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3 *Poker and Positioning*

Early in my research in Chania, I watched a poker game at Meltemi, the gambling coffeehouse introduced at the start of this book, while Petros was its owner. Playing that evening were Petros and several other regulars: Nondas (the later owner of the establishment), Mikhalis, and Stelios. The game lasted for almost five hours, and throughout the game Nondas had been losing and Stelios had been winning, and doing so soundly. There seemed to be no end to his production of flushes, straights, and even a few fours-of-a-kind. Stelios seemed not to react at all to his good fortune; he played steadily and before long had a sizable pile of markers in front of him. After this continued for some time, Nondas turned to no one in particular and shouted, "He's made monkeys of us!" Then, as he cut for the next deal, he said to the deck of cards forcefully, "Wake up, bastard!"

Such an event was one among many such forceful attempts to engage fortune that I observed in Chania. How is the social analyst to make sense of them? Does the appearance of such "superstitious" practices indicate an ignorance or stubborn intransigence about integrating laws of probability into Chaniot gamblers' understandings of outcomes? Or do such events provide an opportunity for social analysts to understand more clearly how in the present, as outcomes appear from moment to moment, social actors engage them and construct understandings of their world, understandings that are bound up in relationships of power and interest? In this chapter I explore the microsocial interaction that takes place over a poker table as a way of clarifying the extent to which the interpretations of outcomes by those players reflects an ongoing project

of the construction of a meaningful world. Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration provides a backdrop for reconsidering the place of contingency in social life not simply in "modern" settings but in any environment where the unexpected unfolds. The broader argument is that practices and concepts often treated by anthropologists as respected but exotic modes of thought or action, isolated from questions of power and "modern" practice in general, can be instead the sites and keystones of the ongoing projects of reality construction themselves. As Michael Jackson (1989, 17) writes about the reliance by anthropologists on such categories as witchcraft, the evil eye, and magic, "Many of these frames of reference suggest radical *discontinuities* between 'them' and 'us,' and fail to clarify on what grounds we can reach an understanding of such 'alien' beliefs and practices." It is for this reason that discussions of risk analysis and management on one hand and superstitious practices on the other often present themselves as incommensurable.

Risk, Modernity, and Structuration

The kind of dichotomy I identify here between nonmodern (or premodern) views of uncertainty and the modern view—that which takes the analytical status of risk as preeminent—are evident in Anthony Giddens's *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (1991). The work is a useful example because it demonstrates clearly the dangers of residual categories that appear inevitably once the West is identified with an inherent quality. Modernity for Giddens is defined by three necessary preconditions: industrialization, capitalism, and surveillance and control of social life (epitomized by the nation-state). He concludes that members of modern societies are characterized by an awareness of the uncertainty of future outcomes, which are in turn shaped by the prevalence of such statistical techniques as risk assessment. Conversely, in "nonmodern" societies, Giddens argues, there is a concern with fate, destiny, and an individual's relation to the cosmos (*fortuna*). Thus, Giddens equates "traditional" society with a preoccupation with the cosmological domain while denying its members the possibility of doubting their cosmology. Thinking in terms of risk assessment (which Giddens opposes to thinking in terms of *fortuna*) therefore is unavailable in these societies, Giddens suggests, because it is "intrinsic to institutionalized risk systems" which are "much more prominent in modern rather than premodern societies" (1991, 119, 117). The conditions of modern societies, on the other hand, require that their members think in terms of risk assessment, although notions of fate "do not disappear altogether" (130).¹

In essentializing such categories as risk, fate, *fortuna*, fatalism, and modernity, Giddens relies on a highly individualized focus throughout his discussion. Giddens separates the individual from his or her social context, just as he separates the concept of modernity from its historical context. This forces Giddens to essentialize both these concepts and the people who seem to act completely at their mercy. Consider the following quote: "The point, to repeat, is not that day-to-day life is inherently more risky than was the case in previous eras. It is rather that, in conditions of modernity, for lay actors as well as for experts in specific fields, thinking in terms of risk assessment is a more or less ever-present exercise, of a partly imponderable character. . . . Individuals seek to colonize a future for themselves as an intrinsic part of their life-planning. . . . All individuals establish a portfolio of risk assessment" (1991, 123–24, 125). This is precisely the assumption that leads Giddens to equate the lack of a highly rationalized, bureaucratized system of risk assessment (as found in his premodern societies) to an adherence to an outlook based on fate, or predestination (Giddens 1991, 109–43). This perspective denies the possibility that fate could be appealed to as a strategy, one made possible by circumstance according to the rules of performative appropriateness. Thus, Giddens's formulation does not hold for a place such as Chania, where a discourse of fate is not prevalent among most gamblers but instead appears in the Greek state's ad campaigns for its several lotteries, most pointedly in the poster that proclaimed, "It puts your fate in your hands!" Gamblers in Chania, by contrast, found an appeal to fate less attractive precisely because it suggested a lack of agency ("Fate means you close your eyes!" one exclaimed to me).

