the odds. Despite pari-mutuel betting being based on the abstraction of a pool of money, in practice there were transactions that could circumvent this

accounting totality because of problems of transparency. This cut to the core of the way that gambling had been problematized as a site for unfair business – a problem which, however, was now situated within the legal economy itself.

The solution to this basic problem of transparency of the pari-mutuel model in international horse race betting was to come with the totalisator. The first totalisators were introduced to the Indian racecourses during the 1920s after they were invented in New Zealand in 1917 (Conlon 1997), some years before the introduction to both the British and American racecourses. The totalisator was an electro-mechanical device which calculated the odds while connecting the ticket issuers to one large board showing the odds. Because of the complicated mechanism, the odds could not be shown before the races based on what people were betting as an estimation of the given odds. Instead, it enabled bettors to check whether the odds they were given were correct after the race, when the odds finally showed on the board.

A fully computerized totalisator was invented in the US in 1966, which enabled estimations of odds prior to the race (Conlon 1997). However, in this post-colonial context, the Indian racecourses were not the first to embrace new developments in betting technologies. Despite technologies being invented to allow for even more transparency in betting transactions, they were not utilized in India. It was not until the 1990s that computerized totalisators were introduced to the Indian racecourses (Chettiyappaya 1995). Until then, it was only with the bookmakers that the bettors could in fact get an estimation of odds prior to the races. The introduction of the computerized totalisators meant that the process of placing a bet and potentially getting a payout at the totalisator sped up considerably.

The history of the totalisator in India shows that during colonialism there was an incentive among the Britishers at the race clubs to use the totalisator as their mode of betting. This incentive, I suggest, is tied to the mode of governance over a risk market that the totalisator enabled, which suited colonial capitalism. In post-colonial India, however, the totalisator was neglected.

### **Managing Madness**

In the 1930s, when the mechanical totalisators had been installed at the Indian racecourses, the race clubs were converted from private enterprises into corporations of limited liability with shareholders and an elected committee (Frith 1976). Since then the totalisator taxes have not been there just to raise money for the operation of the racecourse, but also to raise profits for the

shareholders of the race club. The race clubs were standardized along procedures for corporations that had been created through economic law (Birla 2009). The organization of the racecourse to some extent mimicked the modern state with elected representatives, a juridical system, unionized employees, an organized tax system, and systems for allocating resources towards the public interest. This was all connected partly to the totalisator, which enabled a long-term stable management of risk, along the characteristics of “firm-type economy” (Geertz 1963, 47-50)

Since the introduction of the totalisator to Indian racecourses, there have been periods at various racecourses in which pari-mutuel betting was the only betting facility provided, ensuring control of the betting market by its British shareholders. This was also the case after Indian Independence in 1947, when the British still dominated the race club managements. Indians were not in majority in the managing committee in Bangalore until the 1960s (Chettiyappaya 1995), and thus the race club and the totalisators stood as an example of a continuation of a British exploitation of Indian economy even after Independence. This perspective is evident in an anonymous letter written by a woman to Gandhi, which Gandhi cites in one of his texts written on the problems of gambling. The letter reads:

By practically robbing the public, the W.I.T. [Western Indian Turf] Club can afford to pay its European employees handsome salaries. If you were only in the know I am sure you would agree with me that hanky-panky tricks are carried on by the Turf Club and thus the public are cheated and robbed of a lot of money. Do, for God's sake, try and right matters. Things were certainly better when the bookmakers were allowed to take bets on the racecourse... If the government would take over the totes I am sure things would be more fair and square. The public invariably lose, and those who win are the owners of the horses and their trainers and jockeys (Gandhi 1952, 159).

Gandhi goes on to say that he sees it as a “pathetic” letter (Gandhi 1952, 159), as horse betting should not be legal in the first place. However, what it also shows is that there was a perception that the British management was more corrupt than what could be expected from Indian bookmakers and the newly established Indian government which Gandhi and others embellished with hope. However from the 1970s onwards, when Indians were running the race clubs, the race clubs' political organization was publicly criticized again, this time not for exploiting the economic system, but because the officials were acting as bettors and were involved in fixing futures, as also mentioned in chapter one.

As a consequence, the horse owners were not allowed in the managing committee anymore and government officials were instead given representation there, which gave the state a stake in the industry (Chettiyappaya 1995, 64). In Bangalore, in 1983, after renewed criticism of the

management of the race club, a commission was set up by the government, which was to reorganize the business. This was after a short period in which the government had taken over the club management due to accusations of corruption (Chettiyappaya 1995, 58). The commission suggested that bookmakers should be eliminated in favor of the totalisator (Chettiyappaya 1995, 63), which was the method through which the problem of corruption allegation had been dealt with in the US. Furthermore, they suggested that the Turf Club was to be under direct government management.

According to a survey done at that time in cooperation between Bangalore University's Psychology Department and the racing magazine Turf Talk, 72.86% of the respondents thought that a government administration of racing would be worse than if the race clubs managed themselves (Chettiyappaya 1995, 64). Despite the propositions from the committee, the race club management continued to be a corporate enterprise and the totalisator was only a competitor to the more popular bookmakers. This arrangement was what the bettors wanted, according to the race club management.

Examining the history of the totalisator locates the current use and perception of the totalisator in a global and local process of economic governance tied to the development of market devices and economic law. The totalisator's ambiguous position represents both the possibility of fair and unfair economy. The formalized economy in the postcolonial state in India is also set in an ambiguous position, and is often considered more exploitative than supportive. Looking at the history of the totalisator and the race club corporation is therefore an angle from where to understand conflicts around the history of economic governance, which today are reflected in the neglect and perception of the totalisator.

### **Discourses of corporate corruption**

Now I will aim to shed light on the ambiguous position of the totalisator, which was considered both a solution to and a source of deception at the Delhi racecourse. I will do so from the point of view of the handicapper Rajeev. Rajeev, like most bettors at the Delhi racecourse, preferred to bet in the betting ring. Nevertheless, he occasionally used the totalisator to bet small amounts and to make combination bets, such as forecasts and quinellas, which could only be done with the totalisator. His preference for long odds bets at times drew him to the totalisator, because he, unlike

many others, was doing comparisons between the bookmakers' and totalisator's odds. Whereas the bookmakers never offered odds over 20:1, there was no limit to the odds the totalisator could give. Often Rajeev would send the man working for the club in the members' room to place a bet for him on the totalisator so he did not have to stand in line. Despite Rajeev's preference for betting with bookmakers, he thought that the totalisator was important in establishing a fair game at the racecourse, free from the problems of concealed economies. The problem, however, was the totalisator economy itself which he thought was deceptive.

Rajeev kept a large number of documents concerning the management of the Indian racing industry in a wooden box in his bedroom. There were newspaper articles, official documents of the race club, and 12-year-old letters he had written to officials within and beyond the racing industry. He had given one of these letters the headline "Dengue Danger at Delhi Race Club". In the letters he pointed out several concerns about the Delhi race club's management, including the election processes for the committee, internal finances, as well as sanitary conditions. He did this while stressing the race club's position just opposite the Prime Minister's home, which enabled him to position his arguments in a political domain. In the letter he also targets the totalisator. He writes:

The totalisator operated by the club is hand operated, unsupervised and therefore at the mercy of corrupt elements among the staff. It lacks any credibility. Computerization, promised for long, is nowhere in sight. Is it not a play to benefit bookmakers, licensed or otherwise, who abound at the Race Course? The net result is that the Government and the club lose revenue but not the club managers because of bribes, in the latter case affecting the development of the sport since DRC [Delhi Race Club] pleads it is unable to raise the stake money [prize money], which is the lowest in the country present.

Rajeev puts the totalisator in an ambiguous position. On one hand, the totalisator is seen as a potential to end corruption, and on the other hand the totalisator itself is seen as being at the mercy of the ones who operate it and thus open to corruption. This ambiguity, I believe, is linked to the connection between the totalisator and corporate economy, and the concern is tied to the differentiation between public and private interests inherent in corporate management. Rajeev consistently used the words "corrupt" and "corruption" to describe the racecourse management, which for him was the source of the deception that went on there. Corruption was not just a problem identified at the racecourse, it was also a daily topic in newspaper debates and daily conversation in Delhi, as in many other places in India (Gupta 1995; Parry 2000; Fels 2008).

Jonathan Parry, based on case studies in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh, has argued that the preoccupation with corruption in India does not simply reflect a factual increase of the kind of

economic exchanges that can be defined as central to corruption, but rather it reflects a growing internalization of universalistic bureaucratic norms as well as the idea of a divide between a public and private interests (Parry 2000). Part of the critique directed at the club management is thus tied to the organization of economy that it represents. This is an economic institution where the people inside it are meant to follow bureaucratic routines beyond self-interest (Parry 2000, 52). In such a system the assumption of people serving their own interests, rather than the interests of the corporation, can lead to the assumption of corruption. According to Parry, the assumption itself can also lead to practices of corruption.

The assumption of self-interest is not problematic in relation to bookmakers. The bookmakers, as they are believed to be acting as self-interested businessmen, cannot be blamed for pursuing profits “licensed or otherwise”. But the racecourse management can be blamed for allowing it to happen within their jurisdiction in the shadow of formalized economy. According to Rajeev, they allowed unlicensed and untaxed bookmaking for their own benefit, as it enabled them to ask them for bribes. Thus the management could make most its money from bribes instead of through the corporate economy.

In his letters, Rajeev called for “fair play for the public”, which is to be sought through political means rather than in the private sector of the bookmakers. Rajeev plays on dual meanings of what constitutes the public. In the letters to the club and politicians the stated aim of reforming the management of the club is to uphold racing’s reputation as a respectable sport. Yet, as a bettor, the aim is to encourage fair play, transparency and equality among all bettors through even opportunities of winning<sup>6</sup> beyond deceptive practices and concealed economies.

Rajeev also pointed towards possibilities for cheating among the totalisator staff. At the end of one day at the races, I met Rajeev and he asked me how my day had been. I told him that I had won in one of the earlier races. He asked me the common question about the odds I had gotten. I told him that I had won 300 rupees from my 100-rupee bet. Rajeev then took me to a small board that I had passed many times, but had not taken much notice of. On the board the odds had been written in small numbers with charcoal. It showed 31, which meant that I should have won 310 rupees and not 300, and that the totalisator operator had given me 10 rupees too little. Rajeev immediately took me to the totalisator next to the member’s room and yelled at the lady behind the

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<sup>6</sup> The word *pari-mutuel* in itself has connotations of fairness, and can be translated to equal reciprocity, as all winners are paid based on the same odds.

counter after which I got my 10 extra rupees. He told me that the people operating the totalisator were “not to be trusted”.

I knew from previous conversations with the same woman that after working nearly 10 years at the totalisator she was still only employed as a day laborer and made close to 3000 rupees a month, which was often paid after weeks of delay. I felt bad. The awareness of the relative value of 500 rupees, which was my preferred amount of betting, had me confronted with issues of economic inequality. This meant that I choose to bet less at the totalisator as I was not reminded of their poor living conditions while betting. I did not come across bettors who expressed similar moral concerns directed at the totalisator operators, yet it may be one among many factors that makes betting in the betting ring more fun. Knowing about the totalisator operator’s poor income furthermore made bettors trust them less than they trusted their bookmakers. They expected them to try to take advantage of their position in the totalisator system out of need, not unlike the assumption of the jockey cheating for the same reason.

But it was not the totalisator operators who were considered the main problem of that method of betting – it was the racecourse management. In his letters, Rajeev targeted the race club’s balance sheets, in which he had found that one year 1,900,000 rupees too much had been paid out through the totalisator. He indicated that the club management, who controlled the totalisator’s finances, had taken this money for themselves. The procedures for handling balance sheets, in this case, were a sign of deception in the race club’s internal finances rather than a materiality of transparency.

### **Corporate conspiracies**

Todd Sanders and Harry G. West, in an introduction to an edited volume on conspiracy theories, draw a link between the discourse of transparency in the global order of good governance and the existence of conspiracy theories (West and Sanders 2003). They emphasize that central to conspiracy theories is the idea of the possibility of transparency in modern democratic political institutions. At the heart of conspiracy theories is a questioning of whether what we see is really the whole truth based on the idea that transparency is possible. Therefore, the discourse of transparency, conveying notions of trust, openness and fairness, goes hand in hand with suspicion, concealment and treachery (West and Sanders 2003, 12). It is not that conspiracy theories should be understood as conveying pre-existing orders beyond modern democracies, but rather that they are

part of processes of a globalization of a political culture. The point is that, in line with Parry's argument, conspiracy theories of corruption are tied to the development of democracy itself and the concept of transparent institutions. For example, the history of the totalisator in India is tied to the history of economic governance of modern democracies, and as part of this, the totalisator itself is linked to conspiracy theories.

Just as the "discourse of corruption" has been interwoven with discourses of the state in India, as discussed by Akhil Gupta (Gupta 1995), the corporation as an economic unit has become entwined in this discourse through real and imagined alliances with the state. The idea of the corruption at the race club shows an internalization of a divide between public and private interests and sectors, in which the people of the corporation, like politicians or bureaucrats, are playing on both sides of the fence.

The race club itself was at several times personified. It was thus thought to be equal to its managing director or "president", and the money bet at the totalisator was said to "go into the president's pockets". The corporate economy was thus clearly politicized in the Indian sense of the word, meaning that it was considered as a battleground for money for both public and private means. According to Akshan: "The president is the meanest man... He is greedy. If it was up to him he would take the TVs [hanging at the racecourse]". The president of the racecourse was not seen as a man of distribution but a man who was stealing, in a similar manner to the totalisator.

