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VISITORS TO NORTHERN AUSTRALIA: DEBATING THE HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS GAMBLING

By

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Presenter's bio:

Helen Breen has taken leave from her position as Academic Coordinator for the Centre for Professional Development in Club and Gaming Management and lecturer in Tourism and Hospitality Management, Gaming and Club Management at Southern Cross University to undertake full-time PhD research in the area of Indigenous gambling. She is a researcher with the University's Centre for Gambling Education and Research and has co-authored the first Australian textbook on club and gaming management.

VISITORS TO NORTHERN AUSTRALIA: DEBATING THE HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS GAMBLING

ABSTRACT. Was gambling introduced to Indigenous Australians by British colonists in 1788 or was it introduced by Macassan fishermen much earlier? Using a variety of literature resources it is argued that Indigenous Australian gambling did exist in regions along Australia's northern coastlines in pre-colonial times due to the influence of Macassan fishermen. Using an anthropological model, the adoption of card games and gambling is seen as an adaptive response to changes in the lives of Indigenous Australians. It is also argued that Binde's (2005) four conditions for predicting the presence of gambling in traditional societies are not reliable indicators for predicting gambling by Indigenous Australians in northern Australia in pre-colonial times.

Footnote: The author is aware of deliberations around titles used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Alternative terms such as Indigenous, Aboriginal, Koori and Murri are in common use. For consistency, the term Indigenous Australians (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), 2002; Mansell, 2003) has been used to include all Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples.

Introduction

In identifying future challenges for the growing gambling sector, it can be productive to look back at historical events to evaluate those that have been influential in creating the current environment. Historical accounts of early Indigenous gambling are the subject of some debate. A debate over the origins of gambling by Indigenous Australians centres on whether gambling was introduced by early Macassan traders in the north, or whether it was introduced by early British colonists who arrived in the south along the eastern seaboard.

In the south east of Australia, O'Hara (1988) explains that British colonists brought gambling with them on the first fleet. Early arrivals were mostly army personnel, sailors and convicts, groups likely to gamble given long sea voyages on small ships with few opportunities for recreation. Many convicts were alcoholics and inveterate gamblers who brought their habits with them from the prisons of Britain (Mann 1811). On arrival in Australia the new environment was very challenging and harsh for the colonists and convicts (Inglis 1985). Gambling was an escape from the rigors of life and quickly became a popular pastime (Caldwell, 1985; Brady, 2004). Gambling was widely regarded as having been introduced to Indigenous Australians by early British settlers in Sydney (O'Hara 1988).

Early researchers into Australian gambling claimed that Indigenous Australians did not have a gambling culture or tradition prior to European settlement [see for example, Cumes, 1979; Dickerson, 1985; O'Hara, 1988; Foote, 1996]. Indeed Dickerson (1985, p.45) wondered why that was the case and wrote, 'Gambling was unknown to Aborigines prior to contact with Europeans. This fact in itself is unusual as most human societies have included some form of gambling'.

This line of thinking has not really been challenged. For example the Productivity Commission (1999, p.22) the first national inquiry into Australian gambling reported that,

‘Gambling was imported into Australia with the new settlers, primarily from Britain but with some Asian and European influences. Settlers and soldiers organized card games such as *cribbage* and *all fours* and *pitch and toss*, an early form of two-up. These games thrived despite attempts by colonial administrators to stamp them out’.

However, while many felt certain that Indigenous Australians did not gamble before British colonial settlement in 1788, there were hints that this was not the case for northern Australia. Indigenous Australians, Steane, McMillen and Togni (1998) suggest, gambled in a variety of ways not familiar to, or recognised by, early European colonists. This was found to be the case in American Indian and Inuit peoples gambling before European settlement in North America (Culin, 1907; Wardman, el-Guebaly and Hodgins, 2001). A lack of observation, not being familiar with, or not recognising Indigenous practices has had important consequences in Australia. Based on mistaken beliefs and Eurocentric observations (Lynch and Veal 2006) by Captain Cook and other early European explorers and settlers, the British government occupied Australia without a treaty on the grounds of *terra nullis* (McGlade 2003). *Terra nullis* was assumed as the land did not appear (to Europeans) to be used or developed by Indigenous peoples. This non-recognition of nomadic land use due a lack of a built environment and poorly observed hunter-gatherer practices has been the focus of Indigenous people’s struggles and injustice, for recognition and land rights since 1788, when the first fleet of British ships arrived in Sydney. Unjust dispossession and return of land is today strongly contested due to this earlier lack of recognition of Indigenous Australian land rights.

