THE AMBIGUITIES OF ALCOHOL: DEVIANCE, DRINKING AND MEANING IN A CANADIAN NATIVE COMMUNITY

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Abstract: The interplay of Western and Native cultures gives drinking both positive and negative meanings for Indian people. This essay examines the ambiguities of alcohol in one northern Native community, with specific attention given to the way in which drinking relates to deviance and Indian cultural values. It is based largely on fieldwork conducted in the small Dene community of Colville Lake during 1967, 1968 and 1971.

Résumé: Pour les Amérindiens, l'interaction entre les cultures occidentales et amérindiennes donne à la consommation d'alcool un sens et positif et négatif. Cet essai examine les ambiguïtés de l'alcool dans une communauté nord-amérindienne. La relation entre la consommation d'alcool et la déviance ainsi que les valeurs culturelles amérindiennes se trouve au centre de l'examen basé principalement sur une étude faite dans une petite communauté Dene du lac Colville en 1967, 1968 et 1971.

Alcohol, despite its volatile reputation, can shed a sobering light on social behaviour. Once incorporated into people's bodies and communities, it can transform their comportment. Whether alcohol's effects are seen as being primarily physiological or psychological in nature, the cultural responses to drinking are rarely neutral. What makes alcohol consumption informative, however, is not just the extremes of approval and disapprobation that it evokes, but the varied and subtle behaviours that it elicits from both drinkers and those who observe them. In societies where alcohol has only been introduced in recent times, its modern history can also tell us much about cultural change and continuity.

Anthropologica XXXIII (1991) 81-98

Among Native American people in Northern Canada, alcohol was unknown in pre-contact times. After its introduction into the North by early fur traders and trappers, the consumption of alcohol was quickly established as a central element in Indian social and economic life. By the latter half of the 20th century, alcohol had emerged as one of the main social and health problems facing Native communities. By then, legal restrictions on the sale of liquor to indigenous people had been repealed, and most Indians had moved to urban centres where bars, hotels and liquor stores could be found. In both large and small communities, alcohol was often connected to forms of behaviour that Indians and Whites alike saw as deviant and disturbing. These included violence towards people and property, and the misuse of human and economic resources. However, there were other factors that complicated the situation. Whites, who introduced alcohol, also presented certain models for drinking behaviour which are not fully consistent with Native norms of conduct. Furthermore, many Indian people experience drinking as pleasurable and meaningful, not just as problematic. It offers them opportunities for personal fulfilment and for participation in Native patterns of generosity and expressiveness. Indian people consequently exhibit ambivalent attitudes towards alcohol, and their involvement with it ranges from heavy drinking to total abstention.

The interplay of Western and Native cultures thus gives drinking both positive and negative meanings for Indian people. This essay examines the ambiguities of alcohol in one northern Native community, with specific attention given to the way in which drinking relates to deviance and Indian cultural values. It is based largely on fieldwork conducted in the small Dene community of Colville Lake during 1967, 1968 and 1971.[1] This village of 75 people is situated in the boreal forest zone of the Northwest Territories which lies between the western shores of Great Bear Lake and the tree line. At the time of fieldwork, the community's economy was still based on hunting, fishing and trapping, plus a small amount of wage labour provided by the settlement's only two non-Native residents, a Catholic missionary and a fur trader. The village had grown up in the early 1960s as a satellite of Fort Good Hope, a large Dene settlement located some 140 km away on the MacKenzie River. The development of the smaller community had been prompted, in part, by the lack of employment, the poor trapping and the amount of alcohol consumption in the larger town.[2]

The church and trading post were the sole Western institutions represented at Colville Lake. It had no school, nursing station, police detachment, liquor store or local industry. Although alcohol occasionally reached the settlement from a government outlet in another community, the people usually drank *Kontweh* — "homebrew" or, literally, "fire-water" — made by them from ingredients available at the local store. The alcohol content of

Kontweh ranged from 3 to 4 percent (Durgin 1974:59). It was made from yeast, water, sugar and a fruit or carbohydrate base, such as raisins, dried currants or beans. Brew pots usually contained two to five gallons of liquid, and the mixture was left to ferment from one to several days.