One day while in the member's room Rajeev told me of a trip to England where he had once gone to visit some of his family. I asked whether there was less corruption there and he answered, "The British invented corruption". Corruption was not something that was associated with India specifically or with Indian culture; it was something embedded in the political system – and its technologies – which was invented by the British. As we went outside the members' room to have a look at the horses that were to run in the next race, a prize ceremony was taking place in the paddock for the last race. "There is the corrupt president," Rajeev said, pointing to the man handing over the prize to the smiling owner of THE ENGLISH WOMAN, who had won the race.

Corruption was not only considered to be located in the president's pockets, but was considered endemic to the system in all its levels. When I asked bettors to identify where corruption had its source, they replied, "No matter how much you research you will never get to the bottom of the corruption". Yet, Rajeev often encouraged me to make corruption the primary topic for my research on the Delhi racecourse, which he saw as the interpretive frame for understanding the

place. In some ways I did, however, ‘corruption’ is only one part of a larger evaluative frame of deception.

Rajeev had just lost his bet. Like any other punter, after losing a bet, Rajeev often claimed that the race had been manipulated. Yet, rather than blaming greedy bookmakers, needy jockeys and powerful horse owners alone, Rajeev went on to see the main problem of how the races were conducted as being located in the race club, as an organization, and its management. In his critique of the race club he thus interwove a critique of the system of corporations with that of the state’s through a discourse of corruption.

I have dealt here with “corruption” as an emic concept. The word was mostly used among the relatively well-educated English-speaking bettors. A bettor from the racecourse village did not use the word corruption, but nevertheless worked with the idea of an external governmental control of the racecourse tied to concealed parallel economies: “Now the government has captured this [the racecourse]... now no one knows if this racecourse earns money. No other racecourse on earth earns as much money as this racecourse, still nothing is happening. Where the money goes and where it doesn’t – no-one can tell”.

My point is that the discourse of ‘corruption’ is tied specifically to the club management and an internalization of economic law, and corruption was by and large not the word used to describe ways in which players in the industry were making money from manipulating the game. Bookmakers paying off jockeys to pull horses were not considered corrupt, but “professional cheaters”, according to both Rajeev and Abi. Corruption was, as opposed to cheating, used to describe manipulation in very specific contexts, namely in relation to the club corporation, bureaucracy, taxes, politicians as well as the police – all actors and units central to the modern capitalistic state. What it had in common with other imaginations of economic transactions was the basic idea of deception, which opened up to speculations in concealed economies within the totalisator economy and the race club corporation.

### **Public objection: Challenges to the legitimacy of the racecourse jurisdiction**

The idea of the racecourse management as corrupt also involved the jurisdiction of the racecourse. Not only was the president of the racecourse imagined to illicitly take money for himself from the

race club corporation, the judges who were there to ensure a fair race were also considered to both be upholding the rules of the game and breaking them in order to ensure that they could profit from betting. Again, there is a paradox, as the judges both represent the potential for order as well as for deception.

Since the 1980s in India, one way that allegations of corruption within the race club management were addressed was by giving an enhanced role to the judges in order to protect the sport from the horse owners who could be manipulating the races (Chettiyappaya 1995, 16-45). The judges was seen as a potential way out of fixed racing or other modes of unfair riding, as they, unlike the horse owners and jockeys, could be considered unbiased. Yet, among bettors at the Delhi racecourse, the judges, as everyone else, were considered to be bettors themselves and therefore biased in terms of having a preference for a specific winner of the race. Rather than upholding fairness and the rules of racing, they were considered to be self-interested players who would manipulate the result in order to meet their own interests or their friends' in the race club management.

One day, the bettors got fed up. It was after a race held in Delhi, when a number of bettors had just rejoiced after INDIA SHINING had won with long odds close to 10/1. Not long after the triumph, however, a hand-painted sign was put up at the finishing line that said "objection" with red letters. This was to signal that a questioning concerning the riding of the race would be held in a closed room in which the judges of the race would interrogate the jockeys implied.

I was sitting in the members' room with Rajeev. He said: "Maybe the race will be annulled if the judge did not play the right horse. They do that!" Another bettor from the members' room, Sahil, overheard Rajeev and said that from the newly installed surveillance cameras in the members' room, the club management could not only see but also hear what was going on inside the members' room. Rajeev looked a little uncomfortable. He had recently expressed his annoyance with the cameras as they set a limit to how often he could invite me to join him in the restricted members room, where he was only allowed guests three times in a month. Because of the surveillance cameras, the management could check whether he was following the rules. The surveillance cameras had been installed at various spots in the racecourse, which, according to Rajeev, were to ensure that the bettors did not carry cell phones without having paid the fee. Some minutes after the objection sign was erected, there were loud voices suddenly came from outside the members' room and I got up to see what was going on.

Outside I saw a large crowd with raised arms, shouting angrily. I found out that it had just been announced that the winner had been disqualified. This was not an uncommon thing, but today the bettors were far from pleased about it. I met Mr. Kumar, an employee of the racecourse management, who told me to follow him in order to be safe. He wanted to take me to an area closed off from the public. We went up the stairs towards the VIP floor and continued on further up to the only area that had a full view over the racetracks. This was an area where the races were being monitored. He asked me if I wanted a beer. This was the first time I was offered alcohol, as it was otherwise not allowed at the racecourse premises. I declined.

From where we stood, we had full view of the horseshoe-shaped racetrack and the angry crowd, who were now banging at a fence that had been closed in preparation for the horses in the upcoming race to walk to the racetrack. The defeated bettors were locked into the area of the betting ring and could not leave the racecourse. Some started to try to crawl over the fence and eventually opened the gate by force, and they started running towards the paddock. Inside the paddock nine horses were getting ready for the next race and the cheerful ballroom music was playing at high volume in the scratchy speakers. The shouting overpowered the music and now the bettors attempted to prevent the horses from running in the next race by blocking the way to the racetracks.

Mr. Kumar was laughing about the whole scene. He had also bet on INDIA SHINING and would have won 2000 rupees from a 200 rupee bet. He told that these sorts of uprisings happened around three times a year. Some large men came and led the protesting bettors away from the track. The horses ran slowly to the starting point of the race and people started betting. Everything was back to normal. I met Akshan who told me that it was "the Don", the mafia bookmaker, and his allies who had restored order in the crowd. The racecourse management allowed them to operate at the racecourse as unlicensed bookmakers in return for keeping order in such situations where the police had been bribed to stay away.

Later I also saw Rajeev again, who was now fully convinced that the winner had been disqualified because the judges had bet on a different horse. He pointed out to me that in Delhi they were not showing the enquiry of the jockey on television. This meant that the bettors had no chance of knowing what went on in there. Enquiries from some of the other racecourses were broadcasted on the television screens and were held in courtroom-like rooms, from what I knew the interrogations were held in English despite this not being the spoken language of all the jockeys.

When talking about the new technologies for the surveillance of bettors, Rajeev complained of the lack of surveillance technologies directed at the management and the horses. He said that the technology that was used to cover the races was very poor. The heavy square televisions with small screens were old and made it difficult to both see and hear the horses. There were only few cameras directed at the horses, which made it difficult for Rajeev to estimate whether there had been a fair race and whether a horse had been pulled or not, or which horse was in fact the real winner in the case of a close race. This, according to Rajeev, gave more freedom to the judges to decide on the outcome of the race either by declaring a winner or by annulling some jockeys, as done in the above situation, depending on what they and their friends in the management had bet themselves.

Rajeev thus emphasized the importance of transparency at various levels. The deficiency of technology was both preventing the horse enthusiast from watching the powerful creatures close-up and it also made the spectators unable to inspect the justice of the juridical system. The judges, as representatives of the rule of law, were considered to have a concealed stake in the game, and thus the juridical system upon which the rules of the racecourse were to be upheld was itself believed to be partaking in the deceptive game of the Delhi racecourse.

### **The illegitimacies of taxation**

Part of the bettors' avoidance of the totalisator is tied simply to the fact that it is subject to taxation. Approximately half of the tax taken from totalisator bets goes towards the upkeep of the racecourse and half goes to the state. In the above, we have seen how the racecourse economy is considered to be in the hands of corrupt racecourse management, and the technology of state taxation is also considered to be corrupt and deceptive.

In India, tax policies are determined at a state level. A reduction of the totalisator betting tax, for example, in the state of Andhra Pradesh from 20% to 12% meant a considerable increase in bets with the totalisator was recorded over a period of ten years at the Hyderabad racecourse (Turf Authorities of India 1995). The choice of betting platform, I suggest, is connected to differences in the official totalisator and bookmakers' taxes. By operating primarily based on unreported betting bookmakers can offer competitive taxes so betting with bookmakers is more than simply about saving money. It is about the legitimacy of tax itself tied to histories of governmentality and different ideas of transparency.

When Rajeev was betting on a horse with long odds, which would result in a payout above 2500 rupees, he would have the totalisator operator break the bet down to 10-rupee bets. For example, if he bet 500 rupees, he would break it down to 50 bets of 10 rupees. This way he could avoid paying an income tax on his profit, which was automatically subtracted through the totalisator from winning payouts. This was a common practice, and the operators of the totalisator would even break down my bet without asking me when I was betting on a horse, which would result in a payout over 2500. It was assumed that I expected them to assist me with tax evasion.

In addition to the income tax, the totalisator automatically withdrew a betting tax. When I asked on my very first meeting with Rajeev why he chose to bet with bookmakers he said, “it is simply a matter of saving money” as they would give him a reduced betting “tax” rate of 9%. That said, he did in fact not know what the betting tax percentage of the totalisator was when I asked. Whereas with the bookmaker, betting tax is paid in terms of a percentage added to the bet without interfering with the given odds, at the totalisator the tax is subtracted from the payout reflected in the final odds. For example, when betting 1000 rupees with a bookmaker taking a 9% betting fee, 90 rupees are paid on top. But for the totalisator, the tax percentage is calculated into the odds. In that sense with a 10% betting tax calculated into the odds, the given odds will be 10% smaller than with the bookmaker. As tax is manifested in odds, it means that in most cases bookmaker odds appear higher than the totalisator odds, which explains part of why totalisator odds do not easily compete. The only time I came across an actual attempt to come up with the tax percentage of the totalisator I was told: “Only 60% of your money is on. 40% is taken on tote.” But overall, no-one, not even the bookmakers, knew of the betting tax percentage of the totalisator. The mean betting tax in India in 2010 was 15%, and in Delhi it was 16%, which included an entertainment tax of 6%, and a 10% tax paid to the racecourse. This means that the totalisator tax in fact is 1% below the official bookmakers’ betting tax of 17%. However, many do not pay the 17% tax through the bookmakers.

Janet Roitman, as part of her study on unregulated trade in Cameroon, argues that tax evasion and the perception of tax as illegitimate has to be understood in relation to how the connection between tax and price became a political technology that exemplified the materialization of colonial power in its fiscal form (Roitman 2005, 10). Similarly, I suggest that in order to understand the neglect of the totalisator it is necessary to grasp the technology in which tax and odds are inseparable, as something tied to a colonial economic-political power, where odds, with their locked in tax, can be seen as the very material of fiscal power itself.

In a different article, Roitman writes about how people in Cameroon, whenever they believe they have not been given a fair price operate with the notion of tax as something that signifies what has been added to the “true price”. The context for this argument is the situation of bargaining, where people attempt to come in an agreement on what the “true price” should be (Roitman 2003). At the Delhi racecourse, you can bargain with bookmakers with whom you have established a relationship by asking for “market rate”, which is the highest odds offered on a particular horse in the betting ring. With the totalisator, however, neither the bettor nor the totalisator operator has a role in determining the odds. What is left is a sensation of the odds of the totalisators being taxed in such a way that the odds are below what is reasonable.

For a long time I was a bit confused about all the differing “taxes” and, to some extent, so were the bettors. When asking a group of bettors to reflect on the illegality of the betting activities at the racecourse, one man said to me: “But betting is legal; we pay tax.” Another man only partly agreed: “Sometimes yes, when we play at the tote and pay tax, but often we are not paying tax in the ring.” “But even that is taxed,” came the reply from the first bettor. He was suggesting that even the illegal betting fee issued by bookmakers is referred to as a tax.

Tax was not only used for something that was in fact an illegal fee, but also for something that could be considered a bribe. When asking Akshan why the race club management allowed them to charge their illegal betting fee instead of an official betting tax, he said that they permitted illegal betting because this means that the bookmakers would pay “high taxes” to the race club, namely 15,000 rupees a day. Akshan described this bribe, which was beyond the official cost of having a bookmaker at the racecourse, as a tax. When I went on to ask why the race club management and the state allowed this illegal business to exist, he told me that it was enabled through a “tax” paid to the police. “That is the highest tax... because corruption is so high.” Bettors and bookmakers alike were of the idea that the police was connected to people working in the state. Thus, by paying “taxes” to the police, the money reached the state. This was, however, through a different channel than the official taxes, as it was “tax” paid to private people working in the state. For Akshan, being a licensed bookmaker was not simply a privilege in comparison with the unlicensed bookmakers, it was more an obligation – an obligation to pay tax, both by reporting a small percentage of their “number one” bets for the official bookkeeping records, and by bribing the race club managers for allowing the majority of their business to go in the “number two” account book, which was not reported for state taxation. The lack of differentiation among bettors and bookmakers between different kinds of taxes, fees and bribes reveals that all are considered as extra amounts added to a

price. There was no consideration of the need to bring money into the race club for upkeep and improving conditions for the horses, which was part of the initial reason behind the introduction of betting tax at the horse races. It did not reach a benevolent state concerned with its people either.

