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“Don’t gamble for money with friends”:

Moral-economic types and their uses

ABSTRACT

Some anthropologists have developed “processual” approaches to classification, arguing that we should turn our attention from reified categories to processes of categorization. A focus on how gamblers in Luang Prabang, Laos, use the categories “gambling for beer” and “gambling for money” makes clear that an adequate processual approach must disentangle two kinds of typification: one generic, one specific. People in Luang Prabang are drawn to categories of gambling as tools for both painting the world abstractly (generics) and putting action under a description (specifics). Distinguishing these two kinds of typification resolves the apparent tension between “ideal types” and messy “practice,” and it redirects the study of human classification toward understanding how people mobilize categories for diverse moral ends. [*moral economy, gifts, commodities, ideal types, typification, reflexivity, processualization, Luang Prabang, Laos*]

The distinction of one type of reciprocity from another is more than formal.

Marshall Sahlins (1972, 192)

Months into fieldwork in Luang Prabang, Laos, Dii picked me up from my house on his motorbike.¹ It was a late Sunday afternoon, and we rode toward the southern edge of town to a snooker hall to drink and gamble. The hall was a musky, masculine place, dark even in the daytime. Shortly after Dii and I started shooting around, Sii, a man in his late 20s, walked in to meet us there. Sii and I played first. In the lead-up to our game, we playfully jawed at one another and wagered 50,000 Lao kip, or about six US dollars, split into two pots. Twenty thousand would go to the pot earmarked “for beer.”² That money would be communal; for beer, yes, but also for spicy barbecued meats, the snooker table fees, or anything else we decided on. The winner would pocket the remaining 30,000 kip for himself, a true “money bet.” I won the first game and Sii the next three. When it came time for me to pay, we argued about how much I owed. The figures feel stale and unimportant now, but they really mattered then. Should the beer money be calculated cumulatively across the four games we played? Did I owe 120,000 or 100,000? During fieldwork, I usually tried to be flexible and forgiving, to leave space for others to tell me what was true or right, but that night, I dug in my heels. I made points and counterpoints, I appealed to the reticent Dii, and I teetered on the edge of anger. I lost myself over a few dollars. Eventually, other friends arrived, and I yielded, handing Sii the cash he said I owed.

Dii had been mostly quiet as he watched us play and bicker, checking his phone, occasionally laughing at mistakes and complimenting good shots. After I paid Sii, Dii said he wanted to go home. It was much earlier than usual, we had spent very little of the beer money that I lost, and others had just arrived, but he was quietly adamant: we had to leave. On the motorcycle ride back, he lectured me. In most motorcycle conversations, one competes

against the wind, but that night Dii's voice cut through, sharp with disappointment. Hadn't I noticed that after losing the first game, Sii had rushed to bet again? "He got too hot," Dii said. I felt guilty for getting just as worked up, but Dii did not mention that. Instead, he told me not to "gamble for money" with Sii anymore. My mistake was agreeing to that type of bet in the first place. I had put us in a position to bicker. We had succumbed to the inevitable. The 20,000 kip bet "for beer" was fine. Similar bets were an essential part of our nights at the snooker hall. But the 30,000 kip bet for money to keep was a problem. As we drove down the road, he repeated as much: "Just don't gamble for money with friends."

In Luang Prabang, many people say that friends should not gamble for money, that doing so creates antagonism. Yet when Dii lectured me on the motorcycle, the rote idea felt new, more powerful. My gambling with Sii had spoiled Dii's night. In typifying our games as unacceptable "money gambling," Dii was not just feeding me a line; he was marking a boundary between himself and Sii's hostility. He was entreating me, a foreigner, to adopt a "Lao" sensibility that he knew I sometimes lacked, and he was guiding me to be a less contentious, greedy person. With the tidy distinction between beer and money gambling, he was doing powerful work.

This distinction pervades many games in Laos, but none more so than *pétanque*, a game of bowls like bocce and lawn bowling, that has exploded in popularity. While organizing stakes, casually chatting, or sitting through interviews on gravel and dirt courts scattered throughout Luang Prabang, *pétanque* players use the categories of beer and money gambling for many purposes: to wager, to frame others' intentions and aims, to judge and alter those intentions, and to take stances on good and bad sociality, made stark and binary, in the most generic forms. When asked, they offer a clear view of the contrast: beer gambling is for fun, money gambling is for money. The beer gambler wants social solidarity; the money gambler wants profit.

To capture the local ubiquity, social salience, and moral quality of beer and money gambling, I call them *moral-economic types*. Similar types have long been central to how anthropologists understand and discuss economic practice and its moral dimensions. Think of gifts versus commodities, sharing versus giving, and *kula* versus *gimwali*. I call these types "moral-economic" not to signal adherence to a strict notion of moral economy (cf. Carrier 2018; Palomera and Vetta 2016), but to underline that people use them to draw patently moral and economic contrasts (say, between right and wrong, or interested and altruistic). They are "moral" in the sense that people frequently evaluate them and use them to evaluate events and people as good or bad, in that people's judgments about them are themselves often judged as signs of character, and insofar as people treat them as key terms in how one should—or should

not—live (for a notion of "moral action-descriptions," see Anscombe 2011; see also Williams 2006).³ They are economic because they concern transactions of goods and services. And they are types insofar as people use the terms associated with them to talk about kinds and to identify events as tokens of those kinds.⁴ I understand these moral-economic types not as conceptual categories that underlie practice but as semiotically mediated, multipurpose tools that actors use for ethical, economic, and referential effect.

To understand the utility of beer and money gambling in Luang Prabang, it is necessary to distinguish two ways that people use them: to talk about practice *generically* and to identify *specific* events as instances of a type. Generics and specifics are both useful for making moral claims, but they are useful in different ways. In generic uses, people talk about types as types, that is, as kinds of sociality, abstracted from particular tokens. A *pétanque* player might say that money gambling is for getting "what other people have" or that beer gambling is for producing "solidarity" (*saamakhhii2*). These generic uses can sound "structural"—as if they were spoken by society itself—but they always emerge from a social position. In specific uses, on the other hand, people label moments of gambling, real or imagined, as tokens of a type. "We are gambling for beer here," for instance. Superficially, labeling what is happening appears to be a straightforward affair, but putting an event under a description can emphasize responsibilities, imply intentions, and evaluate others (Anscombe 1957, 1979; Enfield and Sidnell 2014, 2017; Sidnell 2017).

