

# Preface

Since the repeal of the state liquor regulations in Australia that prevented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from having legal access to alcohol, numerous strategies have attempted to minimise the harms associated with problem drinking. This book tells the story of how governments, their advisers and Indigenous people themselves believed they could minimise such harms by changing the way people drank: how they tried to ‘civilise’ the drinking act itself. In a sense, this endeavour started in 1789 when Governor Arthur Phillip first taught the captured Aboriginal man Bennelong to raise his wine glass in a toast; however, it was two centuries before the notion found its way into policy in the form of government-endorsed liquor outlets serving Indigenous people in or near remote communities. In the 1970s and 1980s, canteens and clubs were licensed to serve rations of beer in remote Indigenous communities, and government agencies made it possible for Indigenous organisations to purchase public hotels whose sales were affecting their communities. These two approaches to the distribution of alcohol were originally driven by the belief that drinking on regulated premises over which Indigenous people had some control would help to inculcate moderate drinking patterns, and help to prevent damaging binge drinking and sly grog sales. This idea, that people would be able to ‘learn to drink’ in a conducive setting, forms a narrative thread throughout this book.

Both of these somewhat controversial approaches (having drinking clubs and purchasing hotels) attempted to manage Indigenous drinking by making the sale of alcohol a *social enterprise* that drew in community members as participants, and ostensibly benefited them by allowing them to share in the income generated by alcohol sales. The idea that these outlets could help to cultivate moderate ‘civilised’ drinking patterns while simultaneously making a profit created a number of moral and social dilemmas and unforeseen outcomes that also form a major theme for the book. Indigenous social clubs and hotels were social enterprises

insofar as they were (and are) run (or at least advised) by community-based organisations with participatory governance structures that gave voice to community stakeholders. Perhaps most importantly, as quasi-social enterprises, these projects were intended to benefit their owners by reinvesting profits in charitable or community-led activities. Even if a club or a hotel could not make a profit, the money they spent on wages and other locally sourced production costs would stay in the community.

Some of these ideas about reducing drunkenness by regularising drinking venues, making local citizens shareholders and allocating profits for the betterment of the community had been popular in nineteenth-century Europe. The Swedish 'Gothenburg' system, for example, was a style of alcohol control based on the municipal or community ownership of liquor outlets. Designed to improve standards of behaviour and to civilise uproarious drinking, the Gothenburg system offered an alternative to prohibition by emphasising moderation, and downplayed profiteering by employing 'disinterested' managers who had no pecuniary interest in alcohol sales. As documented in this book, the idea of community ownership of hotels was disseminated from Sweden to Britain and later to Australia where the (non-Indigenous) citizens of several rural South Australian towns purchased their local public hotels as co-operative ventures. I use the principles of the Gothenburg system and its variations as an analytical framework with which to examine the case studies presented in the second part of the book.

This book is based on fieldwork conducted in Indigenous communities and towns in northern and central Australia, visits to community hotels in South Australia and interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous protagonists and knowledgeable observers. It also makes use of documentary evidence from reports, archives, local libraries and newspapers. The book contributes to three fields of scholarship: it is a socio-historical study of alcohol; it examines the history of Australian Indigenous policy; and it constitutes a study of social enterprise.

The opening chapter examines the social history of the idea that people can learn to drink in moderation: that drinking, along with other aspects of personal comportment, can be 'civilised'. The work of Norbert Elias sets the scene here. An example from early Australia illustrates the rudimentary attempts made by elites to impart the rules of cultured, moderate comportment around food and drink to the representatives of the invaded Aboriginal groups encountered during the first days of colonisation.

Offering alcohol to Aboriginal people in and around Sydney Cove, and seeing how they responded and how quickly they could learn, was a test of how amenable they might be to ‘civilisation’ and assimilation. The chapter continues by addressing the more modern formulation of the idea of learning to drink that arose in the 1930s and 1940s following the end of Prohibition in the United States (US) (1920–1933) and restrictive war-time policies in other countries. At this time, with the influence of the temperance movement waning, the public wanted an alternative to abstinence. By the 1960s, behavioural psychologists working in addiction programs began to experiment in teaching alcoholics and others with drinking problems how to control their drinking. I argue that this thinking, together with the idea that drinking was a *learned* behaviour, permeated the Australian policy approaches to Indigenous drinking that accompanied the repeal of alcohol prohibitions.

Since the 1830s in Australia, legislation had created a number of prohibitions attached to the possession and consumption of alcohol by people classified as Aboriginal as well as people of mixed descent, Torres Strait and Pacific Islanders. Following federation, these became state or territory laws that varied by jurisdiction and applied differentially to Indigenous people depending on their perceived degree of assimilation and where they lived. This form of race-based ‘prohibition’ in Australia thus differed markedly from the National Prohibition Act (the Volstead Act) enacted in the US in 1920, which involved amendments to the Constitution, grew out of local option laws and was the culmination of a politically effective social movement led by the Anti-Saloon League and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The Volstead Act was repealed in 1933 following the election of Franklin D Roosevelt and the loss of popular support.

In Australia, the ‘prohibition’ laws affecting Indigenous people were repealed in each state and territory between 1957 and 1972. This was accompanied by the gradual removal of racial discrimination from state laws and the recognition of Indigenous civil rights. However, there were (and are) exceptions. Despite the official end of the prohibition on selling or serving alcohol to Aboriginal people, some publicans continued to refuse them service in a variety of overt or covert ways: in the 1980s, several Aboriginal non-government organisations explicitly requested licensees to desist from selling alcohol to members of their communities; and in

the Northern Territory in particular, but in other regions as well, some Aboriginal communities continue to apply their own local 'prohibition' laws and maintain their lands as dry areas by choice.