Jonathan Parry, in his text on corruption in India, takes notice of the high level of publicity when it comes to giving bribes. Whereas no-one talks about taking bribes, many will tell about giving bribes (Parry 2000, 27). This was also the case among bookmakers, as well as the horse owners, who talked about how they had to pay jockeys to try to win in order to out-bet the bookmakers. Parry argues that the moral judgment was placed on those who accepted bribes, whereas giving bribes was not morally judged, but instead seen as a necessity because of the system, which was considered to be corrupt. As a consequence of this mixed morality of bribes, corruption was at simultaneously secret and public. Similarly, the payment of bribes at the Delhi racecourse was a public secret, which shaped the moral framing of taxation.

Tax evasion is not unique to the betting sector in India. According to estimations from the 1980s, 41-58% of taxable income escaped taxation (Harris-White 1996) and more recent estimations are even higher. Barbara Harris-White has listed three reasons for income tax evasion in India. First, it is a consequence of a lack of legitimacy of local governments. Second, it is tied to the political weakness of the local governments in the face of the commercial elite. Third, it is a ramification of political conspiracies. This enables the elite to go untaxed, and the people with less earnings to be the primary taxpayers (Harris-White 1996, 33). There were similar reasons for betting tax evasion at the Delhi racecourse. Betting tax evasion was tied to lack of legitimacy to the race club management as well as the state government, which were both considered corrupt, which enabled a situation that subjected the poorer classes to become the prime tax payers through their use of the totalisator.

The totalisator offers a platform from which to critique aspects of state economy for the segment that can afford not to use it. This critique is directed at tax itself, representing on one hand the materiality of fiscal state governance, and on the other hand an entanglement with informal payments. The problem of tax is not simply state involvement and governance over betting economies, but also the manner in which they are involved, where formal and informal payments exist parallel to each other. Taxation is thus a representation of both the legitimate and illegitimate economy, as well as the transparent and the concealed economy. As part of this ambiguity, taxation would come to be seen as payments to individuals, such as politicians, race managers or bookmakers, rather than to the horses and people living in slums. The problem of the totalisator is

thus the fact that it systematically collects tax, which per definition is considered an illegitimate system of deceptive economy.

### **Opaque odds**

The totalisator is a machine that produces odds, which enable systematic tax extraction. Unlike the bookmakers, the totalisator cannot be beaten, which is yet another reason for its limited popularity. Natasha Schüll has used a study on both designers and users of American casinos to examine the way in which odds for winning at slot machines are constructed and controlled in order to ensure profit (Schüll 2012). Her study is an example of how the game itself is manipulated in order to meet the economic goals of a few actors, namely the owners and shareholders of the casino. Slot machines are not just subject to chance, but are programmed to create a large numbers of near misses in order to stimulate the gambler. This programming is based on documented research on addictive behavior. The machines also collect data on the individual gambler while they are gambling in order to make a profile of the gambler and create the kinds of outcomes that will keep him or her in the game as long as possible. Ironically, game designers work consciously with the importance of gaining the gamblers' trust in their machines through the way the games are designed in order to maintain their belief in their chance of winning (Schüll 2012).<sup>7</sup>

At the Delhi racecourse, the computer technology was not that advanced. Among bettors it was partly a lack of trust in the computerized odds, which kept them away from the totalisator. There was an awareness of the odds being constructed in such a way that the totalisator was unbeatable and always came out as a winner. This was considered an unfair game as opposed to the game with bookmakers, in which the bookmakers themselves could lose, despite having some advantages through the authority to charge betting fees. The totalisator, in that sense, epitomized the complete control of the betting economy through the programming of an unfair game. Nevertheless, the totalisator technology also represents the possibility for guarding against people cheating.

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<sup>7</sup> In USA, the introduction of slot machines at the racetracks, has created an increased income on betting with the totalisator, as it has attracted more people to the racetracks. Yet, the slot machines have generated double the revenue of horse race betting, and the taxes on the slot machines have therefore come to finance a considerable part of the racing industry (McGowan 2001). In India, it is the totalisator alone, which is the main technology channeling money to the racing industry.

In the above letter from Rajeev written in the late 1990s, he calls for a computerization of the totalisator, which had already been installed at other Indian racecourses (in Hyderabad in 1988 and in Bangalore in 1990) (India 1995; Chettiyappaya 1995). Rajeev first of all proposes the computerization as one step away from the swindling of totalisator operators who could manipulate the payouts because of lack of transparency. Second, he argues that only a computerization of the totalisator will enable it to compete with bookmakers, because of the limitations in ways in which odds could be updated. Since Rajeev's letter, the totalisator has become computerized at the Delhi racecourse, but despite this advancement, the totalisator is still not trusted.

According to Rajeev, the technology still had crucial limitations despite having being computerized. This did not have so much to do with the possibilities for the totalisator operators to cheat, but with the computer technology itself, which was lagging behind. He pointed out that the odds would keep changing after the race because the computer technology could "not keep up with the betting".

Hirokazu Miyazaki, as part of his study on Japanese securities traders, writes about how the attempt to locate gaps in prices as part of an arbitrage methodology was tied to the idea of an incomplete presence (Miyazaki 2003). The market was thus considered to be behind reality, and based on this he observed a "temporal orientation of an incomplete present" (Miyazaki 2003, 261). However, where this idea of the information as being behind from the actual market was used as a method of seeking profit among Japanese security traders, in terms of the totalisator, the experience was that the gap in time always acted to one's disadvantage. In Miyazaki's case the temporal imperfection was used as a ground for exploring arbitrage opportunities. However, this was not the case at the Delhi racecourse. The totalisator was not used by those doing speculative betting, by exploring price differences between bookmaker odds and the totalisator odds, despite these sometimes being very different. Because you do not buy a fixed odds at the totalisator, you cannot do arbitrage with the totalisator as the odds bought are uncertain and can change. The totalisator odds implied more risk for the bettors in the sense that there was an uncertainty about what the odds would be in the end, and often they experienced that their odds would be worse than when they had placed the bet.

The totalisator odds existed at a different numerical system than the bookmaker odds. What was written as 1 or 1/1 with a bookmaker equals an odd of 20 with the totalisator. The totalisator odds were calculated along 10 paisa units and included the wager in the odds. For this reason, the bookmaker and the totalisator odds could not easily be compared one-to-one, and they involve

different methods of calculating potential profits from winning. I came across several bettors who only used the betting ring, who even told me that they did not understand the totalisator odds in comparison with the fixed odds of the bookmakers, which prevented them from working out which platform was offering the best payout.

For those who knew how to interpret the totalisator odds, many would still not take them into account when betting. It was as if the totalisator and bookmakers offered parallel games, and most would only play one of the games: the bookmakers' game. Bettors bet with bookmakers even though the bookmakers did not always offer the best odds. At one point I encountered a bettor who excitedly told me he had won the race at 1:20 odds with a bookmaker. I pointed out the totalisator odds were showing 734 on the screens above our heads, which was equivalent to 1:64 with the bookmaker. He had not even bothered to look.

As mentioned, the totalisator odds displayed on the totalisator screens are calculated as bets are taken in. The final odds, however, cannot be known till after the race when tax has been subtracted from the betting pool and divided across the winners, which is unlike bookmakers' odds, which you buy at a fixed rate. At one point I bet on DARK HORSE and the odds were almost reduced by 100% from the time that the race started to the time the payout odds were declared. Even after the race was over the odds at the totalisator screens kept changing. Besides showing the ongoing odds for each horses, the totalisator screens also show the pools of money that are staked in the single races. For a single race I registered that the win pool after the race went from 240,000 to 320,000 rupees. Besides telling us about the relative low pools at the size of a single bet from a single bettor betting with the bookmakers<sup>8</sup>, this shows that one third of the bets were only updated in the totalisator software after the race.

In the ring, as we saw in the last chapter, a sudden large bet can change the market drastically within seconds. Whereas the ring odds reflect a betting market in real time, the tote does not. The totalisator odds in fact offer an exact calculation of the betting distribution of the totalisator betting market as a whole. But they are not valued as numbers reflecting a connection to the reality, both because of limitations of the technology and, because of the totalisator's limited number of users, making its sign value limited.

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<sup>8</sup> Based on my survey I have calculated that the average minimum bet was 11,085 rupees per race, and 20% of the respondents had a minimum bet of 100,000 per race.

Despite the potential of transparency being inherent in the totalisator technology, in which the betting market as a whole is summarized in the totalisator odds, the totalisator is experienced as an opaque, inconsistent, slow system open to manipulation. Computer technology is not given a privileged position in its ability to contain and reflect a complete image of the betting economy. This contradicts existing ideas about gaining transparency and efficiency of economy through technology, but is similar to other examples in which procedures tied to formal economy in India create opacity rather than transparency (Bear 2013).

### **Parallel odds**

Totalisators are not only found inside the racecourses in India, but also in approximately 40 “off-course betting centers” attached to the racecourse in the states that have a racecourse. In the state territory of Delhi, as well as in Bengal and Tamil Nadu, there are no off-course betting centers<sup>9</sup>. Off-course betting is a term, which was first associated with illegal bookmakers in England before they were legalized through betting outlets (Chinn 2004). In India, the term is still mostly used to describe illegal bookmaking involving bookmakers working from outside the racecourses via telephones, which I will refer to here as phone betting. Understanding developments in phone betting provides insight into a shifting role of the totalisator in terms of its power to generate economic value, and its role in providing a center for betting. This is a shift that has to do with developments in technologies existing concurrently with the limited developments in the totalisator technology.

Abi told me how he managed to bet on the races in the 1960s when he was posted in the mountains of South India far away from any racecourse. Back then, newspapers played an essential role in phone betting. Abi first of all was dependent on the handicapper expert’s selections of possible winners, not unlike his mode of betting today, where he reads the selection of possible winners in the BOL. At the time, these types of selections were printed in the national newspaper, *The Hindu*, on the day of the races held in Madras. Based on these suggestions, Abi would pick a horse, then call his bookmaker on the landline telephone and place his bet with him. The following day, the result would be printed in the newspaper along with the totalisator odds that were given at

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<sup>9</sup> According to official statistics from 2010 the off-course betting centers generated 93.5% of all reported betting turnover.

the racecourse of Madras. In the case Abi had won, his bookmaker would make his payout based on the totalisator odds printed in the newspaper. At the time phone bookmaking thus existed based on an imitation of the totalisator odds, which gave the bookmakers an inbuilt tax advantage, as they were already measured after a subtraction of tax money from the betting pool. This system of phone betting tied to the printed media enabled Abi to bet on the races in Madras regardless of where he was posted.

The use of various information technologies for betting, such as the newspaper and the telephone, enabled a decentralized betting market to exist linked to the betting in the racecourses. Paying attention to developments in information technologies has been an important focus of an Actor Network Theory-inspired approach to financial markets. For example, a study by Alex Preda on the history of the stock ticker, has shown how the numbers inside the New York Stock exchange were communicated out to the city, and how flashing lights were lit on top of the tall building for the numbers to reach New Jersey (Preda 2006). Ritu Birla has shown how at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in India, betting markets and informal futures markets depended on telegrams as well as methods of communicating numbers through flashing lights at hilltops. Since then telephones enabled new ways of betting. Yet, as argued by Anne Hardgrove, old and new technologies were used concurrently in the operation of the betting markets in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hardgrove 2005). This was also the case in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Rajeev told of how he in the late 1950s used to bet on the last figures of the New York Stock Exchange cotton stocks,<sup>10</sup> which were also printed in the national newspapers in India. This was, however, not the only mode through which the numbers were communicated; they were also written with chalk on the trains traveling out of Bombay and would therefore reach all corners of India. Later when the mafia started the *matka* lottery where numbers were drawn from somewhere unknown, these numbers, which could not be printed in the newspaper, were carried by the same train technology to local lottery operators. Therefore the reach and operation of various betting markets has historically depended on developments in communication technologies enabling centrally produced odds or figures to form the basis for local betting providers.

In the 1980s Akshan's grandfather started to employ people who would use the pay phones outside the racecourse to connect with bettors who wanted to bet with them in absence. This allowed phone betting to exist independently from the totalisator and the newspapers, and instead

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<sup>10</sup> This kind of lottery resembles the "numbers game" in Harlem, run by the New York mafia, where numbers from Wall Street Stock Exchange was used for picking numbers for lotteries in the street of Harlem (White et al. 2010).

be based on odds in the betting rings. The year 1995 marks another big change in the phone betting market. This was the year the cell phone was introduced to India. Before the cell phone there was a time gap, or an “information gap” in the words of Akshan, because in the time it took for the bookmaker employees to run to the telephone booths, the odds could have changed considerably. The cell phones, however, enabled direct contact between absentee bettors and the betting ring through cutters, as described in previous chapter. The cell phone furthermore meant that the various betting markets of the racecourses, spread out in the country, became more integrated, as a person standing in the Mumbai racecourse, for example, could compare the Mumbai odds with the Delhi odds.

