

**From card games to poker machines: Gambling in remote  
Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory**

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## Thesis Declaration

*I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.*

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*Signed*

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*Date*



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## Table of contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
The current Indigenous affairs discourse .....	3
What is Aboriginal gambling? .....	7
Gambling research in Australia .....	11
Re-framing Aboriginal gambling research .....	15
<b>Chapter 1:</b>	
<b>Historical overview of gambling by Aboriginal people in Australia .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Early research.....	34
The gambling ‘revolution’ .....	39
Economic implications of gambling .....	42
Social implications of gambling .....	49
Benefits of gambling.....	51
Shift in gambling research approaches .....	53
<b>Chapter 2:</b>	
<b>Fieldwork and methodology.....</b>	<b>57</b>
Fieldwork sites .....	59
Maningrida, Northern Territory .....	61
- Population .....	63
- Employment.....	67
- Housing .....	68
- Education .....	69
- Health .....	69
- Shops.....	70
- Alcohol.....	70
- Gambling.....	71
Gambling venue, Darwin, Northern Territory .....	80
Methodology .....	81
Psychological approaches .....	82
- Example 1 .....	84
- Example 2 .....	85

- Example 3 .....	86
An anthropological approach to gambling research .....	87
- Methods used in gambling venue .....	91
<b>Chapter 3:</b>	
<b>The social regulation of card games .....</b>	<b>95</b>
Card games in Maningrida.....	99
- Kunt.....	100
- Buta .....	101
Patterns of card games .....	102
Cards .....	109
Social interaction .....	113
Social regulation of card games.....	115
Gender.....	123
<b>Chapter 4:</b>	
<b>The gaming regulation of card games .....</b>	<b>127</b>
Kinship and reciprocity.....	127
Social capital and card games .....	129
Money .....	130
Entertainment vs ‘Business’ .....	134
The redistributive mechanism of card games .....	135
Cash accumulation.....	137
‘Business’ gambling in Maningrida.....	138
The regulation of card games.....	139
‘Business’ games at Level 3 .....	146
‘Business’ games at Level 4 .....	146
Analysis of gaming regulation.....	147
- Level 2 and 3 games .....	152
<b>Chapter 5:</b>	
<b>The politics of card games in Maningrida .....</b>	<b>157</b>
Legislation and policing of card games .....	158
The Intervention.....	162
Gambling and the Intervention .....	168
Racial politics.....	172

<b>Chapter 6:</b>	
<b>Commercial gambling venue, Darwin.....</b>	<b>189</b>
Literature review .....	190
Methodology .....	201
Aboriginal people’s attendance at the venue .....	203
Playing the pokies .....	207
The social life of poker machine play.....	207
Politics of commercial gambling .....	209
Gender.....	212
Machines and cash .....	214
Alcohol.....	220
<b>Chapter 7:</b>	
<b>Problem gambling.....</b>	<b>223</b>
‘Problem gambling’ around the world.....	224
Gambling screens.....	230
Current harm-minimisation strategies.....	235
- Card games .....	236
- Commercial gambling .....	237
The Future.....	239
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>245</b>
- History of Aboriginal involvement in gambling.....	245
- Card games.....	247
- Poker machines gambling.....	249
- Problem gambling.....	250
- Is Aboriginal gambling a problem? .....	251
- National strategy .....	252
<b>References.....</b>	<b>255</b>

## Table of figures

Figure 1.1: Ethnic composition of the Northern Territory (Ganter 2006) .....	26
Figure 2.1: Map of the Northern Territory.....	58
Figure 2.2: Population Distribution Maningrida (NTDEET 2007) .....	65
Figure 2.3: Language groups and outstations of Maningrida district .....	66
Figure 2.4: Employment distribution of Maningrida (DEWR 2006) .....	65
Figure 2.5: ‘Which mother are you?’ (Maningrida Mirage 1971b).....	72
Figure 3.1: Number of card games in Maningrida.....	105
Figure 3.2: Number of games by days of the week (wet season) .....	106
Figure 3.3: Number of games by days of the week (dry season).....	107
Figure 3.4: Five week period of card sales at MPA (Aug – Sept 2007) .....	110
Figure 3.5: Number of packs of cards sold (MPA) 2005-2007 .....	112
Figure 3.6: Break down of selected language groups in the Maningrida region .	117
Figure 3.7: Social layout of the community and the direction of card players ...	118
Figure 4.1: The regulation of card games in Maningrida .....	139
Figure 4.2: Gaming regulation.....	140
Figure 4.3: First level of gaming regulation .....	141
Figure 4.4: Second level of gaming regulation.....	141
Figure 4.5: Third level of gaming regulation.....	142
Figure 4.6: Fourth level of gaming regulation.....	143
Figure 4.7: Number of card games by type.....	148
Figure 5.1: <i>Gaming Control Act</i> (NT) .....	159
Figure 6.1: Percentage attendance at the venue .....	204
Figure 7.1: The criteria for the CPGI used to determine a gambling problem ....	232

## Table of tables

Table 3.1: Number of bystanders around card games over 3 week period.....	98
Table 4.1: Number of games at each level as a percentage of total number of games .....	149
Table 4.2: Number of games at each level by season as percentage of total .....	150
Table 4.3: Average number of card players during wet season and dry season .	153
Table 5.1: Number of children around card games over 3 week period.....	182
Table 6.1: Average number of people attending the venue .....	203

## Table of pictures

Picture 1.1: ‘A game of euchre’ (Johnston 1876).....	21
Picture 1.2: ‘Men’ 1945 (Northern Territory Library 1945).....	44
Picture 2.1: Maningrida, Arnhem Land 2007 .....	60
Picture 2.2: Dukurrdji children, Bottom Camp, Maningrida .....	63
Picture 2.3: Wet season roads and river crossings, Maningrida region .....	64
Picture 5.1: The community meeting after announcement of the Intervention ...	164
Picture 5.2: Community consultation by politicians, 28 June 2007 .....	166
Picture 5.3: Community consultation by politicians, 28 June 2007 .....	166
Picture 5.4: Poster on notice board in Maningrida (February 2008) .....	171



# **From card games to poker machines: Gambling in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory**

by

Marisa Annetta Fogarty

This thesis presents a comprehensive analysis of the gambling activities of Aboriginal people living in remote areas of the Northern Territory, Australia. Extended fieldwork was carried out in the remote community of Maningrida, Arnhem Land. The research focused on card games played in the community. In addition, research was conducted in a large urban gambling venue in Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory, that examined remote Aboriginal people's access to, and use of, poker machines (electronic gaming machines). The findings describe complex social, economic and political processes at work within both community card games and the urban gambling venue from an anthropological perspective.

The findings suggest that Aboriginal people in Maningrida benefit socially, economically and politically through membership in the informal regulatory structures that existed within card games. However, the community also identified problems relating to card games, particularly in relation to the impact of card games on children. This research also found that, although playing poker machines in an urban gambling environment was an activity that remote Aboriginal people engaged in and enjoyed, it did not offer the same social and economic opportunities as card games. There was a distinct reliance on social relationships within the urban gambling venue,

and the efforts and attempts made by people to continue to gamble in groups (despite the individualised nature of poker machines) was significant. Aside from winning a large sum of money, the economic benefits for remote Aboriginal people attending the venue were minimal. The information gathered through this fieldwork has significant implications in terms of the development of relevant harm-minimisation strategies. Finally, the research found that the Aboriginal people involved in this research defined ‘problem gambling’ differently from mainstream definitions. The research found that Aboriginal people defined ‘problem gambling’ *as a person neglecting or rejecting social relationships and obligations as a result of gambling*. The findings from this research identify a significant need for the development of a national strategy in Australia to address the issues that Aboriginal people face in relation to gambling.

## Introduction

The research presented here is an ethnographic account of gambling in remote Aboriginal Australia. How Aboriginal people living in remote northern Australia engage with different modes of gambling is the focus of this study. The research extensively analysed card games played by Aboriginal people living in the remote community of Maningrida, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory (see Appendix 1 for map of Australia). The thesis also, to a lesser extent, examined remote Aboriginal people's use of poker machines<sup>1</sup> (electronic gaming machines) in a large, urban gaming venue in Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory. Extensive ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in Maningrida and Darwin to highlight the social, economic and political impacts of card games and poker machine gambling in the Northern Territory.

This research was an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage grant awarded (ARC Linkages project LP0506701) to Charles Darwin University (CDU) and the Northern Territory Treasury (now Department of Justice), Northern Territory Government. The project was one part of a broader gambling research agenda at the School for Social and Policy Research (now The Northern Institute, CDU) that focused on the development of research designed to inform gambling policy and regulation in the Northern Territory.

The initial scope of this research was to investigate the impacts of commercial gambling on Aboriginal communities in Northern Australia. However, once the

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<sup>1</sup> Poker machine is the term commonly used in Australia to describe electronic gaming machines, or slot machines.

research began, it became clear that significant gaps existed between the paucity of evidence in the literature, and the actual reality of gambling in remote Aboriginal contexts (see McMillan & Togni 2000, Productivity Commission 1999, Fogarty 2008). An investigation that solely focused on the impacts of commercial gambling would fail to recognise that a significant proportion of Aboriginal people's participation in gambling in the Northern Territory was through card games (McDonald & Wombo 2006, Wild & Anderson 2007). There was a paucity of evidence of how, when or where Aboriginal people gambled, or even if they gambled, particularly in the commercial gambling environment. Most of the literature that existed was over a decade old and there was not much more than anecdotal evidence on the current situation that Aboriginal people faced in relation to gambling (see Foote 1996, McMillan et al. 2000). The questions that arose during this early part of the thesis research specifically focused on 'What is Aboriginal gambling?' However, it very quickly became clear that this was not the question that governments, academics or the media wanted answered. What the mainstream dominant discourse overwhelmingly wanted to know was 'Is Aboriginal gambling a problem?' Unfortunately, for the most part, this discourse automatically assumed that Aboriginal people would experience problems with gambling. This assumption was ironically problematic in itself. The clear inference was that Aboriginal communities and families were inherently dysfunctional, and that 'problems' associated with gambling were symptomatic of this dysfunction. However, my intention to paint an accurate picture of gambling in a remote community in part seeks to challenge these assumptions.

The following section outlines the current Indigenous policy setting to examine the nexus that occurs between problem gambling research and the discourse of dysfunction that surrounds Aboriginal people and communities in Australia.

*The current Indigenous affairs discourse*

Indigenous affairs policy in Australia has seen a significant shift for over a decade towards conservative, neoliberal rationalities focused on market-orientated reform. Howard-Wager (2007, p.3) suggests that this shift ‘has inculcated new moral discourses and ethical practices of inclusion and exclusion in Australia’. This ideological policy shift occurred at the same time as parts of the Australian media sought to actively shape political agendas in Indigenous affairs through the construction of a mediated public crises (McCallum 2012). Baum, Bentley and Anderson (2007, p. x) state that ‘policy debates in the Australian media have presented Aboriginal issues as if they are unsolvable and intransigent and caused by ‘deviant’ characteristics inherent in Aboriginal communities’. Prior to June 2007, gang violence, homicides, paedophile rings, child neglect, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, gambling, drug and volatile substance abuse, ill-health and poor educational outcomes characterised media reporting on Indigenous affairs. The political and policy discourse was couched in deficit terms, characterised almost solely in terms of dysfunction – particularly in the remote community context (Martin 2007, p.5). This provided the Australia Government with the moral impetus and the political imperative for radical intervention into the lives of Aboriginal people living in remote communities in the Northern Territory.

In June 2007, the Australian Government announced the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER, commonly referred to as ‘The Intervention’) as urgent action to protect Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory from systemic child abuse and neglect. The NTER included a range of regulatory measures designed to ‘stabilise’ and ‘normalise’ 73 prescribed communities in the Northern Territory (Altman & Hinkson 2007). The measures involved the compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal townships, widespread alcohol restrictions, the quarantining of welfare income, linking welfare income to school attendance and compulsory health checks for children. Proudfoot and Habibis (2013) suggest that opponents of the NTER argue that the measures did little to address the causes of child abuse and neglect, that the NTER was imposed without consultation, and it was discriminatory, requiring legislation that suspended the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (see also Altman and Hinkson 2007, Altman 2013, Amnesty International 2007, Calma 2007, Martin 2007, Moore 2012, Nicoll 2012). The NTER measures have been rebadged under the current Australian Labor Government and are now called ‘Closing the Gap: The Indigenous reform agenda (2011)’, and the ‘Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (2012)’ policy agenda.

The role of gambling within this discourse has been a developing one. Prior to, and during the NTER, despite minimal evidence, gambling was positioned as one of the myriad of dysfunctional activities that Aboriginal people were engaging in, which was perpetuating the disintegration and the lack of social cohesion of Aboriginal families and communities (Jefferies & Bond 2010). However, more recently, the policy focus has shifted to expanding the ‘Income Management’ scheme (compulsory government restrictions on expenditure of up to 70 percent of welfare incomes) to five other

communities outside the Northern Territory. Gambling is becoming one of the major justifications in this process, despite a serious lack of evidence of the appropriateness of these measures<sup>2</sup>. In the six years since the announcement of the Intervention, there has only been one paper assessing the relationship between Income Management and poker machine expenditure. Lamb & Young (2011) found a positive relationship between Income Management and poker machine expenditure in only one venue in Alice Springs and one venue in Katherine, Northern Territory. So, despite the serious lack of research effort that has gone into determining this relationship, the discourse of dysfunction surrounding Aboriginal people is so pervasive in Australia that significant social welfare policy and legislative changes to the welfare system continue, largely unchallenged by the broader Australian population.

Nicoll (2008) argues that perhaps there is a broader racialised agenda in Australia in relation to Indigenous sovereignty and gambling (particularly when compared to the North American situation) and that ‘some of the discussion about Indigenous gambling which supported the Northern Territory intervention had less to do with worries about the poverty in remote communities than with the implications of extending to Indigenous Australians a real stake in the national illusion’ (2008, p. 20). Nicoll positions ‘the virtual public silence on the role played by Indigenous gambling businesses as tools of economic development in the United States and Canada’ as part of a broad colonial, neo-liberal agenda framed against Indigenous sovereignty in Australia (2009, p.51). What Nicoll fails to point out is that while Australia’s Indigenous leaders and communities actively engage in debates surrounding issues of

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<sup>2</sup> FaHCSIA commissioned an evaluation of ‘New Income Management in the Northern Territory’. One of the findings was that ‘Compulsory Income Management is a blanket measure which is applied to a large number of people who, according to the analysis of survey data, interviews and other consultations, are able to manage their money and who report that they do not have problems related to alcohol, drugs or gambling’ (Bray et al. 2012, p.xxi).

sovereignty and economic development, the ‘silence’ that exists in Australian debate around the gaming situation in the United States extends to the Indigenous public voice. Although Nicoll points out in her concluding remarks that the economic function and cultural meanings attached to gambling in the US and Australia are radically different, her comparative critiques lack recognition of the vastly different social, demographic and geographic contexts between Indigenous people in Australia and the United States.

As outlined above, public policy in Indigenous affairs for more than a decade has been constructed almost exclusively around a dysfunctional, deficit discourse. This has resulted in unprecedented legislative and policy reforms in Australia, particularly in the Northern Territory. Most of the fieldwork for this thesis was conducted just prior to the beginning of the NTER, however, the question that this thesis asks, ‘Is Aboriginal gambling a problem?’ is embedded in this discourse. To answer this question, it is critical that Aboriginal people’s understandings, meanings and values attributed to gambling are understood. Working within parameters of Aboriginal understandings will enable separation of the question, ‘Is Aboriginal gambling a problem?’ from the discourse.

The research begins by defining ‘Aboriginal gambling’ and then re-situates current gambling research approaches, and the broader political discourse in Indigenous affairs, to construct a platform to begin the research that sits outside these mainstream problematising discourses.

*What is Aboriginal gambling?*

In mainstream Australia, the concept of ‘gambling’ has many different definitions. Various definitions of ‘gambling’ range from the Oxford English Dictionary (2002), that defines the verb ‘*to gamble*’ as playing games of chance for (a lot of) money, to national reports such as the Productivity Commission’s 1999 inquiry into Australia’s Gambling Industries that defines gambling as ‘staking money on uncertain events driven by chance’ (Productivity Commission 1999, p.6). Adding to the Productivity Commission’s definition, the NSW Parliamentary Library report titled ‘The economic and social implications of gambling’ goes further to define gambling as subdivided into two groups: wagering (racing and sports) and gaming (casinos, gambling machines, keno and lotteries) (Drabsch 2003). Other reports such as that prepared for the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority in 1999, ‘Australian gambling: Comparative history and analysis’, define gambling as the ‘lawful placement of a wager or bet on the outcome of a future uncertain event’ (Australian Institute for Gambling Research 1999, p.4). The up-dated Productivity Commission Inquiry Report (2010) into gambling defines gambling as somewhat more than a financial transaction. The report describes gambling as ‘an entertainment based on staking money on uncertain events driven by chance, with the potential to win more than staked but with the ultimate certainty that gamblers as a group will lose over time’ (Productivity Commission 2010, p.1.4). However, the reason that there is little agreement about definitions of gambling is because, as McMillan (1996) suggests, the concept of gambling is dependant on the socio-historical context in which it occurs.

This is very true when looking at the global Indigenous gambling context. Other countries define and construct gambling in completely different ways. The prime example is the situation in North America, where discussions of Indian and First Nation gambling are primarily centered on the extent of economic development in reservations with or without casinos. Indian Nations are authorized to establish casinos on their land under the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (1988) (Conner and Taggart, 2009). Currently, there are 420 gaming establishments, associated with nearly 240 tribes across 28 states (National Indian Gaming Commission 2013). In the United States alone, the 2012 gross gaming revenue from Indian reserve casinos was \$27.9 billion (National Indian Gaming Commission 2013). The extent and impacts of economic development in First Nation states with casinos in Canada are more reserved. Belanger et al. (2011) tentatively conclude that provincial First Nations' well-being has improved with the advent of reserve casinos, although there was significant variability between communities.

Much of the gambling activity by Australian Aboriginal people discussed in this thesis takes place in informal community settings, and is therefore not quantifiable in the way that commercial, regulated gambling can be measured. This is in stark contrast to the North American situation, where a highly regulated industry exists. In this thesis, the modes of gambling discussed are not necessarily about staking money or a lot of money, neither are they necessarily entertainment, and nor do they necessarily fit under the two subgroups of wagering and gaming. Young et al. (2007) describe card games as:

*...located outside of formal western gambling spaces. They therefore fall outside the government controlled fiscal structures that define regulated gambling. As such card games operate, not in an independent manner, but at a community level outside of the usual formal mechanisms of governmental monitoring and control (Young et al. 2007, p. 328).*

This is where concepts such as ‘unregulated’, ‘non-commercial’ or ‘community’ gambling are used to describe card games that remote Aboriginal people play. This is in contrast to casino or club gambling on poker machines that are described as ‘commercial’ or ‘regulated’ gambling.

Part of the problem in defining remote Aboriginal people’s gambling activities is that today many people participate in both ‘regulated’ and ‘un-regulated’ forms of gambling. To analyse Aboriginal people’s experiences of gambling within the mainstream legal definitions of ‘regulated’ and ‘un-regulated’ could be seen to neglect the reality of peoples’ gambling behaviour and polarise different modes of gambling. This terminology also lends itself to regarding ‘regulated’ gambling as normal, controlled and safe, juxtaposed with ‘unregulated’ gambling, as occurring outside controlled societal structures, as deviant, dangerous and socially disruptive.

In order to avoid these connotations, I will discuss gambling in terms of the particular activity, that is, ‘card games’ and ‘poker machine’ gambling. These two types of gambling were selected as the focus of this research as they were the most popular forms of gambling with Aboriginal people living in remote areas of the Northern Territory. This is not to say that people did not engage in other forms of gambling

such as table games, keno or horse races, rather than, participation in card games and on poker machines far outweighed any other gambling activity.

When discussing definitions and terminology to be used throughout this thesis, much thought has been put into whether to use the term 'Aboriginal gambling'. However, this terminology has potential to paint an inaccurate picture of Aboriginal people and communities in Australia as it fails to recognise the diversity that exists within and between cultures and regions. It also invites generalisations about Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people's understandings and interactions with gambling that is potentially problematic. It is for these reasons that this thesis will not use the term 'Aboriginal gambling'. Instead, this thesis will specifically refer to gambling, encompassing both card games (unregulated) and poker machine (regulated) gambling, by Aboriginal people living in remote areas in the Northern Territory. This also represents a shift away from the assumptions inherent in the question 'Is Aboriginal gambling a problem?'

A conscious decision was also made to specifically use the term 'Aboriginal' throughout this thesis to describe the people involved in the research. These people first and foremost self-identified as 'Aboriginal'. However, the term 'Indigenous' will be used when referring to the broader policy context, as it encompasses the broader policy discourses relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

By exploring definitions of what 'Aboriginal gambling' is, and rejecting the use of such terminology, it becomes clear that there are tensions in understandings of gambling and the gambling activities of Aboriginal people in Australia. The origins

and depth of these tensions are explored further in the following section that discusses the appropriateness of current psychological approaches to gambling research within the Aboriginal context, particularly in respect to the current policy discourse in Australia.

### *Gambling research in Australia*

Research into commercial gambling in Australia is predominantly psychological in nature and almost exclusively focused on ‘pathological’ and ‘problem gambling’ (see Abbott & Volberg 1999, Productivity Commission 1999, 2010). The epidemiological methods that these psychological approaches employ are generally focused on isolating an individual’s gambling activities to the extent that they neglect that individual’s cultural and societal context (see Steane et al. 1998, Kinsella & Carrig 1998). These approaches are based on definitions and understandings of ‘gambling’ and ‘problem gambling’ which do not necessarily relate to the gambling experiences of Aboriginal people living in remote parts of Australia. The following section discusses the national definition of the construct of the ‘problem gambler’, and the methodologies used to determine the extent that problem gambling impacts on Australian society.

The dominant focus of gambling research in Australia is what many would consider the reality of gambling – ‘problem gambling’. Below is the nationally accepted definition of ‘problem gambling’ in Australia:

*Problem gambling is characterised by difficulties in limiting money and/or time spent on gambling which leads to adverse consequences for the gambler, others, or for the community (Neal, Delfabbro & O'Neil 2005, p. 125).*

The Productivity Commission's Inquiry (2010) into the gambling industry found approximately 115,000 (~1%) people in Australia were categorised as 'problem gamblers', with another 280,000 (~2.1%) people in Australia categorised as 'moderate risk' of becoming problem gamblers. However, when population surveys suggest that 70 to 80 per cent of Australian's gamble each year, at least once, and 15 per cent of those gamble regularly, it is concerning that the majority of gambling research in Australia is focused so disproportionately on the 'problem' of a small section of society (Productivity Commission 2010). Problem gamblers are viewed as the 'cost' of the gambling industry and are positioned as distinct from the rest of the population that gamble for 'fun, entertainment or social reasons' (Productivity Commission 1999).

Problem gambling is measured by psychological assessment tools (for example, the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS)) that are used by treatment providers to identify problem and pathological gamblers (Lesieur & Blume 1987). Other instruments, such as the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI), measure the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling in the broader population (see Abbott & Volberg 1999). Measuring problem gambling in society using these instruments in large scale problem gambling prevalence surveys is the type of methodological approach that informs most gambling policy and regulation in Australia (see Volberg 2004).

However, as Young (2012) suggests, defining, and effectively isolating, this group of ‘problem gamblers’ within society is highly problematic. Young (2012) states:

*...the discursive machinery of government and industry, combined with the statistical production of social categories, has merely located risk within a deviant population. The need to control and manage this deviant tail of the bell curve (social control), combined with the epistemological tools of the psy sciences (the statistics produced by the PGPS), has produced a pathologised minority (the pathological gambler scapegoat). This is a discursive process that transfers the responsibility for gambling consumption away from the power centres that generate the risk and harm (i.e. state and industry) towards a socially and statistically constructed aberrant class – a covert device of legitimation that allows for the reproduction of the gambling industries. This is the real reason PGPS are so commonly used. They provide a credible ‘scientific’ device to justify the orthodoxies surrounding public approaches to gambling-related harm (Young 2012, p.9).*

The reality of gambling extends far and beyond this disproportionately researched group of statistically defined problem gamblers, to a broader population where gambling plays a part in their lives that is far more complex and complicated than ‘fun, entertainment or social reasons’. This discursive ploy is easily reproduced in minority social or cultural groups. As Nicoll (2007) suggests:

*Research is encouraged to show that specific social or cultural groups (e.g. women, Asian or Indigenous people) have particular vulnerabilities to developing 'problem gambling', while research that examines the spaces and practices of gambling (particularly in casinos, hotels and clubs) in which individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds co-exist and interact is neglected (Nicoll 2007, p. 106).*

These psychological approaches that focus on problem gambling are highly problematic when used to study Aboriginal people's gambling activities. This is highlighted in Stevens and Young's (2010) publication 'Independent correlates of reported gambling problems amongst Indigenous Australians'. The article found:

*In remote areas, multifamily households, participation in sports and cultural events, and reporting of community problems were associated with higher reported gambling problems, while having a relative removed from their natural family was associated with lower reported problems (Stevens & Young 2010, p.147).*

These results highlight the problems associated with drawing conclusions from these types of studies. Every family in Maningrida, where the research for this thesis was conducted, lived in a 'multifamily' household, and every family participated, to a greater or lesser extent, in sport and cultural activities (which were not one and the same). Research that focuses on empirical measurements of this kind has the potential to produce inaccurate findings that provide very little insight into gambling in remote Aboriginal communities, or how gambling impacts on people's lives. These types of

results are also highly problematic when situated within the current Indigenous policy discourse.

Moving away from problem gambling research approaches, as well as disengaging from the current policy discourse, will provide an opportunity to re-frame the research in Aboriginal understandings of the role and place of gambling in a remote community in the Northern Territory.

### *Re-framing Aboriginal gambling research*

To begin to position the gambling activities of Aboriginal people outside the current discourse and problem gambling approaches, it is helpful to discuss Brady's (1992) book *Heavy Metal*. The book explores the issue of petrol sniffing in Aboriginal communities in Australia. Brady uses Zinberg's (1984) three determinants of what impels someone to use an illicit drug: the drug (the substance itself and its pharmacological actions); the set (the individual person and their psychological state and personality) and the setting (the physical and social setting within which the drug use occurs). Brady (1992) explains that understandings of drug use in the general population are so oriented towards individual psychopathology, the setting has been neglected, and yet in some respects it is the most significant variable. This is very similar in the gambling context, where the focus is skewed towards non-Indigenous perspectives of individualised psychopathology.

This research aims to highlight 'the setting' – to present a picture of gambling in a remote Aboriginal community that sits within the complex social setting within which

it exists. The research aims to understand the complex social, political and economic processes internally and externally of the gambling. To begin to do this, it is important to historically contextualise Aboriginal people's involvement in gambling in Australia.

The first chapter of the thesis provides an historical overview of the existing literature relating to gambling and Aboriginal people, and communities, in Australia. The history of gambling for Aboriginal people is deeply connected to colonial contact histories. By reviewing the literature, I question current understandings that card games played by Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory were introduced by European settlers or Macassan traders. These findings also highlight that despite innovations partly based on interactions with other cultures, gambling for Aboriginal people has been ongoing and self-sustaining throughout colonial history.

The second chapter provides an overview of the fieldwork locations and the methodologies used to conduct the research. An 18 month period of research was conducted in the remote Aboriginal community of Maningrida, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. Fieldwork was also carried out in a large gaming venue in Darwin, Northern Territory. Chapter 2 provides a detailed overview of life in Maningrida, as well as a history of gambling in the community. Following on from this analysis, I discuss methodological approaches that were chosen to conduct this research.

The next three chapters of the thesis represent a detailed ethnographic insight into card games played in Maningrida. These chapters explore how the social, economic

and political processes evident in card games act to informally regulate the games. I will explore how card games are a distinctly Aboriginal space and participation has potential social and economic benefits to players. However, I will also discuss how card games can be problematic for many people in the community.

The next chapter provides an ethnographic analysis of poker machine use in an urban gaming venue in Darwin. Chapter 6 begins with a review of the current literature relating to Aboriginal people's participation in commercial gambling. The remainder of the chapter explores the social, economic and political processes surrounding Aboriginal people's use of poker machines in a busy Darwin venue.

Finally, Chapter 7 provides an in-depth discussion of Aboriginal understandings of 'problem gambling' and how they may differ from mainstream Australian understandings. This chapter also provides a review current harm-minimisation strategies used in venues around Australia and the relevance of these measures to the way that Aboriginal people from remote communities access and use commercial gambling venues. In conclusion, I engage with the question that is so often proposed of this research – 'Is Aboriginal gambling a problem?'



## Chapter 1

### **Historical overview of gambling by Aboriginal people in Australia**

In Australia, very little research effort has gone into analysing Aboriginal people's historical interaction with gambling. However, neglecting the historical dimensions of Aboriginal people's early engagement in gambling serves to perpetuate the perception that gambling occurs within a society that is devoid of structural and cultural differences and conflicts (McMillan 1996). By reviewing the history of Aboriginal gambling, I situate the research against a broader backdrop of race relations and colonial contact history in Australia. The following chapter will analyse the historical literature of Aboriginal people's involvement in gambling and explore the introduction of different forms of gambling, beginning with card games.

*Let the games begin...*

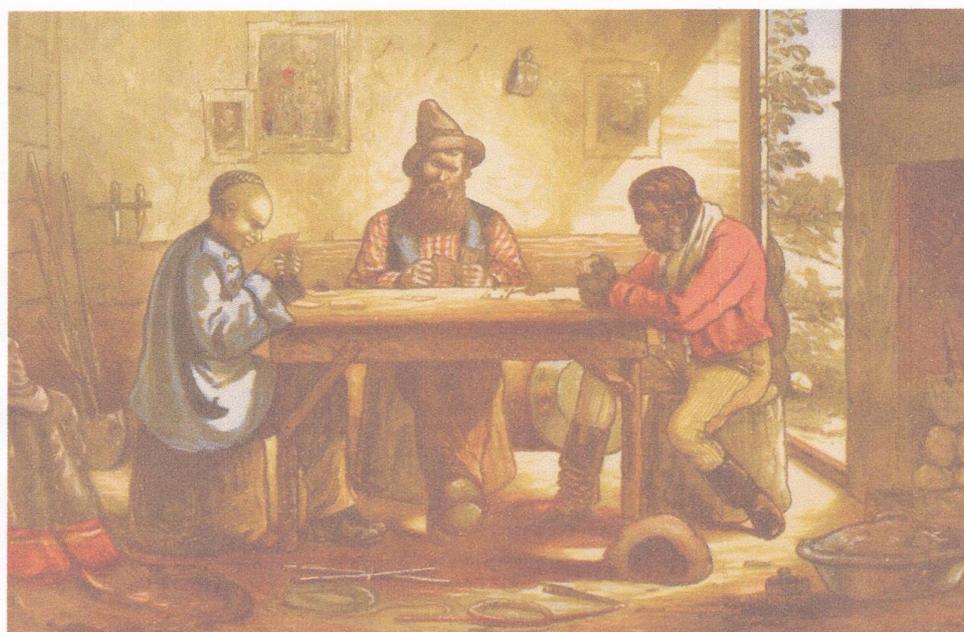
Although games existed in 'traditional' Aboriginal society as depicted on rock art and through the literature (see Roth 1902, Salter 1967, Moncrieff 1966), there is no contemporary interpretation that suggests that games of chance that could be viewed as precursors to modern card playing existed in traditional Aboriginal society.

Dickerson (1985, p.45) suggests the absence of gambling pre-contact is unusual, as most human societies have included some form of gambling. Contrary to this belief, Binde (2005, p.1) found through extensively mapping ethnographic and historical evidence relating to the spread of gambling, that gambling was not a universal phenomenon and that prior to the era of European colonisation, non-gambling

societies appear to have covered large areas of the globe. Binde (2005, p.1) found that there were some factors that lead to predict the presence of gambling in the society, for example, the presence of commercially used money, social inequality, societal complexity, and the presence of certain kinds of competitive inter-tribal relations. Binde (2005, p.6) suggests that throughout Melanesia, Australia and New Zealand there was virtually no gambling, although he does state that perhaps card playing, introduced by Asian traders, was present pre-European contact in some aboriginal groups in northern Australia. Breen (2008) contests Binde's conditions for the presence of gambling in a society within the Australian context. She describes opposing constructs of social organisation, as well as the presence of gambling pre-European contact as evidence. However, the case that Breen makes is built on minimal evidence that suggests that gambling was introduced to people in northern Australia by Macassan traders. The following section of this chapter will review the evidence that exists to address the questions of when and who introduced card games to Aboriginal people? After conducting an extensive literature review there appears to be three apparent possibilities, European settlers, Chinese settlers and Macassan traders.

Throughout the literature, it is often unquestioningly accepted that European colonisation and/or Macassan traders north of Australia, were largely responsible for the introduction of gambling and card games to Aboriginal people (see Breen 2007, Nagel et al. 2011). However, Chinese settlers and their influence have been completely neglected in this picture, particularly in the north of Australia. The following section will explore the role that Chinese settlers around Australia played in the introduction of cards and gambling to Aboriginal people. Picture 1 below depicts

the complexities in trying to build a greater understanding of gambling in Australia. The picture, drawn in 1876, shows a Chinese fossicker, an Aboriginal tracker and European digger playing cards together.



Chinese fossicker 'Ah Sin', Aboriginal 'Jack' the blacktracker, and 'Harry' the white digger play cut-throat euchre for pennyweights of gold on a remote goldfield somewhere in Northern Australia. This degree of fraternisation was considered inappropriate and depraved in politer regions. (National Library of Australia, nla.pic-an 8927787)

**Picture 1.1: Johnson 1876, 'A game of euchre' *Australasian Sketcher*, 23  
December, Melbourne, Victoria.**

I would suggest that this picture and the article that goes with it are one of the earliest depictions of Aboriginal people engaging in gambling in Australia. Although this picture does not separate out the European and Chinese influences, it demonstrates the complexities in social interactions and influences around gambling. The text below was attached to the picture, and provides an insight into Aboriginal people's position in society at the time, as well as highlighting the political tensions between European and Chinese people in 'the colony'.

*Our plate depicts a scene not unfrequent [sic] at some of the out-of-the-way gold-fields in this, or either of the other colonies, and especially in Queensland, where the three races shown are found living closely mixed together. It is a bright Saturday afternoon, and Jack, the black packer[tracker], 'Harry, my friend,' the digger, and Ah Sin, the Chinese fossicker, have met to while away an hour or two at a game of 'cut-throat euchre' for a pennyweight a corner. On the present occasion fortune has smiled on Ah Sin. It was his deal, and he has 'taken it up'. He is 'all but.' The digger is only four, and the aboriginal has not 'turned his cards,' or, in other words, has not made a point. The Chinaman has taken the first trick on suit and led the ace of trumps. The European has the king, say, and a small one. Jack holds the queen. But it is no service, for Ah Sin, as his complacent smile seems to indicate, has the 'left bower' and two small ones in reserve. He is sure of the point wanting to bring him through triumphant, and he already enjoys the pleasure of victory ... But it may be that there is a meaning in the picture besides the plain matter-of-fact one that appears on the surface. The three races have been for some time playing a game for life on this continent. The aboriginal race have very nearly played their last card, and the game is henceforth between the whites and their yellow-skinned competitors. John Chinaman holds his own remarkably well, and in some parts, as in North Queensland, scores one point after another. The immense extent of Chinese immigration to that region some time back was viewed with alarm, and the thought expressed in Bret Harte's poem, 'we're ruined by Chinese cheap labour,' was present to the minds of large numbers of the colonists. But although*

*that colony has seen fit to adopt measures intended to act as a restriction on the influx, the alarm appears to have practically died out, and there is no reason to doubt that the two races may work on amicably together and aid in the development of an immense territory, where 'there's room enough for all' (Johnston 1986).*

On further investigation, the author of this article, J.C.F. Johnston, became Education Minister of South Australia, and was also the minister responsible for the Northern Territory during the late 1880s. He was a prolific writer on mining and social issues, as well as a poet and fiction writer. The descriptions in this article suggest that gambling with cards was a readily accepted pastime. The article also demonstrates the significant tensions between the different races. This is important when contextualising other sources later in this chapter as there is most often little actual explanation as to how long Aboriginal people had been playing cards, or with whom they played. This source demonstrates that as early as the nineteenth century, mixed race card gambling readily occurred in Northern Australia.

Unlike the more 'liberal' notions described above in 1876 of inter-racial interludes, early twentieth century government policies focused on 'herding' Aboriginal people into reserves and institutions (Docker 1964). The legislative controls introduced throughout this period forced 'problem populations' into institutions. This was carried out in-part for Aboriginal people's own 'protection' and perceived benefit, but also in the interests of social control (Haebich 2000). Politically, it was a time where any problem, including gambling, was attributed to Aboriginal people's innate inferiority and/or inability to adapt (Haebich 2000). Another early reference to gambling was in 1914 in Katanning, Western Australia, where racial tensions were at boiling point

between the white residents and the Nyungar people. To try to rectify the situation, the Nyungar leaders responded by endeavoring to impose law and order on the town camps by drawing up some basic rules, one of which refers to gambling:

*Rule No. 3: No gambling in the way of cards and two-up allowed, they can have a game of cards at night when their work is done but not play for clothes or money (Haebich 2000, p.257).*

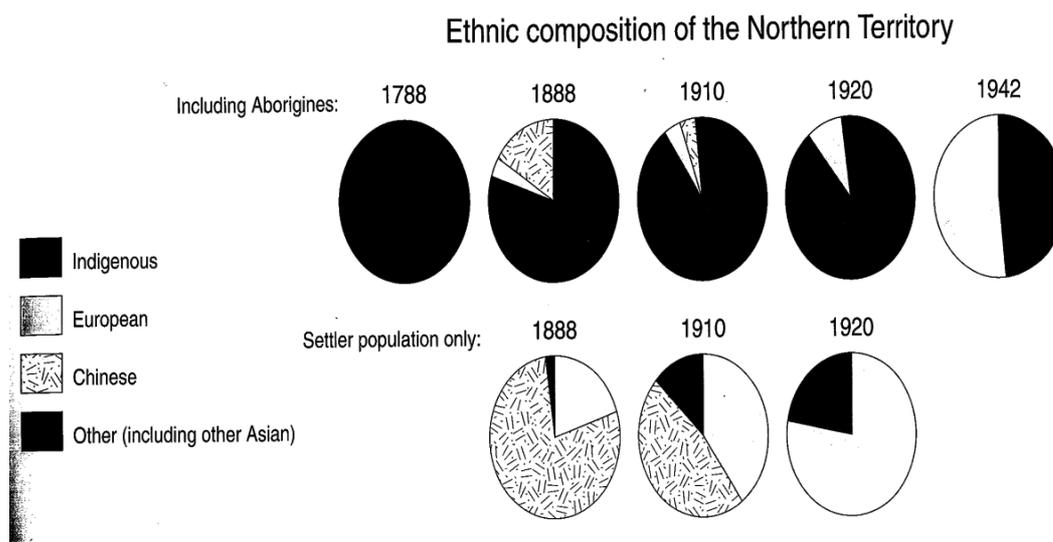
Annie Lock, a missionary, was invited to this meeting to record the decisions, which explains why the rules are contextualised in terms of what ‘they’ can and can’t do which is demonstrated most patronisingly in the first rule that states ‘They must be good’ (Haebich 2000, p.257)!

It is these small references to Aboriginal people’s contact (or conflict) with European settlement that suggest it is likely Europeans were the main actors in the introduction of gambling and cards to Aboriginal people in many institutions, settlements, stations, missions and town camps across Australia. For many Aboriginal people, this would have been their first encounter with a non-Indigenous culture. It is not surprising that there is little documentation of recreational interactions between Europeans and Aboriginal people as it was most likely not encouraged. The missions and institutions in particular most likely did not record any gambling that may have gone on for fear of external perceptions of a loss of control, and/or the gambling was kept hidden from those in charge for fear of retribution. As Berndt and Berndt (1947) suggest, particularly on mission settlements, mainly for religious reasons, card games were a taboo activity that was rigidly suppressed. This is exemplified by Trigger (1986) who

states 'it would be unthinkable that a group of [Aboriginal] people would continue gambling in the presence of a White Doomadgee [mission] staff member' (1986, p.114).

Chinese settlers and their influence on Aboriginal Australians, and the potential introduction of specific card games, have been very much neglected in the literature. The 1876 article presented previously in the chapter, vividly describes the tensions between the Chinese and European settlers. Chinese traders have been recorded visiting the north coast of Australia since the 1750s (prior to British settlement of Australia in 1788), and would have been trading with northern Aboriginal people (Ganter 2006). It is possible that throughout this period, Chinese people introduced gambling or gambling games to some populations of Aboriginal people. Berndt and Berndt (1947, p.249) suggest that before British settlement, Chinese, Malayan, Javanese and Macassan traders played a form of card game with Aboriginal people of the north. However, the evidence for this information is unclear.

Many Chinese immigrated to Australia as a result of the gold rushes, settling in cities such as Melbourne and Sydney, as well as many who settled across the north of Australia and down the centre. At the beginning of the twentieth century, places such as Cairns, Darwin and Broome had large Chinese populations. In fact, the population of Chinese immigrants living the Northern Territory far outweighed the European settlers until 1920 (see Figure 1.1 below, Ganter 2006).



**Figure 1.1: Ethnic composition of the Northern Territory (Ganter 2006)**

In 1928, anti-Asian legislation was developed in the NT, where a provision was added to the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1918*, to try to protect Aboriginal people against ‘immorality, injustice, imposition and fraud’ associated with Chinese people (Ganter 2006, p. 113). Chinese immigrants were viewed throughout this period by ‘white’ Australians as morally bereft.

