

Université de Montréal

Not Just Drunks:

Agency and Aspirations of Eeyou Drinkers in Chisasibi, Quebec

Par

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Thèse présentée en vue de l'obtention du grade de doctorat
en anthropologie

Octobre, 2021

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Université de Montréal

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Cette thèse intitulée

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Résumé

La présente recherche vise à ajouter la vision et l'expérience de vie des buveurs autochtones à la littérature anthropologique portant sur ces derniers. La documentation publiée à ce jour démontre un lien entre les habitudes de consommation d'alcool chez les autochtones et les conséquences de siècles de perturbations coloniales. Toutefois, la perception qu'ont les buveurs autochtones demeure absente de ces ouvrages d'analyse. Des entrevues, des observations participatives et des analyses par les médias locaux ont été menées entre 2010 et 2011 dans la communauté crie (eeyou) de Chisasibi, au Québec, auprès de membres répondants de la communauté prenant part à un large éventail d'habitudes relatives à l'alcool.

Une attention particulière a été portée aux Eeyouch âgés de 18 à 60 ans se définissant eux-mêmes comme des buveurs d'alcool. Une approche phénoménologique axée sur l'expérience vécue et sur les concepts d'agentivité et de corporéité a été utilisée pour démontrer la manière dont les buveurs interagissent avec les idées et les personnes pour donner un sens à leurs expériences et à leurs identités. La possession et la consommation d'alcool sont interdites à Chisasibi et l'opinion générale au sein de la communauté est que l'alcool est à la fois un résultat et un facteur de perturbation sociale et culturelle. La recherche a démontré que de nombreux membres de la communauté craignent d'interagir avec des individus en état d'ébriété, tout en ressentant de la compassion à leur égard en raison des traumatismes intergénérationnels qu'ils ont vécus. Les participants à la recherche qui se sont définis comme des buveurs actuels ou anciens ont exprimé des sentiments positifs associés à la consommation d'alcool et à l'ivresse, tout en reconnaissant que leurs raisons de boire découlaient d'émotions douloureuses liées aux effets de la colonisation sur leur communauté et leurs familles. Au cours des observations participatives et des entrevues, ces participants ont exprimé une certaine prise de décision par rapport à leur choix de boire; la plupart d'entre eux ont estimé qu'ils avaient le droit et la capacité de choisir, et beaucoup considèrent qu'une consommation responsable demeure possible. En outre, lorsqu'ils décident d'arrêter ou de réduire leur consommation d'alcool, ils mesurent la moralité de leurs actions par rapport aux normes et aux valeurs locales. Malgré l'opinion populaire selon laquelle les gens ne

sont pas eux-mêmes lorsqu'ils sont ivres, ils ont revendiqué la responsabilité de leur choix de boire et de leurs actions lorsqu'ils étaient ivres. Enfin, ces participants se sont qualifiés eux-mêmes en termes qui allaient au-delà de celui de buveur et qui étaient axés sur le maintien de la culture eeyoue, l'épanouissement spirituel ou religieux, les rôles familiaux et la réussite professionnelle.¹

Mots-clés : Boire autochtone, Ethnographie du boire, Eeyouch de la Baie James, Anthropologie phénoménologique, Agentivité, Corporéité.

¹ Ce résumé a été traduit de l'anglais par [Isanielle Enright](#).

Abstract

This research aimed to add the perspectives and life experiences of Indigenous drinkers to the anthropological literature on Indigenous drinking. Existing literature demonstrates links between current rates and patterns of drinking and centuries of colonial disruption. However, the perspectives of drinkers are largely absent from these analyses. Interviews, participant-observation, and an analysis of local media were conducted in the Eeyou (Cree) community of Chisasibi, Quebec, from 2010 to 2011 with interested community members of all drinking statuses. A focus was placed on the experiences of Eeyouch between the ages of 18 and 60 who identified as current or former drinkers. A phenomenological approach, focusing on lived experience, and the concepts of agency and embodiment were employed to demonstrate the ways in which drinkers interact with ideas and people to give meaning to their experiences and identities. Possession and consumption of alcohol are banned in Chisasibi, and the dominant community view is that alcohol is both a result of and contributor to social and cultural disruption. Research demonstrated that many community members feared interacting with drunken individuals while expressing compassion toward them due to their own experiences of inter-generational trauma. Research participants who identified as current and former drinkers expressed positive feelings associated with drinking and drunkenness, while recognizing that their reasons for drinking stemmed from painful emotions related to the impacts of colonization on their community and families. During both participant-observation and interviews, these participants expressed a sense of volition in relation to their choice to drink; most participants felt that they had the right and capacity to choose, and many felt that responsible drinking was possible. Further, when deciding whether to quit or reduce their drinking, they measured the morality of their actions against local norms and values. Despite the popular view that people are not themselves when drunk, they claimed responsibility for both their choice to drink and actions performed while drunk. Finally, these participants expressed identities that went beyond that of “drunk” and that focused on the maintenance of Eeyou culture, spiritual or religious fulfilment, familial roles, and professional achievement.

Keywords: Indigenous drinking, Ethnography of drinking, James Bay Eeyouch, Phenomenological anthropology, Agency, Embodiment.

To the people of Chisasibi and to all the drinkers in my life, past and present.

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Acknowledgements

I have many thanks to give to all the people who have contributed to the completion of this work. The people in Chisasibi who shared their stories, their pain, their joy, their resilience, their community, and their homes with me have my deepest gratitude. Despite the delicacy of the topic and the understandable wariness that they may have had toward non-Indigenous researchers, I was made to feel like I belonged in Chisasibi. Friends, colleagues, and research participants encouraged me to question everything I thought I knew and to step out of my comfort zone every day that I was in Chisasibi, and many of them continue to do so today. I consider this a life-changing gift and am humbled by its strength and endurance.

In the world of academia, many people have provided me with invaluable guidance and mentorship. First and foremost, I have immense gratitude toward my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Marie-Pierre Bousquet. From our first meeting in 2007, during which she gave me “homework” and funding recommendations before I was officially her student, to the final steps in the completion of this dissertation, she has shown unwavering enthusiasm for the value of this project. Her support has helped me maintain the determination to complete my dissertation despite many personal and financial setbacks.

Other professors I’ve worked with during my graduate studies have ultimately contributed to my success in this project. Most recently, the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Pierre Minn, Dr. Guy Lanoue, and external examiner Dr. Natacha Gagné, have allowed me to proceed to the last stage of this degree with full confidence in my work. Their engagement with the material in this dissertation has opened new avenues of discussion and thought for future work. Dr. Gilles Bibeau, who led my first-year doctoral seminars, inspired me to make greater connections between anthropology and other disciplines. Dr. Karine Bates and Dr. Robert Crépeau, members of my comprehensive exam committee, greatly contributed to the development of my initial research questions. Dr. Sally Cole, my master’s thesis supervisor at Concordia University, has remained a strong influence in my desire to experiment with different writing styles and to highlight voices that have long gone unheard in anthropological literature. Other professors from my master’s

experience maintain an important influence on my work. Dr. Nadia Ferrara, a member of my master's thesis committee, helped me have confidence in my ability to address delicate subject matter from an anthropological point of view. Dr. Dominique Legros, also on my master's thesis committee, has always encouraged me to look beyond the horizons of anthropological thought. Finally, Dr. Chris Trott, who taught at Concordia University during my undergraduate years, remains a mentor to this day and has always helped remind me of the reasons I came into anthropology in the first place.

Several colleagues at Vanier College, where I have taught anthropology since 2002, are also owed tremendous gratitude. From proofreading my funding applications, to helping brainstorm titles for the dissertation, to random messages of encouragement, Dr. Gordon Aronoff has never wavered in his encouragement and confidence in my ability to complete this dissertation. Several other colleagues have helped by proofreading funding applications or parts of this work, or by sharing their own experiences with doctoral work: Kim Matthews, Lisa Fiorentino, Mark Prentice, Erin McLeod...thank you all so much!

Funding from the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC), Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Northern Scientific Training Program (NSTP), and the department of Anthropology at the Université de Montréal made it possible for me to take a leave of absence from my employment for the first 3 years of the doctoral program. For that, I am deeply grateful.

I also would like to express gratitude to the two individuals who translated the English version of the abstract. I wanted to support Indigenous translators. Nellie Cox of Chisasibi, who works as a translator at the Cree School Board, translated the abstract into *iijiyiyimuwin*. While I am fluent in spoken French, the quality of my written French is not ideal. Isanielle Enright, Kanien'kehà:ka and professional translator, therefore translated the abstract into French.

On the home front, involvement in the urban Indigenous community of Tioh'tia:ke (Montreal) has deepened my commitment to supporting Indigenous-led movements for decolonization and Indigenization. The insights shared by local Indigenous Elders, activists, scholars, educators,

artists, and community workers have led me to question my choices in a deeper way and to strive to remain accountable, always.

Many friends and chosen family members have greatly supported me throughout this endeavour. Marie, merci pour ton soutien dans la traduction de l'article basée sur cette thèse! Karine, thank you so much for your help in the preparation of my defense in those last few days when the stakes seemed higher than ever! Suzanne, merci pour la traduction d'un résumé d'une communication il y a bien des années, ainsi que ton offre de café pour au « pauvre doctorant qui ne doit absolument pas manquer de café ». Charlie, Sarah M., Sylvie, Maryanne, and many dear friends: thank you for your words of encouragement over the years. I am eternally thankful to my parents, Rose-Marie and Jacques, who taught me perseverance and resilience. I have needed to dig deep into these to get to the point of even writing this acknowledgements page! Larry, thank you for driving me to Chisasibi that first time for my master's research. I would have never been able to go otherwise, and it's thanks to that first trip that I have been able to keep going back. Lorena, thank you for being understanding over the years when both research and writing have led to less time for us to spend together. And to my dear son, your willingness to uproot your life and spend a year in Chisasibi with me has made all the difference. I would not have survived a year away from my precious child.

“Welcome to Chisasibi!”: An Introduction

“Welcome to Chisasibi!”, a young man yelled out at me with a smile as I smoked a cigarette beside Chisasibi’s commercial centre. It was around 9:30 am on April 29, 2011. The man, whose name I would later learn was Dale³, was standing with four other young men and one young woman. All of them appeared happily intoxicated, and I was to find out that the group was ending a night of drinking. During all my visits to Chisasibi since my first trip in 1998, many of the first people to enthusiastically welcome me to the community were people identified as “drunks”: people who some of my friends and acquaintances advised me to stay away from. Yet the enthusiasm with which groups of people like Dale and his friends greeted me at nearly every occasion made it hard for me to follow that well-meaning advice.

This dissertation stems in large part from my first refusal, during my master’s fieldwork in 1998, to follow this advice. As a person from a long line of “drunks”, as alcoholism was common in my family of origin, I could not find it within me to ignore the people who were the most relatable to me and who gave me what felt like the warmest welcome. My choice led me to make connections that I never would have otherwise. It led me to learn about the lives of people who are often unheard despite how loudly they express themselves. This choice also led me, in the years that followed my first fieldwork experience, to be highly critical of portrayals of Indigenous drinking in anthropological literature.

I am particularly critical of the way in which anthropological literature unintentionally posits Indigenous drinkers as passive victims, without agency. One of the main streams of discourse in anthropology and related fields locates Indigenous drinkers in a causal chain that reaches back to the beginning of settler colonialism on Turtle Island⁴ and extends to the present day, causing social disruption at every step. The other examines the behaviour of Indigenous drinkers to extract latent functions of which the drinkers themselves are supposedly unaware.

³ To preserve the confidentiality of research participants and friends who shared their stories and perspectives with me, pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation.

⁴ Turtle Island is commonly used by Indigenous and other writers to refer to North America. The designation of Turtle Island is found in the origin stories of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples.

This dissertation does not deny the role of colonial disruption in the phenomenon of Indigenous drinking, nor does it deny the damages that excessive drinking causes in communities. Moreover, as an anthropologist, I do not deny that functionalist approaches have their use in helping to relativize behaviour that seems, on the surface, to be maladaptive. Rather, my goal is to centre the perspectives of Indigenous people who drink, or who drank in the past, in ways that are considered problematic in their communities. What do they have to say about their own drinking? Why do they drink? Is it a choice? How does it feel to be a “drunk” or to be drunk in a community where drinking is considered a legal and social transgression? Most importantly, who are they as individuals beyond people who drink or used to drink?

The dissertation takes the form of an ethnographic work, focussing on the lived experiences and perspectives of people who identified as current and former drinkers in Chisasibi, an Eeyou (Cree) community situated on the Quebec coast of James Bay. To this end, a phenomenological approach was used to explore the ways in which the life experiences of drinkers bring them into contact with a multitude of community views. In turn, they engage with these views in agentic ways to understand and make meaning of their own experiences and their identities.

What follows is a brief introduction to the community of Chisasibi and to the main population with whom I worked in this research. Next, I go over some points that are essential to understanding this dissertation, such as the goals, arguments, and limitations of my research, my positionality as a person and researcher, and some important terminology. Finally, the introduction ends with an overview of the organizational structure of the dissertation.

Chisasibi: A Second Home

Chisasibi is a vibrant young community which has continued to grow since its relocation from the island of Fort George in 1980-81.⁵

The above quotation is more than accurate in describing the community of Chisasibi as vibrant. From the first time I set foot in this town in July 1998, I felt the vibrancy of Chisasibi to such an extent that I was compelled to return time and time again. My first stay in the community lasted

⁵ <http://www.makivik.org/chisasibi/> (consulted on April 16, 2016)

3 months. I was completing research for my master's degree in anthropology at Concordia University. I chose this community because I had visited the region of Eeyou Istchee (the Eeyou, or Cree, name for the Eastern James Bay area) to visit a college friend many years before and had developed a personal interest in the area. As is the case for many ethnographers, my host community got under my skin and began to feel like a second home. I returned twice for social visits between that first stay and my year long stay for my doctoral research in 2010-2011 and thus maintained my attachment to the community. But it was during this most recent stay in Chisasibi that this attachment was solidified, and that the town began to feel more like home than like a second home.

Since my return to Montreal in July 2011, I have dreamt of Chisasibi at least once per week. I experience local happenings vicariously through my Facebook friends and continue to pine for the north. In between visits, I look north-west from Montreal, and I imagine the feel of the northern wind on my face. I daydream about the late summer sunsets, the frozen bay in the winter, and walking around in town, along the sandy paths in the community, running into people and having random friendly conversations with people of all ages who welcomed me into their community.

This dissertation is therefore written from a place of close attachment to Chisasibi as a place and as a community. It is written from a place of caring, personal stake, and mutual trust and respect between myself and the people I call friends. It is written with an appreciation for a place that is at once contradictory and consistent and that has its unique set of quirks that can be seen as either annoying or endearing. Is there any other place in the world where the town's 30th anniversary is celebrated two years in a row with no apparent contradiction?

“Drunks” and Heartstrings

My choice of Chisasibi as a location for doctoral fieldwork was a highly personal one; I needed to go back somehow. My choice of topic, however, was both an academic and personal choice. My master's fieldwork dealt with Indigenous/non-Indigenous friendship relations in and outside of

the workplace (Leclerc, 2001)⁶. During the three months that I spent there, the topic of drinking was a salient one and came to play a role in the ways that I formed friendships in the community. Drinking was thus a prominent theme in two chapters of the resulting thesis.

Indeed, whether they are busy at work or at play, running errands, or simply relaxing at home or around town, people in Chisasibi consider encounters with groups of drunken individuals to be a regular feature of their daily lives. My decision to socialise with people who were labeled “drunks” by my host family and other people in the community was an ethical one.⁷ I came from a family where problematic alcohol consumption was a recurring theme leading to fatal illness in multiple cases and to emotional and mental despair in many others. I had grown up to see the multiple facets of individuals in situations of extreme alcohol consumption and had adopted a personal philosophy that these individuals had knowledge and life experience that were as rich as anyone else’s. Therefore, despite several warnings such as “Don’t talk to the drunks” and the status of Chisasibi as a dry community, I decided that I would risk my own reputation in the community and sit and chat with people who were drinking outside and even share an occasional drink with them.

In the years between the completion of my master’s degree and the beginning of my doctoral studies, I was on hiatus from being a student and developing my career as a Cégep⁸ teacher. However, the “drunks” of Chisasibi were always on my mind. I often remembered one man who was standing on the front porch of a house as I walked by one sunny day. He looked at me in a strange way, and I thought that he was about to say something. Instead, he fell face first into the sand below. At this point, I have two separate memories. In one version, the man picks himself up almost immediately, and scrambles off in another direction without looking at me. In another, he lays there for quite some time with children playing nearby, and other people walking by. No one says anything. No one approaches. And I stand there not knowing what to do.

⁶ The last name in citations referring to my master’s thesis is different on account of a legal name change.

⁷ See Leclerc (2001), chapter 5, for a more detailed description of my decision to talk to drinkers and the encounters that resulted from this decision.

⁸ Cégep stands for « collège d’enseignement général et professionnel » (College of General and Professional Teaching). Cégeps are institutions of higher learning between high school and university in Quebec.

I cannot tell which version is the “true” memory. I have come to accept that they both have an element of truth. In one case, the fellow in question hurries away, avoiding contact. Given the sense of shame expressed to me by so many drinkers and former drinkers in Chisasibi and elsewhere, this makes sense. In the other, people avoid any chance of interaction with the drunken individual, even if that means not reaching out to help while he is drunk. This also makes sense based on the ambivalence expressed by so many people in Chisasibi about responding to drunken people.

I also frequently thought of Sammy, who I met early during my first stay. He was young and drunk, along with a few of his friends, and I was 25, lonely, with no friends in a new town. Sammy and his friends kept me company on a Sunday morning when most people were out of town to hunt, and the rainy weather kept most other people indoors. But a few days later, I effectively ignored him when he called out to me to say hello as I was walking by the commercial centre. My excuse to myself at the time was that I wanted to hear what the woman I was with had to say; she was telling me about her father’s role against the incursions related to hydroelectric developments in the 1970s. But what also happened was that she spat out the word “Drunks!” as we passed him by, and I was afraid of her judgement should I talk to him. The look on his face when I turned away from him marked me.

Both incidents happened before my decision to disregard advice and judgement and talk to people who drank. And because of that decision, I formed friendships with people I would not have otherwise met: some with people labelled as “drunks” and some who drank in more moderate or private ways and who approached me because they had heard that I was “open minded”. Some of these friendships were short lived. Before the widespread use of the Internet, it was more difficult to stay in touch with people, especially people who spent much of their time intoxicated. But these friendships were not forgotten.

Over the years, they awakened a desire to contribute to the inclusion of the knowledge and experiences of drinkers in the academic discourses on Indigenous realities. This was both out of a deep respect and caring for drinkers and out of a drive for greater academic representation of a mostly unheard population. Much of what I read about Indigenous populations, particularly

material written by non-Indigenous scholars or journalists, referred to the topic of alcohol consumption. But the voices of drinkers themselves were rarely represented. This fuelled my motivation to pursue doctoral research that would focus on the lived realities and perspectives of people collectively referred to as “drunks”, and who had welcomed me into their circles.

About This Dissertation

The stereotype of the “drunken Indian” is very powerful and pervasive in Canadian society. Among non-Indigenous people, it leads to a series of assumptions about Indigenous physical constitution (“They just can’t handle their liquor!”) and about Indigenous social structure (“They just can’t adapt to the modern world!”). These assumptions unfortunately lead many non-Indigenous people to either revile or pity Indigenous communities, neither of which is conducive to productive inter-cultural relations.

In Indigenous communities, the understanding of the issue is much more complex. The stereotype of the “drunken Indian” is one that many rightfully seek to denounce. Not everyone in Indigenous communities drinks, for example. Further, there are historical and social phenomena that help explain the high rates of drinking in Indigenous communities. Centuries of attempts at assimilation by European colonists and Canadian and provincial governments have led to a complete upheaval of Indigenous social structure. This upheaval caused a great deal of emotional and mental distress in the population, leading many to seek relief in various forms of intoxication. Alcohol is the most visible of these, but certainly not the only one. It is therefore circumstance, and not something inherent to Indigenous people or societies, that has led to the existence of high rates of drinking.

Thanks largely to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), understanding of the impact of assimilation attempts on Indigenous communities has spread among non-Indigenous Canadians. Indigenous communities are gaining more support for their ongoing efforts toward community and individual healing.

However, the stereotypes persist and hurt Indigenous people, whether they drink or not, in various ways. One of the ways in which stereotypes affect Indigenous drinkers is that it is largely

assumed that Indigenous people cannot drink in a moderate fashion. Individuals wishing to have some wine with their dinner or a can of beer to relax after work often face criticism or ridicule, sometimes from their own people.

Another way in which these stereotypes hurt Indigenous drinkers is that people who do engage in “problem drinking” are not typically considered to have anything legitimate to say about their own lives. According to many, these individuals are too frequently wrapped up in states of drunkenness to be able to talk about the things that have affected them. They are said to not know anything about their own culture and to be irresponsible and dangerous.

Goals and Argument

One of the goals of this research and dissertation, then, is to encourage recognition of the humanity of people often deemed “less than human”. Drinkers in Chisasibi are Indigenous, and therefore part of a population that has long been oppressed and rendered invisible in Canadian society. It is my hope that sharing the views and experiences of people who drink will help dispel some of the worst stereotypes.

Another goal of this research is to work on filling the void in the literature on Indigenous drinking, which all too often neglects the inclusion of the voices of the people who engage in this behaviour. There is little anthropological work that centres the experiences and views of Indigenous drinkers. Therefore, this work contributes to an anthropological understanding of the issue. It complements existing literature that more than adequately shows the links between Indigenous drinking and colonization and demonstrates that drinking is a cultural phenomenon that, like many others, fulfills certain needs for the people who engage in it.

This dissertation therefore holds the life experiences and worldviews of Eeyou drinkers in Chisasibi as its central focus.⁹ It is based on what they expressed were important topics, during interviews and casual conversation and highlights the ways in which they perceive themselves as willful agents rather than as passive victims of colonial processes. As mentioned, I do not deny the disruptive impacts of colonialism on the Eeyouch and on Indigenous societies or that certain

⁹ A clarification of how the term “drinker” is used for this work is provided in the terminology section below.

forms of drinking are a result of those impacts and are linked with other disruptive phenomena; neither did the participants in my research. Rather, through my discussions with them, I was guided toward seeing the extent to which they engaged with knowledge about the impacts of colonialism on their lives to make meaning for their life experiences and choices.

Indeed, the self-perception as someone with control over one's choice to drink and, therefore, one's status as an agent, was one of the central themes of nearly every discussion I had in a multitude of contexts ranging from parties to encounters with public drinkers to private interview discussions. It must therefore be considered as an important aspect of drinking behaviour as a complement to perspectives coming from *outside* the drinker's own experience.

My argument is outlined in detail in chapter 4. It is built along three primary axes: 1) that there are agentic processes at work in the understanding of one's emotional states and relationship with drinking, at least among those who are in the process of questioning their choices; 2) that there are agentic processes involved in one's consideration of accountability and choice, and 3) that the agentic processes of questioning one's choices and re-orientating one's actions as well as a corresponding sense of self are non-linear and subject to a variety of cultural, moral, and normative evaluations by self and other.

Limits and Limitations of This Research

As with any research, there are limits and limitations to this project. Some are related to establishing parameters for the research process or to practical or safety matters; these are elaborated on in chapter 5, along with my methodological approach. Here, I present some limits with regards to the general topic of the dissertation as well as some limitations on the extent of my research.

First, this is *not* a dissertation about the nature of alcoholism or addictions. While not denying that these concepts play a role in the lives of research participants, I follow their lead in not placing them as central concepts in their expressed perception of self. Further, the medical and psychological knowledge involved in studies of alcoholism and addiction lie outside the boundaries of my own studies and training. What the dissertation *is*, instead, is an ethnographic

exploration of what the population represented by research participants consider to be important about their experiences and views thereof.

Second, this ethnographic study is *not* a report of people's drinking habits. I did not ask questions about what, when, where, or how much they drank, or who they drank with. Rather, I was interested, as discussed above, in their interpretations of their experiences, *on their own terms*. I wanted to know what was important enough to them to want to talk about in relation to their realities.

Third, it is important to note why I focus on the Eeyou population of Chisasibi even though there is an Inuit population within the community. According to local authorities, the Inuit population of Chisasibi, in 2020, numbers at approximately 250 out of a total community population of over 4,500 people (Grand Council of the Crees, 2020). With such a small number, the few self-identified Inuit individuals with whom I spoke in the context of my research would have been too difficult to describe while still preserving their confidentiality. Therefore, unless otherwise specified in the text, respondents quoted or cited in the paper can be assumed to be Eeyou.

Furthermore, my argument makes a connection between the views of drinkers and the general views found within the community. Much of the discussion at the community level is centred on an Eeyou heritage and way of life. The background of the Inuit population of Chisasibi has some similar features, but there are also some significant differences. For example, the Inuit did not traditionally inhabit the area in the region of Chisasibi (Patrick, 2003, Fireman et al., 2011). There has also been conflict between the Eeyouch and the Inuit in the community.

That said, many local Inuit have inter-married with Chisasibi Eeyouch, so there are individuals of mixed heritage. I did not always know the full background of the individuals who participated in the research. Unless they self-identified as Inuit, I did not know if they had any Inuit heritage. Nevertheless, in the context of an official Eeyou community, I chose to focus on the expressed Eeyou realities to avoid specifying "Eeyou" or "Inuit" or using the very broad term "Indigenous" in reference to individual research participants.

In terms of limitations, a primary one is that I never became fluent enough in *iiyiyuyimuwin* to be able to have a conversation with research participants in what is the first language for many of

them. There were a few Eeyou participants who had English or French as a first language. However, for most of them, English was their second language. As fluent as most of them were, my inability to understand them had they chosen to express themselves in their mother tongue undoubtedly leaves a gap filled with things that *could have* been expressed.

Another limitation is that I was unable, due to my personal circumstances, to participate in all the contexts in which people drank. On one hand, this made it easier to avoid certain ethical breaches concerning confidentiality and informed consent that could have easily occurred had I witnessed people in states of extreme drunkenness. However, it does mean that there are in-the-moment conversations and topics of conversation that were not included in this work.

Finally, I was in the community for only one year. It takes many months to simply gain trust on behalf of a large quantity of people on such a sensitive topic. My employment at the school helped, as described in chapter 5. However, there are people who I was never able to reach either because I did not have a chance to meet them, or because they did not pay attention to the forms of media that I used to recruit participants (posters, radio, and the local newsletter).

Positionality

It is very important for me to state that I do not claim to speak *for* the people who participated in this research project. Given the language barrier noted above and given my social identity and position with respect to the people of Chisasibi, it would be impossible anyway.

Without a doubt, various aspects of my identity affected the extent to which people were comfortable sharing their stories and perspectives. On one hand, I was always very open about my own experiences as an adult child of an alcoholic, my own past struggles with drinking and other substances, and my lack of desire to judge people for their drinking behaviour. Along with my status as a moderate drinker and smoker at the time of this research (I no longer smoke), being a part of the wider social grouping that includes all people who have experienced dealing with the effects of drinking – one's own or that of others – may have contributed to the trust that research participants, especially those who identified as current or former drinkers, showed when they shared deeply personal experiences and thoughts.

In terms of connecting with community members who did not feel directly targeted by my research, but who still had things to say on the topic, there were additional factors that facilitated my relationships. First, my existing connections in and knowledge of the community from previous visits, and my general disposition as a joking person surely helped facilitate the formation of friendly and open bonds with research participants, some of whom became friends with whom I still maintain contact. Second, my employment in the high school and in a local Cégep transition program gave me a specific status in the community other than the nebulous one of researcher – a status that tends to be treated with a certain amount of levity in the community.¹⁰

On the other hand, my status as a settler and a researcher never disappeared. My white skin, my non-Eeyou ways of being and expressing myself, and my inability to communicate in *iyyiyuyimuwin* beyond a few basic phrases were constant reminders that I was not of the community and could only go so far in *truly understanding* what people wanted to teach me. Moreover, there is always an inherent power dynamic between settler researchers and Indigenous research participants, given the overarching colonial context. Whether I agree with the existing system of dominance or not, I benefit from it.

All these factors shaped the nature of what was shared, the ways in which I interpreted what was shared, and how I chose to present it in this dissertation. By being transparent about these factors, I hope that anyone reading the dissertation will be able to take these caveats into consideration as they read my ethnographic accounts and my analyses thereof.

Terminology

As I do not use many words in *iyyiyuyimuwin*, the Eeyou language, I do not provide a glossary of terms. In the few instances where a word is used, I simply explain the meaning in the text. However, some terminology does merit explanation here to facilitate the reader's understanding. First, it is of note that I use Eeyou (plural: Eeyouch) rather than Cree to refer to people and the

¹⁰ In my master's thesis, I provided some accounts of people's mocking reactions to the abundant presence of researchers in the community. Further, some friends made similar comments during the time of my doctoral research as well as during social visits and further online contact.

community.¹¹ Many people use Cree in conversation, and most regional entities use Cree in their official titles. However, there is a growing tendency in the community to use the word Eeyou as part of a wider movement toward the assertion of sovereignty. Further, Indigenous scholars advocate for the respect for and use of Indigenous names rather than names that were imposed by colonial nations (see, for example, Vowel, 2016).

Second, the term “drinker” is used throughout the dissertation. Aside from the obvious reason that using a derogatory term such as “drunk” would go against the principles I espouse here and against our ethics as contemporary anthropologists, the term “drinker” requires some immediate clarification, although I do elaborate on this in chapter 2.

Due to the self-selecting recruitment process, and the complex ways in which self-identity works, research participants identified with the act of drinking in a few ways. For example, people who drank at the time of this research would sometimes identify as “former drunks” or “ex-drunks”, despite their current practice. As is elaborated in chapters 10 and 11, the intention behind one’s drinking has an impact on one’s status as one who drinks. One can *drink* in a way that is problematic – frequently, extensively, and publicly – because of unexamined emotional problems, or one can *just drink* in casual, moderate ways without having or causing problems.

Further, my recruitment strategies wound up drawing many people who did not drink at the time of this research but who had done so, in self-professed problematic ways, in the past. I explain my reasons for broadening the scope of participation in chapter 5. For now, suffice it to say that the topic of drinking and its role in their own lives was significant enough to them that they were drawn to participate in a research project that clearly centred the perspectives of people who drank. Indeed, in speaking of their experiences, they were able to articulate their views at the time that they drank in addition to their views at the time of this research.

Therefore, the general term of *drinker* includes all participants who identified as people who had engaged in the act of drinking at some point in their lives, in ways they considered significant. When a distinction is needed between people who drank at the time of the research and those

¹¹ The word Eeyou is sometimes spelled *iivyiyu*. However, the most common spelling in local Chisasibi media was Eeyou. Communities further south in Eeyou Istchee often use the spelling Eenou.

who no longer drank, the terms *current drinker* and *former drinker* are used. However, it is always important to remember that these terms are based on the way in which a person primarily identified and not on their actual behaviours. So, as mentioned above, one could identify as a former drinker and still drink in a wide range of frequencies and quantities.

There is no strict distinction to be made between drinkers and non-drinkers in the community, other than those distinctions made by individuals who identify themselves as one or the other. Even some individuals who self-identify as people who do not drink sometimes drink in moderation; when they say that they do not drink, they mean that they do not drink to get drunk or that they do not drink on a regular basis. Therefore, my reference to people as drinkers or non-drinkers can only refer to their state at the time of my interactions with them or to their self-identification.

There were, as described in more detail in chapter 5, research participants who did not speak from the perspective of a drinker. Rather, they participated with a desire to speak from the point of view of a family member – partner, child, parent - of a drinker, as someone who was affiliated with one of the local entities (health board, school board, band council, etc.), or just as a concerned community member. Their identification in this dissertation with those specific identities does not mean that they were not current or former drinkers. It simply means that they participated in this research in a capacity *other* than that of drinker, with a highlight on these other perspectives. There were a people who engaged with my research from multiple points of view; clarification is offered on a case-by-case basis.

Layout of the dissertation

The first chapter sets the stage for the ethnographic descriptions contained in this dissertation. The location, demographics, and some general characteristics of Chisasibi are described, along with a brief historical overview, a description of the general pace of life, and some of the main themes discussed in the community concerning governance, health, education, and justice.

Following this, chapter 2 provides an overview of the initial views about drinking in the community. Drinkers, during early conversations, tended to emphasise the festive aspects of drinking and drunkenness while other people focused on the negative consequences and the links

between drinking and other social phenomena. These phenomena are observed by community members and scholars alike and have a direct bearing on the existence of a by-law that completely bans alcohol.

Chapter 3 consists of a review of the literature on the topic of alcohol from an anthropological perspective. First, an overview of how anthropologists and other social scientists approach alcohol use as an element of human culture is given. Then I demonstrate that scholars have tended to focus on what is seen as a problematic use of alcohol when it comes to Indigenous societies in North America. The link between alcohol, colonization, and social disruption is highlighted as a recurring anthropological theme. Next, I show how functionalist accounts of alcohol use in Indigenous societies have attempted to show how alcohol use can fulfill certain human needs, even when used in a way that may be perceived by community members as abusive. Finally, I demonstrate that despite the relative lack of discussion of human agency and ambivalence in anthropological literature on Indigenous drinking, there is ethnographic material that points to these as relevant paths of inquiry.

In chapter 4, which focuses on the theoretical and conceptual framework for this dissertation, I explain how my research fills a void in the literature described in the previous chapter whereby perspectives and life experiences of drinkers are rarely highlighted in anthropological literature on Indigenous drinking. I follow this by describing the phenomenological approach that I employ in this dissertation, as well as the main concepts that I use in my analysis: lifeworld, agency, and embodiment. Finally, a more elaborate description of my argument is provided.

Chapter 5 describes the methodological aspects of my research, including access to the community, recruitment, and language learning. I follow with a discussion of my research methods: informal discussion-style interviews, participant-observation, and observations of local media, as well as the methodological implications of applying a phenomenological approach that included drunken states in research. Finally, I discuss ethical issues involved in this research project

In chapter 6, I provide an overview of the analytical tools I employ in this dissertation: thematic analysis of fieldnotes and interview results and the ethnomethodological concepts of context and

indexicality. I then provide an overview of the main contexts of engagement with drinkers during my fieldwork: public spaces and private events. The chapter ends with an overview of the population represented by research respondents as well as a list of key participants.

The ethnographic component of this dissertation begins in earnest with chapter 7. As with chapter 2, which contained some ethnographic material without being the focus, the title of each remaining chapter contains a quotation from a research participant that exemplifies the main message of the chapter. Further, each of the remaining chapters follows a formula whereby ethnographic themes are presented, based on participant observation and interviews, along with an analysis with reference to the ethnographic material.

Chapter 7 is a sort of hybrid chapter; it contains a more focused literature review pertaining to the historical context of drinking in Chisasibi combined with the perspectives of Eeyouch who discussed this topic, either as research participants or as contributors to local media. The three historical phenomena that are most cited are early colonization and the fur trade, the residential school system, and the relocation of the community from Fort George Island to its current location. The remainder of the chapter highlights the ways in which drinkers referred to these phenomena in their interpretation of their life experiences, or lifeworlds, and of the painful embodied emotions that emerged from them. The concept of embodiment is applied here to highlight the agentic process of intersubjective engagement and meaning making involved in the accounts shared by drinkers.

Chapter 8 includes an overview of the painful emotional states that drinkers described as immediate contributors to their drinking behaviour, either at the time of this research or in the past. If embodied emotions are given meaning through intersubjective engagement, the forms of emotional expression that accompany drunken states are as well. The concept of embodiment is once again applied with a focus on anthropological work on the phenomenology of suffering to understand how embodied cultural norms and meanings are expressed even in ecstatic states such as drunkenness.

With chapter 9, I widen the ethnographic focus to the community level and describe encounters between people who are in the states described in chapter 8 and others who are not in drunken

states at the time. Descriptions based on participant observation and interviews are provided from the points of view of drinkers and people who were not drinking during these encounters. These events are characterized by ambivalence from both perspectives, but this ambivalence takes different forms: avoidance on one hand and expectations of rejection on the other. Regardless, this ambivalence is tied to ideological conflict in the community about social norms and social control. This is illustrated with references to what people say about youth drinking in the community.

In chapter 10, the voices of current drinkers who expressed strong feelings about the right and capacity to choose are highlighted. While they generally recognized that their choices may sometimes be harmful to themselves or others, nearly all research participants agreed that drinking was a choice. The concept of will, a component of agency, is explored in this chapter based on anthropological works and then applied to what participants had to say about the act of choosing.