This part of the history, on the one hand, illustrates how developments in communication technologies have enabled betting market to exist in various ways operating at large geographical scales. On the other hand, what I want to emphasize is the change since 1995. Whereas in the past illegal betting was facilitated through the totalisator technology combined with the printed press, with the new technology of the cell phone, the illegal market can exist independent of the totalisator, through the access to bookmaker based odds, communicated through the *daba*. This is thus another example of how the totalisator has lost its significance as a device for the generation of economic value.

I was made aware of how phone bookmaking exists parallel to the totalisator when visiting one of six off-course betting centers in Mumbai (situated 50 meters down the street from the Mumbai Stock Exchange). The betting outlet consisted of a relatively small room, which opened up to the street. Inside were three totalisator counters on the bottom floor next to benches where elderly men, primarily from the lower-middle classes, were sitting together watching the races on one small television screen. There was a stairway leading up to a second, less crowded floor with a sign that said “min 100 rupee bet”, segregating the space along economic class in a similar way to how the racecourses were organized.

As I walked outside the betting outlet to get some fresh air, I realized that in addition to the totalisator in the betting shop there was a kind of betting ring on the street outside. Approximately five men leaning on their motorcycles with expensive cell phones in their hands were offering fixed odds betting. Standing with the BOL in my hand, which was a sign that I was there to bet, I was approached by one of the bookmakers: “Do you want to do a cash bet?” I told him that I wanted to bet 500 rupees on number four, RING MASTER. Without looking at the totalisator odds, which could be seen from his position, the bookmaker took his cell phone and called a *daba*. He told me

the odds, 2:1, and then pointed out that the odds were better than the ones shown on the totalisator screen. I placed the bet, lost, and was encouraged to try again by the bookmaker. It was clear that the street bookies were accepting larger bets compared to the totalisator at the betting shop, and the men holding the BOL on the street were of a higher economic class. The street bookies with the easy access to odds through the cell phone were not dependent on the totalisator odds. The new information technology of the cell phone had enabled the informal betting market to exist not just as a imitative economy, but a parallel economy.

Similarly, inside the Delhi betting ring it was not only the bettors who did not pay attention to the totalisator odds, but also the bookmakers. Akshan, as part of his role of monitoring the market, never used his binoculars to take a peek at the totalisator odds, despite them being displayed on televisions hanging in the middle of the betting ring. When I asked the “king of downstairs betting”, “the Don”, whether he took the odds of the totalisator into account, he told me, similar to what I was told by a number of bettors, that he did not really understand the totalisator odds.

In England, statistical research has shown that the bookmakers’ odds move in the direction of the totalisator odds (Peirson and Blackburn 2003, 30), yet in the Delhi betting ring I saw the opposite movement. Even if the totalisator odds were fairly different from the bookmakers’ odds, they would eventually move closer to the final odds/starting price of the betting ring. This suggests that totalisator bettors may tend to imitate the betting in the betting ring, and that dropping odds in the betting ring would eventually lead to dropping odds at the totalisator as well, yet with some delay. This is another example illustrating that the center for the generation of economic value of the future lies with bookmakers and not with the totalisator. In England, the differentiation between a bookmaker economy and the totalisator economy has become more blurred, as there has been a development towards corporate bookmaking working at larger scales (Cassidy 2010). This has brought the experience and economy of betting with a bookmaker closer to the totalisator, with a digitalized management of risk through the production of algorithmic odds. Illegal bookmaking is inherent in the history of bookmaking, not only in India, but indeed also in England and the US (Chinn 2004; Munting 1996). The history of horse betting in the US shows how the pari-mutuel betting system introduced to the various states between 1906 and 1935 meant a development in a parallel mafia-run off-course bookmaking industry (Munting 1996, 113)<sup>11</sup>. As in India at the time, the odds were given by copying the legal odds of the totalisator, and thus the legal betting system provided a market for an illegal betting system by creating profitable odds.

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<sup>11</sup> Estimations in the US in the 1960s showed that 16.5% was bet in the illegal market (Herman 1967, 89).

In her Master's thesis, which focuses on the co-existence of legal and illegal betting in Australia, Raewyn Graham argues that the illegal betting market continued to exist after the introduction of the totalisator because bookmakers constructed extensive networks that enabled them to provide a faster and more accessible betting service to bettors than the totalisator could do (Graham 2007). Yet, computerization of the betting platforms facilitated an expansion of the legal market and a reconfiguration of betting networks by providing access to betting both through the telephone and the Internet. With these developments the comparative advantage of illegal bookmaking, which according to Graham was a question of easy access, was eliminated. It was developments in the technologies for betting that meant a gradual move from the illegal to the legal markets.

Yet, I would say that the use of legal betting platforms is about much more than a question of access, and that we should keep in mind developments in technologies enabling illegal markets as well. Choosing a legal betting platform over an illegal one is tied to how the economy of the betting facilitator is imagined and the kinds of odds that it can offer, as discussed above. Online betting, as well as app-based betting, represents the newest technological developments for betting. However, these may only represent one tendency in the new domains of gambling.

In 2011, a federal act was passed in India which holds Internet providers responsible for the transmission of any information that can "corrupt" people, of which gambling information has been declared one of them. The state of Sikkim is the only state which allows online gambling in India, and this represents a loophole through which international betting corporations are considering possibilities to capture the extensive Indian sports betting market (Thompson 2009). Nevertheless, there is an awareness of the difficulty of offering favorable odds compared to the odds of the illegal betting market existing beyond taxation. It is not unlikely that within the next decade, following the general trends on neoliberal policies of India, online sports betting will be legalized. Yet, on the basis of the present study, I can only imagine that an online betting market would be a marginal market.

In India in recent years, the advocacy for legalizing betting on other sports such as cricket has gained pace, not only in order to avoid match-fixing, but also as a way to channelize betting through legal economies, as discussed in chapter one. This study nevertheless shows that a legal betting market does not necessarily rule out illegal markets. Part of the reason for this is that there is a preference for the illegal betting market, which on the one hand may be considered more

legitimate than the betting markets tied into corporate and state economy, and on the other hand may offer more sought after odds.

Technological developments play a significant role in creating various odds. In India, cell phones have had a profound effect on the operational logic behind the odds, as exemplified in the role of the cutter and that of the mystic *daba*. The cell phone changes the geographical scale of the betting markets by enabling betting in absentia and it reconfigures the dynamics of the markets as well. As a result, the trajectory of odds becomes more complex and the development more unpredictable both for bookmakers and bettors. Yet, in order to understand where the gravity of the horse betting market in India lies, it is the cell phone and not the totalisator that is the central device, despite nationwide statistics showing that the off-course totalisators generate the majority of the betting turnover in India. As part of this, economic value is generated in the dominantly informal economy and not in the formal economy, and the value generation is enabled through communication technology rather than digitalized algorithms. This is, paradoxically, a process that has to do with technological developments, but only the technological development related to communication, and not programmed calculation.

## **Conclusion**

The perception of the totalisator is parallel to the perception of legal economy in Delhi, and thus understanding the neglect of the totalisator at the racecourse reveals more behind the mistrust in legal formalized economy in Delhi. An important part of conceptualizing the racecourse as a site for deception has to do with the fact that it is legal, and therefore integrated into a political culture which is basically not trusted, as it is believed to mask concealed economies of self-interested players.

In this chapter I have shown how the preference for betting with bookmakers is tied to class, the history of economic governance in India, ideologies of corruption, fiscal policies, and technological inefficiencies. My examination of the coexistence of bookmakers and totalisator technologies in the microcosm of the Delhi racecourse has also characterized the operation of parallel economies, formal and informal, as something connected to class, economic history, technological developments and distrust in systems of governance.

The totalisator is not only set in a deceptive system at the racecourse, it exists as a materialization of a corrupt and deceptive system of concealed economy. And as a consequence of

the lack of trust in the totalisator and everything it represents, the totalisator comes to project far from any economic totality, but rather, a marginalized formal economy. The totalisator is either actively targeted as an impossible possibility for fairness at the racecourse, by someone like Rajeev, or just passed by or ignored by bettors as well as bookmakers.

In the social studies of finance (Callon, Millo, and Muniesa 2007; Carruthers and Kim 2011), as well as in newer studies on gambling (Schüll 2012; Cassidy 2012), the markets examined are increasingly located in machines. However, this chapter stands as a case showing how there may be parallel markets lying in the shadows of legal betting and finance, which should not escape ethnographic attention. Despite technological developments towards automated trading and online gambling, it is important not to lose sight of the markets for speculation existing beyond these machines. At the Delhi racecourse, even though the machines and software are there for a legal market of controlled risks, the machines are not utilized. Such machines are designed to encompass the abstraction of a totally graspable economy. However, this is far from how all economies operate or are imagined to exist. This is not to say that we should not focus on devices, but we should be aware what kinds of devices we focus on. Whereas the totalisator is a device for a totalizing economy encompassing all available information, the cell phone enables information to exist at a more decentralized level. Bookmaking systems linked to larger undefined networks of information and exchange, through the cell phone, create a different ground from which speculations in futures exist and odds are generated, than that of totalizing technologies. It not only allows for concealed economies to exist, but also creates an expanded space in which the concealed can be imagined.



## **Speculating on speculation: Conclusion and perspectives**

In the thesis I have explored from various angles, historically, speculatively, socially, economically and technologically, how the Delhi racecourse is a site interpreted as a site of deception and concealed economy. In this last part of the thesis, first, I want to sum up what the contexts are for this interpretation. Second, I will recapitulate the overall argument of the thesis and the conclusions from the separate chapters. Third, I will give suggestions for further research in the space between anthropology of gambling and finance by moving towards an anthropology of speculation, examining examples of what I term betting capitalism. And finally, I will present some recursive reflections on the methods of inquiry and analysis through which the thesis has come into being, while pointing towards analogs between the bettor and the anthropologist who are both involved in what may be seen as speculative endeavors.

### **Interpretative contexts**

When explaining my study to colleagues and others who were interested, I have often been asked whether it was true that the races at the Delhi racecourse are fixed. The extent that races and futures are in fact fixed at the Delhi racecourse is not something that I can prove, yet what I can prove is that this unprovable assumption frames economic calculations, transactions and social relationships at the racecourse.

In the thesis, I have not examined one single overarching interpretation of the racecourse, but I have uncovered it specifically from the point of view of bettors, and to some extent bookmakers, who come to the racecourse on a more or less daily basis. Had I focused more on the producers of racing, the jockeys, large-scale horse owners, trainers, caretakers and breeders, the significance of the horse would probably have been more prominent. The bettors maintain that to them, it is all about betting. Still, I have found the bettors' interpretation of the horses particularly intriguing as they exemplified a speculative approach to horses, and as this is what makes the betting economy at the Delhi racecourse.

At the racecourse bettors were oriented towards an interpretation of the economic microcosm of the racecourse imagined to be dominated by concealed economies. These

interpretations should be understood in the context of inequalities, economic growth, discourses of corruption, as well as to gambling addiction.

Let me start with inequality. The fact that the racecourse is surrounded by both immense wealth (the Prime Minister's house and the Delhi Gymkhana Club) and immense poverty (the slums inhabited by jockeys and horse caretakers) fuels doubt in the rules of the game by which horse racing is being played. Because of this inequality, it cannot be expected that people can join under the rules of the sporting game of horse racing, for some jockeys are riding for the survival of their families.

But inequality does not explain everything. It is not only jockey's who enables the deceptive game. The other side of it has to do with greed among those who already have. Bettors talked about the greed of Delhi, and the wish for money when they tried to make sense of the racecourse economy. This greed was understood as part of humanity (and the story of the Mahabharata was used to exemplify this,) however, there was an experience of the greed having accelerated along with the development of the "New India". The interpretation of the racecourse was thus tied into reflections on the galloping neoliberal Indian growth economy and the social and moral consequences of this development. This was a context where people were considered to be aiming for money and more than prestige. At the racecourse this idea was reflected in the assumption of that the money of betting was more lucrative than the prestige of winning.

A third context for the interpretation of the racecourse as a deceptive setting is tied to discourses of corruption, part of everyday conversations in Delhi. As part of this discourse, the state is not trusted as a manager of economy. It is thought to be illegitimately taking money from people rather than to be working in their interest. The Delhi racecourse, tied to its colonial history, is set up along models and procedures for management of economy, with similarities to the state. The racecourse itself thus is seen as a replication of the state economy itself. Part of the interpretation of the racecourse as a site of deception is thus connected to its ties to colonial technologies of power and, paradoxically, to the fact that it is a legal place for gambling.

The last context for the interpretation of the racecourse as a place of deception, which I want to emphasize here, has to do with personal histories and addiction. I have purposely not problematized addiction as a theme of study in this thesis, as the focus has been on understanding the decision-making processes of bettors in an embedded market and not the psychological and economic problems that could be connected to their betting habits. Yet, part of the interpretation of the racecourse, I suggest, is tied to addiction. One of the characteristics of gambling addiction

involves a lack of trust in oneself, as the bettor is not fully in control of his own life. It also involves lying to family members and even doing illegal acts for the sake of more gambling (Raylu and Oei 2002; Petry 2010; Simonsen and Møhl 2010). In this sense, the Delhi racecourse can be seen as an economy of addiction, not simply because it depends on men with gambling addictions, but because the interpretation of the economy mirrors the bettors' understanding of themselves. They see themselves and each other as people who are not to be trusted, who are lying, and driven by the wish for money and greed rather than prestige. This does not mean that the interpretation of the Delhi racecourse is simply a reflection of the bettors' inner lives. What I suggest is that the psychology of the bettors adds an edge to the interpretation of the Delhi racecourse set in a context of inequality and greed.