*Like Aborigines, Asians were a problem population subject to a medical-moral policing rationale. Anxiety about the Chinese was expressed as illicit sexual relations, unsanitary and crowded housing conditions, and concerns over smallpox, leprosy, opium addiction and gambling, couched in the moral lexicon of filth, laziness and lasciviousness (Ganter 2006, p. 119).*

Prostitution, opium addiction and gambling were seen by Europeans as fundamental parts of Chinese life (See Stephenson 2003, Williams 1999). In these early days of colonisation, Chinese people, like Aboriginal people, were constantly singled out and

significantly marginalised (Williams 1999). Chinese gambling and gambling dens appear consistently throughout the literature of Chinese settlement around Australia. However, linking Aboriginal people to the gambling or gambling dens is somewhat more challenging. One source from the Cairns Post in 1912 (Cairns Post 1912, p.5) suggests that a gambling house in Chinatown, Innisfail, was raided by police, '13 Chinese, 2 Japanese and one Aboriginal' were found in the gambling house. Another very early reference to Aboriginal involvement with Chinese people and gambling dens is in the Northern Territory Gazette in 1894. The article states:

*During the last week or so our police have been actively endeavoring to suppress certain forms of Palmerston vice, but they have not yet got beyond gambling and aboriginal opium dealing. Last Friday night a couple of constables raided a well-known Chinese- gambling den and scattered their forceful attentions broadcast among the inmates (Northern Territory Gazette 1894, p.2)*

Gambling dens are also reported on in relation to Aboriginal people by a missionary named James Watson in 1915. He describes his time in the town he called 'Darwin the Damned':

*Aborigines wandered the filthy streets, drunk on methylated spirits and willing to hawk their wives for the price of another drink. Venereal disease was rife; alcohol and opium addiction were commonplace; there were gambling dens and dives that catered for all the vices; and leprosy was spreading (McKenzie 1976, p.103).*

Watson's view is reiterated by Berndt and Berndt (1947) who describe the Chinese gambling-dens in Darwin or 'Houses of Joy' where 'fan-tan'<sup>3</sup> was played, and 'stakes' ranged from a few shillings to an individual's complete earnings, or a native or half-caste woman:

*... 'sly-grog' and opium selling which were often an integral part of gaming dens, accompanied by 'white- and black-slaving,' prostitution and drunken orgies ... shows how forcible and disastrous was the initial clash of local aboriginal groups with the incoming aliens (Berndt and Berndt 1947, p.249).*

What these descriptions do suggest, is that Aboriginal people gambled, or were at least involved in the gambling, with Chinese people. Hunter (1993) also suggests that Aboriginal people in Broome played a game of 'sticks' at the beginning of the twentieth century that was of Chinese origin. Berndt et al. (1947, p.250) state 'natives developed at least two forms of games derived from Chinese sources', in particular, 'sticks'. They suggest this was originally a Chinese game that was adapted by Aboriginal people into a card game called 'ka:bu or karbu' or 'five-card'. One of the games (called Kunt) that will be discussed in Chapter 3 was also translated as 'five-card' and had the same rules that Berndt and Berndt describe. Palmer (1982) also discusses this game as Kunz. He states 'Kunz is a card games that was probably introduced to the area by Asian pearlers who visited a number of the ports in the

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<sup>3</sup> Although 'fan-tan' is a very well-known game among the Chinese, card playing was also popular (Williams 1999 p.55).

region' (Palmer 1982, p. 55). This evidence suggests that at least one of the actual card games played by Aboriginal people today is potentially of Chinese origin.

One of the other reasons that there are very few sources available that describe Aboriginal and Chinese gambling interactions is that it is highly unlikely that either group of people was literate, or at least literate in English, to be able to write accounts of the time. Despite this, the evidence that does exist demonstrates that Chinese people most likely had much more influence than is given credit, particularly in the north of Australia. Both Chinese people's propensity to gamble and the similar social standing of Chinese and Aboriginal people, point towards potential significant interaction around card gambling.

The third and perhaps the most elusive part of the quest to understand how gambling or card games were introduced to Aboriginal people is through the Macassan people. Although this is increasingly the 'accepted' explanation as to the introduction of gambling or card games in the north of Australia, there appears little primary evidence to suggest this (see Brady 2004, Breen 2007). The Macassans came from Sulawesi, Indonesia, and travelled to the north of Australia to collect trepang from as early as the 1700s. This trade stopped in 1907 when the Australian government banned them from entering Australian waters. Brady (2004, p.1) suggests that Macassan visitors were responsible for the introduction of gambling to the Aboriginal people along the northern coast. Others, such as Cawte (1968) whose work was carried out in the Northern Territory, Palmer (1982) in Western Australia, Berndt and Berndt (1947) also in the Northern Territory, and more recently, Breen (2007) have influenced this view. For the most part, these authors have viewed the language used to describe

gambling and counting in Yolngu Matha (a north-eastern Arnhem Land language) as derived from Macassan words as evidence of the introduction of gambling to Aboriginal people. Christie and Greatorex (2009, p.10) found through interviews with Yolngu people that gambling was ‘introduced by the Macassan’s as a gift, in the formal cultural sense of exchange, or investment, not just left behind, but exchanged properly for meat maybe, by the fireside and the history was recorded in Yirritja songs’. Elkin (1955) also recorded the Yirritja songs that incorporated gambling on ‘the English Company Islands and the mainland opposite’ (Yolngu people’s country). However, Elkin’s interpretation was that it was white man that brought the cards, not Macassan traders. In addition, he describes the dancing as particularly animated, not suggestive of card playing. Elkin described their actions as representing ‘the back and forth movement of the sea: the dancers went down on their haunches and then up again’ (Elkin 1955, p.60). However, Christie and Greatorex (2009) also suggested:

*During the mission times, the nature of dopulu (card games) changed, the missionaries brought both the possibility of gambling for money and the opposition to gambling. Through money, dopulu changed from a game (wakal) to ‘serious’. It was really the Europeans who showed us how to gamble properly for money. The old people didn’t play in front of the missionaries. It’s good for people not to gamble in public, it’s really not part of our culture (Christie & Greatorex 2009, p. 10).*

Despite these findings, there is no mention in the very early texts of anthropologists such as Thompson, and others such as Kyle-Little or Doolan, who entered these areas of Arnhem Land prior to settlement that any card or gambling games existed.

However, in saying this, just because the gambling did not appear in the literature does not necessarily mean that it did not exist. As Pyper (1978) suggests, the gambling could have been omitted by anthropologists during this time as it was not considered 'traditional' to Aboriginal society and culture.

When conducting interviews for this thesis in Maningrida, Arnhem Land (NT), another angle to the Macassan involvement in the introduction of gambling and card games to Aboriginal people became apparent. The majority of people from the Ndjebbana group (the traditional owners of Maningrida) that were asked about cards or gambling and where the games came from responded with 'Macassans'. As one woman explained: *This game was in Arnhem Land before Balandas*<sup>4</sup> (D\_\_27.9.2006). However, when asking people from other family groups that had a mix of coastal and inland country in the Maningrida region, the responses were much more unsure: 'maybe Balanda, maybe Macassan' or simply, 'I don't know'. My interpretation of such discrepancy in the responses was that perhaps the Ndjebbana people's answers were more politically motivated. As the Ndjebbana people were arguably the most colonised in the region as the township exists on their land, I suggest that claiming descent from the Macassan's puts the gambling and control of the gambling somewhat out of the hands of non-Indigenous people. The other point worth making is that there is no reference, in language or otherwise, anywhere else along the north coast of Australia of Macassan people introducing Aboriginal people to cards and/or gambling. The other contradictory evidence is that the card games played in Arnhem Land were mapped by Berndt and Berndt in 1947 all the way down the centre of

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<sup>4</sup> Balanda means non-Indigenous person in Arnhem Land – thought to originate from the word Hollanda.

Australia to Alice Springs – communities that were exposed to mining and Chinese settlement, not Macassan traders.

Other information extracted from the journal '*Australasian Sketcher*' (1873–1889) reports regularly on the extent of the mining exploration that was occurring in northern Australia in that latter half of the 1800s. The journal refers to exploration expeditions by both Europeans and Chinese people to the most remote parts of northern Australia (including Blue Mud Bay, east Arnhem Land). Chinese people were in constant competition with European settlers for mineral resources across the north. Chinese people also had similar social standing to Aboriginal people at the time and were likely to have interacted with each other socially. To also consider that the Macassan's were not officially banned from Australian waters until 1907, suggests that it is likely that Aboriginal people in north-east Arnhem Land learnt language that described cards and gambling from Macassan traders, although this does not necessarily warrant the conclusion that they introduced gambling or card games. Also, one of the card games that Aboriginal people play today appears to be of Chinese origin. All the available evidence suggests that the Chinese people were much more influential than has been previously considered in the introduction of gambling and/or card games to Aboriginal people in the north of Australia. It is also worth noting that the card games or gambling games reported to have been played by Aboriginal people in the southern parts of Australia appear to be much more of European origin, such as poker, euchre and two-up.

From the evidence that exists, I contest the suggestion that the Macassan's 'established' gambling or gambling activity in the north of Australia. It is entirely

possible that at some point in time, Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land played cards with, exchanged cards with or, simply talked about cards or gambling to Macassan people. However, from the available evidence it seems far more likely that any real introduction or establishment of gambling and/or card games occurred for most Aboriginal people from interactions with European and Chinese settlers. With European and Chinese settlement cards began to be brought into communities and through the introduction of cash and/or other non-traditional tradable goods, such as, tins of sugar, flour, beer and tobacco, that sat outside 'traditional' patterns of distribution, the gambling became part of everyday life for Aboriginal people in the north of Australia.

Sixty-seven years ago Berndt and Berndt (1947) suggested that a historical background of card games be written, as doing so would provide a major insight into the 'background of Aboriginal –white, or –Asiatic contact' (1947, p.249). Since their time, much research has been conducted on contact and settlement histories, although unfortunately, the gambling aspect of these histories has been neglected. The reason that this has occurred is probably that written evidence may simply never have existed, and/or the oral and archeological evidence does not exist anymore. Despite the lack of available sources, it is clear that gambling for Aboriginal people in Australia is derived from interaction between diverse cultures.

Regardless of its origins, the literature that does exist on gambling in Aboriginal communities clearly demonstrates that it became a self-sustaining activity in a relatively short period of time. The following section will analyse how Aboriginal people's interactions with gambling were represented in the literature. Most of the sources are anthropological, and particularly the early sources depict gambling as

evidence of the erosion of ‘traditional’ Aboriginal culture. Following this literature review, I will highlight the key themes regarding the social and economic impacts of gambling that begin to appear in the historical research and discuss their resonance within the current Indigenous affairs discourse.

### *Early research*

The earliest record of a rigorous academic analysis of Aboriginal gambling is anthropologists’ Berndt and Berndt’s paper titled ‘Card Games among Aborigines in the Northern Territory’ (1947). This paper was written at a time when a dichotomy of ‘traditional’ versus ‘non-traditional’ Aboriginal people dominated the anthropological discourse. Gray (2007) states that despite ‘a discourse which claimed to investigate the effect of ‘culture contact’ and ‘culture clash’... Australian Aboriginal anthropology was predominantly concerned with the pre-colonial social order to the point of blindness of the contemporary scene’ (2007, p.15). Berndt and Berndt clearly saw themselves as pioneers in investigating culture contact: as Berndt states ‘apart from Elkin, we were probably the only anthropologists in Australia who discussed the topic [of culture contact] at all consistently during the early 1940s’ (Berndt 1984 p. 162). In that respect, their investigation of the phenomenon of card games, which they describe as the ‘most obvious manifestations of culture contact in the Northern Territory’, is logical (Berndt & Berndt 1947, p.248).

There is some mention in the literature prior to Berndt & Berndt’s (1947) analysis in the Northern Territory of gambling in New South Wales (NSW). Reay (1944) discussed gambling as an activity that was expressly forbidden by the management of

the station run by the Aborigines' Welfare Board, near Walgett, NSW. Morris (1988) suggests that gambling during this time was an act of resistance by Aboriginal people to the Welfare Board. He suggests:

*...drinking and gambling did represent direct acts of defiance to the Board's policy of assimilation as they were a clear inversion of bourgeois notions of social respectability, including sobriety, industry and self-discipline (Morris 1988, p. 51).*

The New South Wales Welfare Board (1945) described gambling amongst Aboriginal people as prevalent throughout the whole state. The report describes the States attitude to gambling amongst Aboriginal people:

*While it must be regarded as a vice that should be discouraged...It [gambling] is a retreat for the Aborigine from the hard facts of the white man's world, a means of putting in time, and doing something emotionally exciting in a purposeless life (New South Wales Aborigines' Welfare Board 1945, p.11)*

This focus on gambling in NSW communities continued into the 1950s, where much of the literature that addressed gambling or card games in Australia was produced by Professor Elkin, Chair of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, his students or students whom he advised. This occurred predominantly as a result of a lack of funding for research post-Second World War.

In 1955, Elkin suggested that Aboriginal people's participation in drinking and gambling were seen as symbols of equality with Europeans. Elkin demonstrates this point using a song collected from Arnhem Land:

*Dealt/ "face to face" sat/dealer/white and black fellows*

*Hard place on dealt/table at/(we)many sat 'face to face'*

*Dealer/we many sat/black and white* (Elkin 1955, p.68)

Fink (1957), a student of Elkin's, describes gambling at a Government Aboriginal station, called Mission, nine miles from the town of Barwon. During her fieldwork in 1954, she estimated that 50% of Mission dwellers were inveterate gamblers. Fink found that 'there were small gambling games during the weekdays among the women and unemployed men ... the bigger gambling schools started when the men arrived at weekends with their pay cheques' (1957, p.77). Another of Elkin's students, Hausfeld (1960), wrote a thesis titled 'Aspects of Aboriginal Station Management' that includes a section on gambling at stations in southern Queensland. The 'non-church' section of the adult Aboriginal population played a game called 'pups' (Hausfeld 1960). Despite the stories of large sums of money being won during the games, apparently none of the stories could be established as factual. Hausfeld (1960, p.63) goes on to note that some women spent excessive time playing 'pups' and warnings were issued by the station manager in cases where neglect of children was perceived. Yet another student of Elkin's, Calley (1957), reports in a paper titled 'Race Relations on the North Coast of New South Wales', that one of the major stereotypes held by white people of Aboriginal people is that of being addicted to gambling. However, he states:

*This would be true of a minority of the population on these stations and reserves only. Of those who do gamble, very few indeed gamble heavily ... In this area Aborigines gamble only with Aborigines, though I understand that on the stations of the central west a few whites, often professional card-sharpers, participate ... As playing cards or dice for money is illegal, the gambling schools are subject to raids by the police at the instigation of the station manager (Calley 1957, p.193).*

As evidenced by the anthropological literature of the 1950s, the focus of this period was predominantly on NSW's Aboriginal communities and the vast majority of the research was conducted by Elkin's students. However, an exploration of the literature base more broadly during the 1950s reveals the use of gambling to exemplify the dysfunctional nature of Aboriginal people and their inability to cope with 'modern' society. For example, the article 'The Aborigines must help themselves: Laziness Retards Progress' (District welfare officer 1953), in a magazine called *Dawn* was not atypical of the time. The article was designed for NSW Aboriginal people and was supposed to provide them 'with much food for thought'. It stated:

*The problem, however, still remains that the aborigines[sic] in general are reluctant to give up their old slothful ways and face up to the responsibilities of life. Drink and gambling are still the main causes of preventing the aboriginal people to rise up to a better standard of living (District welfare officer 1953).*

Others, however, reported the opposite problem. Berndt and Berndt (1947) explain that in the Northern Territory, although gambling was known on the stations, it was generally considered an unnecessary and useless innovation. This is exemplified again in writing from Wave Hill Station:

*... here again, interest in indigenous[sic] activities and station life generally, the non-payment of wages, the scarcity of food and consequent bad diet, general disillusionment and long working hours for a great number of the natives resulted in a disinclination to play card games for gain or for pleasure (Berndt & Berndt 1947, p.261).*

Jane Goodale, who wrote one of the most commonly referenced papers on gambling in Aboriginal communities first discussed card playing on Melville Island in 1959. She commented that some of the goods coming into the settlement on the supply boat were purchased by Aboriginal people who had either accumulated credit or become 'lucky in cards and had won hard money' (Goodale 1959, p.45). Another small but interesting reference is the transcript of a song that was written in 1964 in NSW about the game 'two-up'. It is noted in text below the song that 'a policeman comes along while the aborigines are playing two-up. The money is going up and coming down. They spot this policeman and they just throw it up in the air, and off' (Gordan 1968).

Others, such as Cawte, discuss gambling at length in-terms of adjustment to cultural change (see Cawte 1968, 1969, and Barker, 1977). McKnight (2005), an anthropologist who spent much of his life working with the people of Mornington Island, Queensland, writes about gambling during his fieldwork in the early 1960s. He

said at this time gambling was condemned and everybody resolved to give it up.

McKnight recounted the following meeting:

*It was suggested during a meeting that if the rule of no gambling was really applied then people would give it up, one member of the meeting even suggesting that the gamblers be sent to another neighbouring island. It was decided that the more practical option of enforcing a ban should occur, although no punishment was decided. However, no headway was ever made because the ardent gamblers, the young men, were not present at the meeting (McKnight 2005, p.97).*

The literature over the 1950s and '60s highlights the complexities of contact between Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous people in the era of assimilation policies in Australia. However, the 1970s saw the end of the assimilation policy era and the Australian Government embarked on a new policy era focused on self-determination and land rights in Indigenous affairs. The huge ideological shift in policy, occurring at the same time as the increased liberalisation of commercial gambling in Australia that resulted in shifting views towards gambling, have led to an exponential increase in references throughout the literature of Aboriginal people gambling in almost all areas of Australia, even the most remote.

### *The gambling 'revolution'*

The literature during the 1970s paints a pervasive picture of Aboriginal people's engagement in gambling, particularly in remote Aboriginal communities. This

'revolution' in gambling activity is exemplified by Keen (1994), who reports that by about the mid-1970s the 'all-pervasive, day-to-day activity' in which most adults in Milingimbi (NT) were engaged was card-playing. The daily routine of gambling was interrupted from time to time by alcoholic binges which erupted in quarrels and fighting (Keen 1994). McKnight (2002) also found that around the mid-1970s gambling had become a common pastime on Mornington Island. Others have described the gambling as a 'fairly prevalent pastime' or a cross-cutting institution (Eckerman 1976, Gray 1978). Gray (1978, p.48) asserts that amongst the inhabitants of Carnarvon Reserve some of the members of the 'Mob' played cards regularly, although he suggests that there were no compulsive gamblers amongst them, meaning that no one played cards to the neglect of other social obligations such as child care. Robinson and Yu (1975) found that by 1971 cards were being played in most Kimberly settlements including the more remote centres of Kalumburu and Balgo Hills, Western Australia (WA). Personal communications between anthropologists in the field and Pyper through her master's thesis in 1978 suggest that card games were widespread, even in remote outstations. The correspondence reports card games at: Roper River Settlement (Bern 1972), Duck River (Merlan 1978), Milingimbi (Keen 1978), Maningrida (Meehan, and Hamilton 1978), Hooker Creek (Stead 1978), Warribari (Bell 1978), Aurukun (Sutton 1978), Elcho Island (Williams and Leku 1978), Yirrkala (Morphy 1978) and Yandeyarra (Tonkinson 1978).

One reason for the increased observance of card games may have been policies prior to the 1970s that focused on the centralisation of services that pulled many Aboriginal people from remote parts of the country into towns and cities, where they would most likely have been exposed to gambling and/or participated in gambling. So, during the

1970s, when policy approaches shifted to that of self-determination, many people returned to their outstations, appropriately named 'the Outstation Movement'. Perhaps many people who had previously lived in towns and played cards, continued to play when they returned to their outstations. This goes some way to explaining the sudden increase in gambling in remote communities in the Northern Territory at least.

Other reasons suggested to explain how widespread the gambling had become during the 1970s, include the declining influence of missions that often strongly discouraged gambling (Hunter 1993), the introduction of social security payments for Aboriginal people (Pyper 1978) and paid wages (Broome 2001). Others, such as Rowley (1971), interpreted gambling as a symbol of the breakdown of Aboriginal society as a result of racist and paternalistic practices:

*Alcoholism, 'reckless' expenditure, neglect of children, deliberate affronts to Australian middle class morality, a campaign against officialdom, gambling, refusal to pay rents, are all to be expected of a frustrated caste groups, which has been the object of race prejudice, subjected to special legislation and to paternal controls by officials and conditioned within special institutions to make its own secondary adjustments in order to pursue as far as possible its own defiant purposes (Rowley 1971, p.233).*

However, Pyper (1978) suggests it was the broader political notion that there was a breakdown in the 'traditional' social order in Aboriginal communities that perhaps led many anthropologists to shift their focus to investigate the reasons and causes of this

breakdown, where gambling was seen as a contributing factor. Robinson and Yu's (1975) paper addresses this issue, suggesting:

*It is not sufficient to dismiss the phenomenon of gambling as a social 'problem' or to regard its persistence simply as an attempt to occupy an abundance of leisure time. Card playing is a specialised and highly formalised social event and its almost universal acceptance by Aborigines invites sociological attention (Robinson and Yu 1975, p.48).*

What is really apparent in the literature of the 1970s was that gambling was changing rapidly from an activity that Aboriginal people were sporadically engaging in, or adapting to, to fast becoming a social norm – even in the most remote communities of Australia. During this period, very clear themes began to appear in the literature. The following section will explore the common themes identified, in particular the economic implications of gambling in Aboriginal communities, as well the social impacts of gambling on families, and in particular, on children. There was also another small, component of the literature that looked at the benefits to Aboriginal people of gambling.

#### *Economic implications of gambling*

The early literature describes the payment of wages to Aboriginal people as highly problematic in relation to expenditure on gambling. Berndt and Berndt (1947) are alone in their suggestion that the Aboriginal people they worked with were too disillusioned from working too hard to play cards. Other perspectives paint a different

picture, such as those of the pastoralists in Western Australia, who used the gambling as a powerful example to justify the exploitation of Aboriginal labour (see Fink 1957). This is exemplified in the 1935 Mosely Royal Commission that was appointed to investigate, report and advise upon matters in relation to the condition and treatment of Aborigines:

*The objection to payment is based on the assertion made by many pastoralists that the native has no idea of the value of money, that he is an easy victim for unscrupulous itinerant hawkers and that it encourages him in his gambling desires, which are firmly fixed. He will, of course, gamble without money; for a game of cards he will, if losing, divest himself piece by piece of his clothing to enable him to continue the game; but with money, his gambling instincts are aroused to the fullest extent. It may be that, with closer supervision and by taking a greater interest in this attribute of the native, his squandering habits might be checked (Moseley 1935 p. 6).*

Broome (2001, p.141) states that ‘until the Second World War, only about half the Aboriginal stockmen in the north received any wages, and those who did were paid at a rate far below what Europeans received for the same work’. However, change began to occur after the Second World War when many Aboriginal people began to be paid for their work, particularly those who worked as part of the army (2001). This is exemplified in Picture 1.2 below that shows Aboriginal men in army uniforms at Elliot (NT) playing cards.



**Picture 1.2: ‘Men’ 1945 – Aboriginal men playing cards at the Elliot, some in army uniforms (Northern Territory Library 1945).**

Broome suggests that during this period ‘some (Aborigines) fell into gambling, which was understandable given that this was the first cash wage some of them had ever received’ (2001, p.141). As touched on earlier in this chapter, gambling contributed greatly to the ideological view throughout the first half of the twentieth century that Aboriginal people were neither competent nor responsible with the expenditure of their income. There are conspicuous similarities between these assumptions and that of the current day. A major policy of the Northern Territory Emergency Intervention (June 2007) involved quarantining welfare incomes for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. Ideologically, the reasoning behind the quarantining of incomes was that Aboriginal people are irresponsible with the expenditure of their incomes, which as Pearson (2001) states, is in part due to expenditure on gambling (see also Wild & Anderson 2007).

One of the other interpretations of the economic implications of gambling came from Peterson (1977), who surveyed four institutionalised communities: Warburton, Amata, Ernabella and Docker River, and found that the redistribution of money appeared to have mainly taken place through card playing (see Gray 1978). This is the first instance where the understanding of card games as a redistributive activity, as opposed to an activity designed for purely personal gain, is aired. The development of this idea over the next few decades provides a platform from which part of the current debate around the role of gambling in Aboriginal communities is centered.

Pyper (1978) explores the redistributive qualities of card games further, arguing that ‘gambling is an economic practice ... which allows redistribution of resources drawn from the European cash-economy, in accord with the Indigenous values and economic interests of Aboriginal society’ (1978, p.73). Others such as Harris (1977, p.241) describe gambling as a modern means of ‘sharing the catch’. Harris suggests that gambling was a substitute for the system of sharing resources that operated when Yolngu people at Milingimbi depended solely on hunting and gathering for their food supply. The most detailed exploration of the idea of gambling as a redistributive mechanism is Altman’s (1987) ethnography of Gunwinggu people in Arnhem Land. He outlines how gambling is a complex social response to an initially inequitable distribution of cash. He found that the gambling functioned effectively as a redistributive mechanism, and as a mechanism that facilitated small-scale capital accumulation (1987). He found that there was insufficient evidence to suggest that the practice was counter-productive. Altman (1985) says, that by focusing on the structure of the outstation economy:

*... that the relations of production in the subsistence sector are egalitarian and that the economic role of gambling includes the transposition of this egalitarianism from the subsistence to cash nexus* (Altman 1985, p.51).

Other studies, such as Eckermann's (1976, p.21), found that three-quarters of all Aboriginal households in a south-west Queensland town suffered economic hardship at various times because of excessive drinking and gambling. She found that in most cases these were not simply a mechanism of tension release, rather there were three main causes: loneliness, inability to find a sexual partner and domestic, marital problems (1976, p.22). Other economic analyses emphasised social groupings within communities. Teasdale's (1971) work with Aboriginal people in Armidale, NSW, found that important informal social grouping in the economic lives of people on the Reserve were cliques, and the most obvious clique on the Reserve was the card-playing clique. This group was composed of all women, although, occasionally when more numbers were needed, men might be invited to play. This 'card-playing clique' sat in direct opposition to the 'religious clique' who strongly disapproved of gambling (except, he says, for one person who was an oddity, who was a member of both cliques!) (1971, p. 187).

Discussions of expenditure became more significant during the 1980s when there was a significant shift away from social policy, to a policy discourse focused on economic development, particularly in relation to the 'management' of Aboriginal people's monetary affairs (see Altman & Sanders 1991). This shift is represented in the

research on gambling in Aboriginal communities. Research began to focus on bridging the gap between local Aboriginal economic structures and the broader Australian economy (see Allen, Altman, Owen & Arthur 1991). There were increasing numbers of critiques of Aboriginal expenditure, for example Hunter and Spargo (1988) and Bryant (1982). Bryant's (1982) research, conducted in Robinvale, Victoria, found that aside from rent, electricity and food; alcohol, tobacco and gambling were major expenses. Further, she found that, beyond a certain minimum level of satisfaction of purchasing foodstuffs, priorities shifted to expenditure on alcohol, tobacco and gambling (Bryant 1982, p.64).

Between the drive for economic development and concern for what Aboriginal people were spending their money on, an essential component of policies was to ensure the Protestant work ethic was enshrined in Aboriginal people's way of living. The notion of the Protestant work ethic is analysed and challenged in Goodale's (1987) analysis of card playing in Tiwi society. She reports that the Tiwi people clearly distinguished between two modes of card games, one which is considered 'work' and the other 'fun' or leisure (1987, p.7). Her work analyses the concepts of 'work' and 'leisure' and explores how Tiwi people have not come to share Western (or Christian) notions of the contrast between work and leisure, or the values associated with work. Goodale (1987) argues that:

*Aboriginal gambling should be seen as an adaptive strategy to contemporary life in the townships where money is needed by women to obtain daily food requirements for their households; and where new wage-work patterns restrict employed men and women and mothers of*

*school-aged children to weekend and holiday hunting outside the townships. For Europeans, weekend and holiday hunting is conceptualised as a leisure activity... While I argue that neither gambling nor hunting are classed as leisure or recreational activities by the Tiwi, I also question whether Tiwi view or value wage work in the same sense that Westerners do (Goodale 1987, p.19).*

In many respects Goodale's research defines the issues that economic rationalists struggle with even to this day. The idea that there can be different values associated and placed on work, expenditure of money and time, is a very complex one, particularly for disciplines such as economics (see also Zimmer 1987).

Another interesting by-product of the push to instill the Protestant work ethic in Aboriginal people was a seemingly reinvigorated resurgence of religious movements in Aboriginal communities at this time. A talk written by Noel Pearson (1987, p.4), suggests that the members of the mission at Cape Bedford, which is now known as Hope Vale, had a strong social ethic that allowed them to reject gambling, which never flourished at Hope Vale. Another example of religious influence during this time is in a community in South Australia where men would play 'two-up' with their beer rations. However, this all came to an end when the beer was stopped after a Christian Revival in April 1982 and has never been restarted (Brady 1982). Altman (1987) also found that in 1981 and 1982 the gambling stopped as a result of a fundamentalist Christian movement that swept through Arnhem Land. He said that many Gunwinggu people would claim that 'they no longer gambled as they were now Christian' (1987, p. 173).

*Social implications of gambling*

The social impact of gambling was the other significant area of inquiry that developed during the 1970s. In particular, the research at this time focused predominantly on the impact of gambling on families and children.

Von Bamberger's (1980) study attempts to tackle two problems associated with gambling: the legalities of gambling, and the impact of gambling on children. The research was conducted at Shark Bay (Western Australia), where she found that 'gambling was accepted as an easily tolerated illegal practice' (von Bamberger 1980, p. 241). She also notes that gambling was, in part, tolerated because it was difficult for the constable to get evidence that would stand up in Court. The other impacts of the gambling that are raised are the consequences of gambling on children. She points out that aside from many men disapproving of the gambling, which often triggered domestic arguments and fights, the biggest problem concerned women and the care of their children:

*Women's games usually began in the afternoon and continued for at least three or four hours, sometimes well into the night. This meant that those mothers with school-age children were not at home when school was over for the day. Most locked their doors on leaving home, thereby shutting out their children. As one said, 'If I don't, the place is a mess when I get home and they'll have wasted half the food'. Children, consequently, sometimes had to track their mothers down, and then either tease for money, eat with*

*relatives, or go hungry until the game ended* (von Bamberger 1980, p. 240).

In 1973, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Affairs visited Shark Bay in Western Australia. The local newspaper, *Daily News*, reported the visit as ‘Aboriginal Inquiry Told: Young Drink—Mothers Gamble’:

*The township of Denham ... is a place not only of fishermen but of gambling mothers, drinking teenagers and old dogs ... coloured mothers were neglecting their children and their homes because of private card-playing gambling sessions ... old dogs and young children could be seen outside the houses as mothers had card sessions indoors* (Daily News 1973, p.3).

McKnight (2002) refers to the opposite problem on Mornington Island in mid-1970s. Some young mothers would shut their small children in the house while they went gambling, unfortunately though, McKnight makes no reference to the ‘old dogs’ and their domestic arrangements!

Children are also mentioned in a story from 1970 in Derby, Western Australia, called *That Game of Guns!* (Hercus & Sutton 1986):

*When we play together we try to beat each other from early morning until mid-day. They don't care at all about lunch or tea. They just stay in that game of Guns. Some of those who are mothers and fathers forget to cook*

*tucker for their children. Some receive fifty or sixty dollars a week in their pay, the whole lot of which they throw away in that game of Guns.*

*Mothers and fathers stay on leaving their children behind hungry. They have no food (Hercus and Sutton 1986, p.276).*

Contrary to these reports, other accounts at the time from south-east Arnhem Land describe the gamblers in the community as those who were unburdened by children (Bern 1974). From a child's perspective, another fitting mention of gambling was found in a little book called *Aboriginal Culture* at Victoria River Downs station. The book was hand written by children in 1984. On the page about daily life, there is a very sophisticated story about card games from a child's perspective:

*Experienced people know how to cheat and are fairly rich. For instance one day as I was watching the game and this lady won. It was then her turn to shuffle and deal. It was funny how she somehow figured it out and she got the same hand again and won but everyone else got a lousy hand. I really do not know how she did so (Aboriginal Culture in Victoria River Downs 1984, p.2).*

### *Benefits of gambling*

In addition to determining both the economic and social implications of gambling, the research of the 1970s and early '80s also provided some focus on the benefits of gambling to Aboriginal people. Gambling was used as a primary example of proof that Aboriginal people were not incapable, as previously thought, of handling

numerical problems (Robinson and Yu 1975). Robinson et al. (1975) found that it was the social context in which numerical problems were presented that played a large part in Aboriginal people's numerical understanding, as opposed to cognitive factors. These understandings were extended to the classroom, where educators Holm and Japanangku (1976), used Aboriginal card games to demonstrate how children's knowledge of mathematics through card games could be used by teachers to teach mathematics. Others, such as Davidson (1979) explored this further in his paper titled 'An Ethnographic Psychology of Aboriginal Cognitive Ability'. He found through studying particular individuals while playing cards, that the particular skills used for card tasks were quite different for Aboriginal people than for white Australian people. Davidson argues that while white Australians use number recognition and logical addition in a game of cards, Aboriginal people store and retrieve spatial information in a systematic fashion (Davidson 1979, p.292).

The 1970s and '80s saw gambling become a significant part of many Aboriginal people's lives around Australia. Gambling, particularly through card games, was impacting, positively and negatively, on many social and economic aspects of community life as detailed through the literature. However, it is not until the late 1980s in Australia that a dramatic shift occurs in understanding gambling and its impacts on communities. Gambling problems become clinicalised and individualised with the development of the psychiatric disorder of 'pathological gambling' (see American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)). Research begins to shift from anthropological ethnographic accounts of gambling, to the medicalised, psychological approaches of gambling research outlined in the Introduction of this thesis.

*Shift in gambling research approaches*

Hunter and Spargo's (1988) paper, titled 'What's the big deal: Aboriginal gambling in the Kimberley', represents the first major expression of the shift in gambling research involving Aboriginal people away from anthropological ethnography, to research more broadly based in the discipline of psychology. Hunter et al.'s paper describes Aboriginal social structures, and the social and economic functions of gambling, as having broadly negative health implications, particularly physically, psychologically and socially (1988, p.670). The paper suggests that gambling acts as a direct competitor for those resources that are available for spending on subsistence, that the lack of cash accumulation is inimical to any form of planned economic or domestic improvement, and finally, that alcohol is not the only cause of Aboriginal 'problems' (1988). Despite the authors stating that alcohol and gambling are kept quite separate, there are constant comparisons with alcohol throughout the paper, including the suggestion that gambling is responsible for alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents (1988, p.671). They suggest that because some people have been known to drive extreme distances if they win money in card games to obtain alcohol, gambling therefore results in an increased risk of motor vehicle accidents. However, the overall point of Hunter et al.'s paper is to position gambling as a social pathology that contributes to the overall dysfunction of Aboriginal people's lives.

Hunter and Spargo's work represents the point in the literature that anthropology largely leaves the field of gambling research. Aside from Martin's (1993) ethnography in Arakun, Cape York that touched on the role of card games in the lives of Aboriginal people, no other research specifically discussed card games until the

research for this thesis began in 2006. The previous couple of years have seen a slight increase in interest in the area with new studies that explore the impact of gambling and card games on Aboriginal communities (for example Breen, Hing & Gordan (2010) and Christie et al. (2009)). However, the focus of research from the 1990s to the present day has been very much on commercial forms of gambling. As suggested in the Introduction, gambling research is, theoretically and methodologically, solidly based around the concept of ‘problem gambling’. Chapter 6 of this thesis will review the recent literature based on ‘problem gambling’ and Aboriginal people in Australia.

The current chapter focused on expanding and challenging current assumptions around the introduction of gambling to Aboriginal people, particularly those people living in the remote north of Australia. It is broadly reported in the literature that Europeans and Macassan traders introduced Aboriginal people to card games and gambling. However, this chapter has highlighted that the Chinese settlers also played a significant role in this introduction, perhaps much more than can ever be evidenced through the current literature base. The analysis preceding this focused on a detailed literature review that portrays card games played in Aboriginal communities as a complex social and economic activity that has potential positive and negative impacts. Finally, this chapter discussed how the focus of gambling research has shifted dramatically away from ethnographic studies on card games, to research that is focused on ‘problem gambling’ and commercial forms of gambling.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed overview of the fieldwork locations and methodologies used to conduct the research. The chapter contextualises life in the community of Maningrida where I conducted 18 months of fieldwork, as well as providing a

historical look at gambling in Maningrida. Fieldwork was also conducted in a large gambling venue in Darwin, which will also be discussed. Following this, I will outline the methodological approaches used throughout the research.



## Chapter 2

### Methodology and Field sites

The previous chapter provided an extensive review of the literature, highlighting evidence that suggests that Chinese settlers were far more influential in the introduction of card games to Aboriginal people than is suggested in the existing literature. The previous chapter also demonstrates that although gambling and card games were introduced to Aboriginal people as the result of settler interactions, by the 1970s gambling had become a self-sustaining activity in the social, economic and political lives of people living in remote Aboriginal communities. The literature describes complex social and economic impacts of card games on communities. Exploring these impacts and the extent to which they are occurring in the current context will be the subject of the next four chapters. The following chapters will provide a detailed ethnographic study of both card games and poker machine gambling. To begin this analysis, this chapter will contextualise the two field sites used in the research by providing a detailed overview of the community of Maningrida, Arnhem Land, as well as outlining the urban gambling venue in Darwin. This chapter will also discuss the research methodologies used to conduct the research and outline why certain approaches were taken over others.

Figure 2.1 shows a map of the Northern Territory, and the location of the community of Maningrida and the city of Darwin.



Figure 2.1: Map of the Northern Territory<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Source: <http://www.nttravel.com.au/northern-territory-map.html>, visited on 11.8.2013.

*Fieldwork sites*

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, no research had been conducted in the Northern Territory that focused on remote Aboriginal people and gambling for over 25 years. Given that 79% of the Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory lives in remote and very remote areas, it was appropriate that this research focused on the remote context (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006a).

The focus of the research project was initially only on commercial forms of gambling: however, it became clear that to choose to not engage with the card games would neglect a significant part of the picture in understanding the gambling activities of Aboriginal people living in remote communities. A combination of evidence from the literature, as well as anecdotal evidence from numerous sources, suggested that card games were the major form of gambling that remote Aboriginal people engaged in. I decided that the research needed to broadly investigate Aboriginal people's engagement with both card gambling and poker machine gambling. The preliminary hypothesis was that insights gained through understanding card games would contribute to a better understanding of remote Aboriginal people's interaction with poker machine gambling. The decision was also made to focus solely on the card games played in Maningrida, as opposed to researching card games in Darwin as well, as there were considerable social, ethical and practical issues associated with studying card games in the urban context. It is for this reason that the gaming venue was the exclusive focus of the urban research component. The starting point of the research was the remote community of Maningrida, in Arnhem Land (see Picture 2.1 of the Maningrida community from the air).



**Picture 2.1: Maningrida, Arnhem Land, 2007**

Maningrida was chosen as the initial field site for the research primarily as I already had personal connections with the community. These connections contributed greatly towards building strong relationships with people around the research. Maningrida was also the second largest community in the Northern Territory which meant that there was significant diversity within the population, as well as family connections that spread across the north of Australia, and the south of the Northern Territory. I believed that working with such a large and diverse community would produce research findings relevant across different Aboriginal

populations around Australia and a diversity of contexts. In terms of contextualising the gambling, it is important to point out that there are no poker machines in Maningrida. This raises important questions about how Aboriginal people living in very remote areas access poker machines, as well as the extent that gambling is a driver for mobility from remote communities. Mobility was high from Maningrida, specifically to Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory. Darwin was identified as the primary location where people from Maningrida engage in commercial gambling, so it is for this reason that a commercial gambling venue in Darwin was chosen as the second field site for the research.

The following section will provide a detailed description of the community of Maningrida at the time when this fieldwork was carried out. It is important to note that since this research was conducted many new houses have been built and many pivotal organisations, programs and people that were involved in the research have come and gone. However, providing a detailed snapshot of the community at the time the research was conducted is very important, even if some things have changed. Discussing the geographic positioning, population, social makeup, employment, housing, education and health situation of the community will contribute to providing much needed context to the research and greatly inform the findings. This section will also provide an overview of the history of gambling in Maningrida. Following this, I will briefly discuss the commercial gambling field site in Darwin.

### *Maningrida, Northern Territory*

Steane et al. (1998) suggest Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory have unique qualities that must be considered in any research design. This is precisely why it is important to contextualise the community of Maningrida and construct a picture of the gambling within

this context. The community of Maningrida is located on the north-western Arnhem Land coast of the Arafura Sea, 600 km east of Darwin.

Maningrida was initially constructed as a trading post (a project of the Native Affairs Branch) in early 1949 by Patrol-Officer Syd Kye-Little<sup>6</sup>. Prior to this, the region was part of the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve with entry limited by the Aboriginals Ordinance (Altman 2005). In 1957, the community was officially established as a government settlement by the Native Affairs Branch, in part to slow (or halt) post-war migration of Aboriginal people from the region into Darwin (Doolan 1989). From the early 1970s, a period of great change and growth occurred in the community. A flourishing forestry industry grew with the introduction of a saw mill in the township in 1970. The school, medical clinic, council and Maningrida Progress Association (MPA) were all built, as well as other developments such as the airport and the first post office (Maningrida Mirage 1970b). Significant shifts in national politics during this time resulted in Aboriginal people rejecting previous policies of ‘centralisation, modernisation and assimilation’ and returning to live in small decentralised groups on their clan estates (Altman 2005). This is more commonly referred to as the ‘Outstation Movement’ (Altman 2005). In order to support people returning to the outstations, a resource centre called Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) was established that still services the 32 outstations of the Maningrida region. Arguably the most significant event to occur during the early days of the history of the settlement was in 1976, when Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory were granted inalienable freehold title to their lands following the passing of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*.

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<sup>6</sup> In one trading period, the post reported that 27 crocodile skins, 1 dingo scalp, 6 snake skins, 58 baler shells, 22 pandanus baskets and 16 floor mats were exchanged for tobacco, soap, mirrors, combs, toothbrushes, needles, cotton and dress material (as the Maningrida Mirage (1970a) states it is usual that there was no mention of tea, flour and sugar).

*Population*

**Picture 2.2: Dukurrdji children, Bottom camp, Maningrida, 2007.**

The population of the Maningrida region is approximately 2437 people, of whom 92% (2260 people) identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Approximately 200 people residing in the community are non-Indigenous. Much of the activity in the tropical north of the Northern Territory is dictated by the two seasons, the wet season (starts approximately November until April) and the dry season (May until October). Maningrida is directly affected by these seasons, and as a result experiences great fluctuations in the population of the township. During the dry season, you can fly or drive to and from the community; however, in the wet season the rivers flood and flying becomes your only option

(see Picture 2.3 of the wet season in the region). This results in the population of the community increasing dramatically during the wet season as mobility to the 32 outstations is severely restricted<sup>7</sup>.