One reviewer of his earlier work suggests that Giddens's key contribution to anthropological thought is his integration of action and structure (Karp 1986). Ironically, it is precisely on this point that I find Giddens's later work on risk and fate less successful. The reason for this is that Giddens relies on ideas of fate and risk that lack any sense of potential manipulation by the actors themselves (in direct contrast to his earlier model of structuration, which accorded social actors this ability). The pervasiveness and inevitability of risk assessment thinking in modernity and notions of fate elsewhere that Giddens observes may be more the result of his own exposure to the prevalence of such ideas in the social sciences. This general observation is also made by Jackson (1989, 15), who, as I mentioned in the Introduction, proposes that uncertainty is a universal feature of human experience, arguing that "the anthropologist's preoccupation with regularity, pattern, system, and structure has to be seen as less an objective reflection of social reality than a comment on

his personal and professional need for certitude and order."² I therefore view *modernity* as a problematic term when used analytically to distinguish some societies from others—Greece might well be placed on either side, depending on how the line is drawn—and make the argument here and throughout this book for an alternative approach to making sense of the place of the contingent in any society.

Not surprisingly, then, turning to Giddens's earlier work provides a more helpful approach, and it is with regard to this work that Karp's observations above are well-founded. In *The Constitution of Society* (1984), Giddens outlines his theory of structuration, an approach that relies on the notion that local actors are themselves discursively and practically knowledgeable about their activities (they are as much, here, social theorists as the social scientists who study them). Giddens's restatement of his theory bears extensive quotation:

Structure, as recursively organized sets of rules and resources, is out of time and space, save in its instantiations and co-ordination as memory traces, and is marked by an "absence of the subject." The social systems in which structure is recursively implicated, on the contrary, comprise the situated activities of human agents, reproduced across time and space. Analysing the structuration of social systems means studying the modes in which such systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction. . . . The constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality. . . . [T]he structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize. (1984, 25)

As they engage in activities, then, human beings "draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts" and thereby produce and reproduce the social systems of which they are a part. Therefore, *structuration* indicates a dynamic relationship between structure and action, where amid the semistructured flow of everyday life, knowledgeable actors' practices both shape and reproduce those structures. It is in this sense that the concept of structuration can be applied to a social setting where uncertainty is a key (and explicit) element. Thus, we may usefully explore the means by which gamblers make sense of unforeseen outcomes as they unfold in the context of a game, while concomitantly relating these understandings to other aspects of social life, by applying this idea of structuration. Moreover, such an approach can be extended to apply to any case where the politics of contingency are at stake. Giddens (1984, 25–26) himself observes this: "Structure is not to be equated

with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling. This, of course, does not . . . compromise the possibility that actors' own theories of the social systems which they help to constitute and reconstitute in their activities may reify those systems. The reification of social relations, or the discursive 'naturalization' of the historically contingent circumstances and products of human action, is one of the main dimensions of ideology in social life." Therefore, a recognition of actors' awareness of the possibility of "unintended consequences" becomes crucial (1984, 27) because it is this sensitivity to the contingent that makes the process of creating meaning a high-stakes enterprise.³ Structuration allows the analyst to grasp what is at stake in various actors' putting forth of particular means for understanding the unexpected. With this in mind, then, I now turn to an examination of this phenomenon in practice.

Life Is a Gamble

In Chania, a frequent subject for chatter between games at the poker tables in the coffeeshouses, or *kafenio*, was a certain type of "luck" (*gouri*) or, more specifically, various players' claims to possessing or lacking it and their attributions of this presence or lack in others. These claims and attributions, and attempts to maintain or alter their verity, reveal as much about the immediate social milieu as they do about the player in question. The concept of *gouri* often is encountered in discussions with gamblers outside the immediate context of playing, although it is often behind the scenes at the gaming table during the game, as will become clear later in this chapter.