This thesis has shown how the above interpretative contexts, which frame the racecourse as a site of deception, are not just used to describe economy, but are also generative for how the economy of the racecourse operates. In the thesis, I have linked the interpretative context of deception to practices and policies. In each chapter, I have thus shown how the interpretative frame of the racecourse as being a place of deception has manifested in jurisdiction, prediction, friendship, and the betting economy in between the legal and illegal realm.

## **Thesis results**

In this section, I will summarize the results of each chapter. My entry to the summaries is an emphasis of the Delhi racecourse as a speculative space. As a consequence of the interpretation of the racecourse as deceptive, betting has become a speculation on concealed economies of bribes and other secondary economic activity. The speculative space is a place in which theories of delusive people and economies are entwined with profit-seeking as a primary goal. It is a space where the interpretation of the economy also shapes the economy.

The racecourse is tied to a history of colonialism and betting in India (chapter one). Horse racing in cities on the Indian subcontinent has developed from a sport used by the British elite to test the strength and speed of their horses to a ground for speculation among the Indian public. The case of horse racing, as well as cricket, shows how betting markets have the power to alter the symbolic significance of spectator sports as the players come under suspicion of double dealing in parallel economies: the sports economy and the betting economy. Betting markets thus foreground the possibility for deception in sports. With an attention to a debated history of jurisdiction and

regulation of horse race betting, I have shown how this dark side of the sport has been problematized.

Horse racing is a ground for speculation on future outcomes (chapter two). The knowledge production existing at the Delhi racecourse is focused on inside information, speculations on the intentions of people, as well as monitoring what other people are doing, rather than an analytical approach to the qualities of the horses. Predictions of the future are focused on figuring out the intentions of people imagined to be acting with the goal of serving their own material interests “by hook or by crook”. The speculation to some extent challenges the hierarchy of knowledge tied to class, because knowledge about the future is located in webs of information crossing class boundaries.

The speculative realm frames a particular kind of sociality, which builds upon suspicion (chapter three). This is a sociality in which people might help each other out by, among other things, handing out loans, and for that reason, friends are important. Nevertheless, the kinds of friendships established at the racecourse remain within a closed sphere hidden from families. The relationships build on the idea that everyone present in the speculative space is basically 1) acting out of the desire for money and 2) not telling the truth. The possibility for deception among friends is inherent in the friendships, which are based less on emotions than utility.

In the speculative space of the racecourse economic value develops in the intersection between the visible and the concealed economy (chapter four). The possibility for deception means that there are tendencies for bettors to imitate people assumed to know the fixed future, which results in prices escalating and polarizing. This escalation is tied to an understanding of knowledge about the future as something hidden, which can nevertheless be revealed in the market movements. Odds proved a compelling ground from which to examine how the “theory” of the racecourse, namely that each race might be fixed, was reflected in how odds were set and interpreted. The odds developed from a monitoring of people and odds rather than a monitoring of the horses. This was because signs of concealed money were sought through the movement of odds, which were believed to give an indication of a possibly fixed future. The overall pattern of polarized odds was thus a manifestation of the shared assumption of the racecourse as a deceptive place.

The kind of speculative market I have described is defined by its existence in between legal and illegal economies, with the majority of transactions existing as part of an illegal economy (chapter five). This is tied to a basic mistrust in institutions for formal economy, which are considered corrupt. Consequently the main part of the economy exists beyond digitalized

algorithms. The technology that enables the market to exist is the cell phone rather than the computer. With the cell phone, the illegal speculative markets have gone from operating through an imitation of legal markets to operating independently from legal markets.

As part of the mistrust in the legal economic channels, very little money is collected through tax to cover expenses at the racecourse. This results in poor conditions for the horses as well as a relatively small prize economy compared to the economy of betting. The money can thus be won in the betting market and not from the racecourse economy, which sets up the races for fixed futures and the racecourse to be interpreted as deceptive. Therefore, it becomes difficult to determine whether it is the interpretation of the racecourse as deceptive that causes it to be neglected, or if it is deceptive practices that create the interpretation. The point is that the interpretation and the practices are closely interlinked.

Overall, the thesis has examined speculations in economies of concealment at the Delhi racecourse, giving insight into mysterious layers in the Indian economy existing in between the legal and the illegal, the visible and the invisible, and between interpretation and practice. In the chapters I have engaged in the field of study from various diachronic and synchronic perspectives by following people, laws, technologies and odds. I have approached the Delhi racecourse as a site tied to local economies, global technological and legal developments. As part of this approach, I have identified the racecourse as a site that shares a history with the fields of gambling and finance.

## **Betting capitalism**

Bringing together the anthropology of gambling and finance and working towards an anthropology of speculation not only provided a useful frame for my study, but this merging of approaches may also open up to new areas for research into the many faces of financial capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In public and academic debates after the financial crisis in 2008, financial capitalism has been compared with gambling through the concept of “casino capitalism” (Cassidy 2009). Rebecca Cassidy has pointed out that this metaphor does not in fact describe what is at stake. In order for an analog to gambling to have any analytical or political impact, one has to have a more nuanced understanding of gambling economies. The casino is an example of a place set up for the consumption of risk in a very controlled and seemingly transparent setting, not unlike the

totalisator<sup>1</sup>. Casino capitalism as a term does not describe financial capitalism and the process of “financialization” (Krippner 2011) in which more of the economy is located in financial products, and where finance has become popularized (Clark, Thrift, and Tickell 2004). If we were to stick with a gambling metaphor to describe finance, *betting capitalism* would be a more appropriate term than casino capitalism, and it also comes closer to the language used by financial traders themselves, who describe their activity as betting rather than trading.

Betting capitalism, unlike casino capitalism, has the potential to move beyond the distinction between legal and illegal economies. Casinos may be involved in illegal businesses, however, they nevertheless exist as part of a legal economy subject to taxation. When the gambling legislation in India went from targeting “gaming houses”, which would be the equivalent to an illegal casino, to banning “wagering” and “betting” as well (Birla 2009), this was to capture a form of gambling which was associated with the development of communication technologies which enabled figures to travel across locations, and where an additional speculative economy could be added to an economy tied to modes of production.

In the introduction, I argued that studies on the anthropology of gambling might benefit from approaching forms of gambling more as a form of economic decision-making than a social game, and find inspiration in the anthropology of finance. Here I suggest the reverse, that the anthropology of finance might benefit from looking into the part of the anthropology of gambling dealing specifically with betting. Exploring various betting sites thus provides an opportunity to understand speculative practices beyond the closed doors of Wall Street, thereby avoiding a Western-centric understanding of speculation as existing mainly within the formal economy.

What I propose is that the derivative market, where various products tied to movements and outcomes in the stock market have hijacked the stock market, originally meant to create value, supporting production in capitalistic ventures (LiPuma and Lee 2004). Derivative markets have enabled speculations on other people’s speculations rather than on the future popularity of a particular product. Winning is sought from predicting bankruptcies rather than successful business ventures (Appadurai 2011). Similarly, it may be argued that at the Delhi racecourse, the betting

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<sup>1</sup> The casino is the ultimate representation of the development of modern forms of gambling where strangers either play against each other, the casino or a machine, in games where the casino is set to win (Cassidy 2009; Schüll 2012). It has been the development of such technologies, which enable gambling to be controlled at the level of what Geertz has termed the firm type economy, that explains shifts in gambling policies. Gambling sites have become grounds for systematic tax collection and pure profit-raising for the state (Sallaz 2006).

market, in which people speculate on other people's speculations in the odds market, has hijacked the sport of horse racing and the economy tied to the breeding of horses. In modern capitalism, the "real" economy of production has been exceeded by the financial economy, which now makes up more than two-thirds of all monetary transactions (Krippner 2011).

Similarly, at the Delhi racecourse, the betting economy exceeds the economy tied to the production of horses, which involves both the economy of breeding and racing. In this space in which the economy is dominated by the betting economy, the real winners are believed to be those who can successfully lose a race and profit from the loss. By focusing on the speculations on fixed futures, this study can be read as an example of speculation on the failure of the "real" economy, based on hard work with horses and the economy of breeding and prizes. The betting economy is larger than the horse economy, and this affects the way that value is generated in the speculative market of odds. The study exemplifies the kind of value generation tied to speculation, in which the inherent qualities of the object and its possibilities for developing, in this case the horses, becomes of secondary significance to the speculative realm of understanding the concealed intentions of people in the speculative market.

It has been argued that the financial crisis has resulted in an emerging lack of faith in the current capitalistic model (Stiglitz 2010). The financial crisis has foreshadowed ways in which players in the center of the game can manipulate the financial system in order to make personal profit. In this sense, everyone is now experiencing the consequences of a game that is rigged. Yet, doubt does not simply rule out speculation, but fuels it, and can exist side-by-side with faith (Miyazaki 2013, 68). Based on my research, I foreground doubt as the main influence on speculations at the racecourse. Betting is thus not done based on faith in horses, but on mistrust and doubt in people. Mistrust and doubt is not problematic for action – it frames action. In this study, I saw how races thought to be dominated by the "real economy" of breeding and prizes were not necessarily the races that were most popular among bettors. This reinforces my point that at the racecourse, what is speculated in is the failure of the economy of the horses as well as the legal economy at large.

While studies of anthropology of finance are critical in understanding modern financial capitalism, their frames remain narrow; speculative practices continue to be situated within formal and contemporary financial markets. My study shows how legal markets can both enable illegal markets for speculation or dark finance and, in a case like India, be marginalized in relation to the formal markets. I suggest that the field of anthropology of finance may benefit from moving beyond

Western-centric legal markets for speculation (located in offices at expensive addresses using state of the art technologies), and find inspiration from the history and anthropology of gambling. This demands a slight move away from a focus on calculative machines and economic theories in the generation of financial markets, which is also prevalent in the social studies of finance (Callon 1998; MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu 2007; Beunza, Hardie, and MacKenzie 2006; Beunza and Garud 2007). Instead, a focus on information technologies, such as the cell phone, and speculations in the blurred realm of illegal markets would provide a more nuanced understanding of the extended reach of betting capitalism in the age of communication. I hope that the present study, in making analogies between betting and finance, and by providing an overview of the historical context of the developments of technologies and law, can serve as an example of how such a mapping of practices on the fringes of financial/betting capitalism, may be approached.

### **Recursive speculation**

My fieldwork at the racecourse not only revealed an economic microcosm, but it also invited me to reflect on my own methodology and mode of analysis part of the knowledge production of writing within an anthropological framework.

The study is primarily based on participant observation at the racecourse where I myself acted as a bettor and speculator. The method enabled me to create a rapport among bettors in a space morally condemned and it also created a certain awareness of the procedures of prediction and where to locate signs of fixed futures. By betting I established relationships of confidence with my co-bettors where I, as an accomplice, was invited in on the betting game as well as the double life led by the bettors – one with their fellow bettors and one with their families. Even then, or maybe because of it, I could not help but question the reliability of the information I was given. Lies and secrecy were common practices among the bettors, and part of the fieldwork was not only uncovering a truth, but the speculations about the truth in a space in which everyone was considered to be untrustworthy, self-interested and deceptive. Using a variety of methods, including participant observation, interviews and a survey, as well as following bettors in different settings at various times of the day, enabled me to identify how bettors gave conflicting information in different contexts. Rather than looking for a truth, I tried to identify patterns in the kind of information that was part of various contexts.

The biggest challenge during the fieldwork was a personal challenge brought about by my gender. I was unsure of the intentions the bettors had for engaging in friendships with me, and they also had every right to question my intentions for wanting to be friends with them. When it came down to it, my endeavors to establish friendships with them were certainly motivated by my own aims of doing good research which provided me with the best opportunities for a future academic career, rather than making friends for life. In that case, the ambiguity of our friendships went both ways. As a result, I was living up to the idea of the basis for friendship established at the racecourse as something based on self-interest and hidden intentions. In the end, the friendships were only really enacted when we spent time as betting friends. After my fieldwork, I was not to be found at the racecourse anymore. However, when I went back to the racecourse without notice after a year, Rajeev, Bobbi and Abi asked, “Where were you?” before everything went back to normal. Our relationships were able to continue where we had left off, which was right there at the racecourse. The relationship was not established beyond time and space, but was bound to time and space and only existed in one context, which was the betting context.

The aim of the study was to understand the betting market and decision making within it, and not as such to raise awareness of and help the bettors with gambling addiction, who I encountered. Yet, I hope that my research will provide insight into how gambling disorders are not simply a universal measurable pathology, but are located in the economic and social structures in which the gambling takes place. Yet, by describing the market for betting in greater detail, the study can just as well be used by companies trying to develop ways of getting more people to bet in India and to get more money out of them if the betting laws become more liberal (which I would not be surprised about). In the end, the study is more about economy than about addiction. Yet, it gives insight into the kinds of markets for risk, under which an addiction to risk can develop.

During my fieldwork, I often went to bed at night with an unsettled feeling of wanting to run away from everything. However, the next morning, once the soothing music from the racecourse started playing in my head as the race meeting was getting closer, I could not get to the racecourse fast enough, escaping conflicts in my own family life caused by my preoccupation with my study at the racecourse. At the racecourse I enjoyed interacting with male companions in a playful way, including laughing at their sexual jokes, which represented an interaction with men which at times seemed liberating, as it enabled me to have male-female friendship in an Indian context where this was rather uncommon. Also, by winning money I got temporary satisfaction which only increased as my wagers went from being based on random selections, such as choosing by the name of the

horse, to other peoples' suggestions, to speculations on the patterns of people behind the races and picking up inside information.