Chapter 11 follows with the words of drinkers who were contemplating the decision to quit or reduce their drinking, or who had done so in the past. There is a wide range of views on the best strategy for quitting or reducing, and disagreement about whether drinking was the primary problem that needed to be addressed for those who are suffering. An anthropological discussion of the connections between volition, or will, and moral frameworks is then provided, followed by an exploration of how drinkers assess themselves according to the multiple frameworks available in the community. The concept of shifting will is also explored to highlight the complex ways in which drinkers can be attributed with will or agency while they are in drunken states.

Finally, chapter 12 wraps up the dissertation with an ethnographic description of the various factors of identity to which drinkers referred *beyond* their status as drinkers. Eeyou culture, spirituality, family relations, and career aspirations are all important things with which drinkers identified. Anthropological concepts of embodiment, as it overlaps with personhood, and of the construction of the self along with theory concerning willful reorientation are applied to highlight the ways in which research participants who were drinkers perceived themselves as capable, willful agents in relation to their identities and aspiration.

Chapter 1 – Chisasibi: The Big River

Chisasibi, which means the Big River, is an Eeyou (Cree) community situated in Eeyou Istchee, or the people's land, the area of Northern Quebec that the Eeyouch consider to be their ancestral homelands.¹² Eeyou Istchee is located on the Canadian Shield and is characterised by boreal forest with some beginnings of tundra. Out of the four Eeyou communities on the eastern coast of James Bay, Chisasibi is the northernmost. It is situated on the southern shore of La Grande River, roughly seven kilometres from the bay.

This chapter provides some background information on the community of Chisasibi. Starting with a brief geographical and historical overview, the chapter goes on to describe the importance of Eeyou heritage in the life of the town, including the maintenance with links to the land. Then an overview of the primary governance institutions is given, as well as a glimpse into the daily routines and events in the community.

1.1. Chisasibi as a Place

Chisasibi can be considered a remote community, as the closest town is roughly 100 km away. However, it is easily accessible by both road and air. While flying to Chisasibi offers one a beautiful aerial view of the boreal forest and the bay, driving to Chisasibi is a unique road trip experience.¹³ Anyone driving to Chisasibi necessarily goes through the remote town of Matagami - where one can already feel a slight northern chill in the air even in summer - unless they are willing to drive on isolated logging roads. From Matagami, one embarks on the James Bay Highway and travels it nearly to the end, winding across the boreal forest, rivers, and bogs, crossing not a single town, making the obligatory stop at the single gas station on the road. One frequently makes the roadside acquaintance of local nonhuman residents: black bears, porcupines, hawks, wolves, moose, and caribou in the winter. After roughly 600 km, there is a left turn onto an unnamed

¹² The Inuit refer to Chisasibi as Mailasik (Rogers, 2012). While there is a small Inuit population in Chisasibi, most Indigenous research participants were Eeyou. This thesis therefore focuses on the Eeyou majority. However, many of the realities described here are relevant to Inuit residents of Chisasibi.

¹³ There is a website devoted to the James Bay Highway experience: <http://jamesbayroad.com>. (Consulted on January 23, 2016). In 2020, it was renamed to the Billy Diamond Highway (Bell, 2020).

paved road, sometimes referred to as the Chisasibi access road. From this turn off, it is another 84 km to Chisasibi.¹⁴



Figure 1. – Sign by the James Bay Highway. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée



Figure 2. – A stretch of the James Bay Highway. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée

¹⁴ Images of Chisasibi and a map can be found on the 2021 version of the Cree Nation of Chisasibi website: <https://chisasibi.ca/about-chisasibi/history-geography/> (Consulted on August 20, 2021).



Figure 3. – Wolf by the James Bay Highway. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée

At the time I conducted my doctoral fieldwork, the population of Chisasibi numbered at approximately 4,250 people (Statistics Canada, 2013). Most residents are Eeyou, with a small Inuit minority and a significant number of non-Indigenous people.¹⁵ The non-Indigenous residents either are permanently settled in the community through family ties or are short, medium, or long-term workers at one of the local entities such as the hospital, school, or band office. The population has increased significantly since the founding of Chisasibi in 1980-81, when there was a population of roughly 2,000 people (Cree Nation of Chisasibi, 2006).

¹⁵ In 2012, the Cree Nation's official website cited the following population numbers: 3,800 Eeyou, 150 Inuit and 300 non-Indigenous residents. It was unclear, at that time, when these numbers had last been updated. This information no longer appears on the website (see Cree Nation of Chisasibi, n.d.).



Figure 4. – Sign at the main entrance to the community. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.



Figure 5. – View of the core of Chisasibi from the main entrance to the community. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.

The current layout of the town reflects its adaptation to population growth.¹⁶ The town centre is the oldest part of town. It is framed by an elongated loop formed by two paved roads: Chisasibi Road and Fort George Road.¹⁷ A slightly curved paved road, Maamuu Road, bisects this loop in a north-east to south-west direction. On a town map, the shape created by these roads has the appearance of the head of a Canada goose. From this paved loop, many gravel roads shoot off to form house clusters. These clusters consist of anywhere from 10 to 15 houses situated on small loops of various sizes. According to some Eeyou friends, these clusters initially housed members of extended family. In addition, three gravel roads and several dirt paths lead through a wooded area to the river.¹⁸

Although the town has been growing in both physical size and in population size, the town centre is still the main stage for many of the town's activities including work, shopping, and recreation. It is therefore a primary location for many of the social interactions described in this dissertation. Multiple buildings are situated along Maamuu Road, such as the hospital, the arena, the Youth Centre, the Anglican and Catholic churches, and the high school.¹⁹ Other prominent buildings along this road include the community centre, often referred to as the Mitchuuap because of the large *mitchuuap* (teepee) that forms a part of the building, and the commercial centre. These buildings collectively house a mixture of stores, restaurants, banks, a post office, offices for local entities such as the health and school boards, a fitness centre, an auditorium, and a banquet hall.

¹⁶ Despite this growth, there was still much anxiety among community members about a housing crisis. Many people felt that the rate of growth in housing did not match the rate of population growth.

¹⁷ It is interesting to note here that, during my first stay in Chisasibi in 1998, there were no road signs. During my year long stay from the summer of 2010 to the summer of 2011, road signs went up at regular intervals and, by the time of my departure, there appeared to be road signs everywhere. Many of the roads in the newer developments are named after animals, sometimes in *iijiyiyimuwin*, sometimes in English.

¹⁸ See <https://www.makivik.org/chisasibi/> (consulted November 20, 2020) for a picture with an aerial view of Chisasibi from the north.

¹⁹ Since the time of my stay in Chisasibi, many things have changed. For example, at the time of my stay, the James Bay Eeyou School on Maamuu Road included the elementary school, the high school, and adult education. During the academic year after my departure from Chisasibi, the elementary school was moved to the north-west end of town. The James Bay Eeyou School now consists of the high school and adult education.



Figure 6. – The commercial centre in the centre of Chisasibi. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.



Figure 7. – The *mitchuuap* (teepee) structure on top of the community centre. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.

Another primary location for interactions with community members was the network of pathways between house clusters in the town centre. While many individuals make their way freely between the houses, many also walk along established dirt trails. These trails are bordered by long wooden posts on the ground and meander between the house clusters, linking the town core to the edges of the town centre and therefore to the outlying neighbourhoods. These trails are used by pedestrians and by snowmobiles or four-wheelers, depending on the season.



Figure 8. – My son walking on one of the dirt trails between the houses. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.

Although much of the activity in Chisasibi happens in the town centre, the town's geographical expansion has brought more action to the two neighbourhoods that lie at the two extremes of the community. Framed by the river to the northeast and the access road to the southwest, newer housing developments have been taking place at both ends of the town.²⁰ Both neighbourhoods have seen much residential growth. In addition, these neighbourhoods now have their own convenience stores, chip stands (where fries, poutine, and soft drinks are sold), and parks. While

²⁰ The neighbourhood located to the northwest of the town centre, which was present when I first went to Chisasibi in 1998, is locally known as "Chinatown" because, early in the creation of this neighbourhood, the shapes of the eaves recalled what is commonly seen as a traditional Chinese house. The southwestern neighbourhood is referred to as Beverly Hills because of the existence of several large houses owned by wealthier community members. The band council provides rental housing for all families but people who can afford it can opt to build additions to these houses. Beverly Hills was much smaller in 1998 than it was in 2010, and it has continued to grow since then.

most interactions that I either witnessed or engaged in over the course of this research happened in the town centre, a few happened in these areas.

Other landmarks spread out throughout the town and that serve as reference points in conversations about life in the community include the baseball diamond, the sliding hill, the fire station, two police stations, the Cree Nation Council administration building, an indoor swimming pool, an office building for the department of Social Services, the Multipurpose Day Centre for seniors, gas stations, stores, day care centres, and the Inuit centre. There is also a cultural centre featuring exhibits on traditional Eeyou culture, and an Elder's camp where people meet regularly for storytelling, to learn traditional skills such as snowshoe making, and to meet up for the start of snowshoe treks.

Life "in" Chisasibi is not restricted to the village. There are several locations outside the village, in some cases hours away by car, that are common reference points for community members. These include other Eeyou communities, the beach situated at a small lake at KM20 along the highway, various points by the bay that are popular destinations for picnics, berry picking, launching canoes, or watching 10PM summer sunsets.

The town of Radisson, built for Hydro-Quebec workers in the 1970s and now populated by a very small French-Canadian community, is about 100 kilometres away. It is a frequent destination for Chisasibi residents who need to access certain governmental services which are not available in Chisasibi, who want to purchase groceries in a different location than the Chisasibi grocery stores, who want to go to the local restaurant for a change of pace, who want to buy alcohol at the grocery store or bar²¹, or who are simply out for a drive. A visit to Radisson, therefore, almost always leads to social encounters with people from Chisasibi. And a ride to "Rad" to stock up on alcohol was a frequently requested favour.

But while these locations and roads are geographically outside of the town of Chisasibi, they are a part of the community's landscape. Landmarks along the roads and in these various locations are subjects of daily conversations as people talk about their recent or upcoming plans, or about

²¹ As is discussed further in chapter 2, Chisasibi is a dry community, meaning that no alcohol may be sold, possessed, or consumed within the town boundaries.

other people's whereabouts. Therefore, the Chisasibi experience does not *only* happen in Chisasibi; the entire region of Eeyou Istchee serves as a reference point for life *in* Chisasibi. Chisasibi life includes excursions back and forth from these multiple locations and an awareness of the interconnectedness between physical locations is overtly expressed as a matter of course during the activities of the community.

That the community, in terms of both place and pace, extends beyond the physical town of Chisasibi is perhaps most evident in the importance of trips to Fort George Island and to family hunting camps, situated on the coast or inland. Both are frequent destinations for short or longer-term trips at all times of the year and are frequent reference points in the town itself. Most importantly, they are locations that signify strong ties with ancestral lands.

1.2. Historical Overview

The recounting of the history of Chisasibi often starts with reference to the relocation from Fort George Island. However, it is important to note that the Eeyouch and Inuit of the area did not always reside on the island. Indeed, life on Fort George Island is recent with respect to the history of the Eeyouch. Local knowledge indicates that their people have resided in Eeyou Istchee since before the last Ice Age, which ended 11,700 years ago (Pachano, 2020). Archaeological evidence supports their presence as of 3,500 years ago (Pachano, 2020).

Before the Fort George period, the Eeyouch lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle based on hunting, trapping, and fishing (Pachano, 2020). During the winters, people travelled in small family units throughout hunting and trapping territories collectively maintained by extended family members (Pachano, 2020; Feit, 1982). According to participants in my master's research (Leclerc, 2001) and a report by the Grand Council of the Crees (n.d.-a), there were two distinct groups of Eeyouch: families who hunted along the James Bay coast and families who hunted further inland. After many months of isolation, people would come together in larger groups in the summer for celebrations. The island that would eventually be known as Fort George was a site for such summer gatherings (Cree Nation of Chisasibi, 2020).

People gathered on the island in increasing numbers and for increased periods of time during the fur trade, particularly after its establishment as a trading post by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in the 1800s (Anderson et al., 1981).²² Some Eeyouch were hired by the HBC and brought their families to live with them on the island on a long-term basis. Furthermore, European contact brought many contagious illnesses to the area and most Eeyouch were not immune as they had never been exposed to the viruses. This led to much death and illness and therefore to a higher quantity of people who had a harder time surviving off the land without the help of family members (Morantz, 2002).^{23,24}

Although the Eeyou way of life had already been affected by colonial interference by the time people were settled on Fort George, many people in Chisasibi refer to life on the island as a "traditional" life (see, for example, Fireman et al., 2011). Life on Fort George Island and the ancestral way of life from before settlement on Fort George therefore both serve as reference points for many Eeyouch and Inuit in discussions of cultural heritage and maintenance, as is discussed in more detail further in this chapter.

1.3. Balancing the Old and the New: Continuity and Change

The geographical situation and layout of the town are such that it has a life of its own characterized by many features of a small urban space - Western-style medical and educational institutions, commerce, and elements of contemporary global culture - but also such that it, and therefore these elements of Western influence, are cradled by ancestral lands. These simultaneous realities, while allowing for a rich flow of ideas, create a difficult balancing act for the community. People work to find solutions to problems that reflect both their preoccupation

²² As per Anderson et al. (1981), the HBC first established a post on the island in 1803. However, Pachano (2020) has indicated that there was no post on the island itself until 1816. It was abandoned in 1824, due to low population density in the area, but was re-established in 1837 (Anderson et al., 1981; Pachano, 2020).

²³ The origin of Inuit settlement in Chisasibi on Fort George is less clear since the Inuit population tended to live significantly further north (see Patrick, 2003). According to some sources, missions were established in Fort George before Kuujjuarapik, an Inuit-Eeyou community on the Hudson Bay coast. The Roman Catholic school is said to have reached out to Inuit in the Kuujjuarapik area to send their children to school in Fort George (Fireman et al, 2011; Patrick, 2003).

²⁴ For a detailed overview of the impacts of the fur trade on the Eeyouch of the region, see Morantz, 2002 and Pachano, 2020.

with maintaining ancestral ways and with current socio-political situations that need to be addressed:

We, the Eeyouch of Chisasibi continue to seek ways to preserve and strengthen our language, culture, education, traditions, beliefs and values. Likewise, we also understand that we live in a modern society; thus, we will strive to balance these realities, the new with the old, to ensure ourselves a positive future (Cree Nation of Chisasibi, 2006, para 1).

It is within this complex community context that my interactions with research participants took place. This section therefore provides an overview of primary community concerns with respect to maintaining what they perceive as Eeyou traditions in a changing world, and how these concerns manifest at the level of local institutions. Both these concerns and these institutions are later reference points in specific discussions of community views of drinking. They are also reference points with which drinkers engage in their reflections on their experiences and worldviews.

1.3.1. “In Peace and Harmony with Nature”: Maintaining Links with the Land

“It was good to go back to the bush and be an Indian again” (Sam-Cromarty, 2001, p. 124).

When Eeyouch in Chisasibi talk about “tradition” or “the old ways”, it is shorthand for a rich and complex set of values and practices that are associated with an older way of life. There is sometimes disagreement about what is “genuinely” traditional for the Eeyouch and not a practice that comes from the wider pan-Indigenous community.²⁵ But “tradition” in Chisasibi often refers to hunting, fishing, and trapping: activities that are still practised on ancestral lands today. It also frequently refers to the ancestral lands themselves, including Fort George Island. These practices and links with these lands are highly valued and encouraged in very visible ways.

For centuries, our ancestors lived in peace and harmony with nature. On snowshoe and by canoe, they travelled over hundreds of miles and knew parts of their territory intimately. The natural environment provided medicine, warmth and well-being, and in particular, the animals and plants that sustained their survival. The most significant

²⁵ This distinction is discussed more deeply later in this chapter, in the context of spiritual currents present in the community.

aspects of our heritage are closely tied to these lands. The holistic view of the world teaches us that everything is connected, our moral and spiritual values, our cosmology, traditions and customs, including skills for living on the land. Storytelling, legends and songs were an integral part of traditional child rearing. Our family life and values were centred on the inland camps with moral lessons learned from listening and watching (Fireman et al., 2011, p. 9).

Discussions of tradition frequently contain references to “the land” or “the bush”. These terms signify not only ancestral territories, but all the animals and plants therein. Strong and persistent feelings of connection with the land in general, and to family hunting camps and Fort George Island in particular, are frequently expressed, at both the formal and informal levels in Chisasibi. According to Pachano (2020) “The land was revered because it provided everything a person needed to survive – food, shelter, water, clothing, protection, and a final resting place” (p. 55). This connection is omnipresent in the life of the community; people devote much collective action to solidifying it, to transmitting it through the generations, and even to sharing it with non-Indigenous workers and visitors who show interest. In addition, visible markers of a commitment to maintaining the way of life associated with a connection to the land can be seen in people’s homes and in public spaces.

It would be misleading to imply that this focus on a relationship with the land overshadows other aspects of daily life or that it is a compartmentalized feature of contemporary Eeyou culture. Rather, the people of Chisasibi find ways to weave ties with the land into their daily lives so that these elements remain integrated within a community context that is characterized by both continuity and change. Many individuals of various ages spoke to me directly, in the local media, or in the context of public events with pride about this balance between traditional practices and contemporary institutions. As Brent, an Eeyou health board worker and former drinker, explained “We hunt, we fish, we have our own hospital, we have our own school, we have our own businesses...not too shabby!” (57 years old, Chisasibi, October 7, 2010).

As described further in chapter 7, large areas of the ancestral lands of the Eeyouch were made inaccessible due to hydro-electric developments in the area. Despite these intrusions, many hunting and trapping territories survive today, albeit with significant amounts of flooding because of river diversions caused by these developments. The flooding of many areas of land is a topic of great sadness for many people in Chisasibi and elsewhere in Eeyou Istchee: “Because electricity

was needed down south so people could live better, they destroyed my father's land" (Sam-Cromarty, 2001, p. 152). Not only was there a physical loss of space on which to hunt, trap, and fish, there was a disruption of the migration patterns of the game that the Eeyouch hunt. In some locations, the burial sites of ancestors were covered by flooding.

Yet the land that survives remains as a refuge of peace as well as of personal and social fulfilment to many Eeyouch. Many people still travel to "the bush", more specifically to their families' camps on weekends and holidays to hunt, fish, or simply relax and spend time among family. Discussions of preparation for a trip to the bush often carried a sense of relief and anticipation for the upcoming break from all the stressors of town life. My own visits to the hunting camps of friends demonstrated very clearly that there is a different pace of life in the bush. Rather than worry about a work or school schedule, people pay attention to the place where they are: the weather, the tides (in the case of camps by the bay), and the presence of animals. "It's whatever time it is right now," replied my friend Jim in response to my inquiry about the time during a visit to his family's hunting camp in 1998.

On a practical level, hunting rifles, camouflage clothing, fishing nets, and hip waders are common household items in Chisasibi. Nearly every Eeyou home that I visited had these items in the front entry, in the basement, or in the backyard. The large quantity of *mitchuuaps* (teepees) behind houses throughout the town goes beyond the symbolism of attachment to ancestral heritage; people often use them to cook food obtained on fishing and hunting trips. Travel to the bush and back is a recurring feature of life - so much so that a significant part of life in town revolves around opportunities for these trips and taking care of the results of the hunting and fishing that often occur in the bush.

Beyond the personal and familial level, many community efforts are made to encourage and enable people of all ages to learn traditional skills related to bush life such as hunting, fishing, making snowshoes, cooking traditional foods, and so forth. Students take lessons in Cree culture, and workshops on many of the above bush skills are offered to the wider community throughout the year. Furthermore, in public buildings such as the commercial centre and the community centre, the presence of art representing natural landscapes, often by Indigenous artists, makes

the collective relationship to the land and the associated way of life visible in daily life within the village itself.

Another highly visible and practical indication of the importance of access to the land is the presence of established locations along the river and the bay of what I humorously called “canoe parking lots”. These areas are prime locations for departures for day fishing trips or longer-term trips out to camping grounds that are not accessible by road. There are always several long and thin logs available for use under the canoes as people haul them into or out of the water. During my stay in Chisasibi, my son and I spent many hours relaxing near some of these “parking lots” by the river or the bay. During the fall and spring goose migrations, we would see many groups of people leaving or arriving. A sense of both purpose and anticipation was palpable at these times as people went about the multitude of little details that need taking care of with regards to equipment, safety, and timing. I often envied them, remembering my own previous canoe trips out on the bay with a friend.



Figure 9. – Canoes by the bay. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.

During the goose migrations, goose hunting becomes the talk of the town. Excitement is in the air for people of all ages in the weeks leading up to goose hunting season. The pleasure and anticipation that filled the faces of students as they were telling me about their plans to go to

their family's campground was contagious and unfeigned. Friends and colleagues who could not go to the bush, or who could only go for a few days because of work or other commitments, frequently expressed disappointment at missing out on the opportunity to go out on the land.

Several friends joked about Chisasibi being a ghost town during what they call "goose break". This is a period of two weeks in early May during which the school closes for two weeks so that children can go out on the land with their families. There is indeed a significant exodus toward family camps during this period of the year. With the growing population and an increasing number of activities happening in town throughout the year, it is less and less the case that the town is emptied. But the spring goose break and the fall goose migration remain significant to the community. While there are families that take the time off in the spring to go shopping or to visit families in southern towns such as Val d'Or or Gatineau, there are many who spend all or some of that time at family hunting camps. In the issue of the *Waaskimaashtaa*, a monthly newsletter, that follows goose break, for instance, there are typically several pages devoted to pictures of youth with their first kill.²⁶

Fort George Island, where the local Eeyouch and Inuit lived before the village of Chisasibi was built, is another space that represents serenity and connection to many people. People who are old enough to remember growing up on "the island", as it is commonly called, speak with nostalgia of a simpler time when there was a greater sense of community and a stronger connection to a traditional way of life. There were fewer modern comforts and people had to work harder for their livelihood: "Work kept us healthy at Fort George and at our winter camps – sawing wood...carrying water...and moving about on snowshoes" (Fireman et al., 2011, p. 97). Overall, there is a feeling of intense tranquillity and joy on the island. Eeyou friends described the feelings of peace and serenity that they felt by simply being there, whether they had grown up on the island or not. The importance of Fort George is apparent in the presence of a large chapter devoted to life on Fort George in "Chisasibi: The Great River", a locally produced book featuring pictures and historical accounts of the community (Fireman et al., 2011).

²⁶ *Waaskimaashtaa* is a monthly newsletter that covers events in Chisasibi and includes informative articles, stories, and opinion pieces by residents about a range of topics.

People who are too young to have grown up on the island also expressed ties to the space and what it represents. When I asked questions about the island to some of my students at the high school, they appeared excited about the topic and about my interest in it and willingly told me about some of their own experiences on the island. The space is an immediate part of their life experience as a place from which their families came and as a place that one goes to spend quiet time.

Throughout the year, people travel to the island to take walks or to visit members of the few families that maintain part-time homes there. I would often hear references to these excursions in conversation with friends or colleagues at the school.²⁷ From the time the ice melts in the spring to shortly before it freezes in the fall, there is a barge that transports people and vehicles back and forth from the island to the shore, making the island accessible for anyone who has transportation or the willingness to hitchhike along the dirt road that leads to the barge from Chisasibi. Once on the island, one can walk for roughly ten minutes along a network of sandy roads to the centre of the island. Otherwise, there is nearly always someone with a vehicle who is willing to give a ride. Through a large period of the winter, it is possible to snowshoe, ski, or ride a snowmobile to the island.

To my knowledge, there is one family that maintained a nearly year-round home on the island at the time of this research (see Fireman et al., 2011). But there are several families that maintain cabins on the island for short-term or seasonal stays. Frankie, a man we encountered one afternoon in early September as we were visiting the island, explained that every summer, there were more and more families that came and built summer cabins on the island.

²⁷ More information on my work as a substitute teacher is provided in chapter 5.



Figure 10. – Fort George Island. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.

The emotional importance of Fort George is manifested in an annual event called Mamweedow, which takes place on the island at the end of each July and lasts for roughly one week. It was started in the late 1980s at the suggestion of community Elders. According to Melinda, an Eeyou school worker, “We were trying to figure out a way to help the community. There was so much sadness. We gathered with some Elders and they said ‘Take the people back to the island. They’ll be happy there again.’ So we created the Mamweedow” (56 years old, Chisasibi, October 21, 2010). During this event, many people camp out on the island, either in a cabin or in a tent. There is a *sabtuan*, which is bigger than a *miichiwaahp* and in which traditional foods such as *sigoban*, or goose roasted over a fire, are prepared and served. There are games and entertainment for people of all ages. This event, and the way people talk about it, is a clear marker of the importance of Fort George Island in the life of the community.

References to bush life and life on Fort George are an aspect of daily life in Chisasibi and demonstrate the attachment people of all ages feel to these spaces. But as demonstrated above, these references are not only symbolic or in the domain of “folklore”; people actively incorporate whatever elements of engagement with these spaces that they can into their lives in town. This is done at the informal individual and family levels but also at the wider community level.

1.3.2. Striving for the Eeyou Way of Life

The “traditional way of life” so often referenced by Eeyouch in discussions of maintaining a link with the land goes beyond subsistence-based practices such as hunting and fishing. It includes the entire set of cultural and social practices that are associated with life in the bush and the entire way of life of ancestral generations of Eeyouch (Pachano, 2016). The Eeyouch of today strive to recover and maintain various aspects of this way of life. The way in which people express their attachment to these aspects varies between references to the past and present and reflects the extent to which many people consider them as integral to their current lives.

Like many semi-nomadic peoples of Northern Quebec and elsewhere, the ancestors of today’s Eeyouch spent part of the year in small family units, gathering in larger groups in the summer. An egalitarian worldview is strongly associated with this way of life. Several authors have written about the importance of interdependence in the social context associated with the bush life of the 1970s and before. As Brody (1987), Henriksen (2009), and Tanner (1979) have described, reciprocity was a central feature of social relations among the Inuit, Innu and Eeyouch at the time of their research. These authors demonstrated how reciprocity was an essential way to ensure the well-being of all group members.

Several friends and research participants in both my master’s and PhD research corroborated the importance of egalitarianism, interdependence, and reciprocity, both in ancestral and contemporary Eeyou culture. For example, Kathy, a member of my host family during my 1998 stay in Chisasibi, explained that no one was considered better than anyone else; everyone had an important role to play, from seniors to children (Leclerc, 2001). She also explained that people survived by helping each other and sharing: “When I was young and we lived on the island [Fort George], when people came back from the bush, my mother would send me to bring them sugar, flour and other things they had been without all winter. They would sometimes share some of their fish with us. We didn’t have much but what we had, we shared. Now I share a paycheck but the principle is the same. If I wanted to, I could fill this house with antiques but I choose to share instead’, she explained” (Leclerc, 2001, p. 36).

During a social telephone conversation in 2007, Jim, who was a friend from my 1998 stay in Chisasibi, also elaborated on the cultural imperatives toward interdependence and sharing and how these were based in bush life. He explained that there was a certain level of competition among hunters, and that he would be annoyed if a hunting partner was the one to shoot a moose. But he would still be glad they had food to eat, and that is what mattered more than personal pride; everyone would share and have enough to eat.

With regards to leadership and the transmission of cultural knowledge in older times, Elders held informal authority due to their experience and wisdom, shared through storytelling.²⁸ Kathy affirmed, during my master's research, that the knowledge of Elders was always there to help guide the people in their decisions, and that it should still be that way. Derrick concurred with this position during my doctoral fieldwork and added that many contemporary problems could be resolved by maintaining the practice of listening to the Elders, which had been the Eeyou way for generations (46 years old, Chisasibi, June 16, 2011). In addition to the transmission of cultural knowledge through storytelling, education happened during everyday life. Children and youth accompanied their parents during the activities that were required for the well-being of their family: obtaining and preparing food, chopping wood, hauling water, making clothing, repairing shelter, and so forth.

Concerning social relations, a balance between individual autonomy and cooperative living was prized. Social transgressions were dealt with through healing rather than punishment as the concept of health went beyond physical wellness to encapsulate mental and emotional health (Adelson, 2000). Social norms and modes of dealing with transgressions thereof are discussed further in chapter 9.

There is a spiritual dimension woven into what many Eeyouch consider a traditional or ancestral way of life and the corresponding worldview of egalitarianism. Humans are in a reciprocal relationship with the animals that they hunt, as they are amongst each other. Demonstrations of

²⁸ According to many people in Chisasibi, the status of Elder has less to do with age than with demonstrations of wisdom, respect for others, and humbleness (see also Pachano, 2020). Therefore, I use the term "senior" to refer specifically to elderly individuals and reserve the term "Elder" for individuals who are designated as such by community members. However, while the status of Elder is not necessarily linked with age, most people referred to as Elders by research participants were seniors.

this reciprocity are evident in descriptions of rituals performed to show respect for prey (Tanner, 1979). Further, reciprocity is often described as being desirable not only because it increases the survivability of all members but because it ensures use of the entire animal, thus avoiding waste, which would be disrespectful to animal spirits (Henriksen, 2009; Tanner, 1979). Moreover, these authors specified that the respect for autonomy and refusal to impose one's will on another extends to human interaction with animals. Animals will not give themselves up to be hunted if they are disrespected (Brody, 1987).

1.3.3. Governance, Health, Education, and Justice

During discussions about community issues, people often refer to the social and cultural elements of Eeyou heritage described above, in addition to the importance of access to the land and the practices of hunting and fishing. However, there is also a determination to appropriate Western institutions, such as the governance, medical, educational, judicial, and religious systems, and to infuse them with Eeyou knowledge so that they are culturally relevant. There is a wide range of views about the current effectiveness of these attempts and the direction in which the Eeyouch should be going with regards to finding a balance between older, Eeyou-based practices and contemporary Western-based systems.

One result of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) is that the Eeyouch gained funds and support to create their own governing entities (Grand Council of the Crees, 2021a; Salisbury, 1986). These local entities asserted control over many aspects of life and ensured that, despite having given up many land rights, the Eeyouch would benefit from developments happening on their lands, have a say in issues that affected their population, and have control over services to the population.

For example, as part of the JBNQA, the Cree Trappers' Association was formed to ensure that there would be resources available for people to continue land-based practices, including trapping (Cree Trappers' Association, 2016a and 2016b). The Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) and the Cree School Board (CSB) were also formed as a part of this agreement to ensure that services were given in line with Eeyou values (Salisbury, 1986; Cree Board of Health and Social Services, 2012a, Cree School Board, 2015). The Eeyouch of Eeyou

Istchee also formed governing entities such as the Grand Council of the Crees (GCC) and the Cree Regional Authority (CRA) (Grand Council of the Crees, n.d.-a).

The Eeyouch of Eeyou Istchee are therefore often portrayed in popular media as a model of Indigenous self-empowerment (see, for example, Milewsk, 2013). Some feel that Western-style economic development can benefit the Eeyouch, especially if this development is guided by the Eeyouch themselves, by providing greater income to members of the population and the opportunity to solidify the town's infrastructure. For example, the GCC's position on the Paix des Braves agreement is that the agreement allows them "...to properly carry out these responsibilities [relating to the community and economic development of the Cree] in accordance with priorities and means which we, the Cree, deem appropriate for our own development (Grand Council of the Crees, n.d.-b).

The websites of specific entities such as those governing health, education, and justice contain similar references to the inclusion of Eeyou values and practices. For example, the health board has a department called "Nishiiyuu Miyupimaatisuiin". According to the current version of the Health Board's website, "Nishiiyuu refers to the traditional ways of the Eeyou and Eenou people. The Nishiiyuu Miyupimaatisiun department works to ensure that Cree knowledge and values are reflected in CBHSSJB services" (Cree Board of Health and Social Services, 2020). The word *miyupimaatisiun* refers to well-being (Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, 2012a).²⁹

Similarly, the school board includes, as a part of its mandate, "to serve the Cree people living in Eeyou Istchee and to empower them to take control of their own education system as well as protect their language, culture and traditional pursuits" (Cree School Board, 2015). According to many people with whom I worked at the school, adaptations made to the school system by the Cree School Board to attempt to meet these goals include: education solely in *iiyiyiyimuwin* for the first three years of schooling; language and culture classes as part of the curriculum in older

²⁹ See also Radu, House, & Pashagumskum (2014) and Radu (2015) for a discussion of ways to integrate Eeyou values into healing.

grades; and closure during periods of goose migration so that children could accompany their families on hunting trips.³⁰

As with education and health, the Eeyouch have worked to take greater control over justice and policing. For example, the Department of Justice and Correctional Services was formed in 2008, based on a section of the JBNQA (Grand Council of the Crees/Cree Regional Authority, 2012). In 2012, the department opened a Justice Facility in Chisasibi. Previously, Chisasibi residents could only access legal services through an itinerant, or travelling, court (Cree Justice News and Events, 2012, April 4). With the formation of this department, a clear goal was expressed:

Regrettably, in the past within our traditional territories, the Federal and Provincial justice systems to which we have been subject have not been fully representative of our unique needs and circumstances. Thus, our vision is to reshape our justice system in a manner that both respects the existing judicial regime of our country and province, at the same time creating services, programs and processes that honour and respect Cree ideals, values and ways. By achieving this, the unique needs of our people will be accommodated, and the rights negotiated by our leaders in our Agreements will be exercised (Grand Council of the Crees/Cree Regional Authority, 2012, para. 2).

With regards to policing, the Department of the Eeyou Eenu Police Force was established by the GCC in 2011 (Department of the Eeyou Eenu Police Force, n/d). Each community in Eeyou Istchee has its own station; the Chisasibi station opened in 2011. The force's mandate is to "provide professional policing services throughout Eeyou/Eenu Istchee in partnership with the communities we serve" (Grand Council of the Crees, 2021b, para. 3). While there is no specific mention of Eeyou values in this entity's mission, "hiring priority is given to beneficiaries under the James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement that have strong knowledge of Cree language and culture" (Department of the Eeyou Eenu Police Force, n.d., para. 4).

Notwithstanding the stated goals of appropriating western institutions in a way that highlights and acts on Eeyou values, there are criticisms by Chisasibi Eeyouch concerning a lack of consideration of Eeyou ways in the areas of governance, health, education, and justice. For example, there are people who express the view that giving up the land, as was the case with the

³⁰ During my 1998 stay, friends told me that there was a "goose break" during both the spring and fall migrations. However, during my doctoral fieldwork in 2010-2011, there was only a spring goose break.

JBNQA and the more recent Paix des Braves is a long-term loss and a sacrifice that is not worth making for money that will soon be drained by material demands. Neil described his frustrations with what he perceives as corruption in local governance: “They sold out. They’re happy because they have big salaries now. They threw the rest of us and the future generations under the bus” (48 years old, Val d’Or, July 24, 2012). Similarly, in an interview with a Toronto Star journalist in 1991, Chisasibi resident Larry House expressed that “People always look at the money we got, but our way of life has been eroded. A lot of things came with the project that we didn't want. This is becoming a non-native community and I don't really like it” (Grand Council of the Crees, n.d.-c).

In addition to the dissatisfaction that is expressed about the sacrifices Eeyou governing bodies have made, there is criticism regarding the adoption of a system that is perceived by some as not being fit for Eeyou culture. In the words of Derrick: “Many of our problems come from not listening to or respecting the Elders. The Elders know the way. They have the wisdom to carry us forward. But at some point, this new political system replaced the respect and trust we used to have for our Elders. And that is what we have to fix.” Derrick recounted how, in his youth, he witnessed how some individuals in the community, who wanted to push for a Western-style governing system, turned others away from the informal leadership of a well-respected Elder. “After that happened, things just went downhill. It’s the cause of so many of our problems. Even all the problems we have with alcohol and drugs today. Violence. That’s what I wanted to say to you” (46 years old, Chisasibi, June 16, 2011).

Similar debates occur with regards to the health and educational systems. For example, many Eeyouch in Chisasibi express fears about language and culture loss due to the school program. In their view, the first three years of schooling in *iiyiyuyimuwin* followed by language and culture courses are not enough to counter the erosion of their language by English and French. These views were voiced quite strongly during the introduction of a pilot project at the school at the time of this research, which would introduce bilingual education at an earlier age. Many people felt that adopting this new format would be a further encroachment on *iiyiyuyimuwin*: “Our language is already dying out! This will speed things up even more,” expressed Phoebe, a parent with 3 children in the local school system (36 years old, Chisasibi, May 10, 2011).

Matters of justice and policing are also subject to public debate. The complexity involved in adapting Euro-Canadian justice and policing systems to the local context is particularly evident in the discussion of the alcohol by-law provided in chapter 2. But in general, there are questions raised, locally, about the adequacy of the dominant legal system in dealing with problems in the community.³¹

All the above areas are implicated in community discussions of drinking and drunkenness. Alcohol is perceived a product of European conquest that continues to cause problems in the community (see chapter 2 for a discussion of the web of social issues linked with drinking). It affects people's physical and mental health, it leads to family violence, sexual assault, suicide, drunk driving, child neglect and abuse, burglary, and vandalism. It affects the rates of high school graduation and people's ability to find employment. It affects people's involvement in their community. However, there is much ambivalence on the effectiveness of using a Euro-Canadian strategy, such as a by-law embedded in a Euro-Canadian justice system, to solve these problems. There is therefore a strong desire expressed in the community to promote Eeyou values and norms through the institutions of governance, health, education, and justice for both prevention of and coping with drinking and related issues. And in conversations with community members, described in this dissertation, there is reference to the tensions involved in adapting institutions of non-Eeyou origins to Eeyou values and aspirations.