The early presence of gambling in some Indigenous communities in the north, Steane *et al.* (1998) contend, included wagering over animal carcasses, clothing and other items. A review of history on early visitors to northern Australia and gambling [see for example, Roth, 1897; Moseley, 1935; Berndt and Berndt, 1947; Zimmer, 1987; Goodale, 1987; Haebich, 1988; Hunter, 1993; Haagen, 1994] suggests that Steane *et al.* (1998) have ignited debate about the introduction of gambling into Australia by British colonists in the late 1700s. Recently, Lynch and Veal (2006, p.347) wrote that while gambling was unknown in pre-contact times and not part of traditional Aboriginal society, card playing and gambling on cards ‘... was introduced to Aboriginal communities during the early period of contact with outsiders’. Taking this idea one step further, Binde (2005, p.6) states, ‘In Melanesia, Australia and New Zealand, there was virtually no gambling ... Some aboriginal groups of northern Australia gambled at cards at the first time of contact with Europeans, a practice introduced by Asian traders’.

This paper seeks to throw light on the following question - was gambling introduced by British settlers in 1788 or was it introduced by Macassan traders and fishermen much earlier than 1788?

To do this, historical literature will be examined for records of visits from the Macassan traders and fishermen in regions of northern Australia, anthropology and ethnography theories will be discussed and applied to Indigenous Australian’s gambling.

Macassan Visitors

The history of South East Asia as a centre of trade is generally well recognised (Macknight, 1976; Rolls, 1992). Centres of trade imported and exported goods for their region and acted as a distribution centre for other regions. One such trading centre, Macassar, was a maritime and commercial centre based on the Macassar Strait on the southwest corner of Sulawesi, formerly known as Celebes. Early contact with Malays, Indians, Chinese and Portuguese traders and later contact with Dutch, English and Danish traders brought international trade to and from Macassar (Macknight 1976). The Chinese demand for trepang was just one item traded in this old, diverse trade centre. There were plenty of trepang in the warm sea waters of Timor and northern Australian (Macknight 1976).

Being on the fringe of the South East Asian trading routes, Blainey (1975) contends that ships blown off course, ships looking for sandalwood and small Indonesian fishing boats, would have landed in northern Australia many times in the past. However it was the discovery of a valuable resource, trepang, which encouraged regular and sustained visitation to northern Australia for the purpose of collecting supplies for sale in Chinese markets. For a very long time in the northern parts of Australia, Macassan fishermen from the north visited coastal areas to fish for trepang (Berndt and Berndt 1969). The Macassans called Australia, 'Marege' (Macknight 1976). While other traders visited northern Australia at the same time (Japanese and Chinese), they were less frequent, did not stay long and were fewer in number than the Macassars. Indigenous Australians in the north also had lengthy associations with Melanesian and Indonesian visitors. However, their combined influence was not nearly as strong or as regular as the Macassan visitors. The Macassans sailed annually in fleets of praus to live in parts of northern Australia during the 'wet' season and return home in the 'dry' (Berndt and Berndt 1977). They travelled extensively along the northern coastline from west Cape York, to Mornington Island to the Kimberleys and beyond. Brady (2004), Blainey (1975) and Harney (1969) suggest that these visitors arrived from about 1700 onwards.

However, these suggestions are contested in a biography of Marmel Kudjalee, an Uwadja man born about 1883 (Harney 1969). Marmel believed that the Macassans had been visiting since the Dreamtime as he had heard tales about the trepang collectors from his grandfather that had previously been passed down from his father. To support Marmel's oral history, experienced researchers Berndt and Berndt (1954) argue that Macassan traders were visiting the north coast of Australia by the early sixteenth century and that this is preserved in stories and songs of the Dreamtime. The Berndts in 1988 published *The Speaking Land* - a book containing myths and stories from Aboriginal Australia, one of which is called *Dog and the Macassans* (p. 419). This is a Djuraindjura story told to C. Berndt in 1950 at Oenpelli by Danggoubwi, a lively, knowledgeable lady and an active storyteller. In recounting this story she was supported by a group of women who added their comments. While the Macassan visits had stopped much earlier, their expeditions and culture were 'commemorated in long song-cycles that combine specific details with a wealth of poetic imagery' (Berndt and Berndt, 1988, p.419).