Disentangling generics and specifics clarifies the moral work that "gambling for beer" and "gambling for money" can do, and it demonstrates how one might analyze similar moral-economic types in other contexts. More broadly, it helps contemporary anthropologists theorize categories of all kinds. Most anthropologists are both wary of essentializing the categories they study and use (for a classic statement, see Abu-Lughod 1991) and aware that "essentialism is a recurrent mode of thought and discourse in the communities they study and write about" (McIntosh 2018, 1). This can create an analytical tension. To navigate this tension, some anthropologists have tried to processualize their objects of study, shifting their focus from nouns to nominalized verbs, from categories to "categorization" (Stasch 2019), morality to "moralization" (Lempert 2013; Simoni 2016), and types to "typification" (Agha 2007; Rumsey 2014). The hope is that such processualization can provide a way to study local categories without either essentializing them or erasing local attempts at doing so (Çalışkan and Callon 2009, 370). This requires that one study reflexive activity, or how actors frame social action as they engage in it (Agha 2007). Such reflexivity saturates most social interaction: as people talk and gesture and pass each other things, they also frame their actions and the actions of others, fashioning their intentions, values, and activities out of material

signs (Keane 2008, 34). As linguistic anthropologists have shown, most of this reflexive work is relatively tacit (Rumsey 2014; Silverstein 1993); people do not usually name what it is they are doing as they do it (on explicitness, see Gal and Irvine 2019, 176–82).

There are, however, less frequent moments when people do explicitly name and abstractly reflect on their practices. These explicit typifications can come in both generic and specific form. Although anthropologists have seldom drawn the distinction between generics and specifics—which has gained increasing interest in cognitive psychology (e.g., Gelman 2003)—they, and especially linguistic anthropologists, have long recognized that the two kinds of reference offer distinct affordances. We know, for instance, that even the most abstract utterances tend to be produced with an eye toward their eventual uptake, and that in describing an event in a certain way, a speaker can also evaluate that event and portray herself. But these findings have tended to be characterized in disparate language across the literature.

To gain a processual view of categories, it is essential to disentangle these two kinds of typification. Doing so clarifies the heterogeneity of “process” and shows what a processual account would need to involve. It also illuminates two problems that anthropologists generally have with studying local “types.” First, it resolves an apparent tension between neat “ideal types,” talked about generically, and messy “practice,” described specifically. Ideal types and practice appear to be in tension partly because people talk about types of action using the same terms in both generic and specific ways. Generic and specific uses of these terms often seem to contradict each other; a criminal defendant might agree with a judge’s generic definition of “bribery” but disagree about whether a particular gift to a local cop should count. Both speaking “generically” and labeling “practices” are forms of linguistic practice—that is, they are situated events—but notice that condemning bribery in the abstract differs substantially from identifying people who have solicited bribes. Recognizing this difference leads us away from trying to square “ideal types” with the details of specific events and toward exploring the reasons people have for typifying the world. It makes clear that generic and specific uses of types often differ because they offer people different resources for evaluating others and fashioning themselves.

Second, recognizing the distinct qualities of generics and specifics makes clear what processualizing categories requires and why it is difficult to do. Most of social life is not explicitly typified. This poses endless challenges for the anthropologist, not the least of which is how to handle events that seem to fit an emic type but are never labeled. It also makes powerful those moments when people *do* explicitly name and describe what they are doing. To avoid erasing the reflexive work we are trying to understand, we need to

disentangle these different kinds of typification and interrogate their relation to our own analytic identification of types.

Taking types apart

Anthropologists were first drawn to the sorts of “varieties,” “categories,” “forms,” “spheres,” or “modes” of exchange that I call *moral-economic types* because they seemed to fuse economic and ethical values (e.g., Mauss 1925). Maori gifts, *kula* shells, and the action of the potlatch were interesting because they were about more than mere acquisition. Contemporary anthropologists still study moral-economic types for similar reasons—in recent issues of *American Ethnologist*, for example, authors have explored types such as “hot money” (Zhu 2018), “piracy” (Dent 2012, 666–68; Dent 2016), and “fair trade” (Fisher 2018, 85). But over the last few decades, more patently structural approaches that catalog types and their contrastive ends have gone out of style. Whereas Paul Bohannan (1956, 557) once wrote that “the anthropologist’s first task is to learn the distinctions made by the people he is studying,” and George Dalton (1961, 11) advocated that every ethnographer investigate whether there are “distinct economic spheres,” Jane Guyer (2004, 28) argued several decades later that “ideal type model[s] of moral barriers” like Bohannan’s (1959) and Dalton’s (1961) simplify and obscure the historical realities of economic practice. Guyer was not alone. Critics have stressed that “actually existing relations of exchange are ... mixed and messy” (Tsing 2013, 22; see also Robbins 2008, 47–48), and that rather than look at local words, categories, and contrasts as models of society, we should look through them, toward how people “negotiate” economic morality in ordinary practice.

This critical position is perhaps clearest in discussions of two prototypical moral-economic types: “gifts” and “commodities.” Both are quasi-analytics, meaning they are often given technical definitions and used for comparative analysis, but they are also common, morally loaded terms in English, and anthropologists frequently use them to gloss similar terms in other languages (e.g., Bohannan 1955, 60; Laidlaw 2000, 620; cf. Parry’s [1986, 466] comments on “reciprocity”).⁵ In both roles, scholars have emphasized their fuzziness (Miyazaki 2013, 41) and underlined the apparent disjuncture between their use as labels for specific events of exchange and their generic, “ideal-typical” definitions (e.g., Gregory 1982; for a response to critics, see Gregory 1997). Even strong advocates of the gift and commodity distinction argue that we should treat its “applicability to concrete cases [a]s problematic” (Carrier 1995, 189). Others play with the apparent lack of fit between the lexicalized “abstractions” and the nitty-gritty of “real life.” James Laidlaw (2000, 620) critiques Chris Gregory’s account for ruling out “good examples of gifts”; Daniel Miller

(2001, 91–93) “systematically reverses” the two types; and Anna Tsing (2013, 22) evocatively contends that “not only do self-described gifts and commodities nestle beside each other, but they also incorporate each other’s characteristics, change into each other, or confuse different participants about their gift-versus-commodity identities.”

In this recent work, early anthropologists are often depicted as misguided about the “set of complex negotiations and contestations” (Bunzl 2008, 56) that comprise practice. Yet contemporary critics have only been able to climb so far from “ideal types” and into “practice.” They have been caught in an epistemological and methodological snag. While some might want to set aside analytical types as crude representations of practice, they are forced to reckon with people’s constant use of similar local types for communicative, moral, political, and conceptual work (on “officializing strategies,” see Bourdieu 1977; see also McIntosh 2018). That is, as shown by other anthropologists attentive to the reflexive dimensions of exchange (e.g., Keane 2008; Schram 2016; Valeri 1994; Yount-André 2016), actors like Dii are often as committed to their own types and convinced in their realness as Dalton or Bohannan. These local types are fundamentally as ill-fitting to “fuzzy” practice as the crudest analytics. The result is that even those scholars who try to think beyond types, to take them apart, remain tethered to them by their ethnographic materials.