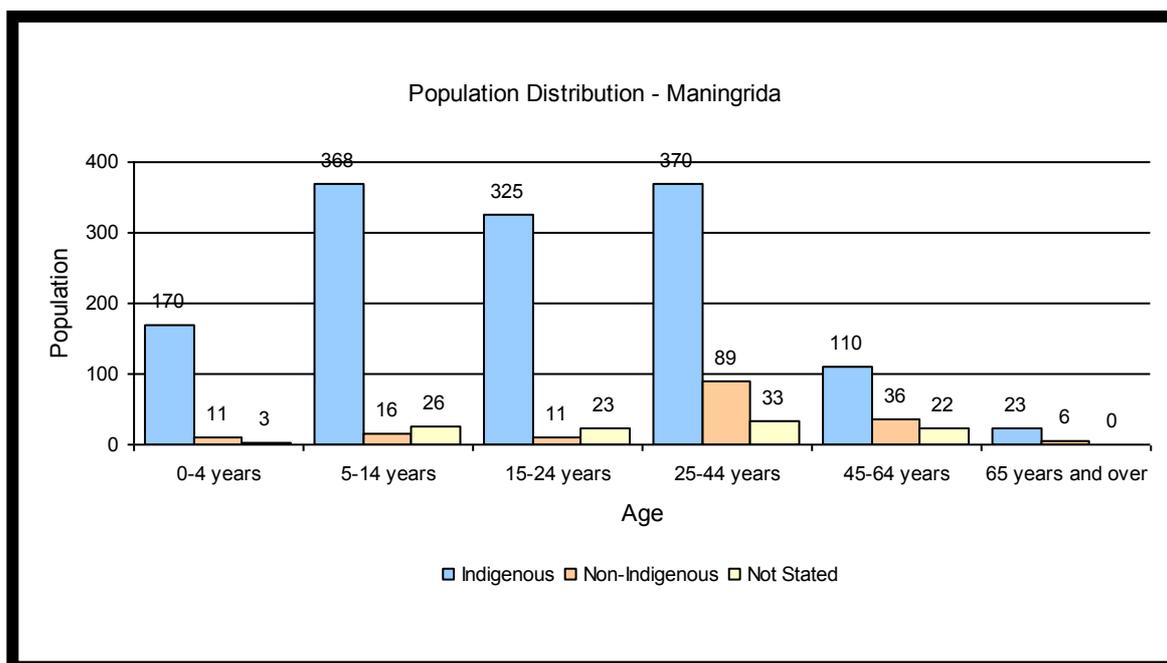


**Picture 2.3: Wet season roads and river crossings, Maningrida region**

In addition to the significant fluctuations in population, the community is also disproportionately young compared to the non-Indigenous population of the Northern Territory, and Australia more broadly. The median age of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population nationally is 21 years old compared to 37 years old for the non-Indigenous population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006b). Figure 2.2 depicts population distribution of Maningrida. The graph shows that 63% of the Aboriginal population of Maningrida is under the age of 24 years old. This has significant implications in terms of program and policy development in the community.

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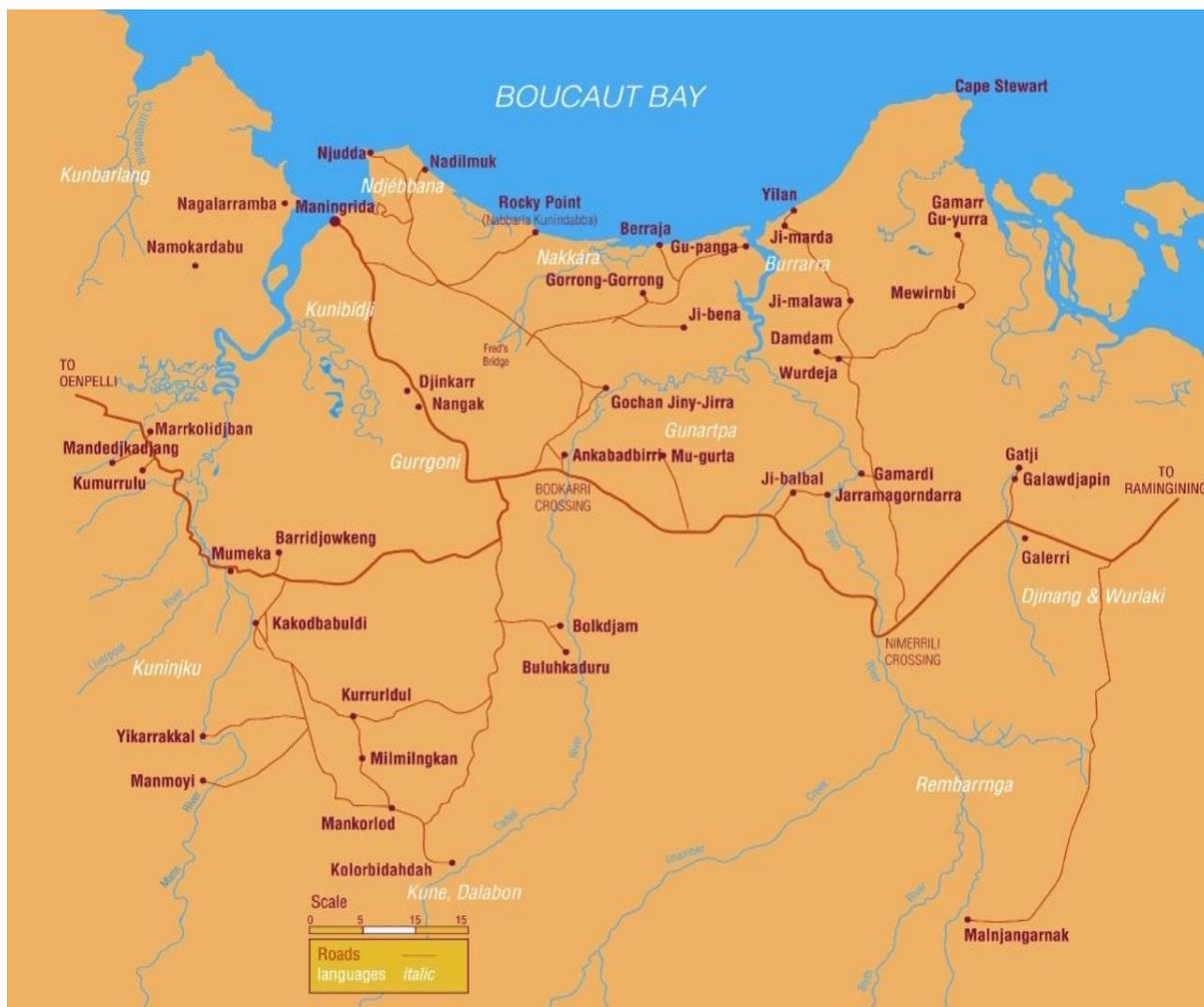
<sup>7</sup> The outstations are small, serviced communities that normally have a population of about 30 people.



**Figure 2.2: Population Distribution Maningrida (NTDEET 2007)<sup>8</sup>**

The population of the community is also divided by languages and clan groups, making for a complex social and linguistic environment. There are over 100 different clan groups in the region (BAC 2007). There are also 10 distinct languages in the region, including Ndjebbana, Burrara, Djinang, Rembarnga, Kunwinjku, Nkarra, Gorgoni and Kune. To make matters even more complex, most of these languages also have different dialects. The 10,000 square kilometers of the Maningrida region is broken up by the differing clan estates of the clan groups in the region. Figure 2.3 below shows the outstations dotted throughout the region (red), as well as the distinct language groupings in the area (white).

<sup>8</sup> The population data used to inform Figure 2 does not include Outstation residence.



**Figure 2.3: Language groups (white) and outstations (red) of Maningrida region**

The complexity of having so many distinct languages and members from so many different clan groups is highlighted during the wet season when a large proportion of the regional populations descend on the township. This has significant impacts on housing, employment, education, and in the case of this research, gambling.

## *Employment*

There were nine employers in the community at the time of the research, the three biggest being Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, the Maningrida Council and the school<sup>9</sup>. The vast majority of the Aboriginal people employed in the community and the outstations were participants in the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) scheme<sup>10</sup>. CDEP was first introduced to the region in 1989 when outstation residents were paid primarily to maintain their outstations (BAC 2007). Due to the significant lack of employment opportunities available to residents, many members of the community receive family/social benefit payments each fortnight from Centrelink. Centrelink provided over \$400,000 per fortnight in income support to Maningrida and outstation residents (Maningrida Council 2008)<sup>11</sup>. At the time that the research was conducted, the employment situation in the community was similar to that outlined below in Figure 2.4.

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<sup>9</sup> Since this fieldwork was conducted, the council no longer exists; it has been subsumed by the West Arnhem Shire council. BAC's future is also uncertain as the corporation is currently under administration (2012).

<sup>10</sup> The CDEP has now been abolished. From 1 July 2013, the new policy framework is called Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP).

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that the number of people receiving benefits in the community has most likely risen since this research was conducted in 2006/2007 as a direct result of abolition of the CDEP scheme as part of the National Emergency Response in remote NT Aboriginal communities.

Employer	Employment				Total
	Current funded positions		CDEP		
	Indig	Non-Indig	Base	Top up	
Council	6	27	1	34	68
Education NT Govt	22	35	0	32	89
Police	1	2	0	0	3
Health Clinic/Aged Care	6	11		21	38
Maningrida Prog Assoc	6	15		12	33
Bawinanga Aboriginal Assoc.	3	38	320	189	550
JET Training		1	2	3	6
Centrelink	3		0	0	3
Menzies Research	2				2
Traditional Credit Union	3	0	0	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>796</b>

**Figure 2.4: Employment distribution of Maningrida (LGANT 2006)**

Figure 2.4 shows that the majority of people living in the Maningrida region were employed by Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC). The vast majority of Aboriginal people employed by BAC worked in the outstations. In the township of Maningrida, the majority of Aboriginal people who occupied fully-funded positions worked at the school.

### *Housing*

Over-crowding of houses in Maningrida was a significant issue, with the average household size being approximately 19 people<sup>12</sup>. Houses ranged from dilapidated housing built during the 1970s to colourfully painted new houses. There were approximately 165 Aboriginal community houses, and all customers in receipt of Centrelink Payments had \$20 per week deducted for rental from their payments (Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> The numbers of houses has increased since this research was conducted as a result of funding from the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

### *Education*

Education was offered to the community through the hub-school located in Maningrida. The school also delivered educational services to some of the outstations in the region. However, the very existence of the outstations schools is a politically divisive issue that has resulted in erratic funding over the past few years leading to the closure of some of these schools. In 2007 there were 920 students of school and preschool age in Maningrida (Fogarty, W 2008). However, only 559 of these students were enrolled, with less than half of them actually attending school (Fogarty, W 2008). On any given day in Maningrida up to 700 students were not attending school (Fogarty, W 2008). These findings starkly demonstrate the challenges faced by Aboriginal people in Maningrida in relation to educating their children.

### *Health*

One of the most comprehensive studies conducted on the health of people in Maningrida was the *Maningrida Adult Health Check: Community Report and Recommendations*. The report assessed the health of 301 adults in the region aged from 15–54 years old and found that diseases such as TB, leprosy and syphilis were prevalent within the population despite health practitioners having worked on quelling these diseases since Maningrida was founded (Burgess 2007). The report found, however, that these diseases were dwarfed in comparison to the lifestyle diseases of diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney disease, smoking related respiratory illness and heart disease. The report also found that 50% of participants were either living with a preventable chronic disease or had treatable risk factors for a chronic disease (Burgess 2007). In addition to chronic diseases, the health checks found significant numbers of skin problems, dental conditions and disabilities, particularly relating to ear

disease and hearing impairment (Burgess 2007). Similarly to the issues of housing and education, the seriousness and the extent of the problems relating to health in the community are significant.

### *Shops*

There are two small competing supermarkets in the community, one owned by the Maningrida Progress Association and the other by Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation. Both organisations have fuel bowsers that supply fuel to the community, and both have competing fast food outlets: MPA runs Hasty Tasty (which specialises in fried food, lollies and soft drinks) and BAC runs The Good Food Kitchen (which specialises in rice and stews, sandwiches, prawns and fruit). A barge brings food to the community twice a week, but in the wet season these barges are weather dependent, sometimes resulting in a temporary shortage of food. BAC also runs an Outdoor shop that sells camping and bush gear, and the Maningrida arts centre. There are two ‘hole-in-the-wall’ shops, both of which sell cigarettes, cards, lollies, pies and cold drinks, one in the council complex and the other at the airport. These shops prove very popular on weekends and after hours times when the other, larger shops are not open. Both of the supermarkets and The Good Food Kitchen had ATMs, which was where the community would access cash. BAC operated an ANZ agency and there was also a branch of the Traditional Credit Union which operated in the community

### *Alcohol*

The community of Maningrida had a ‘wet canteen’ in the late 1970s. This lasted six weeks until the women in the community insisted that it be shut down as a result of the significant

community and family unrest as a result of the alcohol consumption (Fogarty & Paterson 2007). Periods of prohibition have also been imposed on the community over the years. These periods are often viewed as contributing to increases in illicit supplies of alcohol to the community, and anecdotal evidence suggests a significant rise in cannabis use (Fogarty & Paterson 2007). Since 2001, Maningrida has had an Alcohol Permit System. Alcohol is barged into the community once a fortnight and only 'permitted' people within the community can order the alcohol<sup>13</sup>. The Maningrida Council is where most people with a permit place their order for alcohol. Research found that Aboriginal people in the community account for approximately 67 (48%) of the Council's fortnightly orders (Fogarty & Paterson 2007).

### *Gambling*

In Maningrida, there appears to be no mention in written records of card games or gambling until the 1970s. As discussed in Chapter 1, there were discrepancies in the accounts of the introduction of gambling and cards to people in the region. Despite this, many of the elders acknowledge that card games did not become part of daily life until the settlement of Maningrida was established (post-1957). Over a period of five years in the 1970s, card games begin to get mentioned in the local Maningrida newsletter, the *Maningrida Mirage*.

The *Maningrida Mirage* was a detailed newsletter that began in 1969. The first mention of card playing is on 7 August, 1970:

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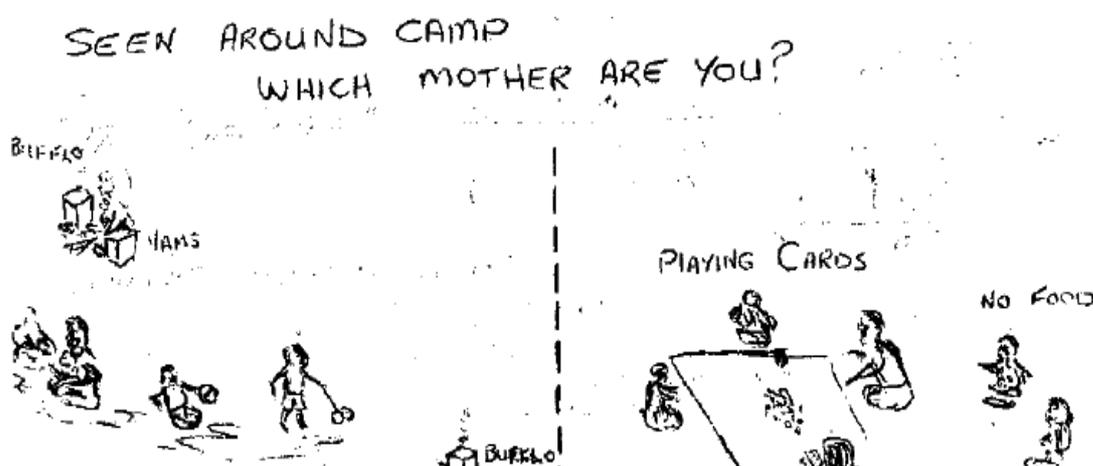
<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 1 for outline of Alcohol Permit System.

*Cards make trouble because people forget about other things and most times they lose their money, because cheating people get it (Maningrida Mirage 1970c).*

The next mention of cards appears almost a year later in an article titled ‘*What is more important?*’ written by Sister Edith:

*When the Baby Money was paid this week, more card games started, numbers of mothers coming to Baby Tucker grew less. A lot more mothers were playing cards, and did not feed their babies. Too many mothers start playing cards and then forget everything else. If the children don't get food and start getting sick mothers will worry, cry, sorry cut themselves (Maningrida Mirage 1971a).*

The next week, Volume 93 of the *Maningrida Mirage*, included the following drawing by Sister Edith:



**Figure 2.5: Which mother are you? (Maningrida Mirage 1971b).**

Sister Edith writes again in Volume 96 (Maningrida Mirage 1971c): *Yesterday: Baby money (child endowment) was paid. How many mothers and children were at baby tucker? 200? No. Only 10 people. Why? Mothers were too busy playing cards...*

Other contributors to the *Mirage* in subsequent volumes identify different problems associated with card games. In Volume 97 (Maningrida Mirage 1971d), cards were discussed at the local council meeting ‘Councilor Munyal said the Pine forest was a big mess and full of people playing cards, and just sitting down’.

Card games appear again in council meeting minutes a few months later during a discussion of wages:

*Cr. Baliya expressed anxiety over the wages that were being received by people. He says that after visiting the Co-op. and Hasty Tasty there is usually no money left. Cr. Riala commented that the reasons for the shortage of cash might be the mismanagement of money and gambling. Cr. Munyal commented that if more money was received in the pay packet, maybe more would be put on the blanket at the card games (Maningrida Mirage 1972a).*

The next mention of gambling is in reference to Forestry staff working in Maningrida. Apparently ‘forestry single quarters has been the ‘honey pot’ for gamblers lately – care should be taken on entering the building as there is a savage dog guarding the premises’ (Maningrida Mirage 1972b).

Over the course of the next few months, cards become a significant feature of the *Mirage*. However, the focus had shifted to the legalities of the activity when the local police decide to actively ban the cards. The discussion starts in Vol. 142 (1972c) in an article called ‘Cards – are out’:

*Some members of the council believe that it is alright for their people to play cards on the weekend. They also state that their people have to play cards in open while balanders can play in their homes. It is wrong for people to play cards for money as this is what is known as GAMBLING. The law of the Northern Territory states that 'any person who uses any house, office, room or place as a common gaming house (GAMBLING) shall be guilty of an offence'. The law further states that 'Any person found in any such house, office, room or place without lawful excuse shall be guilty of an offence'. Paddy Foreman says that people all over Australia play cards for money. I say that people all over Australia get locked up when they are caught playing cards for money. Maningrida will be THE SAME. THERE WILL BE NO PLAYING CARDS FOR MONEY ON THIS SETTLEMENT. (Harry Cox, Police, Maningrida Mirage 1972c).*

Just over a month later, card games reappear in the council minutes:

*Cr. Riala said that he felt that people should be able to play cards on weekends. Not everyone could go away hunting. Some had small children. There was nothing much to do at Maningrida and card playing was a way to pass the time. Council decided that it would be a good idea to invite the Police to attend the meetings and talk over such matters (Maningrida Mirage 1972d).*

Cards, again, form a major talking point at the next council meeting, as it is stated in the minutes that 'Cr. Gandjibala, Riala and the President led a long discussion on the subject [of

cards]’ (Maningrida Mirage1972e). Two weeks later the Police Constable Harry Cox is invited back to the Council meeting to talk to people again. The conversation starts:

*Cr. Riala We have talked about the business of playing cards over the last 3 or 4 weeks. He had asked the Village Councillors not to play cards on work days, but during weekends.*

*Cr. Munyal said that on every mission and settlement they still do playing cards but we Aborigines here are finding it hard.*

*President said we can play maybe for 20c, 40c, or \$2 but not going on, playing with the rest of our money.*

*Cr. Munyal What we talk about here, will go to the Mirage and the Maningrida Mirage can be sent around the village so that people can read what we talked about Constable Harry Cox ‘The policeman does not make laws about playing cards, but the people in Darwin, the Legislative Council makes the law, men like Mr. Kentish and Mr. Chaney. If you want to play cards, you can call on people who represent you, so that they can change the law. As I said, I do not make the law, but I go by the law of the government. The law also says that if I see cards and money, I can take the people who are playing to court. At Bagot the people do not keep on playing cards when the policeman drives through.*

*Cr. Riala The cards can’t be stopped. I’ve seen everywhere when I was at Elcho Is. and Goulburn Is. – I saw people playing cards, but no-one stopped them. The law can’t change, the law can’t say ‘Put cards away’. Maybe another law will say ‘Put cards away, then they will be put away. We learned to play cards from the Europeans. The Government hasn’t put the cards away yet, so we will still play.*

*Supt. It is the gambling that’s against the law, not playing cards.*

Cr. Riala: *What about racing? Balandas put big money on that. Why is it different from cards?*

Cr. Yiriyin: *Maybe people play cards because they haven't got enough money.*

President: *Gambling is a law and can put you in jail. He said that he had lost his money, about 4 or 5 dollars. I know how you people are worrying about the cards. The people here blame the Council and the police, but they don't blame themselves. They bring the cards from Darwin.*

Cont. Harry Cox: *The only way to stop the people playing cards is to remove the cards*

Cr. Riala: *Why don't we write to the Government. We will ask what they think. Will they change the law for Aborigines?*

President: *Sometimes people come to the office to the Supt. asking about the money, because they have lost their money at cards.*

Cr. Riala: *The Government can change the law so that there'll be no cards anywhere – not just at Maningrida.*

Cr. Balaya: *It is best if we can ask the Government to change the law. No cards.*

President: *People are hiding in the bushes playing cards.*

Const. Cox: *The best way is not to do bad things, and then you don't have to worry about me.*

Cr. Riala: *Last week the Council were running into the bush like geese before the police truck.*

(Maningrida Mirage 1972f)

Cards reappear momentarily at a Council meeting two weeks later, when the Superintendent states 'that the matter of gambling was not one which could be debated further. It was against

the law and it was the policeman's duty to keep the law' (Maningrida Mirage 1972g).

However, the discussion on the legalities of cards was not over. At the February Council meeting, apparently there 'was a long talk about card playing' (Maningrida Mirage 1973):

*Some Councillors felt that Maningrida had a different law for card playing. In other places people played cards without any trouble. Council decided that if the police took cards then people should not get wild with the police. They should go to Court with a lawyer and defend them (Maningrida Mirage 1973).*

Cards do not get a mention in the *Mirage* again until nearly a year later, when obviously enough time had passed so as not to upset the Superintendent again! The mention appears at a council meeting:

*The community Advisor expressed his concern of the amount of gambling going on throughout the settlement. He told the council he felt that this was one of the prime causes of child neglect; more than once this last week he had caught children in the garbage tins looking for tucker that their parents should have provided for them. The closure of the kitchen because of a gas/barge problem did not help (Maningrida Mirage 1974a).*

Cards are discussed again at another Council meeting:

*The council expressed concern over the prevalence of gambling in the camps which has kept men away from their jobs and let women to the neglecting their children.*

*Measures to alleviate the situation were discussed and the following action will be taken (Maningrida Mirage 1974b).*

The action is focused on making sure that workers get to work. One of the measures is prohibiting card playing during work hours, where ‘cards will be confiscated and burnt’ (Maningrida Mirage 1974b). There was also an important shift in terminology at this point. References over the previous few years were focused on ‘cards’, or ‘card playing’, however, in the last few entries there had been a change to discussions of ‘gambling’.

The very next *Mirage* (1974c) makes reference to cards as that week’s council meeting was under question because two of the Councillors were playing cards and the others could not be found! The next article to appear in the *Mirage* about the card games was in Volume 331 (1974d). Mirritji wrote the article ‘Putta Card and Poker Game’:

*This is the five card called putta and picture card called poker game. These two cards make trouble because people forget about other good things and most times we lose our small wage which we earns from bark paintings, spear making, carving and so on. There is a little bit of interest in the worse of us and a little bit of fun in the best of them. It is the bad cheating people who get it (Maningrida Mirage 1974d).*

It is towards the end of 1974 that discussions in the *Mirage* regarding card games end. These excerpts demonstrate that card games were contentious issue in the community as far back as the 1970s. Considering that Maningrida had only been a settlement for just over 13 years when these were written, the speed of social change described, was significant. Even at such an early stage of settlement, card games were a highly contested, pervasive activity. A

distinctive pattern appears in the themes that were raised and who raises them. Those people working on the law enforcement side raise the legal issues, those people working with families and children highlight the cases of child neglect, and employers highlight attendance at work as an issue.

However, what the excerpts of the *Mirage* also represent is the voices of Aboriginal members of the community who suggest that these problems are isolated cases, and for the most part, they just want to be left alone to play. The resistance by Aboriginal people in Maningrida to the fairly significant pressures from different people and organisations to shut down card games is marked. The racial tensions are highlighted, and the clear frustration by Aboriginal people at the lack of equality with non-Indigenous people is obvious. What also comes through the *Mirage* excerpts is the depth to which card games have been interwoven with the social and economic lives of people, not only in Maningrida but also across Arnhem Land.

A description of how the community is structured and the challenges that Aboriginal people in Maningrida face, particularly in relation to health, education and housing, goes some way to providing context to the research environment. Although Maningrida has a relatively short settlement history, card games appear to have been a significant activity in which Aboriginal people in the community participated in from the very early settlement days. The following section of the chapter will briefly discuss the commercial gambling venue in Darwin where part of the research was conducted.

*Gambling venue, Darwin, Northern Territory*

One of the agreements for the research to be conducted in the gambling venue was that the venue remains anonymous throughout the thesis. For the purpose of providing context, I can say that it was a large, popular venue in the city of Darwin. Despite the lack of specific detail, the particular venue used in this research was identified as an appropriate venue as many people in Maningrida reported spending time at this venue when they travelled to Darwin. People said that they particularly enjoyed this venue as there were always lots of things going on, lots of people, air-conditioning, cheap food and free tea and coffee. It was also a socially acceptable meeting place where people felt welcomed, unlike some other venues in Darwin.

McMillen and Togni's (2000) *Study of Gambling in the Northern Territory 1996—97* outlines the significant moments in gambling regulation in the Northern Territory. The first casino opened in the Northern Territory in Darwin in 1979. Laws were passed to allow the operation of the casino at a temporary location, the Don Hotel, while the proper casino at Mindil Beach was being built. The casino in Darwin (Skycity casino) remains at that site today, and is the largest casino in the Northern Territory. A second casino is located in Alice Springs that opened in 1981 (Lasserters Hotel Casino). There are currently 18 clubs in the Darwin region and 13 hotels. However, it was not until January 1996, that clubs and hotels in the Territory were able to introduce poker machines into their venues, the first being the Nightcliff Sports Club (McMillen & Togni 2000). As of 2004–2005 there were 1802 poker machines in the Northern Territory (Young et al. 2006). In 2004–2005, Skycity casino had 566 machines (Young et al. 2006). The hotels are capped at 10 machines per venue and the clubs are capped at 45 machines.

After providing an overview of Maningrida, and the gambling in Maningrida, it is obvious that a rich ‘gambling environment’ exists in this remote Aboriginal community. Similarly, the gambling venue in Darwin provides a place of significant poker machine activity for people coming from remote communities. The following part of this chapter will outline the methodologies used to conduct the research. I discuss what approach I took to the research and why other approaches and methodologies were not appropriate within the context that this research was conducted.

### *Methodology*

Relatively little attention has been given to the cross-cultural context of gambling (Gray 2004). Particularly in Australia, even less attention has been given to the methodological issues in researching gambling in the Aboriginal context. The major repercussion of this lack of analysis has been the temptation to impose methodologies used in mainstream research on Aboriginal people, assuming mainstream understandings of gambling and impacts of gambling. As Steane et al. (1998) discuss, methods need to be used that allow Aboriginal people, not the researchers, to define the issues and the socio-cultural significance of gambling. Contrary to the vast majority of the research on gambling in Australia that takes a psychological approach, the following research was conducted within an anthropological framework. To begin with, I will outline the reasons why a psychological approach was not taken to the research.

*Psychological approaches*

As stated in the Introduction, before this research began, there was an underlying assumption that a psychological approach would be taken. Particularly as the focus of policy makers and other academics was on ‘problem gambling’ and measuring the extent to which Aboriginal people were experiencing problems. The media also perpetuated the idea that Aboriginal people were addicted to poker machines, so many inquiries relating to the research were focused on understanding the extent of the addiction facing Aboriginal people. The gambling screens used to conduct this type of work do provide easy, pre-packaged surveys and bounded, tidy methodologies that ultimately produce results (however flawed). The following analysis provides some insight into the inappropriateness of these approaches in the remote Aboriginal context.

Throughout some of the more recent literature, particular findings flag the possible inappropriateness of psychological approaches and methodologies in the context of Aboriginal gambling research. Steane et al. (1998, p. 313) explain in their paper titled ‘Researching Gambling with Indigenous people’ that:

*Positivist research, reliant upon the hard ‘facts’ or objective quantifiable research ... is irrelevant for research across cultural boundaries because it reflects western values and assumptions and does not allow for verification of answers received*  
(Steane et al. 1998, p.313).

Hunter et al. (1988, p. 671) also strongly caution against the medicalisation of complex social problems, that ‘such constructions suggest medical solutions that play into the hands of high-

visibility, short-term political expediency'. Others such as Brady (1992) suggest that addiction or disease models dramatically individuate the problem, but simultaneously relieve both the bearer of the problem and society of blame. Brady (1992) warns of using this model in the Aboriginal context as it entrenches the stereotype of Aboriginal people as hopeless and helpless victims. Foote's (1996) study found that the Aboriginal community was difficult to approach and study using the standard psychological measuring screens, stating that 'the South Oaks Gambling Screen appears to be unsuitable for Aboriginal gambling conditions'. Others such as Dickerson (1996) stated in the study 'A preliminary exploration of the positive and negative impacts of gaming and wagering on Aboriginal people in NSW' that western survey methodologies were inappropriate for use in Aboriginal communities. Reports such as the Northern Territory gambling prevalence survey (Young et al. 2006) recommend an alternative, revised research approach to Aboriginal gambling outside of the psychological gambling surveys.

Importantly, this discussion is not a debate about the use of quantitative and qualitative data: it is broader than that. The problem with psychological approaches and methodologies is that they reflect certain values, assumptions and understandings. Steane et al. (1998) agree, stating that using conceptual categories and meanings from a different cultural paradigm can result in diverting analysis of the data from the intended meaning of the interviewees.

To exemplify the limitations of applying these approaches to gambling research with Aboriginal people, I will look at three examples that were relevant to this research.

*Example 1*

From experience over the fieldwork period, the answers given to direct questioning of Aboriginal people produce an inaccurate picture of the situation from a language, communication and conceptual standpoint. To demonstrate this point, when asking a question of some Aboriginal people in the community, for example, how many times in the past week have you played cards? – the answers often received were ‘maybe sometimes’ or ‘little bit’. This often resulted in me presenting options to people like 1, 2 or 3 times etc. However, on many occasions people would say ‘yes’ to all answers. This highlights that perhaps people did not understand the question, in many cases because peoples English (or rather my language) was not of a certain level. However, also another possibility is that this question, like so many others, simply does not make sense to people’s gambling experience. These types of questions assume that you have a shared understanding of time, and when and how card games start and finish. The concept of a ‘week’ is problematic, so too is the concept of the number of times people played, for example, a person could play in one game - day in, day out, for an entire week, and then answer that they played once. Steane et al. (1998, p.309) also highlighted different forms of non-dyadic and dyadic communication used respectively by Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people that can dramatically impact on interviews. They found that people did not respond well to direct individuated questioning, and when people were questioned in groups, talk was sporadic and could overlap and intertwine, meaning that it was impossible to get a specific ‘yes or no’ or numerical response to a set of research questions.

*Example 2*

A question used in the NATSISS survey (2008) asks the respondent to report ‘if you, a family member or a close friend experiences a problem with gambling?’ is also highly problematic. Aboriginal people have complex kinship systems that influence and organise life in the community. Most people, even if they are not blood related, are related to most other people in the community through a complex system of ‘skin’ relationships. There are 16 different skin names, the names for which alter linguistically, however, they imply the same relationship, for example, the skin name I was given was ‘Gochan’, I am married to ‘Gumarrang’ and so every person I meet relates to me in some way shape or form through that system. They are my uncle, mother, daughter or cousin. So technically, one in every 16 people in the community is my sister. By doing the genealogy of one family in the community, I found that between one old lady and her husband, they had 92 direct descendants, most of who reside in Maningrida. The point is that not only do people have very large immediate families, but technically people view others who are not necessarily directly related as family too. So when asked if you, a family member, or a close friend, are experiencing a problem with gambling – potentially 500 people could all be talking about one particular person (see Stene et al. 1998 for further analysis of the use of empirical methodologies in the Australian Aboriginal context). The question is also conceptually problematic as the results assume non-Indigenous understandings of what a problem with gambling is. This is particularly pertinent in policy and program design, if Aboriginal people have different understandings of what constitutes a ‘problem’ then strategies to address this might be quite different than in the mainstream, non-Indigenous context.

*Example 3*

In the context of remote Aboriginal communities, large-scale problem gambling prevalence survey methodologies are highly inappropriate. Many of these types of surveys contact people by phone which is problematic in the remote context as such a large proportion of Aboriginal people in the NT do not have a telephone in their house. Even prevalence surveys that are conducted face to face, not only present the conceptual, communicative and cultural issues described in the other examples, but in the context of Maningrida, there was a deep mistrust of anyone unknown coming into the community conducting surveys. Brady (1992) had similar findings in her study of petrol sniffing, where communities are very sensitive about researchers and governments in general, as they have experience so many superficial investigative visits and surveys that result in unwanted media attention. In addition to this, many people in Maningrida also felt upset by results or policies that were developed from these fly-in visits, that people felt were based on ill-informed findings that bore little resemblance to the issues or needs that people actually faced.

As the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia (2003) state:

*The construction of ethical relationships between ATSI [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] peoples on the one hand and the research community on the other must take into account the principles and values of ATSI cultures ... failing to understand differences in values and cultures may jeopardise both the ethics and quality of the research (National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia 2003).*

Recognition of these cultural differences forms the basis of ethical research, something that many current approaches and methodologies neglect to do. It is for this reason that it was appropriate that an anthropological approach was taken in such a remote context. The remaining part of this chapter will discuss some of the ethical implications and limitations of conducting this type of research in the context of a remote community.

### *An anthropological approach to gambling research*

As stated above, an anthropological approach was taken to this research. Central to this approach is ethnographic fieldwork based on participant observation, although much of the data was generated using more specific methods such as interviewing, social mapping, counting, and recording. At a very basic level, participant observation requires observing activities, as well as joining in to a limited extent. At a more sophisticated level, participant observation requires building relationships with people, staying or living with people, learning the language and approaching the research with a wide angle of vision that enables the research to be contextualised.

Using this approach, the fieldwork was conducted over a period of 18 months.

Preliminary discussions and trips to Maningrida started four months prior to beginning the fieldwork. The aim was to negotiate permission to conduct the research. The ethics processes that the research project and design went through before even beginning discussions with the community were rigorous and time consuming. However, what I was not prepared for was how challenging negotiating with the community and individuals about conducting the research would be. Having not worked in an Aboriginal community before, I found the initial

role of explaining and justifying the research very difficult. Both the complexities and the time that it took to negotiate the fieldwork were significant.

The first step in this process was identifying which of the organisations within the community would view my research as relevant and worth supporting. By talking to people who had previously worked in the community, I developed an idea with whom I should begin discussions. Writing formal letters, outlining my research, to a few of the organisations in the community was the first step in ascertaining if there was any interest for the research.

The second step was going out to the community to meet with people and begin discussing the research. Over the four month period of negotiations, I went to the community four times. Each time I talked to people from the different organisations, the Traditional Owners and elders of the community. In the initial meetings a few concerns were raised. One of the major concerns was that the community felt 'burnt out' by researchers. The general feeling was that there were too many researchers coming. Many stayed for very short stints of fieldwork and would then proceed to write about a situation that it was considered by the community that they knew next to nothing about. The second concern was that gambling was a very sensitive topic and that the community may not be comfortable with the research. All I could do at that stage was to reiterate the point that the research was guided by strict ethical guidelines, of which informed consent was a very serious consideration. In addition, I planned to conduct the fieldwork over a significant period of time, taking an anthropological approach which meant that it was crucial that a strong relationship with the community be built throughout the research process. I hoped that this would enable people to feel more comfortable with the research project. Continuously returning to the community over the period of the negotiations went some way towards proving this commitment. The lengthy process also meant that I had

begun to form relationships with people that would become central to the research being a success.

However, it was easy to see how students could be deterred from pursuing research in remote communities. Although I never met any direct opposition, there were significant negotiations held with many different people and organisations in the community. Success in getting the research going stemmed from three factors: firstly, the relevance of the research to the community, secondly, the ethics of the research approach and lastly, investment of the time and energy into building those initial relationships that in the end allowed the research to go ahead.

Despite going through the process, I still had a long way to go to get the research off the ground. After a few days of moving out to Arnhem Land to begin work, a serious incident occurred in Maningrida that dramatically heightened the sensitivity around the issue of gambling, essentially making gambling a taboo topic. I was advised by the Maningrida Health Board that it was not appropriate at this stage for me to talk to people about gambling, I would have to wait until the issue cooled off. I respected this advice but it presented a significant ethical dilemma. I had an ethical obligation to let people know what I was researching, but at the same time, if I did I ran a high risk of my research being tainted by the incident. After much consideration, I reached a compromise. I decided that I would focus my time on building relationships with all the people who already knew that I was doing research on gambling and discuss gambling as little as possible. It took nearly two months for sensitivity around gambling to decrease enough to begin to openly discuss it again. It definitely was not the ideal situation, but at the same time it demonstrates perfectly the volatile nature of conducting research in remote communities on sensitive issues.

The major focus became not the research, but building trust and relationships with people in the community. As I was living in an outstation called Djinkarr, about 30 minutes from Maningrida, I quite quickly developed a relationship with the Traditional Owners of the outstation country who had no truck to get into town. I became their personal driver. I would pick up a truck full of people, kids and dogs each morning and we would all go into Maningrida. I also spent 6 weeks volunteering for a few hours a day in the school library. This was particularly helpful in getting to know the community and being able to find some initial common ground with people. Not long after the school term had finished, I also started volunteering at the Good Food Kitchen which had a Tucker Run that sold food around card games each afternoon. This was a great boost to the research. Not only had the issue of gambling become less sensitive, but by helping out with the Tucker Run I began to become a known face around the card games. This helped in getting the message out to people about the research and allowed me to introduce myself to most of the gambling community in Maningrida.

In terms of additional methodologies used to collect the research data, I conducted a literature review prior to the fieldwork beginning. In addition to this, accessing and collecting historical sources within the community – such as reports, local historical books, photos, maps, all contributed to developing my knowledge of the area, the people and of gambling.

Data about card games was collected on a daily basis. At 3 pm every day I counted the number of card games in the community, the number of players, the gender of the players, the number of people watching the games, the number of children around the games, the location of the games and the type of game. This information was collected for a dry season period

and a wet season period. Each day I recorded the location of the games on a map to determine any patterns of games and players. Most afternoons were spent watching games that I was invited to attend. Data and information was also collected from some of the local businesses in the community, for example, the sale figures of cards at the Maningrida Progress Association.

Informal and semi-structured interviews were conducted over the period with particular individuals and groups of individuals. Some interviews were recorded. The quotes used throughout the thesis were written up in field notebooks and indexed under relevant themes. There were a few particular people who were central to informing the research, who would clarify observations and answer my questions. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, the informants involved in the research are anonymous. Initially I had planned to set up group interview sessions before I finished the fieldwork. However, this latter part of the fieldwork was severely impacted by the Northern Territory Emergency Intervention into remote communities. People were so busy attending meetings and dealing with the daily stressors that the Intervention brought, that the setting up of focus groups was inappropriate.

#### *Methods used in the gambling venue, Darwin*

Adapting the anthropological approach and methodologies to the gambling venue in Darwin was difficult. The time restraints on the fieldwork period, as well as constraints of conducting research in a commercial venue, meant that less time was able to be dedicated to this part of the research. Many of the relationships were already established as a result of my fieldwork time in Maningrida, it was not essential that such significant time be dedicated to this part of the research process. In terms of the methodology used to generate some of the data, I

replicated Foote's 1996 study of the casino in Darwin. This was the only study based in Darwin that focused on Aboriginal people in an urban gambling environment, so it provided a solid basis through which to develop my own methodology. Foote's study also provides the closest point to which a comparison can be made between research data to determine if there had been changes in Aboriginal peoples attendance and gambling over the period of 12 years.

I attended the venue three times a day, 10.30am, 3.30pm, and 10.30pm for a month.

Unobtrusive observations were made throughout each of these times. I divided the venue into three different sections to ensure more accuracy in the counts of people that I did, as well as to determine if any patterns existed between the different sections. I did not count attendance in these areas; instead I counted attendance at machines. This meant that those people sitting at or watching the poker machines were counted, however, those people sitting at the bar or walking around were not counted. I also held semi-structured ethnographic interviews with particular individuals, and with groups of individuals, in a relaxed manner both inside and outside the venue. Just as in Maningrida, the focus of the research was building strong, respectful relationships with people inside the venue.

At all times I attempted to ensure that the methodological approaches used in the research were respectful to Aboriginal protocols and values. The research was governed by the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines (2003) of reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, spirit and integrity. Indigenous knowledge and knowledge practices were taken into consideration throughout the fieldwork and subsequent analysis of the fieldwork data. As Wilson (2001) suggests, a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices are needed in order to 'decolonize' the research process. As Tuhiwai Smith (2012)

states, research was once a tool of colonization and oppression for Indigenous people.

However, she suggests that this is gradually changing and the potential for research to offer Indigenous people a means to reclaim languages, histories, and knowledge, as well as to give voice to alternative ways of knowing and being is increasingly important (2012, p.91).

Morten-Robinson (2004) describes knowledge and the act of knowing as connected to experience and understood in relation to situated acts of interpretation and representation. It was of the utmost importance that the fieldwork methodology of my research was flexible enough to allow for Indigenous relational ontology. The qualitative, anthropological methods used throughout the research assisted in this. Tuhiwai Smith highlights the importance of qualitative research methodologies and their congruence with Indigenous knowledge systems and practices. She states:

*Qualitative research is an important tool for indigenous communities because it is the tool that seems most able to ... situate, place, and contextualize; ... to create spaces for dialogue across difference; to analyse and make sense of complex and shifting experiences, identities, and realities; and to understand little and big changes that affect our lives. Qualitative research approaches have the potential to respond to epistemic challenges and crises, to unravel and weave, to fold in and unmask the layers of the social life and depth of human experience (2012, p.103).*

Throughout this chapter, I have contextualised both field sites used to conduct the research. Maningrida is a rich and diverse community where card games form a significant part of the social and economic life of the community. The historical sources regarding card games in Maningrida highlight the racial and political tensions within the community. Although it is

difficult to contextualise the gambling venue in Darwin, it too, is a vibrant, exciting environment. This chapter also outlined the limitations of using particular methodologies and research designs in the remote context and highlights the anthropological methodology that was taken to collect the data for this thesis.

The following chapter provides an in-depth ethnographic analysis of gambling in the remote Aboriginal community of Maningrida. Through extensive data collection, the card games can begin to be viewed as playing a central and critical role in community life. The following chapter outlines the social interaction and social importance of card games in the community.

## Chapter 3

### **The social regulation of card games**

The role of card games in the social, economic and political lives of Aboriginal people living in the remote community of Maningrida will be the focus of the coming chapters. This chapter examines the social importance of card games in the community. As outlined in the previous chapter, historically, card games in Maningrida have been a point of contention between many competing interests. However, what was also very clear was that these tensions have not displaced the significant role of card games in the social and economic lives of Aboriginal people in Maningrida. Primarily using informal interviews and participant observation, I worked very closely with numerous families from the Ndjebbana, Burrara, Djinang, Kunwinjku and Gorgoni language groups. I will analyse the interaction between existing social relationships and structures, and how these social processes are engaged through the context of card games.

