Cosmopolitan encounters provoke a change in habits: How Chinese slot machines affect rural life in Ghana

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

This exploratory study aims to analyse how rural societies in the Global South respond to encounters with new, modern cultural practices from the Global North when they appear in their familiar rural settings. The empirical study explores the case of automated slot machines that Chinese operators have been installing in rural villages in Ghana since summer 2016. In a bid to analyse how such cosmopolitan encounters change the local population's behaviour, the study applies theories of ordinary cosmopolitanism and habitus. The empirical results suggest the existence of two types of response to slot machines as a means of entertainment: they are either accepted, inducing behavioural change, or they are rejected, primarily due to the adverse effects of gambling and gambling addiction. Gambling machines users, who are often young and relatively poor, welcome this new cultural practice for several reasons, and change their daily routines accordingly. In contrast, non-users tend to be older and socio-economically more settled. They consider gambling machines to be a serious danger to individuals and the local community alike and reject such change. The findings also suggest that cosmopolitan encounters foster ordinary cosmopolitan attitudes, such as openness to global scale societal networks, which are culturally different and extended (albeit imaginary) in rural areas of the Global South. Traditional discourse on cosmopolitanism has long overlooked such developments. However, behavioural change due to cosmopolitan stimuli depends to a great extent on individuals' characteristics and on the type of encounter.

1. Introduction

The unprecedented global spread of automated gambling – a form of leisure and entertainment that promises benefits – reached the Global South, and especially Sub-Saharan Africa, in the early 2000s. Two key factors have facilitated the spread of slot machines: extensive improvements in communication and transport technologies, which encourage a variety of cultural diffusion processes; and lower investment barriers due to a decline in the purchase price of gambling machines. The commodified experience of gambling provided by slot machines has therefore become consumable (Murray, 2006; Rybak, 2018).

These global developments are apparent in several rural villages in the peripheral Ghanaian district of Nzema East, where Chinese operators started installing automated slot machines in summer 2016. This district, located in the border region between Ghana and the Ivory Coast, is an area with high unemployment rates and poor socio-economic infrastructure. As a result, local residents are keen to migrate from the rural villages to the cities, or even further afield. These aspects have a major impact on how villagers respond to the installation of gambling machines, with some inhabitants perceiving them as a new, modern form of leisure and entertainment from the ‘developed world’.

Crucially, the sudden availability of gambling machines in the rural communities of Nzema East contradicts the common notion that the rural population, especially in the Global South, can only experience new cultural practices if they move to urban areas (Cid Aguayo, 2008; Hiebert, 2002; Johansen, 2008). The villagers of Nzema East are now experiencing new and modern forms of entertainment from the Global North in their immediate and familiar surroundings, since they have been installed there by Chinese operators. The prevalent discourse suggests that such encounters with consumable cultural practices from other parts of the world, such as slot machines in Nzema East communities, demonstrate the potential to facilitate individual and societal changes in behaviour and mindset (Mansvelt, 2010). Past literature, however, has usually overlooked the rural Global South as a place where cosmopolitan encounters may occur, without local residents having to travel, and the societal implications of such encounters (Jeffrey and McFarlane, 2008; Johansen, 2008).

Against this backdrop, this exploratory study seeks to improve understanding of the responses of societies from the Global South to the experience of new cultural practices exported from the Global North...
when such encounters occur in their familiar geographical and societal context. For the case study of slot machines installed in the Ghanaian periphery in Nzema East by Chinese operators, this aim is encapsulated in three research questions:

1. Which parts of the Nzema East population use slot machines, for what reason and how frequently?
2. How do non-gambling locals and both traditional and public authorities perceive the installation of slot machines and how they are used?
3. Does the newly available experience cause local residents to change their daily routines and traditional attitudes? If so, whose behaviour changes, and to what extent?

The overarching research aim and case-specific research questions are embedded in an analytical framework with two theoretical approaches: emerging discourse on ordinary forms of cosmopolitanism, and Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus. Both lines of thought assert that new experiences, especially cultural activities, may induce change in everyday practices at an individual and societal level. However, individual responses to stimuli, such as coming across slot machines in rural Ghana, depends to a great extent on several parameters relating to the individual and to society as a whole (Czerniewicz and Brown, 2014; Dirksmeier, 2009; Skrbis and Woodward, 2013; Woodward et al., 2008).

Section 2, which presents the concepts of ordinary cosmopolitanism and Bourdieu’s theory of practice in more detail, focuses on the significance of this analytical framework to our exploratory study. Section 3 provides a practical basis for understanding the results of the study. It introduces the reader to the diffusion processes of slot machine gambling in Ghana; the role played by Chinese investors in the spread of slot machines; and how Ghanaian authorities respond to these developments. The empirical research design is presented in Section 4 as a basis for understanding the subsequent analysis, interpretation and discussion of the results. Section 5 presents the main results of the field study, covering responses to slot machines in Nzema East communities, addressing the aforementioned research questions in the process. These outcomes are discussed against the theoretical background in Section 6, increasing understanding of societal responses to such stimuli in the rural Global South. The closing section summarises the main results of the case study and raises avenues for further research.

2. Cosmopolitan encounters as stimuli for changes in habits

Local residents’ experience of a new cultural practice without having to travel, such as the case of slot machines installed in the villages of Nzema East, furthers scientific discourse on cosmopolitanism and its global proliferation. Common discourse supports the assumption that cosmopolitanism is an individual perspective on life, a state of mind, or the consumption of cultural diversity. Consequently, cosmopolitans, i.e. individuals who lead a cosmopolitan lifestyle, are characterised by an openness to new cultural practices; intrinsic aspirations to encounter the cultural other; and the will to extend individual societal networks beyond geographically close relations (Harvey, 2009; Skrbis and Woodward, 2013; Woodward et al., 2008; Yeoh, 2017).