1.3.4. Spirituality and Religion

Just as a spiritual worldview was intrinsically linked with the bush way of life for ancestral Eeyouch, debates about spirituality intersect with debates about governance, health, education, and justice. All the attempts to incorporate Eeyou values into the institutions described above involve some reference to elements that have clear ties to a cultural framework associated with a bush way of life. While the spiritual dimension of these elements may not always be overtly expressed, links are often made with ancestral knowledge that was intrinsically tied to a spiritual worldview. However, the people of Eeyou Istchee have had Christianity in their lives for many

³¹ For a detailed discussion of the incompatibility of the Euro-Canadian justice system with Indigenous worldviews, see Ross (1992).

centuries; this is also reflected in many of the community discussions about drinking and other matters.

There are two churches in Chisasibi: an Anglican Church and a Catholic Church. The majority of Eeyouch are nominally Anglican and, as such, the Anglican Church is often referred to as the main religion of the area. This Church has a long history in the region, as the first missions in the mid-1800s were Anglican (Anderson et al, 1981; Fireman et al., 2011). The Catholic Church, locally established in the early 1900s, has much lower attendance and its members are mostly Inuit or French Quebeckers (Patrick, 2003). At the time of this research, there was no other established church in Chisasibi. However, during my stay, there were occasional visiting Evangelical or Pentecostal events in town, advertised on the radio and with posters in the community.

As is the case with other institutions, the adoption of Christian religions in Indigenous communities, including those in Eeyou Istchee, involved some degree of local interpretation. There were attempts on behalf of missionaries in the area to change the way of life of the Eeyouch as they viewed Eeyou ways with contempt (see Fireman et al., 2011). During my 1998 fieldwork, Kathy, a member of my host family explained that, in her view, missionaries had destroyed Eeyou values, and that this loss was still felt in current times (Leclerc, 2001). However, it has been noted by ethnographers that the Eeyouch practised their own rites well into the 20th century (Rogers, 1963; Tanner, 1979). These authors noted that there may be some elements of these rites that were of Christian influence, but that local ideology influenced the way in which Christian elements were incorporated. As Brightman (1993) wrote regarding the Rock Cree, “Indigenous spirituality has decisively colored at each stage the sense that Crees make of Catholicism and in this sense reproduces itself in new idioms” (p. 27).

Today, many Chisasibi Eeyouch practice several rites that are associated with an ancestral way of life. The most prominent among these is perhaps the Walking Out ceremony. Each spring, children who have become able to walk in the past year take their first steps in the context of one of these ceremonies. Walking Out ceremonies take place very early in the morning. Accompanied by their mother, the child walks out of a *miichiwaahp*, which was constructed with new posts, around the

fire, and back into the *miichiwaahp* where they are greeted by Elders and other relatives (Fireman et al., 2011).

Although there is less public discussion on the topic, there are some individuals who continue to practice rituals associated with hunting. However, people rarely spoke to me in detail about these practices. Even for people who put less emphasis on rites associated with hunting, respect for prey is manifest in discussions about the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous hunting. This was particularly evident in late 2015, when caribou carcasses were found by the side of the James Bay Highway. According to Roger Orr, as cited in Herodier and Bell (2015), “I was very saddened when I saw this, because of how we were taught to respect these animals. My mind went directly towards my thoughts on the sacredness of these animals” (para. 4). According to Pachano (2020), this respect for animals is tied to ancestral beliefs that all things in nature have a spirit: rocks, mountains, plants, rivers, and animals.

Death is another topic of conversation that includes spiritual overtones. Most deaths in the community are marked with funerals in the Anglican Church. During both of my longer-term stays in Chisasibi, the deaths of prominent community members were also marked by the closure of the school and other services. There has been some discussion among friends in Chisasibi related to the decrease in this tendency. Agatha, for example, explained that the entire community used to stop all activities when anyone died: not just prominent individuals (46 years old, October 12, 2010). Other people have noted, however, that with the current size of the community, it would be impossible to do this as deaths occur several times per month.

In private conversations, the subject of taboos around death occasionally came up. For some individuals, referring to older times, it is both dangerous and disrespectful to wander around the community after a death. According to Tad, for instance, the ghosts of the individuals lurk for a period of time after death, and it is better and safer to stay home to avoid disturbing them. “That’s how it is in our culture, even if people don’t talk about it a lot,” he explained. “I don’t really bother with it, but my wife really makes sure to stay home with the kids to be safe” (35 years old, Chisasibi, February 17, 2011).

The discussions about matters such as respect for animals and the dead typically remain at the level of friendly disagreement. However, during an informal chat with a friend early in my stay, the term “religious warfare” came up with reference to conflicts between people who adhere to one of the Christian Churches and people who are working at reclaiming what they perceive as traditional Indigenous practices, either local or pan-Indigenous, such as sweat lodges, shaking tent ceremonies, goose dancers, or the Sundance. “Our own people wind up turning against us, because they believe that our traditions are devil worship,” said Suzy in frustration as she was explaining some basics about an upcoming Sundance ceremony to me (39 years old, Chisasibi, June 7, 2011). Similarly, Dean, who identified as Christian, felt that many of his fellow Christians were too judgemental toward those who followed other paths (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011).

According to several friends who participate in these Indigenous practices, they are subject to disdain by some other members of their community. I experienced this first-hand when I inadvertently mentioned the Sundance celebration to an Eeyou school employee on June 9, 2011. The jovial smile he had during our preceding discussion of other community events disappeared and he cut me off, telling me that he did not want to hear about this event.

Until the mid-2000s, sweat lodges were not allowed inside the village on account of these views, according to Gavin (36 years old, Chisasibi, May 15, 2011). However, there was an established lodge in town in addition to other locations outside the town at the time of this research and sweat lodges were even occasionally announced on the radio. An even greater point of contention is the above-mentioned Sundance, now occurring on an annual basis at the hunting camp of a Chisasibi family. In addition to the negative views about non-Christian rituals expressed above, some people in Chisasibi see the Sundance as a non-Eeyou tradition that has no place locally. During my first attendance at this local Sundance, it was explained by one of the ritual leaders that this ceremony was given to the Chisasibi Eeyouch by David Blacksmith, a Plains Cree healer who had a vision to renew the Sundance tradition. So, while it is acknowledged that this was not originally an Eeyou practice, it is seen as a legitimate healing ritual that is locally appropriated.

Similar arguments are made with reference to the annual Chisasibi Pow Wow. Many community members participate in the Pow Wow and enjoy the connection that is maintained with other Indigenous communities. But there are some who feel that the Pow Wow is not an Eeyou event. During a social visit in the summer of 2007, my friend Jim expressed that he had no problem with people doing Pow Wows if it was a part of their traditional culture. But in his view, Pow Wows were no more Eeyou than baseball, and he treated them the same way – as entertainment from the outside in which he had little interest.

This sentiment was echoed in the words of a senior named Kevin with whom I frequently chatted in the commercial centre. On one morning in late August, a few weeks after the Chisasibi Pow Wow, he expressed that he wished the community's youth would go back to Eeyou tradition instead of other people's traditions. But for the people who enjoy the Pow Wow, the "imported" and pan-Indigenous nature of this tradition gives them a wider sense of Indigenous identity. "Well, it's something to hang onto. For young people, anything we can give them to hang onto is good. It keeps them out of trouble. We're all related anyway: the Cree, and all the other Natives," explained Gary (42 years old, Chisasibi, August 12, 2010).

Notwithstanding these debates, many people took a middle of the road approach to spirituality. "Church, sweat, whatever. They're all different paths to the same thing" said Clem as we drove around town one evening (27 years old, Chisasibi, May 24, 2011). Similarly, Dean explained that "God created several paths to get to him. You pick one that's good for you" (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011). This same sentiment was expressed by several participants, including ritual leaders, at the Chisasibi Sundance which I attended from June 16 to 18, 2011. The terms "God" and "Creator" were often used interchangeably during the ceremony, with some describing the Sundance lodge as a kind of Church where one can commune with God or even Jesus.

1.4. The Beat of Chisasibi's Drum: Pace of Life

Life in Chisasibi has a fascinating pace with some elements that could appear paradoxical. There is an unhurried, small-town feel alongside an urban hustle and bustle with near constant activity. The above-mentioned importance of maintaining links with the land and related elements of

Eeyou heritage is highlighted in many of the community's activities, along-side other elements of life in Chisasibi.

On most weekdays, many community members are busy with school or work, depending on their age. Workers are employed at one of the local entities such as the band office, the hospital, the school, the offices of the health or school boards, or at one of the many businesses in town. Yet others circulate throughout the town, visiting family and friends. The centre of town is a flurry of activity. People go in and out of the commercial centre, either to pick up a coffee, drop off food at the small shop where people can sell their home-made baked goods or other dishes, or wait for one of the stores to open. Many seniors, or *chayouch*, spend time during the day sitting and socializing. During my frequent visits to the centre, I would often see women sitting at tables on one side of the centre. Meanwhile, many men hung around on the benches in the middle of the commercial centre or off to the side playing checkers.

At the time of this research, both the elementary and high schools were adjacent to the commercial centre. In the mornings, at lunch time, and in the afternoons, there was an influx of children, teens and workers travelling on foot or in cars, snowmobiles, or four-wheelers. On the other side of the commercial centre, there was a consistent stream of people heading to and from the hospital and the other health services immediately behind it. Many conversations with informants and potential research participants therefore happened in the large, mostly unpaved parking lots situated on either side of the commercial centre as people were on their way to or from one of the above-mentioned locations.

In the evenings and on weekends, there were frequent activities at the community centre, in the school, or in the arena and youth centre across Maamuu Road. For example, bake sales, talent shows, sports tournaments, square dancing competitions, community walks, and celebrations are regular occurrences in which community members come together. There are also a few annual celebrations such as the previously mentioned Mamweedow, the Pow Wow, Chisasibi birthday celebrations, and Annie Whiskeychan Day.³² Throughout the year, there are special series of

³² Annie Whiskeychan is recognized as a key player in the promotion of *iiyiyuyimuwin* in schools across Eeyou Istchee (Welcoming Committee, James Bay Eeyou School, n.d.).

events such as storytelling by Elders, snowshoe making courses, berry picking contests, fishing derbies, and canoe races. In addition to activities that are specifically associated with Eeyou heritage, there are events that highlight sports and music such as a bicycle races and talent shows, or recurring events such as sports matches and square dancing competitions including teams from across Eeyou Istchee.³³ Finally, the ACTION program, which is run by the band council, includes series of courses on a wide range of topics such as: creative writing, badminton or other sports, conversational skills in *iijiyuymuwin*, arts and crafts, and so forth. This wide selection of activities afforded many opportunities for both socializing and research.

1.4.1. Community Events

In addition to the activities described above, there are continued efforts by various entities in Chisasibi to bring community members together to discuss and raise awareness of a wide range of issues affecting the community through the organization of workshops and symposia. Participating entities include the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB), the Youth Council, which is part of the Band Council of the Cree Nation of Chisasibi, and other concerned community members.

During my stay, there were several symposia, awareness weeks, or other events organised to this end: Addictions Awareness Week, a Family Violence Symposium, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) Awareness Week, and Youth Week. There was also a short series of workshops on youth and sexuality. During many of these week-long affairs, there are presentations and speakers' panels held in the auditorium or banquet hall, both located in the community centre. These events are sometimes aired live on the radio for the benefit of people who are unable to attend. In addition, members of the organising entities, local specialists, or specialists brought in from out of town are often invited to speak on the radio in addition to speaking at the events themselves.

Drinking and related phenomena are recurring topics during these workshops and symposia. During Addictions Awareness Week, for instance, one radio broadcast featured an Eeyou medical doctor from Chisasibi who described the impacts of alcohol on one's health. Even when the

³³ Hockey, broomball, football, and basketball are popular sports in Chisasibi and often involve teams from across Eeyou Istchee and other First Nations communities.

general theme of the event was not about drinking, it came up either as a salient issue that was either directly or indirectly connected to the main theme. This was noted, for instance, during the Family Violence Symposium, where drinking was frequently mentioned as a contributing factor to this violence. As such, these events were an important source of insight from community members, both from the presentations themselves and from informal conversations with other participants.

1.5. Conclusion

Life in Chisasibi abounds with references to Eeyou history, and its geographical location gives direct access to ancestral lands, albeit reduced by colonial interference. Whether discussing concerns about governance, education, health, or justice, or working to instill a sense of community through events and informative symposia, people in Chisasibi refer to what they perceive as a traditional way of life as a way in which to maintain a sense of connection with their history. At the same time, attempts are made to appropriate western institutions in a way that asserts and maintains local autonomy. It is a tricky balance, subject to much debate within the community.

Concerns about drinking reflect these tensions. As is discussed in the following chapter, people widely perceive drinking and drunkenness as contributors to disruptive phenomena, or as a correlated effect of colonial disruption. Attempts to curb drinking are manifest in discussions of all the areas above, including efforts to maintain a traditional way of life, health, and education; as is the case for most Indigenous worldviews, these are strongly related in a holistic way. Most notably, however, many initial discussions of how to curb drinking concern governance and justice. Of course, people who drink speak of this phenomenon in a different way, particularly when they are in drunken states.

Chapter 2 – “We’re Having a Good Time!”: Drinking in a Dry Community

In the introduction to the dissertation, I mention that small groups of drinkers were often among the first to welcome me to the community during my visits, whether for fieldwork or social reasons. After an initial welcome and discussion of their town, the topic of drinking almost invariably came up, unprompted, in conversation. As with many community members, they had a lot to say on the general topics of drinking and drunkenness. While later chapters explore these views in more depth and reveal much more nuance, it is relevant to begin this dissertation with an overview of initial reactions that research respondents and other community members had toward drinking. Much of the substance of these reactions reflect the popular discourse expressed by community members in local media, such as the monthly newsletter and community radio. This chapter therefore begins with an overview of the initial responses that research participants – both drinkers and non-drinkers - had to the topic of drinking and drunkenness. Then, the status of alcohol as an element of and contributor to a web of social issues and as an illegal substance according to a local by-law is described.

2.1. Drunks and Zombies: Community Concerns about Drinkers, Drinking, and Drunkenness

Many people I interacted with during my daily life in Chisasibi, whether they went on to participate in this research or not, began our interactions with discussions of their town. Sometimes this took the form of a welcome; other times, this took the form of asking me why I was there or what I liked about the town. These conversations tended to be positive, with a focus on the beautiful landscape or the vibrant nature of the town itself with its array of cultural, athletic, artistic, and educational activities.

The pride with which many Chisasibi Eeyouch talk about their town is tempered by a concern with the level of drinking and drunkenness in the community, as well as a wide range of issues that are commonly associated with drinking, such as domestic violence, drug use, sexual violence, and

suicide. Whether they are busy at work or at play, running errands, or simply relaxing at home or around town, people often express concerns about the presence of “drunks.” “Drunks” are perceived as a threat; they threaten the peacefulness of families and of the town itself as well the proper running of events. At the same time, their presence and behaviour bring about a sense of sadness mixed with anger about the state of the community of Chisasibi.

“Drunks” is the term most frequently used in Chisasibi to refer to individuals who walk around town in a state of intoxication. They are usually in groups but occasionally an individual can be seen wandering alone. From many discussions about “drunks”, this term is typically reserved for certain kinds of drinking: public drinking and drinking to the point of drunkenness. As subjective as the latter may be, it is usually described by people in Chisasibi as a state in which the individual becomes non-functional - they cannot walk straight - and incoherent. “You see them walking around, they’re just stumbling around. You can tell they’re drunk,” said Zoe (26 years old, Chisasibi, October 19, 2010). “It’s not like you can even have a conversation with them [when they’re drunk]. They don’t exactly talk clearly or anything,” added Caitlin, a woman from another Indigenous community who worked for one of the local entities in Chisasibi at the time of my research (43 years old, Chisasibi, April 13, 2011).

During the period of this research, I occasionally heard people use the term “zombies” in reference to frequent and heavy drinkers. Some individuals used it interchangeably with “drunks”. However, some nuanced their use of the term “zombies” with an explanation about people not being themselves in intoxicated states, an issue discussed below. Often, this is tied into larger discussions of psychological issues that lead people down the path of addictions. In an issue of the local newsletter, *Waaskimaashtaaui*, Pelchat (December 2012) applied the term both to individuals and to the troubles that plague them. Her letter to the editor began by outlining her own experience with addictions – hers and those of loved ones – and how they stem from the need to avoid painful memories and difficult emotions. She argued that addictions made things worse as they add problems to those one already has. She then described these personal problems as zombies:

Zombies in all of this do exactly what they are created for – they are something that comes back to haunt you after you thought it was long done, dead, and buried. They

can attack you, infect you, terrify you, make you angry and make you feel hopeless about it all. They come in all forms, from the small to big, from the recent to the decrepit, worst of all they can be loved ones. [...] to simplify ... zombies = pain/trauma/avoidance (Pelchat, December 2012, p. 3).

Pelchat (2012) then argued that the term “zombies” could also be applied to people who had used substances or engaged in other addictive activities to avoid the above-mentioned problems:

Continue to hide from it all and sooner or later you become a zombie yourself. They exist right now in our reality. They are those poor souls who turned away from getting clean. They are the people you see on the weekends all wasted after a binge. They are the parents who neglect their children because they would rather do their “thing” than to care for their children. They are the neighbours that you see beating each other up in the street. It can easily be you or me (p. 3).

As complex as this and other explanations of the term “zombie” are, the term “drunks” is not without complexity. For instance, it is important to clarify that the category of “drunks” is not a static one. At a given moment, people who are not drunk are not necessarily people who do not drink at all. Conversely, people who are drinking or drunk are not necessarily in that state on a daily or even weekly basis.³⁴ Furthermore, it is not only professed non-drinkers or former drinkers who express concerns about the presence and behaviour of “drunks”. People who drink to various extents also discuss the risks of coming across inebriated individuals during daily life. As such, there is no discrete social category that includes a set number of named people who engage in drinking or drunkenness. For this reason, in addition to the importance of showing the utmost respect to all people including drinkers, the terms “drunks” and “zombies” are only used in this dissertation to refer to people’s own use of the term within the community.

Moreover, “drunks” and “zombies” comprise nonindividuated categories. In other words, when research participants and other community members spoke about “drunks”, they would nearly always be referring to groups of people and not to specific individuals: “There are drunks walking around” or “Watch out for drunks”. If an individual was placed in the category of “drunks”, that person was referred to solely in reference to their status at that time: “I saw a drunk” as opposed to “So and so is a drunk.” Unlike non-Indigenous residents, when Chisasibi Eeyouch spoke of

³⁴ There are some individuals who are known to be in extreme states of intoxication on a regular basis, sometimes daily. I would sometimes see these individuals walking alone after I had seen them with a group. As indicated in the section on ethical concerns in chapter 5, these individuals were excluded from this research.

individuals in my presence, such as a relative or a friend, they would use the adjective “drunk” rather than refer to them as “a drunk”: “Whenever his dad was drunk, he’d beat him,” related Zoe, for example, when talking about her own father’s experience growing up (26 years old, Chisasibi, March 7, 2011). This does not mean, of course, that Eeyouch never refer to someone as “a drunk”; I simply never encountered this usage. When I asked people if they would use the term to refer to an individual, there was either uncertainty or a statement that this was unusual. Therefore, the terms “drunks” and “zombies” seemed to imply a temporary state and not a permanent identity category to which an individual could belong. People are a part of the category of “drunks” when they are in a state of drunkenness, but it does not necessarily become a part of their ascribed identity. “Are people ‘drunks’ when they’re not actually drunk?”, I asked friends and research participants. The response was nearly always “No” after some thought, sometimes followed by an explanation that people were not themselves when they were drunk; they had lost their personality. “They’re possessed by the spirit of the alcohol” said Agatha, an Eeyou health board worker (46 years old, Chisasibi, August 20, 2010). “When someone’s drunk, they don’t know what they’re doing. They’re not really themselves. They’re ... someone else during that time” explained Brent, another Eeyou health board worker (57 years old, Chisasibi, October 7, 2010).

As is described in greater depth in chapter 9, there is much ambivalence expressed toward drinking behaviours, and there are deep concerns about the well-being of the individuals who drink and of those close to them. However, it is not only the drinking in and of itself that is of concern. As alluded to in Brent’s comment above when he said that people who are drunk do not know what they are doing and as he, Agatha, and others explained in other discussions, there is a host of social problems that people consider to be related to excess drinking. These are discussed further below.

2.2. “We Love to Party!”: The Pleasure of Drinking

Over the course of my research, I had opportunities to engage with drinkers during informal interviews, social contexts, or everyday life. During opportunities for deeper conversation, self-identified drinkers who participated in this research acknowledged many of the same concerns

about “drunks” and drinking as other community members. However, my typical public encounters with group of drinkers such as the one mentioned in the introduction included much good cheer and humour.³⁵ While my presence and identity affected the nature of these interactions, and I clearly was a witness to only one type of context within which group members interacted, these encounters provided important insight into topics about which drinkers wanted to talk.³⁶

During conversations that took place in these contexts, there was always a wide range of topics of discussion. Banter was interspersed with sporadic discussions of pop culture, music, and sports. Hockey was a popular topic, for instance, as it is in the wider community, and people animatedly talked about NHL hockey, local leagues, or informal games between friends. The community of Chisasibi was another popular topic. Significant periods of time during most of my early chats with people drinking in public were spent with them telling me about their town. They informed me about where things were, about certain routines in town, or about where I could get certain things, such as a fishing license. With these and other topics, research participants who identified as drinkers demonstrated that they held on to aspects of their identities that went beyond that of “drunk”: they were hockey fans or players, musicians, and people who enjoyed sharing information about their town with strangers.

The most recurring unprompted theme of conversation in these contexts, where most people were drinking or drunk, was drinking and drunkenness themselves. Interspersed with some general talk of drinking and how much fun it is to party were funny anecdotes about what had happened overnight and whether they would all go home and sleep or look for more alcohol to continue the party. Strategies about rides to Radisson, the nearest town where alcohol could be purchased, were elaborated. Further, exclamations about being drunk or partying and jokes about “being drunks,” accompanied with laughs, were often peppered throughout conversations

³⁵ See the section on ethical considerations in chapter 5 for a discussion of how I navigated the issue of informed consent with people who were drunk.

³⁶ I discuss the limitations of this research, including my lack of access to the large parties of heavy drinkers, in the introduction and in chapter 5. I also discuss the possible impacts of my personal identity on my interactions with research respondents and other community members in the introduction.

about other topics such as the town of Chisasibi, culture, language, spirituality, friendship, politics, education, work, sports, music, and sexuality.

One common response by drinkers to direct questions about their views of drinking, especially when they were intoxicated, was that it is simply fun to be drunk. “We love to party!” answered one young man, whose name I never got, when I asked a group of four men behind the commercial centre one afternoon in October 2010 about their interests. Similarly, Dale and Everett both exclaimed variations of “I just like to party,” one morning as I chatted with them and their friends next to the commercial centre (24 and 22 years old, Chisasibi, April 29, 2011).

To be clear, drinkers did not solely focus on the fun aspects of drinking. Acknowledgements of distress, fears of spiralling into a life of addiction, concern about disappointing family members, disappointment in missing out on opportunities of various types, and shame about the state of the community due to high levels of intoxication and related issues all frequently came up during private interviews with some of the individuals I encountered in public. They also occasionally came up during these public encounters. But in these situations, almost all these acknowledgements were followed up with a “but”: an emphasis that, *at that moment*, participants were having a good time drinking and being drunk.

Some private interactions I had with people who were drinking followed a similar pattern. However, in addition to reflections on the negative factors of drinking, participants would often decry the ways in which colonial interference had led to the current social crises, including a high rate of “problem drinking”, that they perceived in their community. The relocation from Fort George Island in 1980-81, loss of access to hunting and fishing territories, racial discrimination, residential schools, and the imposition of Western institutions were all regular topics of conversation when I spent time with groups of people smaller than three in private contexts. Like with the statements by public drinkers about the negative impacts of alcohol, described above, these statements were very frequently followed by reaffirmations of the present drunken good time. One anecdote from my master’s research in 1998 exemplifies this pattern. I had been drinking beer with Don and Alex on a side road between Chisasibi and Radisson one evening,

when the topic of colonialism came up. Both men spent several minutes expressing intense anger about destruction that “the white man” had wrought on their community:

Don continued: “But we’ll fight them! We’re always gonna win in the end. The Cree is strong and will always survive. The white man is weak. He’ll lose when we really start fighting back.” He stopped as his voice had become hoarse from shouting. “But we’re having a good time tonight, aren’t we ...?” (Leclerc, 2001, p. 151).

The fun aspects of drinking were not only discussed by people who were drunk at the time. Some drinkers and former drinkers who, during interviews, mostly described drinking as a negative force in their lives - a result and contributor to social and familial disruption, for example - also talked about fun times they had had while drunk. When asked, some claimed to not regret these times. For example, Tabitha, a former drinker who expressed negative views about drinking, expressed that: “I had so much fun! I wouldn’t do that anymore, but ya know, I don’t regret it” (April 12, 2011, 44 years old, Chisasibi). In other cases, respondents did not perceive drinking as inherently negative, and tended to distinguish between times that they drank for pleasure and times that they drank to escape problems. For example, Tad explained that: “Sometimes it’s just fun and relaxing to get a bit drunk on the weekend. Just to destress from a hard week at work. It’s not always this big deep thing, ya know” (34 years old, Chisasibi, November 15, 2010).

In other cases, drinkers who laughed about good times they had had while drunk were more ambivalent. “I had some fun times, sometimes. I still do, sometimes. I don’t know if it’s worth the trouble,” explained Codie, who identified as a moderate and sporadic drinker at the time of this research (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Similarly, Dean, a former drinker, was reluctant to acknowledge that drinking could simply be pleasurable, without underlying problems. “I’m not sure. At the time, maybe you think you’re just doing it for fun. But I think there is always something else going on. I’m not sure. Even if it *is* just fun, it winds up destroying you inside” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011).

Dean’s line of thought reflects the perspectives shared by many other people in Chisasibi in this research. Contrarily to people who were in drunken states, other people who participated in this research tended to focus on the damage that drinking caused to the individual, the community, and the culture.

2.3. A Web of Social Issues: Alcohol in Northern Quebec

There is a multitude of perspectives about drinking on behalf of members of the community of Chisasibi, which are elaborated in this dissertation. But the initial overarching sentiment expressed either by individuals who participated in this research or in local media is that there is too much drinking; it is visible every day, out in public and in people's homes, and it is connected with a host of other issues such as domestic and sexual violence, depression, suicide, drug use, and so forth. Their concerns are echoed in scholarly literature about alcohol in this area and in the wider region of Northern Quebec, which includes Eeyou, Innu, Naskapi, and Inuit communities.

The high incidence of alcohol use, among other phenomena such as drug use, violence, and suicide, is described in quantitative terms by several health-related surveys in Indigenous communities of Northern Québec. Anctil and Chevalier (2008), Barss (1998), Simard et al. (1996), Kirmayer et al. (2000), Mercier et al. (2002), Muckle et al. (2007), Petawabano et al. (1994), and Robinson (1985) have discussed the rates and patterns of alcohol consumption in Eeyou Istchee and other northern Indigenous communities in the two decades preceding the time of this research.

Their statistics, many collected close to the time the research discussed in this paper was conducted, show a higher incidence of drinking, particularly binge drinking, among youth and among males. For example, Anctil and Chevalier (2008) found that 21.2% of respondents in the age categories of 12 - 17 and 18 - 29 indicated that they consumed 5 drinks or more at least once per week in the year preceding the study. Furthermore, Anctil and Chevalier's (2008) study indicated that only 10.6% of women had consumed alcohol at this rate compared with 17.2% of men. These numbers are like statistics gathered for other First Nations communities in Canada. According to a health survey conducted between 2008 and 2010 by L'enquête régionale sur la santé des Premières Nations (ERS) 2008/10 (2012), "près des deux tiers [des adultes] qui consomment de l'alcool le font de manière excessive (c.-à-d., 5 consommations ou plus en une occasion au moins une fois par mois au cours des 12 mois précédents). Les hommes des Premières Nations sont plus susceptibles que les femmes de consommer de façon excessive" ["nearly two

thirds of adults who consume alcohol do it to excess (that is, 5 drinks or more at a time at least once per month over the 12 preceding months). First Nations men are more likely than women to consume in an excessive manner”] (p. 105).

These statistics support the experiences expressed by many Chisasibi residents: alcohol use is omnipresent in the community and many people take issue with the tendency to binge drink, particularly among young males. Further, almost all the anecdotes of public drinking described by research participants or witnessed in the context of this research involved young men.³⁷

Chisasibi residents as well as scholars from outside the community have also shown concern with social phenomena related to drinking, such as violence and suicide, described by both Niezen (2009) and Tanner (1999) as “social pathologies”. Literature on Indigenous drinking demonstrates the link between high rates of drinking and other phenomena such as general crime, suicide and parasuicide, homicide and so forth. For instance, Robinson (1985) has stated that alcohol and drug abuse among the Eeyouch at the time of her research lead to family conflicts, domestic violence, child neglect, burglary, school problems, general disturbance of peace, vandalism, fights, and murder. Many of Niezen’s (2009) respondents in Chisasibi made links between the rise in alcohol use after the relocation of the community from Fort George Island (see chapter 7) and the rise in youth delinquency (fights and vandalism, for example). Similarly, seniors in the nearby Anicinabek communities of Pikogan and Lac Simon make strong links between alcohol use and fatal accidents, public fighting, and family violence (Inksetter and Bousquet, 2018, p. 11).

Indeed, many of the life experiences that community members, including drinkers, shared with me involved elements such as conflict, violence, family discord, and school problems. Parents often recounted incidents involving disputes with their drunken teens. For example, Charlie, a non-Indigenous francophone woman who was married to an Indigenous community member and who had been living in Chisasibi for most of her adult life, described her teenage son’s behaviour: “Quand y’a commencé à se tenir avec cette gang là, y s’est mis à arriver à maison sâoul tous les soirs. On se ramasse tout le temps à se chicaner pour de quoi; je trouve qu’il est complètement

³⁷ It would be a mistake to say that all drinking in Chisasibi qualifies as problematic. This research indicates that there are many people who drink in moderation in their own homes or in bars outside the community. This is addressed more deeply in chapter 10.

hors de contrôle” [“When he started hanging out with that group of friends, he started coming home drunk every night. We always end up fighting about something; I feel like he’s out of control”] (Charlie, 39 years old, Chisasibi, September 11, 2010). Other parents complained about how their children’s school performance dropped when they began to drink.

The link between suicide and the use of alcohol and drugs is of particular concern. A newsletter in Chisasibi indicated that “Of all the suicides and suicide attempts that have occurred in Chisasibi almost all of the persons were either under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs” (Chisasibi Police Report, 2012, p. 4). Barss (1998), writing about the Eeyouch, has indicated that alcohol use was detected in most incidents of suicide or attempted suicide from 1982-1991. These links are certainly not restricted to Chisasibi or Eeyou Istchee. Based on a survey of studies conducted among Indigenous peoples in North America between the 1970s and early 2000s, Kirmayer et al. (2000) affirmed that: “Alcohol intoxication has been noted to be a major factor contributing to suicide in most studies of Aboriginal people” (p. 38).

Another frequently mentioned problem in relation to drinking involved physical violence between women and men. Zoe described witnessing multiple public incidents where arguments between partners became physical. A cousin of hers was involved in one of these incidents: “They were just there on the side of the road, punching each other! They were so drunk too!” (26 years old, Chisasibi, November 10, 2010). Current and former drinkers acknowledged these issues. Codie recalled his days of heavy drinking: “I just felt so angry all the time. And I wound up beating up my girlfriend. I didn’t even know why” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Similarly, Tad described how his wife threw dishes at him when he came home drunk after promising that he would stop drinking (34 years old, Chisasibi, November 15, 2010).

Several community members expressed concern over the link between drinking and sexual violence more specifically. Michel, a non-Indigenous school board worker related how a student had confided in him about surviving years of sexual abuse by her father and his friends, inflicted mostly in the context of drinking parties. “*Elle devenait une esclave sexuelle à chaque fois que son père pis ses chums se soulaient!*” [“She became a sex slave every time her dad and his buddies got drunk!”] (45 years old, Chisasibi, April 8, 2011). Sexual violence was also reported as

something that happened in public spaces. “In the spring, when it gets warmer out and people drink outside more, down by the river, there are even more young women that get raped,” commented Agatha (47 years old, Chisasibi, May 17, 2011).

As Petawabano et al. (1994) argued, it is nearly impossible to accurately assess whether alcohol is the actual cause for these other phenomena. It could very well be that individuals drink as a pretext for other behaviour. They also suggested that alcohol abuse could be an “accelerating factor” (p. 45) with regards to other behaviours so that, even though individuals might be predisposed to engage in these behaviours, the influence of alcohol may be a factor of disinhibition that allows them to go through with them despite the potential negative consequences. Finally, Petawabano et al. (1994) pointed out the possibility that alcohol use varies with other behaviours in a corollary manner. In other words, alcohol abuse and other behaviours could result from the same factors, rather than have a causal relationship to each other.

Other scholars working on Indigenous drinking in North America have questioned the causal relationship between alcohol and these other phenomena. Westermeyer (1979), for instance, pointed out that in the century preceding his work, suicide and homicide rates among the Diné and Apache remained unchanged while rates of alcohol use increased. Vitenti (2018), in her work on suicide in the Atikamekw and Anishnabek communities of Manawan and Lac Simon, Quebec, respectively, suggested that while alcohol and drugs may play a role in suicide, they are not necessarily determinants.

2.4. The Chisasibi Alcohol By-Law

Regardless of whether people view the relationship between alcohol and related phenomena as causal or correlated, alcohol is often the target of concrete actions at the local level. It is thought that decreasing alcohol consumption will also decrease family discord, violence, suicide, and other issues in the community. This is evident in Chisasibi’s status as a dry community. It is forbidden to possess or consume alcohol in Chisasibi. A local by-law that banned the sale of alcohol but that allowed individuals to keep small quantities of alcohol in their own homes took effect in the 1980s, shortly after the community was officially established (Banning Alcohol in Chisasibi, 2008). The Cree-Naskapi Act (Minster of Justice, 1984) allows the Cree Nation of

Chisasibi to have a by-law that regulates alcohol use within the boundaries of its jurisdiction. The by-law was modified by the Chisasibi band council in 2008 and now prohibits all possession of alcohol (German, 2008). This modification entailed tougher penalties:

[...] the new bylaw is a total ban prohibiting possession.

For a first contravention of the bylaw without aggravating circumstances the offense is liable for a \$500 penalty. For a second offense or a first with aggravated circumstances, the penalty upon conviction is \$1000 and a six-month prison term. For a third offense, the fine is \$2000 and a six-month prison term and loss of any Cree Nation of Chisasibi-owned housing.

For those who engage in the sale, transfer or exchange of alcoholic beverages the fine is automatically \$2000 and a six-month prison term for a first offense, the same and loss of housing for a second offense and a third or subsequent offense would also garner the fine, prison term, loss of housing and banishment from the community.

Within the context of the bylaw, police will have the right to search any “suspicious” vehicle entering the community without a warrant. This will also apply to non-residents and non-Natives who enter the community (German, 2008, para. 3-5).

2.4.1. Bootlegging and the Police

Despite the tougher penalties and the inclusion of possession under the modified by-law described above, claims were made that the by-law mostly targeted bootlegging. “Though Rupert insisted that the banishment clause is really aimed at bootleggers that the community is well aware of, he said that it probably will not apply to those who are really suffering from alcoholism and are not distributing it.” (German, 2008, para. 6).

Brad, a non-Indigenous police officer who had been working in the community for a few years, agreed that bootlegging needed to be targeted more than possession. He explained that what happens concretely is that alcohol is only seized by the police if people are caught distributing it publicly, if people have alcohol in their cars, since cars are considered a public location, or if the police get several calls complaining about a party. “As far as I’m concerned, if you can get the booze into town and into your fridge, and you don’t cause any problems, it’s yours and we’ll leave you alone”, he explained (37 years old, Chisasibi, November 3, 2010).