Chapter 2 traces how the Gothenburg ideas of alcohol control were disseminated to Britain, the US and ultimately to Australia. In the late nineteenth century, local citizens of several towns along the Murray River bought hotels to raise funds for local causes and to diminish sly grog sales. They raised funds through their personal resources or bank loans and 12 premises were purchased in South Australia: nine of the original 12 are still in community hands. In a parallel but separate development that began in the mid-1970s, several Indigenous community associations also bought hotels, usually in an attempt to curtail the troublesome sales practices of their owners. To make the purchases, Aboriginal groups obtained loans or grants from various Aboriginal economic development funds, first established by the Australian Government in 1968. I pay particular attention to the Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC), appointed and funded from 1980 to 1989, and its successor agencies. I present case studies of these enterprises later in the book. Chapter 2 continues by outlining how the investment policies pursued by Indigenous business and development agencies changed over time, forcing some enterprises to concentrate on commercial rather than socially responsible goals; with alcohol as the commodity, this indifference to social objectives sometimes had undesirable outcomes. Reference is also made to kava, a mood-altering substance over which an Aboriginal association held licensing and distribution rights. Like the Gothenburg system, the arrangement created a monopoly, raised revenue that was distributed for community benefit and created an antidote to illegal sales.

At around the time of the first experiments in Aboriginal ownership of hotels, some Australian state and territory governments encouraged remote communities to establish beer canteens and licensed social clubs as a means to communicate moderate and sociable drinking behaviour to Aboriginal people who were adjusting to newly granted drinking rights. Many of these enterprises evolved from the beer rationing systems through which 'native administration' officials had hoped to inculcate moderate drinking patterns. Chapter 3 deals with this episode in policy thinking: it focuses on the influence of government advisers, community superintendents and missionaries that led to the birth of these clubs and the mixed motivations that underpinned their development. Primary among these motivations was the belief that Aboriginal people could 'learn' to drink in more

acceptable ways if they were presented with limited amounts of alcohol in pleasant settings—a reprise of earlier ideas about the so-called civilising process of the eighteenth century, about managing the post-Prohibition era of the 1930s in the US and about adopting middle-class norms in the 1950s. In the Australian Indigenous policy context, it was an exercise in assimilation.

The second part of the book (Chapters 4 to 7) presents case studies of community-based clubs and community-owned pubs to illustrate how theories of community and citizen ownership and notions of teaching moderate drinking were put into practice. In Chapter 4, I describe the Murrinh Patha Social Club, one of the earliest of its kind, instigated by Catholic missionaries at what was then known as Port Keats, now Wadeye, in the Northern Territory. The Tyeweretye Club, the topic of Chapter 5, was located in a town (Alice Springs) rather than in a remote community. Instigated by an Aboriginal non-government organisation, the club was designed to provide a convivial and non-racist drinking venue for Aboriginal town dwellers and visitors from outlying communities alike. Both clubs were intended to cultivate moderate drinking styles, but only Tyeweretye achieved this goal, and then only partially. I relate how each of these clubs became the subject of vigorous resistance, primarily from Aboriginal women's groups' campaigns against grog in all its forms, and analyse why neither club survived for much longer than a decade.

Chapter 6, 'Indigenous communities buy hotels', describes the sequence of hotel purchases made by, or on behalf of, Indigenous organisations—an initiative that started in 1975, before the advent of Aboriginal development agencies. Some of these projects, such as the Oasis Hotel at Walgett and the Woden Town Club in Canberra, both funded in the 1980s by the ADC, proved to be disastrous and short lived. By contrast, other premises, such as the Transcontinental Hotel at Oodnadatta and the licensed roadhouse at Mt Ebenezer in the Northern Territory, have lasted for a decade or more. The chapter is primarily made up of observational and interview data from fieldwork visits, but also pieces together the fragmented documentary record on these enterprises. Chapter 7, 'The Indigenous purchase of the Crossing Inn', is a case study of a 'community' hotel in Fitzroy Crossing, one of a suite of enterprises purchased by an Indigenous investment company representing the peoples of the Fitzroy Valley, Western Australia, with funds from the ADC. Despite early hopes that ownership of the hotel would constrain sales and 'civilise' drinking, there were accidental and deliberate deaths, hundreds of injuries and cases

of violence against women; there was also an increase in alcohol-related damage to unborn children. By 2007, the situation was so serious that the State Coroner conducted an inquest into 22 deaths in the region (many of which implicated the Crossing Inn): two courageous Aboriginal women sparked a grassroots movement to petition for an end to the inn's takeaway sales; the director of liquor licensing imposed restrictions on sales; and child health experts called for a major study of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders. I analyse how the original ambition for the hotel to be a crucible for moderate drinking was thwarted by the investment policies of the Indigenous business and development agencies that funded the project, as well as by the hotel's own Indigenous controlling body. The concluding chapter reminds the reader of the major themes that make up the book.

A number of questions have pursued me throughout this research. Can people learn to drink differently? Do the social clubs introduced into some remote communities help to cultivate moderate drinking styles, or do they make things worse? Is Indigenous ownership of pubs in small country towns a viable and sustainable strategy to bring about local control over sales? Does such ownership provide the economic and social benefits envisaged by the Indigenous proponents of such enterprises? As well as answering these questions, I want this book to show how a policy of 'self-determination' encouraged a certain type of engagement between Indigenous people and the supply and sale of alcohol.

This text is taken from *Teaching 'Proper' Drinking?: Clubs and pubs in Indigenous Australia*, by Maggie Brady, published 2017 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.