One might be tempted to translate *gouri* as "lucky charm," but it is far more general: Anything from a time of day to a particular position at the card table to a semiritualized practice (always drinking a Greek coffee before playing, for example) to the presence (or absence) of someone can bring a player good or bad *gouri*. The entire immediate social scene (for example, that of a coffeeshouse) can be claimed to bring one *gouri*. For Chaniots, *gouri* has a connotation similar to the English word *augur*, where the idea of a "sign" or "omen" of good tidings is not far removed from how *gouri* is used and often suggests an indication of this good fortune in a proximate item, person, or practice.⁴ On several occasions, after I arrived at a *kafenio* and sat slightly behind a friend who was playing poker, that player began winning. He then referred to it often, saying, "Bravo! Look! You brought me *gouri*!" The impetus behind and meaning of this claim was later brought into focus by how one player described it to me: "Someone who is winning doesn't want to change anything, be-

cause he doesn't want to change his *gouri*." There is a direct parallel here with Giddens's observation that in many instances of social life "strategically placed actors seek reflectively to regulate the overall conditions of system reproduction either to keep things as they are or to change them" (1984, 27-28); the importance of this aspect of the application of *gouri* will become evident through the example discussed later in this chapter.

Poker is an especially useful focus for an examination of how *gouri* is used because the structural features of this game (i.e., that it is a contest between a small number of people who play together over an extended period of time and that its central strategic element is one of hiding and revealing, both of cards and intentions) help bring into sharp relief this intersection between *gouri* and social interaction. It is in the context of an unpredictably unfolding present and an indeterminate future that players (dis)order the reality over the gaming table through their claims about how the emerging patterns of outcomes, and their position with regard to them, should be understood. These claims themselves constitute risks of the self as they expose the player who makes them to the possibility of damaging social remonstrations. Also, I want to be sure to note that I emphasize here one trope of accountability, in this case *gouri*, somewhat to the exclusion of others (skill, luck as otherwise construed, fate, and statistical probability). Although these other tropes emerge in poker-playing contexts and play a part in my discussion in this chapter, I nonetheless found that in the context of poker *gouri* is most frequently highlighted. Therefore, I here extend Chaniots' emphasis on *gouri* for the heuristic purpose of further illustrating the degree to which claims about chance through this term are embedded in local social relations.

An Evening of Contest

The event described here took place in late November at Meltemi, a poker *kafenio*⁵ that I visited regularly. In the evenings, beginning around 7 P.M., the poker started, often lasting until midnight or 1 A.M. On most nights there was one table with a continuous game, almost always the front left table, as a heavy curtain covered the window along the front of the *kafenio*, leaving this table the least visible from the road. This position highlighted the tension between exposure and concealment, the public and the private, that is as present at the boundaries between the gambling *kafenio* and the outside world as it is over the poker table itself. In the months before I made a contact at this *kafenio* I had walked by it many times, catching only the barest glimpse through the

windowed doorway of a card game at that front table before I was already past it and wondering whether I had been seen staring. There were four players who played for about eight hours on this particular evening. Petros, a close contact of mine and the former owner of Meltemi (having sold it the previous spring, 1995, to Nondas), was there. Petros had nonetheless continued to play at Meltemi nearly every night. Because either Nondas or Petros played in nearly every game (and sometimes both together), one of the two was the "banker," an arrangement that did not change after the sale of the *kafenio*. Another player at the table this evening, to the right of Petros, was Mikhalis, another regular. He was a quiet player, and seemingly very serious, as he never seemed to change expression, whether winning or losing, and even between hands he did not engage in the frequently heard chatter over the table.