Using old Dutch shipping records, invoices for freight and payment, loadings and letters to ship captains, Macknight (1976, p.97) argues that praus from Macassar began to visit northern parts of Australia, 'in the last quarter of the 17th century'. This

started in a small, irregular way and the flourishing trepang industry developed gradually and more obviously. Macknight (1976) is supported by Rolls (1992, p.14) who states,

‘From the early 1670’s a flotilla of about sixty praus, manned by twenty to thirty men each, ran down each year when the wet north-west monsoons sprang up in November, December and January, and sailed back on the March-May change to the south-easterlies’.

It is clearly obvious that the seemingly isolated northern parts of Australia were visited by outsiders from time to time (Berndt and Berndt, 1996; Rolls, 1992) either by accident or design over many years. However identifying dates for these visits before written records were available is difficult. Indigenous Australian Dreamtime stories have a range of over 40,000 years. Based largely on the work of Macknight (1976), Blainey (1975) and Rolls (1992) it is argued that for over two hundred years, from about 1675 to the early 1900s, anywhere from 1,200 to 1,800 Macassan visitors arrived each summer to work as seasonal workers gathering trepang along some 700 miles of Australia’s northern shorelines.

Host Guest Relations

Responses by Indigenous Australian hosts to seasonal visits by the Macassan fishermen varied. In the Tiwi Islands the hosts were hostile (Goodale 1971). They attacked the Macassans and some were killed. In other places there was a cautious but accepting host attitude (Macknight 1976). After initial skirmishes, both parties realized that they had knowledge or goods valuable to the other. For instance, Berndt and Berndt (1947, p.249) wrote, “Maccassar traders in the early days of northern settlement and in recent times maintained friendly relations with the natives of Elcho Island; here the visitors would exchange rice for women”. The Macassans had prestigious goods for personal use by Indigenous Australians, plus items for trade with inland groups and for ceremonial exchange. On the other hand Indigenous Australians knew where the trepang were located, had access to food, water, women and were potential sources of labour (Macknight, 1976; Berndt and Berndt, 1977). They recognised that each were people of great skills. Blainey (1975, p.14) argues that Macassans read the sea ‘with the same superhuman accuracy as Australian Aborigines track the land’.

Cultural Materialism and the Emergence of Gambling

Theory can be used to help explain behaviours and motivations which can account for the emergence of gambling in a society. Cultural materialism is an anthropological theory based on the premise that human culture develops as an adaptive response to environmental alterations (Harris 1979). Cultural anthropology is the study of human social and cultural behaviour (Blanchard and Cheska 1985). Using the theoretical model of cultural materialism, Kaplan and Manners (1972) explain culture as being made up of three main elements - techno-economic elements, socio-political elements and ideological elements. Culture change comes about in a ripple effect, first from material change in adapting to the physical environment (technological and economic), which produces further change and adaptation within the structures of a society (social and political), finally resulting in change at the superstructure of a society (ideological).

As an explanatory model (Harris 1979), cultural materialism assumes that at the first techno-economic level people adapt their culture in order to fulfil their basic human needs. These techno-economic needs are met by having adequate food, water, shelter and other people to assist in obtaining these supplies. These needs are directly connected to human survival. Environmental change directly impacts on human existence and produces changes in modes of production and reproduction. At the second socio-political level, alterations as a result of earlier techno-economic change, affect domestic, social and political economies (Mawhinney 2006). Social and political activities such as games and play are a direct result of adaptations stemming from the economy of, and technology used by, a community. At the third ideological level, change affects religion, art, and the science of a society (Harris 1979). Religion, values and philosophy are created by a myriad of materialistic forces that have worked their way through the socio-political elements of culture to find justification and legitimation in ideology (Kaplan and Manners 1972). In this model culture is determined by the basic material needs of a community. Socio-political and ideological changes are adaptive by-products of techno-economic change. Cultural materialism is useful to explain the adaptive significance of many emerging social and cultural practices, such as gambling.