Drinking not only evoked some of the most dramatic behaviour and intense controversy among Native people in the community, but had also been an issue of contention between the local trader and the priest. The latter inveighed against alcohol's disruptive impact on the village and criticized the storekeeper for selling the yeast used in the manufacture of homebrew. But the trader resisted what he felt was moralistic meddling in his business, and insisted on the separation of heaven and earth, Church and store. Each man had his supporters among the Indian population, and alcohol simply fuelled an old feud between the two.

Among the Native members of the community, alcohol-related deviance arose around several cultural ideals, including the maintenance of emotional control, a spirit of generosity, a sense of responsibility and autonomy; and an ethic of non-intervention in the lives of their neighbours. Drinking occasions also provided opportunities for Native individuals to manipulate one another into acting out certain culturally disapproved behaviours. Specifically, drunken people could sometimes be induced to act in violent, sexually flirtatious or emotionally explicit ways, all of which deviated from the community's normally restrained standards of conduct. For those who observed, manipulated and judged such behaviours, this type of staged deviance reinforced the value of alcohol as a vehicle for both public morality and entertainment.

The next section of this essay offers a brief description of the community and its core values. This is followed by an analysis of deviant behaviours that are associated with drinking. In the discussion and conclusion, a series of contrasting themes from Native life are identified to help explain the tolerant and sometimes encouraging way in which Indian people respond to drunken deviance.

The Community and Its Values

For much of the sub-Arctic year, alcohol has a very secondary role in the lives of most people at Colville Lake. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the 14 Hare Indian families from this community still spent close to half of each annual cycle at small, scattered bush camps of one to three households. They travelled mostly by dogsled, snowshoe and canoe, and subsisted by a combination of caribou and moose hunting, fur trapping and freshwater fishing with gill nets. During these long periods of dispersal from their settlement, most people saw drinking as inimical to the daily re-

quirements of survival: winter life in particular demanded a full commitment of energy and attention, and even families that drank during other seasons felt that brewing in the bush endangered people's food supply, judgment and personal safety. People who brewed and consumed alcohol in such situations were subject to a good deal of private criticism and gossip. The perception of drinking as deviant was thus partly a function of time and place.[3]

The village yielded a new context and different criteria. For one to two weeks at the Christmas and Easter holidays, and during the summer-fall period of June through September, the 75 Native members of the community re-grouped at the settlement. Sociability was much more intense, survival problems were less pressing, and drinking was more common and acceptable. Both men and women consumed alcohol, and, while some brew parties involved people of just one sex, most occasions saw participants of both genders and various ages. Not everyone in the band indulged in alcohol: there were four interrelated families, closely allied with the local priest, whose members almost totally abstained from drinking. But beyond all the internal divisions created by alcohol and the local feud, there was a network of bilateral ties which cut across the entire village. All the community's households—drinkers and non-drinkers alike—were related to one another through bonds of blood and marriage. People saw their social world as composed of *sagot'ine*, "my people," a term embracing a village-wide kindred whose members defined each individual's social security and personal identity. This compact kinship universe gave a special force to the Native values which governed people's consciousness. Accordingly, while drinking both enlivened and disturbed the tenor of village life, it did so against a background of shared relations and expectations.

Five values were especially pertinent to an understanding of alcohol and its ambiguities. First, Native people in the community lived with a keen sense of their *interdependence*. They camped together during the winter, shared equipment and supplies throughout the year, and provided help and labour in times of need. While this theme was usually thought of and acted out in economic terms, it also found expression in recreational activities such as drinking. People tried to avoid behaving in ways that would strain or rupture the interdependencies that made the rest of life relatively secure. Alcohol put this ideal to the test by turning private sentiments into public acts; who got invited to a brew party, and how one behaved towards them while drinking, could either express feelings of respect and mutuality or expose their absence.

As a commodity, alcohol was distributed according to the Native values of *generosity* and *reciprocity*. Just as caribou meat, fish, firewood and hides were shared as part of the local system of exchange, homebrew passed as an

element of social currency. The informal accounts that people kept in their heads of goods given and received served as measures of reputation: a person's largesse with homebrew, though less crucial than the giving of food, could mark his or her image as generous or stingy, as welcome or deviant. Hospitality thus had to be practised alongside the risk of insult and animosity.