The third player at the table (to Mikhalis's right) was Andreas, a young man whom I had not seen before at the *kafenio*. He was about thirty-two years old, and therefore about fifteen years younger than the approximate age of the other players. Petros later called him a *khroniaris*, which means someone who plays "yearly," that is, during the holiday season. However, the word is also used for young livestock, in much the same way that *yearling* is used in English, and this evocation of qualities of vulnerability, naiveté, and youth highlights how regular gamblers often characterize their relationship with the *khroniaridhes* as predatory. This portrayal cuts both ways, however, because a yearling who is fortunate enough (in the regulars' eyes) to win over the short holiday period of gambling, and who then disappears, does not give the regulars a chance to win their money back. Though not a novice at the game, Andreas did seem at times to suffer from lapses in concentration, making procedural mistakes such as trying to change the ante when he was dealer before a full round had passed or forgetting who had opened and therefore having to ask the other players who could bet first in the second round. Nonetheless, Andreas won steadily over the course of the evening, presenting a seemingly endless string of threes-of-a-kind. The link between these outcomes and the broader issues of intergenerational contest and contest between novices and regulars figured prominently through the implicitly and explicitly applied trope of *gouri* as the evening went on. The fourth player, Dhimitris, was not as regular a patron as Petros and Mikhalis, but I had seen him at the *kafenio* a few times, and he had been playing there for a little over a year, albeit semiregularly (a few times a month, he told me). He was roughly the same age as Petros and Mikhalis, and again the difference not simply in familiarity between the players but also in age, between Andreas and the other three, was clear.

As play proceeded through the evening, Petros was breaking even or losing slightly, Mikhalis was a little in the black, Andreas was winning almost without pause, and Dhimitris seemed to lose hand after hand, most often to Andreas. Mikhalis, as always, kept his expression the same, nearly silent as he asked for cards, bet, or folded. Andreas's miscues continued, and responses by all of the players to them grew more abrupt and impatient, but it was Dhimitris who began to take every opportunity to complain. After losing a high-stakes hand that had come down to only him and Andreas (Andreas's full house beating Dhimitris' three-of-a-kind), he turned to Petros and quickly showed him his cards before throwing them in, and said, "Look! What else could I have done? He doesn't know what's going on but he wins!" Getting a very small nod from Petros, Dhimitris continued, "That wasn't correct, what I did? I had three queens!" Andreas remained silent, not even looking at Dhimitris, who continued to look around the *kafenio*, his arms slightly spread, a mixture of bewilderment, anger, and supplication on his face. At that point Mikhalis, who was shuffling and preparing to deal the next round, looked up for a moment and said sharply, "Come now! Are we playing or talking?" This ended the discussion, and the next hand was played. The pattern of winning and losing, the disruption of Dhimitris's outburst, and the difference in age and familiarity between the players combined here to create a situation that on the surface may be simple but that in fact reveals what is at stake during this game beyond the money on the table. Before returning to analyze this event more closely, however, I will take some space to note some significant and unusual features of the game as it is played in Chania. Given the importance the trope of *gouri* places on circumstance and practice, these conventional aspects of the game are central to a full understanding of what happened that evening and how it provides an example of structuration in practice.

How Can One Know Another?

The poker game they played that night in Meltemi was by far the most common form of it played there and throughout Chania, and in almost all respects it is the same as draw poker as commonly played in the United States.⁶ Between hands, the deal rotates around the table counterclockwise. After one complete cycle has been completed the dealer has the right to change the minimum opening bid or increase the ante. However, the ante is handled differently than in most draw poker games as played in the United States. In Chania it is the dealer who puts in a certain amount, not each player, and this amount is forfeited to the next

hand if the hand dealt is tossed in (that is, not opened by anyone). A certain amount of money is paid to the house, and this is called the *vidhani*.

In Meltemi *kafenio* they also have an unusual system for representing the money bet on the table. Rather than the more commonly used poker chips, this *kafenio* uses *khartakia* ("little cards"). The owner takes the old decks that have become unusable because of the marks from wear on their backs and takes them to a friend who, with a machine, trims off the white border around each card.⁷ The trimmed-down cards, each representing 250 Dr (about US\$1), are to the players noticeably smaller than the full-sized ones and do not create confusion for them. To the unwitting, however, it can seem that the players are playing a rather strange game where they periodically throw cards into the middle of the table. The beauty of the system, the owner told me, is that "when the police come, they will see that we are just playing cards!" Here, then, the theme of concealment and revelation is played out not between the players at the table but rather between them and those outside this social sphere, most notably the police, who do not participate in the game.⁸ This tension between gambling as hidden practice and the attempts by the state to regulate it (through both its enforcement of antigambling laws and its sponsorship of casinos and state lottery games) reappears throughout the concealed scenes of illegal gambling in Chania and brings to mind the difference, noted earlier, between local gamblers' conceptions of the risks they take and the state's use of the trope of fate in its advertising for these games.