At first glance, card games in Maningrida were a very obvious, public activity that people participated in. Games were most often played in front of, or between houses, and in bushland or parkland around the community. At night people played under street lights along the roads, or on verandas of houses. The games were played predominantly by women, although the higher stakes games attracted more men. On the surface, in contrast to other aspects of community life, the card games seemed to be a relatively conflict free activity. For the most part, life in and around the card games was cheerful, happy and colourful. However, as a researcher coming into the community, it did not take long for me to realise that there were significant social processes and tensions at work in and around the games. To build on

the context provided in the previous chapter, below is a *vignette* that describes a woman in Maningrida playing cards.

*It was four o'clock on a Thursday afternoon and I was sitting under one of the smallest trees in the community, its shade just touching each of the 5 women I was sitting with. Around us a throng of small kids danced in the dust. The women were playing cards; however, the real interest was in the gossip about a hilarious love affair that had been developing between a daughter of one of the woman and a man from another community. I sat, trying to watch what was happening in the actual game, although the women's harsh dissection of the hapless man's attempts at courtship proved far more interesting. Later that evening, one of the women asked me to join her at another game. The game we arrived at was markedly different to the last. The little tree had disappeared into the darkness of the night and we were now sitting on a well-lit wooden veranda. There was a serious anticipation in the air as the crowd grew to watch the game. There were no babies sleeping on mothers laps, in fact there were no children present at all. The woman I was with had also changed. Gone was the jocularity of the afternoon love story. Her levels of concentration had increased and the now stilted conversation focused only on the hands people had in front of them. Although the woman was playing exactly the same game as before, so much had changed. It was at this point that I started to question what had changed and why.*

To analyse this setting, it is obvious to even the most remote bystander that the games are a highly social activity. They are entertaining; both in terms of social interaction, as well as the anticipation of winning money. Previous research on card games is very explicit in its acceptance of the games as a valued part of everyday life in remote Aboriginal communities. Goodale (1987) describes the card ring as an acceptable form of social interaction and

recreation within most Aboriginal communities. Hunter et al. (1988) reiterates this point, stating that gambling in many Kimberley communities is a major focus of socialisation and discourse. Others such as Holden et al. (1996) and Foote (1996) describe gambling in the form of card games as a culturally acceptable form of social interaction and recreation within Aboriginal society. People in Maningrida regularly described card games as ‘lots of fun’ or ‘exciting’.

One young lady said: *There is nothing for us mob to do except play cards, this community is too boring* (V\_\_\_ 27.10.2006).

Another man described cards games as: *When I finish work, I play cards – just like Balandas [non-Indigenous people] drink beer at that club, I play cards – maybe win some, maybe lose some, don’t worry me* (M\_\_\_ 22.11.2006).

Not only were card games a form of entertainment and social interaction for the players, but also for the many spectators that the games attracted. On any one day there could be up to 100 people round the community watching card games. To get perspective on this, the number of spectators were counted over a three week period. Some of these people would have been waiting to join a game, however, many were just watching, enjoying the ups and downs. On the following page is Table 3.1 that outlines the number of bystanders around the card games over a period of three weeks.

Number of bystanders around card games from 22.2.2007–15.3.2007			
Date	Day	Number of bystanders	Total by week
<b>22-Feb</b>	Thursday	26	
	Friday	60	
	Monday	0	
	Tuesday	25	
	Wednesday	25	136
	Thursday	27	
	Friday	24	
	Monday	0	
	Tuesday	20	
	Wednesday	48	119
	Thursday	49	
	Friday	79	
	Monday	3	
	Tuesday	23	
	Wednesday	41	195
<b>15-Mar</b>	Thursday	96	
Total number of bystanders		546	

**Table 3.1: Number of bystanders around card games over a 3 week period**

What is obvious from Table 3.1 is that card games very successfully drew a crowd. Just as playing cards was popular, so was watching the games. There were often as many spectators of the card games as there were players (see Chapter 4 for numbers of players). People

around the games were constantly engaged in conversation with both the players and each other. The higher the stakes of a game, the more it attracted spectators. This created an air of tension and excitement; however, there was often great hilarity at the ups and downs of the big games. As Povinelli (1991, p. 248) states ‘to miss a card game is to lose an opportunity to increase your weekly pay check as well as to participate in an important portion of the social activity of the community’. Living in such a remote community, diverse forms of entertainment for adults were scarce. The card games filled this gap.

However, when describing something as ‘entertainment’ it has the immediate effect of creating the perception of something insignificant. Korn, Gibbins and Azmier (2003) discuss this further in their paper ‘Framing public health policy towards a Public Health Paradigm for gambling’. They argue that when gambling is viewed with the ‘traditional’ gambling frame of ‘entertainment’ or ‘recreation’ it neglects to encompass the social and economic impacts. In addition to this, using this terminology implies aspects of escapism. To define card games as escapism in this context implies that people can engage or disengage at their own choice. However, this remote community gambling context was much more intricate than that, card games are embedded within the community. The card games exist in a distinctly Aboriginal space, providing a significant point of social interaction that has broad social and economic implications. It is for this reason that it is important to frame the context of card games as distinct from just an entertaining pastime.

#### *Card games in Maningrida*

There are approximately four different games that are played in Maningrida; however, the two most popular games formed the basis of the research: Kunt and Buta. The rules of these

games are often adapted to different situations and numbers of players. However, I will outline the basic workings.

### *Kunt*

The aim of the game is to discard all cards, or be left holding cards of the least value.

Normally games have approximately 5–8 players. The game allows for variation in numbers of players, and this impacts on how many cards you are dealt initially. For example, in a four player game each person is dealt 9 cards, if you have five players, then you get 8 cards, six players 7 cards and so it continues. This game was particularly hard to learn because people had their cards so well hidden that it was very difficult to follow what was happening. It was simply not possible to learn by watching over people's shoulders! People appeared to almost photographically remember the cards in their hand by looking at them only for a split second. The cards would then be covered for the rest of the game.

The cards that are left in the pack are placed in a central pile and people take turns in picking up a card from this pile. After they have picked up a card, they may discard a card, or they may discard numerous cards if they either get a run of a particular suit or a minimum of three cards or get a minimum of three of a kind. The game ends either when a person has discarded all their cards, or when all the cards in the central pile are gone. This game requires skill, as players can influence the outcome through their decision to discard particular cards.

*Buta*

Buta is the other most commonly played game in Maningrida. Buta is also referred to as ‘2 and 3’, or the English name for the game is 'Instant'. Normally games have 12 players. There are two main variations of this game, depending on how many people are playing. One variation is played with five cards and the other is with three cards. The five card game has a maximum of eight players where each player is dealt five cards. The three card game is played with a maximum of 12 players, where everyone is dealt three cards. Two cards are placed facing up on the ground and are used by everyone. The face cards are discarded (Aces are kept in), so the game is played with 40 cards. The initial aim of the game is to ‘make’, which means to make 10, 20 or 30 out of three of the five cards. For example, 6, 2, 2 – you ‘make’, 7, 2, 1, – you ‘make’, 4, 5, Ace – you ‘make’. Those who cannot ‘make’ drop out of the game. Those that can are left to add up their two remaining cards and whoever is the closest to 10 wins. For example, if you have 6, 6, which add up to 12. This is then called ‘2i’. This hand would be beaten by someone with 9, 8, that would equal 17, which is called 7i. It is still a bit unclear as to exactly why it is referred to as ‘i’, though it appears it is people calling the one in 10 as an ‘i’. If two people for example get 7i, then those two people have a play off for the money in the next round. That is where they play for both the current pool of money and between each other for the pool of money from the previous round. This game is very quick and like Kunt, people are very secretive about their cards. Unlike Kunt, Buta is a game that is based entirely on chance.

Both Buta and Kunt games are played in Darwin, elsewhere across the Northern Territory, and in northern Australia more broadly. However, games that were played in Darwin often involved many people from different communities and had slightly different rules. For

example, sometimes games have ‘jackpots’ if certain card combinations were made and these games often presented more opportunities for side bets and side games, particularly in the Buta games because there were so many people playing.

Presenting the rules of these games simply has been a challenge, as the games were actually very complex. The play was incredibly fast and the cards were kept very secretive. Often by the time I had caught on to what had happened, the game had moved on. Attempting to determine the exact rules of card games proved to be a very challenging aspect of the research. If I played with one particular language group and thought I had grasped the rules, I would invariably end up talking to a different language group and often some of the rules I had learnt would be shunned as ‘inferior’ rules, and I would be adequately informed of the ‘correct’ rules. Despite the occasional variations, there was generally broad acceptance of the rules.

### *Patterns of card games*

When beginning to look at patterns of card games and how people play, preliminary research found that the number of games played on weekends was insufficient to warrant the long drive each day from the outstation where I lived to the township of Maningrida, particularly in the wet season when extreme weather conditions made the drive very difficult.

Maningrida was no different to most parts of Australia, in that, weekends were a time when people relaxed and spent time with their families. Particularly in the dry season many people would spend the weekends hunting and gathering food in the surrounding bush and outstations. Although people did play cards in the outstations on weekends, these were

mainly small family games. Similarly, in Maningrida over the weekends, the games were small, family games. Occasionally, the bigger, higher stakes games would continue on the Saturday night, but on Sunday nights it was very rare to see a card game at all<sup>14</sup>. There was a distinct sense that the weekend broke the intensity of the week, and part of that intensity during the week involved social interaction around card games.

Every fortnight, one regular feature of the weekends that had a direct impact on the number of people playing cards was ‘grog’ handouts. On Saturday mornings, every fortnight, alcohol would come in on the barge and be handed out by police to those people who had an alcohol permit<sup>15</sup>. The Maningrida council administered the orders for those people who had a permit. The amount of alcohol a permit holder could buy was capped at two cases of beer or 6 bottles of wine as a substitute for each case of beer (although, Indigenous people were not able to order wine). The actual number of orders by Aboriginal people at any one time was approximately 67 orders – a relatively small proportion of the Aboriginal community (Fogarty & Paterson 2007).

Even though a vast proportion of the Aboriginal population did not legally have access to alcohol, these weekends directly impacted on the number of games played, particularly at night. There was a distinct understanding in the community that mixing card games and alcohol was highly problematic. This is not to say it didn’t happen, although it was a rare occurrence. On one occasion, people I was working with had been drinking while playing cards. It did not take long before the game eventually erupted in an argument when one man declared that others in the game were cheating. Avoiding potential conflicts like this around the card games was important to people. It was important that the games were not

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<sup>14</sup> Goodale (1987, p.10) had similar findings, that ‘there was rarely any play on Sundays, when nearly the entire community “went bush” to gather local delicacies from shore, reef, river, or forest’.

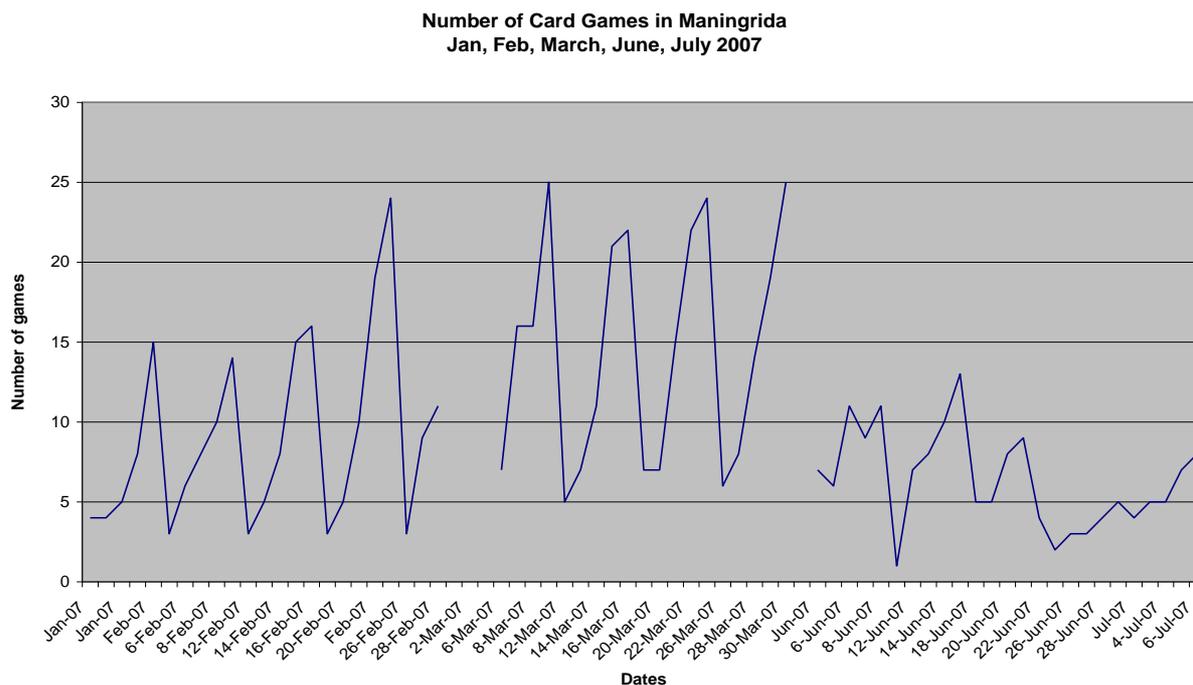
<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 2 for detail on Maningrida’s Alcohol Management Plan (Appendix 2)

compromised by people affected by alcohol. Many times people effectively shooed others away from card games if they approached affected by alcohol or drugs. It was very clear that they were not welcome. Hunter et al. (1988, p. 669) also had similar findings in the Kimberley communities were 'serious gamblers tend not to drink while gambling, and frown on drinkers who are disruptive of a game'.

In contrast to what was occurring in the Aboriginal population, Texas Holdem poker nights were very popular amongst particular groups of non-Indigenous people in Maningrida on 'grog' weekends. Players had the potential to win a few hundred dollars. The games were highly competitive, and people were for the most part, heavily intoxicated.

However, for Aboriginal card players, the disassociation between alcohol and card games was significant. It demonstrates that the games provide a somewhat separate function to that of entertainment and/or escapism. The deliberate separation between drinking and card games also highlighted that the functionality of the card games was important to people, as disruptions caused by people who had been drinking were unwelcome.

Although data on the patterns of card games over the weekends was not collected, the numbers of games in the community were counted each week day over a period of five months (15 weeks in total). Observations were made at approximately 3 pm each day. Figure 3.1 below demonstrates the patterns of the card games in Maningrida over the months of January, February, March, June and July, 2007.



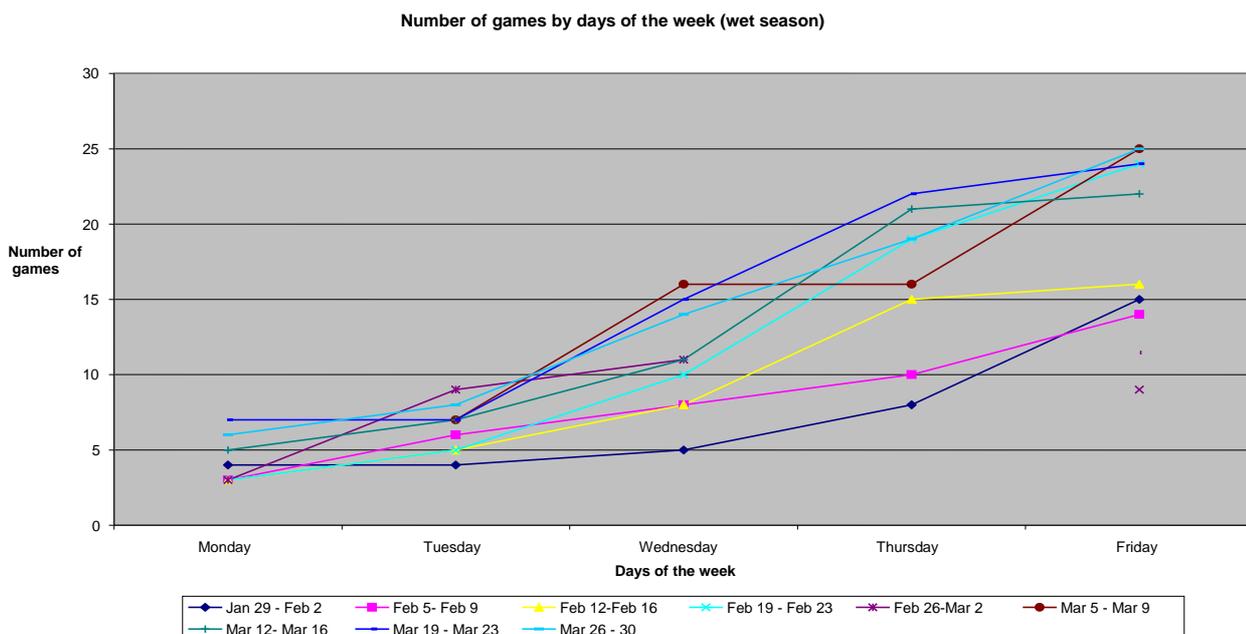
**Figure 3.1: Number of card games in Maningrida (Jan, Feb, March, June, and July 2007)**

The number of card games escalates from January (up to 15 games a day), through February and March (up to 25 games in the community). Then looking at the months of June and July, the number of card games is significantly less and much more erratic. This data suggests that there were significant seasonal fluctuations in card games. The months of January, February and March were wet season months when many people from the surrounding outstations come into the community to live temporarily. June and July are dry season months, when the population of the community is dramatically reduced because of increased mobility. The seasonal fluctuation in the gambling is also acknowledged by people in the community.

*Dry season everybody's too busy to play cards. People are out bush, fishing, hunting..., ceremony..., shopping. People doing too many things (S\_\_\_ 21.2.2007).*

*Wet season people just sit down, play card. Nothing else. Dry season too much dust and kids have holidays so people visit family (T\_\_\_21.10.2006).*

As well as highlighting the seasonal fluctuations in the number of games throughout different months of the year, Figure 3.1 also demonstrates that the gambling peaks at the end of each week in the number of games. Almost every week, particularly during the wetter months, the end of the week is represented by a peak in the number of games. To analyse this further, the data was divided up into days of the week for both the wet season and the dry season. This is demonstrated below in Figures 3.2 and 3.3.

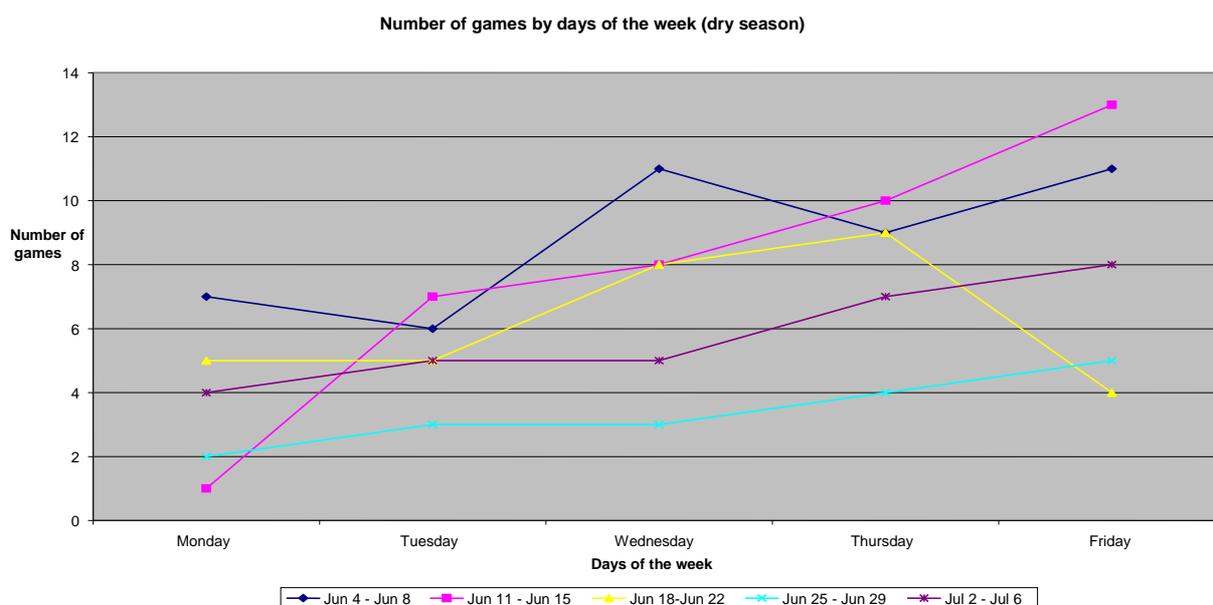


**Figure 3.2: Number of games by days of the week (wet season)**<sup>16</sup>

Figure 3.2 demonstrates that each week the number of games would crescendo, with Thursdays and Fridays having the largest number of games. Monday would see a small

<sup>16</sup> Data is missing for 1st and 5th March due to flooded roads not allowing travel into Maningrida.

number of games, anywhere from 3–7 games during the wet season. This would increase to anywhere from 9–25 games on a Friday during the wet season. The largest number of games was on 25 March 2007 with 25 games. A similar increase can also be seen throughout the week during the dry season (see Figure 3.3 below).



**Figure 3.3: Number of games by days of the week (dry season)**

Figure 3.3 above shows the number of games each day during the dry season. Although there is a dramatic reduction in the number of card games, the weekly pattern is the same as the wet season. During the dry season, the largest number of games recorded was on 15 June 2007, with 13 games and the smallest number of games was recorded on 11 June 2007, when only one game was recorded. It is important to note that the only inconsistency in the data was on the week ending 22 June 2007, that saw a dramatic decrease in card games on the Friday. This was the day the ‘Intervention’ was introduced which clearly impacted on the number of card games on that particular day. The other week that was erratic was that of 4 –

8 June, 2007. There were funerals and ceremonies going on in different parts of the community, as well as a long standing feud that resulted in shop closures, so the results from this week should be considered as outliers.

The consistent weekly pattern in the numbers of card games also challenges the hypothesis that the number of games is directly linked to when people are paid<sup>17</sup>. If there were a direct correlation between people being paid and the number of card games, a pattern of high numbers of card games when people were paid would be expected. Centrelink<sup>18</sup> stagger payments in the community, some people being paid on a Monday and others on a Thursday for example (Interview with Centrelink Maningrida 8.11.2007). Some payments were made fortnightly, and others are staggered on a weekly basis. The royalty payments<sup>19</sup> that particular groups in the community receive were also staggered. Different clan groups received payments at different times of the year. If the frequency of games was directly correlated with cash in the community, royalty payments, for example, would be expected to have an impact on the frequency of games. It should be noted that what this data does not show is the amount of cash that is going through these games. The amount of cash within the games could be significantly increased when people were paid. However, this research found no direct link between payments made to members of the community and the number of card games. The evidence shows that there was a steady, consistent pattern in the frequency of the games in the community.

What was clear was the seasonal variation in the number of games. There were significantly more card games during the wet season months. This is not surprising as the population of the

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<sup>17</sup> Goodale (1987, p.10) found 'cardless days are directly correlated with a general lack of available cash just before payday'.

<sup>18</sup> Centrelink is the Australian Government agency that pays the welfare money, the pensions, family allowance and family benefit payments.

<sup>19</sup> Royalty payments come from mining in the area, as well as land use agreements etc.

community increases over these months. However, regardless of season, there was an increase in the number of games from Monday to Friday each week. This finding corresponds with data collected on the sale of packs of cards in the community.

### *Cards*

There would be no card games without packs of cards. The cards that are sold in all the shops in Maningrida are the 'Queens Slipper' cards. They come in red and blue packs of 52 cards. The cards were always given premium positioning at the checkout at the Tucker Run, and were placed in full view at the little hole-in-the-wall shops, very similar to how lollies are placed at supermarket checkouts. They were very easily accessible. Maningrida Progress Association (MPA) had the cards in a glass cabinet at the cigarette counter – much less accessible, as you had to ask staff if you wanted a pack. This was done on purpose as the head of MPA was against card games as he believed it was one of the main reasons why his employees failed to turn up to work (BY\_\_\_ 28.5.2007).

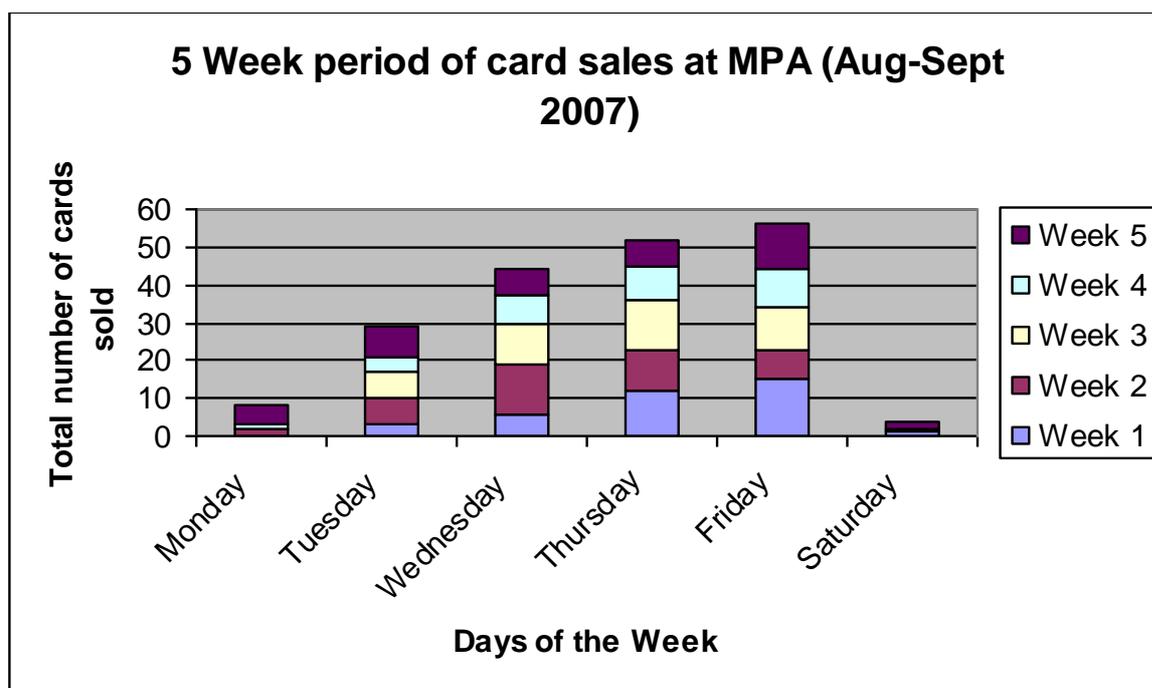
People preferred to play with blue packs of cards, despite there being no apparent reason. It was common to see the little cardboard stand in the shops full of packs of red cards and all the blue ones had sold out. Red cards were always the last resort. There appeared to be no gender bias in choices of colour – everyone, male and female, preferred blue cards. Despite repeated questioning, I never received an explanation.

Although there was slight variation between the shops, the cards cost about \$5.80. After hours, when the shops were shut, the price of cards increased exponentially. Numerous people stated that a pack of cards could go for \$20 or \$50 after shop hours, and there was one

suggestion that a pack was sold for \$100 (C\_\_\_ 2.4.2007). Cards were a high use item that quickly got wrecked, lost or dirty. Almost every new game started with a new pack of cards. This also helped minimise cheating if, for example, certain cards were missing or had been bent in certain identifiable ways or marked. People also felt more comfortable with a new pack because the bad luck of yesterday's cards was gone! One lady stated: *That pack is rubbish pack now, no luck left in that one* (D\_\_\_ 14.12.2006)!

During the fieldwork, data was collected on the sale of packs of cards at the MPA shop.

Figure 3.4 below, outlines the sales on a daily basis over a period of five weeks, for six days of the week (excluding Sundays when the shop was shut).



**Figure 3.4: Five week period of card sales at MPA (Aug – Sept 2007)**

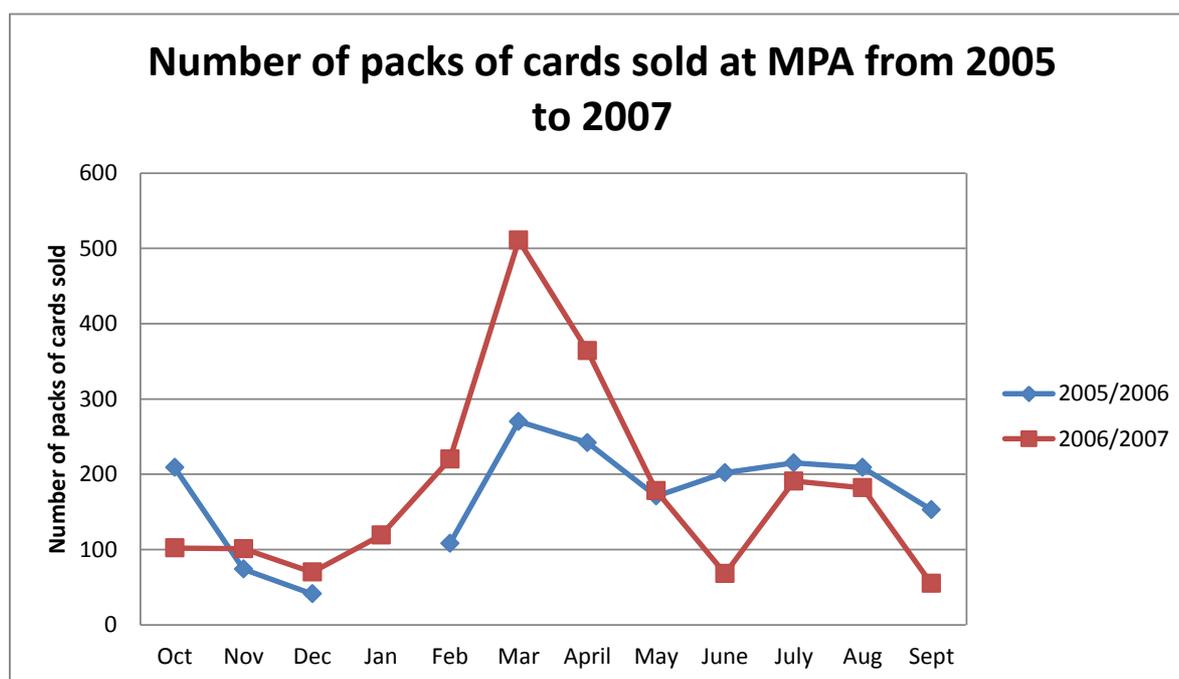
Throughout the week the number of packs of cards sold clearly increases. From Saturday to Monday there are considerably fewer cards purchased. This data is consistent with the

information presented in Figure 3.2 and 3.3 that demonstrated that the number of card games in the community escalated throughout the week, and dropped off on the weekends.

The other indicator of the importance of this data is that it again shows steady weekly patterns in the sale of cards. If the days that people were paid in the community made a significant difference in the amount of card games in the community, then the data would be expected to be much more erratic, as payments are staggered and made on different days for different people.

Obviously, pay days were a factor in people's purchasing of cards, because quite simply, if people do not have money they cannot make the purchase: however, the data shows that there were other factors at play. This weekly trend of an increase in both the number of games and the number of packs of cards sold occurs through both the wet season and the dry season. This highlights that although monetary and logistical factors influence the sale of cards, there appear to be other significant factors dictating gambling patterns in the community. The card games were not simply *ad hoc*. The games did not just spontaneously begin.

An analysis of card sales data over the period of two years reveals that these patterns were consistent. Figure 3.5 below shows the number of packs of cards sold at MPA from September 2005 – to October 2007.



**Figure 3.5: Number of packs of cards sold (MPA) 2005-2007<sup>20</sup>**

Figure 3.5 demonstrates that the sale of cards in Maningrida is seasonal. The trends over the two year period are similar. Significantly, more packs of cards were sold from February until May, particularly over the year 2006–07. This is the wet season.

The major outlier in the above chart is the months of March and April 2007. The research suggests that this dramatic spike in the number of packs of cards sold is due to the community experiencing a significant period of stress. Martin (1993) found increases in gambling when there was increased social stress in the community. In Maningrida, during this period there was no significant increase in population, outside the normal wet season influx. However, the community was thrown into the national spotlight as the court proceedings began for a child sexual abuse case that occurred in the community (Wilson

<sup>20</sup> The data for the month of January 2006 was missing.

2007<sup>21</sup>). The shame felt by the community and the complexity of issues that the community was forced to address over these months was significant. The significant increase in number of cards sold and the significant increase in the number of card games in the community (see Figure 3.1) during this time suggests that card games were used as a means of processing extreme stress. To explore this further, the next part of the chapter analyses how people process information through card games in Maningrida and the importance of this interaction.

### *Social interaction*

During card games, lengthy conversations about day-to-day activities, gossip and discussions regarding politics and community issues are carried out. The games create a space where people can express their views in a safe environment. Not only are people predominantly talking to close family, but also there are often few children around listening to the conversation, providing an adult space that is most often not afforded in the over-crowded housing in the community.

The interviews conducted throughout the research brought to light countless examples of the importance of the social interaction through card games to Aboriginal people in the community. Two examples that stand out were from a young girl and an older lady. The young girl stated that:

*Because I had that little baby last year, little balang, I had to finish going to school. I couldn't go any more. So now, for me, I play cards some afternoons because it means*

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<sup>21</sup> Wilson, A 2007 'Claims of child rape shames Territory', *The Australian*, 9 February, 2007.

*that I have company. The old ladies help me. They give me advice on the baby*  
(C\_\_\_10.3.2007).

The older lady's story was somewhat similar in that it described the need for the social interaction around card games. The lady's husband had been taken to Adelaide for major surgery. I met her at a card game one afternoon. She said:

*I am so sad for my husband. I have been missing him so so much. I cry for him. Now I play card because I get lonely without him. When he comes back I won't play any more* (M\_\_\_12.4.2007).

I suggested that it was a good distraction for her and she said: *Yes, good distraction, those ladies they just talk and talk and more talking. It makes me happy.*

The social interaction around card games was also used as a way to get community messages out to people. A worker at the Health Board in Maningrida stated that:

*The card games are a good medium for getting information out to the community. Often we will recruit a few people in the community to go and talk to people at card games and let them know about programs or services that we offer'* (J\_\_\_15.10.2007).

Similarly, other organisations in the community have used card games in the same way. The *Birthing Business in the Bush* program is a good example. Older women would go round the card games and talk to younger women about birthing business and issues that they may have

with their babies after they are born (Liquid Rain Design & Bawinanga Women's Centre 2004).

The exchange and interpretation of information through the social interaction of card games was also apparent in the way people progress through different games. People would often start at a smaller card game and as the evening progressed, they would walk to other, larger games in the community. This resulted in direct flows of information from one group to another. Information, messages, discussions and events were adapted and interpreted by Aboriginal people and passed on to others through this constant, daily social interaction. These flows of information were not interrupted by non-Indigenous people, which meant this social engagement had the direct result of creating an autonomous Aboriginal space and flow of information. This is examined further in the following section when the flow of card games and players in the community was mapped. This map highlights the connection of inter-group relationships and card games.

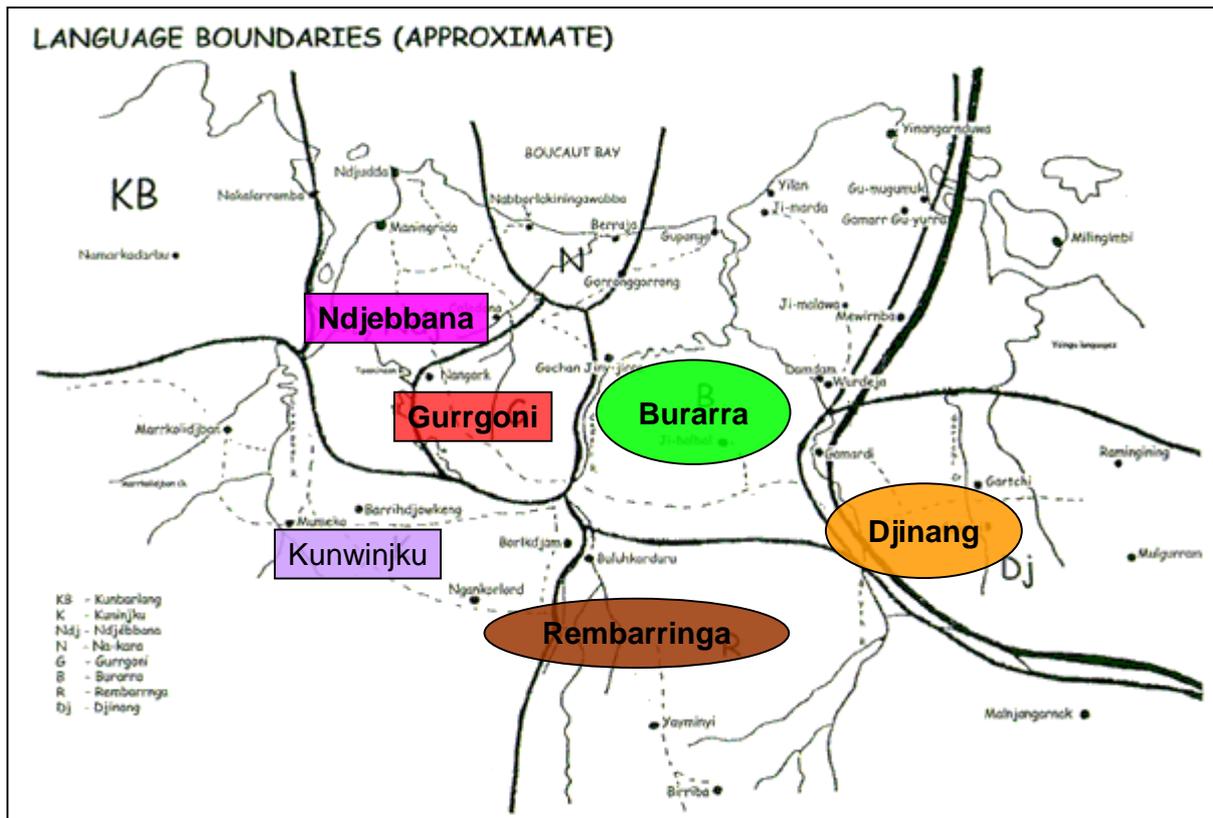
#### *Social regulation of card games*

Maningrida began as a trading post. Over the 50 year history of the township, the population grew as people from the surrounding outstations in the region gradually moved into the township to access services. This was an unnatural social setting for the people of such a vast region (10,000 square km) to begin to live in such close proximity to other clan groups, particularly those groups that had fraught relationships.

Card games in Maningrida provided a situation that fostered alliances between groups, sometimes against other groups. These socio-political alliances were heavily relied upon in

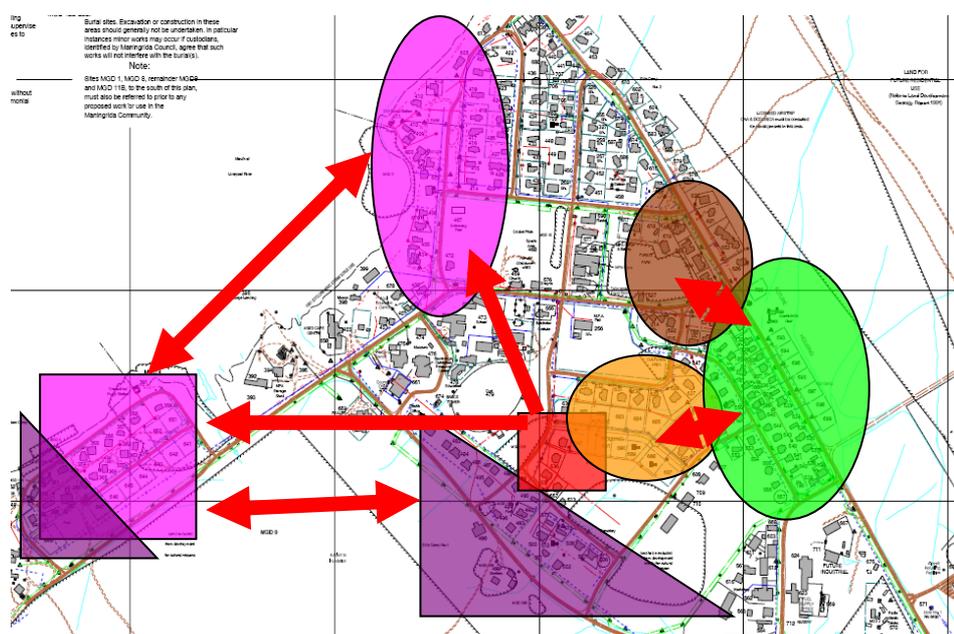
everyday life. They often dictated the particular shops that specific groups frequented, and in many cases the type of employment that a person from a particular language group may engage in, and the services that they would or would not access. The card games were a forum for the strengthening of ties between particular groups, as well as perpetuating tensions towards others.

Mapping the card players and the card games in the community was important, firstly, to try to determine the extent that card games were influenced by the social organisation of the community, and secondly, to see the interactions that occurred between different groups or families. The actual physical layout of the community is directly influenced by the group relationships. People in the community live in close proximity to their family, which results in parts of the community being dominated by a single language group. To begin to demonstrate this, Figure 3.6 represents the breakdown of language groups in the Maningrida region.



**Figure 3.6: Break down of selected language groups in the Maningrida region**

The map shows the boundaries of some of the main language groups in the 10,000 square kilometre region. Figure 3.6 represents groupings of related clans under common languages. In terms of housing in Maningrida, Kunwinjku people, for example, live in one part of the community, whereas the other side of the community was dominated by Burarra families. To demonstrate this, Figure 3.7 is a map of six different language groups in the region and the patterns associated with where people play cards.



**Figure 3.7: Social layout of the community and the direction of card players**

Figure 3.7 shows that people's patterns of gambling were based on family ties and ties to country. The shapes represent where particular language groups in general reside in the community. The arrows represent which groups play together and where. What we see is that Ndjebbana people (pink shapes) play together in two locations. Gurrgoni people (red square) play with Ndjebbana people, in both Ndjebbana clusters of houses; however, they do not hold games where their houses are based. Kuninjku people (the purple triangles) play predominantly with Ndjebbana people, at two locations. Djinang people (orange circle) play predominantly with Burrara people (green circle), in both locations. Rembarranga people (brown circle) also play predominantly with Burrara people (green circle), at their houses and at Burrara houses. Card games were also quite decisively divided between east Maningrida region people and west Maningrida region people

Figure 3.7 highlights that the layout of the clan estates in Maningrida region is reflected in the layout of houses in the community. The relationship that different clan groups share with some neighbours of their clan estates, and not others, directly corresponds in the patterns of card games and players. By mapping who plays where and with whom, it becomes apparent that card games are socially regulated. Card games provided a way for people to build and maintain social relationships.