Indeed, I did witness one instance of police confiscating beer bottles from a vehicle on the side of the highway that links Chisasibi with the James Bay Highway and a few instances of police cars

driving to a house where a loud party was occurring. I also frequently heard about the confiscation of large quantities of alcohol upon the discovery of bootlegging operations, such as this example from 2012: “Earlier in October, the EEPF conducted two busts in Chisasibi. On Oct. 12, there was a warrant involving the illegal sale and distribution of alcohol as well as other offences. In these raids, officers seized one five-litre keg, 20 cans of beer and nine bottles of liquor” (Levitas, 2012, p. 5). However, I did not hear of any cases of confiscation in people’s homes or arrests for drunkenness in cases where there was no violence or other disturbance. And when I was stopped by a police officer at 2 am while driving home after a friend’s going away party, the only consequences to my admission that I had two beer several hours earlier were a threat to undergo a breath test and a stern order to go home and go to bed.³⁸

Bootlegging is often mentioned in the community as one of the things that allows widespread alcohol use to occur, particularly among youth. Therefore, there is often pressure placed on the band council and on the police force to crack down on bootlegging. For example, this short report was included in the January 2012 of the *Waaskimashtaau*:

In January of 2008 the Chisasibi Police received a letter from the band council of the Cree Nation of Chisasibi. In this letter the police were informed that concerned citizens of Chisasibi wanted something done about the bootleggers and drug dealers in the community.

The illegal sale of alcohol, especially to minors, is a serious problem for the community of Chisasibi. Bootleggers facilitate and promote underage drinking which in turn causes a great deal of problems to their friends and families. Alcohol is in the category of depressants which often leads to confusion, suicidal thoughts and tendencies. Of all the suicides and suicide attempts that have occurred in Chisasibi almost all of the persons were either under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. We must stand together to combat the war on drugs and help and support those with alcohol/drug dependencies to have a clean safe community (Chisasibi Police Report, January 2012, p. 4).

Overall, many people feel that eliminating bootlegging will reduce the quantity of alcohol and that, until this problem is addressed, little can be done to deal with what is perceived as a major addiction problem in the community.

³⁸ Although the police officer who pulled us over was Indigenous, it might still be the case that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are treated differently in this kind of context, as the general attitude expressed by many Eeyouch is that drinking is mostly a problem among members of their own community.

2.4.2. The Gate and its Fall

In 1998, as I headed to Chisasibi for the first time to conduct research for my master's thesis, I encountered "the gate", situated roughly 20 kilometres out of town on the access road that leads to Chisasibi from the James Bay Highway:

Along the stretch of the road [. . .] we eventually came to a small building on the right-hand side of the road. A sign told us, in English, French, and Cree, that we had to stop for inspection before going any further (Leclerc, 2001, p. 11).

According to Niezen (2009), the gate was effective following its 1991 establishment and helped reduce the levels of alcohol consumption. However, according to several friends and research participants as well as Brad, the police officer quoted above, the gate was taken down in 2004 because it had become ineffective. Charlie described how the workers at the gate would party with confiscated alcohol. "Ça ne servait pas à grand chose en fin de compte" she concluded. ("It was actually pretty useless") (39 years old, Chisasibi, September 11, 2010). The word "useless" was used by several other people along with accounts of how the workers at the gate would only confiscate alcohol from drivers who were unwilling to pay them to overlook their possession of alcohol. Nicole described how a friend of hers once stopped at the gate and went into the building to see if anyone was around when no one came out to talk to her. "The guy was sitting there drunk. He wasn't even doing his job" she said with a laugh. (58 years old, Chisasibi, December 7, 2010).

Indeed, in my own experiences in 1998 going through the gate with friends, sometimes with alcohol, I never witnessed an inspection at the gate and my friends rarely worried about getting caught with alcohol. One trip stands out: I had gone with Don and Alex, Eeyou men in their 20s like myself at the time, to Radisson. Their main mission was to acquire some goods for a hunting camp, but they also obtained a large quantity of bottled beer: 5 or 6 cases of 24. As we headed back to town, mixed feelings were expressed:

As we approached the gate about an hour later, Don and Alex began to fear that we would not be able to get back into town with so much alcohol in the vehicle. They decided to drink half of it before crossing into town. They knew of a spot where we could drink in peace, they told me, and asked me if I minded. I agreed and we were soon travelling down another dirt road.

[...]

Before we crossed the gate into Chisasibi at around 11PM [sic], the two men half-heartedly hid the remaining beer [from the case we had brought in from the trunk to drink from] between the seats. “Ah, they never check anyway,” Alex stated confidently, in spite of his earlier fear of being caught with alcohol [and having it confiscated].

The man at the gate [came to the open window on the driver’s side and then] simply waved us by with a knowing look as Alex nonchalantly called something out in Cree. We were free! (Leclerc, 2001, p. 152).

Many people shared similar stories or recounted how they simply had to give a portion of their alcohol or some money to whoever was working at the gate to get through.

There were other ways to get into town with alcohol, particularly in the winter. My friend Zach, a man in his 50s who I knew from previous visits to the community, took my son and me for a drive out of Chisasibi early during my doctoral research. He shared stories about how he got alcohol into town in his younger days by using the skidoo trails in the forest, easily by-passing the main road and the gate. He laughed about how easy it was since the authorities would not dare come looking for them in the woods.

During my stay in Chisasibi, reinstating a checkpoint was occasionally proposed to curb bootlegging and drinking, but these suggestions were typically half-hearted. “Maybe if they brought back the gate?” said/asked Randall, a man in his 60s as we chatted in the commercial building one morning. He continued, shaking his head: “I’m not sure. It’s hard to figure out what to do now” (60 years old, Chisasibi, November 24).

Randall’s uncertainty reflects that expressed by many people who spoke to me or who expressed themselves in the local media: drinking is a problem, and we keep trying to resolve it, but nothing ever seems to work. And now we do not know what to do about it. This uncertainty matched the complexity of the issue: one way or another, drinking is tied to a web of social problems that threaten community welfare, and this web is entrenched in a long history of colonial interference, described more fully in chapter 7.

2.5. Conclusion

Notwithstanding the by-law, drunken individuals have a ubiquitous presence in the community. Drinking and drunkenness are highly visible in Chisasibi and are often one of the first topics of conversation, second only to conversations about the town itself. While this dissertation exposes much more nuance and ambivalence in people's views about drinking, the initial reactions to the topic follow certain trends. Drunken individuals usually talked about "having a good time" while drinking, even if further discussions revealed ambivalence on the topic of drinking and drunkenness. Among the wider community, drinking and drunkenness are stigmatized to a certain extent, with the terms "drunks" and "zombies" taking on the air of slurs. This stigma is related to social and legal pressures against drinking, particularly public and "excessive" drinking.

The observed and documented rates of drinking and the problems that are associated with it, such as suicide and violence, highlight the sensitive nature of the topic in Chisasibi. Events such as the relocation of the community and residential schools created much social upheaval. Drinking is perceived to play such a pivotal role in this upheaval, as both an effect and an element of its perpetuation, that the community leadership felt the need to take action in the form of a by-law that prohibits the possession of alcohol. Whether it is effective or not, the existence of this by-law is a clear sign that alcohol is seen as a menace to the well-being of the community.

This echoes much of the literature in anthropology and related social sciences on the topic of Indigenous drinking in North America. It is now relevant to turn to a review of this literature. This review provides the academic context within which this doctoral research took place and demonstrates how it contributes to filling a void in the anthropological literature.

Chapter 3 - Drinking in Indigenous North America: A Review of Anthropological Literature

The high level of concern with drinking and the view that drinking is related, in one way or another, to the history of colonization and to further social disruptions are not unique to Chisasibi. There is much literature that documents similar situations in Indigenous communities in North America and around the world. To place the current study in the wider context of anthropological discourse on Indigenous drinking, this chapter provides a review of literature from anthropology and related disciplines on drinking in general and on Indigenous drinking.

3.1. Social Science and Studies of Drinking

Within anthropology and related social sciences, there is a large body of literature pertaining to the study of drinking. While emphasising the learned, socially and culturally defined nature of all aspects of drinking, much of this literature also criticizes “common sense” models of alcohol use and alcoholism that have pervaded public opinion, policy making, and scientific inquiry. As a result, several models have been elaborated to explain not only forms of drinking that could be described as excessive but those that fit into socially accepted patterns in the various cultural contexts where it is found.

Social scientists studying drinking are generally united in their hesitance to provide general definitions of alcoholism, problem drinking, or alcohol abuse that would apply cross-culturally or even across different segments of individual societies. One of the common features of the approach of anthropologists and some sociologists to drinking is the caveat that what appears problematic to one group may not be considered as such in another. Indeed, Heath (1987) indicated that few non-Western societies can be said to suffer from high rates of alcoholism and problem drinking when one defines the terms in relation to local norms and practices concerning drinking and drunkenness. He has also argued that drunkenness is not universally viewed as a deviant or problematic behaviour. Similarly, Mandelbaum (1965) suggested that scholars

carefully distinguish between alcoholism and drunkenness to avoid viewing drinking behaviours that are considered normal in a social context as alcoholic behaviour.

Even when drinking is recognised as excessive or problematic relative to its social and cultural contexts, most anthropologists and sociologists eschew medical discourse to qualify the behaviour. Indeed, much of the commentary on the term “alcoholism” in social science literature appears to justify its move away from the disease model of alcoholism, seen as an unfortunate and pervasive notion that informs much public policy and scientific research on drinking and related phenomena. Suissa (1998) summarized the critique of this model in his suggestion that the medicalization of excess drinking obscures the myriad social, cultural, and personal factors involved in drinking behaviour. In addition, he observed that, in this model human choice is omitted as a variable in an individual’s drinking patterns.³⁹

With regards to alcohol-related problems, the social science literature has had to contend with popular ideas about the causal relationship between drinking and various social ills such as social disruption, violence, sexual violence, homicide, and suicide. These ideas are implicit in the single-distribution model, prevalent in alcohol policy related literature. The underlying idea behind this model is that there is a: “... direct relationship between the average daily per capita alcohol consumption and the prevalence of a wide range of health and social problems associated with the misuse of alcohol” (Grant & Litvak, 1998, p.1). Grant and Litvak (1998) pointed out that this model does not take account of cross-cultural variations in drinking patterns. Moreover, as Single and Leino (1998) argued, the model does not consider variation within a society, such as gender differences. In line with the approaches described below, they claimed that drinking patterns, or the settings, social contexts, and time frames for drinking are at least as important as drinking levels, or quantity of alcohol consumed, in the understanding of a relationship between alcohol and social and health problems.

Moreover, several authors have questioned the notion that drinking, even extreme, is forcibly a cause of social problems. Heath and Rosovsky (1998) indicated that “serious researchers are

³⁹ Thatcher (2004) offers a similar criticism in his argument against the application of the disease model to alcohol abuse among Indigenous people in Canada. However, his criticism sometimes takes him to ethnocentric extremes in the form of sweeping suggestions that blame the victim.

careful to point out that they are dealing with correlations and explicitly reject causal interpretations” (p. 211). Levy and Kunitz (1974) have also suggested that drinking and other phenomenon such as violence and suicide might have similar causes rather than have a causal relationship between them. Nevertheless, many scholars have failed to question the relationship between drinking and “problems” in their work. This is particularly the case for literature dealing with Indigenous peoples such as Indigenous North Americans, as is discussed further below.

3.2. Social Science and Explanatory Models of Drinking

Notwithstanding Western-based ideas about what constitutes alcoholism, problem drinking, and alcohol-related problems and about the urgency of dealing with the “alcohol problem”, many social scientists have elected to consider drinking as one element among many of human social behaviour. As such, they have elaborated several explanatory models for the various patterns and modes of drinking that exist in human societies. As early as the 1940s, Bacon (1991) called for his peers to move beyond the “exotic”, or extreme areas of alcoholism and extreme drunkenness and to examine the entire range of alcohol related behaviours as well as the relationships between these behaviours and other aspects of social organisation and culture (p. 25). He argued that it was important to provide comprehensive social analyses of the ways people drink, the specific contexts in which they do so, the norms that govern their drinking behaviour, and many other socio-cultural facets of drinking.

3.2.1. The Sociocultural Model

In line with what Bacon (1991) had in mind, the sociocultural approach to drinking considers alcohol abuse or problem drinking as one set of behaviours within a wide range of drinking practices. As described by Heath (1977), this approach: “... emphasizes patterns of belief and behavior that characterize various populations” (p. 1) and considers the relationship between drinking and social relationships and norms. As this has been a predominant model in much anthropological work on alcohol use, it is pertinent to present its major observations here. Not all authors cited in this section explicitly associated themselves with this model. However, their work clearly includes links between alcohol use and social and cultural dynamics.

Primary among the tenets of sociocultural studies on drinking is that drinking is a social activity. Heath (1987) has argued that solitary drinking is rare outside the West. Additionally, Mandelbaum (1965) stressed the importance of understanding social relations to understand the meanings associated with drinking, given that drinking nearly always occurs in social contexts. In line with the social aspect of drinking, Douglas (1987) commented on the learned nature of drinking patterns; one learns the norms associated with drinking from others in one's social environment.

If drinking is a learned, social activity, it means that it is informed by social norms, or rules that prescribe behaviour. These norms dictate the contexts in which drinking is appropriate. For instance, while drinking might be seen as a passage from work to leisure time in mainstream American society (Gusfield, 1987), it may take place in ceremonial contexts in several non-Western societies (Mandelbaum, 1965).

Social norms also define appropriate drinking levels. What is considered heavy drinking varies from one cultural context to another (Honigman, 1979). On the other hand, the definition of abstinence can vary from consuming fewer than one drink per year in the United States to being in a drunken state fewer than twelve times per year in Chile (Heath, 1998).

If the time, location, and patterns of drinking need to be defined relative to their cultural contexts, so do the effects. MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) carefully deconstructed the idea that total social inhibition and lack of ability to adhere to any social norms are inherent effects of alcohol. Rather, they argued, each cultural worldview provides its adherents with expectations about how alcohol will "make" them behave. Similarly, Douglas (1987) commented on the way in which social norms provide expectations about drunken performance. In reference to mood, an internal state that is expressed through one's behaviour, Plange (1998) argued that the "... behavioral outcome of mood, enhanced by alcohol, is also context dependent, or culturally prescribed" (p. 91).

All these norms related to drinking are widely acknowledged to vary cross-culturally. However, Mandelbaum (1965) also stated the importance of considering variance across subgroups within a society. He pointed out that drinking norms often vary along gender lines, for instance. Nahoum-Grappe (1991), an historian, corroborated the common and long-standing association of drinking

with masculinity. She has also described, particularly for European peoples, the class-based variations in drinking patterns.

3.2.2. Functionalist Analyses of Drinking

In addition to the above generalisations, many anthropologists and other scholars have suggested that drinking and drunkenness fulfill social and psychological functions. Indeed, as with the study of religion, ritual, and witchcraft beliefs, functionalist analyses of drinking behaviours have been prominent in the ethnographic literature dealing with drinking. Although fewer anthropologists identified themselves as functionalists after 1970, many accounts published later included discussions of how drinking and drunkenness fulfilled certain needs for groups or individuals (Heath 1987).

Social functions that are thought to be fulfilled by drinking include group bonding and cohesion and a sense of belonging and group identity (Mandelbaum, 1965). Drinking patterns can even serve to mark off parameters of inclusion and exclusion, as illustrated by the works of Castelain (1989) among French dockers and of Mars (1987) among the longshoremen of the Canadian Maritimes. In both cases, adherence to a specific pattern of drinking was expected for a man to be considered an insider. Being a good worker was not enough. Castelain (1989) also showed how the drinking pattern of the dockers, perceived as excessive by mainstream French society, served as an identity marker and a badge of pride for many dockers, who actively refuted the “alcoholic” label that they knew was attributed to them.

Another common function that is noted in the literature is that of the “time-out” in which individuals, because of the disinhibition afforded by drunkenness, can go beyond the usual limits on behaviour without fear of sanctions. This may seem to imply that drunken behaviour, through this mechanism, often goes far beyond the bounds of what is considered socially acceptable and into the realm of sexual violence and homicide. However, MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) went to great lengths to demonstrate that all societies have limits to the degree of disinhibition that will be tolerated. As stated above, they argued that cultural understanding of the effects of alcohol inform the actual level of disinhibition that will be demonstrated. Their work contains

detailed and far-reaching ethnographic examples that demonstrate that, in all societies where there is socially sanctioned drunkenness, there are limits that are rarely breached.

Scholars have also described several psychological functions that are fulfilled by drinking and drunkenness. One such function is stress relief. Horton (1971), in his oft-cited work, argued that societies in which there are high levels of anxiety due to subsistence or acculturation stress are more likely to have high rates of drunkenness.² Schaffer (1976) similarly argued that drunkenness provides a release from anxiety but referred specifically to anxiety related to inter-personal hostilities. More recently, Douglas (1987) suggested that, by drinking, humans construct an ideal world to avoid facing the painful realities of a chaotic world. Also writing on the theme of fantasy, Boyatzis (1976) claimed that drunkenness enabled fantasies of power for individuals who felt unrightfully powerless within their societies, such as men who sought privilege in a social situation with few prestige-awarding venues.

Finally, Barry (1976) promoted the dependency theory which considers the inner conflict that many individuals develop over the course of their enculturation. According to this theory, many adults maintain an inner drive to engage in dependent behaviour toward others and to seek nurturing and emotional support even though they are expected to be more independent and autonomous in adulthood. Barry (1976) claimed that drinking allowed for this conflict to be temporarily resolved as disinhibition allowed individuals to engage in nurturing or nurturance-seeking behaviour without fear of judgement, as with the “time-out” model described above.

The sociocultural model and its early functionalist tendencies are not without critics. Heath (1977), himself an active proponent of the sociocultural model, has pointed to some weaknesses in this literature. Most of the weaknesses have to do with the difficulties involved in finding the

² It must be noted that Horton (1971) also argued that foraging societies were the ones that were most likely to have these high rates. Further developments in the study of foraging societies worldwide indicate that his view is highly misinformed. And, of course, the very title of his article demonstrates the ethnocentric worldview in which anthropological studies of that era were often entrenched.

appropriate terminology. However, he decried the tendency in the literature whereby: “drinking is conceived as *causing* problems for the economically and politically dominant segment of the world’s population, but as *relieving* (or at least resulting from) problems for those who are dominated” (p. 10).

Heath (1977) also pointed out that these models generally focus on norms considered standard within a society and fail to acknowledge variation in levels of adherence to these norms:

There is rarely any indication of the range of variation among individuals with respect to how often, how deliberately, or how closely they conform to the patterns in question, nor is mention made of any standard divergencies from the norm that might themselves be other patterns characterizing acceptable alternatives in the nature of subnorms for various categories [...] even a small and relatively homogenous population will show a distinct range of variation among individuals with respect to beliefs and action patterns, whether in connection with drinking or with any other aspect of culture (Heath, 1977, p. 10).

Similarly, Jessor and Jessor (1977) criticized the sociocultural model for obscuring the importance of individual personality in the study of drinking behaviours. They argued that an individual’s attitudes toward the social norms and the extent to which they feel compelled to engage within their groups as responsible agents have as much bearing on their drinking behaviour as the norms themselves. More recently, Suissa (1998) highlighted the role of individual motivation and choice with regards to drinking.

Finally, Spiro (1967) criticized functionalism in general for basing explanations of behaviour with reference to its consequences regardless of whether the actors intend for these consequences to happen. He argued that if a certain consequence, or function, is intended by the actors, their motivation is a causal explanation. However, if the consequence is unintended, it is an insufficient explanatory element since an unintended consequence cannot explain its own cause. His critique referred specifically to functionalist analyses of religion. However, since the functions of drinking and drunkenness described above are similar to those identified in studies of religion, it is pertinent to mention Spiro’s (1967) criticism here. Indeed, this and other criticisms outlined above are supported by the present research.

3.3. Social Science and Indigenous Drinking in North America

As with other social scientific studies of alcohol use, social science literature on Indigenous North American use of alcohol focuses on the social, cultural, and psychological aspects of drinking.⁴⁰ There have been many studies in the biological sciences that attempted to locate a genetic or other physiological element that would predispose Indigenous North and South Americans to a low tolerance for the effects of alcohol. Social scientists have tended to eschew this model much in the same way that they refuted the disease model of alcoholism, as discussed above. Heath (1987) and Westermeyer (1979), for example, pointed out that these studies have been inconclusive and that they have applied poor methodologies and faulty analyses.

Concerning terminology, Westermeyer (1979) criticized the broad stroked application of the term “alcoholism” to Indigenous peoples based on points that emerge from ethnographic data, social scientific thought, and statistics existing on Indigenous drinking at the time of his research. First, he reminded us of the difficulty involved in defining the term when we take account of cultural variations in norms associated with drinking. Secondly, with regards to the given rates of what Westerners consider to be “alcoholism”, there was, at the time he wrote, much variation between Indigenous societies. Some of the rates in Indigenous communities in the United States, for example, were much higher than the national U.S. average and some of them were much lower. Finally, his work indicates that there was, according to these statistics, much variation within Indigenous societies along the lines of age, gender, and other sub-categories. Westermeyer (1979) rightly argued that focussing on alcoholism as a major problem among Indigenous peoples obscures other issues that contribute to the social climate that allows the problem, real or perceived, to persist. These issues include prejudice, lack of access to health care, unemployment, and other forms of discrimination.

40 In this text, I use the term “Indigenous” to replace the use of the word “Indian” favoured by many authors. The term includes Inuit and Métis peoples as well as all First Nations in Canada and American Indians in the United States. Whenever possible, the name of specific nations is used in reference to case studies. However, when necessary, the term used by the author is used to ensure clarity.

Notwithstanding the hesitance of some researchers to unproblematically apply the terms “alcoholism” or “problem drinking” to Indigenous drinking patterns, some scholars have based their research on the existence of problematic drinking patterns. Levy and Kunitz (1974) have pointed out that, even though social science studies of alcohol around the world have increasingly focussed on drinking as a learned and coded social behaviour like any other, studies of Indigenous North American drinking have mostly focussed on problem drinking. Therefore, much social science literature concerning alcohol use among Indigenous peoples of North America lies in the “exotic” range of alcohol abuse, extreme drunkenness, and alcohol-related problems, as described by Bacon (1991).

Indeed, many studies of Indigenous health and well-being paint a portrait of Indigenous societies in which alcohol abuse looms as a menacing and pervasive problem. Drinking is often considered a problem in its own right, or a symptom among many of cultural disintegration and the mental anguish that accompanies it. It is also usually described as a primary contributing factor to other social problems such as domestic and sexual violence, suicide and parasuicide, homicide, accidents, and crime in general (Barss, 1998; Evans, 2004; Suissa, 1998; Thatcher, 2004; Waldrum et al., 1995; Whitehead & Hayes 1998). This is demonstrated in the literature cited in chapter 2, for instance.

However, as with the medical model of alcoholism, there are other scholars who have sought to use research to help debunk common stereotypes about Indigenous drinking. As discussed later in this chapter, for example, several scholars successfully demonstrated that the descriptions of violent, drunken Indigenous people in early accounts by fur traders and missionaries were exaggerated and biased.

However, the stereotype of the “drunken Indian” persists, in and out of academic literature, and it has remained relatively unchanged since the time of the fur trade. Contemporary descriptions of Indigenous alcohol use by some social scientists echo those of early missionaries and traders. As with its historical counterpart, however, this contemporary model can be effectively deconstructed by a critical examination of the assumptions on which it is based.

Westermeyer (1979), for instance, referred to the large variety of drinking patterns described in ethnographic accounts. While the stereotypical behaviour of binge drinking and drinking to extreme levels of drunkenness does exist, many Indigenous individuals either abstain or engage in moderate and discrete forms of drinking. As mentioned above, he pointed out that drinking behaviours vary within Indigenous societies, but he also indicated that they could vary over the course of an individual's lifetime. Both Heath (1987) and Westermeyer (1979) argued that the high visibility of binge drinking is what leads many observers to believe that it is the predominant pattern. On a similar note, Heath (1997) pointed out that the visibility of binge drinking, when it occurs, leads to high rates of arrest especially in contexts of "dry" communities where the possession of alcohol itself is an offence.

3.3.1. Alcohol as an Element of Colonization

Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars in anthropology and in other fields, as well as other people speaking and writing about Indigenous drinking, have exposed links between problem drinking and the long history of colonialism. As seen in chapter 7, contact with European explorers, traders, and settlers led to interference with existing Indigenous social structures, which were part of a web of adaptive features such as subsistence strategies, political and economic structures, the importance of kinship, and a cosmological relationship with the environment. The disruption of the economic system through the fur trade and, later, neo-colonial changes to the natural resources on which Indigenous peoples relied for their subsistence led to internal power imbalances, political turmoil, and interference with family structures. Overt and covert attempts at assimilation and acculturation contributed to a sense of culture loss that left Indigenous people in a state of confusion and despair.

The presence of alcohol in this story is ubiquitous. It appears early in the story as one of the tools that European traders had at their disposal to manipulate Indigenous people. It then makes an appearance as a contributor to the early downfall of Indigenous social structures. Finally, it maintains an ongoing role as one of the many substances that Indigenous people, in their despair and pain, turn to for temporary appeasement of their distress.

In one way or another, most scholars touching on Indigenous drinking refer to the colonial history and neo-colonial present to describe the context within which this drinking occurs. For the most part, these authors refer to specific aspects of colonization to examine, in a closer fashion, the interaction between the social forces working on colonized peoples and the people themselves.

As described in chapter 7, assimilation attempts in the form of residential schools caused damage to the psychological and emotional well-being of Indigenous individuals who attended and to the social fabric of their communities. However, assimilation attempts by colonial forces are also said to have instilled the values of the dominant culture into Indigenous ideology. These values often include ideas about the goals and ideal life toward which people should strive. However, social dynamics such as lack of equal access to Western-style education, discrimination, and prejudice deprive many Indigenous people from the means of achieving those goals.

Levy and Kunitz (1974) have used Merton's concept of "retreatism" to describe the coping mechanism of people who have little or no access to what is generally agreed upon, in their society, to be ideal life goals. Excessive drinking is one means by which people retreat from the system in the face of this limited access. For example, Clairmont (1962), in his observations of drinking patterns among the Inuit of Inuvik in 1961, concluded by stating that heavy drinking was probably due to the assimilation of Western goals coupled with the lack of means of acquiring them.

Lurie (1979) suggested, however, that it is the lack of means of acquiring *traditionally valued goals* that is an agent of frustration for so many Indigenous individuals and that this frustration leads them to engage in heavy drinking. As is discussed in chapter 12, this is the case for many youths in Chisasibi who wish to engage in highly valued Eeyou activities such as hunting and fishing, but who lack access for a variety of reasons.

Cultural confusion, such as that described above, and anomie, defined by Jilek (1981) as "the absence of an effective normative structure" (p. 3), are often linked with depression and other psychological states that lead to heavy drinking and related phenomena among Indigenous people (Jilek-Aall, 1978). Both authors noted this trend during their practice as psychiatrists in an area of British Columbia highly populated by people of the Coast Salish nation. Patients expressed

symptoms of depression and angst related to the lack of solid cultural norms by which to live and to the confusion and frustration that this entails. Evans (2004) also pointed to anomie in addition to boredom in his description of the suicide patterns of Inuit youth, relating many of these suicides to alcohol. Whitehead and Hayes (1998) also identified anomie as a prime factor in heavy Indigenous drinking.

Links between problem drinking and the long-term effects of colonization are highly present in the ideology of many Indigenous people as well. Maracle (1994), in his poignant collection of personal recollections by Indigenous Canadians who have been affected by heavy drinking, illustrated that many individuals associate this problem with European conquest. Adelson (2000) similarly noted that alcohol is perceived by the Eeyouch of Northern Québec as a negative effect of contact with whites. She described this attitude in the context of a local social movement to adopt healthy lifestyles that avoid or minimize the consumption of alcohol and other Western goods such as store-bought food. Other authors have depicted this association of alcohol with whites as an indicator of fatalism. Stevens (1981), for example, claimed that members of the Passamaquoddy nation of Maine felt that they had no control over their drinking and that their blaming of whites for bringing alcohol left them feeling hopeless and powerless.

From the above review, we can see that, as Piron (1994) pointed out, the prevailing anthropological discourse on Indigenous alcohol use locates problem drinking in a web of social problems related to disruptions caused by Euro-North American interference in Indigenous social and cultural systems. Indeed, the impacts of colonization, neo-colonialism, attempts at assimilation and all the social ills that accompany them on Indigenous societies can in no way be denied. Furthermore, this macro-level explanatory model has been useful in debunking essentialist stereotypes about Indigenous people and drinking.

However, as Piron (1994) argued, this explanatory model *on its own* both over-simplifies the complex issue of drinking by reducing it to an unavoidable link in a causal chain and overlooks individual agency. Similarly, Thatcher (2004) and Waldrum et al. (1995) reminded their readers that attributing problem drinking solely and unproblematically to the story of colonization

removes human agency from the equation and locates Indigenous people as powerless victims of history.

3.3.2. The Social and Psychological Functions of Drinking and Drunkenness in Indigenous North America

The focus on much of the literature that links Indigenous drinking with a history of colonial disruption tends to focus on extreme drinking patterns and a macro-level explanation of this phenomenon. But there are many social science analyses that have taken a more micro-level approach and promoted the idea of looking beyond the “problematic” nature of alcohol use to examine the functions of drinking and drunkenness in Indigenous societies, past and present.

A recurring theme in social science analyses of Indigenous drinking, particularly anthropological analyses resulting from ethnographic fieldwork, is that drinking fulfills social functions for its participants. Like religious rituals, drinking and drunkenness are said to promote social bonding and solidarity. Lemert (1980) noted the social function of drinking in his ethnographic work in three Salish nations in British Columbia as did Brody (1970) in his fascinating work with urban Indigenous people in the Canadian Prairies. What is especially interesting about Brody’s (1970) work and conclusions is that drinking, in an urban context, facilitates the bonding of Indigenous people from various nations. Spicer (1997) made similar observations in urban contexts in the United States.

All these authors highlighted the reciprocity that took place with respect to sharing alcohol as well as the rarity of solitary drinking. The sharing of alcohol as a means of preserving relations that were traditionally ensured through lines of kinship and cooperative hunting among the Tununermiut Inuit of Baffin Island was also observed by Matthiasson (1980). Hamer (1980), Jilek-Aall (1978) and Lemert (1980) have all added that drinking facilitated social relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as well by easing tensions and by allowing participants to feel as though they were on equal footing.

Brody (1970) noted the importance of remembering that the set of values and norms to which urban Indigenous people adhere is diametrically opposed to that of the dominant culture. Despite

the external observer's potential view of heavy drinking as beyond the norms, the above authors and others specify that heavy drinking to the point of extreme intoxication *is* the norm in many Indigenous contexts. For example, Hamer (1980) indicated that, among the Forest Potawatomi of Michigan, drunkenness was valued as a fun, recreational activity. As with all norms, then, the specific norm for heavy drinking fulfills a social function.

Several authors have argued that this norm goes beyond facilitating group bonding to promoting a sense of group identity and belonging. As Brody (1970) put it, "to drink is to be a part of the community and to be a part of the community is to drink" (p. 12). Roy (2005), reporting on his work with the Innu of Québec, indicated that drinking had become an identity marker to the point that an individual's decision to abstain sentenced them to social isolation. Stevens (1981) observed the same phenomenon among the Passamaquoddy. She further noted that peer pressure was a large factor in the promotion of drinking and that abstinence was seen as a sign that an individual felt superior to their peers. Bousquet's (2005) work among the Anicinabek of Quebec adds a kinship-related dimension to the question of drinking as marker of identity and belonging. She argued that people's primary drinking circle consisted of people in their kinship network, which is also their primary social and support network. To stop drinking therefore carried heavy social ramifications.

The idea that normative heavy drinking is a marker of group identity and belonging goes beyond the level of local groups to the level of Indigenous identity itself. Even though most Indigenous people are keenly aware of the stereotypes of "drunken Indians," several authors have argued that living up to this stereotype is a way of reclaiming and protecting their identity as Indigenous. In this vein, Lurie (1979) argued that Indigenous people who drank to get drunk did so to assert their Indigenous identity in the face of a dominant society that pressured them to assimilate. Honigman (1979; 1980) also asserted that the Indigenous residents of Inuvik, which includes Inuit, Métis and other Indigenous nations, practised heavy drinking as a means of resisting further assimilation. Similarly, Anicinabek individuals who had stopped drinking and related behaviours such as smoking confided to Bousquet (2005) that they feared they were losing their Indigenous identity.

Although the idea that heavy drinking, or any drinking at all serves a function of symbolising Indigenous identity is rather prevalent in the literature, there is some indication that this is not a universal feature. Adelson (2000) remarked that Eeyouch in Whapmagoostui associate drinking with “the White man” and consider it to be antithetical to Eeyou identity. Roy (2005) also noted that drinking was sometimes considered, among the Innu, to be associated with whiteness but that this association is what encouraged individuals to drink since it symbolized a higher status.

Nonetheless, several authors have argued that some Indigenous people engage in heavy drinking and public drunkenness in a conscious move to confirm the stereotype of “drunken Indians” in the eyes of non-Indigenous people, in contexts where there was frequent contact. Hamer (1980) claimed that the embodiment of this stereotype contributed to the maintenance of clear social categories and predictable interactions. Lemert (1980), for his part, claimed that some Indigenous individuals took advantage of the pity that non-Indigenous people would have for them when they portrayed this stereotype. This argument strongly resembles Sharp’s (1994) discussion of how people in a social position of submission or oppression can project responsibility upon members of the dominant group.⁴¹

Social functions are not just about group solidarity and identity. Some authors have demonstrated that alcohol plays a role for Indigenous individuals who wish to reaffirm individual social roles in contexts where economic change had disrupted traditional power relations within a society. Lemert (1980) maintained that drunken individuals would gain prestige by giving away spirits. He added that, in times when it was illegal for Indigenous people to be in possession of alcohol, the ability to obtain alcohol also conferred considerable social status. Roy (2005) corroborated this finding among the Innu, where people would go to significant lengths to obtain alcohol, highly prized in times of prohibition. Robbins (1973) has offered an interesting analysis of how drunkenness itself served as means for Quebec Naskapi individuals to assert their economic and political status. Individuals who have achieved economic success by Western terms reify their high status when drunk by giving away alcohol. On the contrary, individuals who have not

⁴¹ Sharp’s (1994) argument dealt primarily with gender relations among the Chipewyan but he extended his argument to the colonial domination of Indigenous peoples.

achieved this kind of success make up for their perceived lack of status by engaging in drunken verbal aggression to make claims of personal status.

The issue of power has been discussed by some scholars in the context of more psychological functions of drinking and drunkenness. Hamer (1980) described how changes in gender roles led both Indigenous women and men among the Forest Potawatomi to engage in heavy drinking. Whereas men's economic status as providers had diminished with loss of access to traditional means of subsistence, women had maintained their traditional identity as mothers and caretakers in addition to taking on roles as financial providers because of governmental relief allotted to mothers. Hamer (1980) therefore claimed that drunkenness allowed men to live out a fantasy where they had maintained their former high status. Meanwhile, drunkenness allowed women to get revenge on their husbands, who they saw as contributing little to the family's welfare, by engaging in sexual activity with other men.

At the psychological level, a highly prevalent theme in the literature about heavy drinking among Indigenous peoples is the use of drinking and drunkenness as a disinhibitor. This disinhibition is sometimes said to allow a level of interpersonal warmth that is often said by scholars to be uncharacteristic in many Indigenous societies (Westermeyer, 1979). Similarly, Hamer (1980) applied the dependency theory to the Forest Potawatomi and concluded that drunkenness makes individuals more likely to engage in nurturing and helping behaviour and to look for emotional support. This allowed them to obtain a temporary reprieve from their dependency conflict.

More frequently, however, the literature suggests that drunkenness lowers inhibitions against aggressive behaviours that are usually considered to be outside the norms. A recurring suggestion is that most Indigenous societies do not hold people responsible or accountable for their actions when they are intoxicated and that there are few sanctions inflicted upon these individuals, even when they are no longer intoxicated. Clairmont (1962), Hamer (1980), Kupferer (1979), Lemert (1980), and Robbins (1973) are among the many ethnographers who have reported the prevalence of aggressive behaviour that is forgiven on account of drunkenness in their respective locations. In most of these descriptions, drunken interactions begin as lively and congenial and

escalate to various levels of verbal and physical aggression that would normally be avoided if the participants were not intoxicated.

With respect to the actual relationship between drinking and emotional expression, Shkilnyk (1985) suggested that drunkenness leads to the release of emotions that are usually suppressed, thus allowing for social tensions that already exist to surface. However, Lemert (1980) argued that aggressiveness was a motivator for drinking so that individuals *could* publicly display their negative emotions without fear of reprisal.