People also held firmly to ideals of individual autonomy and emotional restraint. The ethic of independent action embraced many facets of life, including the freedom to hunt where one chose, to make camp or leave the village when one saw fit, and to make homebrew despite the laws of the Whites or the disapproval of certain neighbours. A corollary of autonomy—its negative reciprocal—was that people should avoid intervention in each other's lives. This ethic of *non-intervention* was manifested in many ways.[4] People did not tell one another how to trap, where to make camp, or how to discipline a child or a spouse. The anti-authoritarian ethic extended to alcohol and its potential dangers. People may have privately disparaged the excesses of others, but they would not publicly express their disapproval or interfere when others indulged. Even when drinking led to violence, people tried to refrain from injecting themselves into the situation because intervention was easily mistaken for intrusion.

Cultural norms of control not only applied to how one dealt with others but also to how one dealt with oneself. *Self-restraint* was a hallmark of sobriety, and the normal tenor of social life—within families, among kin, between neighbours—was marked by emotional containment. There were notable exceptions: children and young pups were treated with open affection, and grown dogs were the objects of direct and displaced anger. But the feelings underlying other relationships were more likely to be understood than expressed. Drinking provided the one situation where the rules of restraint were suspended. Conversations at brew parties quickly escalated beyond the muted tone that obtained in everyday talk. Even before people had a chance to put much alcohol in their stomachs, speech and body language became animated. Drinkers expressed themselves more provocatively in verbal, aggressive and sexual ways. Old quarrels, for example, suspended in time, were revived in the atmosphere of a brew party. But it was the context of drinking, and not just the alcohol content of people's blood, that defined such behaviour. Animated drinkers at a party could quickly lower their voices and their volatility if an unwelcome person entered the cabin. The rapid reassertion of control suggests that propriety and sobriety could be reconstituted when socially necessary.

People used drinking to re-define *responsibility* as well as restraint. Sober individuals were accountable for their actions. But alcohol changed the way certain people behaved and the way others judged their behaviour. An ex-

ample of this was provided by Emile, a man who appeared drunk at a party, and who then picked a fight with his former trapping partner. Because he was inebriated, Emile was seen as being out of control. Whether the others who were present shared his feeling that this partner had stolen some of his furs was tangential to their immediate assessment of his actions: since Emile was perceived as drunk, he could not be held responsible. Alcohol thus created a "time out" situation during which "socially sanctioned misbehaviour" became permissible (Edgerton 1976:59). Furthermore, a man who began such a fight was not held "accountable" for his actions in the literal sense of having to "give an account" of his behaviour (ibid.:26-31). Under circumstances of this kind, people in the community preferred to get past the trouble, not analyze it, or hear it explained or excused. In the example being considered, they did not upbraid or condemn Emile either at the time of the fight or on the following morning. Such a judgement, however, was not invariably the end of the story: people who forgave did not necessarily forget. While they did not expect to *hear* accounts, they did *keep* accounts of other people's misconduct in their heads. In this case, for example, the assaulted partner nursed a memory of the night's events and acted on it several weeks later—at a time when he, also under the influence of alcohol, could not be held accountable for his behaviour. In reality, then, alcohol re-defined and suspended responsibility, but it did not erase it.[5]

Deviance and Drinking

For most of the Native people at Colville Lake, drinking per se was not deviant. In the narrowly legal sense, in fact, the most deviant aspect of drinking was not alcohol but brewing. Due to the community's isolation and lack of a liquor store, however, bringing in commercially produced alcohol was a very difficult, unpredictable and expensive proposition. Not only was making homebrew more feasible and affordable, but the community's tolerance of this activity, and the absence of local law enforcement agents, allowed it to proceed in a relatively uninterrupted way. Native attitudes and White law did not coincide on the issue of drinking, then, but they did not actively clash.