Within card games, the social structure was hierarchical too. The smaller the card game, the closer the relationships between people. The smaller games were normally only within family groups, or between family groups within the same language group. However, the larger games were played between family groups and between language groups.

Particularly in the larger games, the strict social regulation worked effectively to minimise conflict between particular social groups and/or individuals. The games acted as a means of controlling social interactions and provided a structured, rule bound, regulated space for interactions between groups that would not necessarily, normally, interact. The major examples of this happening was when there was a significant influx of people from the outstations into the community, or when a large ceremony was occurring in the community that involved people from many different communities. The card games flourished in this context because they provided people with a structure through which to communicate and develop political alliances. Similarly, Martin (1993, p.139) also found in the Aurukun township of north Queensland, gambling ‘allowed the complexities and ambiguities in relationships between people –taboos, resentments, hostilities, obligations and so forth – to be temporarily avoided and submerged in an almost ritualised context of enjoyment and even euphoria’ (1993, p.139).

However, just as Figure 3.7 demonstrates people's patterns of play and how card games are regulated by these relationships, what it does not demonstrate is the tensions between groups that do not play together. When discussing the inter-group tensions with members of the community, explanations such as: *'we don't play with that mob, they use magic cheating'* (E\_\_\_\_22.4.2007) or *'it's bad luck to play on that country, we must stop here'* (Vi\_\_\_\_19.2.2007) or *'that mob, they run away with all that rupiah [money], we don't play with them'* (J\_\_\_\_8.2.2007) were often given as the reasons why certain groups did not play together.

There were some 'communal' areas in the community where games were played at times, for example, open grass or bush land around the community. The location of the games did not change regularly; however, when it did, particularly in shared, public spaces, the inter-group politics were apparent. Just as much as card games provided ways for different groups in the community to build and maintain relationships, the games could also be used by particular groups as a symbolic appropriation of particular shared, public spaces. Different groups could incite tensions by positioning the games in certain public spaces in the community. This type of provocation was evident between the two largest groups in the community, the Ndjebbana and Burrara language groups. The Ndjebbana people, whose country the township was located on, were less than impressed when Burrara families would play cards in particular public areas. One man stated when pointing to a Burrara family card game that had been set up in an open central area of the community:

*That mob, they shouldn't be playing card there. They make too much mess. They should go back to their houses and play* (T\_\_\_\_6.6.2007).

Another Ndjebbana woman talked about some Burrara families that were playing at this same contested spot in the community:

*Those women are all addicted gamblers. They are neglecting their children. They should be at home with their families, not playing cards. It's terrible to see (D\_\_\_\_ 18.5.2007).*

It should be noted that this woman was a regular card player too. However, when other groups played in this particular position, these tensions were not evident; in fact, Ndjebbana people would often join in the game. And those Burrara groups would often play games in these particular spaces at times when they were trying to assert their position in the community. Both these groups were large in numbers, and often competing for resources and positions of influence within local organisations.

There was also significant inter-group politics in the positioning of card games at or between particular houses. This would normally occur in larger games, between clan groups that played together (see Figure 3.7). The larger games would continue at a certain location for at least a couple of weeks, but were more prone to change as there were potential financial incentives for hosting a game that made them more competitive. There was also significant social standing to be gained from hosting the larger games in the community. The smaller games were less likely to change location because they were held between houses, with one or two families from those houses playing together. These smaller games did not provide people with any particular social standing other than within the immediate family.

The people who hosted the games were seen to be in a socially powerful position. One woman informed me when we attended a game:

*That lady over there, she is the boss. It is her house, she is important and will have good luck for sharing her house. This game will stay here, maybe one week, two week, three week. When her family had enough of all the late nights, they might finish that game. My aunty is still mad at my uncle for growling at everyone to go home, finish up! All that luck is gone since, she blames him, she is still cranky at him*  
(T\_\_\_5.4.2007).

Just as significant as the games were when positioned at a particular house, was when games moved away. The reason the games moved was normally because they had finished and it was someone else's turn to host them, however, as the above example demonstrates, if the game had to be moved earlier, it may take the individual or family a significant period of time to recoup the social standing to host a card game again.

As suggested before, the social regulation of card games was also important during times of high stress in the community, most often relating to a death. When there was a funeral, card games would stop for the particular groups involved, sometimes for weeks at a time. When someone died, serious conflict could arise during the grieving period where a certain individual may be held responsible for the death, through sorcery or other means. The consequences, or 'payback', if a person were blamed for the death of another individual could be severe and violent. When card games stopped as a result of a death, it minimised the potential interaction and potential conflict that could arise between people in a highly emotional state.

Ceremonies also had a significant impact on card games in the community. In Maningrida, the groups involved would cease playing over the course of the ceremony. Sometimes, particularly in the outstations, small Kunt games would be played in between ceremonial obligations; however, these were small, social games that often continued for only a few hours at a time. As a result of the social regulation of the games in Maningrida (see Figure 3.7) most of the groups involved in the ceremonies would be those that normally play together. So, the relational nature of card games meant that games for those groups that were not involved could continue without interruption.

The final section of this chapter analyses one of the most important aspects to consider in the social regulation of card games, gender.

### *Gender*

When analysing the social regulation of card games, it is important to consider that gender plays a significant role. Earlier research suggests that women, whether they be Wik people (Martin 1993), Tiwi (Goodale 1987), Gunwinggu (Altman 1987), or Kimberly (Hunter & Spargo 1988) were the main participants in card games. By counting attendance at card games each day for the period of five months, this research found that in Maningrida, 87% of the card players were female. In most card games around the community, there would usually be one or two male players. The men would most often play sitting on a milk create or flour tin, overseeing the group of women. Despite the overwhelming gender bias in the card games, physically, the male players have a superior position in the game. Men tended to participate in the bigger card games and they would gamble higher amounts of money (this is

consistent with the findings of Goodale (1987) and Martin (1993)). For many middle-aged men, playing cards was often seen as an inferior activity. During interviews, men would say that they only played at the casino or at the poker machines, as opposed to playing card games. One man expressed his views that: *'woman play too much, they lose everything. And then they don't like the cards because they feel sad for ripping off their families'* (PD\_\_\_28.5.2007). Women often expressed similar sentiment when referring to young women, particularly young mothers, who played cards. One lady said: *'Young mothers, they neglect children. They don't buy food, and then their husbands growl them'* (D\_\_\_17.11.2006).

Sometimes children were allowed to play the games, or sit on their mothers lap while playing. I only ever observed female children who were invited to play or watch, or who wanted to participate. In many ways, it could be argued that this was important social learning. To teach your daughter to be good at card games, or at least to have an intricate understanding of how games are regulated by social relationships, could be seen as investment in that child's ability to negotiate the world as an adult. These findings are similar to von Bamberger (1980, p. 238) who found:

*...by the age of eight or nine, most children had an accurate working knowledge of a complex variety of roles and situations relevant to gambling, as well as an appreciation of some of the relationships between individual players, particular games, and other aspects of community life* (von Bamberger 1980, p.238).

This chapter provided an intricate insight into the social workings of card games in Maningrida. Card games were a focal point of social interaction in the community. The

pattern in the numbers of card games suggests that the games were highly seasonal and that weekly patterns existed in the play that were not necessarily the result of pay days. This chapter also examined the social regulation of card games. The games facilitated inter-group relations in the community, as people's engagement in card games demonstrated clear patterns of social interaction. The card games were also points of conflict at other times between groups. The research also found that participation in the smaller games was predominantly immediate family playing with each other; however, the bigger card games were most often a mix of different languages participating. The next chapter analyses the financial and economic aspects of card games, as well as identifying other levels of informal regulation that exist in card games in Maningrida.



## Chapter 4

### **The gaming regulation of the card games**

To demonstrate the extent that card games in Maningrida were socially regulated, the previous chapter described complex social interactions and social tensions within card games in the community. This chapter will analyse the economic functions of card games in the community. In addition to this, I will explore the relationship between the social regulation and the economic function of card games. The way that money was used and distributed between kin was central to understanding the connections and complexities between the social and economic lives of people in Maningrida. The chapter also analyses what is regularly described throughout the literature as ‘business’ type card games. The previous literature presents a picture of games that are ‘fun’ and ‘entertainment’ and other games that have ‘business’ or ‘work’ –like qualities. This chapter will review these understandings and then discuss ‘business’ type card games in Maningrida.

The following section will examine understandings of Aboriginal kinship and reciprocity, as a mechanism for understanding the way that money is used and distributed by Aboriginal people in Maningrida.

#### *Kinship and reciprocity*

Kinship is central to Aboriginal social organisation, setting up complex systems of rights, obligations and behavioural expectations (Peterson & Taylor 2003). Peterson and Taylor (2003) discuss this social organisation as resulting in a domestic moral economy, where

sharing with kin lies at the heart. They describe the first feature of the Aboriginal domestic moral economy as an ethic of generosity. However, acting generously takes place in response to demands, often passive rather than active (Peterson & Taylor 2003). This notion of responding to demands has been coined by Peterson as 'demand sharing' (Peterson 1993). He described demand sharing, with its shedding of the altruistic overtones of unsolicited giving and its individual actor orientation, as highly compatible with most of the cost-benefit theories used by biologists to explain sharing, such as benefits to kin, cooperative acquisition, conservation and tit-for-tat reciprocity (Peterson 1993). Schwab (1995) also discusses this in his paper titled 'The calculus of reciprocity: Principles and Implications of Aboriginal sharing'. He describes the act of sharing as 'part of a complex cultural system in which individuals and groups provide economic assistance to one another but also variously display, shape or deny social alliances' (1995, p.2).

Transcending this anthropological notion of demand sharing, or domestic moral economy, is the sociological construct of social capital. The first major analysis of social capital stems from Bourdieu's (1985) work, *The forms of capital*, where he defined social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (Bourdieu 1985). He distinguished three forms of capital; economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. He argues that the acquisition of social capital must originate from investment of both economic and cultural resources. This paved the way for Coleman's functionalist approach to social capital where he described the mechanisms that generated social capital as the expectation of reciprocity, group enforcement of norms, the consequences of its possessions and the 'appropriable' social organisation that provided the context for both sources and effects to materialise (Portes 1998, p.5). Similar to Peterson's

concept of demand sharing, Portes (1998, p.8) interprets Coleman's work as suggesting that resources obtained through social capital have, from the point of view of the recipient, the character of a gift. However, central to giving or receiving capital, is security of membership in social networks. Portes (1998) demonstrated through Durkheim's social theory, what he defines as the final source of social capital, that is, 'in the case of reciprocity exchanges, the motivation of donors of socially mediated gifts is instrumental, but in this case, the expectation of repayment is not based on knowledge of the recipient, but on the insertion of both actors in a common social structure' (Portes 1998, p.8). This theoretical explanation is critical to understanding card games. Central to the redistributive mechanism of card games, is the construct of reciprocal exchange. What allows these exchanges to occur and what allows the acquisition of actual or potential resources is the network of 'institutionalised' relationships – the social regulation of the games outlined in the previous chapter.

#### *Social capital and card games*

Bourdieu's (1985) construct of social capital is relevant to card games in Maningrida. The following section will analyse the ways that card games are a forum through which Aboriginal people accrue social capital. The games act as a process of exchange of resources through membership of social, kin based networks. These networks are clearly recognisable through the social regulation of the games (Figure 3.7). The smaller games that were played predominantly by close family, within a single language group, build on familial social capital, through reciprocity and distribution of resources. However, the larger games that are played between language groups build on an extra-familial, communal form of social capital.

This section of the chapter will explore the ‘investment of economic capital’ that Bourdieu (1985) suggests is essential for the acquisition of social capital. When referring to the term ‘economic’ or ‘economic processes’, I am not suggesting that there is state based, formal economic regulation of card games. However, what I am suggesting is that there are informal processes and organizing principles of the card games that determine much of the distribution of cash in the community.

In order to gain a better understanding of how money is distributed and accumulated in the community, the following section will discuss people’s understandings and attitudes to money.

### *Money*

Earlier research describes the role of card games in the community as a process of recontextualising cash within an Aboriginal framework and distributing a newly introduced, foreign commodity (see Pyper 1978). However, when my research was conducted, cash was not a ‘foreign’ commodity to Aboriginal people. This then leads to the hypothesis that Aboriginal people’s understandings of money and ability to accumulate cash has developed or changed since the previous research was conducted.

Throughout the literature, there is a commonly held view that Aboriginal people have different understandings to non-Indigenous people when it comes to the value of money. In 1984, Kesteven interviewed 32 Aboriginal people (both male and female) who indicated that they had limited practical understanding of money, but no general understanding. In her study

of uranium mining royalties in Oenpelli, Northern Territory, she found that Aboriginal people:

*..have no idea where money comes from, no involvement in budgeting, no knowledge of investment, interest rates, inflation nor a concept of affording, the closest people came to this concept being that they were not “ready to buy something, but wanted to buy it” (Kesteven 1984, p.108).*

In 2000, Cane wrote about the Spinifex people, describing their understandings of money as limited. He suggests that Spinifex people use money in a distinctly Aboriginal way, where the value of money is symbolic rather than commercial and distributed rather than accumulated (Cane 2000, p.96). Martin (1993) also describes the ‘Aboriginalising’ of money and how it was contingent on personal relationships.

In Maningrida, understandings of money were still different to non-Indigenous understandings, despite a 50 year contact history. People would often view a \$100 note as more valuable than two \$50 notes; similarly, a \$20 note would be more valuable than two \$10 notes. Money was really only discussed in ‘whole’ number figures; for example, people would not talk about cash in terms of \$2.50, rather \$3 or most likely, rounding to \$5 or \$10. Amounts in tens (10, 20, 30 etc.) were most commonly discussed, particularly in relation to the card games. Notes were viewed as more valuable than coins. To give someone coins, even of the same value as notes (say \$10) was often viewed as slightly insulting. From this perspective, the physical nature of money was viewed in a slightly different way. People did understand the monetary value of the cash, although it was exchanged and discussed in a slightly different ways. On a purely observational level, people almost always folded notes

directly in half when playing. In terms of physically handling cash, notes were almost always folded in half.

However, the biggest difference lay not in people's understandings of amounts of money, but in how money was spent. People were acutely aware of the purchasing power of money. At a practical level, often people would go to the shops with \$50, for example, and purchase items worth \$30, however, the remaining \$20 would then be spent bit by bit, before that person left the shop. Price was rarely considered when people made a purchase; it was more about what cash people had in their hand that dictated how much they spent. One example of this was a children's bike that was being sold at one of the shops in Maningrida for a few hundred dollars. The family that bought this very over-priced bike spent all of their fortnightly money on this purchase for their child. There was no money left over at all for food or anything else. When I asked the parents about it, they said *'we have been wanting that one for our son \_\_\_\_\_, all his cousins have bikes, he's been crying for that bike'*. When I asked the couple about the cost of the bike, they said *'it's ok, we have rupiah for bike. \_\_\_\_\_ was paid today. But maybe now we play card, get more rupiah, then buy tucker. Or maybe go fishing'* (L\_\_ 28.5.2007). The *modus operandi* was whatever money was in your hand at the time determined what money was spent.

Money would change hands regularly between family members in the community. This issue has been widely commented on in the literature (see Altman 1987, Schwab 1995, Peterson and Taylor 2003). Samson (1988) states that when money enters the internal economy of transactions between Aboriginal people, the face value alters because it is related to the past history of the people involved in the transaction, the nature of their social relationship and the use to which the money is to be put. Myers (1988) also describes this change in the value of

money in relation to kin. He suggests 'service exchange sustained between kin, transforms the significance of money and things, which are used mainly to confirm relatedness rather than to celebrate the individuation' (2003). Austin-Broos also describes the value of money as being mediated by sharing between kin in a context where scarcity is magnified by payday binges and relatives who have lost at cards (Austin-Broos 2003, p. 125).

Altman (1987) discussed this sharing of cash between kin in his study in Arnhem Land. He quantified 72 transfers of cash. Of the 72 transfers, he found that 67% were to people within the household cluster and of the remaining 33% of cases, most were based on significant kinship obligations (Altman 1987, p. 163). As Altman suggests, quantifying sharing between kin is very difficult, as the sharing may be insignificant in terms of material or economic terms, but for the Gunwinggu people he worked with, the expression of the sharing ethos in a 'transaction' is loaded with social significance. I too, found quantifying the sharing particularly difficult despite it constantly going on around me. There were two significant problems that impeded my ability to record this type of data, despite knowing how important it was. The first problem was that Maningrida is such a large community that I was not always aware of the kinship relationships that existed between people, so understanding the significance of the transaction was difficult. Secondly, money often changed hands discreetly, without anything even being said, so it was very difficult to ascertain the exact amounts of money that were changing hands.

In addition to the physical way that money was distributed from person to person, card games provided another means of distribution along kinship lines. To examine this further, the following section will review the literature on the economic mechanisms of card games. This literature outlines previous work that portrays a dichotomous relationship as characterising

card games. That is, card games as ‘entertainment’ or card games as ‘business’. This section will review the literature and then outline the ‘business’ type card games in Maningrida.

### *Entertainment vs. ‘Business’*

Altman (1985, p.56) was one of the first anthropologists to describe in his case study of an Arnhem Land community that people ‘differentiate between two types of gambling: one that could be called gambling as leisure activity, when only small amounts of cash changes hands and gambling as “business” activity when larger amounts of money circulate’. Similarly, Goodale (1987, p.7) found that within the card games played on the Tiwi Islands there were two modes of games, one which is considered ‘work’ or ‘business’ and the other which is more relaxed ‘fun’ and ‘family’. She suggests that play-type games among the Tiwi were most frequently restricted to close family members, and money freely circulates between all players; however, ‘work’ gambling was isomorphic with hunting (Goodale 1987, p.19). This notion that there was a distinction made by Aboriginal people between gambling as entertainment and gambling as ‘work’ or ‘business’ is reiterated by McKnight (2002) who found that community members often referred to gambling as taking on the qualities of hunting through which people gained a livelihood and demonstrated their individual competence and worth. Povinelli (1991) also found that the normative rules and regulations that governed food collection among women were extended to card-playing. Even the language used to discuss gambling were often terms associated with hunting and gathering (1991, p.247).

Although people in Maningrida would regularly refer to gambling as ‘*business*’ or ‘*working hard*’ when gambling, this understanding of a distinction between ‘business’ type games and

‘play’ or ‘fun’ type games was not apparent. This distinction was not apparent in either the observations of the games or people’s interpretations of the games. All games in Maningrida appeared to have elements of both. That is, all games had the element of ‘entertainment’, however, all games possessed ‘business’ or ‘work’ –like, functional qualities. To discuss this further, it is important to examine the available literature on what is actually meant by ‘business’ –type gambling.

*The redistributive mechanism of card games*

Altman (1987) discusses this idea of ‘business’ –type gambling in his book *Hunter-Gatherers Today: an Aboriginal economy in north Australia*. His research in a remote outstation in the Maningrida region found that the time allocated to gambling by the community over the period of three months (March–April, June and September–October) was particularly significant. Gambling accounted for 7.3%, 20.8% and 16% of potentially productive day-time hours<sup>22</sup> (Altman 1987, p.164). He found that the gambling functioned effectively as a redistributive mechanism, which clearly distinguished the ‘business’ of gambling time, from production time and leisure time.

This understanding of card games as a method of redistributing cash was not unique to Altman’s work or Arnhem Land. Peterson reports that in 1970, in a survey of four institutionalised communities – Warburton, Amata, Ernabella and Docker River – the redistribution of money in the community appeared to have taken place mainly through card playing (see also Gray 1978). On the Cox Peninsular, Povenelli (1991) found in the community she was working with that ‘what casual observers and judgmental social workers

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<sup>22</sup> These were underestimates as people often gambled well into the night which was not measured, see Chapter 2 and 3 for methodological discussion.

do not acknowledge is that gambling is also a serious economic activity that redistributes cash among family groups' (Povenelli 1991). Others such as Pyper (1978) explored this idea, arguing that 'gambling is an economic practice ... which allows redistribution of resources drawn from the European cash-economy, in accord with the Indigenous values and economic interests of Aboriginal society' (1978, p.73).

Pyper's suggestion that the purpose of the redistributive mechanism of gambling was a way to negotiate the European cash economy is reiterated throughout the literature. Altman suggests that gambling was modified by Aboriginal people to redistribute an introduced commodity, cash, at a time of rapid economic and social change (Altman 1985). Goodale (1987) also argues that Aboriginal gambling should be seen as an adaptive strategy to contemporary life in the townships where money is needed by women to obtain daily food requirements for their households. Steane et al. (1998) concur with Altman and Goodale, that gambling, particularly since the introduction of a wage system and welfare payments in the 1960s, was fundamental to redistributing cash resources between kin. And finally, Harris (1977) described gambling as a modern means of 'sharing the catch'. That is, that gambling was a substitute for the system of sharing resources which operated when Yolngu people at Milingimbi depended on hunting and gathering for their food supply.

In Maningrida, the social regulation of card games allowed for complex redistributive mechanisms to exist that in effect distributes cash within and between social networks. So, critical to the redistributive mechanism of card games was the social regulation. To enter into these games was distinctly different to a casino table game, for example, to play for a turn and then leave. To play these card games was to enter into a full organisational social and economic structure. The concept of reciprocity, and understanding the social obligations and

relationships were intricately woven into the structure of the card games. This highlights just how different these games are to other mainstream forms of gambling.

### *Cash accumulation*

Another 'business' -like quality that is reported throughout the literature resulting from card games is that large sums of cash can be won that would otherwise never be generated, and this would often result in the purchase of capital items. Sansom (1980) notes, in his research with town camp residents in Darwin, that life was lived by men and women from hand to mouth, with an absence of significant capital accumulation. Austin-Broos (2003) agrees, stating that the notion of saving money for personal purposes is limited. However, Altman (1987) argues that gambling is a useful method for people with no cash income (like young men) to gain access to cash. Altman (1985) also demonstrates that gambling winnings in outstations are used as a collective resource to purchase items for communal use. Windfalls from gambling are generally spent quickly on cars, refrigerators or washing machines (Austin-Broos 2003). Others report that people use card games to finance funeral ceremonies, where money raised from gambling is used to cover funeral costs (Bonson 2001). Palmer (1982) reports a system in Goanna Downs where money was siphoned off from gambling into what they call a 'fruit tin' which is then classed as 'community money' (1982, p.56). This money is then spent on motor vehicles and trucks, and in this particular example the 'community money' was used to purchase a pastoral property in 1979 (1982, p.56).

Similar to Palmer's findings, not only does cash accumulation occur as a product of a large win, but it also occurs by way of a 'fee' based system used in many of the games. The existence of this fee system within the card games is widely referenced throughout the

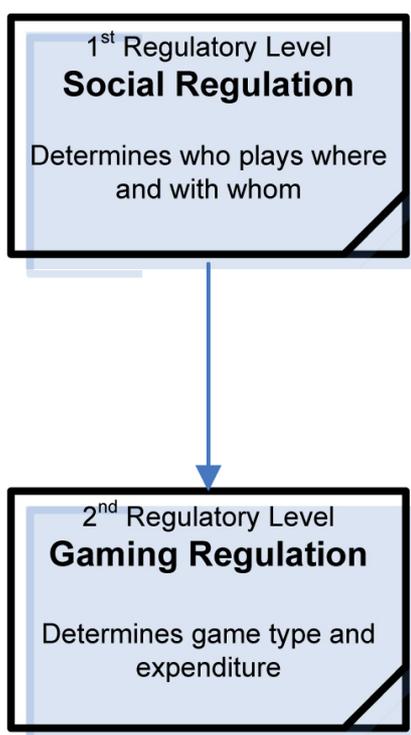
literature (see Goodale 1987, Palmer 1982, Pyper 1978, McDonald & Wombo 2006, Holm & Japanangku 1976). It is most often referred to as ‘tong’ money. Throughout certain card games, a ‘fee’ is charged to play. This is no different in Maningrida. Tong money was an accepted part of many of the larger games. The owner of the house where the cards were played states an amount of money that they require, that money is then gradually taken out of the pools of money in the games. The amount of money requested is normally uniform throughout the community, normally a couple of hundred dollars. The money that is accumulated is often used to pay bills. In contrast to cash being accumulated through a ‘big win’, the ‘tong’ money is rather small scale (normally \$200–\$300); however, it is a constant, more reliable, mechanism for cash accumulation.

#### *‘Business’ gambling in Maningrida*

Having gathered an understanding from the literature describing the ‘business’-like attributes of card games that focus predominantly on the redistribution of resources and potential to accumulate larger amounts of cash, it is important to analyse the situation in Maningrida. Chapter 3 has demonstrated that card games in Maningrida were socially regulated. However, after extended time observing card games, it became clear that it was more than just the social connections that dictated what games people would play. It became clear that games were highly structured in determining not just who people would play with, but what game and how much was spent. The following section will examine these findings and outline the informal economic mechanisms that regulate the games.

*The regulation of card games*

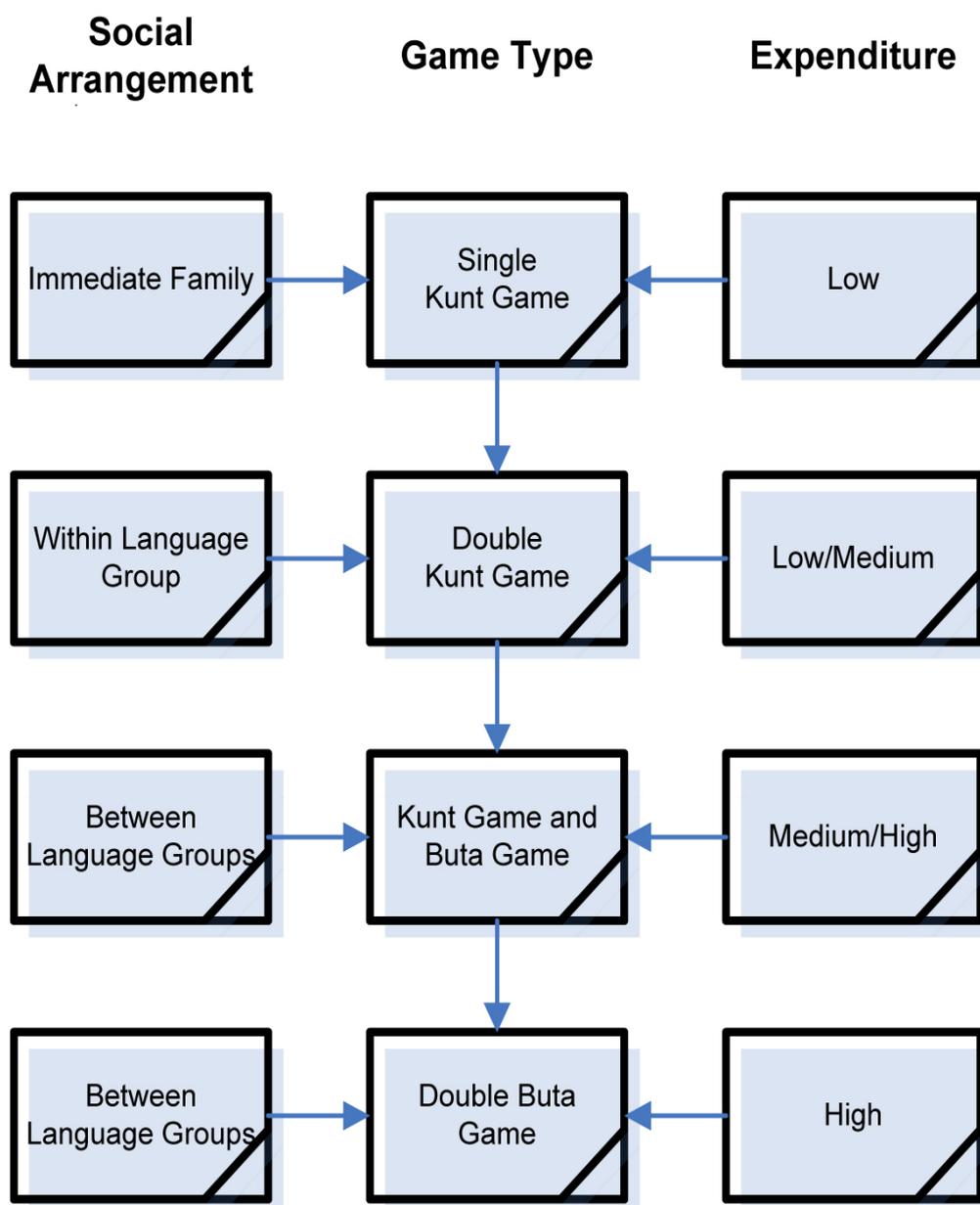
To explain the regulatory system, it is necessary to break it into two levels. The first level, the ‘social regulation’ was outlined previously in Chapter 3. The second level is called the ‘gaming regulation’. The ‘social regulation’ determines who plays where, and with whom. The ‘gaming regulation’, however, refers to what games people play and how much money people spend (see Figure 4.1).



**Figure 4.1: The regulation of card games in Maningrida**

To further explain the gaming regulation of card games it is necessary to reiterate that there were two different types of games played in Maningrida, Kunt and Buta. The gaming

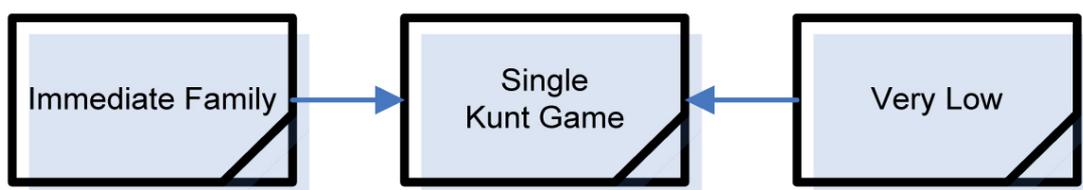
regulation was directly influenced by the type of game that was played, and the expenditure<sup>23</sup> at the game. After further analysis, the research found that there were four different levels to this structure and that all games in the community fell into one of these levels. To explain the gaming regulation, Figure 4.2 outlines the structure.



**Figure 4.2: Gaming regulation in Maningrida 2007**

<sup>23</sup> The level of betting

Figure 4.2 breaks down each game by the social arrangement, the game type and the expenditure at the game. It is now important to dissect this model and analyse each of the levels of the gaming regulation in Maningrida. To begin, Figure 4.3 outlines the first level of gaming regulation.



**Figure 4.3: First level of gaming regulation**

The first level is immediate family, single Kunt game, with very low expenditure. The game is usually played in the afternoons and lasts for only a few hours. This type of game usually involves five women, predominantly mothers with young children. These games are very socially localised, where most of the women are related and live in the same or neighbouring houses. The level of betting on these games is low, ranging from 20 cents to about \$5 per round.



**Figure 4.4: Second level of gaming regulation**

Figure 4.4 outlines the second level of the gaming structure; that is, within-language group relationships, two Kunt games side by side and low/medium expenditure. The players are normally all women, though occasionally a man will play. These are social games that involve predominantly different families from within the one language group. Expenditure on these games is considered to be low to medium, with bets ranging anywhere from about \$1 to \$10 depending on the particular day. These games normally only run in the afternoons and are often located in open spaces between houses.

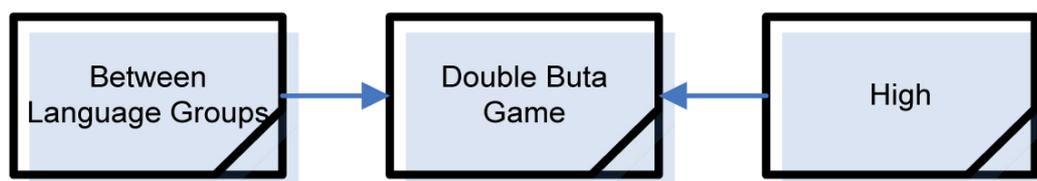


**Figure 4.5: Third level of gaming regulation**

The third level of the gaming structure (Figure 4.5) consisted of games that were between-language groups, a Kunt game beside a Buta game, with medium to high expenditure. There was a mix of language groups and the games were much more socially complex. The Kunt games are normally all women and the average betting range is approximately \$5 to \$20 per game. The Buta game, however, is predominantly half men and half women. The betting on the Buta game starts at \$10 and can climb to hundreds of dollars. These games attract spectators and are mostly held at a house in the community. They run late into the night. Play usually stops in the early hours of the morning and starts again after lunch. It is expected that most of the same players return, particularly those that won money from the game the previous night. Often those that have lost all their money are temporarily funded by other

winning players to stay in the game. However, when it has been decided that a particular person has had enough chances and does not win, they often leave the game and someone else will take their spot, even if the person entering the game has to be temporarily funded by others to begin.

One of the biggest differences with these games compared to the two lower level games is that these attract a fee. This fee system is referred to as ‘tong’ money<sup>24</sup> which was discussed in the previous chapter. Hosting these games can be quite competitive as there was the added incentive of the tong money. It was usually a woman that was responsible for collecting the tong money from each round. The money was normally collected in a cigarette packet and kept out of sight. The service that was provided for this money was access to toilets at the house, lights at night to keep play going, rubbish collection and generally, a safe environment.



**Figure 4.6: Fourth level of gaming regulation**

The fourth level of the gaming structure was between-language groups, two Buta games side by side, both with high expenditure (see Figure 5.8). These games involve a mix of people in

<sup>24</sup> The word ‘Tong’ is Chinese, typically meaning an association or secret society, often associated with organised crime. I believe that Aboriginal people’s use of this word reflects their close association with Chinese immigrants around gambling in the NT.

the community. Nevertheless, the mix is still governed to a large extent by the social regulation. There is minimal movement between the east Maningrida region people and the west Maningrida region people. Normally, there would be two or three of these big games going on in the community at once. It is at this level that the stakes were highest. Often the games result in one winner, potentially winning thousands of dollars. These games could have 20–30 spectators at any one time, particularly when the stakes were high. They were very competitive and were taken seriously, so people like to watch the game. Again, the fee system applied to these games, but the household could ask for more money because of higher stakes and the fact that the games attract more people. Both women and men play these games equally and the players are often considered to be serious gamblers. This game was certainly not for amateurs!

The gaming structure described is hierarchical in terms of expenditure. This means that often people will start at the bottom and through winning –progress through the different levels of games. One man described it this way: *Some people stay small, they are little fish. Others play big, we call them high roller* (M\_\_\_\_ 27.2.2007).

To exemplify this movement from one gaming level to the next, one woman explained:

*I been playin' cards. Nearly won big mob rupiah [money]. I been playin' that game down at bottom camp, you know which one? For two days. I play all day, work really hard. Then V\_\_\_\_ and J\_\_\_\_ came with me and we stopped at that other game, you know? Big money. I played for hours. Won everything, whole lot. Maybe \$500. V\_\_\_\_ was jumping she was so happy for me. We went next game, that one at \_\_\_\_\_ house.*

*Big mob. Lots of people. We played for long time... I won some more (S\_\_\_\_\_ 24.2.2007).*

When I asked her how much she won in the end, the response was: *Nothing! Poor bugger me! Maybe try again tomorrow (S\_\_\_\_\_ 24.2.2007).*

The typology of games in Maningrida also helps when discussing the ‘business’ aspects of card games. All games in Maningrida had an element of ‘entertainment’. Similarly, all games in Maningrida had an economic role as well. Level 1 and 2 games were redistributive in nature (see Figure 4.3 and 4.4). These games were played between close family relations. The purpose of these games is predominantly to deal with an inequitable distribution of cash. For example, if some family members get paid on a Monday and others not until a Thursday then it is a way for people to access cash where they may have run out just before a pay day. These games also have the function of pooling economic resources. For example, people who live in a household of six adults and many children will often play cards. The winner of these games would take the accumulated money to the shops and buy food for the entire household. This system worked very well where particular households often had many children and a communal approach was taken to food, as it would be virtually impossible for a parent to feed only their children and not the others in the household. So, essentially, the ‘business’ of these games is to redistribute cash resources and acts as a family budgeting system. This concurs with the previous research. When looking at Level 3 and 4 games (see Figure 4.5 and 4.6), the ‘business’ side of the gambling gets somewhat more serious as a result of the higher expenditure.

*'Business' at Level 3 games*

Level 3 games (Figure 4.5) were played between different language groups within the community. There was a commonly held perception that in these games the money was more 'at risk'. That is, the cash is more at risk of being lost to another family where no benefits trickle through to the losing family. Level 3 games are redistributive at a higher community level. Money stays within the community, going round the games. However, the money can, and does regularly, move from family to family. From a broader economic perspective, games at this level were not necessarily problematic as the winnings generally stayed in the community. However, from a social perspective these Level 3 games could be problematic as money changes hands from family to family, which has the potential to create friction between families. Level 3 games also provide community members with the greatest opportunity to accumulate larger amounts of cash that could not necessarily be saved. People pay bills or splurge at the shops as a result of winning at these games. As one lady stated after winning \$400:

*I can pay mobile recharge now, those kids they calling all their friends, too expensive, but now I can pay that one. Also, maybe buy some clothes, that old lady needs new clothes and buy kids DVDs (S\_\_\_ 15.12.2006).*

*'Business' at Level 4 games*

The predominant purpose of Level 4 games (Figure 4.6) is large scale cash accumulation. People played these games because they want a chance to win a lot of money. These games were not necessarily redistributive in nature. There was normally one big winner who takes a

large sum of money. Interestingly, redistribution of the winnings does often happen after the game. A large sum of money may be won and at least part of it will be redistributed through the family. Sometimes certain amounts would also be ‘humbled’<sup>25</sup>, in itself a redistributive process. However, Level 4 games were where the issue of money leaving the community arises. After people won a large amount of cash, some was given to family in Maningrida, but in some cases much of the money leaves the community. People want to buy a car or a boat or travel somewhere after having a big win at the card games.

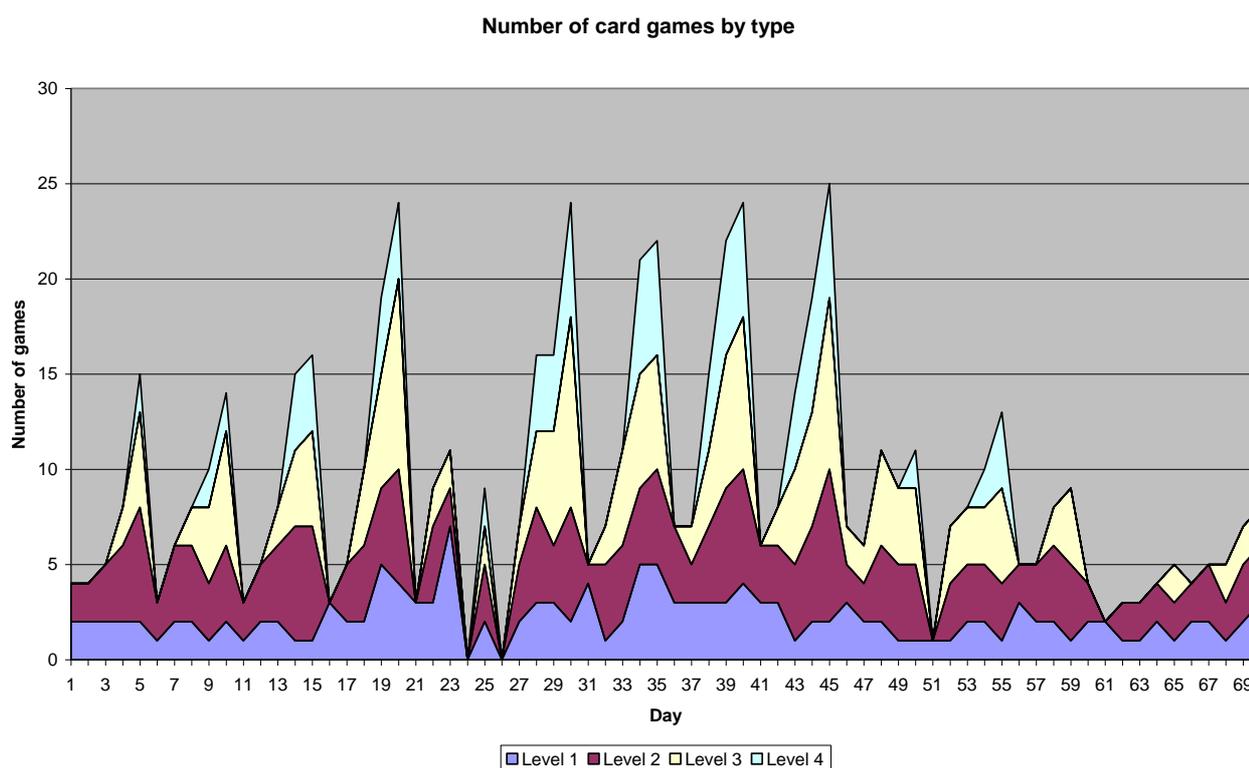
When discussing the informal economic function of card games in Maningrida, this research demonstrates that all card games have ‘business’ – like qualities. Nevertheless, the purpose of the ‘business’ is different when looking at the different levels: for example a Level 1 game is redistributive in comparison to a Level 4 game where people are focused on cash accumulation as a result of a win. However, all card games present an opportunity for individuals and family groups in the community to accrue economic capital. As there are different economic and social reasons for people to play particular games, it is important to analyse which level of games people are most engaged in and the potential positive and negative consequences.

#### *Analysis of gaming regulation*

To further understand the gaming regulation of card games, the data on the number of games each week was broken down to look at the number of games at each level, each week. Figure 4.7 below shows data collected over a 14-week fieldwork period.

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<sup>25</sup> This is a term used by Aboriginal people to describe a request made for money, in part as a result of kinship obligations. The cash, or some amount of cash, is normally given.



**Figure 4.7: Number of card games by type**

Figure 4.7 depicts the trends at the different levels when looking at the different types of games played in the community. On the days when the largest numbers of games were played (usually towards the end of the week) there is a rise in Level 4 games. Throughout the entire fieldwork period, Level 4 games were never played at the beginning of the week during the hours when the data was collected. The numbers of other types of games played are fairly consistent throughout the fieldwork period.

Table 4.1 demonstrates the number of games at each level as a percentage of the total number of games over the fieldwork period.