Broadly put, deconstructive approaches to moral-economic types are useful for critique but self-sabotaging in the hunt to understand why moral-economic types like gambling for beer and money are compelling for people in Luang Prabang. When viewed abstractly, beer and money gambling are as fragile and easy to disassemble as “gifts,” “commodities,” and myriad other categories that anthropologists have taken apart. Their boundaries are blurry. They are hard to find in “pure” form. But exclusively emphasizing their messiness obscures their utility as moral tools.

Beer and money types

To understand the ubiquity of beer and money gambling in contemporary Luang Prabang, one needs to understand the ideological weight associated with playing games such as pétanque in Laos. Since the 1975 socialist revolution, “good” activities that foster “solidarity” and unity have been bolstered by Lao politicians, civil servants, and intellectuals, who have also fretted over activities that cause social discord. As the revolutionaries rose to power, they rhetorically aligned “gambling” (*kaan3 phanan2*) with the decadence of their domestic and foreign enemies and even forbade the sale of bingo sets and playing cards, commenting that “everyone knows that gambling is a terrible scourge for Lao society” (JPRS 1975, 33). Gamblers, along with “idlers,” “drug addicts, hooligans, and robbers,” were sent for “rehabilitation” (FBIS 1976, I4).

During these early socialist days, pétanque was rarely played, and for the better part of the next two decades, its association with gambling led local police to ban it, occasionally raiding courts and rounding up players. The state has since reversed its stance on gambling in key respects, and in the early 2000s pétanque saw a change of fate, as several gold medals in the Southeast Asian Games helped legitimize it. Rather than describe these reversals as about-faces, state rhetoric frames them as consistent with a commitment to socialist morality (Schwenkel and Leshkovich 2012; Zhang and Ong 2008). When I began conducting fieldwork in Luang Prabang in 2013, almost every large government office had a pétanque court. A slew of private entrepreneurs built courts that doubled as bars, where they sold snacks and beer and, sometimes, charged small court fees; countless enthusiasts cleared rectangles in yards or empty lots.

Now many people look at pétanque with ambivalence. Its outsized role in Laos’s international sporting profile gives it the political and moral halo of a national “sport” (Creak 2015), but at the same time it has been subject to fresh critique. “Playing sport is good for health,” one journalist wrote, but “pétanque has become a problem” (*Vientiane Times* 2008). Critics grumble that it is a means to laziness, not fitness, and that people use its acceptance as a sport as a cover for gambling. The Luang Prabang government occasionally wearies of this chatter and restricts pétanque courts and their usage at public offices.

Among players, debate about how to play pétanque without it being a “problem” is often framed as a choice between “gambling for beer” and “gambling for money,” moral-economic types that echo sentiments that were core to Laos’s 1975 socialist revolution (Evans 1990; High 2014). When speaking generically, most players say beer gambling is for “solidarity,” “love,” and “good sociality,” the same goals that the socialist state has long trumpeted. Money gambling is for money, cash won at the cost of friendship.⁶ One man’s description is typical:

Gambling for beer means to play for friendship, for drinking beer. It does not mean you are playing to lose or win. Gambling for money means to play for losing or winning because if you lose, you lose money, and if you win, you win money. There is no playing around [in gambling for money]. Everyone is trying.

The two types are also tied to distinct social and gendered figures, with different relations to the state and party. Male and female civil servants (*phanakngaan2*), with their proximity to the state, are paradigmatic beer gamblers, while money gamblers are characteristically men, especially *tuk-tuk* and minivan drivers in the tourism industry. The courts where money gamblers play are talked about as metaphorically and physically dirty places, where no

one, but especially women, should spend too much time.⁷ Gambling for money is particularly unbecoming for civil servants. People often claim, as one man put it, that “only a tiny number of civil servants play for money,” but in point of fact many male—but not female—civil servants do gamble for money on pétanque. It is just that doing so could expose them to censure. When I asked one civil servant friend why I hadn’t seen him around a money-gambling court recently, he said he had been promoted, so “it would now be inappropriate” (*bòø-khùù2*) for him to keep coming around. The problem with his going to the court did not concern pétanque itself. He kept playing in tournaments, at his government office and at privately run courts where people mostly played for beer. The problem was being perceived as the kind of person who gambles for money—a rough and untrustworthy man, prone to argument and desirous of what others have, a man who earns money (*haa3 ngen2*) through hustling on games rather than hard work. As a good civil servant, and thus as a moral socialist actor, he should find money gambling distasteful and unbecoming. Money gambling both chanced evincing this disposition and risked fostering it, as if the court might leak into those who went there: another civil servant acquaintance once told me that he could hear the money-gambling court in the unintentionally rude question particle I used to ask his girlfriend questions (I used *qaq2* instead of the more formal *bòø1*).

When pressed, almost all pétanque players said they would not gamble for money with just anyone. Instead, they drew their own lines in the sand—or gravel—between those with whom they would gamble for money and those with whom they would not because doing so would be “bad” (*sua1*), “ugly” (*bòø-ngaam2*), or unethical. Some told me matter-of-factly that playing for money was always bad, no matter whom one was gambling against. Most frequent money gamblers tempered this broad evaluation and said that while there were certain classes of person—“friends” (*muu1*), for instance—with whom one should not gamble for money, it was fine to do so with strangers or casual acquaintances. These were the two most common generic positions on the morality of money gambling—that it is never OK to gamble for money, on the one hand, and that money gambling can be morally neutral with certain classes of opponents, on the other. Both have very different practical entailments, but they also share a moral polarity, a kind of moral tilt.⁸ In both, one should not gamble for money with those to whom one is closest. In both, gambling for money is thought to index a social distance, aloofness, and a lack of “love” and “solidarity” among gamblers; in both, beer gambling is presumed to foster such “good” sociality.

Of course, what people say generically about how and with whom they gamble and what they are construed as doing in practice do not always line up. Many men broadly proclaim they never gamble for money but are often found

wagering cash. On his motorcycle, Dii passionately told me not to gamble for money with friends, but he also money-gambled with his closest mates. When I pointed out to Sii that he had recently gambled with a mutual friend, he explained that he did not follow the maxim only because the friend “had talked a lot [of trash]” (*man2 vau4 laaj3 lèqø-bòø-thùù3*).