Speculations were not only an empirical reality; they also inspired me to think of my own interpretive strategy (Riles 2004; Miyazaki 2006; Miyazaki 2007; Maurer 2002) (Holbraad 2005). In my analytical process, I was trying to grasp how money exchanges I had never seen were part of the reality I was unfolding. As with speculators in betting markets and finance, anthropologists in their preoccupation with imaginaries and interpretative levels of reality are also oriented towards grasping the possible connections between various observations in the microcosms we study. Anthropologists engage in an analytical task, which lies in between the systematic observation of patterns and interpretations of what cannot be observed in a world of materiality. In doing so, we establish links between the visible and the invisible, the mythical and the historical, the economic and the cultural.

Neither betting nor anthropology is an exact science aiming to arrive at provable realities. They are speculative analytical endeavors, where connections in the world that cannot be proven through science are attempted at being comprehended. As part of our approach, we apply various methodologies because we do not believe that there is only one level of reality which can simply be observed or narrated. We look for truths behind what we see and hear, because in the end we do not fully trust the single informants to be able to convey the full truth to us. We interpret informants in terms of how they are positioned in the microcosm and what their strategies in this might be. This means that we might not think of them as liars, but at least we think of them as positioned in such a way that they can tell some parts of a truth, but others parts they either have to hide or to adjust. Furthermore, in our fieldwork we can be confronted with doubts as to what it is the informants want to get out of us. Sometimes, we find it is money. This puts us in a speculative and at times mistrusting relationship to our fields of study.

Bettors are guided by the wish to make money and be recognized by fellow bettors by predicting the future through understanding the connections and patterns of the present. Anthropologists are also guided by the wish to establish theories about possible connections in a world of visible and invisible spheres alongside their wish to make a career in academia, which includes recognition among fellow academics and making money in the form of a monthly income.

Bettors at the Delhi racecourse often used the racecourse to reflect upon themselves, Delhi itself, their version of economic man, and men who act as individuals out of either need or greed. The racecourse was a microcosm from where they reflected upon a macrocosm of an Indian

economic reality. Likewise, I as an anthropologist, used the racecourse as a microcosm to grasp aspects of Indian economy as well as betting capitalism. This connection established between a micro- and a macrocosm is in itself speculative, in the sense that the macrocosm can, per definition, not fully be seen or known, as it exists on a scale beyond human perception. Yet the microcosm allows us to make observations and interpretations through which we try to grasp aspects of an incomprehensible totality.

At the racecourse, the bettors and I became co-speculators, at least for some part of the way, both methodologically and analytically, on the market for odds. Yet, whereas the bettors were caught in the rhythm of the racecourse, always oriented at figuring out what was going to happen next within the 30 minute timeframe between races, I had the luxury to be able to step back once the fieldwork was over, and spend more than two years exploring larger economic, geographical and historical contexts in which to understand the microcosm of the Delhi racecourse.

The Delhi racecourse was a uniquely compelling site in which to map a local market in India as part of the speculative market behavior involved the bettors themselves trying to decode the market and understand its inner logic. A great portion of this logic, I found, was in its own interpretation – or speculation if you may – as a ground for deception. The running of the racecourse was entwined with imaginations of how the rules of the game were being played and speculations of the intent of each actor. This meant that the focus was always on the hidden objectives represented in economic transaction, while the horses were running in the background.



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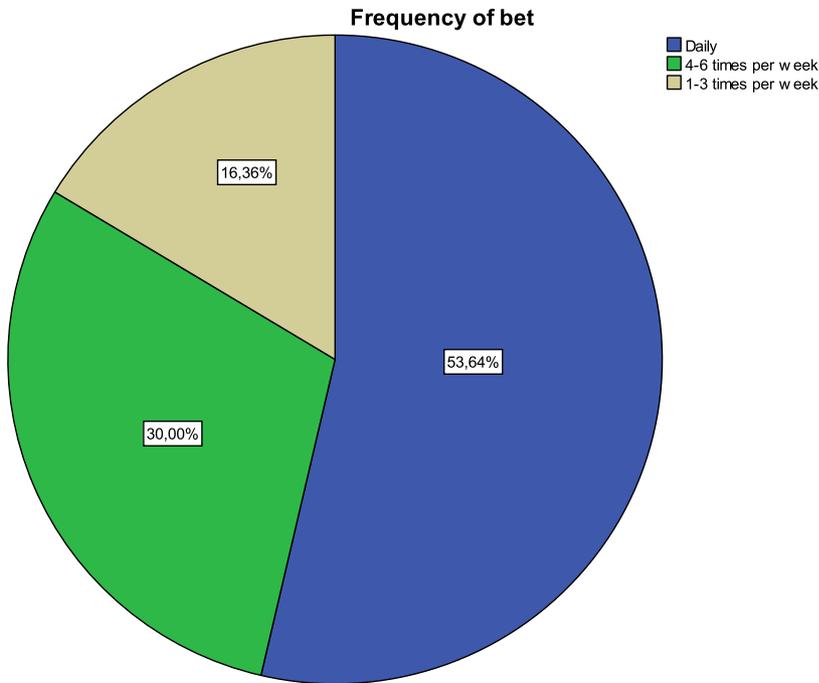
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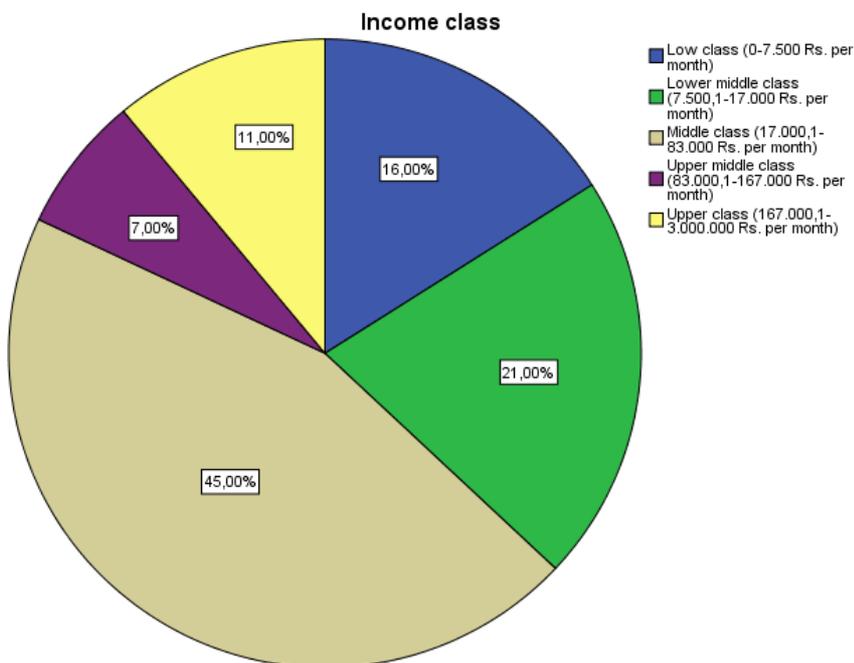
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# Appendix A: Descriptive data on bettors at Delhi racecourse

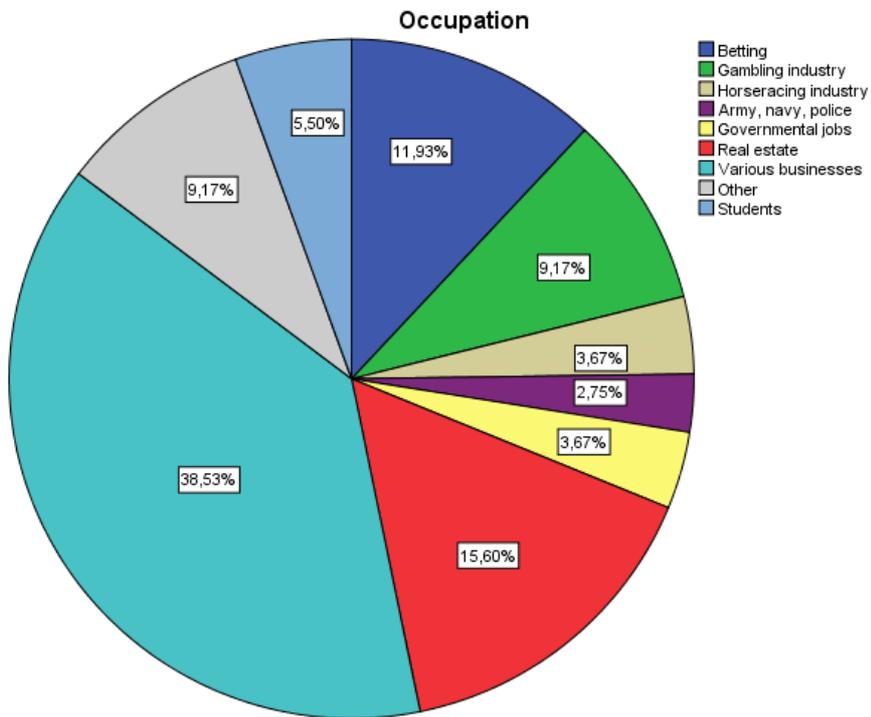
## Frequency of racecourse betting



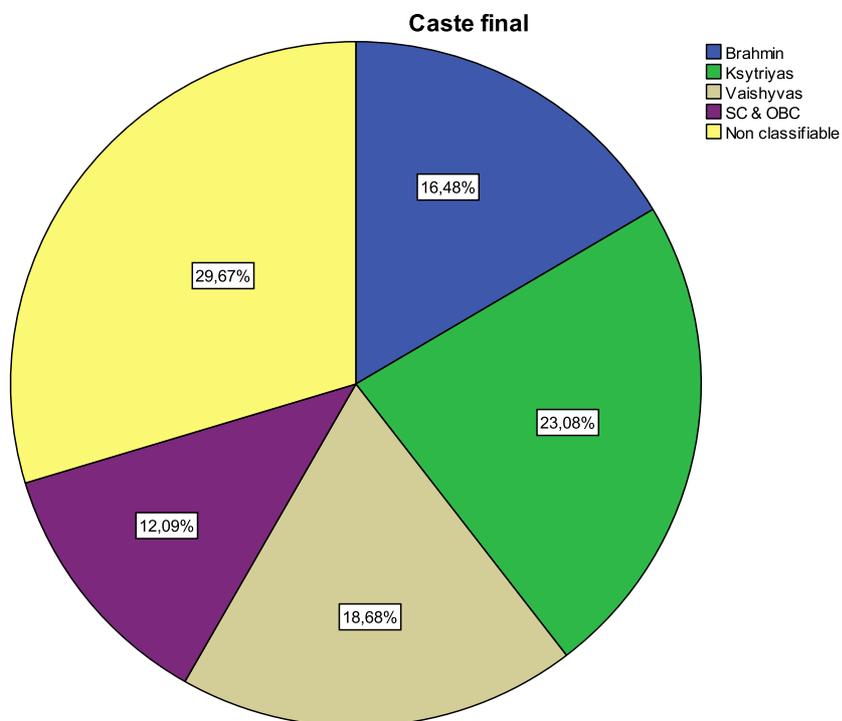
## Income class (categories based on McKinsey and Company (2007) and NCAER (2005))