3.3.2.1. Criticisms of functionalist models

As is the case with wider functionalist analyses of human alcohol consumption, some anthropologists have been critical of the generalizations contained in functionalist models as applied to Indigenous drinking. Heath (1987) cautioned that statements about the suspension of norms during drunkenness are often made in the context of stereotypical descriptions. It is therefore important to consider the overall picture that an author is presenting of a society in the evaluation of the validity of these claims. Brody (1970), on the other hand, simply explained that, among the urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants he worked with, drunkenness is such an omnipresent reality in their daily lives that it cannot accurately be used as an excuse for any sort of behaviour. This is an important point. The frequency of an individual's incidents of drunkenness must surely be a factor in whether a state of drunkenness can be used as an excuse. Perhaps episodic drunkenness rather than nearly constant states of drunkenness is more likely to lend itself to the "drunkenness as excuse" model.

As described earlier in this chapter, MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) have convincingly argued that there are limits to how far beyond the usual norms people will go when they are intoxicated. Much of the ethnographic literature that they cited pertains to Indigenous North America. In many cases, the means or levels of fighting in which drunken individuals engaged were not conducive to the infliction of serious harm to any individuals. Both Brody (1970) and Hamer (1980) also observed that drunken fights rarely got to the point of serious injury.

Similarly, MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) pointed out that there are nearly always individuals who are exempt from being targets of aggression by intoxicated people. As a case in point, they

indicated that in the past, very few of the missionaries and traders were the targets of physical aggression. Furthermore, even if a drunken Indigenous person would threaten them, they would rarely follow up on their threats. In contemporary times, they cited ethnographies that document that non-Indigenous people are rarely targets of drunken physical aggression. Similarly, Kupferer (1979) attested to the different manners in which drunken individuals among the James Bay Eeyouch have interacted with non-Indigenous people as opposed to their fellow Eeyouch, for example.

In essence, MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) sought to remind us that drunken behaviour is learned in the same way that patterns of drinking are learned. They argued that, in addition to learning the binge drinking pattern and the tendency to drink to extreme levels of intoxication from the traders who introduced alcohol to them, many Indigenous people learned to expect aggressive tendencies during drunkenness. In another approach to examining how cultural expectations determine people's psychological response to intoxication, Brody (1970) argued that the lack of fear of the state of drunkenness is what allows Indigenous people to get drunk fast. This point is important to remember when considering the psychological functions of alcohol for which many scholars have argued. There is nothing inherent to alcohol that affects its drinkers in any particular way. Rather, people's expectations of its effects, highly informed by social and cultural norms as well as individual experience, will fulfill themselves according to these very expectations.

3.3.3. Considering Human Agency

Both the colonial disruption model and the functionalist approach described above are subject to criticism. A notable criticism targets the lack of consideration for human agency in these analyses. However, many scholars who have explicitly or implicitly applied these models have also described the ways in which many Indigenous societies and individuals have been active agents in the adoption or use of heavy drinking behaviour.

With reference to the historical development of what is now seen as a pervasive heavy drinking pattern, several scholars have suggested that this behaviour was incorporated into existing social patterns in much the same way that other elements of European culture were adopted and

adapted to suit Indigenous preferences. For instance, Dailey (1968) suggested that the binge drinking pattern fit well with the “eat all” pattern of many nomadic societies, who had no practical reason to preserve food. Similarly, Gélinas (2005) suggested that alcohol use was gradually incorporated into the ceremonial protocols of the Attikamek and into pre-existing Indigenous trading networks as a matter of course. On a related note, MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) stated that other “time-out” mechanisms existed before European contact, when there was no alcohol in most northern Indigenous societies, and that alcohol was simply incorporated as another mechanism by which people could circumvent the usual social norms.

Another example that has been suggested by some authors as a way that Indigenous individuals have consciously and deliberately engaged with drinking norms is the “faking it” mechanism. MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) indicated that missionaries suspected Indigenous people of faking drunkenness as an excuse for violent behaviour. In contemporary times, Lurie (1979) argued that some Indigenous individuals attribute the stereotype of aggressiveness to white people. Pretending to be drunk and engaging in aggressive behaviour could therefore be a means by which some individuals might avoid being accused of acting like whites, since their white-like aggressiveness could be attributed to their drunkenness.

Lemert (1980) believed that some individuals acting out the drunken stereotype to obtain favours from non-Indigenous people, as described above, were pretending to be drunk. He attributed this belief to what he perceived as an exaggeration of drunken behaviours and the ease with which he observed many people to become sober and lucid in emergency situations. While he may be correct in suggesting that there was some “faking” involved in the drunkenness, this facility to become sober might merely be another confirmation of Brody’s (1970) and MacAndrew and Edgerton’s (1969) point that the behavioural effects of alcohol are highly influenced by worldview.

With regards to functionalist analyses of Indigenous drinking, it is possible to take an approach that focuses on the enacting of agency. This is particularly true of explanatory models that consider drinking as a means by which individuals and groups maintain a sense of Indigenous identity. For example, Jaccoud (1995) has argued that Inuit youth actively use drinking in their

appropriation of a southern lifestyle and in their resistance to parental authority, which they view as oppressive. They therefore exercise agency in the process of identity affirmation, in much the same way that many Indigenous people in preceding generations may have used drinking to affirm their identity in the face of Euro-Canadian oppression.

3.3.3.1. Case Studies: Agency, Drinking, and the Negotiation of Norms and Identity

To demonstrate how a consideration of agency with regards to drinking complements, rather than contradicts, an analysis that relies on functionalism or an exposure of colonial disruption, we can look even more deeply into relevant case studies. For this dissertation, it is useful to consider ethnographic material from communities where there have been disruptions in the mechanisms for maintaining social norms and for dealing with behaviours that are viewed as transgressive, as is the case for Chisasibi (see chapter 9).

Robbins (1973) documented a case study that demonstrates that, in a social setting where egalitarianism and traditional modes of attributing prestige have been disrupted, drinking can serve as a mechanism through which individuals attempt to re-establish equilibrium. Among the Naskapi of the Schefferville area, as in many other Indigenous communities, there has been a decrease in the economic importance of hunting and a corresponding increase in wage labour. This has changed the criteria by which people gained status in the community. Whereas prestige was formerly attributed to skilled hunters, individuals who had access to long-term employment were now perceived as having greater socio-economic power and prestige (Robbins, 1973).

These shifts understandably created considerable conflict and anxiety. Robbins (1973) argued that individuals engaged in leveling mechanisms while drunk in response to this anxiety. Individuals, generally male, who previously had status and who felt that their status was unfairly diminished would, in their drunken states, make belligerent and grandiose claims that would assert their own higher qualities relative to those individuals who held greater prestige. The latter would generally ignore this behaviour. The intoxicated individuals would then feel validated in their claims. Conversely, individuals with newly found status would gain recognition and validation of their prestige by being generous with alcohol. Recipients would show gratefulness toward the givers by offering compliments attesting to their greatness.

Robbins (1973) indicated that the Naskapi verbalised low tolerance for drunken behaviour. As with the Eeyouch of Chisasibi, however, this disapproval tended to be mainly directed toward drinking that was perceived as socially disruptive, such as aggressiveness leading to conflict. However, the conflicts that occurred were often situated in a context of changed social dynamics where norms regarding the awarding of prestige had shifted. Although Robbins framed his argument in terms of a personal identity struggle, it is interesting to note that this struggle takes place in a wider context of a normative shift. Transgressive drunken behaviour would enable one either to address other norms that they felt were not being upheld or to solidify a new norm that they felt was beneficial to them.

In the above example, drinking, although transgressive, was a means of enabling people to engage in personal identity struggles. There are other contexts in which people have more deliberately and consciously used drinking as a means of identity affirmation, either in terms of individual or group identity.

In the face of a dominant political system that denied Indigenous people the privilege of drinking alcohol, the successful acquisition, sharing, and drinking of alcohol was an identity and status marker for the Innu of Pessamit according to Roy (2005). Interviews with community members who recall this period indicate that there were many difficulties involved in getting alcohol since authorities would arrest any Indigenous people caught with alcohol and take away their supplies. Furthermore, non-Indigenous people were forbidden from selling alcohol to Indigenous people.

Knowledge of their surroundings was crucial in obtaining alcohol since using roads was likely to lead to arrest. Smugglers would use the woods and water ways to transport alcohol back to their communities. In many cases, meeting points were established in the woods outside of villages and groups would gather to drink all the available alcohol as quickly as possible to avoid capture and the loss of their goods. According to Roy (2005), this resulted in hero status being attributed to individuals who demonstrated the skills necessary to obtain the prized alcohol.

Under these circumstances, it appears valid to state that a set of social norms was established to justify drinking and drunkenness. This set of norms was a reaction to a situation that was viewed as restrictive. However, it included at least two aspects of social norms that were associated with

a hunting way of life. Informal prestige and authority were attributed to the highly skilled “hunters” and, in turn, these hunters engaged in reciprocity by sharing the valued “prey”. Rather than create conflict and disorder, drinking then enabled a continued form of social solidarity. Moreover, as Roy (2005) has argued, acquiring and drinking alcohol in spite of legal restrictions imposed by the dominant society enhanced a sense of Indigenous identity. This identity both stood in opposition to an oppressive regime and incorporated an element of prestige associated with its restriction to members of the dominant group.

In both case studies, the impacts of colonial disruption on a community are acknowledged and the social and psychological functions that are fulfilled by drunkenness are identified. It is also possible, in both cases, to consider how personal agency operates to allow individuals to negotiate and affirm their identities in a context of changing social norms and relations.

3.3.4. Considering Ambivalence

Another way to go beyond the dominant explanatory models for Indigenous drinking is to consider the ambivalence with which many Indigenous societies and individuals are reported to view alcohol. Spicer (1997) has provided valuable knowledge about the extent to which his urban Indigenous interlocutors were conflicted about drinking and drunkenness. On one hand, they recognised the negative effects that their drinking had on their physical and social well-being, and they often perceived alcohol as a disruptive force brought into their lives by the dominant society. On the other hand, they also enjoyed the sense of belonging and camaraderie that their drinking offered and the way in which they were able to enact some of their traditional values, such as reciprocity. Lurie (1979) and Stevens (1981) also noted ambivalence where, on one hand, people feared and loathed drunkenness but had empathy for drunken individuals. These views echo those expressed by drinkers and non-drinkers alike in Chisasibi, as described in chapter 9.

On the theme of ambivalence, it is also important to note that Indigenous people have their own views on drinking and that these views are not the same within any given Indigenous population. According to Bousquet (2005) and Thatcher (2004), many Indigenous people have internalised the disease model of alcoholism, for example. However, as discussed in chapter 7, many people associate the problem with colonization and blame Westerners for introducing this devastating

element into their societies. In the two Northern Quebec case studies illustrated above, and in later chapters of this dissertation, it is demonstrated that there is ambivalence in how people perceive drinking and drunkenness. Clearly, not all Indigenous people agree on the nature of the “alcohol problem,” its cause, or even whether it is indeed a problem.

3.4. Conclusion

Despite the social science imperative to look at a wide range of drinking behaviours, scholarly examination of Indigenous North American drinking has often focused on what is perceived as an extreme drinking pattern. For example, as discussed in chapter 2 with regards to Indigenous peoples of Northern Québec, such as the Eeyouch, Innu-Naskapi and Inuit, much of the quantitative and qualitative literature asserts that alcohol abuse is rampant and that it is central to the persistence of many social ills such as violence, suicide, and family discord. Scholars who discuss the statistics are often careful to avoid directly stating that drinking is a causal factor in social disorder, however, with many pointing out that high rates of alcohol may be correlated to these other phenomena. Yet there is a prevailing idea in many communities that alcohol is indeed to blame for many of the problems that they see among their peoples, especially among their youth. This was demonstrated in my own research and in Niezen’s (2009) work in Chisasibi.

Regardless of whether alcohol is seen as the *cause* of socially disruptive phenomena or as *one element in a web* of socially disruptive phenomena, the literature makes it clear that drinking is linked with them in one way or another. The impacts of colonization on Indigenous societies are indisputable. However, this model often fails to take personal agency into account and tends to victimize Indigenous drinkers.

While drinking is often cast as a negative force in Indigenous lives, functionalist analyses indicate that this behaviour fulfills certain social and psychological functions, such as the facilitation of social interactions and psychological release. Like the colonial disruption model described above, functionalism has been criticized for a lack of consideration of human agency or even awareness of the very functions that are described. However, these analyses have the merit of repositioning drinking and drunkenness from the area of “problems” to the area of “social behaviour.” Thus, we have access to information about how drinking, even to a point that is perceived as excessive

by writers or the people involved, fulfills certain needs. Knowledge about these needs complements the information on the horrific impacts of problem drinking.

As indicated above, there has been some work that considers agency and ambivalence in relation to Indigenous drinking. However, there remains much work to be done in this area. There is also a gap in the literature in terms of whose voices are presented in the ethnographic works on Indigenous drinking. With a few exceptions, such as Brody (1970), Spicer (1997), and Bousquet (2005), there are few ethnographic works that highlight the views of people who drink. The following chapter discusses the importance of this inclusion, as well as the theoretical approach employed in this research, which highlights agency and related concepts such as life experience and embodiment.

Chapter 4 - Phenomenological Anthropology and Marginal Voices: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The literature provided in chapter 3 clearly locates this dissertation within a vast body of anthropological research that considers various socio-cultural aspects of drinking. Anthropologists and other social scientists have provided myriad frameworks for understanding the ways in which drinking patterns are intertwined with social, political, economic, and historical forces across human societies and through time. The result has been a wide-ranging and comprehensive vision of the ways in which people use alcohol around the world.

However, anthropological work on Indigenous drinking has tended to focus on problem drinking: drinking considered excessive and drinking that is linked with social problems such as violence, sexual abuse, and suicide. This drinking is often discussed with reference to a history of colonial disruptions as both an effect of these disruptions and as a cause of further turmoil. While recognizing the devastating impacts of colonization, there are anthropologists who have focussed on the social and psychological functions that drinking serves for Indigenous groups and individuals.

From the existing literature, then, we are left with a sense of the complexity of both the phenomenon of Indigenous drinking and of its perception within Indigenous societies. However, there remains a lacuna in the literature. The colonial disruption and functionalist models, while useful and valid, have been criticized for failing to consider human agency. As Piron (1994) argued, the ways in which anthropological literature generally discusses the colonial roots of Indigenous drinking overlooks the agency of people who drink. Indeed, with a few exceptions (see Spicer, 1997 and Spradley, 1988), the perspectives of individuals who consume alcohol are absent from analyses of the causes, effects, and circumstances of drinking behaviour. Not only does this disempower the individuals concerned by positing them as passive victims of deterministic socio-historical processes, but it maintains a ubiquitous discourse that is, ironically, very close to the popular views that anthropologists and social scientists concerned with alcohol studies have been

attempting to subvert for several decades. However, there are works that show that it is possible to consider agency in a way that complements the above analyses. Indeed, from the case studies highlighted at the end of chapter 3, it is clearly possible to consider agency while accounting for broader social and historical processes.

This dissertation aims to fill part of this gap in the anthropological literature on Indigenous drinking. First, my research holds the perspectives and life experiences of Eeyou drinkers as a primary source of ethnographic knowledge and centers their stories. By no means are these divorced from wider community concerns or from the social, political, economic, and spiritual currents of the Eeyou nation. Rather, the dialectical relationship between the various perspectives expressed in the community and the experiences of drinkers are used as the context for analysis. There are anthropological precedents for ethnographies focusing on marginalized voices, as they provide additional nuance and richness to the ethnographic record while considering the impacts of wider socio-historical forces.

Second, both agency and ambivalence are highlighted as factors of importance in the lives of drinkers and other community members in Chisasibi. Indeed, the perspectives of drinkers demonstrate that they engage in agentive processes in making meaning for their experiences, and that these processes involve ambivalent views that emerge from engagement with a number of available worldviews.

In line with the goal to centre the perspectives of drinkers, rather than engage in a behavioural analysis of drinking that details who drinks when, for how long, and how much, a phenomenological approach was employed in the research methods and data analysis for this dissertation. This approach centers the ways in which people engage with and interpret the various elements of their daily lives and of their life story. This engagement is understood here through the lens of the concepts of lifeworld, agency, and embodiment, described below.

4.1. Marginal Voices in Ethnographic Practice

In addition to the anthropology of drinking, it is important to place this research in the context of a wider body of work that centers marginal voices in ethnographic practice. My methodological

approach focussed on learning from individuals who would not usually be heard either in the daily realm of life in their community, in the larger arena of Quebec and Canadian society, or in the academic realm. Their life experiences and perspectives thereof constitute a primary source of knowledge for this research, and the voices of drinkers and former drinkers are centered in this dissertation.

Several authors have advocated methodologies that would lead to the inclusion, in anthropological discourse, of voices often rendered marginal within academia. For example, Cole (1992) and Cruikshank (1990) have both alluded to how women's stories shed light on differences in perspective between women and men and to how these stories often question the assumptions that Westerners have about women's roles in non-Western societies. Far from being anecdotes that merely illustrate individual realities, these perspectives and experiences demonstrate interactions between the individual, society, and culture. Similarly, as suggested by Preston (1986) in her work with an elderly Eeyou woman, the events that mark individuals' lives and that they choose to share in interviews demonstrate the extent to which these events highlight community values.

Rosaldo (1993) expounded the importance of including the stories of people who are in socially subordinate positions within their own societies. He argued that it is crucial to take account of how people with less political power in a society interpret their own lives, these interpretations being no more biased than those of more powerful members of the society. According to Rosaldo (1993), taking marginalised people seriously renders our questions and analyses more complex since these voices call into question the idea that the societies in which ethnographers work are ideologically homogenous. Less powerful individuals in a group have a greater comprehension of those with power than vice versa; their perspectives can therefore contribute to a deeper understanding of power dynamics.

My research deals directly with the lives of individuals who engage or have engaged in behaviour that is considered transgressive by many in their community, as discussed in chapter 9, and whose voices are often considered irrelevant both within and outside of their community. Furthermore, the community itself is situated within a wider social context of coloniser-colonized power

relations. It is therefore important to keep the issue of focussing on marginalised voices at the forefront of questioning and analysis.

In line with the arguments of the above ethnographers, the worldviews and life experiences of Indigenous drinkers can add perspectives that are complementary to those present among other individuals in their communities and in academic discourses on Indigenous drinking. Drinkers are not necessarily considered as marginal individuals their entire lives; people who have quit drinking and resumed what are perceived as responsible roles in the community are well-respected. However, the voices of drinkers when they are in a stage of life during which they routinely drink, are not generally taken seriously, either by fellow community members or by scholars. Further, former drinkers are only taken seriously insofar as they followed the recommended route of sobriety. I argue, then, that the voices of people who currently drink as well as the views that former drinkers had while they were still drinking are marginal views.

With this work, I therefore aim to show how the experiences and perspectives of people who engage, or have engaged, in drinking in Chisasibi go beyond providing a portrait of the lives of these individuals. Indeed, the words of current and former drinkers showcase values that are significant in the wider community and question assumptions that non-Indigenous people – including scholars – tend to have about Indigenous drinkers and their level of agency.

As seen in the literature review provided in chapter 3, anthropological analyses offer explanations of drinking that are often removed from the actual lived experiences of drinkers, especially in the case of Indigenous drinkers. Indeed, with the exceptions of Brody (1970), Spicer (1997) and Spradley (1988), we hear very little about the daily existence of Indigenous people who drink. Moreover, all three of these ethnographies take place in urban settings, leaving us with little idea of the lived experiences of people who drink in Indigenous communities.

Interviews and participant observation with Indigenous people who drink, or who used to drink, provide important knowledge about their perspectives on drinking, their life experiences, their perspectives of their community and culture, their individual and group identities, and their values. Their experiences and perspectives offer illustrations of ways in which people act on and engage with the circumstances of their lives.

4.2. A Phenomenological Approach

A phenomenological approach is well-suited to the project of centering the life experiences and perspectives of drinkers. Phenomenological research is centred on the ways in which participants experience life events and how they use them as reference points to create meaning. Several authors have elaborated on a phenomenological approach in anthropology. Jackson (1996), one of the most prominent of these writers, explained that this approach recenters the daily lived reality of the people with whom ethnographers work. Hunter (2018) explains this approach as one that “aims to understand experience (or religion, culture, love, the paranormal, and so on) as experienced and understood by the experiencer, in its own terms” (p. 25) or “[...] what it *feels* like to experience consciousness” (p. 25). Further, this approach considers the “dynamic ways that individual actors shift between differing attitudes in the context of their engagement with their social and physical needs” (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011, p. 88). This entails an acknowledgement and acceptance that lived experience is uncertain and ambiguous. Individuals are continually engaged in negotiation and reconfiguration of their own understanding of this experience and of their own role in it. Ambivalence then becomes a site of engagement and a rich source of insight. Rather than look for hidden meanings of which social actors are unaware, as has often been the case with traditional functionalist or symbolic analyses in anthropology, the intention of this kind of study is to highlight how actors engage in the social creation of meaning. As Jackson (1996) eloquently stated:

Rather than examine the epistemological status of beliefs, it is more important to explore their existential uses and consequences. Our emphasis is thus shifted from what beliefs “mean” *intrinsically* to what they are *made* to mean, and what they accomplish for those who invoke and use them. The sterile antinomies of rationality versus irrationality, or science versus magic, will be exorcised only when the criteria of truth encompass dialectically both antecedent causes *and* projective purposes (p. 6).

Whether experiences are religious in nature (Knibbe & Versteeg, 2008), or involve other states of being that have not traditionally been taken seriously by scholars in anthropology such as addiction (Garcia, 2014), nervous distress (Rabelo & Souza, 2003 and Low, 1994), personal struggle (Desjarlais, 1996), experiencing honour or shame (Abu-Lughod, 1986), or dreaming

(Goulet, 1994), the meanings attributed to these experiences and states by the participants are taken as seriously as any other form of knowledge.

If phenomenological anthropologists critique analyses that minimize the importance of the meaning people make of their own experiences, it does not mean that they seek to replace analyses of structures with expositions of personal narratives and experiences. Rather, a phenomenological approach places all forms of knowledge on equal footing (Jackson, 1996) and seeks to “restore credibility to native perspectives that have already been undermined by professional knowledge and power” (Katz & Csordas, 2003, pp. 275-276). Many phenomenological studies in anthropology focus on experiences that have tended to be explained solely with reference to underlying structures of which participants are unaware.

A phenomenological approach to the inclusion of ecstatic and other states is relevant here. Indeed, much of the work conducted by phenomenological anthropologists highlights experiences such as religious rituals that have often been relegated to exotic practices of “the other” in traditional ethnographies. Classical positivist anthropology has typically regarded these experiences as expressions of underlying social structures or processes unknown (or unanalyzed) by the participants. Furthermore, it has tended to mine the discourse of participants for clues about symbolism that the anthropologist could then analyse to create an explanatory scheme that would often make little sense to the participants.

Hunter (2018) in his work on spirit mediumship, has advocated approaches, including phenomenology, that contribute to “non-reductive anthropology”, or “an approach to investigating the paranormal that does not seek *easy explanations*” (p. xii). This position is a response to anthropological explanations for mediumship that attribute the phenomenon to things such as fraud, mental illness, social rebellion, performance (p. xii), and a social-functionalist approach that reduces spirit communication to “mechanisms for the attainment of social goals” (p. 66). He argued that the perspectives of these approaches are relevant and important, but that they offer only part of the whole story. Indeed, “the richness and significance of experience are just as much a part of consciousness and the universe as any physical object, and, as such, demand to be taken seriously” (Hunter, 2018, p. 24).

Similarly, Kleinman and Kleinman (1996) discussed how ethnographic description, despite its basis in lived experience, can sometimes transform basic human experiences such as suffering and distress, in the process of framing these experiences as “the reproduction of oppressive relationships of production, the symbolization of dynamic conflicts in the interior of self, or as resistance to authority” (p.170). In their view, this transformation is not much different than that created by psychiatric transformations of these human experiences into mental disorders. They therefore suggest that, when refraining from removing these human experiences from their social and historical contexts, we refrain from divorcing knowledge from the “messiness and hurly-burly of daily living” (p. 170).

With its emphasis on experience and meaning creation and its acceptance of states that are not usually taken seriously by scientific inquiry, a phenomenological approach is perfectly suited to the project of including the voices of Indigenous drinkers in scholarly discourse. As demonstrated in chapter 3, most studies of Indigenous drinking in North America have elaborated on the causal relationship between colonial disruption and high rates of drinking or on functionalist analyses of drinking behaviour. Like Hunter (2018), I argue that these analyses are important and offer crucial information and perspectives. However, without the inclusion of the meaning of these experiences as perceived by drinkers themselves, they are incomplete and reductive.

As with the studies of pain, struggle, and religious phenomena mentioned above, a phenomenological approach to Indigenous drinking seeks to place the knowledge and truths held by drinkers at par with that of others in their communities, of scholars, Indigenous or not, who attempt to explain the causes and effects of Indigenous drinking, and of (mostly) non-Indigenous therapists and medical workers who attempt to heal what they consider a disease or disorder. The goal is not to discount the wider historical and social realities within which the lives of Indigenous drinkers are enmeshed. Rather, these realities are considered as something with which drinkers engage to create meaning. Indeed, “Phenomenological approaches [...] attend to the intricate, palpable force of the political, the cultural, the discursive, and the psychological in people’s lives” (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011, p.95).

4.3. Conceptual Framework

Using a phenomenological approach, this dissertation demonstrates that Eeyou drinkers and former drinkers create meaning in their lives. They express this meaning during their day-to-day existence, and these expressed meanings come into play as a tool of self-empowerment in a social landscape that is permeated with ideological ambivalence. The primary concepts I employ are lifeworld, agency, and embodiment.

4.3.1. Lifeworlds

The concept of lifeworld, or lived reality, is central to the work of phenomenologists. Lifeworld is “that domain of everyday immediate social existence and practical activity, with all its habituality, its crises, its vernacular and idiomatic character, its biographical particularities, its decisive events and indecisive strategies” (Jackson, 1996, p. 7). Lifeworlds are taken as the daily arena within which social tensions, personal aspirations, idiosyncratic interpretations of belief systems, and political power are played out to often unpredictable ends. It is where individuals learn, reproduce, refine, refuse, and reconfigure meanings, identities, and norms as they experience and interpret life.

A lifeworld is not, however, merely life experienced passively by participants; it is lived *intersubjective* reality. The meanings, identities and norms that are learned, reconfigured, and so forth do not exist in a vacuum. Indeed, lifeworlds include interactions with other experiencing beings (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011, p. 91). Phenomenologists recognize lifeworlds as loci within which people encounter each other, cooperate, and come into conflict (Jensen & Moran, 2013, p. ix). Individuals interact and engage with each other - sometimes sharing meanings, sometimes sharing a conflict of meanings. The refinements and reconfigurations of meaning that take place in a lifeworld take place in part *because* the social actors involved affect each other.

Phenomenological anthropology does not deny objective states, such as socio-political structures, or the existence of hidden meanings. The interactions referred to above take place in specific socio-political and historical contexts. As described by Desjarlais & Throop (2011), the lifeworld includes all manner of practical components of everyday life, including those that are “historically conditioned” (p. 91). As such, the phenomenological approach does not take a deterministic view

of the socio-political and historical processes that contribute to people's lifeworlds. However, they are considered as entities and realities with which individuals and groups must engage as they create meaning.

It is relevant here to consider the relationship between lifeworlds and worldviews. A worldview is commonly explained as a set of beliefs about reality to which people refer in their interpretation of daily life and experience. As a set of knowledge and beliefs about the world, about how the world should work, and about an individual's role within the world, worldview is intricately tied to lifeworld. As meanings, beliefs, and knowledge shift within a lifeworld, it is crucial to avoid seeing worldviews as static bodies of knowledge.

Even within an individual worldview, different forms of knowledge exist which may either complement and enable each other or contradict each other. As Jackson (1996) acknowledged, "The knowledge whereby one lives is not necessarily identical with the knowledge whereby one explains life" (p. 2). If the knowledge used to *explain* life refers to different and often competing worldviews and the knowledge used to *live* life is shaped through human interactions with life experience, those two forms of knowledge interact and inform each other.

There is indeed an intricate dialectical relationship between worldview and lifeworld, making it impossible to effectively divorce one from the other. Knibbe and Versteeg (2008), in their phenomenological study of religious rituals, explain that "Symbolic systems [through which worldviews are communicated and acted upon], as they are expressed in, for example, rituals and doctrines, can only be understood in relation to the life-world of the people involved" (p. 49). Beliefs, meanings, and perspectives that are a part of an individual's worldview take shape in and are changed by the lived reality of their everyday life. Their lifeworld contributes to the creation of meaning while being affected by prior creations of meaning.

With regards to a relationship between lifeworlds and worldviews, Leblanc (1998) stated that, although phenomenological anthropologists tend to include the concept of worldview within that of lifeworld, it can be useful to maintain at least a theoretical distinction between the two. She acknowledged that it is frequently difficult or even impossible to clearly distinguish between the two concepts and that there is frequently an overlap between them. Nevertheless, she

maintained that in her study of identity creation among Muslim youth in Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire where there are several contradicting systems of thought to which people refer for their identity creation, it is useful to make specific reference to worldviews, even when these very worldviews are fluid and open to interpretation.

4.3.2. Agency

Personal agency is a salient theme in phenomenological anthropology, in keeping with the philosophical roots of phenomenology. As described above, a lifeworld is seen as a locus of interaction between an individual and daily experiences, between individuals, and between individuals and groups and existing social structures and social realities. For interaction and engagement to take place requires agency on behalf of these individuals who engage. While not all the scholars cited below necessarily identify as phenomenological anthropologists, or even as anthropologists, their discussions of agency are relevant to the approach of this dissertation and to phenomenological work more widely.

De Fornel (2010), a sociolinguist, described agency, or *agentivité*, as “*la propriété pour une action d’avoir un agent*” [“the property of an action to have an agent”] (p. 1). His discussion of agency relates to ethnosyntax; however, it is quite relevant to phenomenological ethnographic research. As with phenomenologists, his discussion does not deny the impacts of social structures. Rather, these and other structures becomes incorporated as shared norms, or guides for action. As such, people, as agents, are not simply subject to cultural constraints, but contribute to their production and reproduction. Duranti (2006), a linguistic anthropologist, provided a working definition of agency as “the property of those entities (i) that have some degree of control over their own behavior, (ii) whose actions in the world affect other entities’ (and sometimes their own), and (iii) whose actions are the object of evaluation (e.g., in terms of their responsibility for a given outcome)” (p. 453).

Wisniewsky (2008), a philosophical anthropologist, examined theories of agency and identified social dialogue as a crucial element of people’s own perception of themselves as agents. Indeed, he emphasized the “dialogical self” that engages with others and with social institutions in an ongoing process of development of the self and of those institutions. Like phenomenologists, he

acknowledged that received knowledge, beliefs, and norms have an impact on the individual's perception of life and experiences; each person engages with them to create meaning. What is significant is that the individual is conscious of this engagement and the correlate meaning creation.

De Fornel's (2010) work outlined multiple dimensions of agency, such as volition, causality, control, and others. Indeed, several phenomenologists and other anthropologists focus on specific dimensions in their work. For example, Murphy and Throop (2010) edited a collection of anthropological essays on the topic of will, or volition, several of which are cited in the later ethnographic chapters of this dissertation. Contributors to the volume discussed will and volition from a variety of perspectives. Throop (2010), for instance, elaborated an approach to will that considers a person's sense of initiating an action with a specific goal and a sense of effort. Stewart and Strathern (2010) elaborated on the role of imagination in the will to achieve a specific outcome that is different from one's current state.

In line with the phenomenological approach of this dissertation, Murphy and Throop (2010) suggested that:

[...] an understanding of the constitution, efficacy, and orientation of the will is far from a simple matter of examining individual or collective agency in relation to cultural, historical, and/or social determinants. How actors perceive, feel, think, choose, desire, remember, imagine, fantasize, and act are intimately implicated in anything that we might deem to gloss with the term of *will*. In this light, we argue that it is not enough to simply note that an individual's actions have had tangible effects upon their social world (where anthropological discussions of "agency" often begin and end), for an understanding of the very fabric of human subjectivity lies at the heart of such determinations (p. 18).

4.3.3. Embodiment

Another concept that is central to much of the work of phenomenological anthropologists and other scholars using this approach is embodiment, a concept that helps bridge the above discussions of lifeworld and agency. Strathern & Stewart (2011) stated that "Embodiment refers to the patterns of behavior inscribed on the body or enacted by people that find their expression in bodily form. It thus bridges over from the body as a source of perception into the realms of

agency, practice, feeling, custom, the exercise of skills, performance, and in the case of rituals, performativity” (p. 389).

The concept of embodiment is helpful in work that centers life experiences and perspectives thereof. As Strathern and Stewart (2011) have argued, embodiment does not center bodily experiences at the expense of the mind, “but it does situate the mind in practice” (Strathern & Stewart, 2011, p. 397). Thus, the thoughts, perceptions, and emotions that people have about the world and people around them are included within the concept of embodiment. Further, they posited that embodiment does not strictly concern the body and bodily senses; it concerns ideas about personhood and the self, which are at least partially shaped by engagement with ideas and other people (p. 397).

Indeed, while scholars who employ the concept of embodiment are highly concerned with subjective experiences, embodiment does not isolate the individual from the world around them. As with the concept of lifeworld, embodiment considers socio-political, historical, and cultural influences on the person through their experience of the world, including senses, perceptions, and interpretations. As Jensen and Moran (2013) argued, from a philosophical perspective, “Phenomenology has from the outset [...] recognized that subjects are intrinsically embodied, embedded in social and historical life-worlds, and essentially involved with other embodied subjects, and in an intersubjective cultural world” (p. vii).

If discussions of embodiment tie into the concept of lifeworld, as seen above, it also implies a recognition of agency insofar as the interpretations of experience require engagement with these structures, people, and ideas. Knibbe and Versteeg (2008), for instance, referred to embodiment as a mediator between “patterns and structures which can be observed on a societal level” and “individual life in its intersubjective shaping of everyday meaning” (p. 50). Further, Lyon and Barbalet (1994) argued that embodiment is required for people to have the capacity for social agency:

An adequate understanding of social agency requires a concept of embodied agency. This is because emotion, which is necessarily embodied, functions in social processes as the basis of agency. Emotion has a role in social agency as it significantly guides and prepares the organism for social action through which social relations are generated.

The body cannot be seen merely as subject to external forces; the emotions which move the person through bodily processes must be understood as a source of agency (p.50).

In their view, it is critical to acknowledge the ways in which social power acts on people without considering subjects as passive in the face of this power (Lyon & Barbalet, 1994, p. 54).

4.3.4. Lifeworld, Agency, and Embodiment

The links between the concepts of lifeworld, agency, and embodiment, and their usefulness to this research, become clearer through deeper discussion of embodiment. Despite the apparent focus on the body and therefore on sensory experiences, discussions of embodiment tend to emphasize the engaged process of making meaning of these experiences. For example, Csordas (1994) referred to embodiment as “an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world” (p. 12). Similarly, Strathern & Stewart (2011) reminded us that embodiment goes beyond discussions of the body to include consideration of the body and the person’s environment, and their presence in that environment.

Theorists in a variety of fields have considered agency with respect to the relationship between individuals and structures implicated in the concept of embodiment. Lyon and Barbalet (1994) posited, for example, that the embodiment of experience is a direct contributor to both individual and collective agency, or to ways of acting on the world (p. 54). Similarly, Jensen and Moran (2013) have described humans as “embodied intentional agents” who construct and express meaning as they live their lives in both the “material world and in the cultural and symbolic world” (p. viii).

However, scholars have not all agreed on the “operative locus of agency” (Csordas, 2011, p. 138), or the way in which the body is oriented toward structures. Csordas (2011) described the “elementary structures of agency” (p. 138) based on the approaches of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault in their respective conceptions of existence, habitus, and power relations. He described Merleau-Ponty’s view of agency as the body’s orientation toward the world, wherein intentional threads issue from the individual. Foucault, on the other hand, considered agency as resistance to the threads that go from the world and its structures to the body. Bourdieu’s work posited agency as intention that is adjusted to structures and power

relations, as intentional threads are strung out in both directions. While these approaches appear contradictory, Csordas (2011) suggests that, together, they define “complementary aspects of the relation of our bodies to the world, specifically with respect to how they deal with the issue of agency” (p. 138). This is in keeping with a phenomenological approach that considers lifeworlds as complex and unpredictable.

4.4. Argument

As stated above, the goal of this research is to centre the lived experiences and perspectives of Indigenous drinkers and include them in the academic discourse about their own lives. A phenomenological study of the lifeworlds of Chisasibi drinkers and former drinkers contributes to the achievement of this goal. It considers their daily experiences as self-perceived agents who refer to multiple sets of ideas and knowledge about their world in the perception of their own identities. This agency is expressed in the context of lives that involve the embodied experiences of drinking and drunkenness, at varying levels of frequency and intensity, in a community where drinking and drunkenness are overwhelmingly considered transgressive. This context adds to the importance of acknowledging their agency.