Until now, mainstream cosmopolitanism research has focused on urban spaces, considering rural areas as being only marginal to globalisation processes that enable cosmopolitan encounters by mobilising cultural practices (Cid Aguayo, 2008; Jeffrey and McFarlane, 2008; Johansen, 2008; Skrbis and Woodward, 2013). Since the late 2000s, however, discourse has started shifting towards addressing the everyday forms of cosmopolitanism, which highlights the fact that cosmopolitan encounters in any form, situation or place are significant for the development of cosmopolitan values. Scholars are therefore beginning to counterbalance the long-established focus on urban centres and elitist groups of cosmopolites (Hiebert, 2002; Hopper, 2007; Jeffrey and McFarlane, 2008; KwoK-Bun, 2002; Skrbis and Woodward, 2013; Woodward et al., 2008).

Although past studies on ordinary forms of cosmopolitanism have attempted to broaden the debate by exploring rural forms of cosmopolitanism (e.g. Cloke, 2006; Woods, 2005, 2010), they still offer only limited understanding of the compelling effects of encounters with different cultural activities in the rural Global South (Jeffrey and McFarlane, 2008; Johansen, 2008). For this specific part of the world, cosmopolitanism researchers often assume that experiences of new cultural practices occur only when individuals leave their familiar peripheral settings and actively pursue encounters with the culturally alien in urban centres (most recently, e.g. Czerniewicz and Brown, 2014; Greiner and Sakopalrak, 2013; Page, 2011).

This gap in cosmopolitanism research needs to be closed because ongoing globalisation processes increasingly facilitate not only the continuous commodification and mobilisation of cultural practices based on social media outreach, but also profound developments in logistics, meaning that these processes will eventually reach the peripheries of the Global South. Slot machines in Nzema East are just one of many examples of such developments. These devices enable Ghanaian villagers to experience the same kind of leisure activities as people in the Global North, mirroring a decrease in disparity of cultural consumption patterns between urban and rural spaces and between the Global North and the Global South. As mobilised commodities, cultural activities – the major manifestation of cosmopolitan encounters – become consumable, satisfying symbolic rather than biological needs. In the process, they have a deep impact on people’s everyday lives and mindsets, causing them to think beyond accustomed structures (Bocock, 1999; Brewer et al., 2016; Held, 2002; Hopper, 2007; Linton, 1936; Mansvelt, 2005; 2010; Paltzwall, 2015; Reckwitz, 2005; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002; Yeoh, 2017). Such thinking ‘outside the box’ may induce different responses in societies, ranging from changed routine practices, lifestyles and values, to re-imagined identities and relations with unknown and distant people and places (Brewer et al., 2016; Cid Aguayo, 2008; Delanty, 2006; Held, 2002; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002; Woodward et al., 2008).

According to cosmopolitanism discourse, an individual’s characteristics, and those of the society in which he or she lives and interacts, affect the extent to which common habits and attitudes are adapted in response to cosmopolitan encounters and the development of cosmopolitan values (Skrbis and Woodward, 2013; Woodward et al., 2008). These considerations are closely related to Bourdieu’s theory of practice. Bourdieu offers the concept of habitus as a tool for analysing and comprehending individuals’ willingness to adapt familiar practices and mindsets to a stimulus that they either do or do not pursue actively through mobility. The habitus, as defined by Bourdieu (2002), is “a system of […] permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking, or a system of long-lasting (rather than permanent) […] structures of perception, conception and action.” The habitus appears as a product of community history and individual experiences that produces and reproduces both individual and collective practices based on perceptions and appreciations (Bourdieu, 1977, 1987; Casey, 2001; Dirksmeier, 2006, 2009; Lenger et al., 2013). Yet the habitus is not an everlasting arrangement, but one that is open to change and adaptation in response to new stimuli such as cosmopolitan encounters. In the context of this case study, therefore, changes in habits in response to the introduction of slot machines to Nzema East would be the villagers’ passive response to the new experience as controlled by their subconscious habitus (Bourdieu, 1987, 2002).

Following the theory of practice, attempts at retracing and understanding adaptations in habit in response to cross-cultural encounters require the consideration of several parameters. These include the individual’s age, gender, socio-economic situation and societal status, which are required to identify how individuals perceive, experience and respond to their experience of the culturally dissimilar when it appears in their familiar societal setting (Reckwitz, 2005). Depending on their...
capabilities, individuals may either recognise the encounter and regard it as an opportunity for a worthwhile change in habits, or they may see it as a risk to common existing structures. Accordingly, they either embrace the cosmopolitan encounter and adapt to it, or they reject the new stimulus and any change for the sake of safeguarding accustomed structures (Czerniewicz and Brown, 2014; Dirksmeier, 2009). Concerning villagers from Nzema East who come across gambling machines as a cosmopolitan encounter, the habitus idea suggests that, depending on characteristics such as age, gender and role in the community, individuals will either accept or reject slot machines as a new form of leisure and, as a result, will either alter their everyday lives and cosmopolitan attitudes, or undergo no change.

3. Slot machines in Nzema East under Ghanaian gaming law

Slot gambling, known for its frequent payouts, multiplier potential, flashing lights and sound effects, has proliferated in the Global North since the Industrial Revolution, and is now considered an entertaining leisure activity almost everywhere. Many societies even associate such coin-operated machines with technological development and modernisation (Chhabra and Gursoy, 2007; Fisher and Griffiths, 1995; Huhtamo, 2005). However, experiences of adverse effects on health and morality, and especially gambling addiction, have had a negative impact on societal and legal acceptance of slot machines. For this reason, most governments in the Global North now strictly regulate automated gambling (Courtwright, 2014; Fisher and Griffiths, 1995; Huhtamo, 2005).