While in Australia, the Macassans introduced change at the techno-economic level to Indigenous Australians in their need for supplies and gathering trepang, sandalwood, turtle shell and pearl-shell (Berndt and Berndt, 1954). Indigenous Australians adapted to the Macassan influences and learnt new technology and economic ways – building wooden boats, making pottery, using tools, consuming rice, salt and spices (Berndt and Berndt, 1988; Blainey, 1975). In adapting to new social and political culture, Indigenous Australians learnt to carve wooden figures, sing exotic songs, create new myths, even to growing ‘Van Dyke’ beards, imitating the popular Macassamen style (Rolls, 1992).

Of many introduced activities, card games and gambling on card games (Berndt and Berndt 1947) were two. They wrote, “Before white settlement, Chinese, Malayan, Javanese and Macassan traders in search of trepang, beche-de-mer, dugong oil, cowries, etc., visited parts of the northern coast and came in contact with the natives with whom they traded, obtained women, and at times played a form of card game” (Berndt and Berndt, 1947, p. 249). Cards and gambling on cards were then, and still are, played for business and for leisure (Lynch and Veal 2006), or as Goodale (1987) notes for work and for fun. Card games for business involved gambling for winnings to be used to procure fresh provisions and manpower, particularly for divers to collect the trepang, labourers to help in the trepang processing and crew for the praus and canoes. Cards and gambling on card games were also social activities enjoyed for leisure and recreation, to pass the time (Berndt and Berndt 1978). The sociability of gambling on card-based games was important for Indigenous Australians (Altman 1985).

For the Macassan trepang collectors who traded with Indigenous Australians, access to provisions, women and workers was essential (Rolls, 1992) and this would have been made easier with a win from gambling on cards. In contrast, gambling on card games by Indigenous Australians would have been done in the hope of winning equipment and commodities. Commodities and tools such as tobacco, pipes, beads

belts, cloth, iron knives, axes, glass, nails, hooks, tools and alcohol were keenly sought as a result of exposure by the Macassan fishermen and traders (Blainey, 1975).

Using cultural materialism concepts (Kaplan and Manners 1972), the adoption of card games and gambling appear to be socio-political activities. Encouragement to learn to play card games and gamble can be seen as a direct result of a desire for foreign goods introduced and used by the Macassans. The Macassans' initial superiority of winning at the card games would have quickly seen improvements in Indigenous Australian card playing skills and altered their lives and work methods (involving techno-economic change), thus increasing their available leisure time (socio-political change). The Macassan initial advantage would have been soon redressed by Indigenous Australians. They obviously adapted to this new situation, the exposure to new equipment and valuable commodities, and learnt how to get them. One way was by working for the Macassans and another way was to gamble for them. Macassan tools, such as knives, hooks and quantities of rice, eased the constant hunting and gathering tasks for Indigenous Australians so they learnt the card games and how to gamble. Stemming from adaptations in the economy and technology of their community, the socio-political activity of gambling became accepted by many Indigenous Australians in the north.

In 1907, the South Australian government (then the governing body of the Northern Territory) refused to issue the Macassans licences to gather trepang (Macknight 1976). Up to the time when the Macassans were forbidden to trade on Australian shores (Harney 1969), there had clearly been long and continuous contact between the Macassars and Indigenous Australians in regions of the north. While the Macassans were Muslims and gambling strictly forbidden, the influence of Islam seems to have been limited in regard to gambling in Malacca, Sumatra, Java and Celebes (Binde 2005). Theologically, the Macassans should not have been gambling or introducing gambling to anyone. However, like many tourists, the freedom of being a visitor in a foreign land allowed them to escape the strictures of everyday life and participate in activities, such as gambling, that were prohibited at home.

The value of using the cultural materialism model here is that it helps to explain gambling as an adaptive response to alterations in the physical environment, bringing change in the domestic social and cultural lives of Indigenous Australians. Card games and gambling developed into a favourite pastime (Goodale 1987) for many Indigenous Australians in pockets of northern Australia. Indigenous Australians visibly adapted their way of life as a consequence of the Macassan influences.

Ethnography and Gambling

Binde (2005) defines Indigenous gambling as gambling being undertaken in different cultures before Western colonisation and capitalist expansion took hold, bringing radical shifts in the lives of Indigenous peoples. Using ethnography to examine gambling prior to European colonisation, Binde (2005) claims that gambling can be predicted to arise in societies under four conditions: having and using money, having social inequality and social complexity, and experiencing certain types of competitive inter-tribal relations. On the surface these four conditions appear to describe Indigenous Australian society as understood in pre-colonial times. They did not appear to have money, did not seem to be socially unequal (wide differences in rich and poor), did not appear to have social complexity (large settlements) and had fought

some wars and feuds, but in local fights rather than national ones. These four conditions will now be examined in relation to gambling by Indigenous Australians in northern Australia before European colonisation.