Drinking did set the stage, however, for certain forms of behaviour that deviated from what Indian people regarded as proper and acceptable. As already noted, stinginess with alcohol and the failure to reciprocate invitations to brew parties could tarnish reputations and impair interdependence. Of more immediate impact were the violence and manipulation which drinking occasioned and the questions about responsibility which it precipitated.

Each of these issues was intensified and publicized by the physical layout of the settlement. In comparison to the dispersed and largely sober quality

of winter existence in the bush, social life in the village occurred within a small spatial arena. The community sat upon a narrow plateau overlooking a lake, and its Native houses, church and store lay clustered within a few hundred yards of one another. Indian homes, most of which were single-room, spruce log cabins, were even more concentrated: they were all set around an open plaza at one end of the village, with as few as a dozen yards separating one home from the next. Behind people's cabins lay their outhouses and the area where their sled dogs were kept staked. But to the front and sides of people's homes there were no trees to block the view, no undulations in the land to absorb sound or deflect it.

There was thus little privacy within the community. Trips to the store and church, visits to the outhouse, departures for the lake and arrivals from the bush could all be witnessed with ease. Raised voices in one cabin were heard next door or several houses away. Brew parties were consequently visible and audible to non-participants as well as invited guests.

What was true on the outside was even more evident on the inside of people's home. Most houses had no internal divisions of space. Since children were allowed to be present when adults drank, they became eye and ear witnesses to their parents' parties from infancy on. They therefore became socialized to the emotional effects of alcohol from a young age, and built the associated behaviours into their image of adult comportment. Young children sometimes became very upset at what they saw: they would try to pull parents away from provocative encounters, and some even spilled out brew pots to prevent an impending party (cf. Durgin 1974:128-132). But increasing familiarity and age eventually drew most youngsters into an acceptance of drinking as a fact of life and as a marker of adulthood. One aspect of growing up in the community involved periodically sampling or sneaking homebrew in late childhood and then gradually moving to a more complete participation in drinking during adolescence. At the other end of the life cycle, when elderly people could no longer hunt and fish, they still had a chance to be generous and reciprocate the hospitality of others by sharing homebrew and hosting parties. For both young and old, then, drinking offered a means of participating in the culture and displaying its values.

For people of all ages, the geography of the village and the face-to-face quality of much daily life served to spotlight the deviance of drinkers. Specifically, the lack of privacy on the inside and outside of people's houses shaped the way community members responded to obstreperous acts. When a heated argument or violence erupted at a party, the antagonists were usually made to leave. This rarely ended the encounter, however, but merely shifted its venue from the inside to the more public space of the plaza. Faces quickly appeared in the windows and doorways of other homes and shouts of "free show" alerted people to the unfolding spectacle.

Having set the stage for people to act, spectators now proceeded to direct them. People who were arguing or pushing were encouraged to continue. A wife trying to pull her husband away from a quarrel may have been praised, but was also likely to be mocked and mimicked. The chorus of onlookers recognized that antagonists, preoccupied with their struggle, were highly suggestible at such moments. Offstage voices sometimes offered people very specific suggestions, such as the kind of blow or taunt to throw. Though performers rarely acknowledged these instructions, they often acted as if they were following them.

The deviance of the public drama was twofold. There was the uncharacteristic display of intense emotionality by the drinkers and the explicit manipulation of them by their normally reticent neighbours. Both of these departures from proper conduct were not only tolerable, they were enjoyable: the suppressed was made public without incurring responsibility and the public was both informed and entertained. The experience for spectators was vicarious but cathartic. In Freudian terms, drinking was the prime mechanism by which the group process replaced repression with regression (Freud 1960:60, 62). But this theatre-in-the-round also had its limits and its dangers. People found its deviance profitable only as long as the drinkers did not threaten to inflict serious injury on one another. When the latter possibility loomed, comedy threatened to slip into tragedy.

The shift to a more serious script challenged another of the community's basic values, the premium placed on not interfering in other people's affairs. Spectators, who had called on one another to watch and then encouraged the drinkers to act, now tried to get other witnesses to intervene: "André, tell them to stop"; "Mary, take your husband home."