The trend of gambling as a leisure practice began reaching the Global South, including Sub-Saharan Africa, in the 2000s. Providers of gambling services have inundated ‘developing’ countries with various forms of gambling, including legal and illegal casinos, lotteries and automated devices, in a bid to secure these new, rapidly emerging markets. Several governments in Sub-Saharan Africa have supported these developments, hoping to benefit from the tax income raised by the gambling industry (Binde, 2005; Rybak, 2018; Ssewanyana and Bitanhirwe, 2018; Tolchard et al., 2014). The biggest gambling markets in Sub-Saharan Africa are South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. Whereas South Africa regulates gambling strictly and very successfully, gambling regulations in Kenya are very liberal, permitting all kinds of gambling. The highly restrictive gambling laws in Nigeria officially forbid any form of gambling, despite the existence of legal casinos and a lottery. However, these regulations are poorly enforced in Nigeria, and illegal casinos and other types of gambling have spread throughout the country (PWC, 2013; Tolchard et al., 2014). As reflected in Nigeria, the outreach of gambling to Sub-Saharan Africa is a challenge for weak governments in many countries across the continent (Ssewanyana and Bitanhirwe, 2018).

In Ghana, gambling was first introduced as a leisure activity to the capital, Accra, and then spread to other major cities, and subsequently to the peripheries. This rapid spread is mainly due to the reform of several laws that regulated various gambling activities during the second half of the 20th century. The result of this reform was the inauguration of the National Gaming Act in 2006. Concerning automated gambling, the Gaming Act prohibits the installation and operation of machines without an official licence, and the use of such machines by people under the age of 18 (Government of Ghana, 2006; Owusu, n/a; Tolchard et al., 2014). Extraordinary developments in technology, data retrieval, and logistics have further fostered the expansion of gambling throughout Ghana (Appiah and Awuah, 2016).

Chinese slot machine operators capitalise on the poor enforcement of the Ghanaian Gaming Act by introducing slot gambling to the many restaurants and shops run by Chinese nationals in Ghana as an additional source of income. Slot machine operators exploit a loophole in the Ghanaian societal system, which relies on both legal and traditional authorities. Rural citizens traditionally respect and value the chief-taincy system, comprising regional paramount chiefs, local chiefs and their advisory elders in the villages. In rural areas in particular, most members of the community follow the example and advice of their elders (Boamah, 2014; Wilson, 1987). Slot machine providers therefore negotiate with local chiefs, rather than with the legal authorities, to gain access to communities. In Nzema East, the district assembly has no information about the gambling machines within its jurisdiction, or about the delivery, operation and maintenance of those machines.

The Ghanaian National Gaming Commission established a joint task force in an effort to counter the expansion of illegal Chinese gambling machines (Kale-Dery, 2017). So far, however, the commission has only intervened in Accra, because it is unable to keep up with the rapid spread of slot machines from the cities to the peripheries (Gaming Commission, 2018).

The per capita availability of slot machines, the popularity of gambling activities as a form of entertainment, and society’s acceptance of gambling are constantly on the increase in Ghana, against global trends and contrary to national legislation. As a result, gambling has recently been informally acknowledged as a consumer good in Ghana, as was the case in the Global North in the 1980s (Appiah and Awuah, 2016; Binde, 2005). Being influenced by the ubiquitous advertisements for gambling, word of mouth by friends and peers, cultural demographics and societal acceptance, the perception of gambling is relatively positive in Ghana, especially among students and young adults, who consider gambling a harmless leisure activity. Consequently, the number of youths who gamble in Ghana, which is currently growing at the slowest rate in Sub-Saharan Africa, may rise, in spite of a simultaneous increase in awareness of gambling-related health risks from addiction (Appiah and Awuah, 2016; Ssewanyana and Bitanhirwe, 2018).

Discontent is prevalent in the study area in Nzema East, particularly among young villagers. This sentiment provides an ideal breeding ground for the emergence of frequent gambling behaviour. The motivation to gamble is deeply rooted in the dichotomy of dissatisfaction and satisfaction (Dickerson, 1996), which leads gamblers to believe that the activity brings ‘luck, money and fortune’ (Wyk van, 2013) and will solve their numerous problems. Many villagers of Nzema East complain about problems such as weak socio-economic structures, reflected in the high unemployment rates and low incomes, and the inadequate provision of public services such as healthcare and education. This dissatisfaction appears paradoxical, considering the significant role of the district in achieving economic growth and in contributing to the overall development of Ghana. The villages under investigation are located in the northern hinterland of the Nzema East district capital Axim. This is an area with fertile soil, enabling the commercial agricultural production of rubber and cocoa, and with significant mineral reserves, facilitating large-scale and artisanal mining. However, the district’s rural population receives little in return for its agricultural and mining exports from the central government and private investors (Government of Ghana, 2015; Government of Ghana, 2018; Oxford Business Group, 2014).

4. Methods

This case study is profoundly exploratory, being the first empirical attempt to explore societal responses to the emergence of automated slot machines in the rural Global South. Given its unprecedented nature as a trial run, and considering that individuals behave differently depending on distinct parameters, rigorous qualitative methods of data acquisition and thematic analysis were applied throughout the study.