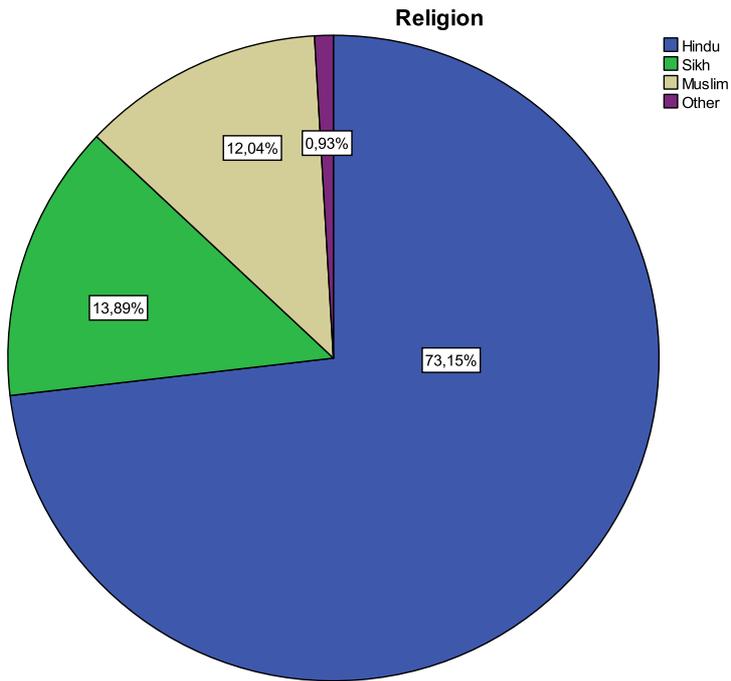
## Occupation



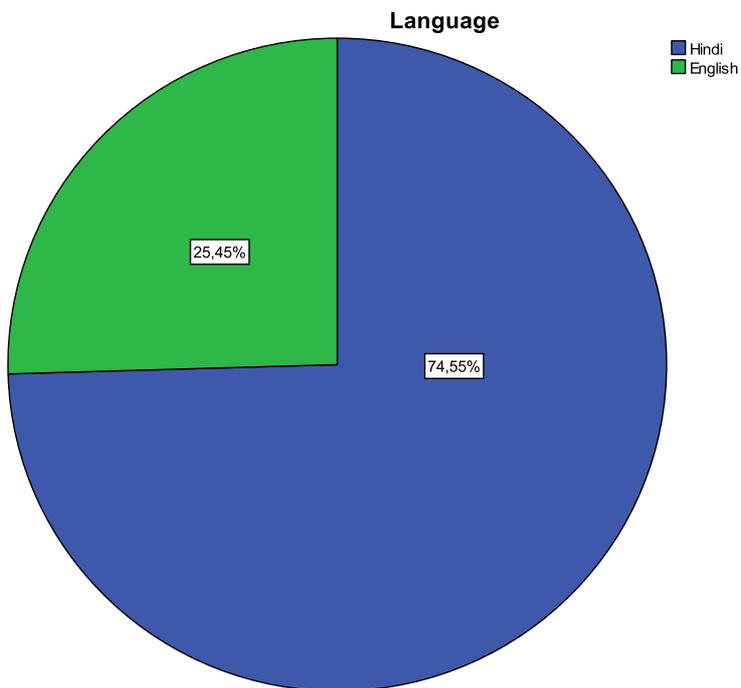
## Caste



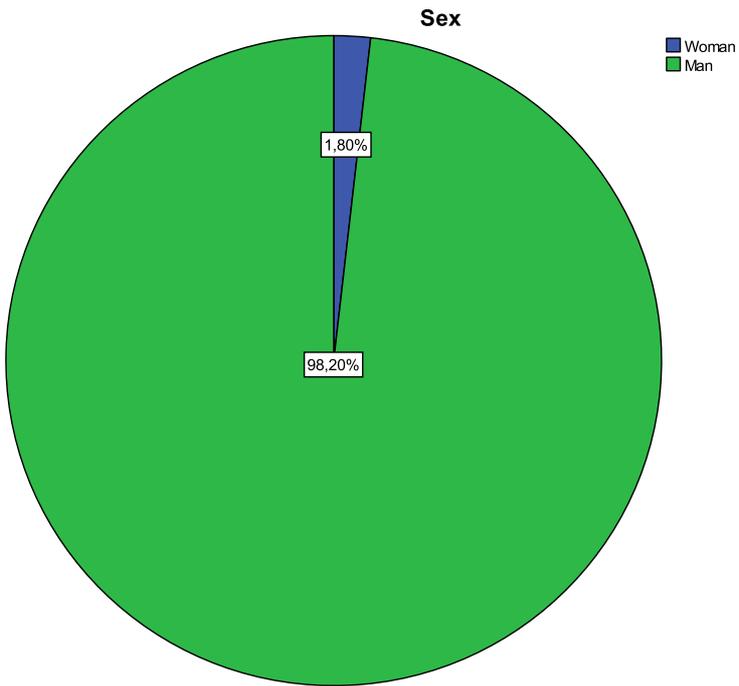
## Religious affiliation



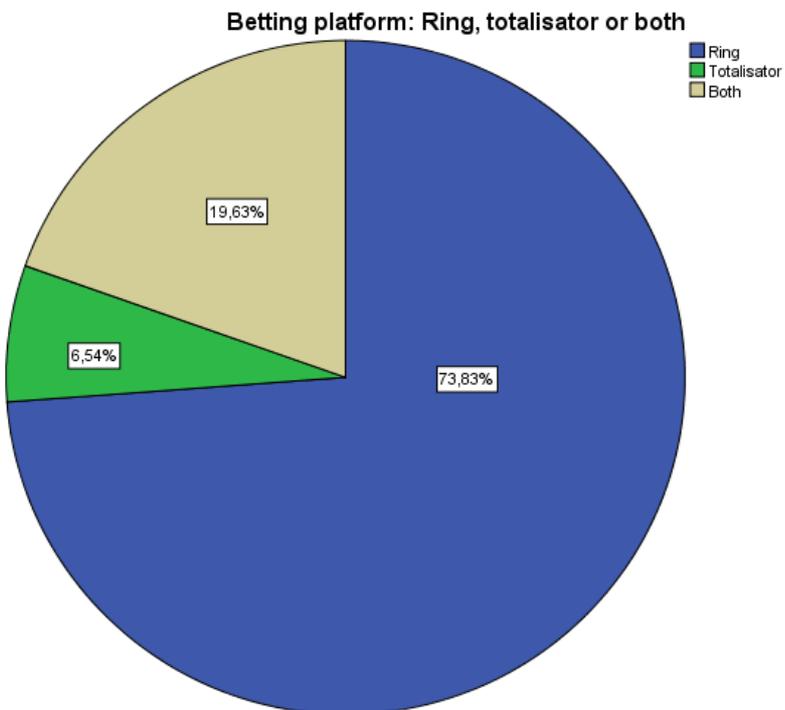
## Language



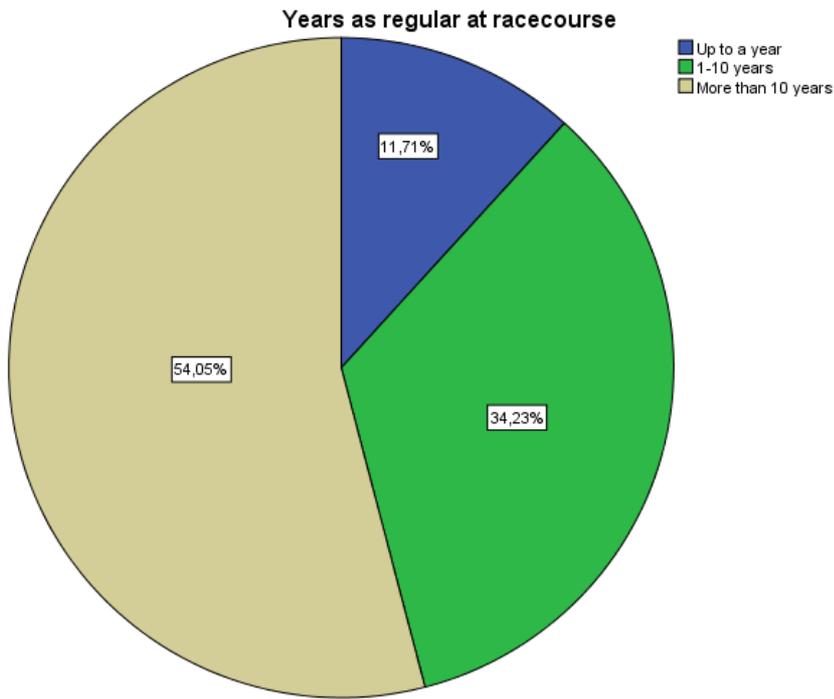
## Sex



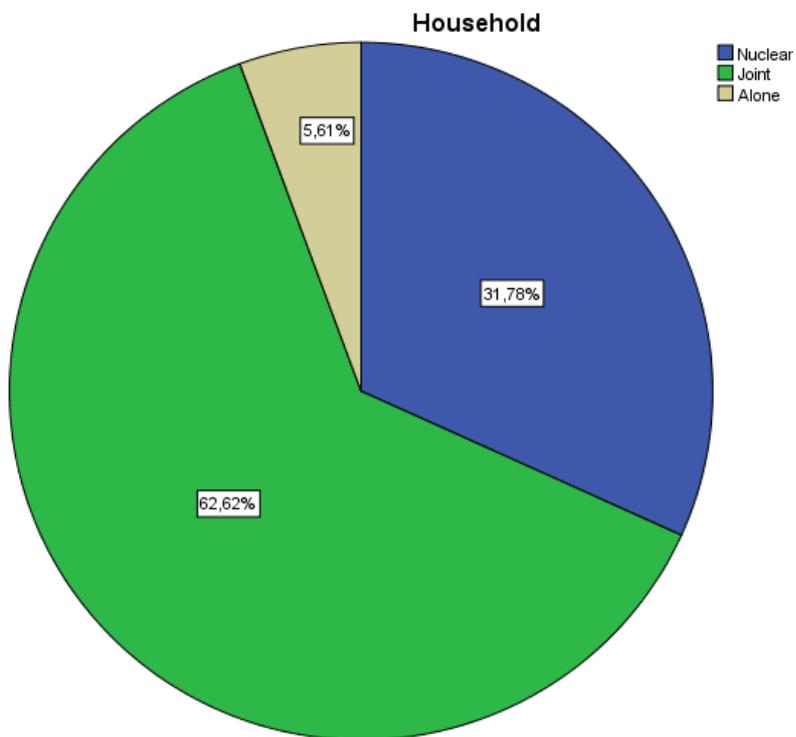
## Betting platform used



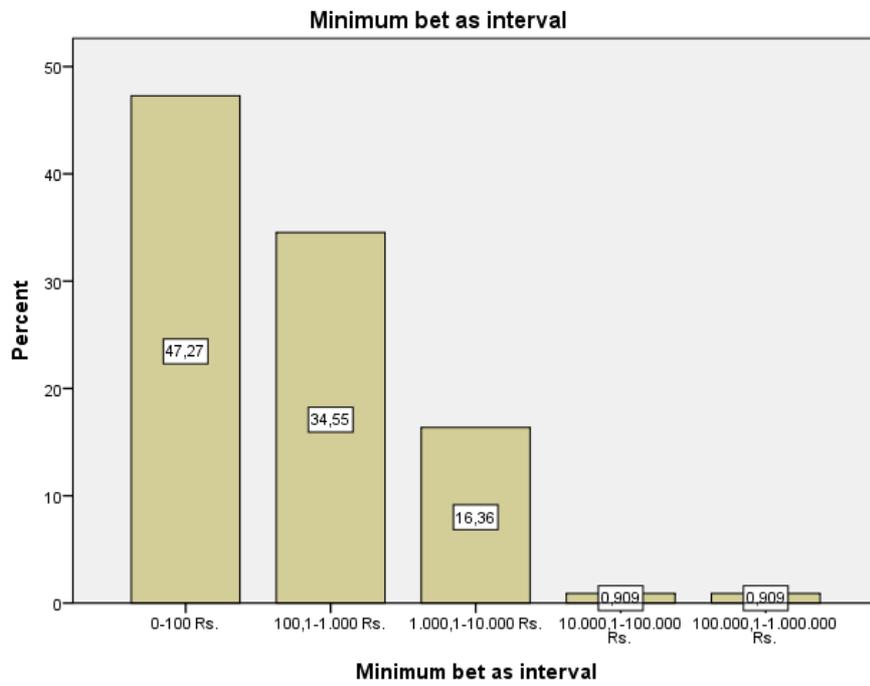
## Years as regular at the racecourse



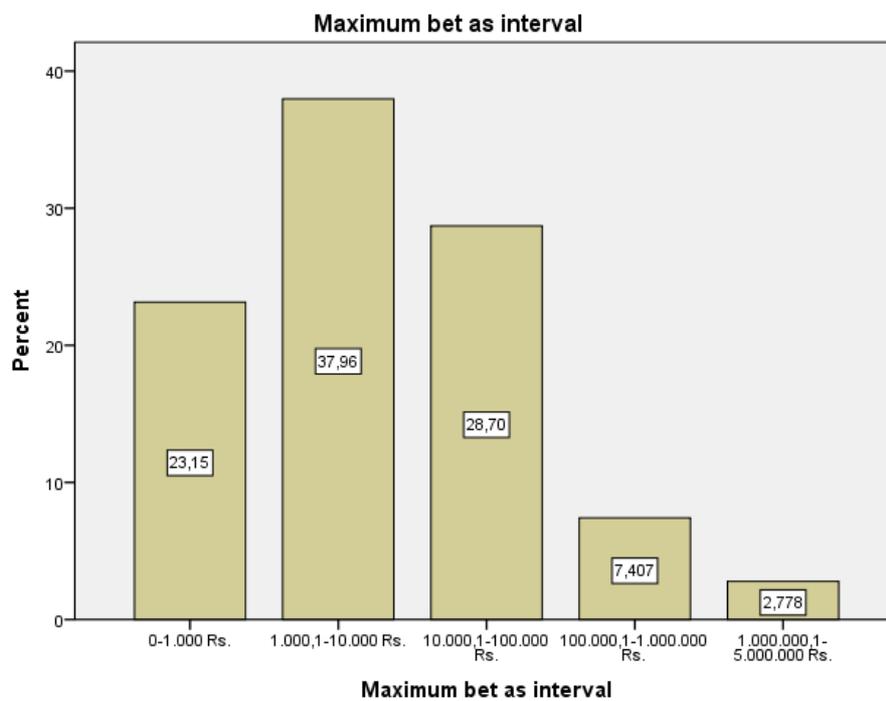
## Household



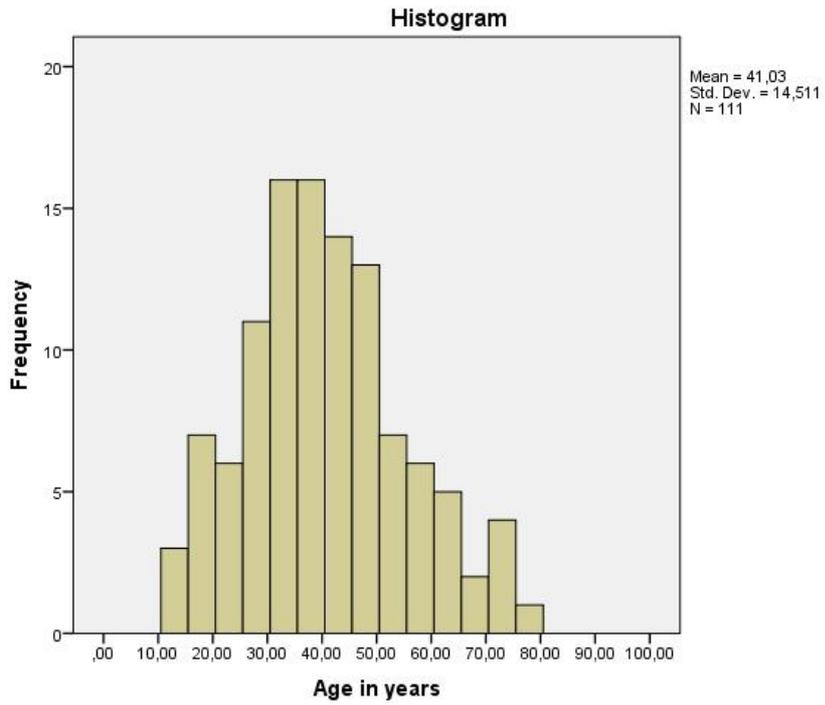
### Minimum bet in rupees



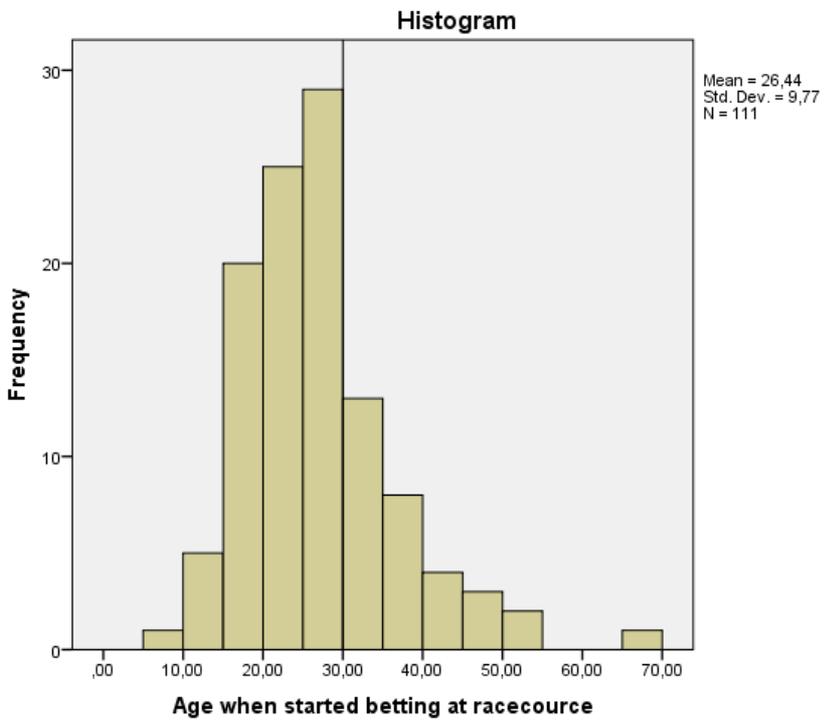
### Maximum bet in rupees



### Age in years



### Age when started betting at racecourse





## Appendix B: The use of totalisator vs. betting ring

Cross tabulation analysis describing populations in terms of betting volume and betting platform

**Maximum bet as interval [row] – betting platform [column]: ring, totalisator or both**

Maximum bet as interval \* Betting platform: Ring, totalisator or both Crosstabulation

% within Maximum bet as interval

		Betting platform: Ring, totalisator or both			Total
		Ring	Totalisator	Both	
Maximum bet as interval	0-1.000 Rs.	39,1%	21,7%	39,1%	100,0%
	1.000,1-10.000 Rs.	85,0%	2,5%	12,5%	100,0%
	10.000,1-100.000 Rs.	80,6%		19,4%	100,0%
	100.000,1-1.000.000 Rs.	100,0%			100,0%
	1.000.000,1-5.000.000 Rs.	66,7%		33,3%	100,0%
Total		74,3%	5,7%	20,0%	100,0%

**Income class [row] – betting platform [column]: ring, totalisator or both**

Income class \* Betting platform: Ring, totalisator or both Crosstabulation

% within Income class

		Betting platform: Ring, totalisator or both			Total
		Ring	Totalisator	Both	
Income class	Low class	37,5%	25,0%	37,5%	100,0%
	Lower middle class	45,0%	15,0%	40,0%	100,0%
	Middle class	95,5%		4,5%	100,0%
	Upper middle class	71,4%		28,6%	100,0%
	Upper class	90,9%		9,1%	100,0%
Total		73,5%	7,1%	19,4%	100,0%

**Years as regular at racecourse [row] – betting platform [column]: ring, totalisator or both**

**Years as regular at racecourse \* Betting platform: Ring, totalisator or both Crosstabulation**

% within Years as regular at racecourse

		Betting platform: Ring, totalisator or both			Total
		Ring	Totalisator	Both	
Years as regular at racecourse	Up to a year	61,5%	7,7%	30,8%	100,0%
	1-10 years	68,4%	7,9%	23,7%	100,0%
	More than 10 years	80,4%	5,4%	14,3%	100,0%
Total		73,8%	6,5%	19,6%	100,0%

**Caste [row] – betting platform [column]: ring, totalisator or both**

**Caste \* Betting platform: Ring, totalisator or both Crosstabulation**

% within Caste

		Betting platform: Ring, totalisator or both			Total
		Ring	Totalisator	Both	
Caste	Brahmin	60,0%	6,7%	33,3%	100,0%
	Ksytriyas	76,2%		23,8%	100,0%
	Vaishyvas	88,2%	5,9%	5,9%	100,0%
	SC & OBC	27,3%	36,4%	36,4%	100,0%
	Non classifiable	96,2%	3,8%		100,0%
Total		75,6%	7,8%	16,7%	100,0%

## Appendix C: Glossary

<b>Arabian</b>	A horse bred originally from the Arabian Peninsula.
<b>Back</b>	To bet on a horse.
<b>Bhav</b>	Odds, lit. Price.
<b>Bookmaker</b>	A man or firm offering fixed odds betting.
<b>Country-bred</b>	An Indian horse breed mixed of ponies originating from the Himalayan region, also called "Indian country bred".
<b>Cutter</b>	Someone who best for others via cell phone and makes a cut from margins in odds.
<b>Cup race</b>	A yearly prestigious races with promising horses running, the presence of non-regular bettors, and with prestige and large prize of money and a golden or silvery cup. Also called invitation races.
<b>Daba</b>	A telephone service that provides the mean odds of the telephone based illegal bookmakers.
<b>Eat money</b>	To win from betting.
<b>Eat a bet</b>	To bet against the winner through a bookmaker.
<b>Even odds</b>	Odds 1/1; same amount can be won as what is wagered.
<b>Favorite horse</b>	The horse considered to have the best chances of winning.
<b>Fixed odds betting</b>	Betting based on odds given before result, often with bookmaker.
<b>Follow</b>	To imitate the betting of others.
<b>Give a horse</b>	To give a tip on a possible winner.
<b>Given odds</b>	The odds offered by bookmakers.
<b>Handicap race</b>	A races where weight is added to the horses saddles in order to level the probabilities of winning for the horses running.
<b>Handicapping</b>	A method of betting which involves calculating probabilities based on information on horses and the conditions under which they are running.
<b>Jeetna-hara</b>	A term used for a betting practice, lit. to win-die
<b>Kelna</b>	To bet on a horse, lit. to play.
<b>Khaanawallahs</b>	Bookmakers, lit. men selling food.
<b>Lay off bets</b>	A method of hedging risks where bookmakers place bets with other bookmakers.
<b>Licensed bookmaker</b>	A bookmaker who work from a bookmaker booth and pay for a license to do bookmaking.
<b>Long odds</b>	Odds with a large proportional payout, often given for horses considered unlikely to win.
<b>Long shot</b>	A horse considered to have few chances of winning.
<b>Market rate</b>	The best odds available in betting ring.
<b>Morning line</b>	The first odds offered (not a word used in the betting ring).
<b>Objection</b>	When a claim is made of foul riding by a racecourse official.
<b>Odds</b>	The ratio of payout if a bet is won.
<b>On job/not on job</b>	A horse which is being tried to to win/not tried to win.

<b>Off-course betting</b>	A term used both for betting in official betting shops and for illegal telephone based bookmaking.
<b>Paddock</b>	An enclosure where racehorses are paraded before a race.
<b>Paisa khaana</b>	To win, lit. to eat money.