The social significance of beer and money gambling goes far beyond the wagering of literal stakes, beer and money. Their appeal and utility, instead, comes from how these objects are imagined to index distinct ethical ends. Money gambling is for the chance to acquire money to take elsewhere; beer gambling is for beer to be drunk on the spot. Whereas money is treated as a clear “external good,” beer is often treated as if it were merely a lubricant for ends internal to the game, a stand-in for good sociality itself (MacIntyre 2010, 188–90). In interviews and casual conversations, in fact, people often focused on what the types were for in this sense. Some used the language of “goals” and “targets” (*paw4 maa3*). Others used the word *phùu1*, meaning “for.” Beer gambling was “for” not only drinking beer but also making “solidarity” and “friendship,” and thus realizing the ideal ends of social activity itself; money gambling was just “for” money.

The contrast between beer and money is thus a shorthand for talking about prosocial and antisocial behavior, for pitting “mutual aid” (High 2014) against “wanting what others have” (*jaak5 daj4 khòøng3 muu1*). This prompts an obvious question: What, among these men in Luang Prabang, makes beer and money intuitive shorthands for these contrastive ethical ends?

Beer, for one, is a key substance of sociality in Luang Prabang, especially for young middle-class men (Zuckerman, forthcoming). Friends stress the closeness of their relationships by talking about how often they share beer, pressure each other to drink, and exhaust their money together in competitive purchasing. Even newspaper editorials warning the public about the dangers of drinking beer mention its social productivity; one notes, “Going to parties and drinking with friends and colleagues is what many prefer to do in order to sustain relationships and form new ones” (*Vientiane Times* 2006). Alcohol intoxicates people. It makes them dance, sing, and enjoy themselves in conviviality. One 40-year-old pétanque player, in explaining why friends pressure each other to drink, put the issue to me bluntly: “[If] you don’t drink beer, it’s not fun.”⁹

Perhaps surprisingly, money, like beer, is also often said to mediate good social relations of friendship and family. While an unofficial mantra in the old anthropology of money was that “money’s baaaaaaad,” as Bill Maurer (2006, 19) cheekily puts it, people in Luang Prabang rarely, if ever, talk about cash as inherently evil. Unlike in the Aegean Greece that Evthymios Papataxiarchis (1999, 163) describes, paper money is not imagined in Laos as a “negative moral

and symbolic force,” something “filthy” and “stinking” that makes a person need to wash his hands. While Buddhism is often portrayed as antiacquisitive, people in the city tend to evaluate the ethics of cash transactions not by whether they include cash but by how that cash circulates (e.g., Kirsch 1975; Spiro 1966; see also Akin and Robbins 1999; Parry and Bloch 1989). In Buddhist ceremonies, for example, money and wealth are typically not hidden away but on display as almsgivers march money trees to temples (Tambiah 1970) and offer the cleanest and freshest bills they can find in the largest denominations they can afford. These acts use money to do something that, at bottom, most everyone in the city would generically describe as ethically good.

Money gambling’s antisociality is thus imagined not to come from money’s inherent moral qualities but from how it mediates social relations in games. Like beer gambling, in which the loser uses money to buy the beer that everyone drinks, money gambling transfers wealth asymmetrically, from loser to winner. But unlike in beer gambling, when a money-gambling game ends, the winner is not obliged to socialize further; he can put the cash in his pocket and “flee” (*nii3*) the scene. He can use it to purchase lunch, support his family, or buy beer to drink with other people. In beer gambling, the winnings are transformed into beer and exhausted within the spatiotemporal horizon of the game (cf. Presterudstuen 2014). Gamblers sometimes talk about this exhaustion as a sacrifice to the people with whom one is playing and drinking (Munn 1992; Reed 2007; Strathern 1988, 294). Money’s inexhaustibility, the fact that it cannot be ingested (Akin and Robbins 1999, 4; Simmel 2011), and its fluidity, the fact that it can be used for other things, mean that money gamblers can acquire wealth, not just “eat” it.

Blurry types

When I went to play *pétanque* with a new group of men, one of my hosts would often, before anyone threw a ball, belabor the differences between beer and money gambling to me. On the motorcycle ride to meet one civil servant’s friends for games, for example, the man detailed to me how the stakes would work. “Every game that you lose,” he said, somewhat awkwardly, “you have to pay 10,000 kip. But the money will go toward buying beer that we will drink together.” We would wager money, he stressed, but not play *for money*.

These explanations typified games in advance. That my hosts thought they were required hints at the men’s lurking worry that what they were doing would otherwise be unrecognizable, that I might be confused or put off by their wagers, the competitive atmosphere, and the games’ superficial hybridity. When examined closely, in fact, most games for beer or money fit awkwardly into their types (Bauman 2002, 59; Urban and Silverstein 1996, 9). *Pétanque* players themselves sometimes allude to this, implicitly grading

their practices with phrases like “real money gambling” (*tii3 kin3 ngen2 thèè4 thèè4*) or comments that they are playing for “just a little bit” (*lin5 nòòj4 diaw1*). But, more often, they paper over the games’ apparent hybridity.

Analyzing these two types of gambling as fundamentally “hybrid” or “blurry” ignores this papering over and thus occludes some of these types’ utility as moral tools. But that does not mean that such hybridity or blurriness is not apparent in many places (see Figures 1 and 2). Take, for example, the difference between the two subtypes of gambling for beer that I have so far elided: gambling for who drinks beer and gambling for who buys beer. In spirit, the distinction between these two subtypes reproduces the distinction between beer and money gambling.¹⁰ When players gamble to see who drinks beer, the loser drinks (as in other games such as beer pong or quarters). The beer might be paid for in a variety of ways—higher-ups at an office party might buy it, for example—but more often than not players paid for it with more bets, that is, by gambling to see who would foot the bill. There are no neat phrases that distinguish these two varieties of gambling for beer. One can, of course, explain the difference, but both senses are ambiguously captured in the most common way of saying “gambling for beer” (*tii3 kin3 bia3*). This linguistic merger complements a conceptual one: players frequently talk about all kinds of gambling for beer as a sort of “pure gift,” a fundamentally disinterested activity of “generalized reciprocity” (Sahlins 1972, 206). “I win this time, you win next time,” they often say. But games to buy beer, which are far more predominant, always have some asymmetrical stakes, mediated in cash, that over time are rarely fully balanced.