The impacts of economic, political, and religious colonization on the social realities of Indigenous communities are known and acknowledged; it is not the goal of this research to deny these impacts. Rather, the goal is to highlight, as do other phenomenological works in anthropology, that drinkers, like other humans, experience life as agents capable of creating meaning despite their common portrayal as “lost” and despite their invisibility as agents in much academic literature.

The concept of lifeworld as employed by phenomenologists in anthropology and other fields allows for an acknowledgement of uncertainty, ambiguity, and ambivalence. In the case of Chisasibi drinkers, this acknowledgement is pertinent as intersecting political, religious, and economic worldviews are lived out during people’s daily experiences. These intersections are expressions of power dynamics that exist between Indigenous people and the dominant society but also of ideological divergence *within* communities. As such, the above-mentioned distinction between lifeworld and worldview, or between people’s lived realities and their impressions of

those realities, is useful even though the two concepts are heavily intertwined. As is the case with Leblanc's (1998) study, there is ambivalence regarding a behaviour: in this case, drinking. There are also conflicting belief sets to which Eeyouch in Chisasibi refer for their own ideological framework. The distinction between perception and practice becomes necessary in discussing the ways in which drinkers re-establish and maintain their identities and exercise personal agency.

For drinkers, alcohol consumption in a variety of forms and contexts often comprises a central element of contention within power dynamics and identity struggles that take place in the community. The embodied experiences in which both shared and conflicting perceptions interact, and ongoing reflection on these experiences, provide opportunities for engagement with the multiple ideological streams present in the community. The bodily experience of drinking and drunkenness, memories of these events, emotional reactions, and intellectual questioning all contribute to the ways in which drinkers make meaning, interpret their life trajectories, consider their roles in their families and communities, and exercise agency.

In sum, lifeworld, agency, and embodiment are three major concepts that are used in this phenomenological approach to the life experiences and perspectives of Eeyou drinkers in the community of Chisasibi, Quebec. This approach highlights the importance of including people's own accounts of their life experience and their own knowledge in academic discussions about their lives. It may be impossible to ever produce a theoretical model that is universally applicable to all Indigenous communities. However, it is certainly possible to seek complementary explanatory models that go beyond the causal and functionalist analyses expounded in much of the existing anthropological literature on Indigenous drinking.

Chapter 5 – Methodological Approach

Following the theoretical orientation and the conceptual framework of this dissertation, this chapter outlines the major components of my fieldwork in Chisasibi. First, I describe the process of accessing the community, attempting to learn *iyyiyuyimuwin*, and finding participants. Then, I turn to a description of my research methods, ethical considerations, and the ethic of harm reduction that is inherent to the approach of this dissertation.

5.1. Access to the Community

I lived in Chisasibi from early August 2010 to mid-July 2011 with my son, who turned 11 during our stay. I had conducted 3 months of fieldwork in Chisasibi in 1998 for my master's research (see Leclerc, 2001) and made several social connections. But accessing the community for research purposes in 2010 proved to be somewhat challenging. Obtaining permission to conduct fieldwork in the community merely involved writing a letter describing my research goals and methods to Roderick Pachano, the chief of the band council of the Cree Nation of Chisasibi at the time. He in turn obtained approval from the band council and sent me a letter specifying the conditions of my stay. These conditions were simply that I had to find my own lodging as the community was dealing with a housing crisis and that I refrain from causing further turmoil in the community.

The biggest challenge was finding a place to live for my son and myself for the year. I had maintained a few friendships in the community but none of the people were in positions to help me. Some of them had relocated to other communities to be with their spouses and others were individuals who held marginal positions in the community and who had precarious living situations. My previous host family was not an option as one of the members had become involved in the band council, which could have made it difficult for me to obtain the "street credibility" that I needed to connect with my population of interest. In the end, we relocated twice in the first five months of our stay. Once I completed a certain number of hours as a replacement teacher at the local high school, I was able to rent a housing unit reserved for teachers, where we were able to stay until our departure from the community.

5.2. Learning *iiyiyuyimuwin*

One of the things that facilitated the ease of forming relationships in Chisasibi was learning some basics of *iiyiyuyimuwin*, the Eeyou language. Although carrying on an entire conversation remained out of my grasp, even my early beginnings of experimenting with Eeyou conversation enabled friendly contacts with people in town. The mere effort, in the words of an Eeyou colleague at the James Bay Eeyou School, "...makes us feel good because the person is interested in learning about us and our culture".⁴² Although the usual response to my use of Eeyou words was laughter, I was reassured several times that it was a delighted laughter rather than a mocking one. I was skeptical of this claim with regards to my teenage students but their gentle ribbing and attempts to trick me into saying dirty words enabled a fun-filled working relationship with them.

My first step in learning *iiyiyuyimuwin* was to study and practice using a website on which one can hear community members from various Eeyou and Innu communities in Quebec say basic words and phrases in their language.⁴³ This was extremely useful for basic introductory phrases that I was able to use as soon as I began to live in Chisasibi. Shortly after I arrived, I purchased an instructional CD from the Cree School Board. The CD contained many of the same phrases as the website. A word or phrase is said in English, French, Southern *iiyiyuyimuwin* and Northern *iiyiyuyimuwin*.

During my stay in Chisasibi, I was able to use local resources to improve my language skills. For example, listening to CHFG radio, where most of the talk is in *iiyiyuyimuwin*, was of tremendous help in getting my ear accustomed to the local dialect. In the winter segment of a local program called ACTION, in which any community member can teach a course in something of popular interest, I signed up for a course called "Cree Conversation." Between the manual and the teacher who was there to correct our pronunciation and repeat the words and phrases so that we could write them according to how our own ears heard them, my range of vocabulary greatly improved. This course helped me identify some of the generational differences in speech as well, as youth often drop the beginning of certain phrases. For example, *taan aa iyihitiyin*, which sounds to

⁴² Personal communication, 2010.

⁴³ <http://www.atlas-ling.ca>

anglophone ears like “daanineteen” and means “What are you doing?” is often shortened by youth (and some adults) to *n’aa iyihitiyin*, or “naiteen”. Knowing these differences led to a lower frequency of misunderstandings between myself and adults, since many new words came to me through my students.

While I never became proficient enough to have a full conversation in *iiyiyiyimuwin*, I was able to introduce myself, talk about myself and my family, ask some basic questions and make some basic statements in social and work contexts. My attempts also facilitated contact with potential research participants, particularly drinkers hanging out behind the commercial centre or between the houses. The looks of surprise, the gleeful laughter, and excited banter that followed my use of *iiyiyiyimuwin*, along with the sharing of cigarettes, increased the ease with which I was able to engage with individuals who would otherwise have been justifiably wary of my presence. As was the case during my first stay in Chisasibi in 1998, my attempts to speak *iiyiyiyimuwin* with groups of drinkers occasionally upset one or more members of the group. In most cases, however, I was treated to lessons in *iiyiyiyimuwin* on topics of interest to some of the people in the group, with hockey and drinking being the most common topics.

5.3. Finding Participants

I took a multifaceted approach to finding people to participate in my research. The first three months were mostly spent settling into the community and letting people know who I was. Early in this period, I wrote an introductory letter for the local newsletter called *Waaskimaashtaa* (appendix 1) in which I explained who I was, why I was in town, what I hoped to accomplish, and how I could be reached. The article was written in an accessible and personal tone. I felt that I should be ready to disclose some information about myself as I was asking people to discuss a very personal and touchy topic with me.

In the weeks that followed the publication of the article, several people approached me in public locations to ask how long I would be in town and to say that they would want to talk to me eventually. Only one person wrote to me to establish immediate contact. Rather than make me lose hope, this lack of direct results reaffirmed that it was a good idea to signify my presence and intentions early on and wait patiently while people got to know me.

As the weeks went by, and more community members got to know me, I was able to engage in many discussions about the topic of drinking in the community. Although those early discussions were usually in public spaces and somewhat general, I was already seeing a diversity of perspectives and experiences emerge. It is important to note also that most, but not all, of these early discussions were with individuals who were concerned about the topic either from the point of view of relatives and friends of people who drink or people who work with drinking community members in a professional capacity: teachers, police officers, and social workers for example.

In the middle of October, I obtained a position replacing the science teacher in the upper high school grades. Although this occupied more of my time, it proved to be a tremendous opportunity to connect with a wider segment of the population. Having an “official” and meaningful position in the community meant that people were less confused about my status and had a reason for interacting with me. Also, becoming friends with various workers in the school, most of whom come from outside the community and are non-Indigenous but many of whom are community members either by birth or through family relationships with band members, provided me with many opportunities for social networking.

Finally, my devotion to the students and the degree to which I “clicked” with them compared to their regular teacher meant that the students talked about me to their parents in a positive way. Meeting the parents at a parent-teacher night or out in the community showed me that my work was appreciated and that I was perceived as a caring and responsible person. Having the opportunity to directly show my character and the sincerity of my intentions through direct action rather than mere words made up for the greater occupation of my time. Later during my stay, it allowed me access to social networks that I may not have otherwise encountered so easily and afforded me a greater ease in initiating interactions with individuals who had a great deal to say on my topic of study. It also added to the richness of my experience in the community.

This increase in social connections and the fact that I appeared to be appreciated by many community members, particularly those involved in school life as workers or parents, gave me the confidence to approach people that I did not know directly but who I had heard might be

interested in participating in my research project. For example, some parents happened to work for the health board and provided me with inroads into the social world of health board workers.

When the regular science teacher came back to Chisasibi, I continued to work as a substitute teacher in the school on a nearly weekly basis. I therefore remained involved in the school community. In addition, I obtained a part-time teaching contract as an instructor of philosophy in a college integration program called *Ashuugan* (meaning bridge), which, in addition to helping make ends meet, helped me make new contacts among older students.

Early in the winter and throughout the spring, I began to reach out to drinkers more directly. My first step was to post signs with a brief call for participation along with my contact information and tear-off strips at the bottom with my name, phone number and email address in various locations around the community. I would check the signs on a weekly basis and replace them when all the tear off strips were gone. Although this did not lead to many calls, I knew that people retained the basic information. When I would encounter new people and introduce myself, they would often chuckle and comment that they had my number in their wallet because of my signs. I also submitted two other letters to the *Waaskimaashtaa* that focused on the research project and presented themes of interest (appendix 2 and 3).

A more successful approach was to “hang out” in outdoor spaces where people gathered to smoke and drink. The main location for this was behind the commercial centre in the middle of the community. But I also encountered many groupings of people on the pathways between houses in the community’s central area.⁴⁴ As a cigarette smoker, I had an instant “in” with many of the people who gathered. After initial small talk where I had the opportunity to show my open-mindedness and lack of a judgmental attitude toward drinking, I would talk about my project and let people know that they could get in touch with me anytime. I would then give out business cards that had my local contact information on them, joking so that it would appear as more of a friendly gesture than an alienating business-like gesture. After the first few times, it became clear to me that, even in cases where individuals were mildly drunk, they appreciated the “business-like” aspect of being given a business card. Somehow, it may have given the whole affair an aura

⁴⁴ See chapter 1 for a more detailed description of Chisasibi.

of legitimacy and validated the opportunity for them to share their story as one that would have wider social credibility. In many cases, people simply gave me their cell phone numbers and said that I could call or text them anytime.

To reach youth between the ages of 18 and 30, I collaborated with the Youth Centre and the Youth Committee of the Band Council to hold two discussion workshops on the topic of alcohol and the impact on youth (see appendix 4 for the flyer advertising the first workshop). In both cases, the workshops drew between three and six people. However, the discussions were deep and revealing.

By far the most successful recruitment strategy was going on the air on CHFG, the local radio station. On the air, I introduced myself in *iiyiyuyimuwin* and described my project and approach in English with the host translating my words into *iiyiyuyimuwin*. I stated and repeated my respect for people who drink and how I wanted their voices to be heard. In a single week after the episode, I had dozens of people text me or stop me in the street to tell me that they wanted to talk to me. Many of them expressed excitement at the idea of sharing their stories with someone who wanted to hear them. From that time onward, I had regular discussions and interviews, many of them with people who became my friends in the process. I also had multiple opportunities for participant-observation in and around the community because of the social networks in which I had engaged.

5.4. Research Methods

The plan as originally outlined in my research proposal had been to learn about the worldviews and life experiences of Eeyou drinkers and former drinkers between the ages of 18 and 29. I had planned to do this through the collection of life stories and the conduction of semi-structured interviews as well as semi-structured interviews with other concerned individuals in the community. These individuals would include relatives of drinkers and people who work in various organizations in the community, such as the school, the hospital, the police force, social services, and the band council.

Participant-observation was to be conducted with individuals who had consented to it during an interview and, as such, was to be more of a complementary method than a primary research method. The goals of using this method were manifold. I wanted to learn about: daily dynamics between drinkers and the larger community and between drinkers themselves; how drunkenness affected people's modes of expression; topics of conversation that were prevalent among drinkers; and the geography of drinking, or where people go to drink and what this says about community attitudes toward drinking.

Several on-site factors led to necessary changes in my methodological plan and, subsequently, in the nuances of my overall topic. The first thing to change was the age group in which I was interested. A prior review of regional statistics initially led me to focus on youth between the ages of 18 - 29. In a study by Anctil and Chevalier (2008), 21.2% of respondents in the age categories of 12 - 17 and 18 - 29 indicated that they engaged in a high frequency of drinking (5 drinks or more at least once per week). Since I wanted to avoid the ethical complications involved in research with minors, I focussed on the older category. However, many of the first people to approach me were self-identified drinkers or former drinkers in their 30s or 40s. Rather than refuse their precious contributions, I decided to widen the age range to include adults between the ages of 18 and 50 who drank, currently or in the past.⁴⁵ This proved to be a wise decision as youth were more difficult to reach until the last few months of my stay, when several opportunities for dialogue with youth opened up. Because of the increased range of ages of participants, I also was able to learn that the drinker/former drinker distinction had limited usefulness since self-identity as someone who stopped drinking may mean complete abstention or simply "slowing down." This knowledge would prove quite revealing, as described in chapters 9 through 12.

Another change was dropping the life history component of the project in favour of a greater focus on unstructured discussion-style interviews. The life history component was to consist of 2 - 3 sessions with interested individuals during which they would tell me the stories of their lives so that I could look for common themes in the life stories of drinkers and former drinkers.

⁴⁵ It is important to note that, given this age bracket, none of the participants were survivors of the residential school system.

However, life in Chisasibi is unpredictable; last minute family plans always take precedence over a pre-arranged get together, for instance. In the case of current drinkers, the unpredictability of drinking opportunities made planning interview times difficult as well. It thus proved extremely difficult to arrange more than one discussion session with an individual that would be lengthy enough for them to elaborate on their life story. I chose, instead, to increase my focus on unstructured discussion-style interviews since this method afforded the research participants and myself greater flexibility with regards to timing and location.

The third change to my methodological plan was that my focus on participant-observation increased. It was initially meant to be a complementary method with which I could compare knowledge gained from interviews with life on the ground. However, it quickly became a primary learning tool. The unpredictability of events mentioned above provided many opportunities for spontaneous events and in-depth discussions, which became a welcome if unreliable source of knowledge. Many of these discussions helped me understand, at an intersubjective level, how people interpreted a shared event or provided insight that could be further explored in discussions with future participants. It also became a significant means by which I learned about general community attitudes toward drinking and related social issues.

I did not aim to produce a quantitative or even qualitative distinction between the experiences of people of different genders in this research. However, it is noteworthy that there is an over-representation of men among self-identified drinkers who participated in the research and an over-representation of women among those who participated without identifying as drinkers.

5.4.1. Unstructured Interviews

A primary method by which I learned about the worldviews of various individuals in Chisasibi was unstructured discussion-style interviews. These interviews took the shape of discussions rather than a series of questions and answers. I let the individual (or group, in cases where friends chose to do the interview together) know about the various broad themes that were of interest to me before we would meet (see appendix 2 for a copy of the themes of interest). This gave them time to think about the themes. But I emphasized that the discussions would be participant-led, and

that they could talk about whatever they wanted with respect to drinking and related topics, or anything else they deemed important about their lives.

I engaged in a total of 114 such discussions with members of the community of Chisasibi. While I had previously established categories of people that I wished to interview and a target number of interviews per category, the complexity of personal identity and the ability of many people to discuss the issue from more than one point of view makes it difficult to give an exact count for each group of people. As indicated above, the line between drinkers and former drinkers is often unclear as many self-defined former drinkers still drink on the same scale as people who would identify as drinkers. Furthermore, people in both groups are often part of other groups of people, such as general community members who are concerned about the issue of alcohol in their community or workers at one of the many organisations in Chisasibi. Finally, it is important to note that just because a research participant spoke from the point of view of, say, a parent of a drinker or a band council member does not mean that they were not a drinker or former drinker themselves.

Therefore, rather than divide the total number of participants into discrete categories, I allow for overlap by providing the number of individuals who addressed the theme of drinking from the perspective of each group. 53 individuals were able to discuss the topic from the point of view of a drinker, 56 from that of a former drinker, 46 from the perspective of a relative of a drinker, and 34 from the perspective of a worker in a local organisation.

Discussions usually happened with people I had known for a while although a significant number of people were willing to engage in an in-depth discussion with me upon our first meeting. Former drinkers or concerned parents of drinkers were the most likely to engage in immediate discussion. Discussions happened in my apartment, in the homes of participants, in my car on a drive to Radisson or to the bay, during walks in town, or in their office or classroom. Given their unstructured nature, the discussions would often be interspersed with joking, discussion of unrelated topics, questions about my own life, and even interactions with other people such my child or their children, passers-by, clients, students, and so forth. Some took place over the course of several meetings. Because of the often spontaneous and discontinuous nature of many of these

discussions, I did not record them. When the interviews happened in a “sit-down” setting, such as my apartment or someone else’s home, I kept a notebook in which I could jot down key phrases or questions. Further, I took some time after each discussion to write up a summary of what had been said while it was still fresh in my mind and to see what issues could be addressed in more depth later.

5.4.2. Participant-Observation

As has been the tradition in ethnographic work, much valuable knowledge about daily life was obtained during day-to-day life in Chisasibi. While deep insights and the sharing of personal stories often occurred in the context of the unstructured interviews described above, spontaneous gut-reactions to community events and current issues happened in the course of work, errands, community gatherings, or “hanging out”. Further, continuations of conversations from interview sessions often occurred during spontaneous encounters or hangouts.

In the first few weeks of my stay in Chisasibi, my participant-observation took the form of wandering around town and gaining familiarity with the daily routines of the community. Participating in daily activities as a casual walk-in to organised events, as a parent of a child at the school, or as a shopper or user of postal services gave me many opportunities to engage with community members. I soon learned, for example, that the commercial centre was a hub of activity and that many seniors spent their days socializing there. I had many joking conversations with the *chayouch* (older men) who spent much of their time in the middle of the centre. Sitting on one of “their” benches shortly before or after the first few arrivals in the morning and calling myself a *chayou* was a sure-fire way to engage in banter and practice speaking *iyyiyuyimuwin* with them. In this way, I was letting people know who I was and why I was there as well as getting used to town dynamics.

As described in chapter 1, life in Chisasibi includes many organized events. Throughout my stay, I participated in as many of these as I could either with or without my son, who was old enough to stay home on his own for a few hours or for whom I could hire a babysitter if needed. Being a very social person, I participated out of a sheer desire to connect with people rather than merely

for research purposes. However, engaging in the social life of the town had many beneficial effects on my research process.

I attended hockey games, dance competitions organized by the Youth Centre, symposia about family violence, addictions and other issues of local concern, and community spirit activities ranging from a walk around the community on one of the coldest days of the year to ceremonies and speeches held by the band council. As my connections increased, I was often asked to help during activities such as the Multi-Cultural Fair or Addictions Awareness Week. During Youth Week, I was invited to attend a meeting by the Youth Council and was therefore able to collaborate in a workshop on youth and alcohol. I participated in as many advertised or spontaneous traditional activities as I could such as helping to put together a *miichiwaahp* (tipi) or making bannock on a stick. During these activities, I was often approached by community members as I was one of the very few “outsiders” to attend and was therefore very visible.



Figure 11. – Hockey game in Chisasibi. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.



Figure 12. – Community Spirit Walk, March 2011. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.

Finally, closer to the end of my stay, I became better acquainted with people who participated in what they considered traditional spiritual practices such as Sweat Lodges and became a participant in some of these activities. Although I participated for personal reasons and not for research purposes, people would often take advantage of my presence and my display of openness to learning about spirituality to discuss the topic of my research with me.

As I became more immersed in the life of the town, my participant-observation took the form of taking walks in the community and having conversations with people that I encountered. My daily routine, on days that I was not working at the school, consisted of having a cigarette or two behind the commercial centre where young people often hung out after a night of drinking. On some days, I could spend up to two hours hanging around with small groups of people chatting about various topics.

Later, I would walk through town, making it a point to circulate outside the central hub of the community. For instance, I often spent time on the network of trails that lead outward from the town centre, through the clusters of houses and out to the two more recent neighbourhoods on

the edges of the town. Wandering these trails or in between the houses in general gave me a very different feel of the town than simply driving or walking around on the paved roads. In between the houses in this area, I was immersed in a coexistence of trees, grass, sand, sheds covered in colourful - in all senses - graffiti; parked vehicles such as four-wheelers, snowmobiles, canoes, bicycles; and *miichiwaahp*. These areas are where I encountered many people who were willing to talk to a stranger: small children at play who were curious to know who I was or people working on a vehicle or a *miichiwaahp* who would sometimes be amenable to letting me “help” - this “help” usually took the shape of me trying to learn how to do whatever they were doing, such as scraping the bark off a tree.

It was here, also, that I often encountered groups of people, usually young men, who were drinking or getting over a night of drinking by one of the many sheds that lined these trails. On those occasions when they welcomed me to hang out with them, I gained interesting insights about people’s concerns and about the dynamics among public drinkers, between public drinkers and other people in the community, and between public drinkers and the authorities.

As I got to know more people in the community, I began to drop in on acquaintances either at their place of work or in their homes. These spontaneous visits would often lead to requests to go for a drive or a cigarette and to further social interactions. On yet other days, I would receive calls or text messages from friends wanting to hang out.

Overall, simply living life provided many opportunities for me to learn about my topic of interest. As many ethnographers do, I immersed myself in daily life as fully as I would anywhere else - enjoying the sights, smells, tastes, and emotions of the place. I experienced social life in Chisasibi as an active participant who had a stake in the life of the town. To this end, I left the notebooks at home. I simply carried my cell phone to take down phone numbers or memos, a small pad to write new words in *iiyiyuyimuwin*, and business cards to hand out to people who were interested in participating in the research project.⁴⁶ Every evening - or sometimes every other evening when my social life became so active that I barely had time to myself - I wrote an entry in a field journal

⁴⁶ To be completely transparent, in the moment, it often felt awkward to pull out the notepad so many new words remained unwritten and forgotten.

that described my interactions, knowledge and experiences that had been shared with me for the purpose of my research, and any other pertinent thoughts. I would review the journal on a regular basis to raise new questions that I could discuss with friends and research participants.

5.4.3. Community Media

People in Chisasibi, like people worldwide, have access to global communications through television and the Internet. However, local communications are a primary source of information on local and national events and of discourse about issues relevant to the Eeyouch, Inuit, and other Indigenous peoples. These media played a big role in learning about events in town and about values that drive many members of the community.

The local radio station, CHFG 101.1 FM⁴⁷, is a part of the Cree Radio Network, operated by the James Bay Cree Communications Society, which serves of all Eeyou Istchee. The station provides an eclectic range of music from country to pop to rock in addition to many ads, both on the air and on the station's Facebook page, ranging from homemade takeout to requests for rides out of town. There is local programming as well as programming streamed from other community stations that are a part of the Cree Radio Network. Current events and issues are frequently discussed on the air. It is also common for specialists from in and out of town such as doctors, therapists, or others to speak about various health issues on the radio.

Listening to the radio and discussing what I had heard was a great way to learn more about community concerns and attitudes toward many issues, including drinking. Thus, even when I had to stay home with my son after his bedtime, I was able to participate in a collective town activity as I was able to receive the information that many other community members were receiving and discuss it with people that I knew the next day. Granted, much of the discussion on the radio was in *ijiyiyuwin*. However, enough of it was in English for me to get a sense of what was going on.

Another important medium for disseminating local news and viewpoints is the *Waaskimaashtau*, a monthly Chisasibi newsletter that contains articles, letters, stories, poems,

⁴⁷ <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/chisasibi>.

and book reviews by community members. Many of the articles report on local events or trips out of town. But there are also frequent articles summarising the results of meetings and consultations by various entities about local social issues. As with listening to the radio, reading the *Waaskimaashtaa* during and after my stay provided much insight about the dynamics of the town.

In the case of both radio and print media, in particular the media that are local to Chisasibi, community members are frequently given a voice on topics of community interest. There are frequently times set aside for community members to call in to the radio with their own thoughts and testimonies pertaining to specific themes. For example, one occasion when many people were invited to discuss their views on air was during the band council elections, which happened in the weeks following my arrival in town. All the candidates for a position on the new council described their views about important community issues and how they planned to address them if they were elected to the council. Similarly, nearly every issue of the *Waaskimaashtaa* contains opinion letters written by community members. The topics of these letters range from how to deal with litter and stray dogs to the housing crisis. On the radio and in print, expressed opinions and testimonies often refer to alcohol or other intoxicants as well as to related social phenomena such as violence, crime, and suicide.

5.5. Ethical Considerations

Drinking is a pervasive yet sensitive topic of conversation in many communities. This is particularly the case in populations such as Indigenous peoples, who are stigmatized by the dominant Euro-Canadian society as populations that are plagued with a host of interrelated social ills, often related to drinking, as previously discussed. Given this social context, and the community-wide sense of anxiety and shame around the topic, broaching the issue in a way that helps people feel safe and comfortable is a delicate process.

Everyone who participated in the research as an interviewee or as someone willing to spend time in town “hanging out” and discussing issues of concern in the community was informed of the nature of the research, what would happen with my notes, how I would protect their privacy, and what the risks of participation were. They were also informed that there was no financial

compensation for their participation and that they could withdraw their consent at any time with regards to their participation or with regards to specific things that they had said or done. Although I had consent forms available, most participants opted for verbal consent (the consent form is provided in appendix 5).

There were potential emotional and social risks associated with participation in this research project. Drinking relates to many sad and often traumatic events in the lives of people who are affected by it either as consumers or as relatives and friends of consumers. Discussing the topic can therefore be a catalyst for reliving difficult emotions. To make sure that participants had recourse to help with dealing with these powerful emotions should they come up, I gave each participant a list of resources that included names of local community members who were willing to be contacted to talk and numbers for various toll-free hotlines. I also made sure that they felt comfortable sharing by adopting an open attitude in my reactions to their words. In other words, rather than adopt a detached and unemotional clinical approach, I fully engaged in their stories. I cried and laughed with them and, when it seemed appropriate, expressed ways in which I could relate to them. I believe that this contributed to participants feeling validated and therefore to them feeling at ease and safe.

To mitigate social risks such as privacy issues and potential stigma, I ensured all participants full confidentiality. I let them know that I would not share their names as participants with anyone in or out of the community and that their words would not be associated with their names or descriptions in any way. Therefore, in this dissertation, I use pseudonyms and provide very vague descriptions to avoid easy identification of research participants by other community members. I generally refer to individuals according to their age, and, if relevant, their general occupation (school worker, band council employee, hospital worker). Unless otherwise specified, the individuals cited are Chisasibi Eeyouch. Finally, I made it clear in all my recruitment materials such as ads and my radio announcement that I was only accepting volunteers over the age of 18. I wanted to avoid the legal implications of conducting research with minors. This proved to be helpful once I had begun to teach at the high school since I could reassure parents that I would not attempt to interview their teenagers and thus enter a conflict of interest.

As explained in chapter 6, I chose not to ignore people who were in states of intoxication. In cases where individuals were under the influence of alcohol but wanted to engage as a research participant, I assessed the feasibility of the discussion for research purposes according to how coherent the individual appeared to be. In many cases, these individuals were only mildly intoxicated as they tended to engage in the first place when they were either at the beginning of their drinking cycle or at the end, after a night of drinking. If the individual was coherent enough to engage in dialogue, I considered the ensuing discussion to be valid for research purposes. However, I made sure to ask the participant for their informed consent again when they were sober. In all cases described in this dissertation, the participants remembered the conversation in question and reiterated their verbal consent to participate in my research. In the case of ongoing friendships, individuals gave consent in advance for occasions when they might be drunk in my presence. Just in case, I would still recap the conversation when they were sober to give them the chance to change their mind. In situations where I was unable to obtain informed consent, either because I never saw the individual in question again, or never saw them in a state that would allow for informed consent, I did not use specific details or anything they said as data; I merely kept note of the interactions as part of a larger pool of general observations about public interactions between drinkers and other community members.

In cases of individuals in the state of extreme intoxication, I did not consider discussions as data. On one hand, the discussions were usually very incoherent. On the other hand, the conversations tended to come to abrupt ends as less intoxicated or sober friends came to guide the individual home or somewhere else where they could lie down. Finally, the most extreme cases of intoxication tended to happen with individuals who systematically engaged in extreme drinking behaviour. It was very difficult to talk to these individuals when they were not intoxicated and therefore nearly impossible to obtain informed consent. This means, of course, that there is still a sub-population within the community that remains unheard in this work. However, for ethical and safety reasons - these individuals were more likely to get angry and physically aggressive - it was a necessary decision.

During participant-observation in the community, I would sometimes be a witness to incidents involving individuals who were intoxicated to various degrees. In cases such as these, I would limit

my notes to general observations about community reactions to the presence of drunken individuals or about the division of space in public situations between people who were intoxicated and people who were not. If I was with acquaintances, I would sometimes gain insight about the situation from them and ask if I could include their perspectives and analyses in my research.

It is important, here, to include a clarification about identifying drunkenness. Alcohol is certainly not the only intoxicant that is used in Chisasibi. People sometimes discuss the use of other substances ranging from mild drugs such as pot and hash, to harder drugs such as cocaine and heroin, as well as other intoxicants such as glue and gasoline. However, drunkenness is the most visible and highly discussed form of intoxication according to my observations and conversations with people in Chisasibi. It is impossible to know for certain whether alcohol is the only or even principal intoxicant involved in many of the public encounters that occurred. However, the encounters described in this dissertation either included a strong component of drunkenness, either as described by the participants themselves or as evidenced by the open consumption of alcohol. Furthermore, whether alcohol was really the cause of intoxication of a group or an individual, people who were not intoxicated and who commented on the intoxicated people's behaviour still spoke of drunkenness.

Because of the topic of my research, it would be easy to assume that the participant-observation component of my project involved the heavy consumption of alcohol. However, Chisasibi is a dry community, meaning that the possession of alcohol goes against the Cree Nation of Chisasibi's by-law, and that alcohol is subject to confiscation. Therefore, contrary to my previous fieldwork in Chisasibi in 1998 (Leclerc, 2001), I refused offers of alcohol when I was out on my walks through the community.

However, like many community members, I did consume moderate amounts of alcohol in private or semi-private contexts such as parties in the homes of colleagues or friendly visits in my home or the homes of friends. In cases where the friends were also research participants, I would later ask special permission to include events that had transpired or words that had been said during

our shared alcohol consumption in my research notes. Given that this only occurred with people after we had established a friendly relationship, this request was never refused.

I did not attend parties where large amounts of alcohol were present and at which the goal was to engage in extreme, or binge, drinking. In addition to the explanation above about excluding discussions with people in extreme states of drunkenness in my research, there are some ethical and safety reasons for this decision. From many accounts, there is a high likelihood of violence and sexual activity occurring at these parties. I did not feel that it was appropriate for me to be present during these situations since some participants in my research would be likely to be there and possibly feel as though they were being observed. Furthermore, I did not want it to appear as though I was disrespecting the band council's request to avoid causing further turmoil in the community. Participating in parties where extreme intoxication is likely, and which often lead to disturbance in the neighbourhoods in which they occur, could potentially make it appear as though I were contributing to something that is widely perceived as problematic in the community. Finally, as a single parent who was responsible for my son, I felt it was inappropriate for me to leave him at home so that I could attend parties at night.

5.6. Making the Research Make Sense: An Ethic of Harm Reduction

Many undergraduate level fieldwork courses warn students about how the first people who have traditionally been drawn to outsiders such as ethnographers were marginal individuals. My goal was to reach these very people that are often not taken seriously either by outsiders or by many insiders. This shaped the way in which I applied the research methods described above. Many of my desired interlocutors were not used to being asked for their perspectives by people other than therapists or social workers who wanted to "help" them. I had to make sure to explain my research in a way that made it clear that I was not there to intervene in their lives in any way or to convince them that they were doing something bad or dangerous.

While the harm reduction approach is clearly an interventionist one and this research is non-interventionist, the attitude with which I explained the goal of my research to potential participants is rooted in the philosophy of harm reduction as described by Beirness et al. (2008). Their paper focuses mainly on harm reduction programs geared toward drug use, but the

philosophical approach is applicable to a wide range of behaviours, including drinking. According to Beirness et al. (2008), the most specific type of harm reduction program is one that seeks to “reduce or minimize the adverse health and social consequences of drug use without requiring an individual to discontinue drug use” (p.2). This approach considers that individuals who do not wish to, or are unable to, stop their behaviour can benefit from options that will reduce the negative impacts on themselves and to others around them. An example of a harm reduction approach to injectable drugs is a needle exchange program, where users can benefit from clean needles to lower the risk of blood-borne diseases.

My research goals and my theoretical approach are in line with a harm reduction philosophy. Without denying that drinking carries health risks and that it is potentially disruptive to social harmony and community well-being, I recognize that drinking is a personal choice, that this choice will be made by a significant number of people no matter what policies are in place, and that many of the negative impacts affecting people who drink and those around them can be reduced by listening to what drinkers have to say about their choices and experiences.

Therefore, other than what participants themselves expressed with regards to their own desires about quitting and the widespread community perceptions about the necessity of eliminating alcohol, I do not focus on the issue of whether people should or should not drink. Rather, I focus on the experiences of drinkers. In this realm of daily lived reality, there is a multitude of factors that have negative impacts on drinkers and the people around them. As is described in this dissertation for example, the public stigma faced by many who drink and routine rejections of their attempts at communication have negative impacts on their self-perception.

Also relevant to this dissertation is one of the key principles of harm reduction - that of humane values - as outlined by Beirness et al. (2008): “No moralistic judgment is made about an individual’s decision to use substances, regardless of level of use or mode of intake. This does not imply approval of drug use. Rather, it acknowledges respect for the dignity and rights of the individual” (p. 3, citing the CCSA National Policy Working Group, 1996). Accordingly, my approach to the words and lives of people who drink is one of respect and one that abstains from moralizing

about people's choices and from making yet another list of all the harmful impacts that their drinking entails.

Chapter 6 - Analytical Tools and Ethnographic Contexts: Applying a Phenomenological Approach

This chapter aims to explain how the principles of the phenomenological approach described in chapter 4 were applied through the methodological approach described in chapter 5. First, I discuss the analytical tools I employed in the production of this dissertation. Then, I provide an ethnographic overview of some key contexts in which I engaged with participants – contexts to which I refer in later chapters in line with the analytical strategies described below. Finally, I present the profiles of key informants and discuss their role in this research.

6.1. Analytical Tools

The main tool I used to make sense of the data from the above research methods is that of thematic analysis, or content analysis. This process consisted of reviewing my fieldnotes and interview notes and looking for prominent themes that recurred in the words of participants. To be clear, this is not a discourse analysis. That would be impossible considering that I did not record interviews and would be unable to analyse the words of research participants using those methods. The quotations that I include in the dissertation were written from memory, sometimes a few hours after the conversations occurred, and therefore may contain slight errors, although the sense was preserved and verified as needed.

Rather, the analysis aimed to extricate the main topics of interest brought up by research participants during planned and impromptu discussions in a variety of contexts. I did this in stages, starting with broad themes that recurred in at least half of the interviews and encounters. To reiterate, the discussions I had during this research were participant-led, in the sense that I merely gave the broad topic that I was interested in and let the discussions flow according to what participants wanted to talk about. The four broad themes that were thus identified in discussions with self-identified drinkers, current or former, were reasons for drinking, choice, quitting, and identity/aspirations. Among those who spoke to me from other perspectives, such as family members of a drinker, workers at one of the local entities, or concerned community members,

the three broad themes were concerns with the negative impacts of drinking, the effectiveness of the prohibition by-law and other measures, and the historical and political causes of drinking in the community.