Six communities of interest were selected, based on accessibility, from the several villages in Nzema East where Chinese distributors have installed gambling machines. First, physical accessibility was a major precondition for the selection of villages. Physical accessibility to these deprived villages is hampered by the poor state of the rural road network, particularly during the rainy season. For this reason, six communities located within 45 min from a main road were chosen. In three of those six villages, operators had removed the gambling machines...
shortly before the study began due to local opposition to the devices. Nonetheless, villagers from these communities were still willing to voice their opinions about the new machines. Second, communities with contacts from previous projects were chosen to ensure direct personal access to local villagers, and especially chiefs and elders. The deliberate choice of villages by dint of their accessibility echoes the exploratory approach and restricts the general transferability of the case study results.

A total of 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted in the six villages in spring 2017. The aim was to gain a holistic understanding of the local circumstances and change in response to the installation of gambling machines. Local interviewees were divided into three subgroups, predefined according to Bourdieu’s assumption that an individual’s response to a new stimulus will differ depending on several parameters. The first two groups represented in the survey are people who gamble on slot machines, and non-users who do not engage with these devices. To ensure a variety of genders, ages, professions and societal status types among the participants of either group, multiple residents of the selected villages were approached.

The third group of interviewees comprised key informants who oversee activities and changes in communities, and typically perceive these matters from a more distant perspective. These key informants included the paramount chief of Lower Axim, two community chiefs and two community elders who inherit advisory and role model functions as discussed in Section 3. Community residents usually follow their traditional leaders’ advice and recommendations. Other participants from the group of key informants (including two teachers, a nurse and the district planning officer) gained their status on the basis of their profession, and the underlying education and qualification status. These individuals also play a model role because villagers expect people in those professions to have a sound general knowledge. Given their advisory role, key informants are crucial to the acceptance or rejection of new and alternative activities for work or leisure in those communities.

In addition, the local caretaker of slot machines in one of the villages under investigation provided information, shedding further light on the explanations and impressions gained. The caretaker—a farmer who had agreed to a slot machine being installed in the family home, where electricity is available—did not consider it a member of any of the three subgroups. In return for overseeing the use of the slot machine in her home, she receives 20% of the profit from each machine. However, the caretaker has not been informed about any legal requirements regarding the use of the slot machines, so she therefore does not restrict their use. Table 1 lists all of the individuals interviewed in the case study.

To overcome language barriers, a local interpreter supported most of the interviews conducted in the villages; students, teachers, the paramount chief and the planning officer responded in English. During the interviews, the participants were given the opportunity to present their personal opinion about slot machines, the socio-economic impact they have on rural villages, and how they are linked to modernisation, development and the possible emergence of cosmopolitan attitudes. To enable the correlation to cosmopolitanism, this abstract notion was discussed with participants before the interviews were held. Following a brief introduction to current scientific definitions of cosmopolitanism, the participants explained how cosmopolitan encounters and values could influence their personal lives and society in their local communities. After discussing and defining the meaning of cosmopolitanism to everyday life in these deprived villages, the interviews focused on the installation of slot machines in those communities, their delivery by Chinese operators, and the interviewees’ individual perception of slot machines with regard to the societal impact they have on the communities.

For analysis purposes, the qualitative empirical data was disaggregated by the three subgroups. This breakdown enabled a comparison of the subgroups’ perceptions of the installation of slot machines, their response to these devices, and the extent to which their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee group</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Number of interviewees</th>
<th>Reference in text</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User (n = 10)</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>User_1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>User_2, User_3, User_4</td>
<td>13, 16, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>User_5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>User_6, User_8, User_7</td>
<td>33, 30, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artisan miner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>User_9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>User_10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-user (n = 6)</td>
<td>Trader</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Non-user_1, Non-user_4, Non-user_6</td>
<td>70, 26, 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Non-user_2, Non-user_3, Non-user_5</td>
<td>32, 70, 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key informants</td>
<td>Paramount chief</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paramount chief</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chief</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chief_1, Chief_2, Elder_1, Elder_2</td>
<td>40, n/a, 65, 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elder</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Elder_1, Elder_2</td>
<td>65, 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher_1, Teacher_2</td>
<td>34, 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Planning officer</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Farmer &amp; caretaker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caretaker</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

installation induced a change in behaviour. Overall, the data analysis followed the concept of qualitative thematic analysis (Flick, 2012).

5. Results

5.1. Users’ perspectives on slot machines in the villages of Nzema East

In this study sample of interviewees, typical slot machine users are comparatively young, with ages ranging between 13 and 33 years. Users have only limited financial means, if at all. This factor is closely related to their age and societal position—after all, the youngest users interviewed were under 20 (4 out of 10), and were still at school or were unemployed, and therefore do not earn their own money. The other users in the sample above the age of 20 work in low-skilled economic sectors as drivers, farmers or traders, earning only small salaries.

Users gamble regularly on slot machines during the week. The majority of users (6 out of 10) stated that they usually only use gambling machines in the evening, and that they sometimes have to “queue to play the game” (user_6) some evenings. By contrast, user_1 described how they gamble on slot machines at “any time of day or night”. The caretaker elaborated on user_1’s statement by reminding that people come to their house to gamble on the slot machine “at any time [they] have enough money to play.”

The users interviewed stated several reasons for engaging frequently with gambling machines. The majority of users (8 out of 10) stated that their main reason for using slot machines was the possibility of financial gain. Older users in particular gamble in the hope that slot machines will increase their scarce monetary means. One older user summarised as follows: “We play for economic reasons because we do not work” (user_1). Three out of the ten users also described slot machines as a vital and welcome addition to the hitherto scant possibilities of leisure
activities and entertainment opportunities in the rural villages. In addition, the slot machine users stressed the significance of these games of chance as a distraction from their familiar everyday routine lives in the communities. They use slot machines in order “not to get bored” (user_2) and because, whilst gambling, they experience “a good feeling” (user_1). The aspects of entertainment and distraction especially attract younger users to gamble. User_10 summed this up by saying that it is young villagers in particular who wish for “anything that entertains them but doesn’t extract money from them.”