The strategy of getting others to intercede had elements of conformity and self-preservation. Neutral individuals who tried to separate combatants were sometimes turned on by the fighters, and found themselves abused as well as embarrassed. If a close relative was involved, however, a sense of responsibility was likely to outweigh the element of risk. Women, for example, often shadowed their husbands at parties, monitoring their behaviour, ready to intervene if hostilities promised to erupt. This was not only consistent with the deference that women showed towards men in the community, but also meant that females had to exercise more control over their own drinking in order to play the roles of monitor and mediator effectively.[6]

But women were not the only ones who bore a disproportionate share of the peace-keeping responsibilities. The Native people in the community who abstained from alcohol were also called upon when other pleas and measures failed. Related to the drinkers by kinship but distanced from them by their personal code of conduct, non-drinkers resented being drafted, but

they sometimes agreed to act as mediators. The effect on their public and self-image was mixed. Occasionally ridiculed for their moral stance on alcohol, they were also praised for the power it gave them to step in where others feared to tread. They recognized this ambiguity and resented it. As one adolescent boy said of his father, "Why should he have to get involved when they can't handle their liquor or their own lives?"

The community's court of last resort consisted of its two non-Native residents, the priest and the fur trader. Segregated from them by race and space, Native people were extremely reluctant to involve these men in their disputes and problems. Asking them to intercede compromised Native autonomy, and gave the Whites information they could use to pressure or embarrass Indian people. Drinking therefore usually served, as it does in other Native communities, "to maintain the Indian-white boundary" (Lurie 1979:135). But drunken violence at the village was sometimes an exception to this rule because it went beyond the behaviours that Native individuals felt they could control themselves. Torn between the difficulty of intervening with one another and a hesitancy to call in White authority figures, community members often saw the latter as the lesser of two evils.

They knew that the price was sometimes a lecture from the Whites on liquor. But they also privately dismissed this as a bit of hypocrisy. "Everyone has a right to a good time," explained one man. "Indians just like to do it their own way." It was not only that White people themselves drank and got drunk. It was also that the admonishing words came from individuals whose ancestors had introduced alcohol to Indian people and who, in Native eyes, therefore had to bear at least some of the responsibility for dealing with its consequences. The final ambiguity of alcohol, then, was that it brought together individuals who were normally distant, and made them feel the weight of responsibilities that each felt belonged to the other.

Discussion

In the aftermath of a prolonged or intense period of drinking at the settlement, many people tended to withdraw to hunting or fishing camps. Some wanted to escape from the overheated atmosphere of sociability and tension created by their neighbours. Others, their reputations already compromised by their drunken behaviour, sought to avoid additional stigma by absenting themselves from further temptation and gossip. In either case, withdrawal was likely to be explained in public as due to the need to secure meat or fish rather than as an explicit desire to escape from others or from one's own vulnerability. The bush thus served as a kind of "back" region to which people could retreat (Goffman 1959), and economic needs were used to mask people's real motives for leaving. Regardless of motive or rationale,

such a strategy of withdrawal was consistent with the way Native people dealt with most situations of inter-personal stress (Savishinsky 1971). Furthermore, the fact that people's trips to the bush were accounted for in economic rather than alcoholic terms reflected the Dene attitude that individuals were not specifically accountable for their drunken comportment.

Without the help of theology or social theory, the people of Colville Lake intuitively recognized what Martin Buber called "the exalted melancholy of our fate" (Buber 1958:16), the fact that every Thou in our world must become an It, that the people with whom we are intimate must also become objects to us, and that, as Georg Simmel observed, it is the separations in our lives that make our relationships possible (Simmel 1957).[7] To these insights, Indian people added some truths of their own. One was that life in a small-scale, interdependent community required a high level of tolerance for the vagaries of people's behaviour and misbehaviour. There were, of course, expectations about human demeanour, but there were also ways for dealing with their violation. Emotional restraint placed responsible limits on sober conduct, but people were also free to act upon the licence granted them by liquor. When they did so, reputations may have suffered, but the stigma was not permanent.