Crucially, no beer gamblers carry around beers, ready to exchange as a game concludes. They buy them with cash. The stakes of beer gambling are frequently even discussed in monetary terms. A game might be for “a bottle of beer” (*phuu5 laø-kèèw4*) or “10,000 kip” (*phuu5 laø-sip2 phan2*). The money is usually collected in a neutral space: a tray, bag, or small, suspended bucket tied to a support beam. In that space, it transforms into “beer money” (*ngen2 bia3*), soon to be conveyed into drinks, snacks, and other incidentals.¹¹ As players beer-gamble throughout a night, as they bet more bottles per game, and as their collective losses grow beyond their capacity to drink, beer-gambling debts can thus come to resemble money-gambling debts. Players sometimes talk about this propensity of games to shift into higher and higher stakes, to morph from a bottle, to a case, to a fifth of whiskey, or to crescendo from a bet for booze to a split pot of both beer money and cash to keep. As games amp up and players lose significant money, fractures sometimes form. Large losses prompt choices: they might be forgiven or shirked, offered as an IOU or demanded on the spot.

Just as most beer-gambling games tend to fit awkwardly into generic descriptions of “gambling for beer,”



Figure 1. *Pétanque* players in Luang Prabang, Laos, distinguish between “gambling for beer” and “gambling for money.” This distinction is here visualized as a cline between two gradable opposites. (Charles H. P. Zuckerman) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

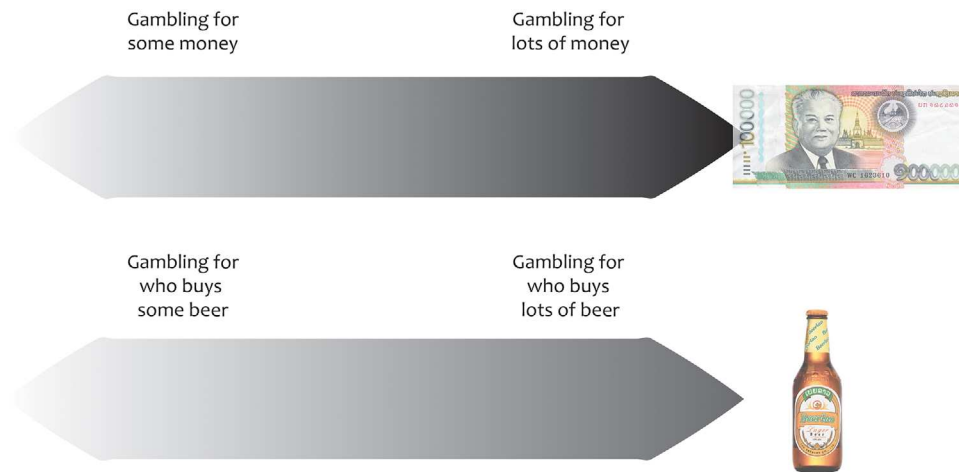


Figure 2. *Pétanque* players in Luang Prabang, Laos, distinguish between “gambling for beer” and “gambling for money.” This distinction is here visualized as two parallel, gradable types. (Charles H. P. Zuckerman) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

money-gambling games are rarely as calculating, or asymmetrical, as players describe them. For one, debts are sometimes forgiven, intentionally forgotten, or heavily discounted. More tellingly still, games for money almost automatically involve small gifts, gestures of commensality that tacitly frame them as not so competitive after all. Usually these take the form of a drink, sometimes a beer, but more often a bottle of water, an M150 energy drink, or a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. When winners do not offer such a gift on their own, losers sometimes demand them, as if the bylaws required such tokens of no hard feelings.

One of the best pieces of evidence against the idea that money and beer gambling are fuzzy on their edges is that the two types of gambling are associated with actual *pétanque* courts, real spaces in the city. “Beer-gambling courts” (*deen3 lin5 kin3 bia3*) and “money-gambling courts” (*deen3 lin5 kin3 ngen2; deen3 phanan2*) make the choice between the types geographically palpable. As players describe them, beer-gambling courts are establishments where sometimes mixed-gender groups of friends and coworkers go to drink together, usually in the evening. They also host tournaments. Money-gambling courts are all-day hangouts, masculine spaces where men linger on the sidelines, eating and watching others play. Money gamblers do not stick to *pétanque*; they challenge one another to draughts, play other games involving the serial numbers of local and foreign bills, and bet on interna-

tional soccer with bookies who pass through. One goes to the beer-gambling court to meet and mingle with friends; people drop in to the money-gambling court alone, looking to kill time and perhaps win money.

And yet even the boundaries between money- and beer-gambling courts are fuzzier and more flexible than people tend to describe them, apparently blurring the lines between the two types and the spaces in which they occur. For one, “money games” sometimes crop up at beer-gambling courts, as beer games do at money-gambling courts. Furthermore, while most people call the money-gambling courts “money-gambling courts,” their owners are hesitant to do so, surely in part to avoid legal scrutiny, but also because the designation conflicts with their broader aspirations toward something more respectable. One owner dreamed of making her court a beer-gambling court; she hired a beer waitress to come in the evenings to effect the change. For a few months, men did begin to play for beer there, but over time most of them wandered elsewhere for their nighttime drinking. The court eventually closed.

Limits of the types’ domain

The analytical difficulty of cleanly applying the types to “real” event-tokens is further complicated because some in Luang Prabang either dismiss or do not recognize the distinction. These people include those outside the



Figure 3. A humorous picture of “pétanque ball soup,” circulated on Facebook by pétanque players in Luang Prabang, Laos. The joke plays on a popular criticism of the game as a particularly destructive form of eating. (Charles H. P. Zuckerman) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

distinction’s social domain (Agha 2007, 169), that is, those unacquainted with hearing or using it, as well as those who are critical of pétanque, such as some monks and women married to avid pétanque players. Many of these critics collapse the distinction and frame the game as inherently wasteful. As one woman put it, “Beer and money gambling are the same. You lose money.”

These critical discourses often frame pétanque as an activity of pure consumption or *kin3*, “eating”/“drinking” (on the ambivalence of eating in Laos, see High 2014). *Kin3*, in this sense, means to wastefully consume. The older woman with whom I lived used *kin3* this way to scold her 20-something daughter—“All you do is *kin3 kin3 kin3*,” she railed at least one night a week. In saying this, she targeted not her daughter’s diet, per se, but her lifestyle and her tendency to go out drinking, spend money, and waste time. In Luang Prabang, women frequently depict men, and sometimes the men in their lives, as having similar habits, preferring “to play and eat” rather than to save (Zuckerman 2018; cf. Brenner 1995). Manipulating and representing the idea that pétanque is a particularly destructive form of eating, male players and critics across the city used Facebook and WhatsApp to distribute different images of a pot of pétanque-ball soup (see Figure 3). One player even printed one of these and taped it to the side of a money-gambling court’s refrigerator (see Figure 4). For those who showed it to me, the image of the presumably dirty broth and the teeth-cracking pétanque balls floating alongside tomatoes and lettuce was utterly hilarious. The joke was that this soup was both what a frequent pétanque player spends his days “eating” and the only thing his wife would want to cook for him after he did so.