A third, younger group of users specifically equated automated gambling devices with modernisation and technological progress, things that have so far seldom materialised in these remote villages. Fourth, six out of the ten users described slot machines as a means to connect with different and unknown peoples and cultures. They often mentioned encountering such devices enables them to connect with a variety of individuals who may be experiencing the same activity at the same time, but in some other place. User_4 explained that “foreign people invite them to play the game”. User_1 added, “I feel that the machine is from the developed world and I feel also connected to that world.”

Finally, all users stated that gambling machines provide their communities with new cultural entertainment opportunities, decreasing the disparity between economically and culturally thriving cities and rural villages. The users believe that their deprived communities lack a range of infrastructural facilities, including road and electricity networks, internet access, and access to potable water. In the cities, however, “you get what you want,” as user_9 explained.

In general, users emphasised that being open to different and foreign cultural and leisure practices is necessary to “endorse development” (user_6), “to gain more benefit” (user_9), and to “boost the economic activities” (user_1). To them, these traits enable a cosmopolitan environment that includes economic and infrastructural improvements as well as entertainment opportunities and education possibilities. From the users’ perspective, cosmopolitanism is closely related to modernisation, comprising physical technological and infrastructure improvements on the one hand, and the modernisation of education and entertainment on the other. Overall, they describe slot machines as a first sign of technological progress and modernisation in their villages.

In spite of their yearning for financial improvement, entertainment and the experience of modern recreational activities, users in Nzema East could hardly ignore the numerous adverse effects that have occurred in their villages since the machines were installed. In fact, they described the emergence of the typically negative socio-economic influences of (addiction to) gambling in their rural communities. By explaining that “the machine took [his] money, so [he] played again to win”, user_9 emphasised the severest and most widespread negative economic impact of gambling: gamblers usually lose more on these machines than they win. Furthermore, three out of the ten users complained that students with no income have stolen money from their parents, members of their extended family and neighbours to play on slot machines. In this regard, user_4 admitted: “I usually have to steal so I can play the game.”

Besides financial losses and the adverse development of young villagers stealing money to gamble, the users expressed another unfavourable impact of their use of slot machines: they experience severe time conflicts as a result of their regular use of slot machines. These conflicts hamper their professional and family commitments and affect both younger and older users. The users stated that “men play instead of working” (user_8), that “the slot machines have [a] negative impact on economic and social life because [they] spend less time with friends” (user_1), and that “[the slot machine] takes people away from their families in the evenings” (user_9). Seven out of the ten users stressed that young users spend less time with their friends and join in less with traditional leisure activities such as playing football. With reference to older users, time conflicts are described as having terrible consequences for the economic situation of individual users and their families alike. This is because the work hours missed by men for the sake of their gambling activities cause financial losses, which are compounded by the loss of money to slot machines. As they reflected on the negative effects of slot machines on organising everyday tasks and schedules, some users concluded that their gambling activities “only waste [their] time” (user_7).

The direct and indirect loss of income by young users stealing from the family budget and by men missing work places an additional strain on the finances of low-income households that can ill afford it. User_10 summed up the situation as follows: “It extracts a lot of money”; user_2 complained that slot machines are unlikely to bring development and a cosmopolitan lifestyle because the distributors, being foreign, “are not with [the community citizens] but [only] want to collect [their] money.” On account of their monetary losses, some users (5 out of 10) spoke in support of a local movement against automated machines, and, as user_9 explained: “[They] stopped playing and advised [the] elders to remove [the machines].”

5.2. Non-users’ perspectives on slot machines in the villages of Nzema East

Unlike the users, most of the non-users who participated in the survey are older, with a broad range of ages between 26 and 70 years. The subgroup of non-user respondents includes one male and six female villagers who earn a living as farmers or local traders.

From the non-users’ perspective, users gamble “any time, even in the evening” (non-user_2) and play on slot machines for economic reasons only (5 out of 6). Similarly to the users, the non-users deplored the direct loss of money from slot machines because they “tak[e] money from the community members [while] only the Chinese gain and make benefit” (non-user_1). Two non-users, however, stated that slot machines may be a good addition to community life “because of the money to win” (non-user_5), at least “for those who gained money” (non-user_4).

The non-users cited an additional unfavourable impact of slot machines on rural communities (4 out of 6). They repeatedly described slot machines as being “not good because it leads children to steal” (non-user_6). This delinquent behaviour of students not only has a detrimental effect on social cohesion within communities, it also presents financial risks. The non-users reasoned that slot machines “spoil children’s moral values” (non-user_6). They described youths as behaving in a disrespectful manner, particularly when they needed money to gamble on machines (non-user_6).

Furthermore, non-users’ and users’ statements concur with regard to time conflicts. The non-users also deprecated what gamblers experience due to their frequent use of slot machines and the consequential neglect of professional and personal commitments. On this subject, the non-users did not differentiate between young users’ neglect of traditional leisure activities and older users’ missed work hours. Instead, the non-users (2 out of 6) related how students neglect their education, whether through truancy in not attending school or through not doing their homework: “Children don’t go to school but rather work to make money to spend at the machines, then they spend the time for learning with the machines” (non-user_3). Non-users gave similar arguments when describing older users’ time conflicts caused by the installation and operation of gambling machines in the villages. Young home-makers were particularly concerned that their “married men stay away from home to gamble” (non-user_4). Non-users in their twenties and thirties specifically condemned slot machines for the negative impact they had on their family members – ranging from siblings to husbands.