	Total number of games	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Number of games	654	154	225	185	90
% Number of games		23.54%	34.42%	28.28%	13.76%

**Table 4.1: Number of games at each level as a percentage of total number of games**

The Level 1 games account for 23.54% of games in the community. As described earlier, these games were very small in numbers of players and small in amounts of expenditure. The games only last for a couple of hours and are very much close family playing together. These groups were like a ‘mothers group’. However, these games act as a family budgeting system. Families pool the household monetary resources through the game and once the game is over, the winner will often go the shop and buy the whole family food. The statements below reflect how people perceive these particular games:

*This one, game for family. Family sit down and play card. The winner go to shop and buy food for family. Sugar, flour, tea, smoke, and toys for kids. This game helps the family. Sometime people say cards is bad for family, bad for kids... but kids happy, they go shopping (V\_\_\_ 9.9.2007).*

*This one alright. No problem. Mothers feed kids. Men are happy, they don't growl their wives. They get food and no humbug (E\_\_\_ 9.9.2007).*

In Table 4.1 above, we also see that approximately 63% of the games played in the community are at the second and third gaming levels. Further analysis is needed here to

understand the different levels and the role that these games have in the community. Firstly, the data was broken down into seasons at each level to see if differences exist.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Total Number of Games
<b>Dry season</b>	44	64	45	8	161
<b>% of dry season games</b>	27.34%	39.75%	27.95%	4.96%	
<b>Wet season</b>	110	161	140	82	493
<b>% of wet season games</b>	22.32%	32.65%	28.39%	16.63%	

**Table 4.2: Number of games at each level by season as percentage of total**

Table 4.3 shows that there was minimal difference between the seasons at the Level 2 and 3 games. These games account for 68% of games in the dry season and 61% of games in the wet season. The data shows that these games were the most common games played. What is striking in Table 5.3 is that over the wet season there was a four-fold percentage increase in Level 4 games. This significant increase can be put down largely to increases in population in the community, resulting in increases in cash in the community that allows these games between different groups, of high expenditure, to occur. It is in the Level 4 games that people have a serious opportunity to accumulate large amounts of cash if they win. People normally try to spend the money on large household expenses. However, when people win large amounts of money they are often ‘humbled’ (asked for money) by other family members, which, as a result of the complex kinship obligations, means that if people don’t leave the community quickly after winning then they often have to hand out portions of it to family members, reducing the big win.

This is exemplified in statements from community members:

*\_\_\_\_\_ won big mob rupiah [money] last night. Maybe \$10,000. Now she is runnin' from humbug. All that family want rupiah. She give some to family but she is going on holiday to Darwin and maybe Goulburn to visit family (B\_\_\_ 17.8.2007).*

When I asked what she will spend the money on, the reply was: *Maybe fridge or boat. That family need a boat to visit their country over other side, you know? (B\_\_\_ 17.8.2007).*

Another informant also discussed winning 'big' at these card games. When I asked how much he had won and what he was going to do with the money, he replied: *I won \$7000. I am going to buy motor car, not rubbish one, good one, fast one. I go to Darwin tomorrow to get car. Drive 'im back when road open (J\_\_\_ 2.3.2007).*

When I inquired about the fact that the roads may not open for a month or so, he replied: *No worries, I live with my sister in Darwin. And maybe long grass, then I will drive 'im back when road open (J\_\_\_ 2.3.2007).*

Despite these good intentions, no fridge, no boat and no car ever appeared in the community. Months later I ran into the man in Darwin – he was living in the long-grass<sup>26</sup>. He had no money left. He was waiting in Darwin until the roads opened to get a lift back to the community with family.

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<sup>26</sup> This is a term given to people who are living rough in the bush areas around Darwin.

What was potentially problematic for the community is the large increase in Level 4 games during the wet season. When people gamble up the hierarchy of gaming levels, money that is won at Level 2 and 3 games that would usually stay within the family, or at least within the community, may then be taken to Level 4 games where there was much greater potential that the cash leaves the community. However, as this research suggests, this was primarily a seasonal issue as opposed to a potential problem that exists all year round.

The other major cost of winning large amounts of money in the Level 4 games was that people leave the community. In many cases when people left after winning ‘big’, as in the case of the man who went to Darwin, they often did not return for weeks, and sometimes months, at a time. So, just as there were potential economic impacts on the community in respect to cash leaving the community, the impacts may be more significant if it was taken into account that people’s employment may be impacted, as well as families in Maningrida might be financially affected as the result of a person or couple leaving the community.

### *Level 2 and 3 games*

To return to discuss the second and third gaming levels, unlike Level 4 games, there was very little seasonal variation (see Table 4.2). These games formed the mainstay of gambling in the community. What makes them different from Level 1 games was that many more players are required. The vast majority of actual card players in the community were playing the Level 2 and 3 games. To explore this further, we can look at the number of card players in the community at the given data collection time. Although the data on the number of players in card games is not broken down to the different gaming levels, it is important to see how many people at a given time are gambling.

Average number of card players	Wet season	Dry season
Monday	23	23
Tuesday	46	34
Wednesday	81	49
Thursday	137	45
Friday	177	63

**Table 4.3: Average number of card players during wet season and dry season**

What we see in Table 4.3 is that there were significantly more people playing cards in the wet season compared to the dry season. The highest number of players in the dry season was 121, whereas the highest number of players in the wet season was 248 – both days were a Friday. The wet season number was very high, especially if you also consider that there were often many spectators at these games – on that particular day, a major proportion of the adult population of the community was either playing or watching a card game.

If the majority of the people in Table 4.1 were playing Level 2 and 3 games, it becomes important to inquire further about these games as they affected a large number of people in the community. To return to the structure of these games, Level 2 games were predominantly within language groups, were at low/medium levels of betting and often only ran during the afternoons. In contrast, Level 3 games went late into the night and could continue for days or

weeks at a time. Sometimes the players would only have a few hours' break in the early hours of the morning. These games were also at medium/high expenditure and were played with people from different language groups. So, not only do these Level 3 games draw people in for long periods of time, but also they often drew significant financial resources away from families. These games also present increased chances of conflict because they were played between groups. Level 3 games were potentially problematic as they compete with other obligations in people's lives.

An analysis of the social and gaming regulation of card games clearly demonstrates the extent to which they were a social and economic institution within the community. The games were used and adapted by Aboriginal people as a way to distribute cash, particularly in households that were over-crowded. Card games also provide a system of cash distribution that worked in conjunction with Aboriginal kinship obligations. The typology of the gaming regulation (Figure 4.2) allows for the redistribution of cash to occur, but also provided individuals with an opportunity to accumulate larger amounts of cash that would not be possible otherwise.

The gaming regulation also highlights that potential problems within the existing structure can be targeted for intervention, for example, that Level 4 games are potentially seasonally problematic. If the community is concerned about money leaving the community, then Level 4 games can be targeted by the community as an area of the gambling that needs modification. Level 3 games are also potentially problematic as they often compete with other obligations and responsibilities people have in the community. However, the reason that the card games were competitive with other aspects of community life is that they hold a lot of social and economic value – particularly in the Level 3 games.

This chapter has determined that card games were informally regulated by Aboriginal people in Maningrida. The last two chapters have demonstrated that the games were a central Aboriginal ‘institution’ within community life. These games were highly valued by many people, and were a point of significant social interaction in community life.

In this light, it is reasonable to ask how did the political discourse surrounding card games come to be dominated by concepts of dysfunction. Are card games dysfunctional? Is Aboriginal gambling a problem? Chapter 3 and 4 have outlined that there are points in card games in Maningrida that were potentially problematic for the players and the community, and overall there was potential for a proportion of resources to be diverted away from the community in unplanned ways. However, the place of card games in the current discourse has not been described. Chapter 5 addresses these issues by discussing the problematising discourse that surrounds card games and gambling in remote communities, particularly in light of the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response. Through this analysis, the chapter will also expose external pressures to control card games by police, as well as Aboriginal people’s resistance to non-Indigenous involvement in, and control of, card games.



## Chapter 5

### **The politics of card games in Maningrida**

The following chapter discusses the problematising discourse of dysfunction that surrounds card games and gambling in remote communities, as defined in the Introduction. As part of this analysis, I will detail external pressures to control card games by police, as well as external policy impacts on card games as a result of the Northern Territory Emergency Response. This chapter will also discuss Aboriginal people's resistance to non-Indigenous involvement and control in the context of card games. Finally, I will examine the actual evidence for the problems associated with card games that were identified by people living in Maningrida.

As outlined in Chapter 1, changing social attitudes and political discourses are apparent in the historical research into card games. These external discourses and pressures were highlighted in Chapter 2, in excerpts from the *Maningrida Mirage* in the 1970s. During this period, the legal ramifications of the games were hotly debated, as well as the impacts of card games on employment and families, particularly children. The excerpts described in Chapter 2 also highlight the strong support from Aboriginal members of the community for card games to continue, and despite periods of threat from the police that people would be 'locked up' if caught playing cards, the card games continued to go on – as they continue to this day. The insights gained from the historical literature provide a platform from which to analyse the current tensions at play in and around card games in the community. To begin this discussion, I will outline the legalities and policing of card games in Maningrida.

### *Legislation and policing of card games*

The card games that are played in Maningrida are ‘unregulated’ games. These card games fall outside mainstream Australian regulatory frameworks and this raises the question as to the legalities of the games and the gambling activity. The issue of regulation was debated historically, with the police definitively stating that the games were illegal (see Maningrida Mirage). However, when attempting to inquire about this further, it initially seemed there was no clear answer and many people had conflicting views. The following section outlines the legislation and the questions that arise about the policing of card games in the community.

Figure 5.1 outlines the legislation that potentially addresses the card games. Section 54 of the *Gaming Control Act* (NT) defines, for the purposes of the Act, ‘unlawful games’. Subsequent sections of the Act relate to those people who organise unlawful games and those people who participate in unlawful games.

## Gaming Control Act (Northern Territory)

### Division 2 Control of gaming

#### 54 Unlawful games

(1) For the purposes of this Act:

(a) a game:

- (i) which is or is intended to be a game of chance; (ii) which is or is intended to be a game partly of chance and partly of skill; or
- (iii) which is a trick or sleight of hand, played with an instrument of gaming, contrivance or device whereby money is or goods are gained or disposed of;
- (b) a game from which a person derives a percentage, part or share of the amount or amounts wagered, staked or played for or for which a charge is made; or
- (c) a game declared under the Regulations or by the Minister under section 53(2)(a) to be an unlawful game, is an unlawful game.

(2) The Minister may in writing permit the playing of a game that is otherwise unlawful in such place or places and on such occasions as the Minister specifies in the notice.

(3) A person is not guilty of an offence against this Division in respect of an unlawful game specified in:

- (a) a notice under subsection (2); or (b) a permit granted under this Act, where the person is playing the game in accordance with the notice or permit.

(4) Notwithstanding subsection (1), the game commonly known as or called two-up or swy is not an unlawful game where:

- (a) it is played at a racing venue situated outside the circumference of a circle having a radius of 80 km centred on the casino at Alice Springs and Darwin respectively, is conducted by or on behalf of a club on the day of a meeting for a period of not more than 4 hours commencing after the finish of the last race of the meeting, and the profits (if any) are payable to the club to be applied towards its purposes or such other purposes as the club thinks proper; or (b) it is played only on 25 April (whether or not Anzac Day is publicly celebrated on that date), is conducted by or on behalf of a Returned Services League Club and the profits (if any) are payable to that club.

(5) In subsection (4)(a), *club*, *meeting*, *race* and *racing venue* have the same meanings as in section 4(1) of the *Racing and Betting Act*.

#### 55 Organising, &c., unlawful game

A person shall not: (a) organise or conduct, or assist in organising or conducting, an unlawful game; or

- (b) receive a percentage of an amount wagered on an unlawful game.

Source:

<http://notes.nt.gov.au/dcm/legislat/legislat.nsf/linkreference/GAMING%20CONTROL%20ACT?opendocument>

**Figure 5.1: Gaming Control Act (NT)**

Correspondence with the NT Government (Crowther, pers. comm., 7.6.2013) advised that card games that Aboriginal people play are not illegal under the Act. They stated that no-one had ever been charged under the law for playing the card games that Aboriginal people play (pers. comm. 7.6.2013). The games are not prohibited games in the NT. However, this information is very much at odds with the prevailing perception, and arguably the experience of Aboriginal people in Maningrida.

Many accounts of cards being ‘banned’ by police and instances in which police had ‘cracked down’ on card games were presented to me over the fieldwork period. There was a common perception by Aboriginal people in the community that when police were trying to assert their presence in the community, they would ‘ban’ or ‘crack down’ on card games. One elderly lady said: *Many, many times in Maningrida cards have been banned. But everyone just plays inside their houses instead until one day, Balanda don’t care anymore, then people can play again* (D\_\_\_ 29.1.2007).

Another lady also had a similar story: *Maybe 2 or 3 times in the last 10 years Policeman has banned gambling games. People don’t care though, they keep playing inside their houses. All it does is make people hide and then when they think it’s ok again, then card games come back to normal* (RY\_\_\_ 3.10.2006).

Nevertheless, many people in the community thought that it was not fair that their games were treated this way. As one man stated: *Just because our games don’t make that Government money, or make those big men rich, they want to stop them. We are doing nobody any harm, but those police and that Government always telling us how to live our lives* (R\_\_\_ 15.10.2008).

Anecdotally, there was a case in Maningrida in the 1980s in which the local policeman tried to confiscate the money at the centre of a game and charge people under the *Proceeds of Crime Act (NT)*; however, the case did not stand up in court (Crowther, pers. comm., 7.6.2013). As is demonstrated through the excerpts of the *Maningrida Mirage* in the previous chapter, the local Constable Harry Cox was insistent in the community meetings that card games were illegal and tried numerous times to stop the games continuing. This research found the general attitude by the police in Maningrida was to ‘turn a blind eye’ to the gambling. The local policeman said in an interview: *To put it bluntly, card games are the least of our worries* (TM\_\_\_ 19.6.2007).

However, the disjuncture between the fact that card games are not illegal and the perceived police pressure to ‘crack down’ on card games in Maningrida was stark. Over the course of conducting this research, numerous phone calls were made and numerous attempts to contact the Northern Territory Police. However, no phone calls or attempts to contact the Police have ever been returned. So it remains unclear on what grounds the pressure from police was based as the card games are not illegal in the NT. Over most of the fieldwork I witnessed no pressure from police at all and card games continued unheeded. However, this all changed in June 2007 when the Australian Government announced ‘The Intervention’. The position of card games in community life was challenged on all fronts. The following section of the chapter explores the impact of external politics directly on the community, as well as the implications at the community level of the pervasive problematising discourse that was driving the policy. In addition to this, I will look at how the internal politics between members of the community with different views of gambling played out in this complex political environment.

*The 'Intervention'*

In the Northern Territory on 15 June 2007, a report called '*Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle - Little Children are Sacred*' was released. The report was conducted by the Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, commissioned by the NT government. The report found Aboriginal child sexual abuse to be an issue of urgent national significance, requiring the immediate attention of the Northern Territory and Australian Governments (Wild & Anderson 2007, p.82). In response to this report, on 21 June 2007, the Australian Government launched the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER or commonly referred to as 'The Intervention'). The Intervention was a raft of legislative reforms specifically targeting remote Aboriginal people and communities (made possible by the suspension of the operation of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*). The scale of the reforms took many by surprise and constituted a governmental intervention unmatched by any other policy declaration in the previous forty years (Altman & Hinkson 2007, Altman 2013). As quoted from the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs media release (Brough 2007), the measures included:

- *Introducing widespread alcohol restrictions on Northern Territory Aboriginal land.*
- *Introducing welfare reforms to stem the flow of cash going toward substance abuse and to ensure funds meant to be for children's welfare are used for that purpose*
- *Enforcing school attendance by linking income support and family assistance payments to school attendance for all people living on Aboriginal land and providing meals for children at school at parents' cost*
- *Introducing compulsory health checks for all Aboriginal children to identify and treat health problems and any effects of abuse*

- *Acquiring townships prescribed by the Australian Government through five year leases including payment of just terms compensation<sup>27</sup>*
- *As part of the immediate emergency response, increasing policing levels in prescribed communities, including requesting secondments from other jurisdictions to supplement NT resources, funded by the Australian Government.*
- *Requiring intensified on ground clean up and repair of communities to make them safer and healthier by marshalling local workforces through work-for-the-dole*
- *Improving housing and reforming community living arrangements in prescribed communities including the introduction of market based rents and normal tenancy arrangements*
- *Banning the possession of X-rated pornography and introducing audits of all publicly funded computers to identify illegal material*
- *Scrapping the permit system for common areas, road corridors and airstrips for prescribed communities on Aboriginal land*
- *Improving governance by appointing managers of all government business in prescribed communities.*

The police and army were mobilised immediately to enter remote Aboriginal communities to implement the measures (see Fogarty & Fogarty 2008, Altman 2013). The announcement of the Intervention had a significant impact on the people of Maningrida. Within hours of the announcement, spontaneous community meetings began to happen. The confusion and fear in the community was palpable. The lack of information and the shock of the announcement sparked misinformed analyses, such as the one below, from community members trying to interpret what was happening and why.

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<sup>27</sup> 'Just terms compensation' is the compensation given to Aboriginal land owners as a result of the acquisition of land for public use.

*Listen up you mob! First I want to say that I'm been working here for a long time and every time I always stand up for everything when things need to be stood up! Now is the time. Someone, he calls himself that Canberra Man Mal Brough [Minister for Indigenous Affairs] and that other one, what's his name? John Howard [Prime Minister]. That the one now! They said on the television that they are going to send that Army here. I say what for? Mr. Canberra man [Mal Brough] wants to take our kids away. They say we abuse all the kids and now he say them UN peace keeping forces are coming here, to this community with guns and all the doctors and they are going to give your kids AIDS check (G\_\_\_ 21.6.2007).*



**Picture 5.1: The community meeting after the announcement of the Intervention, 21.6.2007**

As a result of such interpretations of the Intervention, many people in the community took their children to the surrounding outstations and bush to 'hide' with their families (Fogarty, &

Ryan 2007, Fogarty & Fogarty 2008). Fears the previous policies of the ‘Stolen Generation’<sup>28</sup> were being revisited, mobilised the community into what they saw as having to ‘*defend and protect our children*’ (S\_\_\_ 26.6.2007). In the days and weeks that followed, more accurate information was slowly given to communities. As the army trucks began to arrive, so too did plane after plane of bureaucrats, politicians, media, lawyers, doctors and auditors. Those people who had fled to the bush gradually began to return to the community as initial fears subsided. Male members of the community grew increasingly angry and upset over what they felt were unfair assertions cast on their integrity. One man said:

*It’s bad enough when you know Balanda’s look down on you because you are Aboriginal, or assume you are an alcoholic, but now people look at Aboriginal men as child abusers – it’s not true, but now we have that stereotype too (MR\_\_\_ 5.4.2008).*

What ensued was a lengthy ‘consultation’ process between the Government and the community. Meeting after meeting was held in which the NTER Taskforce would ‘tell’ the community what the changes would entail and community members would be left reeling with questions and objections that fell on deaf ears. In the words of a very senior member of the Taskforce, in the first ‘consultation’ meeting (28.7.2007):

*We didn’t come out here to get your agreement, you have already been consulted. We are just telling you what is going to happen to you.*

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<sup>28</sup> Children were forcibly removed from indigenous Australians as young as possible for the immediate purpose of raising them separately from and ignorant of their culture and people, and for the ultimate purposes of suppressing any distinct Aboriginal culture, thereby ending the existence of the Aborigines as a distinct people from 1897-1960s (Stolen Generations website, visited 16.8.2013).



**Picture 5.2: Community consultation by politicians, 28 June, 2007**



**Picture 5.3: Senator Warren Snowdon and Senator Trish Crossin listening to community concerns regarding the Intervention, 28 June, 2007.**

Outside remote communities in the Northern Territory, debate raged across Australia, and continues to this day, regarding human rights issues, and other legal and social issues associated with the Intervention (see Altman and Hinkson 2007, 2010; Harris, 2012; Altman 2013, Nicoll 2012). It was reported that five years after the Intervention began not one person had been prosecuted for child sexual abuse as a result of these measures (Pazzano 2012). Significant questions as to the motives of the Australian Government in enforcing these policies arose, particularly around measures that targeted the compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal owned townships<sup>29</sup>. Despite the continuing concerns raised about the Intervention measures by many significant legal and social representative bodies<sup>30</sup>, the Australian Government enacted the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011* that will ensure the continuation of key elements of the Intervention for the next 10 years.

The following section of this chapter discusses the discourse surrounding gambling during the Intervention. I will also describe how the external political pressures of the Intervention undermined and disempowered community-based initiatives and strategies to deal with issues relating to the protection of children and gambling.

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<sup>29</sup> A constitutional challenge in the High Court of Australia was held in relation to this measure (compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal owned townships) in the *Wurridjal versus The Commonwealth* case. The Commonwealth defeated the plaintiff.

<sup>30</sup> Amnesty International, the Australian Medical Association, Public Health Association, Australian Lawyers Alliance, Australian Council for Social Services are just a few of the major representative bodies in Australia that have publicly opposed the NTER.

### *Gambling and the 'Intervention'*

The *Little Children are Sacred* (Wild & Anderson 2007) report identified gambling as one of the myriad of significant social issues facing Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, stating:

*Put simply, the cumulative effects of poor health, alcohol, drug abuse, gambling, pornography, unemployment, poor education and housing and general disempowerment lead inexorably to family and other violence and then on to sexual abuse of men and women and, finally, of children (Wild & Anderson 2007, p.6).*

The report made three recommendations in relation to gambling:

*88. That an education campaign be conducted to target gambling in Aboriginal communities, showing the impacts of gambling and especially the risk posed to children who are unsupervised while parents are gambling*

*89. That options for delivering gambling counselling to Aboriginal communities be explored and implemented including consideration of visiting counsellors for smaller communities and resident counsellors for larger communities*

*90. That further research be carried out on the effects of gambling on child safety and wellbeing and that consideration be given to the enactment of local laws to regulate gambling as part of the community safety plans to be developed pursuant to recommendation 79 (Wild & Anderson 2007, p. 201).*

The issues of child sexual abuse that the report raised were something people in Maningrida had been dealing with prior to the beginning of the Intervention. During 2006 and the beginning of 2007, Maningrida was thrown into the national spotlight as the court proceedings began for a horrific child sexual abuse case that occurred in the community (Wilson 2007). The shame felt by the community and the complexity of issues that the community was forced to address were significant. As a result of the situation, the Maningrida Community Action Plan Project (MCAP) was set up specifically to address child sexual abuse. The project was highlighted in the *'Little Children are Sacred'* report as an effective approach in the development of a community response to child sexual abuse.

The group of Aboriginal community members engaged with the MCAP project identified gambling as an issue that the community needed to address, specifically in relation to the supervision of children while parents gambled (Douglas, Pers. Comm. 16.2.2007). The card games were a significant source of discussion for the group over three meetings, where ideas such as limiting the times that people can play cards, restricting the sale of cards, or having an outright community ban on card games were all discussed (Douglas, Pers. Comm. 16.2.2007). The group consulted with the rest of the community, testing their ideas of possible action. They were met by very strong resistance to changing any aspect of the card games (H\_\_\_, D\_\_\_ 15.6.2007). This, in part, was a result of the particular personalities involved in voicing the concerns about the gambling to the community. Three of the members of the group were very anti-gambling. They all expressed their own experiences with gambling problems in the past, and this resulted in an attitude of 'Just because they had a problem, doesn't mean we need to change' response by many other members in the community (A\_\_\_ 22.6.2007).

By the time the Intervention began, those few people in the community that spoke out about card games had made little impact with respect to change. However, the Intervention consultations provided an opportunity for these people to bring up the issue of gambling again and speak out in community forums (First Taskforce consultation, 18 July, 2007). Although gambling was identified in the *Little Children are Sacred* report, it was not, however, mentioned as part of the measures of the Intervention<sup>31</sup>. This meant that the Taskforce members consulting the community were not interested in discussing gambling in the meetings, much to the frustration of the individuals who viewed gambling as potentially relating to child neglect.

The advent of the Intervention saw a pronounced reduction in the number of card games throughout the community. Over the first week, the population of the community reduced significantly as people left because they were worried about their children. As the weeks went on and people returned to the community, gradually people began to play cards again. However, people were acutely aware of, and suspicious of, the numbers of ‘strangers’ around the community and had a distinct awareness of being in the spotlight (R\_\_\_\_, P\_\_\_\_ 7.2007).

The other major impact of the initial stages of the Intervention was a significantly increased police presence in the community. Relations between the police and the community became very fraught. The police pressure on individuals was significant. A zero-tolerance approach was taken by Police to any anti-social behaviour. All cars were searched upon entering the community under alcohol and drug laws, houses were searched on a regular basis, fines were given out for minor infringements and any anti-social behaviour was dealt with by a show of force. About a month after leaving the community, I received contact from community

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<sup>31</sup> Except in relation to expenditure of quarantined money, which is not allowed to be spent on gambling.

members telling me that the Maningrida Police were conducting a ‘crackdown’ on the gambling. I was told in conversations in February 2008 that all card games had been shut down and people were playing cards inside their houses now. I was sent pictures of posters that, according to community members (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), the police had posted. See Figure 5.4 below.



**Picture 5.4: Poster on notice board in Maningrida (February 2008).**

The poster stated that it was an offence to play cards for money, and that there would be severe consequences for those who did, including fines ‘not exceeding \$10,000 or imprisonment for 2 years’ (Community Poster 7.3.2008). By April 2008, the information coming from Maningrida was that there was significant police pressure on people playing cards and the posters were still up around the community (M\_\_\_ 5.4.2008). By September

2008, according to reports from community members, the card games were again occurring in public, and the police focus had shifted (R\_\_\_\_, V\_\_\_\_ 25.9.2008).

Although I was not witness to this period of pressure on card games, it was very real for the members of the community that I was in contact with, and the fear of the repercussions of being caught playing cards was also very real. Nowhere on the poster does it identify anywhere that it was written or informed by the Northern Territory Police or the Northern Territory Government. Without identifying the author of the posters, it would be difficult to get any answers regarding the rationale behind this poster.

The events outlined above detail the beginning stages of the Intervention. Also highlighted were divisions, both within the community and externally, particularly around card games. What was most striking throughout this whole period was the steadfast resistance by the vast majority of the community to stopping the card games. Many people felt that police pressure to stop card games (perceived or real), was just something that the community had to ride out until the police no longer cared. Aside from the group that actively campaigned against the gambling, most people consulted in the research were strongly resistant to any notion of change around card games.

### *Racial Politics*

The resistance to changing any aspect of card games, was in many ways also resistance to non-Indigenous involvement. Despite the complex legal and political environment that card games exist in, the games were used by some Aboriginal people as a forum to strengthen internal political relationships, and as a means of strengthening resolve against other political

agendas within the community. This resulted in the card games being a highly protected, almost exclusive, Aboriginal space. One woman described the games:

*It is the one time Aboriginal people get where Balanda can't tell us mob what to do, we can talk about community problems without getting judgment feelings. This is our way to talk about things that are affecting our community (V\_\_\_ 3.3.2007).*

Another woman said: *These are our games, not Balanda games (R\_\_\_ 10.9.2007)*. There were a few aspects to this sentiment that need to be explained. Firstly, if you were a trusted non-Indigenous person, then there is absolutely no problem about your involvement in the card games. Although, one lady said: *Whitefellas just don't like to play, they always losing their money (M\_\_\_ 22.6.2007)*.

However, the significant pressure from police to shut down the card games in the community over time, coupled with policies like those developed for the Intervention, created a situation where people naturally became protective of the way they wanted to live their life. In addition to this, Aboriginal people in the community were acutely aware of the negative connotations of 'gambling' as an activity, and that many non-Indigenous people who came to the community were trying to put an end to negative behaviours or perceived 'problems'. It was for this reason that I rarely discussed 'gambling' with people, rather I talked about card games. It took a very long time to get the message out to the community and build the trust in people that I was not there to stop the games.

The underlying racial tensions in the community were identifiable through card games. Some non-Indigenous people in the community described card games as a form of passive

resistance by Aboriginal people against non-Indigenous people and dominant institutional structures in the community. As one non-Indigenous employee at the Health Board described the card games:

*The card games are definitely a form of passive resistance by Aboriginal people. People hide in the games and block out the Balanda world. Aboriginal people don't want Balandas coming round card games. Many people will go to play cards when they want to disengage from the Balanda world (J\_\_\_15.10.2007).*

Another non-Indigenous employee in the community described the situation:

*Passive resistance by Aboriginal people is definitely a component of the card games. The games are an Aboriginal space, they are where people escape the non-Indigenous world. It can be very intimidating to walk up to a card game to try to find someone, you are often made to feel very unwelcome (F\_\_\_ 2.12.2006).*

The findings suggest, first and foremost, card games were an 'Indigenous-centric' forum or space. I think it is debatable that card games were an act of passive resistance against mainstream politics, organisations or values. The widespread perception amongst non-Indigenous people in the community that because many Aboriginal people were not engaging in mainstream education, employment, organisational structures or the economy as they thought they should, this then meant that the choice made by Aboriginal people was in fact resistance to these mainstream processes. However, rather than resistance to the dominant structures in society, Martin (1993, p. 139) describes the gambling as oppositional. He states:

*Gambling...was for Wik a collective activity: collective in the sense that the games were public, involved a significant proportion of the Aboriginal population of Aurukun, and drew upon and collectivized resources (in particular cash and time) from disparate individuals and households. As such, it was a practice that stood in structural opposition to those of the dominant society, based as they were on individual rights and property (Martin 1993, p. 139).*

Trigger (1986) discusses a similar situation in Doomagee, a mission settlement in north-west Queensland. His paper 'Blackfellas and Whitefellas: the concepts of domain and social closure in the analysis of race-relations' argues that 'Aborigines retain some autonomy within a "Blackfella domain", through effecting a form of exclusionary social closure' (1986, p. 99). He suggests that Aboriginal people maintain a separate domain as an effective form of social, exclusionary closure, that is designed to exclude or limit access and participation of non-Indigenous people – particularly as a defense against constant administrative pressures and 'attitudinal ethnocentrism' (1986, p. 115). Trigger (1986) argues that this social closure is exclusionary and results in a dimension of resistance not orientated towards the betterment of Aboriginal people's situation, rather the aim is an autonomous social domain.

The situation in card games in Maningrida appears to be a similar situation to what Trigger describes. Card games worked as a collective consolidation of Aboriginal social relationships and distributive processes, as well as a forum for the translation of dominant political, social and economic processes, rather than active resistance against the dominant institutional and organisational structures. The games were exclusionary and provided people with a sense of autonomy from dominant societal structures. Cards games provided an institution-like structure in community life that accounted for and accompanied Aboriginal cultural values.

The games were a culturally appropriate, socially structured activity that allowed Aboriginal political alliances and relationships to develop in the community setting, outside of the dominant institutions and structures.

The racial politics surrounding gambling and control of card games in Maningrida is fraught. Despite pressure from police and efforts by individuals in the community to stop or change card games, they prevail. This chapter has also outlined how the Intervention undermined community-based initiatives designed to respond to child sexual abuse, and problems relating to gambling. One of the major criticisms of the Intervention has been that policy makers have relied on the dysfunctional discourse in Indigenous affairs to develop and implement policy measures without any substantial evidence, and without consultation with Aboriginal people (Fogarty & Fogarty 2008).

However, there are problems and dysfunctional elements of card games in Maningrida. Although, when discussing the problems it is essential to disengage from the political discourse, and look at the evidence. Using Merlan's (2005) idea of the intercultural space, I will detail what both Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous people in Maningrida identify as problems that exist as a result of card games. She suggests that 'when people come together (even or perhaps in contrasting or conflictual ways), it is not enough to explain each point of view separately. Interaction has an inherent polyvalence about it: no single perspective will account for what happens' (2005, p. 179). This is true of card games in Maningrida. Although the games themselves are a distinctive Aboriginal domain, the impacts of these games are not bounded, albeit grounded in different understandings. The broader social meaning and place of the games in society are a medium of interaction. This is particularly true in relation to the urban card game context that has been described by Christie and Young (2011). They detail the emergence of gambling, in particular card games, as an urban public problem. Christie et

al. (2011) analyse how the ‘public problem’ elicits various responses from different actors and in the case of gambling in the Northern Territory it can be proscriptive and reproduce dominant hegemonic interests. Others such as White (1992) also describe how the social and physical construction (and use) of urban space can be either a constructive or destructive force in shaping particular social relations. With these social complexities in mind, the remainder of this chapter will discuss the impacts of card games on the community of Maningrida, from both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous perspectives.

Card games in Maningrida were often talked about in terms of a breakdown in ‘traditional’ society, particularly by elders in the community. Altman (1985), McKnight (2002), Hunter and Spargo (1988) have all noted this throughout their work. Many of the elders in Maningrida viewed gambling negatively and as a representation of the breakdown of ‘traditional’ society. They saw card games as a negative consequence of modernity. This story from an old man in Maningrida, exemplifies these feelings, when he describes how he first brought his children into Maningrida to attend school and playing cards is the representation of the loss of his ‘traditional’ life.

*We used to live on other side<sup>32</sup>. We used to eat crab, fish and cockles from that saltwater country. Some days I would look for mangroves. I would take those mangroves home to eat. Kids would play and go fishing on my uncle’s country. Me and my kids we would sit by that fire and eat oysters and mud mussels. Kids would listen to those stories. We made canoe and brought kids here (Maningrida) to go to school. My mother, she came here getting some clothes for those children. When I came here, I would say I want to go play card. I was winning this money, coin and*

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<sup>32</sup> ‘Other side’ is a place called Nagarralumba, which you can see from Maningrida. It is located on the other side of the mouth of the Liverpool River and was this old man’s traditional country.

*notes. I play, play, play. Yes, I got this food from those shops. Then I go home and sleep. This not right way. Not like the old day. Kids play sitting down now, they don't listen to those stories. Now I want to take that old lady to the otherside for her weaving, making basket. I still waiting for that boat. When that boat come, I will get my swag and take that old lady and we will go other side forever (J\_\_\_15.4.2007).*

The old man's story was not unique. Many elders in the community would comment on young people playing cards, for example this old lady:

*Young people, all they do is sit down and play. They don't go bush and learn traditional ways. They ignore what we say, don't play anymore. They don't listen (M\_\_\_ 12.4.2007).*

Another woman described the situation this way:

*My daughters only play cards. I look after their children all week cos they play cards. I am sick of it. They are losing their culture and their children's culture. I used to play, but now I see the light, my daughters need to see the light too, before it's too late (H\_\_\_ 18.11.2006).*

The other major concern for some people in the community in relation to card games was the impact on family cohesion. These problems related to domestic arguments, and in extreme cases, domestic violence, as well children being neglected by their parent/s as a result of playing cards. People described these problems:

*Mothers, they neglect children. They don't buy food, then husband growl them (D\_\_\_ 7.12.2006).*

*I bin giving my sister-in-law money lately cos she hasn't got enough to feed her kids because she gambles so much. When she gets paid she will go to shop and buy some food, maybe \$100, junk and then she gambles all the rest. The junk is eaten in a day or two and there is no money for food for the rest of the time (T\_\_\_ 23.3.2007).*

*I used to have a problem with gambling a long time ago. I was not looking after my children. I felt guilty. My children still make me feel bad about it. I would get really angry at them when I lost money, but they were little so didn't understand. This is very common in the community. Many children don't get fed because all the money is gone. They cry and are sad. Also, women they have to go to family and beg for food because they have no money to buy any. (H\_\_\_ 17.9.2006)*

A lady was angry at one of the card games one day, she was yelling in her language at everyone who was playing. The people that I was with translated what she was saying for me. She was telling people: *Go home and look after your children. You shouldn't gamble all your money away; you should be looking after your kids. Feed your kids.*

Some of these issues were reflected in the *Little Children are Sacred* (2007) report:

*'Gambling is a big problem and kids are not being fed because of it'. Service providers – Tiwi Islands*

*'Cards and gambling are big issues particularly among the women – a lot of the money that should be spent on children is being spent on gambling' Men's meeting – Katherine region*

*'..expressed concern about mothers, in particular, gambling and neglecting their children'. Women's meeting – Central Australia (Little Children are Sacred Report 2007, p. 201)*

The impact of card games on family cohesion was exacerbated by the type of game that was played (see Chapter 4 for outline of the gaming regulation). The higher the level of the game, the greater the positioning outside of specified kinship networks, the more money at risk and the longer the game would continue. The potential social impacts of both winning and losing were exacerbated as these games are no longer within the family bounds.

To add to the complexity of analysing the impact of gambling on family cohesion was the way people gamble. People in Maningrida would play cards for short, intense periods. This was a regular occurrence throughout the year. People would play intensively for a couple of weeks or a couple of months and then cease to play for many months after. Just as the community experienced high points in frequency of gambling, so did individuals.

Another problem that was raised by non-Indigenous people in the community was in relation to children not attending school, predominantly because parents were too busy playing cards to send their children. Although quantitative data relating to this issue was not collected, observations suggested that some parents whose children did not attend school when they were playing cards, also didn't attend school when the parents were not playing cards.

Non-attendance at school was an obvious issue in the community, children could be seen all over the community during the day when they were supposed to be at school (see Fogarty, W 2011). However, the link between school attendance and card games was not observable in any demonstrable sense. There were also a significant proportion of children in Maningrida whose parents were not necessarily playing cards, whose children were not at school (Fogarty, W 2011). Also, it is important to point out that 30% of card games that were played in the community were small, family games that began in the afternoon and continued for a few hours. There is no reason why parents would be impeded from sending their children to school in the morning if they were playing these particular games.

The flip side of children not attending school is that they were often found in the vicinity of card games. In Maningrida, there is no doubt that children were around card games but at least in part, they were there because they were not at school and had gravitated significant others, not because they were directly involved in the games. Most children would be playing football or other games around card games. To begin to get an idea of the numbers of children around card games, I collected data for a period of three weeks, at 3pm. This data is outlined in Table 5.1.

Date	Day	Number of children	Total week
<b>22-Feb</b>	Thursday	57	
	Friday	48	
	Monday	2	
	Tuesday	18	
	Wednesday	30	155
	Thursday	0	
	Friday	13	
	Monday	0	
	Tuesday	16	
	Wednesday	49	78
	Thursday	49	
	Friday	22	
	Monday	5	
	Tuesday	23	
	Wednesday	38	137
<b>15-Mar</b>	Thursday	70	
Total number of children		440	

**Table 5.1: Number of children around card games over 3 week period**

From the above table we can see that the largest number of children around the card games over the three week period was 70 children on 15 March 2007. Mondays were regularly when the lowest number of children present around the games. This is not particularly surprising as Mondays were also the days for the lowest number of card games in the community.

It was not a common occurrence to see children playing card games with adults. However, it was often children who would teach me how to play cards. It would be very rare for a child in the community not to know how to play cards. From the perspective of some Aboriginal

parents, it is important for children to know how to play cards otherwise they will not be able to engage in this form of social interaction (see also Chapter 3). One mother stated:

*If I don't teach my daughters to play card then they might be ripped off when they grown up. They might be tricked and someone take all their money. That happens if they don't learn to play (P\_\_\_ 2.2.2007).*

However, one issue that many Aboriginal people in the community identified as a problem was that children would set up their own games and play for money. There were numerous occasions that I witnessed this occurring in Maningrida. There was strong community disapproval of children playing cards unsupervised. This resulted in children attempting to hide these games from adults. In the games that children were playing, there was a maximum of four kids (approximately 7-10 years old), playing for small change.

Phillips (2003) discusses this particular problem in Queensland:

*I saw a group of small children, again from about three or four to ten years old playing a game of poker. When their Aunty and I walked by, they hid their coins and pretended not to be playing for money. Their Aunty did not see this, and warned them that they had better not be playing for money, to which they responded they weren't. Twenty minutes later, I returned to the house, and a small child of about three was crying. The Aunty came out of the house to see what the problem was and realized they were playing for money, and that the child was crying over a \$10 note (Phillips 2003, p.55).*

However, it is also important to put things in perspective; card games were not nearly as lucrative for children as a game called ‘holey’. The children would throw coins at a small hole dug into the ground and basically, the closest to the hole wins. An Australian Government publication recommends this game (see *Yulunga Traditional Indigenous Games Education Curriculum*, 2009) which it states can be played with coins, marbles or small rocks. The publication, however, does not endorse the winner keeping the coins at the end of the game despite the fact that this is exactly what happens in these games when played outside the school yard. Children practice hard at this game, and if they were good then they often win money from other children.

The issue of children around card games is often sensationalised by the media in Australia. Reports such as the one below from Kununurra, Western Australia (June 2010), have suggested that the Wyndham – East Kimberley Shire attempted to ban the sale of cards to stop children gambling. It had identified children gambling as a problem, with the Shire Chief Executive, Mr. Gaffney, suggesting that:

*In March, shire officials noticed increased gambling in parks involving mixed groups of adults and children aged 10 and over, sometimes going late into the evening... It was quite evident that kids had quite a lot of money on them from cards. We're not talking \$10, \$20, we're talking hundreds of dollars (The West Australian, 2010).*

Other reports such ABC online (1.6.2010, 10.10am) suggest that: *Children have been seen gambling in the parks, sometimes with \$50 and \$100 notes.*

These articles appear to report speculation by the Shire officials. From the card games observed through this research, there were regularly female 'children' aged 13, 14, 15 years old playing cards with adults. However, these 'children' were very young mothers playing the low level games. This particular group of young girls were often identified as problematic by many older women in Maningrida, not because they were playing cards, but because they had had children so young (M\_\_\_\_ 7.2.2007, V\_\_\_\_ 15.5.2007, H\_\_\_\_ , Va\_\_\_\_ 11.12.2006). Parents were very concerned as these young girls were not able to go to school or have a proper childhood.

The final problem that was identified, specifically by non-Indigenous people, was in relation to employment. Some employers in Maningrida felt that people were not turning up to work because they had been gambling. The head of one of the shops in Maningrida described the situation:

*We used to have a problem with people not turning up to work because they were playing cards. Since then I have been really strict on not accepting this as an excuse for people not turning up to work, or people turning up late. I have no tolerance for it in this organisation. As a result, all my staff are now really good about it. We haven't got that problem anymore. However, sometimes employees will come in and ask for their pay early because they have lost their last pay on cards. But they are all clear on where I stand on this issue and these requests are not welcomed (BY\_\_17.06.2007).*

Other non-Indigenous workers suggested that:

*Some people miss work because of cards and we have to go around the card games looking for them to bring them to work, it's very frustrating (L\_\_\_\_12.2.2007),*

*Occasionally people will miss a day because they have been playing cards all night and are too tired to come to work. It's not fair on the people that do come to work each day (Tucker Run employee, 27.5.2007).*

When discussing the issue of employment in relation to card games, it is important to be mindful that in some cases Aboriginal people may be feeling discontented with their workplace for a plethora of reasons. This can result in people playing cards simply because they are not at work. This, however, may be interpreted by the employer as cards drawing people away from work. One man at a card game stated: \_\_\_\_\_ [Employer] *is always treating me like a little boy. He is always telling me what to do, talking down to me. I don't have to put up with that.* I asked the man what he was going to do now, he said: *Maybe I'll sit here for a while, play cards. For maybe one day, or two.* Situations like this highlight the importance of analysing the context.

Similarly, it was interesting to note that it was most often employed Aboriginal people who spoke strongly against card games in the community. These particular people were employed and were trying hard to make the community a constructive, better place. These people valued their jobs and employment in general. They viewed the gambling as restricting opportunities. Teasdale (1971, p.185) discusses a similar situation in Armidale where she described 'cliques' in the community. She found that the card playing clique was the most

obvious clique on the reserve. Those people who were not part of that clique, predominantly the religious members of the community, disapproved strongly of the gambling. Similarly, the people who were very religious in Maningrida were often outspoken against the card games. The situation was similar to those people who were employed, on school boards, councils, local reference groups, where different groups in the community represent different institutional values and interests.