While the deviance that ensued from alcohol was disturbing to Native people, it was still "soft" deviance—that is, it did not pose a serious threat to the lives of individuals or the well-being of the community as a whole (Raybeck 1991). Drunken abuses were usually private violations directed against persons and their property rather than the public at large. There was only one man in the village who occasionally drank alone, and even he was a common participant at brew parties. Another individual—the most marginal man in the community—was a heavy drinker and wife-beater, but he was more frequently gossiped about for his laziness as a trapper and his failure to reciprocate other people's generosity with meat and fish. Furthermore, there were no clinical alcoholics at Colville Lake.[8] Even the community's heaviest drinkers could go for weeks or months without homebrew when living in the bush. Just as many of them could turn their drunken comportment on or off when the rhythm of a party dictated, most could refrain from liquor when survival made this imperative. When drinking behaviour did get out of hand, disapproval, withdrawal, gossip, mimicry and embarrassment were seen as sufficiently punitive responses to it.

In contrast to the treatment of deviant people in complex, Western societies, Indian drinkers—even the most chronic and disruptive ones—were not labelled by their peers. Nor were they placed in institutions. The latter did not exist within the village, just as labels did not exist as part of the Native vocabulary. Neither of these civilized responses to deviance—verbal stigma or physical isolation—would have worked in this small world of in-

terdependence and kinship, of proximity and publicity. Both would have been disproportionate to the relatively mild nature of the misbehaviour at issue. Furthermore, the financial costs of institutionalization would have been unaffordable, and the social costs of ostracism too wrenching. To sever a relationship with one person would jeopardize ties to others because the troublesome individual connected a person to other members of the community. Indian people felt that it was preferable and sometimes more profitable to play with, learn from and leave drinkers than it would have been to label and risk losing them altogether. Dealing with deviant acts was far more fruitful than imposing a deviant identity on people.

In summary, drinking was a pleasure and a problem for Indian people. It attracted some, repelled others, but affected everyone. At Colville Lake, the illegality of brewing was a minor issue for Native members of the community. Of much greater concern to them were people's emotionality, stinginess, interference, suggestibility and sense of responsibility. Native individuals knew that Whites, who introduced alcohol and now condemn its excesses, themselves continue to drink and sometimes get drunk. They are consequently seen as hypocritical by many Natives who, nevertheless, ask them, albeit reluctantly, to intercede in their quarrels.

Despite the appearance of volatility—the raised voices, the occasional fights, the spectacles of embarrassment and the ebb and flow of people—drinking at Colville Lake was usually under control, even when it spilled out into deviant behaviour. Participants lived without labels, were restrained without institutions, and indulged without becoming alcoholics. For the population as a whole, drinking was seasonal and sectional, its misbehaviours staged and its deviance soft.

The village, despite its small size, lacked a uniform code of conduct regarding alcohol. The attitudes of Whites and Indians differed, and Native people themselves were split between brewers and non-drinkers. The culture of the community represented what Anthony Wallace has called an "organization of diversity"—an orchestration of varied behaviours, personalities and values—rather than a standardized way of living and thinking to which everyone subscribed (Wallace 1970:22). The diversity wove together several contrasting themes and issues: the counterpoint of Indian and White, restraint and volatility, privacy and publicity, manipulation and non-intervention, responsibility and freedom, and normative and deviant.

The result of this counterpoint was sometimes dissonant, but the dissonance underscored a picture which sheds some good light on the bad. The lesson of Colville Lake is that cultural differences and community size not only shape people's perception of deviance, but also affect their willingness to indulge in it, and their ability to tolerate it.

Comparisons and Conclusions

In four centuries of culture contact, Europeans and Native Americans have introduced one another to a great variety of ideas, technologies and behaviours. Few of these have been as seductive, as controversial and as misunderstood as alcohol. The relationship between drinking, behaviour and deviance has been studied in many Native American populations, including a number of northern communities. Most of the latter have been considerably larger and more urbanized than Colville Lake, however, and so the village provides no comparable data on such issues as policing, public policies, arrest rates, liquor purchases, alcohol education programs or Native conduct in bars and hotels. The village's size, isolation and economy embody a number of distinctive characteristics which shape its drinking pattern: these include its lack of a retail liquor store, the absence of local law enforcement officials, an emphasis on bush activities for subsistence, a small and closely interrelated Native population, and the presence of only a few non-Native residents.