Pertaining to the discussion on development, modernisation and its correlation with cosmopolitanism, the non-users (5 out of 6) did not perceive slot machines as a sign of progress and transformation, or as a means of achieving higher levels of development in the villages of Nzema East. The non-users associated development exclusively with practical improvements in infrastructure, better communications, and
information technology, as well as with job creation and economic growth “to boost economic activities” (non-user_1). They broadly attributed such progress to urban areas only and did not believe that their relatively remote communities attracted any kind of cosmopolitan encounter. Furthermore, older non-users stated that global cultural practices and cosmopolitan attitudes cannot and should not be a part of the everyday local lifestyle, because these new-fangled things are in contradiction with their traditional way of life and undermine the importance of established leisure activities in the rural communities.

The non-users generally believed that the adverse socio-economic impact of slot machines overshadowed any potential benefit. To limit the risk of financial losses and the onset of gambling addiction in rural communities, some non-users (3 out of 6) successfully “team ed up with the chief to remove the machine” (non-user_6). Rather than accepting slot machines as a new recreational practice in the villages, non_user_2 desired other signs of technological development in the communities “to give the children more of civilisation than the slot machines.”

5.3. Key informants’ perspectives on slot machines in the villages of Nzema East

The key informants in the survey responded according to their advisory roles, as explained in Section 4. They noted that gambling, i.e. playing games of chance for money or other valuables, has no real tradition there, and most were suspicious of a direct link between the installation of slot machines and any possible (economic) modernisation or transformation processes in the rural communities (chief_2; elder_1; elder_2; teacher_2; nurse).

When commenting on the socio-economic effects of slot machines in the villages, the key informants referred especially to two areas on which slot machines have a profound impact. First, slot machine users’ frequent gambling causes financial losses. These can either be direct losses, when villagers gamble on machines, or indirect losses, when users fail to meet their work obligations and consequently miss out on wages or profits. The same goes for when students steal money from the family to gamble. Second, slot machines have a negative effect on young villagers’ behaviour and cause them to neglect their education.

Regarding the economic effects of slot machines at the district level, it is of great concern to the Nzema East planning officer that the non-institutionalisation of gambling activities leads to high revenue losses. Neither foreign slot machine operators nor local caretakers pay taxes to the district finance authorities on their income from the machines. The planning officer stressed that any increase in the district budget through such tax payments could promote socio-economic development in the rural communities and in the district as a whole. To enforce the payment of taxes, slot machines would require registration under the National Gaming Act by means of proper licensing.

The district assembly and the traditional authorities highlighted the detrimental impact of these gambling activities, especially on young locals. Elder_2 stated that the slot machine is “not good because it has [a] negative impact on children, but doesn’t return anything to the community.” Similarly, teacher_2 explained that the gambling machine “only benefits the Chinese.” All members of the key informant survey group pointed out that local students’ motivation and efforts have been steadily decreasing ever since the gambling machines were installed: “Children do not spend enough time learning” (teacher_1) and “do not stay home after school” (elder_1). In response to these developments in local schools, the Nzema East planning committee placed the issue of unlicensed slot machines on the agenda for discussion at the district assembly in spring 2017; the assembly’s decisions were still pending in late 2017, and by summer 2019 there was still no information on the decisions taken.

At the village level, teacher_1 campaigned for the local Parent Teacher Association to impose punishments on underage slot machine users. Another major grievance that the key informants, non-users and users all mentioned was that young users steal money to gamble. Chief_2 stated that slot machines “cause children to steal.” The paramount chief believed that these delinquent practices pose an additional economic risk to already poor villages. In this regard, chief_1 remarked that gambling devices are “negative in economic perspective because the children steal money.” Again, all the key informants deplored the fact that students neglect their schooling and other traditional obligations, such as helping their families with household or farming duties, and were saddened that peers and friends cut short traditional leisure activities in favour of gambling on slot machines. As chief_2 summarised, “children do not follow their usual activities such as movies or studies.” Finally, the key informants disapproved of the changes in young people’s moral values after encounters with slot machines. Elder_1 expressed his unease as follows: “It brings only bad habits to the children like smoking, gambling and so forth.”

As a consequence of their stricture and concerns, the local chiefs, elders and community teachers set in motion a campaign against the installation and operation of slot machines in their villages. In several community meetings, traditional leaders raised the issue of gambling machines and collected local citizens’ complaints for presentation to the foreign operators. Chiefs from two of the communities under investigation met the slot machine owners and persuaded them to remove the machines from their villages in late 2016 and early 2017, before this empirical study was undertaken. In one of the six villages, the gambling machine was removed by the owner just a few days before the survey because “some children broke the machine itself to get money out of there,” as teacher_2 explained.

Despite their criticism and efforts to remove the slot machines from their communities, some key informants consider slot machines to be a worthy addition to local community life. These positive impressions are particularly related to the aspect of developing a societal network between rural villagers and foreign slot machine distributors. In this regard, chief_1 noted that “besides [having a] negative impact, [the slot machine] causes a connection to the Chinese.” Both traditional leaders and community teachers consider such networks – even if only fanciful – to be a chance for young people to experience modernisation and development in the villages. Chief_1 described how the experience of different cultural practices might support the connection between villagers and “other people and other communities.” Teacher_1 added that such encounters will “enlighten and educate the community.” Both respondents stressed the significance of comparatively small additions to the villages, such as slot machines, “to endorse development and connect the community to the globalised world” (teacher_1).