The idea that playing pétanque, no matter what one is gambling, consumes rather than produces wealth, contrasts with the generic sense of gambling for money described above, in which the winner puts his winnings in his pocket and flees the court. In the latter take, a winner earns; in the former, he wastes. The two contrastive images of pétanque—as entirely consumptive versus potentially productive—appear to reproduce the beer- and money-gambling distinction at a different logical level, while they also demonstrate the obvious: that generic descriptions, or claims about how things are, are themselves always positioned.

Putting types back together in two pieces

When one analyzes the beer- and money-gambling practices, the types are easy to take apart. Some people in Luang Prabang even deny that they are meaningfully distinct. For those who accept their distinctiveness, they seem less like clusters of necessary and sufficient features—as few concepts are (Wittgenstein 2009)—than categories with fuzzy boundaries; more “gradable opposites” (Lyons 1977, 271) than absolute binaries. Figures 1 and 2 capture this blurriness, the fuzzy range between the types, by sketching the conceptual architecture that seems to underlie that range and the flexibility of these types across events.

But settling on the idea that these types are “blurry” offers us little insight into how they are used. When one looks at why players are drawn to explicitly typify games in situated interaction, it becomes clear that although Figures 1 and 2 illuminate how the types can seem from the vantage point of an analyst, they also obscure what typifications



Figure 4. An image of “*pétanque* ball soup,” printed and pasted to a gambling court’s refrigerator in Luang Prabang, Laos. The handwritten caption reads “The ultimate food: Luang Prabang soup.” The joke plays on a popular criticism of the game as a particularly destructive form of eating. (Charles H. P. Zuckerman) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

look like in practice. They do this by juxtaposing generic and specific references to beer and money gambling that have occurred across real-time interactions (on Bohannon, see Agha 2017, 324), treating distinct acts of typification as if they were somehow commensurate and thus combinable in a model. Fundamentally, these figures are asynchronous amalgams of distinct events of typification. While players do occasionally point out the fuzzy boundaries of types, more often they use typifications to erase such gradience. When Dii, for instance, told me not to gamble for money with friends, he implied that our complicated wager—involving beer, money, and snacks—was reducible to money gambling. In such moments, the moral-economic distinction between beer and money gambling is projected as a neat separation between two nongradable types—a crisp difference between pure sociality and economizing, between what one does with friends and what one does with strangers. Calling such types “blurry” neglects that they are often effective precisely because they can be used with such clarity.

Generics

Buun, an established civil servant, and I sat on a bench at the edge of a *pétanque* court. Nearby, middle-aged men, shirtless in the shade of a thatched roof, played for money. We had both frequented the court for years yet never spoken at length. I had pitched our conversation as an interview, and my audio recorder was out, but the formality faded

alongside the late-afternoon sun. Between sips of Heineken and bites of grilled chicken innards, Buun made the generic distinction between the types of gambling I had at this point memorized. “Gambling for beer means whichever person wins ... whoever wins or loses, you drink together,” he said. “But when you gamble for money, the winner puts [the money] in his pocket and gets out of there.” I replied, “So you think that playing for money is”—but Buun cut me off. “[It’s] not good!” he said, rushing to distance himself from the gambling he was spending his evening amid.

Generic uses, or *generics*, a concept I borrow from philosophy, linguistics, and cognitive psychology, are words, phrases, or propositions that refer not to specific objects, ideas, or delimited sets of objects, but to a class of objects or ideas as such (Brandone et al. 2012; Krifka et al. 1995; Leslie 2012). Comprising so-called nomic utterances (Silverstein 1993) and other essentializing discourses (Koven 2016), generics are “deictically non-selective” (Agha 2007, 43–45) and as such can seem indexically extracted from the scenes in which they are uttered. Common examples are “Mosquitoes carry malaria” and “Lions have manes.” These are not statements about any particular mosquito or lion, and they are not disproved by counterfactual cases—for instance, the occurrence of a mosquito without malaria or a maneless lion.¹²

Pétanque players like Buun talk generically about gambling for beer and money frequently and with ease. When asked, they clearly and uniformly specify the activities’ different ends and broad moral profiles. The relative

uniformity of generic descriptions of gambling for beer and money is a testament to their local salience. That is, they are well-established social kinds (Krifka et al. 1995, 11). This uniformity is not an unusual ethnographic finding. Trobrianders gave Bronislaw Malinowski (1922, 190) detailed accounts of *kula* and “clear descriptions, almost definitions of *gimwali*”; Kabre people sketched for Charles Piot (1999, 65) what was “always the case” in their exchanges. When I asked about less salient types of economy than gambling for beer and money in Laos, I sometimes got no answers at all, or my questions fizzled. When I pressed one woman, for instance, to explain the differences between how people spoke at two different local markets, she looked at me quizzically. “They’re the same,” she said. The problem was not that I was asking her to compare apples and oranges, but rather that I was asking her to compare eating apples standing up versus eating apples sitting down. That this example itself makes little sense is part of the point. These types—different markets in Luang Prabang or different postures while eating apples—are not salient enough as types for people to have automatic things to say about them. Gambling for beer and money are the opposite of such unremarkable categories.

Buun’s reaction to my follow-up question, his rush to get his generic stance on beer gambling on record, shows the stakes of talking about these touchstones in Luang Prabang. Because the types so strongly index ends thought to be the substance of ethical conduct, talking about them, even abstractly, is “sticky” with moral hazards (on ethical “stickiness,” see Mathias 2019). Gambling for beer and money are thus not just well-established kinds but morally weighty ones. When I asked people about less loaded social kinds that were nevertheless locally salient—say, what kind of noodle soup they ate or the sort of firewood they preferred—they offered effortless answers, but they never spoke as urgently as Buun did when he talked about gambling for money. Unlike these more neutral questions, the subject of gambling, like an on-ramp to evaluation, seemed to lead men to *moralization* (Lempert 2013); that is, it forced them to take a moral stance. The subject was thus to be dealt with delicately, as a vehicle for performing morality, especially for a midranking civil servant like Buun speaking to a foreigner with a recorder out at a money-gambling court.