<b>Pari-mutuel betting</b>	A form of betting where all bets of the same category are placed in one pool and where odds are determined after race result.
<b>Peoples favorite</b>	The horse with the shortest odds.
<b>Pool betting</b>	Another word for pari-mutuel betting.
<b>Prize money</b>	Money given from winning a race (or coming second, third and forth) also called stake money.
<b>Pull a horse</b>	When holding a horse back from winning, for example by pulling it in its rope.
<b>Punter</b>	another term for bettor, in India also used for someone who buys information from someone, and for someone betting with someone.
<b>Race-fixing</b>	A practice where the result are decided upon beforehand.
<b>Roll money</b>	A method of betting where all that has been won are added to the next bet.
<b>Runner</b>	Someone running to place bets for someone else.
<b>Short odds</b>	Odds with a small proportional payout, often given for horses considered very likely to win.
<b>Starting price</b>	Odds offered when race starts (not a term used at the Delhi racecourse)
<b>Thoroughbred</b>	A horse breed in the 17th and 18th century England for horseracing.
<b>Tipster</b>	Someone selling tips on what to bet.
<b>Totalisator</b>	The technology that calculates odds of pari-mutuel betting.
<b>Tax</b>	A term used both for racecourse taxes, state (Entertainment) taxes and bribes.
<b>Unlicensed bookmaker</b>	a bookmakers who enter the racecourse from buyin an entry ticket as bettors and act as bookmaker without a license.
<b>Winning-loosing</b>	A term used for a betting practice.

## Abstract

This Ph.D. thesis concerns betting in India. It is based on a long-term fieldwork at the Delhi racecourse and examines speculations behind the social and economic practices of betting on horse races. Speculation is understood as a method of profit seeking tied to interpretative methods on imprecise knowledge. These speculations are located in the context of an Indian economy, while parallels to global finance are drawn.

The thesis follows a number of bettors in their daily life inside and outside the racecourse. Furthermore, it traces the development of various technologies central to betting. The thesis focuses on the history of horse racing in India, modes of prediction, friendships among bettors and bookmakers, the interpretation of and work with odds, and the coexistence of legal and illegal economies.

The main argument of the study is that the Delhi racecourse is perceived as a site of deception, where a considerable amount of the races are being manipulated by jockeys, trainers, horse owners, race judges, and the mafia in order to extract money from the betting market. Betting is therefore oriented towards figuring out the hidden human intention clothed in economic transactions rather than the potentials of the horses. This interpretation of the racecourse generates complex market practices where the majority of the economy exists in illegal bookmaking, kickbacks, bribes and a market for insider information among people with little trust in each other and the procedures of the legal economy.

The dissertation is situated within the field of economic anthropology, and by researching a yet unexamined field of study, it contributes with insight into layers of the Indian economy, as well as to the anthropology of gambling. Concurrently, the thesis creates synergy between anthropology of gambling and anthropology of finance in order to bring to light an approach to speculation as a form of profit seeking tied to a knowledge production that is oriented towards the unobservable and the concealed.

## Resumé

Denne afhandling omhandler gambling i Indien. Afhandlingen er baseret på et længerevarende feltarbejde på Delhi's galopbane og undersøger de spekulationer som ligger bag de sociale og økonomiske praksisser der er forbundet med spil på heste. Spekulationer angribes som en måde at søge profit på baseret på fortolkninger forbundet med upræcis viden.. Disse spekulationer placeres i en indisk økonomisk kontekst samtidigt med at der drages paralleler til finansverdenen.

Afhandlingen følger et antal spillere indenfor og udenfor galopbanen. Tilmed undersøges udviklinger for teknologier forbundet med spillet. Afhandlingen på gambling lovgivningen, metoder for forudsigelse, venskaber mellem spillere og bookmakere, fortolkningen af og arbejdet med odds, samt sameksistensen af legal og illegal økonomi.

Hovedargumentet i afhandlingen er at galopbanen forstås som et sted for bedrageri, hvor et ikke ubetydeligt antal af hesteløb bliver manipuleret af jockeys, trænere, hesteejere, bookmakere, dommere, og mafiaen for at tjene penge fra spillemarkedet. Forbundet med bettningen er derfor et forsøg på at gennemskue forskellige menneskers hemmeligholdte intentioner og økonomiske transaktioner snarere end hestens potentialer. Denne overbevisning afføder komplekse praksisser, hvor tyngden af økonomien er at finde i illegal bookmaking, bestikkelse og et marked for insider viden blandt mennesker med sparsom tillid til hinanden og til de legale økonomiske teknologier.

Afhandlingen bevæger sig indenfor feltet økonomisk antropologi, og ved at stille skarpt på et indtil nu uudforsket felt bidrager det til indsigt i lag af Indiens økonomi samt til gambling antropologien. Afhandlingen skaber synergi mellem gambling antropologien og finansantropologien med henblik på at arbejde hen mod en tilgang til spekulation, som en form for vidensdannelse orienteret mod det ikke observerbare og det hemmeligholdte.