The other key informants, despite preferring a more cosmopolitan character in their villages, to “endorse development” (elder_2), do not consider the slot machine as an opportunity to bring about improvement, “because it has [a] bad impact on the communities” (chief_2). The local chieftaincy and community teachers believed that it was good to generate sustainable development in their villages and enable rural citizens to be part of more profound globalisation processes, which would create jobs, improve industrial machinery or technology, facilitating education and enabling links to other people, such as “computers [and] playing machines for studying” (chief_2). Elder_2 added that such means of modernisation may enable rural villages to catch up with “those in the cities [that] are developing faster than those in the villages” – a view that reflects slot machines users’ idea of a disparity between rural and urban spaces in Ghana.

6. Discussion

This exploratory case study necessitates the recognition of certain limitations to the transferability of the results for two reasons. First, the small number of interviews set in the very specific context of the villages of Nzema East in Ghana, which were selected deliberately as explained in Section 4, does not allow for broader generalisation. Second, the risks that accompany gambling activities are likely to strengthen responses that reject slot machines as a new cultural practice.
Consequently, the installation of other forms of modern leisure activities may cause a different response.

Despite these limitations, the findings of the extensive investigation into slot machines installed in six rural villages in Nzema East may provide a more detailed understanding of the responses of rural residents from the Global South to encounters with modern leisure activities that originated from the Global North and now form part of their familiar surroundings. This understanding centres on a couple of interrelated findings that reflect elements of Bourdieu’s (1977) habitus concept and that broaden the discourse on cosmopolitanism based on the impressions gained from the rural Global South.

Bourdieu’s theory of practice suggests that there are two prima facie outcomes for villagers of Nzema East to respond to the sudden appearance of slot machines in their communities, which encroach on their accustomed environment: either rural residents will accept slot machines as a new, modern leisure activity, despite having nothing in common with their traditional cultural practices, or they will simply reject them. In this regard, Dirksmeier (2009) considers encounters with these culturally alien slot machines to be either a worthwhile addition to individual and communal lifestyles, or a source of risk to familiar structures. Whether individual villagers deem gambling machines to be a blessing or a curse will depend largely, according to Bourdieu (Dirksmeier, 2009; Reckwitz, 2005), on their particular character and values.

The findings from the villages of Nzema East suggest, above all, that acceptance or rejection of slot machines depends on traits such as an individual’s age, role in the community, socio-economic status, and perception of their own position regarding modernisation and development processes. Consequently, the findings indicate that the pre-defined research groups of users and non-users represent either one of two empirical types that accept or reject slot machines for distinct reasons. Users are typically younger than non-users, have a lower disposable income, contend with a comparatively insecure social and economic status, and have a strong yearning for development and modernisation in their communities, since they are unable to leave their villages due to a lack of personal resources. These characteristics correspond to the extensive literature on gambling motivation (e.g. Fisher and Griffiths, 1995). Furthermore, these traits indicate an openness to change – changes in individual behaviour as well as in the societal context – which appears to be so important in the cosmopolitanism debate (Skrbis and Woodward, 2013).

How exactly, then, do the characteristics of users and non-users affect their response to the introduction of coin-operated machines to the villages? Overall, users in the communities under investigation are willing to alter their traditional, everyday routines, spending significant lengths of time on machines. Most gamble for fun and entertainment, or as a distraction from their routine lives. This openness to innovation suggests that consumer behaviour is changing fundamentally in these deprived communities. While older villagers mainly consume goods and services to satisfy their biological needs, younger people consume the experience of new cultural practices to meet inherent needs that go beyond biological needs. A variety of adverse effects accompanies such changes in users’ everyday routines: their neglect of professional and social responsibilities, their acceptance of being short of money, and the fact that students steal money to gamble, are some of the adverse effects. Such changes in behaviour point to the rise of gambling addiction among users in the communities of Nzema East (Monaghan and Derevensky, 2008). This is the reason why most non-users and key informants represented in the sample of socio-economically settled and older villagers consider gambling devices to be a source of risk to the societal structures of their communities. Crucially, they reject slot machines as a cultural practice in their villages, not only for themselves, but also for frequent users.

The correlation that some users make between the simplistic use of slot machines as a new, modern recreational activity and their individual relationship to other cultures and cultural practices embodies the second key finding of the case study. The discussion as to the acceptance or rejection of slot machines in the villages of Nzema East and the question of who accepts or rejects them as a new form of leisure are embedded in a broader discourse on cosmopolitanism. At the individual level, the findings highlight the emergence of certain core values of a cosmopolitan lifestyle as defined, for example, by Skrbis and Woodward (2013) and Woodward et al. (2008), as part of the ordinary cosmopolitanism debate: openness to the cultural other, the aspiration to experience cosmopolitanism frequently, and the putative extension of societal networks.

The notion that they are somehow being ‘invited’ to play by foreign slot machine distributors from a supposedly more developed and technologically perceptive country gives users the impression that they are in a genuine relationship with the device operators and with other gamblers in distant countries around the world. This is why users express a feeling that they are expanding their personal networks, an idea that Woodward et al. (2008) emphasise as an important feature in cosmopolitan thinking. Following the users’ argumentation, the expansion of societal relations will foster tangible development in the communities in the long term, because these connections reach out to a world, and a society, that embodies a higher level of development than that in the villages of Nzema East concerning all major aspects of (everyday) life. Overall, users no longer consider themselves as strictly rural residents of these six peripheral villages in Ghana, but rather as members of a global society who experience and enjoy automated gambling as a shared leisure activity and as a means to attaining a modern lifestyle.

Some of the local key informants support this users’ claim and consider young users’ appreciation of their belonging to a broader global society to be a supportive element in young villagers’ futures. Local chiefs and elders, as traditionally important figures in the communities, setting out to broaden the idea of development, are able to gain a concept of more comprehensive structures than mere infrastructural improvement. ‘They are therefore able to appreciate the significance of societal relations and networks beyond the boundary of the villages, which will affect young locals seeking their place in a globalised society. Nevertheless, both key informants and non-users would prefer other signs of globalisation processes and increasing cosmopolitan values than slot machines in their rural communities, things that would overcome the negative effects of gambling machines, but still enable an experience of the cultural other.