The previous three chapters have evidenced that Aboriginal people in Maningrida benefit through membership in the social structures that exist within card games. People also benefit from the redistribution of cash resources in the community. However, as is outlined in this chapter, the community was a complex intercultural space where complex interactions occurred around card games. Just as much as external policy measures impacted on card games, internal community politics also formed a medium for interaction regarding card games. There were problems with card games that the community identified, particularly in relation to the care of children and the impact of card games on children.

Chapter 7 will outline the importance of localised initiatives that specifically incorporate Aboriginal understandings of card games to deal with problems identified by the community in relation to gambling. The focus of the research will now shift to the commercial gambling environment in Darwin. The following chapter explores the extent to which Aboriginal social, economic and political processes exist within a formal, highly regulated gambling environment. The literature review at the beginning of the chapter highlights a significant shift to psychological research approaches. However, what does not shift is the dysfunctional discourse, instead there is a nexus with problematising gambling research approaches that

exacerbate public perceptions that Aboriginal people's gambling behaviour is inherently problematic.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Commercial gambling venue, Darwin**

The previous chapters have outlined the complex social, economic and political processes that exist in and around card games in Maningrida. Based on the evidence, this chapter examines remote Aboriginal people's gambling activities in an urban gambling venue in Darwin. An analysis of the way Aboriginal people from remote areas negotiate an urban gambling venue will expose the differences and the similarities between different types of gambling. The previous chapters outlined the social and gaming regulation of the card games in Maningrida. The findings highlighted the fact that card games exist in a distinctly Aboriginal space which allows for the transmission, and translation, of both internal and external social, economic and political processes. Card games are a central, structured community institution for Aboriginal people in Maningrida. A comparison of this understanding of card games to the way people gamble in a gambling venue will highlight potential disjunctures between poker machine play and card games.

The research for this chapter was carried out in a gambling venue in Darwin. The condition of allowing the research to be conducted in the venue was that the venue remains anonymous. Apart from stating that the venue is large and regularly frequented by much of Darwin, and more broadly, Northern Territory, there is little context that can be provided.

As outlined in Chapter 1, most of the literature on card games in Aboriginal communities is anthropologically based. However, when discussing commercial gambling, most of the literature in Australia has a medicalised/psychological frame that is heavily focused on

problems associated with gambling. This perspective also applies to research that is conducted on Aboriginal commercial gambling, although there is an increasing trend towards public health approaches. To begin the analysis of the urban and commercial context, it is important to begin by framing it within the literature, both in the Northern Territory and more broadly around Australia.

### *Literature review*

During the 1990s, as the number of poker machines and gambling venues increased dramatically around Australia, attention began to focus on the impact of gambling on Aboriginal people (McMillen 1996). Aboriginal specific gambling studies started to appear. For example: 'A preliminary exploration of the positive and negative impacts of gaming and wagering on Indigenous people in New South Wales' (Dickerson et al. 1996) and the 'Gaming and wagering amongst Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander communities in the north Queensland' report (Holden, et al.1996).

These studies found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gamblers spent significantly more than their non-Indigenous counter-parts on gambling machines and all forms of gambling. Also, there was some evidence that commercial forms of gambling had reduced the expenditure on traditional card games played within communities (Holden et al. 1996).

In the early 2000s, the *Aboriginal and Islander health worker journal* regularly produced articles on Aboriginal gambling. One such article called 'Bingo Orphans' interviewed a women, Darlene Auger, from Canada who worked on developing Aboriginal treatment programs for a variety of addictions, in particular gambling related issues amongst Aboriginal

youth (Ellis 2000). Another article written by Aboriginal health worker, Terrence Ritharrmiwuy Guyula (2001), from Gapuwiyak, talks about how he came to be a health worker and he states ‘the strong discipline I had received from my father helped me to say “no” to alcohol, smoking, gambling, petrol sniffing and forbidden relationships’ (2001, p.4). Another article featured in the Sept/Oct 2002 edition was written by Barbara Bicego, a gambling counsellor with the Illawarra Women’s Health Centre. It was called ‘When a woman’s best friend is doing her harm’ (2002). Bicego suggests that ‘women sometimes describe their favourite poker machine as their “best friend” and they seek respite in gambling from the violence and other problems in their lives’ (Bicego 2002, p.7).

A contrast to these more personal accounts of gambling is provided by Foote’s (1996) discussion paper, titled ‘Aboriginal gambling: A pilot study of casino attendance and the introduction of poker machines into the community venues in the Northern Territory’. Through participant observation, Foote witnessed a change in Aboriginal gambling modes and situations, with Aboriginal people utilising new spaces and modes of gambling – for example, the Darwin casino. The report explored these observations further by measuring attendance rates of Aboriginal people at the Darwin casino. Foote (1996) found that over a two week period a total of 695 Aboriginal people were observed attending the casino, with a daily mean of 49.6. Of these, 66.8% were women and 33.2% were men. Attendance at poker machines made up 76.3% of the observed attendees. The methodology that Foote used in that study has been replicated in this research and will provide a point of comparison later in this chapter.

McMillen and Togni (2000) also conducted a study in the Northern Territory that focused on Aboriginal gambling. They conducted semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal people

while on field work trips. They found the most prominent type of gambling for Aboriginal people from urban centres and remote communities appeared to be playing cards. They also found that Aboriginal people viewed card playing as both a positive social and economic activity. However, they found that commercial forms of gambling were viewed less positively, largely because they are seen as a drain of money from local communities and families.

One of the other significant papers addressing the issues that Aboriginal people face in relation to commercial gambling was Brady's (2004) discussion paper 'Regulating social problems: The pokies, the Productivity Commission and an Aboriginal community'. This was a clear example of the potential impacts of gaming licences on the Aboriginal community of Yalata, South Australia. The community fought a battle against the Nundroo Hotel Motor Inn's application for a gaming machine licence (Brady 2004). The Liquor and Gaming Commissioner turned down the gaming machine licence application as the communities around Nundroo were already dealing with high levels of social problems. The hotel appealed the decision that was then taken to the Licensing Court where the decision to reject the licence application was upheld. The Court's decision was reported:

*The landmark decision also means that issues such as the socio-economic impact of gaming machines on "extremely dependent people" can now be taken into account when deciding whether or not to grant poker machine licences (Abraham 1998, p.3)*

Brady (2004) used this as an example that highlighted the need to 'make clear distinctions between in-community and out-of-community gambling, and between different gambling mechanisms'. Brady also states that 'like some researchers, Aboriginal communities and

organisations are now problematising out-of-community gambling. In putting up arguments against institutional gaming they must confront the difficult area of regulating social behaviours' (2004, p.10).

In 1999, the issue of Aboriginal gambling was addressed by the Productivity Commission in the Inquiry into Australia's Gambling Industries. The Commission provided a review of the literature pointing to evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders tended to be heavier gamblers and concluded with evidence given by McMillen to the inquiry that there is much to learn about Indigenous gambling and further research attention needs to be given to the impact of both commercial and 'traditional' gambling on Aboriginal communities (Productivity Commission 1999, E.6).

However, despite the Commission's findings that much further research needed to be conducted into Aboriginal gambling, five years passed before more research started to emerge. In 2005, a report 'Research into health promotion and best practice services for Indigenous communities' in Victoria found that poker machines were the most common form of gambling for Aboriginal problem gamblers (Department of Justice 2005). They advocated a preventative care model approach towards Aboriginal problem gambling, aiming at incorporating aggressive community development strategies, greater Aboriginal specific community education and better service delivery outreach. Others such as Kinsella and Carrig (1998) had also explored intervention models for specifically dealing with Aboriginal problem gamblers. Through their work with the Riverland Aboriginal community in South Australia, they developed a pilot model of intervention that also included a heavy emphasis on community development and education and training.

In 2007, the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW conducted a review of gambling and its impacts on Aboriginal communities in NSW (Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW 2007). This report, aptly titled 'Pressing problems', found that Aboriginal people consulted during the project consistently identified gambling as a source of significant problems for individuals, families and communities (2007). Like the Victorian report (Department of Justice 2005), their focus and findings were very much based on the lack of relevant treatment services available to Aboriginal people in NSW. They also stressed the importance of the 'development and use of culturally appropriate methodologies to appropriately evaluate the impact and effectiveness of Aboriginal-specific and mainstream gambling activities and services for Aboriginal population groups' (AH & MRC of NSW 2007, p.4).

The most recent large scale survey work in the Northern Territory was carried out by researchers at Charles Darwin University in 2005. A telephone survey found that 73% of the NT general population participated in at least one gambling activity over the 12 month period preceding the survey. A further 63.8% of people reported participating in more than one gambling activity (Young et al. 2006). The survey found that 27% of the gambling population played poker machines. The survey also attempted to reach Aboriginal people; however, this proved problematic as it was a telephone survey that in effect neglected those people without a telephone, including many Aboriginal people. As a result, the Aboriginal respondents contacted were among the more well-off and urbanised sections of the Territory's population. The results were also problematic because the sample size of Aboriginal respondents was so small that the results appeared somewhat distorted. However, the survey interviewed 126 Aboriginal people and found that, of those people, 116 did not have a gambling problem (44 of these people were also non-gamblers) (Young et al. 2006). Of the 10 Aboriginal survey

respondents who did appear to have a gambling problem, 6 were female, aged 25–34 and worked full-time.

As a result of the problematic data on Aboriginal gambling, the researchers at CDU embarked on a qualitative scoping study (McDonald & Wombo 2006) to explore the issue further. The study found that casinos and social clubs provided welcoming environments for Aboriginal people to meet friends and family. The report found two negative impacts of regulated gambling; the first being that people were dissatisfied with poker machines because they lost their money and the second being that Aboriginal people on high incomes were subjected to constant pressure for money from family members who drink and gamble (McDonald & Wombo 2006). The report suggested that much more research needed to be conducted into the field of commercial Aboriginal gambling.

Other reports emerged, such as that commissioned by Gambling Research Australia, titled ‘Reported gambling problems in the Indigenous and total Australian population’ (Stevens & Young 2009). Stevens and Young (2009) assessed correlates of reported gambling problems of Aboriginal people in Australia. The project attempted to steer away from the individuated, problematising approaches of other research, although the extent to which this is achieved is questionable given the nature of the quantitative methodology and data used. The research project attempted to conceptualise the ‘problem of gambling’ rather than the ‘individual problem gambler’, concentrating on the problems and other lifestyle issues faced by Aboriginal people (Stevens & Young, 2009). Through the use of the four ABS data sets analysing gambling-related problems (the 2002 NATSISS, the 2004/5 NATSIHS, and the

2002 and 2006 GSS's<sup>33</sup>), the authors found that gambling problems were clearly situated with indicators of social breakdown and transgression, including witness to violence, abuse or violent crime, alcohol or drug related problems and trouble with the police. This finding, although not surprising, suggests that gambling problems could possibly be alleviated through initiatives that improve social and economic wellbeing.

Quite contrary to these quantitative approaches to Aboriginal gambling, Christie et al. (2009) published research based on a contextually grounded, qualitative approach. Using Aboriginal consultants, the research examined both regulated and unregulated gambling. They found that card games were widespread and that socially and economically they formed part of everyday life. Some people played for fun but others played to try to gain large sums of money for things that they were unable to save for. They also found that although there are some arguments over card playing, generally the money circulates and people look after each other (2009). The report also discussed regulated gambling, finding that venues in Darwin were good neutral spaces to meet. However, some negative impacts were that big city living was more expensive and that there were not such strong kin networks in town to protect people from the ill effects of regulated gambling (2009).

This recent research trend towards qualitative studies that incorporate both card games and commercial gambling, is reflected in research conducted by Breen, Hing and Gordon (2010). They attempt to move away from large scale quantitative research, using a qualitative approach to interview people. They interviewed 169 Indigenous people in North Queensland and the Bundjalung region, northern New South Wales. This detailed study took a public health approach that looked at risk and protective factors of both card games and commercial

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<sup>33</sup> National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS), and the General Social Survey (GSS)

gambling in two different regions. Through their work they have developed different Aboriginal gambler profiles. For the card games they identified two gambler types: social card gambler and committed card gambler, and for commercial gambling they identified three different profiles: social commercial gambler, committed commercial gambler and occasional binge commercial gambler (Breen et al. 2010). The authors found that:

*Committed gamblers faced many risks, had limited protection and experienced many and severe negative consequences from their gambling. In contrast, social gamblers were largely protected from many gambling risks by limiting their gambling and understanding that gambling was just a leisure pursuit. The occasional binge gambler faced the risks, protective factors and consequences of whatever mode they were gambling in at the time, although some longer-term consequences of gambling binges were felt (Breen et al. 2010, p.xxix).*

This report was perhaps the most detailed, and dedicated, look at Aboriginal gambling since some of the earlier anthropological studies. It highlights that there are serious issues that Aboriginal people face in relation to gambling, in both commercial gambling and card gambling. Concurrent to both my research and Breen et al.'s research, the Productivity Commission conducted another inquiry into gambling in Australia. However, this time there was no section on Aboriginal gambling; in fact, the issue was completely neglected throughout the entire report. The reason given by Gary Banks, (Chairman of the Commission) for this neglect of the issues Aboriginal people face in relation to gambling was 'that it was such a big issue in itself that the Commission couldn't possibly do it justice' (Pers. Comm. NAGS 2009). In the commissions own words: 'The Productivity Commission is the Australian Government's independent research and advisory body on a range of

economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians' (Productivity Commission website 2013). Not only was there no discussion of Aboriginal gambling as a social and economic issue but there was no recognition of the well researched fact that gambling, problem gambling, interventions and public health strategies to protect people from gambling related harm might be different for Aboriginal people (see Steane et al. 1998; Fogarty 2012, 2008, 2007; Breen et al. 2010; Stevens & Young 2010; Christie et al. 2009), was woefully neglectful.

Other research conducted by Christie and Young (2011), attempts to shift the discussion of Aboriginal gambling away from pathologised, individuated notions of gambling and away from the discourse framing of Aboriginal gambling as a significant public problem. They interestingly advocate an 'Aboriginal venue', that is, the 'production of urban space which has all the positive aspects of an urban casino but which is organised through the state imperative of negotiated community benefit rather than the profit motive of the capitalist enterprise' (Christie & Young 2011, p.265). Although this approach is an interesting speculation, it would seem that much more work needs to be done on Aboriginal gambling within urban spaces and venues before the rationale for specific forms of support can be ascertained.

In a closer look at the Northern Territory, and the impact of the Northern Territory Emergency Response policy of income management, is found in Lamb and Young's (2011) paper "Pushing buttons': an evaluation of the effect of Aboriginal income management on commercial gambling expenditure". The research looked at the association between poker machine revenue and the introduction of income management in clubs and hotels in

Katherine and Alice Springs. In both towns, the researchers found one pub where they could associate income management with a reduction in poker machine revenue. However, they believe that the weak or non-existent effect across the other venues may be influenced by other, unintended policy consequences of the Intervention.

Having provided an overview of current Northern Territory, and more broadly Australian research, on commercial gambling and the impact on Aboriginal people, the evidence suggests that some Aboriginal people do experience problems relating to gambling, particularly commercial gambling. However, most of the research does not delve deeply enough to gain any contextual understanding of how and why Aboriginal people gamble. There is no analysis of how Aboriginal people actually gamble within a venue. There is no real analysis of the systemic causes; rather the issue of gambling fits seamlessly with other research and media reports on the myriad of dysfunctions that Aboriginal people in Australia face. The following research attempts to begin to fill that gap.

International ethnographic research on commercial gambling in general has also attempted to bridge the gap within different social contexts. These approaches attempt to shift the focus of the medicalised, deficit model of current gambling research, to developing an understanding of the significant social dynamics of gambling. Schull's (2012) book, *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Los Vegas*, provides an ethnographic insight into the interaction between gamblers, gambling machines, machine design, commercial gambling environments and technologies. She describes 'the story of "problem gambling" [as] not just a story of problem gamblers; it is also a story of problem machines, problem environments, and problem business practices'. Lalander (2006) suggests that current gambling research has individualised gambling problems at the expense of understanding the social environment.

This led him to study regular gamblers interaction with Electronic Gaming Machines in Sweden and the relationships within the social and cultural environment. Korn, Gibbins and Azmier (2003) also explored the way social issues are framed and the direct impact on public policy debates. They advocate for a public health approach to gambling in Canada that shifts away from the focus on pathological and problem gambling towards a greater focus on the multiple biological, behavioral, social economic, cultural and policy determinants influencing gambling and health.

So, to shift the frame of this discussion away from the current ‘problem gambling’ focused approaches, to develop a broad understanding of the way remote Aboriginal people engage with commercial gambling in a busy, urban context– the following *vignette* will begin to outline the complexities.

*Amongst the computerised noise, flashing screens and clanging coins, she sits calmly, quietly, in the farthest corner of the warren of machines. Her focus is on watching each spin, hoping that this time the machine will finally pay its due. Her concentration is challenged only by the worry that at any moment a family member may walk around the corner, humbugging for money. Her husband sits beside her, although his attention is not on the poker machine, rather it is split between the keno screen across the room and the tickets in his hand. She sits with her handbag on her lap, comfortable in the monotonous rhythm of feeding \$1 coins from bag to machine. After each small win, \$4 here, \$9 there, she looks around making sure family are not watching, and cashes out, restocking what seems like a never-ending supply of dollar coins at the bottom of her bag. Eventually, though, she is found by an uncle and aunt. They stand behind her watching her play, then, somewhere in the mix of play, chatter, and a few seemingly insignificant hand signals, a transaction is brokered. She hands over \$4 to the*

*couple, who promptly disappear into the warren of machines. She and her husband move to a central position in the venue to settle down and play with the rest of their family. Her husband leaves to replenish his supply of keno tickets and she sits in a row of machines with three other women and one man. Two of them play, the others watch, all hoping that one of the machines will soon win, so that they too can be back in the game. Eventually, her never-ending supply of dollar coins dries' up. She too, becomes one of the bystanders, watching others play the machines, waiting for a win to get a stake and try again.*

The *vignette* highlights the different situation in the gambling venue as compared to the community gambling context outlined in Maningrida. The lens through which research is conducted and approached on commercial gambling is also very different. After a brief revision of the methodology used (see also Chapter 2), the next section will look at attendance at the gambling venue and discuss in detail how remote Aboriginal people engaged with poker machines. This research also attempted to understand when and what gambling became problematic for the Aboriginal people involved in this research.

### *Methodology*

As a result of wanting to expand the research from Maningrida to focus on the poker machines, many months were spent negotiating the prospects of conducting research in a particular venue in Darwin. The venue was eventually cooperative and agreed to allow me to conduct the research. However, there were two restrictions placed upon the work, firstly that I did not identify the venue and secondly, that I did not interrupt people's gambling at machines. The venue was identified as appropriate predominantly because many people in Maningrida reported spending considerable time here when they travelled to Darwin. People

said that they particularly enjoyed this venue as there was always lots of things going on, lots of people, air-conditioning, cheap food and free tea and coffee.

I attended the venue three times a day: 10.30am, 3.30pm, and 10.30pm for a month to collect this data. Throughout the four week period there are 8 missing days at the 10.30am time, 2 missing days at 3.30pm and 10 missing days at the 10.30pm time. Most of the missing data is a direct result of my spending many, many hours at the venue and having to miss one side of the day, or the other, as a result.

Unobtrusive observations were made throughout each of these times. The venue was divided up into three different sections to ensure more accuracy in the counts of people, as well as to determine if any patterns existed between the different sections. The count was attendance at machines, not attendance in the area or the venue. This meant those people sitting at or directly watching the poker machines were counted; however, those people sitting at the bar or walking around were not counted. Semi-structured ethnographic interviews with particular individuals, and family groups, were conducted in a relaxed manner both inside and outside the venue. The methodology used to generate some of the data replicated Foote's 1996 study of the casino in Darwin. This meant that I identified and counted people of Aboriginal descent from remote communities. The identification of people as Aboriginal and coming from remote communities was informed by the Aboriginal people I was working with. The following section looks at attendance at the venue.

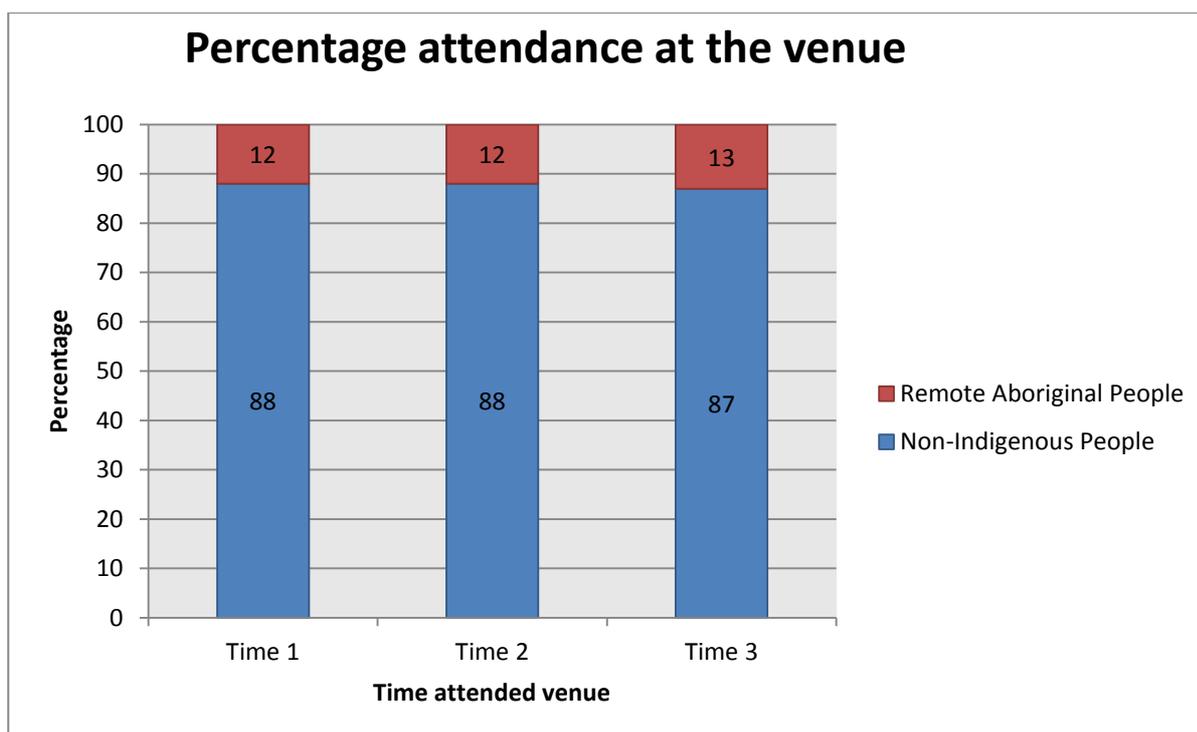
*Aboriginal people's attendance at the venue*

One of the very first aspects of the gambling that I looked at was attendance at the venue, especially as newspapers regularly report casinos and clubs, particularly in the Northern Territory, as being full of Aboriginal gamblers (see Toohey 2009). What Table 6.1 below shows is the average number of Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous people at machines at different times throughout the day. Time 1 represents the 10.30 am time, Time 2 depicts 3.30 pm and Time 3, 10.30 pm, when data was collected.

	10.30AM	3.30PM	10.30PM
Average number of non-Indigenous people per day	106	178	201
Average number of remote Aboriginal people per day	12	22	26

**Table 6.1: Average number of people attending the venue**

What is clear is that remote Aboriginal people made up a small proportion of the gamblers in this venue. Of course, the situation may have been different at other venues; however, it is worth reiterating that this was a very popular venue with both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people in the Territory. This data is exemplified in Figure 6.1 that depicts the percentage of people in the venue.



**Figure 6.1: Percentage attendance at the venue**

It is clear from Figure 6.1 above that the overwhelming majority of people attending machines at the venue were non-Indigenous people, approximately 88% of poker machine patrons. However, when looking at remote Aboriginal people's attendance at the poker machines the data shows that at 10.30am, on average Aboriginal people made up 12% of the total number of people at machines. Again at 3.30pm, on average, 12 % of people at machines were Aboriginal, and at 10.30 pm 13% of people at machines were Aboriginal.

Contextualizing these data in relation to the population of the Northern Territory is important. Aboriginal people make up approximately 30% of the population living in the Northern Territory (ABS 2009). However, my research is only looking at people over the age of 18 (which is the legal requirement for entry into gaming areas in Australia). So, to ascertain the Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory who were over 18 years old, the 2011 Australia Bureau of Statistics population estimates were used. Based on the percentage of the

general Australian Indigenous population under 15 years of age, I estimated that 25% of the adult (over 15) population of the Northern Territory is Aboriginal<sup>34</sup>. To return to the findings in Figure 6.1 on average, remote Aboriginal people make up 12% of the people at machines. Despite including 15-18 year olds, it is clear that Aboriginal people are under-represented as a percentage of the Northern Territory population at this venue. Furthermore, there is at present no evidence at all concerning the proportion of Aboriginal patrons at venues who could be classified as ‘problem gamblers’. Available data thus paint a distinctly different picture from that which is represented in the media, for example *The Australian* newspaper’s Paul Toohey, who describes venues in Darwin ‘full of chronically-addicted Indigenous gamblers’ (Toohey 2009).

However, what this data does not demonstrate is that in the majority of cases, the remote Aboriginal people counted each day and each time at the venue were the same people; there was very little turn-over. Many people visiting from remote areas would spend all day and possibly all night at the venue, and most would frequent the venue numerous times a week, daily in most cases. People would come to the venue repeatedly until no-one in the family had any money left.

To investigate further Aboriginal people’s engagement with the venue, the following section will provide a comparison study with Foote’s 1996 research as it is the only other study that is of a similar structure and in which the venue is comparable. Foote’s (1996) research was conducted in the casino in Darwin. The research has similar methodology, and I would suggest that the venues used to collect the data are comparable. Comparing Foote’s

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<sup>34</sup> These figures are not exact because the ABS sources that only calculated the population under 15 years of age, therefore this data includes people 15-18 year olds.

attendance data with this data may reveal general trends in Aboriginal people's attendance at poker machines over time, as the research was conducted 12 years apart.

To begin, Foote's (1996) overall Aboriginal poker machine attendance found a daily mean of 37.9 people. In comparison, my research found a daily mean of 46 remote Aboriginal people that attended poker machines. Foote (1996) collected data at 3 pm each day and found an average daily mean of 14.1 Aboriginal people; however, this research found the average daily mean at this time was 22 Aboriginal people. Foote's results at 11 pm found 23.8 Aboriginal people attended poker machines, in comparison this research found at 10.30 pm, 26 Aboriginal people.

In effect, the average daily number of Aboriginal people attending the venue was greater in this research by approximately 8 people per day, an overall increase of 17.4% over a period of 12 years. However, this increase is particularly evident at the 3/3.30pm time that found a 64% increase. As is the case with any quantitative data collected, there are contextual issues that arise that may have impacted on the data. During my research, the venue was part of the way through major renovations at the time the fieldwork was conducted, so there were perhaps a lower number of patrons than usual. There were no fewer poker machines – rather the venue was in a state of flux, so this perhaps deterred people from coming.

The other potential impact on the data was the season; my research was conducted in the dry season when mobility was high whereas Foote's research was conducted in the wet season. The numbers of remote gamblers may not be so significant over the wet season months, which would explain why Foote reported lower numbers. The research may simply be measuring seasonal increases.

No significant conclusions can be made about the increase witnessed in the number of Aboriginal poker machine players over the 12 years: however, it would be reasonable to suggest that the increase was a result of both seasonal factors, as well as a general increase in Aboriginal population and players over time. However, what is highlighted is that further research needs to be conducted to interpret trends in attendance at the venue.

What the research suggests so far is that remote Aboriginal people were engaging in commercial gambling. The following section of this chapter will examine the way that people use poker machines and the potential problems that they face in relation to commercial gambling.

### *Playing the pokies*

The previous chapters described card games in Maningrida as a way in which Aboriginal people in remote Aboriginal communities accrue social, economic and political capital. In order to gain a deeper insight into how and why remote Aboriginal people play poker machines, it seems fitting to frame the analysis of poker machines in the same way. The following sections of this chapter will discuss the extent to which Aboriginal people accrue social, economic and political capital from poker machine play.

### *The social life of poker machine play*

From entering the venue to sitting at machines, Aboriginal people's engagement with the venue was a collective one. Throughout the entire fieldwork period none of the Aboriginal

people involved in this research entered the venue by themselves, everyone always came with family. This is very different from observations of many non-Indigenous people who came to the venue alone. Despite Aboriginal people in other reports describing these gambling venues as places where they felt very comfortable, this research found that for people from Maningrida there was a definite mentality of 'safety in numbers' when entering the venue. People often said that they sometimes found it 'scary' or 'intimidating' going past the bouncers at the entrance to the venue, and that it was often quite overwhelming walking in to all the people and noise of machines.

It was also always very important for people to see who else was in the venue. People would often walk around the whole venue before finding machines to sit at. This would mitigate any potential inter-community tensions as groups would often position themselves as far away as possible from other family groups. Once people were inside the venue and had determined who else was inside, they appeared to relax.

Just as people entered the venue together, they most often stayed in groups once inside the venue at the machines. People played the poker machines primarily as a collective group. It was extremely rare to see a remote Aboriginal person playing poker machines by themselves. It was just as common to see two or three people playing a machine together, as it was upwards of 8 or 9 people. Often when two or three people played, they would all concentrate on the one machine. When there was more than two or three players, people tended to sit side by side in a row, all chatting and engaged in each other's play. As the venue was very large, big family groups would often take up a full bank of poker machines. For example, if you had a row of 6 machines, often they would be taken by one family group or one community group.

The communal approach to playing poker machines could be viewed on the surface as an example of how strong networks among Aboriginal families work to regulate the poker machine gambling, in a very similar way to the social regulation of card games. However, this close proximity to family was actually quite fraught. Unlike card games that were regulated on a relational basis, poker machine play was much more a case of people sticking close to their family. The card games sat within the community social structure allowing the relationships to build and gain capital. However, poker machine play was an example of people using social relationships and previously built social capital as a way to manoeuvre within this capitalistic, individualised form of gambling and entertainment. In contrast to many non-Indigenous gamblers in the venue who gambled alone, the Aboriginal people identified in this research relied on social relationships to negotiate the venue.

### *Politics of commercial gambling*

There were many venues in Darwin where Aboriginal people were not made to feel welcome, which was one reason why people were dependant on existing social relationships. Through interviews, it became clear that there was a hierarchy in the types of venues that remote people attended in relation to how welcome and comfortable they were made to feel. At the top were select local clubs and hotels that were regularly frequented by Aboriginal people. A few select clubs were known hang-outs for remote people when they come into Darwin and specific clubs were sometimes 'colonised' by particular communities, for example the Karama Tavern was very popular with people from Maningrida. However, most venues, like the one that this research was conducted in, were complex, intercultural spaces. They were regularly attended by both Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous people. It should also be

noted that there were venues in Darwin where Aboriginal people were made to feel distinctly unwelcome and that were rarely attended by Aboriginal people, if at all<sup>35</sup>.

What these findings suggest is that the choices that people made in relation to what venue they attended were based on inter-racial politics, as well as inter-group politics. People from Maningrida would not attend a venue that firstly, made Aboriginal people feel unwelcome, and secondly, where the majority of people attending were from a different Aboriginal community. The inter-racial and inter-community politics dictated to a large extent people from Maningrida's choice of venue, as well their decision to stay and play together once in the venue.

The tensions apparent in people's choice of venue contributed to the heavy reliance people had on each other when interacting in the venue. The dependence on the social relationships continued with people's interaction with poker machines, as the relationships provided a means to acquire economic capital within the venue. Again this situation was quite different to the card games where people relied, for the most part, on the game to acquire economic capital. On the other hand, with poker machines people relied on each other to be able to continue to fund their play, where wins were few and far between.

Dealing with 'humbug'<sup>36</sup> was a significant part of remote Aboriginal people's experience within the venue. Requests for money from family and through kin-based relationships were regular. The venue disliked this behaviour as they viewed it as a type of bullying and a negative interruption of people's gambling experience, so security within the venue would sometimes intervene if repeated requests for money were observed. This meant that often the

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<sup>35</sup> People were often excluded on the basis of dress codes. However, these dress codes often appeared to be at the discretion of the venue. For example, 'no thongs' often meant no thongs for 'certain' people.

<sup>36</sup> People would respond to 'humbug' or requests for money based on inter-familial relationships.

request for cash came in very subtle ways, sometimes nothing more than a slight hand signal to request cash. Although ‘humbug’ was a daily part of life in the community, in the venue the ‘humbug’ could become quite insidious and relentless for people.

In part, this was because the exchange was expected and because people would lose the money that they had been given so quickly, it was soon met by another request. However, not responding to, or avoiding ‘humbug’ was viewed as detrimental to people’s social relationships. If people attempted to avoid ‘humbug’ either by trying to gamble by themselves in a separate part of the venue, or being deceptive about how much money they had was regularly noted by people as that person being ‘greedy’. It was seen as very problematic behaviour –that particular individual was neglecting their social responsibilities. This point is specifically relevant to the discussion in Chapter 7 about Aboriginal people’s understandings of ‘problem gambling’.

Where remote Aboriginal people did benefit socially from engaging in commercial gambling was when a person won a large amount of money. Similarly, the venue was a popular place to be seen, it implied a certain level of social standing to attend the venue. When talking to people in Maningrida, men in particular would report that they didn’t play cards as it was a petty type of gambling, instead they preferred poker machine gambling, or as one man stated *‘the place where the big fish play’* (T\_\_\_ 27.2.2007). Particularly among men in the community, there was a general view that poker machine gambling was a superior form of gambling. When entering the venue, people could choose to sign up to become a loyalty club member – to acquire one of these cards appealed to both men and women in the community as it was a clear representation of status. Women interviewed throughout the research were much more ambivalent about what type of gambling they preferred. They enjoyed playing

cards in Maningrida, but when going to town, they loved to go to particular venues and play the poker machines.

### *Gender*

Despite many men in Maningrida stating that they preferred the casino or club gambling, one of the stark findings of this research was that gambling, for remote Aboriginal people, appears to be very much a female dominated activity. Data collected from the gambling venue found that 81% of Aboriginal people at machines were female. Time of day or particular day of the week appears to have no effect on these numbers at all. This data correlates with data collected from Maningrida that found that 87% of the card players were female. What is very interesting to note here is that in Foote's 1996 Darwin casino work, the gender breakdown was 66.8% Aboriginal women and 33.2% Aboriginal men at machines. This increase in the number of women at machines over the 12 year period is significant because seasonal changes should not impact on the gender of the players, so this is more likely to represent a true increase over time.

Finlayson (1991) through her literature review of gender roles in Aboriginal society found that writers concentrated on discussing men and women as groups who articulate with each other, en masse, in specific ways, rather than analysing the dimensions of gender significant in everyday life. Keeping this in mind, it would be easy, given the above statistics, to present gambling as a women's activity. However, it is much more complex. Men are vital players in the social dynamic around both card games and poker machines. To refer back to the different levels of gaming regulation in the card games in Maningrida (see Figure 4.2), from the Second Level up, there was in almost all cases, one male player present at each game.

And most often the eldest male, or male of greatest social standing, would sit on a flour tin, while all the women would sit on the ground. In the case of the gambling venue, most of the men interviewed attended the venue with their wives. Observations at the venue found that groups of women only would attend the venue, but throughout the fieldwork period I did not see a group of men turn up – always they were with women.

Despite these results, the gender disparity was not strikingly obvious. While conducting the research had the gender of players not been recorded, I may not have noticed it to be such a female dominated activity. Much more detailed research needs to look at this issue of Aboriginal gambling and gender, and as Finlayson suggests, the analysis needs to focus on the interplay and dynamic between gender and gambling, as opposed to simply if and why more female Aboriginal people are gambling than male.

The picture that starts to develop of the poker machine gambling is different to card games. The players visiting the gambling venue are heavily reliant on their social relationships and are acutely aware of inter-racial and inter-community politics both externally and internally of the venue. Reliance on these relationships can be detrimental in relation to potential ‘humbag’ from others at the venue; however, it is also protective in a sense that people are secure within the venue with lots of family around them, and this enables people to have fun and relax. What has not been discussed yet is how people engage with machines and money inside the venue. The following section will detail these interactions in the gambling venue.

*Machines and cash*

Most remote Aboriginal people attending the venue would only play the lowest denomination poker machines (1c and 2c machines). Only three times over the period of a month did I witness remote Aboriginal people playing higher denomination machines. In addition to this, the level of people's betting on the machine was much closer to the minimum bet than the maximum bet. This occurred for two reasons; firstly, that people would try to make their money last longer, and secondly, because most Aboriginal people only played with \$1 coins, one dollar at a time.

The way Aboriginal people gambled highlighted just how public the machines actually are. People can walk past any machine and see how much is actually on the machine. For many remote Aboriginal people only playing one dollar at a time and constantly cashing out any winning, minimised 'humbug'. When people played, if they had a \$50 note, for example, they would put the note into the note acceptor, spin once and then press cash out. All the \$1 coins would then go into a handbag, pocket or wherever you could carry them in a hidden location and then the person would play dollar by dollar. The same thing would happen if someone won any amount on a spin, they would cash out immediately and the coins would be hidden out of sight. No amount of money would ever sit on the machine. This way of gambling made it extremely difficult to gauge a person's expenditure on the machines.

When accessing cash in the venue, the majority of remote Aboriginal people were not using ATMs at the venue. People were bringing cash in. People did this because accessing the ATMs left the person open to being 'humbled' by family for money as people would know you had cash. Instead people preferred to withdraw cash prior to coming to the venue.

Others, if they did not bring the money in, would only access the ATM once at the beginning of their time in the venue and would avoid going back to the machine. Some people would even lie about having an ATM card on them.

Like most non-Indigenous people, remote Aboriginal people come to the venue in the hope of winning money! There was significant excitement generated about the prospect of winning through the poker machines. However realistically, people were aware that their potential to actually generate money was significantly greater when playing cards. The most I saw anyone win at the poker machines was around \$800; however, people reported winning a few thousand, or knowing someone who had won a large amount. The people observed during this research were betting very small amounts of money, which significantly reduced their chances of winning large amounts of money.

As the result of reports such as 'Little children are sacred' (Wild & Anderson 2007), that suggested that significant amounts of community money was taken from card games and put through poker machines, one of the most frequently asked questions about this research was, is gambling the driver for mobility from remote communities? Are remote people going to urban centres, like Darwin, with the main purpose of gambling? Is money being taken from card games and put through poker machines?

The fieldwork conducted in both Maningrida and the gambling venue found that gambling was not the driver for mobility from remote communities to urban centres. In every case I observed of people leaving the community and people attending the gambling venue, there was a significant other reason for them being in town, most often for hospital visits, meetings and appointments. Never once did anyone say to me that they were leaving Maningrida to

gamble or visit the casino or a club. This could be put down to people hiding the fact that they were going to gamble; however, gambling in a venue, particularly the casino, did not have the stigma attached to it as card games did. People talked very openly about commercial gambling. In many cases they were proud of the experience and openly talked about any commercial gambling they had engaged in when they arrived back to the community.

The research did find that people who left the community would in most cases visit a gambling venue, in particular the casino, during their visit to Darwin. Although gambling was not the initial driver for the mobility, it was definitely an activity that people engaged with when they arrived at an urban area. When talking to people in the venue, these were some of the reasons given for the mobility:

*My daughter, she is having a baby in 2 weeks and we have to come to Darwin one month before baby is due so she can see doctor. I come to escort her. She is tired and sleeps a lot so I am looking for something fun to do – that is why I come to the \_\_\_\_ [the venue] (V\_\_\_\_ 14.10.2008).*

A man who was also attending the venue stated:

*I come to Darwin for meeting at Government building. Big meeting with big mob government (R\_\_\_\_ 22.10.2008).*

Another lady said:

*I am a teacher at \_\_\_\_\_ school. I teach there for 20 years now and have long service leave. I came to Darwin to see my sister who lives here for 2 years now. My husband and I are taking a holiday. We are tired of community politics. We want a break so we came to visit my sister for a couple of months. My daughter who now lives \_\_\_\_\_ is also coming to Darwin to visit us (VL \_\_\_\_ 8.10.2008).*

These reasons were very common. In contextualising this information it is important to point out that the people interviewed in this research were from very remote communities, so these findings may not be applicable to Aboriginal people that come from communities much closer to urban centres and poker machines. Due to the proximity of these communities to the venues it may be more likely that commercial gambling could be a driver of mobility (Lamb & Young 2011).

The other issue in relation to the potential economic implications of mobility in relation to gambling was the anecdotal evidence that suggested that remote Aboriginal people, in a highly organised, quasi-corporate manner are taking winnings from card games in remote communities to urban centres to put through poker machines (see McDonald & Wombo 2006). This research has found no evidence of this occurring in Maningrida. As stated in Chapter 4, it was the Level 4 card games that offered the greatest opportunity to win a large amount of money. When people won this money, they had the intention of spending that money on something significant like a car or a boat, although, in most cases at least some of the money would be given to kin prior to leaving the community.

The major point at which this research found that gambling had a significant impact on mobility was in regard to people returning to their community. Gambling, specifically poker machine gambling, often played a significant part in impacting on the length of time people spent in the urban centre as a result of not having the money to return to their community. The following quotes are from people who found themselves in this situation:

*We bin here for long time. No more money for Air North flight. We waiting, maybe next week we get some money. Those machines, they taking all our money! (R\_\_ 18.11.2007)*

*I am waiting for my family to send me money to get home. I bin call'n and call'n all the time. I got no money any more. All gone. I been worken really hard to win, to get back to my family but I have no good luck any more. So now I wait till that mob send me rupiah for comin' home' (VR \_\_ 12.10.2008).*

*I got no money to get home. I stay here, maybe someone give me money or truck to get home (J\_\_ 5.5.2006).*

Despite these people's situations, they were all in good spirits and relatively unfazed by the pending homelessness that they faced. Many people, in similar circumstances to those outlined above would end up in the 'long-grass' for a period of time, or be staying with 'relatives' in overcrowded housing in Darwin. Ironically, after sustained periods of homelessness (or rather, time in the 'long-grass') people were often no longer able to get entry into venues because of dress standards and would begin to play cards as a way to raise the revenue to get home. As described in the previous chapter, very little money is needed to

begin at the lowest level of the games, and by slowly, gradually winning and moving up the different levels of the games, an individual actually has a realistic chance of turning a small amount of money into enough to get back to their community.