Taking the first of Binde's (2005) conditions for gambling, the presence of domestic commercial money indicates the presence of gambling in a society, there was no obvious presence or use of domestic commercial money in Indigenous Australian groups in northern Australia prior to European colonisation. Nevertheless, valuables other than cash were used for bartering (Berndt and Berndt 1996) and hence were also available as stakes for gambling. Indigenous Australians traded trepang, pearlshell, tortoiseshell and timber for rice, cloth, tobacco, knives, sweets or sugared food with the Macassans. Historically, items were bartered between local Indigenous groups from the north. These items included: iron-headed spears, pounding stones, goods from outsiders such as the Macassans, forehead bands, breast mats, hooked spears, 'biting bags', heavy fighting clubs, spearheads, boomerangs, net bags, possum fur, hooked spears with bamboo shafts (Thomson 1949). Indigenous Australians knew the value of such items which acted as a true substitute for money.

Further, in the network of reciprocal kin relationships, gifts, loans and other services were expected to be repaid in kind or equivalence, within a certain time (Berndt and Berndt 1996). A person might trade a spear for another useful article or for food. A group of people might build a canoe and would expect a share of the fish caught in the canoe. Outside the reciprocal kin relationships, trade and exchange were well established with inland and coastal groups. There existed a vast number of maps of trade routes criss-crossing the continent, usually following waterhole paths, through which passed items of recognised value. Pearl shells from the northern most coastlines were traded through the Great Victoria Desert and Ooldea to as far south as the Nullabor Plain and Eyre Peninsular in South Australia (Berndt and Berndt 1969). Thus Indigenous Australians had an economy based historically on the exchange of goods that had recognisable material value. In support, Langton (1981) explains that a common feature found among all groups of Indigenous Australians is a simple but highly effective material culture. Gambling became another way of exchanging goods in what Zimmer (1987) calls a complementary exchange system. Whilst this is a very short explanation of at least 40,000 years of living and trading in early Australia, it is argued that, while commercially available domestic money was absent, other goods and services whose exchange value was well-known were available for gambling, if required, by Indigenous Australians. Binde's (2005) condition for gambling to arise is not met under the first condition of having and using commercially available domestic money, as gambling was carried on here after its introduction by the Macassans.

The second of Binde's (2005) conditions for gambling is the presence of social inequality. Social inequality is explained as having wide social and economic differences in a society, that is, people classified into class systems (high through to low) and wealth systems (poor through to rich).

In pre-colonial times, Indigenous Australian life was egalitarian. Through the Dreaming, the traditional outlook on the universe and man (Langton 1981), the land belonged and still belongs to the local tribe, not one person, and is an essential part of a person's existence. Indigenous Australians had no central government, each tribe or mob had their own sovereignty (Phillips 2003). Australia was split into hundreds of

small mini-republics, each conscious that its own traditions and people were unique (Blainey 1975). Lynch and Veal (2006) suggest that there were about 300,000 people comprising 500 language groups at the time of British colonisation in 1788. As hunters and gatherers, they moved around in small groups, within their own country and followed traditional law for moving onto or sharing another's country. Each person was responsible for contributing their skills and resources to ensure survival of their group. Altman (1985, p.52) argues that relations of this subsistence economy were "egalitarian" and that the social organisation of production was "generally by consensus". However, he does say that large scale activities were managed by the elders of the tribe and elder males had primary access to hunted game. Historically, men hunted for food while women and children gathered food (Goodale 1987). Food was distributed by a sharing ethic. Strict rules and regulations of sharing were followed, depending on whether there was a surplus or shortage of food and depending on criteria of sex, age or ritual status. This generally ensured stability and efficient management of available resources and labour. In summing up the presence of social equality rather than inequality, Berndt and Berndt (1968, p.119) maintain,

'... there is no privileged class which is singled out by birth or of wealth. Goods are considered to be wealth only if expendable – only if they can be passed on to others ... There are leaders, but they belong to no specially defined class, nor are they maintained by the rest of the community. The same is true for the artist, the songman and the craft worker. They may specialize but they not paid on a full-time basis for doing so, they are not in a sense professionals, and they participate in ordinary everyday pursuits almost as much as other men do'.