I repeated the process of extricating common sub-themes within each broad theme to identify variations and was thus able to elaborate on each of the themes in ways that demonstrated the range of views that exists between individuals, or even over time and across different states for one individual. A phenomenological approach, as described in chapter 4, guided this inclusiveness of ambivalent and shifting views. Indeed, the contexts in which individuals shared their views on a given theme are considered. For example, the different tendencies that exist in how people talked about a topic when they were in drunken or sober states is a factor of analysis.

6.2. Context and Indexicality

As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) have argued, the statements that our interlocutors make are situated within specific contexts and are at least partly shaped by these contexts even as their statements shape the contexts themselves. Goulet (1998) and De Fornel (2010) elaborated on this idea in their discussions of the ethnomethodological concept of indexicality. Goulet (1998) explained that the context of a statement includes the identities of all interlocutors as well as the way in which the statement is made. It is therefore crucial to consider the impact of these factors in the interpretation of statements.

This is highly relevant to my research and to this dissertation due to the unstructured nature of the interviews and other conversations. My analysis, by necessity, considers the contexts in which conversations took place. In the ethnographic chapters of the dissertation, the contexts in which participants shared their views are described and referred to as needed in further discussions. My analysis takes account of whether certain themes, or variations thereof, emerged more often during encounters that involved drinking or during sober interviews. Indeed, the “in the moment” nature of things said during participant-observation with people who were in drunken states often differed from what was said during reflection while sober. In the case of themes that were common to both states, the relative importance often differed.

My analysis also considers how various socio-political and historical processes shaped the social context within which people engaged in dialogue with me. While initial contacts happened along the lines of insider-outsider dynamics, the mutual sharing of common life experiences such as growing up in a family where alcohol abuse was present often allowed further dialogue to take place in an atmosphere of camaraderie. Even this dynamic was not straight-forward of course. Depending on the mood and the topic, my status as an outsider, mostly descendant of the colonising society and with a very white appearance and experience could come back into focus and affect the way in which people expressed themselves. It would be naive to assume that this aspect of our relative social positions in and out of the community could ever go away completely. Overall, however, my interlocutors and I had discussions that reflected the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of our respective identities and statuses within a social context that was, itself, riddled with intersecting ideological and political processes.

6.3. Including Drunken States: A Phenomenological Methodology

It would be easy to discount the veracity or reliability of what people say when they are drunk. Indeed, during the processes of research, analysis, and writing, I had to consistently check myself against brushing off the words of drunken individuals with a statement such as “they’re just drunk – it doesn’t mean anything!” Reminders of the principles of the theoretical and ethical frameworks I adhere to in this work helped me remember the importance of including drunken words and thoughts, and I hope that it will help the reader as well.

As described in chapter 5, my two primary research methods were unstructured interviews and participant-observation, mainly with Eeyou adults who considered themselves to be drinkers or former drinkers, but also with various other individuals in the community of Chisasibi. While the methods themselves may appear no different from typical methods used by ethnographers, it is important to specify how they are shaped by the theoretical orientation of this research project, described in chapter 4.

Goulet (1998) explained that significant exchanges in ethnographic work occur according to the local norms of how one learns or transmits knowledge. In his own work with the Dene Tha, he had to adapt to their communication styles to better comprehend what they wanted him to learn.

This principle is also highly applicable in my research. I engaged in dialogue with people of various ideological and cultural backgrounds, of various ages, and of various subgroupings within the community. I needed to adapt to the corresponding different ways of relating and communicating not only out of respect but to provide safe and mutually respectful spaces in which people could express their honest thoughts and feelings. My approach with people who were drinking or in drunken states in public or in private and my ensuing dialogue with them was thus, by necessity, quite different from my approach with people who were not. Respect was shown in all cases, of course - but this respect was demonstrated through different communication styles and different modes of receptivity.

More importantly, I learned that if I wanted to learn from drinkers, I had to accept that they often wanted or needed to express themselves when they were mildly intoxicated. While I had not previously planned to include anything learned while interlocutors were under the influence of alcohol in my research due to potential ethical problems, it became clear soon after I began to socialise with drinkers that the state of drunkenness was used by many as a vehicle for self-expression. To ignore what they said when they were intoxicated would be to deny and invalidate some of their most visceral and intimate knowledge and experiences. It would be to downplay an aspect of human life that was, at least temporarily and sometimes long-term, a core feature of their experiences, worldviews, and identities. It would be to ignore a highly significant form of human experience.

I did not want to contradict my own overarching goal of including the voices of those who were ignored on account of being “drunks” and betray the trust that they put in me when revealing themselves in the way that came most comfortably to them at the time. Further, as explained in chapter 4, phenomenological anthropology is inclusive of the insights that derive from states which have not traditionally been taken seriously in ethnographic research, such as ritual ecstatic states, suffering, and dreams (see, for example, Hunter, 2018; Goulet, 1994; Garcia, 2014; Desjarlais, 1996; and Robelo & Souza, 2003). Rather than replace verifiable objective knowledge, perspectives based in these states, as argued by Hunter (2018) add richness and nuance to the ethnographic record.

In line with the phenomenological approach and to avoid the pitfalls outlined above, my research therefore includes testimonies and experiences that were shared while informants were mildly intoxicated, maintaining the integrity and humanity of their experiences. To circumvent any potential ethical issues that could arise and to protect the well-being and privacy of my drunken research participants, I adapted the process of obtaining informed consent, as described in chapter 5.

6.4. Key Contexts of Engagement with Drinkers

In chapter 5, there is an overview of the activities in which I participated and during which I was able to have conversations with community members on the topic of this research and about the community in general. It is important, before moving to the ethnographic portion of the dissertation, to give a more developed overview of the contexts in which I was able to engage with drinkers, other than planned interview settings.

6.4.1. “Whatca Doin’?”: Talking to “Drunks” in Public Spaces

There are times at which I had a greater opportunity to engage drunken individuals or groups of drunken people, mostly composed of men ranging from their teens to their thirties but sometimes including young women, wandering through town, or hanging around by sheds between houses sharing alcohol. For instance, many of my encounters with drinkers occurred on weekday mornings or on Sundays, either next to the commercial centre or on the pathways between the houses in the central area of town.

In most of these situations, the people with whom I conversed indicated that they were either waiting for bootleggers to obtain more alcohol, or that they were on their way to someone’s home where alcohol, and sometimes other substances, would be available. In some cases, they had been kicked out of the house at which they had been drinking by family members who did not approve of their behaviour. During and after these interactions, I was able to get their perspectives about their experiences as people who were drinking in Chisasibi.

Not every single interaction with drinkers occurred in the same way. But there are several elements that are typical of my public interactions with groups of people who wandered around

town, drinking or drunk. There were nearly always two or three individuals who took a greater interest in my presence than others. In most cases, they would simply smile, laugh, and greet me with a drunkenly boisterous sounding “hello”, “hey”, or “Whatcha doin’?”, or ask me who I was in a friendly but somewhat defiant tone. Sometimes, someone would ask me if I wanted a drink. This was often asked in a slightly sceptical tone, and the people in the group would look at each other and laugh. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes from September 21, 2010, illustrates this pattern:

As I approached the commercial centre from the direction of the hospital, I saw a bunch of guys by the commercial centre door. There were maybe 6 or 7 of them. There was at least one bottle as far as I could tell. They were laughing, and stumbling around, pretty obviously drunk. I slowed down nearby and lit up a cigarette. One of the louder guys noticed me and said: “Hey, man, how’s it going?”

“Pretty good,” I said. “You?”

“Eeeeeeeh, we’re doing real good man,” he answered with an uneven laugh. “Whatcha doin’?”

“Just walking around. You?”

Laughter was the group’s response.

Once we had exchanged initial greetings, there were usually several group members who appeared happy to stay and chat. These were usually the ones who had called out to me in the first place. The others simply wandered around, talking amongst themselves, and casually listening. Depending on how the conversation went, one of the quieter individuals would sometimes join in. During these interactions, cigarettes were usually shared: mine and others’. Alcohol was often passed around, although I usually declined to avoid having problems with other individuals in the community. Occasionally, someone would ask if I could give them a ride somewhere. Not everyone reacted positively to my approach, of course. From time to time, some individuals within a group would seem upset when I did stop to talk. When these were the most vocal members of the group, I simply walked away to avoid problems.

As time went on, I got to know more people in the community, including people who engaged in public drinking. Also, my presence in the community became more widely known and people were aware of my research and my approach. Many situations therefore flowed more easily after

I had been in the community for a few months. Groups of drinkers that I would encounter would often contain at least one or two people who knew me or knew of me and who would bring me into the group. The anecdote below, which took place on April 13, 2011, the day after I had done an interview on the radio to explain my research, provides an example of this:

As I got closer, another young man, Everett, enthusiastically asked if I was the guy who had been on the radio. When I said yes, he and a couple of others grew very excited. Everett shook my hand with gusto and said that he had been very excited to hear me and had wanted to try to meet me. He felt relieved to hear what I had to say and how I respected young people and drinkers [I had emphasized my non-judgmental approach and my desire to listen to people's viewpoints several times on the radio segment]. He said that he had a lot of things he wanted to tell me. He introduced me to all the others in a mix of Eeyou and English, explaining that I was the guy from the radio. They all came over and shook my hand.

Regardless of how the interactions started, they all tended to end in a comparatively abrupt manner. Someone would call out to the others that they had located more alcohol, or that they had to be somewhere for some other reason. The people who had been the most involved in our conversation would explain that they had to leave, turn, and walk away. The encounter described above provides one example.

When the other men were back outside [after going into the commercial centre], decisions were being made about what to do next. Dale and Everett both indicated that they wanted to come to my workshop that evening and that they were therefore going to go find a place to sleep. Then, after some rapid Eeyou conversation with one of the others, who had started walking off toward the houses, it turned out that someone had located some more alcohol. Everett followed and left Dale to look at me with uncertainty. I felt that he wanted to talk, but talking would have to wait until another time when there was less at stake.

Another example happened at the end of an encounter on September 21, 2010:

At some point, there was some commotion between some newcomers and a few of the other guys who had kept their distance. Devon, Ned, and Walt lost interest in me and walked away saying: "See you around, man."



Figure 13. – Parking lot behind the commercial centre where many encounters with drinkers took place. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.

6.4.2. Private Drinking: From Moderation to Drunkenness

There were contexts in which I was able to participate in private drinking with people that I knew, either through friendships that pre-dated this research or through connections made in the context of the research. On approximately 10 occasions, I attended small family-friendly gatherings in Eeyou homes, either to mark someone's birthday or other celebratory occasions.⁴⁸ On at least a dozen other occasions, friends showed up at my apartment, alone or in pairs, and we would share a case of beer, engaging in increasingly intense discussions as the evening wore on. But there was no intoxication to the point of incoherence in any of these cases.

6.4.2.1. Organized Parties

In the case of small parties that I attended in people's homes, the main goal of getting together was not drinking or getting drunk. Indeed, the gatherings in which I was able to partake were, of

⁴⁸ Although I was invited to many dinner parties hosted by non-Indigenous teachers, I attended fewer than 10. Some of these parties included Eeyou or Inuit community members, or Indigenous people from other nations who worked in the community. But many did not, as there is generally limited socializing in Chisasibi between Eeyouch and Inuit and non-Indigenous workers who are not married with a local community member (see Leclerc, 2001).

necessity, child friendly. However, drinking and various levels of drunkenness occurred in most of these gatherings.

These gatherings generally included anywhere between 10 and 25 individuals who were family, close friends, or co-workers. The atmosphere and interactions at these parties were not significantly different than those of many similar get-togethers I have attended in my life in southern Canada. They tended to remain at a light-hearted level, with occasional serious moments. People circulated around the host's home, grouping and re-grouping in different combinations, chatting about various topics, occasionally erupting in laughter, looking after children, going outside to have a cigarette in small groups, eating, and occasionally sipping from a drink.

Graham's party on June 12, 2011, illustrates this:

He [Graham] was still busy cooking up some food when I arrived, including the fish I had caught with his fishing pole a few days before when his daughter took me out fishing. It was my first catch, and I had given it to him in thanks.

I knew a lot of the people that came. Most of them were related to Graham, but there were a few people from his workplace as well. There were a few other kids too. For a while, a lot of us were hanging out upstairs, in the small living room area right next to the kitchen. I was chatting with Phoebe, Chris, Holly, and Katherine. Most of us had a drink in hand: either a can of beer or a glass of wine. Mostly, they were joking around about the relationship between grownups and their parents, and how parents sometimes keep trying to control their adult children's lives. But the conversation got more serious for a while when Phoebe complained about some of her dad's behaviours. Someone cracked a joke about him eventually, and the mood lightened up a bit.

After dinner, the party moved to the basement. While the adults sat around chatting, drinks in hand, the children were playing video games in one corner, occasionally chiming in to the adults' conversation.

Pretty much everyone had a drink in hand: either a can of beer or a glass of wine (except the kids, of course). Graham, Chris, and Robbie got their guitars out and Chris said that if they were gonna play, people better sing. A few of us promised to sing and, for the rest of the evening, there was sporadic guitar playing with people singing along, interspersed with the buzz of chatter as small groups engaged in conversations of their own. Sometimes, there were periods where everyone (a dozen or so people) were all engaged in banter together. Everyone was in a cheerful mood.

There was also a range of drinking behaviours present. Some individuals stopped after one or two drinks early in the evening, while others drank throughout the event at a steady pace. There would usually be a few individuals who got drunker than others, but their friends who were drinking in a more moderate way kept an eye on them.

6.4.2.2. Impromptu Drinking at Home

In addition to these organized parties, I participated in at least 20 small, spontaneous gatherings of two to three people in my apartment where drinking occurred. These smaller gatherings tended to happen earlier in the evening than the organized parties described above. Drinking was often a strong focus of these get-togethers, either because the people involved knew I had obtained a case of beer, or because one of them had just returned from Radisson with a case of their own to share. As we tended to have only three or four beer per person over the course of a few hours, the levels of drunkenness were quite low. There was some slight drunkenness on two occasions during which one or more people, including myself, drank a bit faster than usual and became slightly drunk.

In some cases, this drinking was a prelude to further drinking later in the night for my guests. Indeed, during these gatherings, my drinking partners would sometimes make plans by text or phone to obtain more alcohol. Inquiries were sent out to find out who had more alcohol. As a last resort, money was pooled to see if they could afford a bottle from a bootlegger. In several of these cases, our get-together ended when they went off to hunt for a bootlegger or a party. In other cases, the partners or children of my drinking partners would call and coax them to go home to their families.

The mood of these smaller and more spontaneous gatherings was significantly different than those of bigger parties. Occasionally, one of the individuals was having a hard time with something in their lives, such as work or family, and a lot of the conversation would be about that. In most cases, though, the mood was one of joviality with idle chatting about events in town interspersed with short periods of serious conversation about relationships or local and global politics.

Although the following anecdote, which took place on April 10, 2011, refers to one of the occasions in which participants became mildly drunk, the interaction follows the general pattern of these get-togethers:

Tad came over to hang out [last night]. I had gone to Radisson a few days before and picked up some beer, including some that Tad had asked me to pick up for him. So we decided to partake together after a week of work. His cousin Caleb came over after his shift and joined us. It was nice to just chill.

Things got pretty silly at one point. We called my girlfriend because Tad wanted to serenade her! And they were telling me about some plays on words you could do with Cree and English.

But we had some really serious conversations too. We talked about the [federal] elections a lot and they were trying to figure out which government, between the Liberals and the NDP, would be better for their people. [...] Then we wound up talking a lot about how so many of the issues in the community relate back to colonization. We were all getting pretty angry about it all.

6.5. Key Participant Profiles

There were many individuals who shared their views with me during this research from a variety of perspectives: those of drinkers or former drinkers, but also those of family members of drinkers or people affiliated with various entities in the community. Unlike the key participants described below, most of them limited their discussion to drinking and drunkenness, even in sit-down interviews. Their contributions were nonetheless extremely valuable, often corroborating the insights shared by key participants. At other times, their views contradicted those of key and other participants, which provided a greater understanding of the diverse ways in which people interpret their experiences.

Some participants shared insight with me during my participation in community events but did not have the time or motivation to meet with me for an interview. In many cases, these briefer encounters still provided very noteworthy information and perspectives, either on an event that was happening in our presence, or on something that I could later discuss with key or other participants. In some cases, a very short informal discussion with one of these participants opened new lines of questioning altogether. Winnifred, Dale, Perry, Caleb, Melinda, Keith, Everett, Brent, and others quoted in various chapters of the dissertation provide examples of this.

The following eight Eeyouch came to be key research participants in several ways. In some cases, they spent several hours in one or more discussion-style interview with me and elaborated on a wide array of topics relating to drinking – their own or that of others – in relation to their own lives and to the social, cultural, and political context of their community. In other cases, they were individuals I saw on a regular basis and with whom I had frequent conversations about drinking and other topics in the context of everyday life in the community.

It is worth reiterating the self-selected nature of the recruitment for this project. People who were drawn to participate tended to be people who had already put a lot of thought into drinking – their own or that of others – or who were in deep processes of reflection at the time of this research. As such, all these individuals showed an active interest in the research project, meaning that they were willing to make and follow through with plans to get together. Further, they were willing to answer questions and provide insight on a wide array of subjects. For this reason, they are the most frequently quoted individuals in this dissertation. They were among those who had the most elaborate things to say on any given theme. Unless otherwise specified, their words provide an example of the perspectives shared by a large portion of respondents. Outlier views are sometimes provided to illustrate the extent of variation that exists, but they are indicated as being unique to the individual.

Collectively, these key participants represent a cross-section of the wider population of people who participated in the research project: people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s; women and men; people who drank at the time of this research, people who had stopped drinking but who still were compelled to talk about their experiences as drinkers, and people who did not talk about their own drinking but only that of relatives or fellow community members. Out of these 8 participants, only 2 (Agatha and Zoe) spoke primarily from points of view other than that of a drinker or former drinker.

The views shared by key participants are representative of the range of views present among Chisasibi Eeyouch on the themes mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Despite differences in their life experiences, there are many things that unite them, the primary one being a

willingness to engage with complex social issues related to the topics of drinking and drunkenness.

6.5.1. Adam, 22 years old

I met Adam close to the end of my stay in Chisasibi. He showed an immediate interest for my project and quickly arranged to visit me at my apartment for an interview. He was eager to share his experience as someone who started drinking very young but who had stopped within the past year with the help of religion. He advocated complete abstinence and felt that his decision to stop drinking was helping him with his academic achievements and professional aspirations. These aspirations had been dampened for too long, by his own account, due to his drinking.

6.5.2. Agatha, 46 years old

Agatha was of great help from the beginning of my stay in Chisasibi. An acquaintance had recommended that I speak with her as she is known as a knowledgeable and compassionate person. As a self-avowed spiritual person – she regularly participated in sweat lodges, for example - she was forthcoming about her own past drinking behaviour. She was also a mother and an employee of the health board and spoke very adamantly about the impacts of drinking on individual, family, and community well-being from these points of view. Because she was a former heavy drinker, having had issues with the law, and very knowledgeable about local history, she also demonstrated compassion toward current drinkers. Although we never sat down for an actual interview, I was in regular contact with her and frequently saw her in the context of local activities or at her workplace. She was always willing to help me with the research process, to share her views with me, and to put me in touch with other potential participants.

6.5.3. Codie, 35 years old

Codie was one of the first people to show interest in this research but one of the last to participate. His participation took the form of one “sit down” interview in my apartment and several follow-up chats to clarify his thoughts. As a father and someone who had gotten into much trouble with local authorities as a youth on account of his behaviour while drinking, he had much to say about the reasons why he began to drink and continued drinking. Still struggling with the

decision of whether to stop drinking at the time of this research, confiding in me appeared to be both difficult and relieving. His hands trembled when he spoke as he sat and told me about the main elements of his life trajectory with regards to contact with alcohol. Later in the conversation, as the discussion turned to healing and spirituality, his demeanour became calm, and he began to smile and talk about his hopes for the future.

6.5.4. Dean, 44 years old

I met Dean in the centre of town in the spring after I was interviewed on the local radio station about my research project. He stopped his car as he passed me walking toward my apartment and got out to ask me if I was the guy from the radio. After a quick chat, he told me where he lived and invited me to drop by any time as he was often home taking care of his children when his wife was at work. I visited him the following day and we had a long discussion about drinking, treatment options, cultural context, and history while his children played. He shared his own experiences with drinking as well as the influence his family had on him and went into some detail about a project that he hoped to work on in the future. After that initial meeting, I saw him on a regular basis in the context of community events and he was always willing to answer follow-up questions or discuss new questions about local issues.

6.5.5. Gavin, 36 years old

Gavin eagerly participated in this research after hearing about it at the workshop about my research that I offered at the youth centre late in the winter. He attended and actively participated in the workshop and then planned to visit me at my apartment for a longer discussion. This first visit was followed by a few social visits. He identified as a former “drunk”, but our discussion showed that he still drank frequently. Because he had undergone treatment that had led him to work on his emotional issues, he felt that he could continue to drink in a way that he perceived was reasonable and not dangerous. He shared his ideas about drinking behaviour in relation to identity and self-improvement from the point of view of someone who considers himself to be “in both worlds”: that of “drunks” and that of non-drinkers. He also had a wide array of perspectives to share about local and international politics and Indigenous history.

6.5.6. Tabitha, 44 years old

Tabitha showed an interest in participating in the research early on, but had a busy schedule as a mother, a worker, and a volunteer for a few organisations. She was quite vocal in the community about local political issues and very forthcoming about her own past as a heavy drinker and her past troubles with the law. Leading up to our interview, we had occasional informal chats on a variety of topics, including the subject of this research. Her interview took place in my apartment, and she willingly shared her own story of growing up with a mother who drank to cope with her trauma as a residential school survivor. She also shared her thoughts about the wider political context of her community. She had an easy laugh and found multiple opportunities to express humour even when dealing with difficult subject-matter, such as family violence.

6.5.7. Tad, 34-35 years old

Tad was one of the first participants in this research. An acquaintance from my first period of fieldwork in 1998, he readily participated in the project. He had been drinking on and off since adolescence. Family responsibilities made him want to reduce his drinking, yet those same responsibilities, by his own account, often led him to want to escape through drinking and gambling. Tad enjoyed talking about his experiences and participated in both the interview and participant-observation capacities. Participant-observation took the form of “hanging out”, usually at my apartment while engaging in moderate drinking, but occasionally at his place or on drives around the community. As our children went to school together, we occasionally got together in a family-oriented context.

6.5.8. Zoe, 26 years old

Zoe, a health board employee, was the first person to contact me about my research. She sent me an email after I first submitted an article explaining my research in the local newsletter, *Waaskimashtaau*, in the fall of 2010. With a father and a grandfather who had engaged in problematic and abusive behaviour while drunk as she was growing up, she had experimented with drinking as a teen and young adult. However, she had decided to stop drinking a few years earlier, although she occasionally engaged in moderate drinking with friends in private. Zoe had many strong opinions about the state of affairs in Chisasibi. While she approached me early on in

my research wanting to actively participate, scheduling conflicts prevented us from having more than short conversations during cigarette breaks during workdays until the spring. Once we had the opportunity to sit down for a longer discussion, she was surprised at how difficult it was for her to begin. But since we had established a friendly relationship, and had even gone fishing together, she was able to open up and appeared to feel relieved once she had.

Chapter 7 - “That’s Why We Are...the Way We Are”: Perspectives on the Colonial History of Drinking in Chisasibi

Indigenous children and youth are born under the staggering weight of history: the historical injustices of colonization; the forced removal off the land by extermination or segregation; the cultural genocide effected by government policy and religious indoctrination; the intergenerational trauma stemming from years of poverty, abuse, and identity oppression. They are more often than not displaced, suffering from economic, social, and cultural marginalization that can trigger substance abuse and violence (Talaga, 2018, pp. 15-16).

The goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate that drinkers are agents who actively think about and engage with elements of their lived reality, or lifeworld, and about how this reality shapes their own story.⁴⁹ The perspectives they shared in the context of this research referred to both macro and micro level phenomena that have affected their life experiences. Many of the experiences in the quotation above resonate with the themes to which they referred. Before delving into these perspectives, it is important to provide an overview of the primary historical forces that are considered as contributors to drinking in Chisasibi. This overview is based on community views and scholarly works.

Chisasibi Eeyouch who speak out about issues affecting their community are acutely aware of the long-term impacts of colonization on their lives from the days of first contact with European traders and missionaries to more recent neo-colonial disruptions. Prevailing views about the links between alcohol use and colonial interference on Eeyou lives support much of the social science literature on the topic of Indigenous drinking in Northern Quebec (see chapter 3). While some of the talk concerning the history behind alcohol in the community deals with the introduction of alcohol through the fur trade, most references to history deal with the more recent issues of residential schools and the relocation of the community of Chisasibi from Fort George Island.

The views of community members, including those of drinkers, tend to support the academic discussions of the links between colonization and drinking. However, for community members,

⁴⁹ From this point onward, the term “drinkers” is generally used to include current (at the time of this research) and former drinkers. The distinction between current and former drinkers is made when relevant.

the links are not merely intellectual – they are a part of their lived experience. This is made clear in the stories drinkers shared about the factors that influenced their drinking. Their intellectual and emotional engagement with the socio-political influences on their lives, both on the community and family level, are discussed here at the intersection of lifeworld, agency, and embodiment.

7.1. Early Colonization and the Fur Trade

The fur trade is often identified as the original source of alcohol in Eeyou Istchee. During call-in episodes on the Chisasibi radio station and in conversation, I would occasionally hear people refer to alcohol as something that had been brought to the Eeyouch, and other Indigenous peoples, by “the white man” during the fur trade era. According to Pachano (2020), “the introduction of alcohol to the Crees was one of the most socially destructive aspects of the fur trade” (p. 100).

Indeed, along with sugar, tea, and flour, alcohol was introduced to the Eeyouch and other Indigenous peoples as a trade good as of the 1600s. According to Morantz (1983), not only did the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) offer brandy as a trade item to compete with other fur trading companies, but they would also offer brandy to Eeyou trappers upon their arrival at the post as alcohol eased relations and encouraged trade. It is worth noting here that HBC records carry the perspective that they were under pressure by the Eeyouch to provide alcohol in trade. It was, according to these records, onerous and costly to transport large quantities of alcohol (Inksetter and Bousquet, 2018). However, according to Inksetter and Bousquet’s (2018) Anicinabek informants in Pikogan and Lac Simon, alcohol was used by fur traders to ensure that Indigenous fur providers would lower their prices. Morantz (2002) also demonstrated that the HBC designated “captains” among the Eeyouch and offered them larger quantities of goods, including alcohol, to encourage them to bring more men to the post, thus establishing a greater influence in the area. Pachano (2020) has argued that trading alcohol was a means for the HBC to control Indigenous people.

Early records kept by traders and missionaries abound with descriptions of excess Indigenous drinking in a variety of locations. Indigenous people were said to drink in binges or sprees, to get quickly and easily drunk, to drink to the point of unconsciousness, to drink until there was no

alcohol left, and to become aggressive to the point of assault and homicide when in a state of drunkenness (Dailey, 1968; Gélinas, 2005; MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969).

While historical accounts of Indigenous drinking are consistent in their descriptions of the quality and quantity of Indigenous drinking and the resulting behaviours and problems, several scholars have cautioned us to be wary of the apparent truism of this model. Bias is one of the issues that they raise. Dailey (1968) suggested, for instance, that it was to the advantage of the Jesuit missionaries to exaggerate accounts of drunkenness among Indigenous peoples in New France to entertain their readership back in France as this would ensure further funding for the mission.

Gélinas (2005) and MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) also pointed out that any non-Indigenous description of Indigenous drinking sprees was necessarily written with regards to events that happened in the presence of the writer. There is therefore little knowledge on behalf of non-Indigenous writers of actual Indigenous drinking patterns and drunken behaviours outside of their presence. For example, Gélinas (2005) observed that French exposure to Attikamek drinking in Quebec often happened in the summer, when nomadic peoples traditionally got together in larger groups for ceremonies, weddings and so forth. Inksetter and Bousquet's (2018) research participants in the Anicinabek communities of Pikogan and Lac Simon, Quebec, corroborate this finding. Local seniors recounted that alcohol was only present during summer gatherings, when it was accessed through trade. On the other hand, the bush was associated with abstinence and hard work. Niezen (2009) has made similar assertions based on his work with Elders in Chisasibi.

With regards to violence during drunken encounters, MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) argued that careful examination of fur trader accounts brings to light a high quantity of descriptions of peaceful drinking encounters. Indeed, Morantz's (1983) research of HBC journals indicates that the arrival of Eeyou traders at the James Bay posts were typically characterized by an evening of "drinking and conviviality" (p. 133). This demonstrates that, as is common practice among humans, it is often the negative events that are recollected, especially when they confirm a stereotype.

Historical records are misleading in another way. They often lead readers to believe that all Indigenous individuals drank in the above-mentioned pattern and that they did so from the time

of first exposure to alcohol. However, both Dailey (1968) and Gélinas (2005) remarked that many individuals abstained from alcohol, fearing the effects that they saw in others. Some even asked European traders to stop providing alcohol to their people. Furthermore, MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) indicated that many Indigenous individuals initially refused the offerings of alcohol from fur traders but that the latter persisted.

This is not to say, of course, that Indigenous people were powerless victims of European insistence that they drink. Dailey (1968), Gélinas (2005), and MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) have all indicated many instances when Indigenous trappers would use the competition between European trading companies to their advantage in the obtainment of alcohol (see also Stevens, 1981).

With regards to historical records, it is easy to think that it was in the sole interest of the Europeans that Indigenous people adopt the use of alcohol. While it is true that traders supplied alcohol with the idea that it maintained Indigenous interest in trade (Dailey, 1968; Gélinas, 2005; Hamer & Steinbring, 1980), Dailey (1968) and Gélinas (2005) both indicated that Indigenous people were interested in other trade goods to which they had become accustomed. Further, they maintained that many Indigenous groups had an interest in maintaining good intercultural relations because of potential military alliances and the protection that it would offer from rival Indigenous societies.

More specifically to Eeyou Istchee, Rogers (1963) has argued that the Eeyouch limited trade items until the middle of the 1800s, and what they did trade for was mostly tools and equipment they could use for hunting. Similarly, Morantz (2002) has indicated that the Eeyouch “orchestrated trade” (p.22) by only bringing enough pelts to obtain what they wanted when they visited the trading posts.

Given the above, the extent of the impact of alcohol on the Eeyouch during the fur trade is unclear. According to Morantz (2002), the written records of Reverend Walton, an Anglican missionary who spent nearly 30 years in Fort George in the late 1800s and early 1900s, noted that “drinking has not been introduced much here” (pp. 66-67). This appears to contradict material from Anicinabek communities further south (Pikogan and Lac Simon), where Inksetter and

Bousquet (2018) indicated that alcohol use was considered rampant by missionaries in the 1800s. Indeed, it was due to Church influence that the HBC banned the sale of alcohol in Rupert's Land in the mid-1800s.

What is clear, however, is that involvement in the fur trade did have impacts on the social and economic organization of the Eeyouch (Morantz, 1983 & 2002). Talaga (2018) quoted an Elder from the Nishnawbe Aski Nation who summarized similar changes among his own people: "The first group of people to arrive here were the fur traders. They changed our relationship with the land, and we took more than was needed', he says, sipping his coffee. 'Now we were doing something we never did before: we were competing to get more than anyone else. Before, we only hunted what we needed. When we had more, we would share with others, because we believed if we shared, we would be blessed with abundance'" (pp. 45-46).

Furthermore, epidemics of European-borne diseases and food shortages along the James Bay coast had devastating impacts on the local population, leading to low morale (Morantz, 2002). As is the case with the disruptions described above, it is quite possible that this low morale led many individuals to engage in greater alcohol consumption.

7.2. Residential Schools and Inter-Generational Trauma

As in other Indigenous communities across Canada, and even elsewhere in the world where similar phenomena have taken place, the impacts of the residential school system are an important focal point for discussions of ongoing colonial impacts on health and well-being. As of the 1930s, there were two residential schools for elementary aged children on Fort George Island, the prior location of the community: St. Philip's Indian and Eskimo Residential School, run by the Anglican Church (Fireman et al., 2011), and Ste-Thérèse-de-l'Enfant-Jésus, run by the Catholic Church (TRC Hearing in Chisasibi Brings Hope, 2013).

According to Fireman et al. (2011), these schools drew children from all over Eeyou Istchee and even from the eastern Arctic. Among the Fort George children who attended them, some did not live at the schools, but many did. Among those who did, most of them returned to their families for the Christmas holidays and in the summer. Some Chisasibi residents have reported positive

feelings about their experiences at these schools. A friend of mine, a man in his 60s, shared that he enjoyed his time at the Anglican school and enjoyed what he learned there. Similarly, Margaret Sealhunter, in her article in Fireman et al.'s (2018) commemorative volume on the history of Chisasibi, related that "the Catholic residential school I went to was not so bad" (p. 77) but acknowledged that it may have been more difficult for the children who were further from home. She also acknowledged that there were some incidents of violence. She considered the ones that she saw minor, "like getting a ruler on the hand, or a smack on the head, when you're not following rules" (Fireman et al., 2018, p. 77) but surmised that there may have been graver incidents that she did not see and that went unreported. Sealhunter has frequently contributed articles to the *Waaskimaashtaa* newsletter in which she shared humorous anecdotes about pranks or crushes on boys.

However, the overwhelming view of Chisasibi residential school survivors is negative. Indeed, according to a *Waaskimaashtaa* article reporting on the TRC hearing in Chisasibi (TRC Hearing in Chisasibi Brings Hope, 2013), "Cree children were taken from their parents (many times forcibly) to be put into the Fort George Residential Schools. Discipline was strict, sometimes excessively so and many children were abused physically and occasionally sexually. Numerous horror stories emerged" (p. 9). It is important to keep in mind, as well, that these local schools only included younger grades and that older children were sent to southern schools, such as Shingwauk Residential School in Sault Ste. Marie (Fireman et al., 2011). The conditions in most of these institutions are widely reported as neglectful and abusive (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Older generations of Chisasibi Eeyouch engage in ceaseless efforts to instill awareness among youth of the impacts of the residential school system. During symposia held in the community on a variety of topics and through radio broadcasts and written articles, people from within and without the community share their testimonies as survivors of residential schools or as the

children of survivors. These testimonies echo those found in multiple reports and books written by survivors.⁵⁰

The main points of these testimonies are the identity confusion caused to Indigenous children when they were pulled out of their communities, the verbal, physical and sexual violence that was prevalent in residential schools, the ways in which children were prevented from seeing their own siblings even if they were at the same schools or from speaking their own language, and so forth. Although many survivors returned home after residential school, they were unable to relate to their own families and communities because of cultural and language barriers that had grown between them. They had not learned to be competent in their society's way of life.⁵¹

Similarly, some scholars writing at a time when residential schools were still in operation have described how Indigenous people, particularly youth, were often caught between the traditions of their elders and the goals and values of the dominant society. Sindell (1968) and Wintrob (1968), for instance, commented on the impact of Western-style education on Eeyou youth in Northern Quebec at the time. Since Indigenous youth acquiring this education often did so in schools that were located away from their communities of origin, their Indigenous enculturation was interrupted. Upon returning to their communities, then, they were caught between traditions that they did not understand and an education that was of little use to them since it was adapted to other social and economic contexts. As discussed below in the section on the community relocation, feelings of cultural confusion are considered factors in high rates of drinking.

Survivor testimonies also described how the trauma experienced at the schools left deep emotional and mental scars. Unable to effectively communicate with their own people, individuals were unable to share their pain. Many turned to alcohol and sometimes other substances to try to deal with their turmoil. In some cases, they grew angry from suppressed pain and rage and became violent with their spouses and children, with this violence often being made

⁵⁰ See, for example, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015); Knockwood (1992); Blacksmith (2010); Blacksmith (2016); Willis (1973); and Gray & Gros-Louis Monier (2010).

⁵¹ This summary is based on presentations held in Chisasibi during the Family Violence Symposium and Youth Week, in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

worse by drinking. In this way, their confusion, pain, and lack of a capacity for family love was transmitted to their children, who often grew up in violence and neglect.⁵²

For example, during the Family Violence Symposium in Chisasibi in 2010, Dennis Windego, a therapist working with the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB), described how he could vividly remember “the colours of the clothes they [the teachers at the residential schools] wore, the colours of the angry nun’s face” and getting a beating just for jumping up and down on his bed (Windego, 2010). On the topic of the ongoing impact of residential school on survivors, Windego (2010) explained that “Our parents took us out of the residential school, but they could never take the residential school out of us.” The memories and pain remain. Windego described how he grew protective mechanisms against this pain and eventually turned to drinking. His rage, made worse by alcohol use, led him to beat his girlfriend.