There is also an instructive difference between the characterization of the group of players at the poker table as a closed community with regard to others in the *kafenio* and the sharply different ethos of the table in many other Greek contexts, where, as Cowan (1990, 148) notes, "a mere lack of chairs cannot justify exclusion. Normally, as the proverb says, 'At the table, there's room for all but one—Satan himself!'" In poker, by contrast, there is a high degree of sensitivity to outside influence on the part of many players, who often insist that no spectators sit near or behind them. Even players who tolerate spectators insist that they sit back from the table, out of the direct illumination of the lamp suspended above. One such player turned quickly to me during a game and looked down, saying sharply, "Don't do that!" It took me a moment to realize that he was speaking of my foot, which was propped on a cross-rung of his chair. My delay in understanding was the result of the fact that this practice is so common in *kafenio* and often is an expression of commensal intimacy (particularly in the midst of a good conversation), coupled with the fact that this was someone I knew fairly well. I imme-

diately realized that this was a very different situation, one in which normal conventions are subordinated to those of the game.⁹

This bounded quality of the table mirrors the bounded nature of the game itself, where all of the players share the intent of creating the appropriate conditions for the unpredictable outcomes to unfold. The game thus takes on a sacrosanct quality, where a significant breach of protocol (such as an extra card dealt) means the hand is "broken" (*spasmeno*) and must be thrown out, with all money returned to the appropriate players. The role of the dealer becomes especially important here because his recommendations for the rectification of more minor transgressions (such as misunderstandings about the amount a given player has tossed in) are the ones likely to be followed. Albeit temporarily, the dealer is the authority at the table, and it is his job to ensure that the game unfolds without contamination by error or cheating.

The four players also regularly (re)determine who will sit where. Four differently ranked cards are selected from the deck and mixed up, face down, on the table. Each player draws a card and they turn them over; they then arrange themselves around the table from lowest rank to highest. The positions are shuffled in this way every two hours so that no one player enjoys a regular advantage by, for example, always following a player with whose style he is very familiar. One player serves as the banker, selling stacks of twenty *khartakia* for 5,000 Dr (about US\$20) each. This player, usually the owner or a good friend of his, and also having carefully placed stacks of twenty *khartakia* on a nearby small table, does not move for these reshufflings of position, so the other players organize themselves around him. Now and then this leads to disagreements because one player or another may be particularly happy with his spot, most often because he has been winning and he claims it has brought him *gouri*. In the end, though, the changes are made, and play continues. In one such case, *Khronis*, another taxi driver who often played at *Meltemi*, hit upon an ingenious compromise when *Petros* refused his request not to shift places: He picked up his chair and moved it to the new spot, insisting that "it was the chair, surely." The rest of their time playing *Khronis* kept that chair whenever places shifted and his claim was borne out; his winning streak continued the entire evening.

Many kinds of things are alternately hidden and revealed in the game of poker, and understanding this quality is essential for an examination of the game as a forum for the engagement of chance. The emphasis placed on reading the other players while giving away nothing (or false information) gives the game a special status with some of its players. One of them, an older and well-known *koumartzis* (gambler, though with a slightly dra-

matic quality) in Chania, in running through a list of card games and classifying them to me as “skill” or “luck” games, hesitated before classifying poker: “It’s not a luck or skill game; it is . . . let’s say . . . psychological,” he said. In general the regular players of poker to whom I spoke noted that the game demanded something extra and that this made the game, in their eyes, different from and better than other kinds of gambling. That this characterization of poker by its players is as much an attempt to claim some special access to this skill as it is to distinguish the game from others does not render these claims trivial. On the contrary, devoted players of each of the major forms of gambling in Chania commonly took steps to distinguish their game (and therefore themselves) from the others around, a practice that mirrors the distinctions made by those who play only in private gambling clubs regarding coffeehouse gambling and vice versa (see chapter 2).

The distinctive skill in poker is the ability to read the other players’ intentions, gauge their resources, both in money and self-confidence, notice patterns in their actions, and, finally, have a good idea of the quality of the cards they are holding, independent of the deceptively large (or small) amount of money on the table. All of this must be done with corresponding control over what oneself reveals in the overriding context of unpredictable distributions of cards. Although most gamblers seem to be trying to give away nothing—indeed, a poker game seems at first to be almost devoid of any communication apart from the betting—it would be a grave mistake to take this at face value. As all the players attempt to limit their behavior, they each attempt to read patterns of action in other players, such as changes in a player’s tempo of play or betting gesture; the importance of the most minute action is magnified. All of the action at the table is very constrained, but it nonetheless fills a range of expression, from enthusiasm to boredom, sharpness to weariness, confidence to worry—any one of which may be falsely adopted or accurately attributed. Thus the game behind the game in poker is one of strategic concealment and disclosure as one attempts to give others an inscrutable posture while simultaneously making one’s own guesses about other players’ situations.