In spite of Binde's (2005) contention that gambling arises in societies with social inequality, it can be seen even from this brief sketch of life in pre-European contact times that Indigenous Australian tribes had networks of reciprocal obligations and responsibilities within the community, ensuring that egalitarian principles were the norm. While there was an elaborate system of land-based authority, laws, ancestral Creator's guidance and respect of elders' wisdom (Phillips 2003), individual wealth systems and class or caste divisions did not exist then. Binde's (2005) condition for gambling to arise under the condition of social inequality is not met in early Indigenous Australian society in the north.

The third of Binde's (2005) conditions, is that social complexity is important for gambling to be present in pre-colonial days. Social complexity is described as a society living in large settlements rather than as small groups of nomadic herders moving from place to place in search of food. Indigenous Australians' social organisation is complex (Langton 1981), but this complexity is based on relationships not physical settlements. In fact, there were no large settlements as we know them today, in northern Australia in pre-colonial time.

Indigenous Australian tribes or mobs were not large (Phillips 2003), but they were strong and cohesive, based on skin or clan groupings and also very complex. Their lives were shaped by the Dreamtime stories, which were an explanation of how the world came into being, plus a model for how people should live and conduct their relationships with others (Lynch and Veal 2006). These laws and stories, some sacred and some secular, are passed onto others through an oral tradition from generation to generation (Berndt and Berndt 1988). Kinship was and is fundamental to social

relations. Complex relationships built around kinship and reciprocal relationships allow people to work out where they stand in relation to others. For example a tribe might be described as any of the following five groups of people: 1) a group occupying a recognised stretch of country and claim religious, hunting and food gathering rights over it by virtue of a Dreamtime charter or right belonging to them; 2) one group sharing a common language, providing they all acknowledge this; 3) a collective of different, smaller groups who share common cultural features ; 4) a group large enough for marriage to take place in; 5) a group small enough to recognise each other as relatives and not outsiders (Berndt and Berndt 1969). Adding to this complexity are social arrangements within a tribe, where divisions cut across one another. These include local descent groups, clans and moieties (Berndt and Berndt 1996). Local descent groups are usually united by a common patrilineal descent, kinship and religious rites or sacred sites. A clan is generally a group of people who have descended in one line from the same ancestor, not necessarily a human ancestor. Clan relationships are associated with certain totems which are attached to country and place of birth (Elkin 1954). Moieties are the division of all natural phenomena into two distinct divisions for social and ceremonial purposes. The two moieties are essentially opposites (Radcliffe-Brown 1930-1). A person must marry into the opposite moiety, not into their own moiety. Descent in a moiety is either patrilineal or matrilineal, affiliated with either a father's male line or mother's female line (Berndt and Berndt 1996).

Overlaid on this local group kinship social system is another structure of compartments called sections and subsections (Berndt and Berndt 1977). Sections and subsections establish rules on the expectations of one set of kin with and towards another set of kin. It classifies people into categories and everyone is identified this way. A visitor belonging to a certain subsection coming into a strange group for trade or ceremony is allocated a kinship position on the basis of what is known about them (Radcliffe-Brown, 1930-1; Elkin, 1954). Section and subsection divisions are understood by those who live by these rules, but are complicated, often obscure and contain hidden difficulties for outsiders.

While Binde's (2005) condition of gambling arising in the presence of social complexity in having large settlements is not met, it is argued here that social complexity for Indigenous Australians was present in their social organisation and social structure. Kin relationships dictate social organisation. From this limited discussion, it is obvious that kin relationships are complex involving descent lines, clans, totems, moieties, sections, subsections and more. These intricate ties are best understood by Indigenous Australians, and of these ties, sacred connections are only understood by a privileged few. From a kin relationship sense, social complexity was certainly present in Indigenous Australians' society in pre-European times. Binde's (2005) condition for gambling to arise under the condition of social complexity (being large settlements) is not met. However if social complexity is defined differently, as being made of the myriad of social structures and organisations that comprise early Indigenous Australian society, then this third condition (Binde 2005) might be considered to be partly met.