Despite these differences, the people of Colville Lake share with other Northern Natives a set of traditional values and an ambivalence about alcohol. Behavioural norms contribute to the people's ambiguous feelings about drinking. Along with other sub-Arctic Indians, the Dene construct their personality systems around emphases on emotional restraint, individual autonomy, anti-authoritarianism and non-interference (Honigmann 1975, 1981).[9] A commitment to non-intervention makes it especially difficult for Native people to deal directly with the deviant acts engendered by alcohol. When self-control is suspended, community controls are not always adequate to the task of sustaining peaceful relations. At Colville Lake, this was because the social mechanisms that people counted on to maintain order—gossip, public opinion, family pressure, physical withdrawal, aggressive displacement and repression—were essentially non-corporate and non-political in nature. In the face of drunken violence there, Whites and non-drinking Natives were occasionally called in, but this was only done with reluctance, with difficulty, and with limited effectiveness. It was not, to pilfer from Yeats (1984), that "mere anarchy was loosed upon the world," but that people here were sometimes compelled to live with some of their own disorder.

Problems of public control and self-control are widespread among indigenous people trying to deal with Western patterns of alcohol. Excessive drunkenness among Native Americans and other peoples has been attributed to a combination of weak internal controls, loose social structure and inadequate or discriminatory agencies working to regulate drunken and emotional comportment (Field 1962; Price 1975). In several Arctic towns, the accul-

turation of indigenous people to Western values has included the process of learning to drink like Whites (Honigmann and Honigmann 1965, 1970). A different response has been found in some Native settlements in Alaska where membership in fundamentalist Christian churches has been an effective way for certain individuals to stop their drinking (Hippler 1974).

Sectarian lifestyles, however, can also have a divisive impact on Native communities by segregating members of different congregations from one another. This kind of problem also arises in communities where indigenous police forces have been created to deal with alcohol and other forms of deviance (cf. Fleras 1981).

Viewed cross-culturally, the most enduring ambiguity of alcohol lies in the combination of positive experiences and negative sanctions that it evokes. Many of the contrasting qualities found at Colville Lake are replicated in other indigenous communities that have been studied. Among such Northern Natives as the Kutchin (Balicki 1968), the Salish (Lemert 1958), the Aleuts (Berreman 1956), the Naskapi (Robbins 1973), the Hare at Fort Good Hope (Durgin 1974) and the Indians of Delio (Honigmann and Honigmann 1945), alcohol helps people to overcome their reticence and express conflict; it validates their claims to identity and adulthood; and it promotes a sense of sociability and social solidarity. In each of these groups, people have also been found to exaggerate or mimic a state of drunkenness in order to circumvent their normal reserve and act out without penalty. As Robbins (1973:115) suggests for the Naskapi, the safety valve of drunken excesses allows for the maintenance of a "reticence ethic" in other areas of life. These and similar cases demonstrate that people often achieve a state of mellowness or intoxication with little alcohol in their bodies, or even from the mere anticipation of drinking (e.g., Berreman 1956:507; Lemert 1958:97; Mandelbaum 1965:282). In many Native American communities, the carry-over of hostilities from one drinking event to the next is also a common factor, as is people's readiness to fight or find provocation in seemingly innocuous behaviour (Washburne 1961:xviii; MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969:47, 64; Brody 1971; Durgin 1974:79-86). Furthermore, the ease with which Native and other people move between sobriety and inebriation in response to immediate social circumstances underlines the cultural definition of drunken comportment, not just its physiological basis.

In ethnically mixed communities, cultural differences in drinking patterns have been a seedbed for misjudgment and misunderstanding. Some Whites in the North, for example, have valued controlled drinking for its enhancement of sociability. But many Native people have also openly appreciated the drunkenness and disinhibition that alcohol promotes: they often drink specifically "to get drunk" (e.g., Berreman 1956:507; Lemert 1958:93). Their image of a "good brew party," in fact, echoes some of the require-

ments for a traditional Irish wake: lots of people, lots of alcohol and at least one good fight (Scheper-Hughes 1983:139).