Particularly relevant in poker, and an attempt to conceal just this kind of dangerous self-revelation, is the attempt to adopt the stance of “the player” (*o pekhtis*).¹⁰ This image, remarkably consistent in its portrayal to me by various contacts, encompasses the tuxedo-clad, James Bond-like master of the game,¹¹ with a serious, distant, unconcernedness or lack of emotionality. A clear instance of the first part of this image was driven home to me on my first day in Athens when, in the midst of

Syntagma Square, the political center of Athens, I looked up at the scaffolding surrounding a large hotel only to see an advertisement for a Greek male singer's latest album, *O Pekhtis*. The advertisement was a three-story-high picture of the album cover printed onto the scaffolding's wind cover, and it showed a lavish casino with the tuxedo-clad singer at a roulette table in the foreground, with a revealingly dressed woman backlit at a doorway in the background. The *pekhtis* is someone who does not concern himself with the possible outcomes in a gambling situation, good or bad. This ideal of unconcernedness, of what I call instrumental nonchalance, is paradoxically effectual because it is the lack of concern over winning that brings success. This idea is consistent with what Herzfeld (1991, 168–76) calls the "ethos of imprecision," where those engaged in social relations evince a casualness about monetary exactitude, an "economic carelessness," such as in financial or other exchange transactions between neighbors, kin, or friends. The difference here is that a transaction between individuals is not necessary for one to have an opportunity to present this posture. Instead, any risky situation provides one a chance to appear unconcerned and paradoxically more likely to attain one's objective. In the example given earlier, Mikhalis was a player who fit this image, but his inconsistency in winning and losing led several of my informants to avoid classifying him as a *pekhtis*. "He plays well," one said, "but he's too careful." The line a true "player" must walk between daring and care is fine indeed.

The game is further informed by individuals' past experiences of playing together; several of them had done so for many years. Thus Petros was able quickly to characterize the competence of several of the regulars at the *kafenio*. In discussing Yiannis, a friendly and expansive regular at Meltemi (although he as often sat and watched or read as played), Petros said that "he does not know the game well. He doesn't know how to control how fast or slow he plays, and he reveals the quality of his hand by pausing or not pausing." By contrast, Nikos, another regular, was to Petros a good player but too conservative. Finally, he said that Nondas, once he was owner of Meltemi, tried too hard to continue to make money playing, often losing his entire night's *vidhani* in a couple of hours. An important caveat to this applies, however. In Chania, particular gambling *kafenias* are associated with two primary features: type of game and identity of players. Thus, Meltemi *kafenio* had a modest reputation for mid-level stakes poker, not known to all the gamblers with whom I spoke but known to the majority. Its customers were primarily working-class Chaniots, many of them tourist industry workers and taxi drivers. (The *kafenio*'s proximity to the largest taxi stand in Chania accounts for the sec-

ond category.) But in contrast to many characterizations of (nongambling) coffeehouses in the Greek ethnographic literature (such as that of Papataxiarchis [1991]), the makeup of the gambling *kafenía* in Chania was changeable from evening to evening. I was struck by the frequency with which I was asked by certain gamblers for the name of someone else in the *kafenío*, someone I assumed they knew fairly well.

This transience has a double meaning among the gambling community, as I discussed briefly in chapter 1. On one hand, a gambler may brag about the number of *kafenía* in which he is welcome, as my friend Charis did during a long afternoon and evening in which we stopped at five different *kafenía* in Chania. At two of them he knew the owner or other regulars through his ties to the political party *Sinaspismos*; two others were popular with people from the area around his village, Skines; and the last *kafenío* was near where he had owned a furniture store. At the same time, this familiarity with multiple sites may justify a negative characterization of him as someone who chooses where to play on a given night solely on the basis of where there might be a profitable combination of money and skill. The degree to which poker players may be able to read others because of past history is somewhat limited by this variability of patronage. Of course, this shifting of opponents becomes fertile ground for claims to being able all the more quickly to evaluate one's adversaries.