The fourth of Binde's (2005) conditions is that certain kinds of competitive inter-tribal relations need to exist for gambling to be present. Here Binde (2005) states that

risk taking is construed as a positive character trait, where brave warriors are required to fight contests for honour in inter-tribal wars.

Warfare or armed conflict was carried out by Indigenous Australians in these early times between two tribes or clans, while a feud was armed conflict between particular families or within groups of kin (Howitt 1924). Inter-tribal fighting was fairly common (Basedow 1925). Armed expeditions might avenge the death of a clan member or punish an offender. The war-making unit is the clan or language group and most common causes of war were an inter-clan killing or a woman. War was not fought for territorial conquest (Berndt and Berndt 1996). The most highly organised warfare was found in northern Australia (Berndt and Berndt 1977). According to Goodale (1987), in the far north where Tiwi men raided mainland groups to acquire more wives as wives were a symbol of prestige for Tiwi men. The Iwaidja and Larrakia fought back, trying to get Tiwi wives in revenge. Rolls (1992) states that there was constant and deadly warfare between some northern Aboriginal tribes, but this was kept hidden from outsiders. Six types of attacks, not all warfare, were noted by Warner (1937/58). These included: the *magarada*, settlement by ordeal; *nirimaoi julngu*, camp fights over accusations of adultery; *narub* or *djawald*, a victim killed while asleep; *miringu* or *maringo*, an inter-clan killing with warfare; *milwerangel*, a pre-arranged fight between a number of clans; and, *gaingar*, large scale, regional warfare, which while rare, is very intense and has a long, simmering history (Berndt and Berndt 1996). Wars were generally small-scale and regional, rather than widespread.

There were some healthy practices to reduce conflict and settle old feuds. One of these was the *prun* (Roth 1897) or tournament involving whole clans, to show off their skills and settle disputes. A host group set up a cleared ground and invited other groups as guests. To uphold their honour, the hosts selected their men to be decorated in cockatoo feathers and stand in the cleared circle. They would taunt the guests to join them in the circle for a verbal dispute or a physical fight, but the action had to remain in the circle. Every so often, a bout of fighting was started. It was ended by elders calling for a rest break. Then, weapons (mostly boomerangs and spears) and injured people were collected. This cycle continued till night, when more friendly ceremonies were held. This cycle might re-occur the next day and eventually when having settled any lingering disputes and enjoying some extra social activity, people went home (Lynch and Veal 2006).

In terms of Binde's (2005) fourth condition that certain kinds of competitive inter-tribal relations need to exist for gambling to be present, it is obvious that early Indigenous Australian warriors did fight brave contests in inter-tribal wars but were also prudent in finding peaceful, honourable solutions. While only examining warfare before European colonisation, it appears that Indigenous Australian could fight if they chose. However, they were more peaceful than warlike in most respects. Binde's (2005) condition for gambling to arise under certain kinds of competitive inter-tribal relations is only partially met, yet gambling, being introduced by the Macassans was carried on here.

In summary:

- Binde's (2005) first condition for gambling to arise is not met in having and using commercially available domestic money, yet a

mutually advantageous economic exchange system was used for trade and gambling by early Indigenous Australians in northern regions.

- Binde's (2005) second condition for gambling to exist due to social inequality (vast gaps in class and wealth) is not met in egalitarian Indigenous Australian society, yet gambling was present in northern parts of Australia in pre-colonial ages.
- Binde's (2005) third condition for gambling to arise, that of social complexity, is not met through the narrow definition of established large settlements. Given a more comprehensive definition of social complexity, possibly including over 40,000 years of ancient culture and society, this condition could be regarded as being partly met.
- Binde's (2005) fourth condition for gambling to arise under certain kinds of competitive inter-tribal relations is partly met, as some small-scale regional fighting and warfare did occur but it was countered by successful peace-keeping strategies. Even so, gambling was present in some northern Australian Indigenous groups before European colonisation.

It is argued that Binde's (2005) factors predicting the presence of gambling in some traditional societies are not reliable indicators for gambling by Indigenous Australians in regions of northern Australia, especially after their contact with the visiting Macassans.