Generic evaluations of practices like beer and money gambling are themselves susceptible to evaluation, and this influences how players make them. It also reveals that generics about beer and money gambling can be effective tools for self-fashioning within interaction. Even as generics refer to timeless qualities of types, those who speak them do so with an eye toward the contexts in which they speak, aware that they might be exposing themselves to judgment or praise, or that their opinions might be taken as a sign of their qualities or quality as persons. This awareness of

ten ballooned when I brought my audio recorder out. Its blinking red light reminded those who saw it that what they said might circulate beyond the interaction. When the light blinked, men tended to voice their dislikes of money gambling more vigorously, launching into a sort of “defensive detailing” (Drew 1998). They tamped down the incipient suggestion that they had a “bad” view of what respectable people view as a “bad” practice. Their evaluations hypertrophied. While my recorder’s effects were strong, it was never the only source of worry. In the semipublic sprawl of money- and beer-gambling courts, with friends and colleagues and strangers around, there were, so to speak, many blinking red lights.

Crucial here is that generics often lead men to take stances and engage in performative talk precisely because they are not entirely extracted from interactions. That is, generics, like all forms of communication, are still anchored to their contexts of production by the indexicality inherent to their having been produced, whether in speech or writing or some other form. This simple fact makes plain that “ideal types,” easy to repeat and espouse, are not concepts that stand apart from action; rather they are tools that people wield in interaction to do moral work.

Specifics

Just minutes after Buun spoke generically about the problems with money gambling, he bet money on the game in front of us. Pausing my interview, he called to a player nearby and, with a practiced ease, staked 50,000 kip. He lost but said that if he had won, he would have bought our beers. In doing so, he retroactively earmarked his wager. We were gambling for beer the whole time, he purported, and his bet became a token of that type—a beer-gambling bet.¹³

More often than one might expect, players like Buun use some combination of forms meaning “gambling for beer” and “gambling for money” to explicitly typify real or imagined games in the past, present, or future. Like generics, these specifics can do moral work, and in many of the cases I found in my interviews, fieldnotes, and recordings of pétanque games, they had clear persuasive force. That is, most of the time pétanque players did not aimlessly describe their games as they played. They did not neurotically organize them into money- and beer-gambling “bins” (Enfield and Sidnell 2017, 112) as a numismatist might organize his coin collection. Far more often, they used these types to evaluate how others were acting and to persuade them to act differently.

For example, it was common in moments of tension to hear players remind each other that they were gambling for beer. As a man took money out of his wallet and complained about having “lost so much money,” another might say, “Don’t worry, we’re just gambling for beer.” When two players began to dispute who scored a point or who owed

whom money, bystanders often cooled their hotheads by calling out, “You are gambling for beer, for fun!” In one backyard game I filmed, men used specifics to counter a complaint that a player was lifting his leg too high: “Ohh, what’s the problem with lifting [your] leg,” one man said, “[We are] gambling for beer [*tii3 kin3 bia3*], right?” The leg lifter then repeated the point: “Lifting [a leg] is not a problem. We are playing for fun. We are gambling for alcohol and beer.”

Players sometimes wielded the label “gambling for money” similarly, to calm people down, deploying it as a foil, for example, “We’re not playing for money here [we’re playing for beer], so calm down.” But they also used “gambling for money” for opposite effect: to highlight tension, to fluster their opponents by reminding them of what they staked, or to underline the seriousness of a game. In one “money game,” as a man took a shot, an audience member attempted to distract him with a yell (Zuckerman 2016). The man, clearly upset, scolded the heckler: “[What], you don’t have eyes? [We] are playing for money here [*lin5 kin3 ngen2 nii4*].” In typifying the game, he took the heckler to task. He also opened himself up to criticism. Shortly thereafter, another spectator accused him of being “hot hearted” and upset at the heckler because he was “losing money.”

People have endless options for how to refer to action (or any swath of experience); “a ‘couple’ kissing can also be a ‘man’ greeting his ‘wife’ or ‘John’ being careful with ‘Mary’s’ makeup” (Goffman 1974, 10). How one chooses from these options to put an “action under a description” (Anscombe 1957, 1979), in turn, can both work to construe the moral qualities of that action—as say, just or unjust—and be construed as a moral or immoral semiotic act itself. The choice to describe Harry Truman as “signing his name on a piece of paper” rather than “ordering the bombing of Hiroshima,” for example, presents us with both a moral characterization of Truman’s conduct and a sense of the values of the person describing that conduct (Anscombe 2011). This is a core finding of studies of interaction (Enfield and Sidnell 2017; Kockelman 2013, chap. 4), but many studying moral-economic types who are not laser focused on language have reflected on it as well. Chris Gregory (2012, 385) writes, “The history of money debt and morality ... is the history of the pragmatics of commercial language usage. We use the word ‘credit’ when we want to say money lending is a good thing and the word ‘debt’ when we want to say that money lending is a bad thing.” Choosing to specifically refer to an economic exchange with one “type” or another in a journal article can likewise imply the mood, ends, and purposes of an exchange, as E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1931, 36), for instance, recognized when he rejected the term *bride-price* as unsuitable because “it encourages the layman to think that ‘price’ used in this context is synonymous with ‘purchase’ in common English parlance.” In fact, the pragmatic effects of typification are what led Arjun Appadurai (1986, 11) to famously

term all circulating things commodities rather than gifts. Following Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Georg Simmel (2011), he argued that a broad use of the term *commodity* helps reveal “the calculative dimension in all ... forms of exchange, even if [those exchanges] vary in the form and intensity of sociality associated with them.” He rejected using *gift* for the inverse reason because it invokes the “pure gift” (Malinowski 1922, 177–80; see also Laidlaw 2000; Parry 1986) and thus inevitably obscured the “calculative dimension [of] societies that are too often simply portrayed as solidarity writ small” (Appadurai 1986, 12). Appadurai thus used *commodity* as a pétanque player might use *gambling for money*: to frame exchanges as fundamentally acquisitive, to make ultimately moral claims about the ends of action.

The point here is that specifics can do more than label interactions. They can change them. They can bring a pair of moral types that almost all men agree on generically to bear on an infinitely complicated interaction. They can be resisted or resigned to, but their basic power is clear, especially when they are about copresent others, whom they implicate directly.

The different utility of generics and specifics

When I pressed pétanque-playing men to give me “examples” of the differences between money gambling and beer gambling, they were sometimes hesitant to do so. This was even true when I asked these questions as others were standing nearby, gambling on pétanque for beer and money. To typify these ready-at-hand games unfolding on the court before our eyes would presumably have been easy—to highlight their qualities, to point to their features—but, self-censored, perhaps, by awkwardness or propriety, people hesitated.