Of all the findings, the inability of people to return to their communities as a result of losing their money in commercial gambling venues was reported as a major impact of gambling on the lives of remote Aboriginal people. Throughout this research I interviewed many people in various stages of the situations described above. The impact on the lives of these people is significant. As homeless Aboriginal people sleeping rough in Darwin's parks and bush spaces, they become part of the 'long-grass problem' (see Fisher 2012). Fisher (2012) outlines similar findings in his paper 'Running amok or just sleeping rough?' where he analyses the public discourse surrounding 'long-grass people'. He too found that the Darwin, essentially non-Indigenous, public perception was that Aboriginal people were coming in from remote communities to drink and run amok. However, in reality, people were just as often coming into Darwin for clinic visits, to see relatives, to act in their capacity as organisational board members, or to flee trouble in their families or home communities (Fisher 2012). He also highlights the serious risks of self-harm, psychological trauma, and chronic illness that long-grass camping often entails for the campers themselves.

The impact on communities, on the families of those people who are 'stuck' in Darwin for long periods of time is also significant. Holmes and McRae-Williams (2008) found in their study of the long-grass population, that half of the participants (n= 62/122) stayed in the long-grass for up to two months. They reported that many of the 'long-grass' population had a deep sadness associated with separation from kin and country. This was also commonly reported to me through the fieldwork period in Maningrida – that family in Maningrida would

be very worried about and greatly miss family members who were stuck in Darwin. In addition to being a constant point of concern, significant financial pressure was also put on family members in Maningrida. Often this time in the long-grass resulted in a loss of an income to a family in Maningrida while the person was away, and sometimes, depending on how long they were gone, there was also a risk that they would not have a job to return too. Also, there was a significant increase in terms of household responsibilities left to those people in Maningrida as a result of people being stuck in Darwin.

Many of the impacts of homelessness associated with gambling were unquantifiable. Particularly in relation to the impact of violence people are exposed to (particularly women) in the long-grass, and the stress placed on the family members left with the responsibilities in Maningrida. When talking to remote Aboriginal people in the gambling venue about what problems they saw or felt in relation to poker machine gambling, or what the negative things were that they experienced, the main response was that people would leave the venue having lost all their money, often very late at night and have no money to pay for a bus or a taxi home. People were very concerned for their safety walking home in the dark.

### *Alcohol*

This final section of research data collected from the venue will discuss the very clear differences in motivations for going to the venue between gamblers and drinkers. Just as the research found that in card games where drinking alcohol around games was strongly discouraged, a similar situation occurred in the gambling venue. Those people who were gambling on a regular basis were not drinking in the venue. In contrast, those people who came in on a Friday or Saturday night, for example, had different motivations (similarly with

the non-Indigenous population of the venue) – they were attending the venue for a social outing, for drinks and gambling. However, in the majority of cases these people did not come back. They attended the venue for one night, maybe two. Aside from the ‘party’ population who came to the venues on the weekends, for the remote Aboriginal people who attended the venue on a regular basis, I observed no consumption of alcohol at all.

It was also interesting that in two cases, men who attended the venue regularly were reformed drinkers. It was explained to me that they didn’t drink any more, instead they came to the venue to play poker machines and keno with their wives. For these two couples, gambling was viewed as an alternative, and as the women explained, a safer alternative to drinking.

After a comprehensive review of the recent literature relating to Aboriginal gambling and problem gambling, it is clear that the literature is heavily focused on commercial gambling and problems associated with gambling. Very little information actually stems from Aboriginal perspectives, or centres around the way Aboriginal people actually gamble. This research found that although commercial gambling is an activity that remote Aboriginal people do engage in and do enjoy, it does not offer the same potential as the card games for people to accrue social, political and economic capital. There was a distinct reliance on social relationships within the venue, and the efforts and attempts made by people to continue to gamble in groups (despite the individualised nature of poker machines) was significant. Aside from winning a large sum of money, the economic benefits for remote Aboriginal people of attending the venue are next to none. The information gathered through this fieldwork has significant implications in terms of the development of relevant harm-minimisation strategies. Chapter 7 will explore understandings of what problem gambling is from the perspective of Aboriginal people living in remote areas. The chapter will also discuss the

disjuncture between mainstream and Aboriginal understandings of 'problem gambling'.

Following this, I will detail current harm-minimisation strategies and contrast those to the way in which remote Aboriginal people actually gamble.

## Chapter 7

### Problem gambling

This chapter uses the ethnographic data from the previous chapters and situates that knowledge within current understandings of problem gambling and harm-minimisation parameters with the objective of making future policy development relevant to remote Aboriginal people. The chapter also briefly discusses current Aboriginal-specific gambling programs and suggests an approach, developed from Aboriginal understandings of gambling and problems relating to gambling, that could usefully inform future public health messages and harm-minimisation strategies relevant to Aboriginal people, particularly in the remote context.

The previous chapters focused on both card games played in Maningrida and poker machines played in a commercial gambling venue in Darwin. The research found that card games played a pivotal role in community life, with a significant proportion of the community engaging in card games at any one time. The card games were a means by which Aboriginal people could gain significant social, economic and political capital. However, this is tempered by the potential negative consequences of card games, particularly on family cohesion, education and employment. When looking at poker machine gambling, the research found that commercial gambling did not provide people with the same opportunities to acquire social, economic or political capital. The gambling venue, although fun and entertaining for people, was fraught with tensions. These included tensions between the individualised nature of the poker machines, and the collective way that Aboriginal people played, as well as racial and inter-community tensions that influenced people's choices.

However, what has not been specifically discussed throughout the thesis is ‘problem gambling’ in relation to Aboriginal people. This has been intentional. I wanted to present the context in which remote Aboriginal people live their lives and the research findings, outside of the problematising discourse of problem gambling. This is a global issue, as Belanger (2006, p. 19) states in respect to the Canadian context: ‘the literature on gaming is problematic, owing to its focus on problem and pathological gaming to the detriment of the economic, social, and political dynamics associated with First Nations gaming’.

However, as derived from the evidence of this thesis, it is clear that there are problems associated with gambling for Aboriginal people and communities. Although, the way problems are defined and viewed is based on different understandings and different associated values. The following section will look at definitions of ‘problem gambling’ used internationally to exemplify ‘problem gambling’ as a socially defined construct. Using these different understandings provides a platform to position Aboriginal understandings of when gambling becomes a problem.

#### *‘Problem gambling’ around the world*

To begin this overview of how ‘problem gambling’ is defined in certain countries around the world, it is important to revisit the nationally accepted definition in Australia of what ‘problem gambling’ is. Problem gambling is defined in Australia as characterised by difficulties in limiting money and/or time spent on gambling which leads to adverse consequences for the gambler, others, or for the community (Neal, Delfabbro & O’Neil 2005).

The British Gambling Commission (2001) defines ‘problem gambling’ as gambling to a degree that compromises, disrupts or damages family, personal or recreational pursuits. This is similar to the definition offered by the New Zealand National Research Council that defines ‘problem gambling’ as gambling behaviour that results in any harmful effects to the gambler, his or her family, significant others, friends, and co-workers (National Research Council 1999, p 21). However, the Canadian Public Health Association defines ‘problem gambling’ in a more medicalised way, as a progressive disorder characterized by a) continuous or periodic loss of control over gambling; b) preoccupation with gambling and money with which to gamble; c) irrational thinking; d) continuation of the activity despite adverse consequences (Canadian Public Health Association 2000).

These understandings of ‘problem gambling’ represent different approaches and understandings of different social contexts. As Per Binde (2009) describes:

*Gambling and problem gambling is conceptualized in different ways across historical periods and societies, and researchers should be aware of how their activities relate to these conceptualizations. Scientists may feel that they work perfectly objectively and detached from moral and political contexts, but in reality all science is framed and influenced by society and culture at large; the fruits of research are not only scientific but also social (Binde 2009, p.67).*

The concept of ‘problem gambling’ and how it uniquely relates to Aboriginal people is something that has been of little focus in previous research. In the broader Indigenous affairs discourse, it is most often assumed that Aboriginal people experience the ‘problem’ of

gambling the same way as non-Indigenous people do. However, this is not necessarily the case. As Neal et al. (2005) suggest:

*One also needs to consider the confounding effects of socio-economic status and culture in any statistical or conceptual analysis of Indigenous gambling, and not assume that the problems arising for Indigenous gamblers are necessarily the same as those incurred by non-Indigenous, middle-class Australians (e.g., loss of employment, visiting high interest lenders, cashing stocks and bonds (Neal et al. 2005, p. 64).*

This issue is compounded by large scale prevalence studies that have been conducted around the world suggesting that Indigenous groups have higher gambling involvement rates and higher prevalence of problem gambling (Breen and Gainsbury 2012). For example Wardman et al. (2001) found that the North American Aboriginal population has a problem gambling behaviour rate 2.2 to 15.69 times higher than the non-Aboriginal population. In New Zealand, Walker et al. (2011) found that Maori and Pacific peoples were more than twice as likely to be frequent, continuous gamblers than people of European and other ethnicities. However, these studies do not tell us how problems are experienced and in what ways they might be different from non-Indigenous communities in different social contexts.

The issue in Australia has been that there is research that suggests that Aboriginal understandings are different (see Steane et al. 1998, Fogarty 2008, 2012, Brady 2004, Breen et al. 2010), however, by not discussing how, or defining the ways Aboriginal people perceive problems with gambling, it allows the issue to be easily sidelined, which is effectively what happened in the 2010 Productivity Commission Inquiry into the gambling industry (see Chapter 6 for further details).

By situating the evidence from the ethnographic fieldwork in relation to the current Australian definition, differences in understandings are apparent. The evidence from this research suggests that both card game and poker machine gambling were centered and structured around social relationships. While gambling, the people involved in this research were either contributing to, or dependent on, social relationships. For the Aboriginal people involved in this research, neither their poker machine gambling nor card games were individuated.

For many people in Maningrida, a substantial proportion of daily life was spent playing cards. For many people who attended the gambling venue, a significant proportion of their day or week could be spent at the venue. People were not concerned with the concept of time; time was not something that was measured, it was not limited, nor was it spent. Each day was a process, a part of life. As often as a person would spend day after day, week after week gambling, they would then just stop. Entering in and out of heavy gambling periods was common; it was how people gambled.

Similarly, with money, the people who were involved in this research, for the most part were not concerned with limiting their expenditure. The vast majority of people and households had extremely low incomes. As discussed in Chapter 4, the way people viewed and spent money was different from non-Indigenous Australians. Spending all your money at a card game was also less problematic, because if another family member from your household won, then you would still be assured food. This is however, where poker machine gambling was more problematic. The money was gone.

This is exemplified in an old lady's comment:

*Those machines take all my money, never stop, that money is all gone. That money is not going back to the community (D\_\_\_ 17.1.2007).*

Another man said:

*Those machines are a real problem. They take all the community money. The money is not going round and round like in card games (PD\_\_\_ 4.9.2007).*

People viewed the way the machines functioned as problematic, not their own expenditure. However, where people in Maningrida and people within the venue did view someone as having a 'problem' was when the gambling impacted on the social relationships and obligations. Probably the most significant example of this is when a mother was not meeting her obligations to look after her child as a result of gambling (see Chapter 3 and 5 for detailed examples). The 'problem' was not necessarily the impact on the child, rather that the mother had not met her obligations within those structured social relationships.

Problems with gambling, from the perspective of the remote Aboriginal people involved in this research, were most often identified when the gambling became individuated. That is, when people were not meeting their social responsibilities. The following were examples of behaviours around card games that were viewed as problematic to people in Maningrida.

Problematic behaviour was observed if an individual did any or all of the following:

- a) began to attend card games by themselves, particularly night games

- b) began to play with particular groups that perhaps your family would not normally play with
- c) began to take winnings out of a game immediately without giving people a chance to win it back.

Similarly, with poker machine gambling, the following were examples of behaviour that people saw as highly problematic. If an individual:

- a) 'disappeared' in the venue and began to play the machines by themselves
- b) attended a venue by themselves
- c) and/or was not 'sharing' their winnings (that is, neglecting their obligations)

When an individual began to develop a problem with gambling it was a relational problem in terms of neglecting their familiar and kin based obligations. This is not to say that people did not experience problems as a result of losing all their money, or spend detrimental amounts of time gambling (as outlined in Chapter 6). They did. However, the impact and the problem lay in how the individual had responded and treated others around them. Aboriginal people defined 'problem gambling' *as a person neglecting or rejecting social relationships and obligations as a result of gambling.*

This definition is important in the practical sense of developing relevant harm-minimisation strategies, but also more broadly, that the difference between mainstream Australian definitions and Aboriginal understandings are defined. Once differences are recognised, it provides a platform from which to begin to build the knowledge base that then informs the way society responds to the problems identified.

The other major contrast in how people viewed problems in Maningrida, was that people did not view their own behaviour as problematic. Card games were normalised within the daily context of community life. Unless an individual publicly started to lose social capital (through neglecting or rejecting social relationships and obligations), gambling was not viewed as problematic, despite the potentially negative consequences being experienced. This was similar in the context of the gambling venue. For the most part, people would discuss other people's behavior as problematic. This has major implications for counseling approaches that focus on the individual and are reflective in nature. This was briefly mentioned by a counseling service provider in the national consultations for the development of the national definition of 'problem gambling':

*The service has had some success in working with Indigenous clients, most of whom are extended family members affected by another's gambling. She indicated that there was reluctance to access gambling services per se, and she identified the view that this is culturally due to "not letting white people mess with your head". The point was made quite forcefully at the Gambler's Help focus group that counsellors should not talk to Indigenous persons about their gambling problems 'up-front' (Neal et al. 2005 p.177).*

To understand gambling as different has repercussions in terms of how gambling and problems are discussed and measured in society. Given the differences in how 'problem gambling' is defined, the standard instruments for measuring gambling harm may also be culturally problematic. The following section will discuss the gambling screens used in prevalence studies to determine the impact of gambling on society. To do this, the research will use the Canadian Problem Gambling Index as a heuristic device to outline where

potential problems fall when using these types of instruments in the remote Aboriginal context.

### *Gambling screens*

Developed around accepted definitions and understandings of gambling problems, are the numerous gambling screens that are used to determine ‘problem gambling’ in a clinical setting, as well the prevalence of ‘problem gambling’ in society more broadly. However, these screens, and the prevalence studies that use these instruments provide ‘an illusion of truth or objectivity that conceals inherent ambiguities and contradictions that tend not to find their way into public debate’ (Young 2012, p.6). In addition to this, if Aboriginal people living in remote communities have different understandings of ‘problem gambling’ then these instruments will potentially provide a very inaccurate representation of problems experienced as a result of gambling. This has been identified by Neal et al. (2005) in their discussion of the applicability of these indexes to particular cross-cultural groups in society:

*Items in some scales may be less applicable for specific subgroups. Problematic examples include borrowing items, those referring to employment, marital relations and specific forms of financial transactions. These items may not be entirely suitable for administration to older samples, indigenous people, or women from more patriarchal cultures (Neal et al. 2005, xi).*

To exemplify this point in the remote Aboriginal context, Figure 7.1 below shows the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI). These are the questions that are asked of an individual to determine if they have a problem with gambling.

**In the last 12 months how often have you  
(or have for item 7):**

1. Bet more than you could really afford to lose?
2. Needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?
3. Gone back another day to try and win back the money you lost?
4. Borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble?
5. Felt that you might have a problem with gambling?
6. Felt that gambling has caused you health problems, including stress and anxiety?
7. People criticized your betting or told you that you have a gambling problem, whether or not you thought it was true?
8. Felt your gambling has caused financial problems for you or your household?
9. Felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?

**Scoring:**

0 = Never, 1 = Sometimes, 2 = Most of the time, 3 = Almost always.

**Scores of 8 or more are deemed to indicate problem gambling.**

([http://www.olgr.nsw.gov.au/gaming\\_rgf\\_gambling\\_index.asp](http://www.olgr.nsw.gov.au/gaming_rgf_gambling_index.asp), visited 10.6.2013)

**Figure 7.1: The criteria for the CPGI used to determine a gambling problem**

The following section will reflect on the criteria in Figure 7.1 within the context of the lived experiences of the Aboriginal people involved in this research, particularly in relation to card games. Using each of the questions, and providing a small insight into how the games work, or people's perceptions, will highlight how problematic these questions may be when applied in a cross-cultural setting. The following are reflections on each question of the CPGI and how it relates to the findings of this research.

1. **Bet more than you could really afford to lose?** The people involved in this research almost always bet all the money they had on them at the time, in both card games and

poker machines. People were so poor that they really could not ‘afford’ to lose any of their money<sup>37</sup>; however, card games were a way to pool money through households for basic food<sup>38</sup>. Similarly, the higher level games pooled significant amounts of money for higher value items.

2. **Needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?** People would sometimes work their way up the levels of games in the community, from games with lower amounts of money to higher expenditure games. This did induce excitement; however, it was not that people needed to gamble with larger amounts of money– it was that this was an opportunity socially, economically and politically to increase monetary wealth and social standing. With the poker machines, people almost always bet the minimum bet.
3. **Gone back another day to try to win back the money you lost?** With both the card games and poker machines gambling, people almost always gambled for numerous days on end, although this was not necessarily chasing losses as such. This was the way that people played. In relation to poker machines, people would attend the venue daily, even if they did not have any money. People lived in the hope that a family member may win and provide them with a chance to play again.
4. **Borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble?** Family members would often prop up other members in a card game until they got themselves back in a position to play for themselves. Essentially it was borrowed money based on reciprocal relationships. However, at the poker machines, people regularly ‘humbugged’ money off family to play. Most people involved in the research did not have access to or qualify for, credit cards or loans.

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<sup>37</sup> The average weekly income of an Aboriginal person living in a very remote area was \$329 (compared to \$812 for a non-Indigenous person living in a very remote area) (ABS 2006a).

<sup>38</sup> Almost half (49%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households earn an income in the bottom quarter of the national average. In 2006, the average weekly household income for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (\$460) was only 62% that of non-Indigenous people (\$740) (ABS 2006a).

5. **Felt that you might have a problem with gambling?** Most people throughout the research would identify others in their family or community who may have had a problem; however, no one self-identified as having a problem. As was described earlier in the chapter, problems associated with gambling were most often reported by other people, not by the gamblers themselves.
6. **Felt that gambling has caused you health problems, including stress and anxiety?** People would report that other people's gambling had caused them stress and anxiety, not their own. For example, one lady said she was exhausted from looking after her grandchildren for days on end because her daughter was gambling all the time (M\_\_\_\_ 9.3.2007). Problems caused as a result of poker machine gambling often put stress on families living back in the community. People would experience significant anxiety as to the well-being of the person in Darwin, unable to return home because they had lost their money.
7. **People criticised your betting or told you that you have a gambling problem, whether or not you thought it was true?** People would most likely engage with this point, as family members were often quite open about criticising others who they felt were causing problems as a result of gambling.
8. **Felt your gambling has caused financial problems for you or your household?** Again, people would most likely engage with this point with their household in mind.
9. **Felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?** People would relate to this question; however, it would most likely be guilt associated with the impact their gambling activity is having on their family.

As demonstrated above, aside from the final three questions on the CPGI, most of the questions that it asks bear little relation to how people actually gamble, or perceive gambling

and its impacts. This exercise highlights the potential misinformation that could be derived from using these instruments. These screens have potential to produce very inaccurate understandings of the real problems experienced by Aboriginal people. The very premise of the screen being a self-reflective, individuated exercise is, in itself, problematic in the remote Aboriginal context.

Not only are the screens that are used to determine ‘problem gambling’ in society problematic in a cross-cultural context, the harm-minimisation strategies used in Australia to protect people from gambling related harm are problematic in the Aboriginal context. As outlined in the following section, current harm-minimisation strategies in Australia do not impact on the way the remote Aboriginal people involved in this study actually gambled in the venue.

#### *Current harm-minimisation strategies*

The following section of this chapter will discuss current harm-minimisation strategies employed across Australia and their relevance to the Aboriginal context. The discussion will begin by looking at card game specific policies and then look at strategies employed in venues and how they relate to the way Aboriginal people gamble. This analysis will demonstrate how current strategies are not relevant to the way many Aboriginal people gamble.

*Card games*

As is outlined throughout the thesis, card games have been banned intermittently in many Aboriginal communities around Australia over the past hundred years. Whenever card games became politicised, the idea of ‘banning’ cards is raised, even in the current context (see The West Australian 2010). The political discourse in Indigenous affairs supports these types of paternalistic approaches. However, banning cards has proven to be an ineffective response to stopping gambling, if that is what the objective is. This research shows that the role of the card games in community life is so important that people continue to play. Unless mechanisms are put in place to fill the social and economic gaps left by prohibiting card games, any attempt to stop the gambling will fail. Policies that are aimed at card games would need to strengthen the institution that is card games (i.e. more regulation), or enact a serious multi-focused approach to providing alternative mechanisms for people to employ instead of playing cards, therefore reducing the role that card games play in people’s lives.

However, this research is in no way advocating external regulation of the card games. External regulation would usurp much of the social regulation of the games, which could potentially create a situation where people increasingly neglect their social obligations to gamble – which would be considered highly problematic by Aboriginal people. The structure that exists at the moment is socially regulated which means that the games are flexible and shaped by other activities in the community. If card games were regulated to a time and a place to play, then the games would begin to compete with other interests in the community, putting pressure on social relationships and obligations.

### *Commercial gambling*

The most efficient way of discussing current harm-minimisation strategies used in venues, is to review those measures employed in the Northern Territory, as outlined in the Federal Government's 'National snapshot of harm minimisation strategies' (Australian Government 2010). The following section will discuss basic harm-minimisation strategies used in Northern Territory venues, for example help services, hotline phone numbers, maximum bets, self-exclusion schemes and limits on cash withdrawals are some of the measures addressed below.

One of the most basic harm-minimisation strategies employed in the Northern Territory, and around Australia, is to provide information about gambling help services and hotline phone numbers to people in venues and displayed on machines so that everyone has the ability to access help services. First and foremost, the information regarding these programs and services all assume that people can read, talk and understand English. This is particularly relevant when discussing remote Aboriginal people, as many people do not speak English as a first language. Many people interviewed through the research said that they would not call those numbers, as they would find it intimidating talking to a stranger about problems. One lady said: *No way would I call, who would answer me?* Another woman stated: *Why would I call a stranger, I would talk to my family* (V\_\_\_16.10.2008). In addition, hotline counseling services rely on people having access to a phone (and one with credit), and privacy to talk on a phone about these type of issues.

Maximum bets on poker machines are another harm-minimisation measure employed in the Northern Territory that did not impact on remote Aboriginal people involved in this research. People predominantly played minimum bets on the lowest denomination machines. As outlined in Chapter 6, people would only put \$1 in the machine at a time and bet the minimum bet to attempt to make the money to last longer. Similarly, banning note acceptors on machines is another strategy that simply does not impact on remote people. People always played with coins.

Self-exclusion schemes were not something that the people I worked with considered, in the most part because they would only occasionally get a chance to go to the venue. Any potential negative impacts that could come from the gambling paled in comparison to the excitement of attending the venue. However, this was one measure that some people were aware of as an option. Although people had no idea how to actually go about it, people were aware that they could exclude themselves from the venue. One man said: *You can stop yourself from going there. People can tell the casino to tell them not to come anymore* (J\_\_\_\_ 2.5.2007).

Limits on withdrawals from ATM machines is another measure that was not particularly relevant to remote Aboriginal people because for the most part, people would have already withdrawn their cash before entering the venue. This was a measure used by Aboriginal people to reduce ‘humbug’<sup>39</sup> from other family members.

Identifying the limitations of these measures for remote Aboriginal people is not intended to undermine the importance of these measures to the broader Australian public. There are also

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<sup>39</sup> Demands for money

other measures used inside venues such as; training staff on responsible gambling, brighter lighting, restrictions on promotions and advertising, and displaying clocks on machines that were not discussed. However, it is increasingly important in Australia, as the gambling industry continues to grow, and as profits from gambling make up significant proportions of state incomes (see Productivity Commission 2010), that it is known, and monitored, what impact harm-minimisation measures actually have, particularly on disadvantaged communities.

By outlining the impact (or not) of current harm-minimisation strategies on the way Aboriginal people coming from remote communities actually gamble, demonstrates just how far behind Australia is as a nation in understanding and recognising the way Aboriginal people engage with different modes of gambling. This was also demonstrated using the CPGI as an example of the incongruence of such approaches and instruments to the people involved in this research.

### *The Future*

If the desired outcome for Australia as a society is that fewer individuals, families and communities experience gambling related problems, then work has to begin long before for the problems arise, and within the context with which gambling and problems relating to gambling are understood. This is particularly important in the Aboriginal context in Australia, as this thesis has outlined. It is clear that if programs, activities, interventions are going to be successful they have to be very organic in their incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives and developed with Aboriginal people, in ways that are congruent with how Aboriginal people

live their lives. This means much more than the implementation of public health approaches, or culturally appropriate help services for Aboriginal people.

In Australia, there needs to be a distinct framework developed to address gambling and gambling problems that is built on Aboriginal perspectives and understandings. This framework needs to be holistic and flexible to account for the heterogeneous nature of Aboriginal culture and understandings in Australia. Part of the reason that it was important to highlight that the remote Aboriginal people involved in this study defined ‘problem gambling’ differently, is that it provides a platform of difference with which to develop a distinctly separate framework. This framework is needed to create broad recognition and awareness of potential problems that Aboriginal people in Australia may experience as a result of gambling.

The very basis of this framework and the future of addressing the issues that Aboriginal people face in relation to gambling has to be built on basic respect and recognition of ‘the special place, culture, rights and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ in Australian society (Reconciliation Australia 2013). As exemplified by the Productivity Commission’s report (2010) in their failure to recognise the issues that Aboriginal people face, there is a broad lack of recognition and respect given by the vast proportion of the gambling industry towards Aboriginal people in Australia. Reconciliation Australia’s website (27.1.2013) suggests businesses and organisations around Australia devise a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to develop and improve relationships with Aboriginal people and communities. Most major mining companies in Australia, media organisations, drug companies, law firms, transport companies, communications companies, hotel groups and football clubs have Reconciliation Action Plan’s. However, until May 2013

(when Crown Casino launched a RAP), there was not a single casino, club or hotel (with poker machines) in Australia that had a RAP. None of the gambling industry peak organisations in Australia have Reconciliation Plans either. It is only when basic steps in respect and recognition towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are taken that change can really begin to happen.

Part of addressing the issues that Aboriginal people in Australia face in relation to gambling is recognising Aboriginal understandings and perspectives of gambling and gambling problems. As this research has demonstrated, different understandings of gambling and problem gambling do exist. These understandings need to be positioned and considered in the development of all future policies, future research projects and in the delivery of gambling related programs, services and harm-minimisation strategies in Australia. Every document that is produced in Australia about gambling should articulate that Aboriginal understandings may be different, or experienced in different ways.

As a result of the revenue that state and federal governments receive from gambling in Australia, it is a statutory requirement by the regulator in all States and Territories to foster responsible gambling and minimise problem gambling (Australian Government 2010). This research demonstrates that State and Territory regulators are not meeting their requirements with respect to the Aboriginal population of Australia.

The framework needed to address the issues that Aboriginal people face in relation to gambling needs to be implemented nationally. There needs to be a national strategy – a co-ordinated approach to creating awareness of, and addressing the issues relating to gambling that are faced by Aboriginal people in Australia. There needs to be significant, co-ordinated

investment into education programs, awareness programs and Aboriginal-specific services, developed on the basis of Aboriginal understandings and perspectives. The important work of existing service providers such as Amity Community Services (NT), the NSW Aboriginal Safe Gambling program and the VACSAL Aboriginal Gambling Awareness Service (VAGAS) (Victoria) all need significantly more support and funding.

The findings of this research also highlight significant gaps in which more research needs to be conducted. One area in particular that needs specific and immediate attention is that of gender in relation to gambling. This research found that gambling was an overwhelmingly female orientated activity. This is potentially concerning if gambling is impacting on the other roles that women have in both families and communities. It was unclear why women were gambling so much more than men, although this phenomenon is not unique to Australia, as Mulholland and McIntosh (2011) describe Maori women in New Zealand as the most 'at risk' category, with increasing numbers of women attending venues and significant increases in numbers of Maori women presenting at counseling services for help with gambling problems.

When designing future research, it is also important to consider taking appropriate approaches, particularly when working with Aboriginal people. As is demonstrated in this thesis, the potential insights gained from applied anthropological inquiry are significant. Binde (2009) concurs with this view:

*Ethnographic studies are of significant value for problem gambling research. Such studies reveal motives for gambling among various groups of people and with respect to different forms of gambling. They may give insight into processes and conditions*

*that contribute to high involvement in gambling, which may make it possible to identify risk factors for problem gambling. Ethnographic studies may also reveal conditions that moderate tendencies to excessive gambling and ways in which individuals cope with emerging gambling problems (Binde 2009, p.52).*

These insights have potential to inform policies, programs and harm-minimisation strategies in ways that are relevant to Aboriginal people in relation to gambling.

And finally, the focus of a national strategy addressing Aboriginal issues, needs to be positioned outside of the pathologising framework of the majority of gambling research in Australia. The focus needs to be primarily on educating and empowering Aboriginal people to gamble safely, before problems arise. The major safety net and the major strength that remote Aboriginal people have is their family. Strong social connections and obligations work to protect Aboriginal people from developing problems with their gambling. Promoting ideas of safe gambling in venues that focus on existing family networks, strengthening families and stigmatising individualised gambling, are all areas that need to be explored.

However, the success of a national strategy requires acknowledgment and broad recognition in Australia that Aboriginal perspectives and understandings of gambling may require different or more nuanced approaches.



## Conclusion

This research is an ethnographic study conducted with Aboriginal people living in remote parts of the Northern Territory in Australia. The research looked at card games in the remote community of Maningrida, and poker machine use in an urban gambling venue in Darwin. The findings outlined in this thesis describe the complex social, economic and political processes at work within both modes of gambling. The research has attempted to move away from the psychological approaches of current gambling research. This research also attempted to disengage from the current Indigenous affairs discourse that presents Aboriginal people as inherently dysfunctional. This was an anthropological study aimed at providing an understanding of how, when, and why remote Aboriginal people gamble and what the impacts are. This conclusion will re-examine the findings of the research and finally, return to the question that is so often posed of this work: ‘Is Aboriginal gambling a problem?’

### *History of Aboriginal involvement in gambling*

The history of Aboriginal gambling in Australia has been a neglected area of research. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the history is intimately connected to Australia’s contact history. The evidence suggests that in the southern states, the introduction of gambling to many Aboriginal people living in camps, settlements, missions and stations was through contact with European settlers (see Reay 1944, Berndt & Berndt 1947, Elkin 1955). Although, it is regularly accepted in recent research that the card games played in northern Australia were introduced to Aboriginal people by Macassan traders (see Breen 2007, Brady 2004). However, this thesis found that it is actually far more likely that the card games and gambling were introduced by Chinese settlers in the north of Australia.

Chinese people had a social standing similar to that of Aboriginal people in the early settlement days. The population of Chinese immigrants in the north of Australia significantly outweighed European settlers before the 1920s. Chinese immigrants were viewed as morally bereft: prostitution, opium addiction and gambling were seen as fundamental parts of Chinese life, and historical records suggest that Aboriginal people were participants in them too. In addition to this, the card games that Aboriginal people play today in the north of Australia are derived from Chinese games. There is actually very little evidence to suggest that Macassan traders introduced card games to Aboriginal people. It appears to be a self-perpetuating claim through the research papers.

This research also explored the early findings on Aboriginal gambling. The earliest studies were anthropological and presented gambling as a prime example of the breakdown of ‘traditional’ culture due to the amount of time Aboriginal people were seen to be playing cards. However, the 1970s and ’80s were times of great social change, and social attitudes to gambling were also changing. Over this period, Australia experienced a large expansion of the gambling market. Reports from most parts of Australia during this time recorded a significant upsurge in gambling in Aboriginal communities. Gambling by Aboriginal people began to be viewed in either moralistic terms as a dysfunctional or deviant activity, or it was portrayed as a benign leisure activity. However, the real issue was that gambling was changing rapidly from an activity that Aboriginal people were sporadically engaging in, or adapting to, to fast becoming a social norm. The research at this time focused on identifying the economic implications of gambling in Aboriginal communities, as well the social impacts of gambling on families, and in particular, on children.

However, it was not until the 1990s that much of the research literature on gambling in Australia became predominantly psychological in approach, and solely focused on ‘problem gambling’. This also coincided with a shift in research to an almost singular focus on commercial forms of gambling. These psychological approaches to gambling are extremely problematic when located in the current policy discourse of Indigenous affairs. For more than a decade in Australia, Indigenous affairs policy has been almost exclusively centered within a dysfunctional, deficit discourse. This has resulted in unprecedented legislative and policy reforms in Australia, particularly in the Northern Territory. Although the initial impacts of the Northern Territory Emergency Response on card games and people in Maningrida are discussed in this thesis, the research attempted to disengage from the dysfunctional discourse that surrounds the Intervention and Indigenous affairs more broadly. The research in this thesis has shifted the discussion of Aboriginal people’s gambling interactions outside of the current psychological gambling research approaches and the current Indigenous affairs discourse, to re-frame the research from the basis of Aboriginal people’s lived experiences.

### *Card games*

The findings of this research demonstrate that card games in Maningrida were more than simply gambling; in fact, there was great value in the games to people in the community. The card games were a central, structured, functional feature of community life. The games were a distinctly ‘Aboriginal’ entity within community life. Aboriginal people worked to keep these games as part of their lives. The card games may not be of traditional cultural origin. However, Aboriginal people have adapted them, and structured them in ways that account for, and accompany their culture. The card games were a forum for the exchange and interpretation of Aboriginal economic, social and cultural processes in the community, as

well as a structure that allowed for the interpretation and adaptation of dominant, mainstream economic, social and political processes. The games offered community members an opportunity to pool resources, increasing capacity, not only economically but also socially. They provided Aboriginal people in Maningrida with autonomy and in many ways were collectively empowering.

Card games in the community were also informally regulated. Aboriginal kinship structures and social relations determined who played with whom. There was also a second level of regulation, the gaming regulation of the card games. This dictated what games people played and how much they spent at each game. Different types of games were played for different reasons, with different expectations on players. People were able to work their way up the different levels of games, which also allowed for social mobility within the community. Identifying these regulatory structures was also critical in determining where problems occurred for people in the community. People identified certain problems that arose in particular games. These findings provide a framework within which to work with communities in identifying the root of particular problems, and determining locally based solutions.

As outlined in Chapter 5, people in Maningrida also experience problems as a result of card games. Framed outside the dysfunctional discourse that exists in Indigenous affairs, this research identified community perspectives of the problems that people in Maningrida experienced in relations to card games. Card games impacted on family cohesion, specifically in relation to mothers not looking after their children as a result of gambling. In addition to this, people in the community viewed children playing cards as highly problematic. Some

employers discussed problems with getting people to turn up to work, and other people identified children not attending school as a related problem.

### *Poker machine gambling*

This research also explored commercial poker machine gambling in a venue in Darwin. The findings were that for Aboriginal people involved in this research the gambling venue provided a foreign, but exciting environment for people to visit. On the surface there was a certain social status awarded to those people who attended the venue. However, this research found that any social standing attained by attending the venue was undermined somewhat by the social reality inside the venue, as there was a distinct reliance on social relationships within the venue. Significant efforts and attempts were made by people to continue to gamble in groups. However, the constant tension between the individualised nature of the machines and Aboriginal people's social relationships and obligations was evident. This research found that, although commercial gambling is an activity that remote Aboriginal people do engage in and do enjoy, it does not offer the same potential as card games for people to accrue social, political and economic capital. Aside from winning a large sum of money, the economic benefits for remote Aboriginal people of attending the venue is minimal. The 'humbug' at machines was ever-present, and for certain people it was quite oppressive. However, the venue offered a vivid and lively 'experience' that was a step outside the reality of remote community life.

### *Problem gambling*

This research also analysed the disjuncture between mainstream and Aboriginal understandings of ‘problem gambling’. The findings suggest that problems with gambling, from an Aboriginal perspective, were most often identified when the gambling became individuated. Problematic behaviour was identified by Aboriginal people when an individual began to attend card games or gambling venues by themselves, or not play within accepted social structures, and were seen to be neglecting their obligations in terms of ‘sharing’ the winnings.

Mainstream notions of loss of time or money spent gambling were not central to Aboriginal people’s view of ‘problem gambling’. This is not to say that people did not experience problems as a result of losing all their money, or spend detrimental amounts of time gambling. However, the problem was perceived in how the individual had responded and treated others around them. This research found that Aboriginal people defined ‘problem gambling’ *as a person neglecting or rejecting social relationships and obligations as a result of gambling.*

A major step in addressing the issues that Aboriginal people in Australia face in relation to gambling is taking on board Aboriginal understandings and perspectives of gambling and problems relating to gambling. As this research has demonstrated, different understandings of gambling and problem relating to gambling do exist. Aboriginal people are exposed to many forms of gambling, from the remote community setting to the urban context. This research is not about dichotomising the different types of gambling as positive or negative. Both forms of gambling present significant challenges to Aboriginal people, families and community life.

Similarly, this research attempted to move away from psychological approaches to gambling and the current political discourse. Instead, it presents gambling as a complex social phenomenon that has many positive and negative implications. So, when people ask ‘Is Aboriginal gambling a problem?’ perhaps they are highlighting a far greater societal ‘problem’, embedded deeply in the current political discourse of Indigenous affairs.

*Is Aboriginal gambling a problem?*

‘Aboriginal gambling’ as such, is not ‘a problem’. Some Aboriginal people, families and communities experience problems, some of the time, in many different ways. To experience a problem from gambling is much more than being pathologically addicted. Problems arise from gambling all the time, some small and easily resolved – others with dire consequences. It is the role of communities to identify where problems lie, and with support, develop locally based solutions.

Aboriginal gambling is an issue that has been afforded very little recognition in Australia. Despite this, gambling plays a significant role in the lives of many Aboriginal people. The evidence from this research suggests that it is of significant importance to shift mainstream discourses and research approaches to view gambling as an activity that impacts on Aboriginal communities broadly, in many different contexts, and at many different levels.

### *National strategy*

Just as important as the need to work with communities, is the importance of creating awareness at a national level that is shaped by Aboriginal perspectives to situate the issue of gambling outside of the existing dysfunctional discourse. There needs to be a concerted national strategy to address the issues that Aboriginal people in Australia face in relation to gambling.

A national approach to the issue of Aboriginal gambling is needed to:

- raise awareness of the issues Aboriginal people face in relations to gambling
- support communities, even the most remote, in dealing with potential negative impacts of gambling
- create better awareness of, and provide funding and support for Indigenous-specific gambling help services
- recognise, nationally, Aboriginal understandings of gambling and problems relating to gambling
- develop a co-ordinated research effort that conducts research in specific areas of need
- build relationships between Aboriginal people and the gambling industry, particularly in relation to creating awareness throughout the industry of the issues that Aboriginal people may face in relation to gambling
- develop a national internet based resource that provides information on research, service provision, programs, media, policy and legislation around Australia that advertised and easily accessible, even for people living in the most remote areas
- work with communities to develop harm-minimisation measures that people and communities can enact themselves, providing safe-gambling strategies.

However, what is central to the success of any national strategy is working with Aboriginal people and with Aboriginal communities, to develop pathways towards a future where Aboriginal people experience minimal negative impacts of gambling in their lives.



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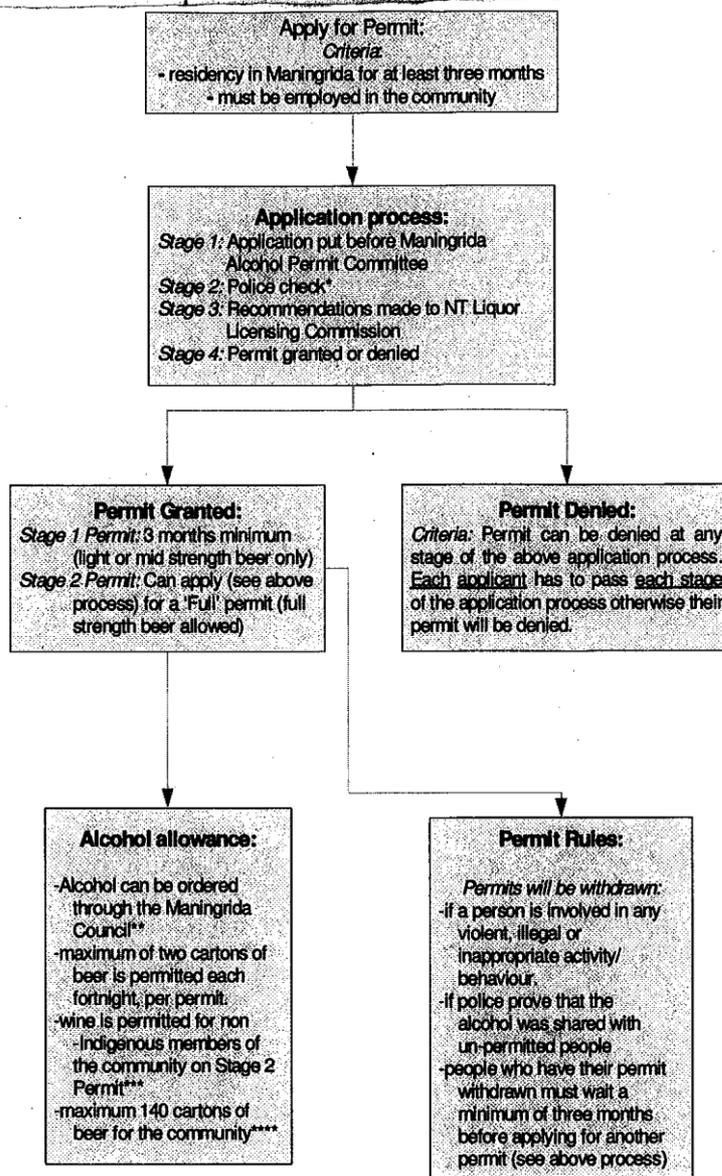
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Appendix 1: Map of Australia



Source: viewed 31.8.2013, [www.australia.edu](http://www.australia.edu)

Appendix 2: Maningrida Alcohol Permit System (Fogarty & Paterson 2007, p. 13)



\* Police Check – This consists of a review of criminal history, domestic violence history, mental health history, person of interest with regard to illicit drugs check and a check of associations to people with any of the previously listed histories.  
 \*\*Alcohol can be ordered through liquor outlets in Darwin, although order has to comply with Maningrida alcohol permit and allowance rules. The order from Darwin has to come in on the same barge that brings in the council order to ensure one drop handout every fortnight.  
 \*\*\*This decision was made by the Maningrida Alcohol Permit Committee through consultation with the community and Traditional Owners of the Maningrida Region. For non-Indigenous people on a Stage 2 permit, 6 bottles of 750ml wine can be substituted for a carton of beer.  
 \*\*\*\*This number is flexible – number can be changed by either Police or Maningrida or Alcohol Permit Committee.