Conclusion

From these early beginnings, gambling, card gambling and commercial gambling, is currently an issue of concern for many Indigenous Australians (Costello and Millar 2000). The School of Social and Policy Research and School of Health Sciences, Charles Darwin University (2006) report that, while Indigenous Australians gamble at cards to raise funds for good causes; for social interaction; and, as a way of accessing money, in a negative way, they suffer from an uneven distribution of money throughout the group; winnings often going to people outside the group; and, social dysfunction, especially in neglect of children. The costs of card gambling are unevenly distributed and critically borne by dependents of heavy gamblers.

In spite of this, playing card games is still important as seen at the 2004 Garma Festival in the Northern Territory. Covering the five days of the festival, the festival report on day two (http://www.garma.telstra.com/2004/day2_04.htm) states,

'The climax of the bunggul came when the Nunggubuyu people from Numbulwar representing the Macassan boat arrived at the Rose River area south of Gulkula. They danced many Macassan themes including flag, telescope, gambling with cards. At the end of the evening's dancing many of the Gumatj, Gupapuyngu yothu yindi joined in with the Nunggubuyu yothu yindi groups to everyone's acclaim'.

Relicts of gambling can be seen in the Yolngu language today. The word *bothurru* or count arises from the Macassan word *botoro* meaning to play dice or gamble. The

Yolngu word *dopulu* or gambling in the Macassan language is *dobolo* or gamble (MacKnight 1976). *Belandah* or *balanda* is the Yolngu name for non-indigenous people, generally Europeans, in northern Australia. *Balanda* comes from Hollander, Hollaender or *Nederlanda* (Jordan 2005) and is also the Bahasa Indonesian word for European. In the Iwaidja language (borrowed by Tiwi peoples), the word for money *wurupia* came from the Macassan word *rupia*, a unit of money (Goodale 1987) which is the Indonesian unit of currency today. Marmel Kudjalee said, 'We Uwadja people, of course, knew the Macassa language well, just as we know yours' (Harney, 1969, p.21). Every bank on the Uwadja (north Australian) shores had a Macassan name (Harney, 1969).

The annual exchange between the Macassans and Indigenous Australians encouraged the sharing and adaptation of language and customs, including gambling on card playing, a pastime enjoyed by both. Using a theory of cultural materialism assists understanding of the role adaptation plays in altering cultures. It explains how and why gambling could be, and was adopted by northern coastal Indigenous Australians.

While Binde (2005) claims that gambling in pre-European times only arose in societies that had money, social inequality and complexity, and were competitive, there is little evidence that these factors had any influence over the introduction of gambling to Indigenous Australians in northern regions by the Macassans in pre-colonial times. Further, the claim that gambling in Australia arrived with the British colonists is only partly accurate. That British colonists introduced gambling to the eastern and southern parts of Australia in 1788 may well be true, but not in parts of the north or the north-west. It is clearly evident that gambling on cards was introduced by the Macassan fishermen and traders in the early seventeenth century, if not the sixteenth century. This evidence can be observed today in language, ceremonies, songs, dance and oral history of northern Indigenous Australians. Card gambling, an activity introduced by the Macassans, was adopted for better or worse by Indigenous Australians, initially for work and fun or business and leisure.

Despite arguments put forward by Cumes (1979); Dickerson (1985); O'Hara (1988); Foote (1996) and Binde (2005), it is argued in this paper that gambling did exist along the northern coastlines of Australia in pre-colonial times, due to the influence of the Macassan fishermen and traders and explained using an anthropological model of cultural materialism.

A note of caution: In the previous analysis references to traditional Indigenous Aboriginal lives might seem to be idealised, reflecting back on a traditional way of life free from much strife and worry, when in fact it was a very hard life. All types of natural disasters had their effects on people with minimal physical protection. Hunting for food took women about five hours each single day (Altman 1987) in all types of conditions. Women were primarily the providers of food everyday for their extended households (Goodale 1987). Men hunted for game for long periods of time. They moved across their country seasonally, looking for food. While many food gathering activities had a social element, life was tough and survival often perilous.

As with all societies and cultures, adaptation to meet changes in the environment means that many are caught in the long lasting consequences of that change. During the time of the Macassan visits, unheralded change had begun for Indigenous

Australians with the arrival of the British colonists in the south east of Australia. Blainey's (1975, p.230) words end this paper, 'the small groups of nomads were thus intensely vulnerable when, unscathed by the neolithic revolution, they were confronted less than two centuries ago by Europe's industrial revolution'.

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