The tendency to keep negative specific characterizations unanchored in the immediate interaction is unsurprising for anthropologists long attuned to the “behind the back” nature of most gossip (Besnier 2009), the invisibility of “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1990), and the delicate way that people tend to handle one another’s “face” (Goffman 1967). But, however unsurprising, it gives insight into the differential utility of generics and specific typifications (Zuckerman, n.d.). That people are generally reluctant to implicate others in potentially nefarious practices like gambling for money makes specific typifications of practice powerful when people do use them, because specifics implicate discrete events and people. Generics are useful in part for the opposite reason as specifics: the connection between them, real events, and people is underdetermined. With generics, the world sits at a ponderous distance, and a man can critique money gambling without necessarily censuring others or sing the praises of beer gambling while still claiming that he does not play much.

Moral-economic types and their uses

When one steps on the sidelines and studies moral-economic types in Luang Prabang, the semiotics of moral economy come to the fore. In a small, growing city in a late-socialist nation, where typifying exchanges as “the good kind” has become a broader state project, uses of “money gambling” and “beer gambling” show the immediate interest that people have in reflexively framing what they are doing and what they are not doing. Reveling in the analytical messiness of these types, in the many instances when individual practices seem to confound them, misses the features that make them so compelling: they are starkly differentiated from one another, easy to talk about abstractly, and persuasive when applied.

Beyond Laos, a focus on generics and specifics makes clear that the tension between purportedly neat “ideal types” and blurry “practice,” a tension that has led to endless debate, is not a tension that anthropologists need to resolve. Rather, it is an effect of trying to square the differences between two distinct referential tools—generic and specific typifications—that people have local, contextually bound reasons to use differently. One should explore, not explain away, the resulting rich, reflexive practices in which people use these tools.

Part of this involves accounting for explicit typifications. Because most reflexive signs are relatively tacit, focusing only on how people explicitly label their actions, as I have done above, will only ever help us understand a small part of social and semiotic life. But while such a focus is insufficient in and of itself, it is essential, because a poor account of how such labels function obscures how we understand social life as a whole (Zuckerman, n.d.). When one accounts for these explicit practices, it becomes clear that the two kinds of typification present distinct solutions and new puzzles. Generic, situated abstractions are likely to be mistaken for perduring local models. Focusing on them shows that abstracting is a practice similar to other practices, one that can be anchored in the occasions in which it is done. Anchoring generics, and exploring actors’ motives for genericizing, promises a means of studying essentializations at arm’s length, so to speak, making it less likely that anthropologists will simply reproduce those essentializations in accounts of them.

A focus on specifics, in turn, makes clear that whether a type should be applied to a given stretch of conduct is often not only a factual question but also a moral one. This introduces a puzzle: What are we to do with unlabeled events—say, games that are tacitly framed as “friendly” but never overtly called “beer gambling”? What evidence do we require to say an event is a token of an event type? Focusing on generics and specifics makes it obvious that we cannot be in the business of settling these disagreements, of deciding which things really are gifts and which are bribes, or

of ignoring these issues altogether. If we explicitly categorize the events that we are studying as of one type or another, in order to argue, for example, that no “gifts” exist, as Appadurai did, then we elide local typifications. If we ignore local categories and proclaim that, because they are so blurry, no actual games “for beer” or “for money” exist, we risk erasing the work of typification that people often care so much about, flattening actors’ choices to explicitly characterize some events and stay silent on others.

It is in an effort to avoid these issues that a growing set of anthropologists have developed processualization approaches, arguing that we should turn our attention from reified categories, moralities, and types to processes of categorization, moralization, and typification (Agha 2007; Lempert 2013; Simoni 2016; Stasch 2019). To do this thoroughly, however, requires an understanding of the heterogeneity of categorization: the tacit things that people do to reflexively frame their lives, the generic and specific ways they explicitly put what they and others do under a description, and the differences between these practices. Bruno Latour (2005, 23) writes that “the task of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst.” Focusing on generics and specifics lets us see the ultimately discursive nature of this goal and its limits, as well as that achieving it would at minimum require us to distinguish between these two kinds of typification.

Notes

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1. All personal names are pseudonyms.
2. This article uses materials from more than 15 months of fieldwork in Luang Prabang. The Lao language is transliterated following the system of N. J. Enfield (2007); numbers represent tones in the Vientiane dialect.
3. I use “moral” interchangeably with “ethical” here. How these types might be differentially deployed in “moral” versus “ethical” projects, as these terms have come to be used (in, e.g., Laidlaw 2002), is an intriguing topic beyond the scope of this article.
4. I use “type” following linguistic-anthropological analyses of typification (e.g., Agha 2007; Rumsey 2014; for discussion, see Zuckerman, n.d.).
5. I call these terms “ethno-metapragmatics” following Michael Silverstein (1993), among others. I use *ethno-* to underline that all categorizing language, whether “analytic” or not, is ideologically positioned.
6. Other salient types of pétanque play exist, for example, tournament play, “practicing” (*kaan3 sòdm4*), and playing for “free”

(*lin5 laa4 laa4*) or for “fun” (*lin5 muan1*), but beer and money gambling are the *most* salient types. On a similar discourse in state-sponsored sporting events, see Creak’s (2015) discussion.

7. In 15 months, I only ever saw one woman gamble for money on pétanque.

8. The simultaneous presence of these two positions—and their shared moral tilt—parallels a historical rift in Laos between “broad” and “narrow” kinds of moral thinking (Evans 1990, 141; see also Sahlins 1972, 199; on the Vietnamese state’s attempt to install a “broad” morality, see Keane 2016, 216, 226).

9. Drinking beer, especially the Beer Lao brand, spread in popularity in the early 2000s. At around US\$1, or 7,000–10,000 kip for a 640-milliliter bottle in 2014, Beer Lao is a semiprestigious midpoint between high-end liquors and cheap, often home-brewed rice whiskey. In Laos, Beer Lao is “one of the most well known and emotionally elaborated commodities” (High 2013, 95; see also Schopohl 2011, 263). Beer Lao advertisements saturate pétanque courts; the company prints its seal on scoreboards, hosts tournaments, and hires pétanque athletes as corporate spokesmen.

10. On *fractal recursivity*, see Gal and Irvine 2019; see also Muir 2017.

11. A player once quipped “give alms” (*tak2 baat5*) as he put his 10,000 kip into a suspended beer-money bucket, playing off the two acts’ parallel form and role in effectuating a value transformation.

12. I do not have space here to explore how generics are encoded in the Lao language, but context and deictics often mark statements as specific (Zuckerman, n.d.).

13. I have glossed these phrases as “gambling,” but the Lao *kaan3 phanan2* is closer to the English *gamble*. *Kaan3 phanan2* is sometimes used to refer to beer *and* money gambling, and it is sometimes used to refer exclusively to money gambling in opposition to beer gambling.

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