But just as the English have looked down upon the behaviour of the Irish, Indians feel stigmatized by the Westerners who dominate and judge their world. The White image of Native drinking as deviant is thus partly a consequence of a "sub-cultural conflict" between minority and majority populations (Edgerton 1976:20-21). The White stereotype of the drunken Indian has been resented but also internalized by many Natives, some of whom have become sensitive to the self-fulfilling nature of the concept. At Colville Lake, this was one reason that Indian people sought to keep Whites at a distance from their parties. The opinions of outsiders only added to the tensions that Native people there already felt between their own values of generosity and autonomy, interdependence and independence, and freedom and restraint.

The ambiguities of alcohol were thus rooted in questions of meaning as well as conduct, and the deviance of drinkers grew out of the cultural contradictions with which life confronted them. Within this small community, there were charges of illegality, hypocrisy, violence and intrusiveness. There were feelings of righteousness as well as claims to the right to celebrate life as one chose. As with so many other moral issues, there was no one truth but there were many judgments. The most revealing were people's assessments of themselves. The most divisive were their attributions of deviance to others. But all lent force to the separations which defined this community, and which thereby bound its members together.

Notes

1. This essay is based upon sections of a paper presented at the Conference on Cross-Cultural Deviance, held at the University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, in May 1984. It draws on anthropological fieldwork in the Dene (Hare Indian) community of Colville Lake, Northwest Territories, conducted during 1967, 1968 and 1971 with support from the National Science Foundation (U.S.) and the National Museum of Man of the National Museums of Canada. Several earlier publications have dealt with various aspects of drinking in this community (Savishinsky 1974, 1977; Savishinsky and Savishinsky 1980). For related material on alcohol use in the neighbouring town of Fort Good Hope, see Sue (1964) and Durgin (1974). I would like to thank Richard Brymer, Morris Freilich, Robert Prus and Douglas Raybeck for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.
2. Since the establishment of the village of Colville Lake, people from the two communities have continued to visit and intermarry. All of the Native people at Colville Lake have relatives at Good Hope. Drinking patterns at the fort town have been described in detail by Durgin (1974). According to Hurlbert (1962), the manufacture of homebrew at Fort Good Hope became widespread in the 1920s.
3. People sometimes illustrated the incompatibility of drinking and survival activities by citing alcohol-related incidents and deaths at Fort Good Hope and other MacKenzie area communities.

4. Several good illustrations of how this principle operates are provided by Broch (1977/78, 1983), who takes his examples from incidents at Fort Good Hope. Comparable material on the Cree is provided by Preston in his essay in this volume.
5. Commenting on the conscious aspects of such behaviour, Edgerton (1976:59) argues that societies in which alcohol relieves a person of responsibility are "a deviant's delight. In such societies he is able to 'save up' his deviant violence, sexuality and the like for drunken occasions during which he may behave with relative impunity. Here, we call attention to man's calculation of the consequences of his deviance and suggest that, to a degree at least, man is able to deviate when it is most to his advantage to do so."
6. Other studies have also indicated that Native men and women have distinct experiences in drinking situations. For example, at Frobisher Bay, Inuit women exhibited embarrassment over the drunken behaviour of their men (Honigmann and Honigmann 1965:214). Among Indians and Inuit at Aklavik, females suffered more guilt about drinking because of its behavioural association with promiscuous sex (Clairmont 1962:8, 1963:60). In most cultures, drinking is seen as being more suitable for men than for women (Mandelbaum 1965:282).
7. Simmel notes that "we are continually separating our bonds and binding our separations" (1957:1, quoted in Schwartz 1968:741). Physical withdrawal is, of course, only one of many means for obtaining privacy and thereby preserving social relations and self-image. The social functions of privacy, and the culturally variable ways of securing it, are reviewed by Hall (1966), Schwartz (1968), Gregor (1970) and Roberts and Gregor (1971).
8. Mandelbaum (1965:282) notes that alcohol addiction and solitary drinking are relatively rare in non-Western societies.
9. The latter quality is explored by Preston in his essay on Cree deviance in this volume.

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