In summary, changes in habits, such as among slot machine users in rural villages, induce the incorporation of the core values of recent cosmopolitanism discourse as described above. Moreover, these changes stress the significance of the impact of most ordinary cosmopolitan encounters corresponding to Skrbis and Woodward’s (2013) analysis. Thus, the findings of the present study indicate the emergence of a cosmopolitanism of habits, which detaches cosmopolitanism from specific localities, away from urban areas and from the Global North, which traditional cosmopolitanism literature has preferred to investigate. Instead, it links cosmopolitan attitudes to the individual itself, no matter where it is situated, if a cosmopolitan encounter is made available, and provided the impetus is of a type that appears worthwhile for the subconscious habitus to allow change. The findings of the case study show that ordinary cosmopolitan encounters appear to be a particularly strong stimulus in the global South if they embody something new and modern from the Global North. Rejection of slot machines by non-users, however, largely stems from the nature of the encounter: the high risk of gambling addiction and its associated socioeconomic problems are major factors. Practices such as gambling that are morally and legally questionable throughout the world are unlikely to produce a profound change in habits in a majority of individuals.

7. Conclusion

This exploratory study of the response of rural residents’ to the
installation of Chinese slot machines in Nzema East, Ghana, suggests that locals from the rural Global South are as susceptible to developing cosmopolitan attitudes as residents from any other part of the world. These results necessitate a broadening of the perspective found in traditional cosmopolitanism discourse, which long overlooked the peripheries of the Global South as localities of cosmopolitan encounters and of corresponding changes of habit.

The sudden appearance of automated gambling machines causes wide-ranging changes in habit among local citizens in Nzema East who gamble on machines. These changes indicate an enhancement of users’ habits through cosmopolitan values. Thus, users represent the first of two empirical types as regards responses to encountering this new and modern activity. They welcome this foreign cultural practice, which appears at first sight to be a modern recreational activity, approaching it with an open mind and seeing it as an addition to everyday life. Later, they adapt their daily routines to the availability of slot machines, displaying an aspiration to experience the encounter repeatedly. Finally, they change how they perceive themselves as members of a societal network of gamblers beyond the boundaries of their villages. These individual adjustments in deprived villages illustrate the emergence of cosmopolitan attitudes (Skrbis and Woodward, 2013; Yeoh, 2017) as responses to the experience of this new and foreign leisure practice.

Representing the second of the two empirical types, locals who do not use the machines and regional and local actors who have a profound impact on broader common decision-making in the villages also adjust their habits or mindsets when encountering slot machines, but in a very different way to the first group. The formation into these two groups reflects the great differences regarding their relative socio-economic and demographic parameters, suggesting that local residents’ responses to a foreign cultural practice depend to a large extent on their individual characteristics. Influenced by these traits, each villager either perceives the encounter as a worthwhile addition or as a danger to familiar traditional community life.

The rejection of slot machines as a new, modern leisure activity by non-users and key informants mirrors their concerns about the adverse impact of gambling machines. These impacts include the emergence of gambling addiction, along with all the associated negative behavioural outcomes in the villages of Nzema East, in terms of time conflicts, financial losses and deviant behaviour. Although non-users and key informants may understand the users’ impression of belonging to a more cosmopolitan society due to encounters with the new cultural practice, they still prefer manifestations of globalisation and cosmopolitanism that are more beneficial to the deprived villages than gambling machines.

Nevertheless, the slot machines in the Ghanaian peripheries embody the materialisation of consumable foreign cultural practices – in this case, specifically from the Global North – which continue to spread all over the world. Frequent confrontation with, and repeated consumption of, the cultural other in the form of gambling machines has a very serious impact on the everyday lives and attitudes of these rural residents. Accordingly, the findings of the case study support the ordinary and everyday approach to cosmopolitanism, which celebrates the recognition of most ordinary and everyday forms of cosmopolitan encounters (Hiebert, 2002; Skrbis and Woodward, 2013). Furthermore, the results confirm the new conception of cosmopolitanism, concerning its need to open up to rural areas as locations where confrontation and adaptation are individuals’ respective responses to such encounters (Cloke, 2006; Woods, 2010). The results from the rural villages of Nzema East are therefore evidence of the need to divert cosmopolitanism of geographical localisation, such as urban centres and the Global North, which traditional cosmopolitanism literature has favoured for so long. Instead, the study underlines the significance of considering the Global South as a locality that increasingly hosts cosmopolitan encounters – not only in the evolving urban centres, but also in the peripheries – forming an immanent part of the discourse.

The case study of Nzema East demonstrates another aspect that is crucial to a holistic understanding of cosmopolitan encounters and individuals’ responses to them. As an experience of a new cultural practice, slot machines exemplify the profoundly adverse impact of gambling on individuals and communities. The deviant behaviour changes that occur among users in the villages point to the high risk of gambling addiction. The differences between the two types of response to the availability of these coin-operated machines in Nzema East suggest that the emergence of cosmopolitan attitudes depends not only on individual characteristics, but also on the type of cosmopolitanism encountered.

This yet very basic understanding of the effects of cosmopolitan encounters on the rural Global South requires future research to evaluate local responses to other types of cultural practice apart from slot machines. Additional case studies on the dispersion and adoption of other cross-cultural experiences will broaden the awareness of how ordinary cosmopolitanism emerges in the peripheries of the Global South.

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