There is also a noticeable distinction between the play of the hand and the periods between hands, which provide regular breaks from the near silence and constitute a comparative flourish of communication. It is here that one most immediately encounters claims about *gouri*. The practice of concealment and disclosure can take on more explicit forms at this time, too, as players who folded show what terrible hands they had (or how they should have stayed in), others pull a few more cards from the deck until they see what they would have received had they decided to throw away cards rather than hold what they had, and the winner gathers in his *khartakia*, stacking them or piling them in front of him. Petros often threw the card from his hand that would have completed an otherwise worthless straight or full house toward the hand of the player who had just thrown it down in disgust.

All Is Right with the World

To return to the concept of *gouri*, then, and to the vignette presented earlier, who speaks and who does not during the breaks between hands is influenced by the trends of winning and losing over the course of play

that evening. During these breaks the contest over claims about the reasons for the outcomes breaks out explicitly, and it is here that the idea of *gouri* comes most prominently into play, as it did for Andreas and Dhimitris. The risk of self that making these claims entails constitutes a self-exposure, the staking of a claim about not simply the players around the table but also about how the shifting patterns of outcomes themselves should be understood and how they should be understood in the context of broader social relations, such as between the "yearlings" and the regulars. What is at stake, then, for the players is not simply the money on the table. It is the momentary, ephemeral, but no less potent ordering of reality. As in this example, it is the player who has just lost a fair amount (and possibly also been losing steadily up to that point) who is most likely to risk breaking the silence and perform his loss. Things clearly were not going well for Dhimitris, who had been losing steadily. To change his *gouri*, he needed to shake things up in some way. Monetary loss thus becomes an index for a particular, and damaging, status vis-à-vis chance rather than simply revealing a loss of financial capital.

Although hands end in different ways, most often the two rounds of bidding leave two players betting against each other, with the other two having folded along the way. Thus, after each hand the most common situation is one in which one of the four players has just lost more than the others, and one has won. The player who won would invite direct reprisals, and potential conflict, by boasting, as Andreas would have from Dhimitris in this case. Speaking would thus violate the winner's interest in keeping things as they are; if something about the situation and his actions in it has brought him some *gouri*, then he does not want to change a thing. In this respect, the *fact* of winning is an indication that the immediate social situation (and, by implication, the player's position within it and interpretation of it) is felicitous (in the Austinian sense; see Austin 1975 [1956]); that is, "all is right with the world," including the winner's view of and place within it.

The third player—Petros in this case—is in a position to be entreated by the loser to hear his story and give credence (or at least respond, positively or negatively) to his complaints. Here, upon receiving the slightest response from Petros, Dhimitris continued, further making his case and restating his story. The dealer of the next hand, here Mikhalis, is the person responsible for moving the game along; he is reasonably in a position to be looking ahead to the next hand, having just put in his own money and now readying the cards. Therefore, he is the player most likely to have an interest in stopping the discussion, calling out, as Mikhalis did, "Come now! Are we playing or talking?"

It is interesting to note that although individual players see a familiarity with others' styles, gained over a history of other hands, as providing a distinct edge over the poker table, past claims about chance, such as those more than a few days old, play a very limited role in this setting. Or, perhaps more precisely, the relevant history of outcomes is so recent, encompassing most often only the evening's play, and thus brought so close to the unfolding present, that claims about this past effectively become claims about the immediate present and point much more to a coming future (and the possibilities of streaks continuing, for example), than a contested past. Rather than the use of history, then, one sees the use of the future, not only in claims about identity vis-à-vis chance but in constructions of that momentary reality itself. In this fleeting ordering of reality, a clear example of structuration, the principle of *gouri* plays a key role. The converse is of course also true, as a player who has been losing seeks to shake things up, to change the *gouri*, as Dhimitris did here. The brief passage that opens this chapter points to this kind of action as well, as Nondas tells the cards, "Wake up, bastard!"

The opening vignette of the Introduction provides a further example to emphasize how these references to *gouri* are embedded in local struggles such as those involved in running a business. The link between his failure at the card table, one that had left him in debt to the very man who had had a successful night as owner only a year before, and his failed investment in the dice table for this year was clear and was commented on by the players as they broke up for the evening and headed out into the night (many of them, as I later learned, to play *zaria* elsewhere). His immoderation in betting and bluffing that night mirrored, for them, his immoderation and ambition in setting up for a large number of customers on New Year's Eve. Such a railing against his misfortune as he performed, under the principles of *gouri*, was perhaps the only recourse by which he might bring about a change in his place in the world.¹²

Situating Chance

In how Chaniot gamblers understand the unfolding outcomes of their games, we see also how they understand the unfolding outcomes of their lives, and the links so quickly made by Greeks between gambling and social life more generally are made clear. A (dis)ordering of reality takes place in gaming contexts such as that of poker in Chania, one that arises between the participants (and other spectators) rather than solely within each actor's experience. Furthermore, the claims about indeterminacy that arise are made in a context structured by rules and conven-

tions that nonetheless relies on chance to unfold. This characteristic of gambling, its aptness as an arena for structuration, also accounts for its potency as a metaphor for other spheres of everyday experience, themselves ostensibly but not ultimately structured as well and amid which individuals and institutions pit competing claims about accountability.

In this way gambling, though a part of everyday experience with significant consequences, nonetheless also provides a semibounded refraction of the precarious nature of everyday experience, a kind of distillation of a chanceful life into a seemingly more apprehensible form. Thus, at least a part of how gamblers in Chania confront indeterminacy lies in their attempts to position themselves or others vis-à-vis chance, using *gouri* and other tropes of chance to account for the unfolding of outcomes from one moment to the next and thereby negotiating an often ephemeral but nonetheless effective understanding of a local reality through this process of structuration. What is risked, then, over the gaming table, is what is exposed to the inspection of others: one's resources, one's intentions, and, above all, one's favorable or unfavorable position, however momentarily, in the present as it unfolds.

Notes

This chapter is adapted from an article titled "Fateful Misconceptions: Rethinking Paradigms of Chance among Gamblers in Crete," which appeared in *Social Analysis* 43 (1): 141-65.

1. It is of interest to note that one of the institutionalized risk systems that Giddens mentions is gambling, which he recognizes as universal but disregards as being a "relatively minor context" (1991, 117).

2. See also the work of James Carrier (1992). He considers Occidentalism in anthropological thought with reference to Mauss's *The Gift* (1990 [1925]) and specifically the problematic distinction of commodity versus gift societies, a discussion of reciprocity easily transferable to the equally problematic distinction of fate (nonmodern) versus risk (modern) societies. See also Douglas and Isherwood's *The World of Goods* (1978, 40) for a further example of this questionable approach discussed earlier.

3. See Becker (1997) for a somewhat similar exploration of meaning construction in the face of the unexpected, although the focus differs from mine in its emphasis on individual narrative.

4. Indeed, the two words may share a history: *Gouri* derives from the Turkish word *ugur*, which may be a cognate of the Latin *augur* (Herzfeld 1981). Note also that this model cannot simply be reduced to a notion of proximity, as personal practice and other events (one's favorite soccer team winning that day) can just as well be grounds for a claim of *gouri*.

5. By "poker *kafenio*" I mean a *kafenio* with card gambling where the most commonly played game is poker. At such a place other games (*tavli* [backgam-

mon] at side tables, *bilota* between two players) sometimes are played, but most often these are to pass the time while players wait for an opening at the current table or wait for enough players to make a new table.

6. To open the betting, a player must have at least a pair of kings or aces. The betting proceeds as in draw poker, with each player choosing to stay in (by putting in the same amount as the players still in) or fold. There are two rounds of betting, one before the players exchange their cards and one afterward. The ranking of the various poker hands is as follows (from highest to lowest): straight flush (*floos*), four of a kind, flush (*khroma*), full house (*foul*), three of a kind, straight (*kenta*), two pair, and one pair.

7. The cards themselves are plastic, not plastic-coated paper, and are very durable, even if their printing is not.

8. In a similar vein, stories of outwitting police officers, such as tricking them into eating stolen meat, are discussed by Herzfeld (1985, 220–22).

9. As will become clear later in this chapter, such a situation could easily have had a different result if my friend's luck had suddenly changed for the better.

10. This characterization of the *pekhtis* has many similarities with the image of the *mangas*, the dramatic, self-sufficient, antiestablishment figure associated with the musical subculture of *rebetiko* in 1920s urban Greece. See Cowan (1990, 173–75) for a concise account of this figure.

11. Indeed, these players often alluded to James Bond to get this idea across.

12. Similar links are made by those who play the state-sponsored lotteries and scratch ticket games between their success or failure in playing these games and their success in the other "national sport" of Greece, tax evasion; see chapter 4