Again, these testimonies support scholarly work in the area. For instance, Bousquet (2005) described how residential schools have contributed to high levels of drinking among the Anicinabek people of Quebec. In addition to the interruption in socialisation described above, she explained that the levels of abuse and humiliation that the children suffered left them with a sense of shame that later led them to consume high levels of alcohol and other intoxicants.

While much of the literature that links an increase in drinking with the residential school system focuses on the experiences of the survivors of these schools, some scholars have also written about the impacts on the parents who had their children taken away. Blacksmith (2016), for instance, wrote of the despair experienced in his home community of Mistissini after most of the children had been taken. Some of Inksetter and Bousquet’s (2018) informants were among the first generation of Pikogan and Lac Simon Anicinabek to attend residential schools. Upon their return home in the 1960s and 1970s, they observed a high rate of drinking among their parents’ generation. This corroborates Blacksmith’s (2016) observation about parental despair.

In addition to the survivors of residential schools, there is much discussion about the impacts of residential schools on the children and grandchildren of survivors. For example, during Chisasibi’s

⁵² Ibid.

Youth Week in 2011, a local health worker gave a presentation on the impacts of the residential school system. In addition to the points outlined above, her message was that “... today’s youth need to remember the past and to understand what their parents and grandparents went through in order to break the current cycle” (Menarick, 2011).

This “current cycle” refers to multi-generational trauma. Today’s youth, who did not attend residential schools but who are the children and grandchildren of residential school survivors, inherited the trauma of their parents or grandparents. Since survivors often engaged in high levels of intoxication, as described above, their children and grandchildren grew up with these levels of intoxication being modelled as “normal”. Furthermore, there were often high levels of child neglect and violence as they were growing up with parents and grandparents who had not learned how to take care of children and who were dealing with the emotional impacts of their trauma. This neglect and violence, often sexual, led to today’s youth and children suffering their own trauma and seeking the same kinds of escape through intoxication. This cycle was described quite fully in the presentation described above but is also described by the TRC (2015) and well summarized by Talaga (2018):

A child born into a home affected by colonization – a home that has experienced the loss of language or connection to its cultural history, knowledge, and traditions – enters an environment marked by unresolved intergenerational trauma. Parents may be grappling with their own adverse childhood experiences, having gone through the foster system or residential school. As a result, they may suffer from mental health issues or addictions that can trigger domestic violence (p. 177).

In brief, there is a strong association made between mass social disruption caused by the residential school system, alcohol use, and further disruption to the social fabric of Chisasibi and other Indigenous communities. It is important to note, here, that the residential school system was a part of a plan of assimilation on behalf of the government of Canada. Indeed, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) has referred to this system as cultural genocide. As such, it is a phenomenon that is spoken of on almost a daily basis in Chisasibi as people discuss the myriad problems they see in their community and the ways in which these problems are propagated throughout the generations. Indeed:

While assimilation through education did not work, the legacy of those schools is still very much present today. Those experiences live on in the minds and the nightmares

of the survivors, who develop derogatory attitudes about themselves that are only reinforced by their engagement with the greater society (Talaga, 2018, p. 212).

7.3. From Fort George to Chisasibi: An Example of Forced Relocation

The relocation of the community from Fort George Island to Chisasibi, in the early 1980s, is frequently discussed by Chisasibi Eeyouch. Nostalgia for life on the island is a recurring theme. People miss the greater feeling of community that is said to have existed there. It is often expressed that things were better and healthier back then. The community was smaller, and the way of life was simpler, still largely based on traditional modes of subsistence (Fireman et al., 2011). And most of all, there was less drinking than in Chisasibi.

Before the founding of Chisasibi, the Eeyouch and Inuit of the area, along with some non-Indigenous workers, lived on the island of Fort George at the mouth of what is now called La Grande River. In the early 1970s, Hydro-Quebec, supported by the government of Quebec, embarked on elaborate hydro-electric projects in the area without consulting the people of Eeyou Istchee. The Eeyouch then began court proceedings to protect their land. The result of the struggle was the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA), a modern treaty that guaranteed several ancestral rights to the Eeyouch while outlining the provincial government's rights and responsibilities regarding exploitation of the land (Richardson, 1976; Salisbury, 1986).

Hydro-electric projects proceeded within the parameters established by the JBNQA. The construction of the La Grande 1 (LG1) complex roughly 30 km from the mouth of the river changed the flow of the river and there were some concerns about the increased erosion of Fort George Island. While Hydro-Quebec had originally committed to financing the improvement of the island's infrastructure, it became necessary (or less expensive, depending on with whom one is speaking) to relocate the community (Cree Nation of Chisasibi, 2006; Fireman et al., 2011; Salisbury, 1986; Richardson, 1976). The Fort George Relocation Corporation was formed amid negotiations with the Quebec government and the people of Fort George, along with about 200

houses, relocated to Chisasibi over the course of 1978-1981 (Cree Nation of Chisasibi, 2006). August 18, 1981, is identified as the town's birthday.⁵³

According to both Niezen's (2009) and my research respondents, the relocation of the community led to increased alcohol-related problems such as public disturbance and violence. These problems were reportedly so extreme that the alcohol by-law described in chapter 2 was put in place shortly after the relocation to help deal with these problems. Many people in Chisasibi remember life on Fort George and acknowledge that there was drinking on the island. However, they tend to agree that it was not as prevalent or problematic before the relocation.

During a walk organized through the community in honour of the annual Chisasibi Spirit Month, on March 7, 2011, I chatted with Keith, a worker for a local entity in his late 30s. He described how he used to see some people drink when he was a child in Fort George, but that it was not as bad as it was at the time of this research. He recalled that his parents only began to bring alcohol into their house after the move to Chisasibi, and that they would see people walking around drunk in the streets in large gangs. According to Keith, it was worse in the first few years after the relocation than it was at the time we were speaking, however.

Melinda, a school board worker in her 50s, agreed that drinking increased in the years following the move. During an interview in her office, she added that "Back then, too, [on the island] people who were drunk would respect our spaces. Like, if we had an event, and we told them to stay away, they actually stayed away. Now, here in Chisasibi you always have to worry that drunks are gonna barge in when you have an event" (56 years old, Chisasibi, October 21, 2010).

Not everyone agreed that the problem became worse after relocation. Tabitha, a key research participant, said "You know, it was just as bad on the island. There was just as much drinking then. People just don't like to talk about it. But I guess you can just see it more here in town so it looks worse. It's like it was more hidden then" (April 12, 2011, 44 years old, Chisasibi). This idea of

⁵³ There appeared to be some disagreement about whether the town was officially founded in 1980 or 1981. This was evident during an amusing anecdote concerning the duplicate celebration of Chisasibi's 30th birthday. Shortly after my arrival in the community in early August 2010, and again during a social visit in August 2011, the town's birthday celebrations were said to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the town's founding.

drinking being more visible instead of it being “worse” than elsewhere was echoed in other people’s statements, but usually in comparison to non-Indigenous communities.

However, the prevailing view in Chisasibi, according to my discussions with residents, my observations of local media, and Niezen’s (2009) research, is that the rate of drinking increased after the relocation from Fort George to Chisasibi. There are two main reasons that are commonly indicated for this increase. The first one is practical; alcohol was more easily obtained after the relocation. Bringing alcohol to Fort George Island had been possible, but the lack of road access made it more difficult. But along with the new village, a road was constructed connecting Chisasibi to the James Bay Highway and the Hydro-Quebec settlement of Radisson. So now obtaining alcohol had become a simple matter of driving 45 minutes to Radisson and back (Grand Council of the Crees, n.d.-c).

The other reason that is often cited as leading to an increase in drinking is the social disruption caused by the move. As discussed above, life on Fort George is remembered as being much more peaceful and community oriented. Deirdre, a school board worker in her 50s, chatted with me in the teacher’s lounge on November 9, 2010. She explained that on Fort George, the houses were spread out across the island, and people would go visit each other. In her view, it felt more like a community. In contrast, Chisasibi felt more like a city - crowded and anonymous – and people felt like they could do whatever they wanted. “So we’ve lost that feeling of being a community,” she said. Melinda, cited above, added that “People were really confused with the move. There was this one woman who was on a drinking spree during the relocation. She sobered up after a few days of drinking and she couldn’t find her house! It had been moved to Chisasibi!” (56 years old, Chisasibi, October 21, 2010).

Melinda explained that the decreased sense of community was tied in with a sense of sadness about the wider issue of losing access to land because of Hydro developments. There was a strong sense, according to her and many others, that their culture and way of life was threatened. Indeed, the fallout from the Hydro-Quebec intrusion into Eeyou Istchee resulted in loss of access to large areas of land because of flooding and because of greater limitations placed on access by the JBNQA. According to Melinda, Deirdre, and others, the fear, sadness, and confusion involved

with this change, as well as a decrease in the possibility of making a living off the land, led to many people seeking comfort in intoxication. The intoxication fueled emotions such as anger, which led to even more social disruption.

What community members expressed regarding the impacts of the relocation supports outside observations on the topic. Richardson, as cited in Grand Council of the Crees (n.d.-c), wrote about his observations in Chisasibi within the decade following the relocation:

Last summer I visited the new town of Chisasibi [. . .]. A wedding was to be held that night. "There'll be a lot of drunks around," said the fellow at the gas station.

[...]

I was there for the weekend. One youth tried to commit suicide. One girl took an overdose of pills. One young man was found passed out on the river shoreline, half in and half out of the water, three teenagers ran a van into the river and had to be treated in hospital, a woman who had been badly beaten up in a drinking quarrel in a nearby house came and asked to be driven home. The bootleggers circled the town selling the beer from out of their vans.

In the week after I left, there were four more attempted suicides (para. 13-15).

Niezen (1993; 2009) argued that the resulting loss of much of the traditional hunting land of the Eeyouch due the hydro-electric projects led to economic disruption. Many people could no longer practice hunting and fishing but could not, due to lack of training or cultural confusion, engage in Western-style wage labour. An increase in alcohol abuse is seen by many Eeyouch and by Niezen (1993; 2009) as being an effect of these changes in material conditions.

Niezen (2009) also discussed how the community of Chisasibi was in a state of grieving after the loss of much of their land base. According to Pachano (2020), 11,500 square kilometers of land were lost to flooding, including many trap lines. Niezen (2009) affirmed that this state of grieving was linked to a rise in social problems, alcohol abuse being prominent among these. Indeed, both Niezen (2009) and Tanner (1999) have referred to "social pathologies" such as alcohol and substance abuse, suicide, and violence that increased among the Eeyouch because of forced community relocations.

The Chisasibi Eeyouch are not alone in dealing with the impacts of forced relocation. The personal testimony of Kaniuekutat, an Innu Elder from the Labrador area, indicates that many similar

changes occurred in his community after two successive relocations (Henriksen, 2009). Shkilnyk (1985) described an even more drastic scenario in her ethnography of an Ojibwa community in Ontario. She reported that, after the community's forced relocation in the mid-1960s, the Ojibwa were unable to adapt to their new surroundings. According to the author, many community members began to engage in extreme binge drinking episodes leading to violence, vandalism, and child neglect.

In the case of Chisasibi, the direct road access to alcohol, mentioned above, provided by the relocation allowed for the greater availability of alcohol. However, it is unclear whether the stress of the relocation is what led to people taking advantage of that greater availability by drinking more and engaging in socially disruptive behaviours.

Writer Boyce Richardson recalls having interviewed in September 1990 a young man in Chisasibi, an ex-alcoholic, who told him how disoriented he had become as a young boy at about the time that Fort George village was destroyed and replaced by the new village of Chisasibi. He spoke of his decline into trouble-making and minor vandalism around the village, involvement with drugs, and finally committal to a reform school near Montreal. But though he was willing to talk about it on camera, he said after thinking it over for a few days that he did not know if his problems had been caused by the relocation of the village or not. He could not say for sure that they were.

Much evidence about social impacts is like this: it is hard to say how much of the impact is due to the James Bay project, and how much due to other factors (Grand Council of the Crees, n.d.-c, para. 9 - 10).

7.4. Intersubjective Engagement with the Socio-Political World: Lifeworlds, Embodiment and Agency

As mentioned above, the known affects of colonization on the well-being of the community of Chisasibi and other Indigenous communities is not merely an intellectual fact for the people most directly affected. Community members, including drinkers, who participated in this research traced direct links between this wider context and their own lives. It is clear from the stories drinkers shared that they were deeply aware of how their drinking history is situated at the intersection of macro-level (historical and political) and micro-level (family and community) factors that affect the people of Chisasibi and Indigenous peoples more widely. This is evident in how their early choice to drink was typically described in relation to personal, psychological, and

emotional issues arising from the daily experiences that shape the lifeworlds, or lived realities, of the individuals in question.

7.4.1. “I Grew up with Abuse”: Family, Friends, and Drinking

At the micro-level, family issues and peer relations were most frequently cited as initial factors in beginning to drink. Several people explained how family situations they experienced while growing up, such as violence or a lack of affection, contributed to emotional pain and anger, and to their choice to start drinking. For example, “There was a lot of pain in my family. A lot of illness and issues like that. I grew up with a lot of pain” (Tad, 34 years old, Chisasibi November 15, 2010). Dean, during our initial interview, described his family upbringing as one devoid of affection: “I didn’t get any affection growing up. My parents didn’t know how because they didn’t learn it growing up” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011).

With a few exceptions, every respondent testified to having witnessed or suffered violence as children and youth. Tabitha, for example, experienced violence at home, well into her teen years: “My mom was so abusive, verbally and physically” (April 12, 2011, 44 years old, Chisasibi). Gavin described the violence he experienced at home as a child: “I grew up with abuse. My dad used a strap on us” (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011). He went on to explain that family violence was such a common occurrence in the community, that many people were anxious, having been raised in violent contexts. In his estimation, this was a primary contributor to people’s drinking.

Drinking and drunkenness were present in nearly all the cases described, particularly in the cases where physical or emotional violence was present. According to Dean, the presence of drinking and drunkenness in the home “creates a sense of normality. It’s what you’re used to” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011). Codie’s words show agreement: “I just thought this was something that happened in all families” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

This sense of normality around drinking made it that much easier to respond to peer pressure. Adam, for example, described how he started drinking when he was about 12 or 13 because he wanted to impress a girl around his age: “She drank, so I wanted to be cool like her and drink too” (22 years old, Chisasibi, May 22, 2011). Dean and Codie also described the impact of peer pressure. Dean described that he “was surrounded by family and friends who drank, so it just

seemed normal” (Dean, 44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011). Codie explained that, as a child of around 10 or 11, he was pressured by older youths to drink: “They told me it would help me be cool, and I wanted to live up to that because they were older than me. [...] Later on, though, I was the one who was the bad influence on other kids” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

7.4.2. “The Whites Came and Tried to Destroy Us”: Colonial Impacts on Community, Family, and Identity

The stories shared by drinkers and former drinkers reflect an embodied awareness that their initial family environment or other aspects of their childhood created an emotional terrain on which the influence of peers to drink could flourish. They also reflect an awareness of the wider historical and social, or macro-level, contexts that contributed to their lifeworlds, such as the aspects of colonial interference described above. Many research participants noted that the residential school legacy had a large role to play in their familial inheritance; surviving residential school placed such emotional strain on their parents or grandparents that they were unable to raise their children in a loving way.

In Dean’s words, residential schools “cut the tradition of thankfulness, and the tradition of showing love” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011). Tabitha also commented on this impact of residential schools: “Later on, I understood why my mom was so abusive. She went through so much at those schools. She didn’t know how to love. Her pain led her to drink, and she treated her kids the way she was raised: with violence” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011). This is, of course, consistent with much of the literature on the multi-generational impacts of residential schools and similar trauma (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Tad’s story revealed another aspect to the residential school legacy. “When I think of what my grandmother went through [in residential school], it hurts me so much”, he said, “To think of her, as a little girl, being treated the way they treated those kids... it really affects me in a bad way” (35 years old, Chisasibi, February 17, 2011). While Tad did not reveal whether there was violence in the home as he was growing up, what he shared demonstrates that the emotional impact of the residential school experience on the descendants of survivors goes beyond the idea of a chain

of neglect and violence. The awareness of the abuse to which parents or grandparents were subjected can lead to great suffering in future generations.

In addition to the history of residential schools, drinkers are aware of other phenomena tied to a history of colonial disruption, such as the relocation from Fort George and ongoing government interventions in their lives. Like other community members, they are not only sad and angry about historical and ongoing colonial interference. They are cognizant of how this history has been conducive to high levels of drinking in their community.

Gavin, for instance, spent quite some time describing his thoughts about the colonial nature of government intervention in Indigenous communities. In his view, the dependency to which these communities are driven through colonial interference, such as the relocation from Fort George, gives an overall sense of hopelessness to people. This hopelessness drives people to engage in drinking and other self-destructive behaviours. “In the end, it works in the government’s favour. They have us at their mercy, and they can control us better when everyone’s drunk” (36 years old, Chisasibi April 28, 2011).

Some of the political conversations I had with drinkers during my master’s and PhD research happened while drinking or during states of drunkenness. These took on a particular intensity. For instance, during my master’s fieldwork in 1998, I spent some time in the woods off the main road to Chisasibi with Don and Alex after a drive to Radisson to pick up beer. They had the following to say when I brought up Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in the community:

“The whites came and tried to destroy us, but we’re always gonna win. We’re stronger than he is,” [Don said].

“You see what they did here?!” exclaimed Alex. “Look, they f**ing destroyed everything. We used to hunt and stuff and now we can only hunt in certain places.”

“Yeah, and the water’s all f**ed up now,” added Don.

The two men were getting angrier at every word. The van was almost shaking with the intensity of their rage. They continued to shout at each other about all the problems that had been caused by the arrival of whites and seemed to forget that I was there (Leclerc, 2001, p. 151).

Similar sentiments were expressed quite eloquently by Caleb, the cousin of a key research participant, as we shared a couple of beers in my apartment one evening. He made connections

between the current situation of his community with regards to drinking and related behaviours and the overall colonial relation between Indigenous people and the dominant society:

“They came and imposed their whole system on us. They moved us, they put in their own schools and businesses. We want to get ahead... we have to adapt and do things their way. We’re forced to use money now – we didn’t need money before. But now we do, and if we want to deal with money, we have to deal with the White man’s bank. It’s discouraging because these aren’t our ways. Same with school. Work. Politics. Everything. So that’s why we are... well, the way we are” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 10, 2011).

Considering the ongoing impacts of colonial interference in their lives, many respondents pointed out that the painful emotions under discussion (see chapter 8) are ultimately linked to a perceived loss of cultural identity. Gavin, for example, said that “Young people start drinking because they lost their Native identity” (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011). While many respondents, such as Dale, and other community members frequently discussed this loss of identity in terms of a lack of bush skills, Gavin focused on a lack of connection with Eeyou spirituality as a major factor in identity loss. Regardless, nearly all respondents touched on identity loss or confusion associated with painful emotions and referred to various aspects of colonial disruption that contributed to this loss or confusion. “It’s hard to know who you are with all this. It’s a confusing world...is it ours, is it the white man’s? I don’t know anymore,” expressed Clem (27 years old, Chisasibi, January 30, 2011).

7.4.3. Lifeworlds, Embodiment, and Agency

As discussed in chapter 4, the phenomenological approach of this dissertation employs the primary concepts of lifeworlds, embodiment and agency. To summarize that discussion, lifeworlds refer to life as lived, including the unpredictable and ambiguous aspects of life that emerge from changing circumstances and interactions with other people and their worldviews. Lifeworlds also include the possibilities and constraints emerging from historical, social, political, and economic structures (see Jackson, 1996; Desjarlais & Throop, 2011). Agency refers to a person or group’s capacity to engage in meaningful and impactful action (see De Fornel, 2010 and Duranti, 2006). In this dissertation, agency is considered in the context of lifeworlds that include a variety of structures directly related to colonial forces: structures that have a direct bearing on people’s daily lived experience.

Further, the concept of embodiment refers to the ways in which bodily experiences of the world, and thus one's lifeworld or lived experience, are interpreted, and given meaning (see Strathern & Stewart, 2011; Csordas, 1994; Jensen & Moran, 2013; Knibbe & Versteeg, 2008). The process of embodied engagement is described as an intersubjective one in which engagement with socio-political and economic realities as well as with the subjectivities of others occurs on a continual basis. Indeed, Knibbe and Versteeg (2008) have stated that "The field of embodiment, in its lived emotional-cognitive sense, is seen as a mediator between, on the one hand, patterns and structures which can be observed on a societal level and, on the other hand, individual life in its intersubjective shaping of everyday meaning" (p. 50). Desjarlais and Throop (2011) have also highlighted the importance, in anthropology, of considering "the ways in which political, social, economic, and discursive formations intersect with the operations and felt immediacies of bodies in a number of sociocultural settings" (p. 90). The enactment of one's agency requires an ongoing, embodied interaction with the circumstances of one's life, which is, in and of itself, an act of agency. It is possible to view agency as the capacity or desire to act on the world while also considering how these capacities and desires are at least partly shaped by that world through embodied experience and engagement with the experiences and views of others.

As described above, participants in this research expressed worldviews and perspectives about their life experiences that acknowledged the presence and influence of a variety of factors, including colonial disruptions in their community. But rather than simply consider these as causal factors, they engage and interact with them in ways that demonstrate a capacity to create and negotiate meaning for their lives. When drinkers reflected on their experiences with drinking, they also reflected on the wider political and social meanings for their experiences, such as inter-generational trauma and assimilation pressure.

As De Fornel (2010) has argued, social structures become incorporated as shared norms and guides for action rather than act as determinants or limitations for action. It follows that people actively engage with these norms along with other norms that exist in their cultural and social contexts. I further argue, then, that any knowledge or perspective that emerges from embodied engagement during daily lived experience also becomes incorporated into these guides for action. Keeping in mind the multiplicity of directions of intentional threads suggested by Csordas (2011),

then, agency can fluctuate between a desire to change, resist, or yield to the structures within which one exists. For these desires to exist, knowledge and awareness of the structures that affect one's existence is required. Therefore, the awareness that drinkers have of wider socio-political and historical contexts demonstrates at the very least a potential for agency. But the intersubjective engagement and meaning-making evident in the stories that drinkers shared demonstrates agency in and of itself and contributes to the desire of drinkers to act on these contexts.

7.5. Conclusion

Colonial disruption, past and present, was shown to be strongly connected with Indigenous drinking in the literature review provided in chapter 3. People in Chisasibi along with scholars and journalists working in the area concur with this assessment and point to specific aspects of colonization that have contributed to drinking. Harking back to the fur trade, one can trace the beginnings of colonial interference in Eeyou lifeways. That the fur trade interfered with Eeyou economic, social, and political organization is clear, and this in and of itself can be argued to have contributed to long-term disruption. However, the fur trade is also associated with the introduction of drinking. The residential school system and the relocation from Fort George Island are events that exist in living memory for residents of Chisasibi and are therefore discussed much more vividly and with much more emotion. Because of the social and cultural confusion these events are considered responsible for, they are said to have directly contributed to an increase in drinking.

Overall, the idea that colonial domination affects all aspects of Eeyou lives is salient in the views of people in Chisasibi. In addition to the strong emotions expressed about historical events and the current realities, there is strong resentment about having to adapt to "the white man's ways" and this forced adaptation is viewed as one of the primary reasons for the host of problems that are perceived in the community. Drinkers who shared their stories about drinking focused particularly on how this colonial domination has affected their community and family lives and contributed to their drinking. In Caleb's words: "that's why we are... well, the way we are." But drinkers went beyond engaging with the historical and socio-political aspects of their lifeworlds

at an intellectual level; their embodied engagement took place at the level of meaning making and emotional response, which, as discussed in the following chapter, are a part of action readiness involved in personal agency.

Chapter 8 - “I Was Just in so Much Pain”: The Emotional Components of Drinking and Drunkenness

Colonial history is often used to explain high rates of drinking perceived as problematic in Indigenous communities. As evidenced by both scholarly materials and local knowledge expressed by Chisasibi residents, this history has contributed to social and cultural disruptions in Chisasibi, and alcohol and other drugs have played a role in these disruptions, as causes, perpetrators, or both (see chapters 2 and 7). However, the goal of this dissertation is not to reaffirm these impacts. Rather, it is to argue that drinkers perceive themselves as agents even within a socio-historical context where it appears inevitable for them to drink.

One of the main themes that emerged from conversations with drinkers is that of emotional suffering. The accounts that research participants shared about how they began drinking nearly always started with recollections of painful emotions, including anger and shame. These emotions were described in relation to life experiences in their families and in their community, and further discussion usually revealed deep reflection on the connections between these experiences and the social, cultural, political, and economic disruptions caused by the historical processes, as described in chapter 7.

What follows is an outline of the main aspects of the emotions involved in drinking and drunkenness as discussed by research participants who identified as drinkers or former drinkers. Next, I describe what participants had to say about their drunken experiences in the community, particularly with respect to emotional alleviation and expression. A discussion of the phenomenology of suffering is provided to highlight the ways in which embodied pain is communicated in intersubjectively understood ways. Chapter 7 demonstrates that drinkers engage, in agentic ways, with local knowledge of the historical causes of social and cultural disruptions that have affected their and their families' lives. This chapter builds on that demonstration to show that drunkenness allows for further intersubjective engagement as drinkers navigate emotional states that contribute to and that manifest during drunken states.

8.1. Drinking, Embodied Emotions, and Intersubjective Meanings

In chapter 7, I affirmed that drinkers are deeply engaged with their community's history and current social realities in their interpretation of their own lives through agentic processes of embodiment. An important aspect of embodiment that anthropologists consider in the agentic processes of engagement, interpretation, and meaning making is that of emotional states. Murphy and Throop (2010), for instance, have suggested a need for a greater focus on emotion in discussions of agency in anthropology. Agency is not simply a matter of the impacts that actions have on the world; it is a matter of "how actors perceive, feel, think, etc." (Murphy & Throop, 2010, p. 18). Lyon and Barbalet (1994) have also argued for the central role of emotion in an understanding of both collective and individual agency: "emotion is central to an understanding of the agency of the embodied" (p. 54).

However, the agentic role of emotions goes beyond simply *feeling* these emotions; the emotion and the awareness thereof is involved in the very understanding of one's experiences. As Archer (2000) stated, "in identifying the import of a given situation, we are picking out what in the situation gives the grounds or basis for our feelings [...] we are not just stating that we experience a certain feeling in this situation" (p. 195).

Discussions with drinkers and former drinkers in Chisasibi revealed that there is a deep awareness of the various historical, social, economic, and political factors involved in their own drinking and that of peers. The emotions that drinkers who participated in this research described, discussed below, were shared in relation to their life experiences, which were usually framed in the context of these factors. A frequent example is the pain and anger caused by childhood abuse or emotional neglect, which in turn resulted from the residential school trauma of one's parents. Indeed, drinkers were generally deeply aware of why they started drinking and of why they continued to drink, when applicable, both in terms of their inner states and in terms of the macro and micro level social realities that have affected them. As such, they were actively engaged with the various phenomena that shape their lived experience and with community views about these phenomena. In this process, individuals were able to identify the aspects of these experiences that, as Archer (2000) argued, explain their emotional states.

8.1.1. “To Feel Better”: Drinking as Emotional Escape from Painful Emotions

The primary reasons research participants who identified as drinkers mentioned for why they started and continued to drink are intense painful emotions. Variations of the phrase “to feel better” came up in most discussions about drinking; drinkers overwhelmingly claimed to drink, at the time of this research or in the past, in attempts to mute emotions. Overall, pain, anger, and shame, stemming from difficult childhoods, family discord, and a wider colonial context were cited as the primary contributors to the adoption of drinking behaviours widely perceived as problematic in the community.

Intense emotional pain was described by multiple people: a pain that is or was all-consuming, powerful, and overwhelming. “I was just in so much pain, and I drank to feel better,” related Tad, who had been drinking on and off since his teens and identified as a former drinker, but who drank regularly at the time of this research, albeit less frequently than in the past (34 years old, Chisasibi, November 15, 2010). Adam, who had recently quit drinking, shared that, although he started drinking for other reasons, he felt intense pain during his drinking years – a pain that led him to “a dark place”: “I had so many nightmares because of how I felt” (22 years old, Chisasibi, May 22, 2011). Winnifred, who had decreased her drinking to a moderate but frequent level, stressed the role of personal pain as well: “Some people say they’re fine, and it’s all just for fun. They’re in denial. They’re denying their own pain” (29 years old, Chisasibi, June 5, 2011).

Several individuals also mentioned anger as an intense emotion that contributed to their early or ongoing drinking behaviour. Codie, who was an on and off drinker at the time of this research, recalled that he “just felt so angry all the time” in his youth (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). He pointed out that, unlike many people he knew, he had not experienced abuse as a child. However, he grew up without a father and always felt like there was something missing. Tabitha, who had been abstaining from drinking for several years, also mentioned anger as well as resentment as recurring emotions during her drinking years: “I was so mad at my mom, before I understood what she had gone through [in residential school]. I really resented how she treated me. So, a lot of my drinking was almost like a revolt against her, against authority, because I was so mad” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011).

Shame and guilt were also discussed by several research participants in relation to their ongoing drinking behaviour. A large part of these feelings derived from their perceptions of their own drinking behaviour – perceptions which usually mirrored those of other community members. Aware of the stigma associated with drinking in the community, an issue that is discussed further in chapters 2 and 9, many drinkers have internalized a sense of shame.⁵⁴

Dale, for example, a young man involved in multiple encounters with groups of public drinkers, expressed that he felt a great deal of shame about his drinking behaviour when he was not actually intoxicated. Like other drinkers with whom I often spoke outdoors, Dale would usually avoid prolonged conversation when he was sober. On one occasion when he was only slightly intoxicated, I ran into him near the General Store in the centre of town. I mentioned that I was still interested in meeting up with him when he was up for it, but that I was hesitant to appear too pushy since he had seemed to avoid me the day before. He responded that he liked talking to me, but that when he was sober, he was embarrassed about what he did when he was drunk. This often led him to drink again to feel better. He insisted that I keep trying, however (May 27, 2011).

An experience during my master's fieldwork in 1998 (Leclerc, 2001) also demonstrated this sense of shame with regards to an individual's drinking behaviour. The day after I had spent a few hours with a small group of young men who were drinking behind a house, one young man, who had sobered up, asked me shyly if he had said or done anything inappropriate the day before.⁵⁵ When I responded that his joking behaviour was fine most of the time but that he had started getting a little violent, which led me to leave the encounter, he looked away and replied "*Agoodah*"⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ While shame and guilt are distinct but related emotions, participants tended to use the words "shame" and "ashamed" to refer to a wider set of feelings that included guilt associated with actions that went against the norms or that were harmful. To reflect their words as closely as possible, I therefore use "shame" here in a similar "catch-all" way. A deeper discussion of how people measure their behaviour against established norms is provided in chapter 11.

⁵⁵ My 1998 fieldwork was conducted before my gender transition, when I still identified as a woman. So, the young man's query about possible inappropriate conduct referred to sexual violence, which is a common occurrence in mixed gender interactions involving intoxication.

⁵⁶ *Agoodah* means "OK" and is often used in similar ways as the word OK is used in English: a catch-all response to statements, to show understanding, or to end a conversation.

In addition to shame about drunken behaviour, real or imagined, the perceived lack of ability to stop drinking was also frequently mentioned as a source of shame. Phil, a school board employee with whom I occasionally took cigarette breaks, confided that he was interested in my research but that he did not feel qualified to participate. He had misunderstood the goal of the project and believed that I only wanted to talk to people who had successfully quit drinking. He expressed much shame over his failure to stop drinking after several attempts at treatment: “I keep trying and failing. I know I have to stop, but I stop for a while and start all over again every time. So, whatever, I just keep drinking” (26 years old, Chisasibi, November 13, 2010). Virginia, a young woman with whom I chatted behind the commercial building one afternoon as she was sharing a bottle of liquor with a group, also expressed embarrassment about her perceived lack of ability to stop drinking. She explained that she had wanted to stop for a few years. Looking at the ground, she said “I just don’t know how,” before taking another swig from the bottle (24 years old, Chisasibi, October 14, 2010).

Feelings of inadequacy were also expressed on other topics, such as the capacity to fulfill familial obligations. Sal, for example, a young man who sat drinking with a group on one of the dirt trails between the house clusters one afternoon, expressed a feeling of helplessness with regards to becoming a new father. “My girlfriend’s having a baby. And I don’t know what to do. I don’t know how to be a dad. That’s why I drink” (23 years old, Chisasibi, May 13, 2011).

There are other aspects of shame described by research participants. Much internalized shame with respect to being Indigenous was expressed by drinkers, for instance. An awareness of the power difference between Indigenous and Euro-Canadian societies in North America takes its toll on some youth. “Sometimes I’m ashamed to be Cree. Makes me wish I was a white guy,” confided Dale when I encountered him behind the commercial centre one morning after a night of drinking (24 years old, Chisasibi, April 29, 2011).

This internalized shame sometimes encapsulated feelings of inadequacy with respect to a perceived lack of capacity in spoken English and to scholarly success. For instance, both Perry and Caleb, quite fluent and clear in spoken English even when slightly intoxicated, expressed shame over their perceived lack of capacity in English. Perry, a youth who had dropped out of school and

who walked me home one morning to have a cup of tea in the hopes of sobering up before a job interview, said “I’m sorry, my English isn’t very good” (19 years old, Chisasibi, March 19, 2011). Similarly, Caleb, who came with Tad to hang out in my apartment during the evening of April 10, 2011, to share a few cans of beer, apologized for his language skills. He said that he enjoyed our conversation but felt ashamed because he did not think his English was good enough.⁵⁷

Codie, Dale, and Tabitha, all cited above, as well as other research participants acknowledged the extent to which their drinking behaviour was related to their painful emotions. And many people acknowledged that their own drinking behaviour intensified these emotions. “I was just so angry all the time. I didn’t even know why. It just took over me, especially when I was drunk, and it made me angrier, then I wanted to drink even more” (Codie, 35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Zoe discussed how drinking worsened anger as well, but in her case, as someone who had stopped drinking, the anger in question was her father’s. “He had big time anger issues when I was growing up! He drank too so that made it even worse. He got violent sometimes. It was pretty scary,” she related during an interview (26 years old, Chisasibi, March 7, 2011).

In addition to causing more pain and shame to themselves, an individual’s drinking behaviour was often reported to cause pain to others, which in turn intensified feelings of pain, shame, and anger for the drinker. The majority of drinkers who shared their stories with me acknowledged that their choice to drink had negative impacts on their family members, just as the drinking behaviours of their own family members had negative impacts on them as they were growing up. “I was mad at my mom for the things she did but I was doing the same thing to my own kids. Imagine! And I knew, too. But I just kept doing it anyway. My anger was more powerful,” recounted Tabitha during a discussion-style interview in my apartment (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011). Similarly, in one of our many conversations, Tad acknowledged that he continued drinking despite the damage he saw it was causing to his marriage: “I don’t know why my wife put up with me all that time. Well, she did leave at one point with the kids. But I kept fucking things up, coming home drunk” (35 years old, Chisasibi, January 23, 2011). Codie also described how his anger, when drunk, often led him to physically abuse his girlfriend and how this behaviour

⁵⁷ It is significant to note that Caleb is the same individual who is quoted in chapter 7 as quite eloquently and clearly describing the impacts of colonization on his community.

led to more shame and anger, fuelling further drinking behaviour (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

All the drinkers who participated in this research indicated their awareness that drinking would render existing feelings worse, especially that of shame. And they generally expressed that they felt better while they were intoxicated, even though they knew it was a temporary relief. Further, knowledge of the fear and disdain that their drinking creates in others could sometimes lead drinkers to feel empowered and rebellious, at least when drinking, which is described further in chapter 10. As Dean describes further in this chapter, drinking, in his youth, had given him a sense of belonging. And as expressed by Dale and Sal above, as well as other drinkers with whom I spoke, the feelings of shame and inadequacy they experience when sober are temporarily eclipsed by these more positive feelings when they drink.

However, nearly all participants recognized the cyclical relationship between negative emotions and drinking. Gavin, who identified as a former drinker, or “ex-drunk” but who still engaged in occasional heavy drinking at the time of this research, stated quite directly that “People drink because they’re ashamed. They feel guilty about something, they’re ashamed of themselves, and they blame themselves. Then they drink to feel better for a while, and then the cycle starts all over again” (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011).

In sum, painful emotions are the most frequently reported direct factors described by research respondents in their reflections about their own drinking histories. These emotions are understood to be both contributing factors to one’s initial drinking and enabling factors in ongoing drinking. They are also understood to be exacerbated by the drinking that is meant to be an escape from them, so that this escape is, at best, temporary.

8.1.2. Drinking and the Phenomenology of Suffering

In the case of the emotions described by participants in this research, individuals who drink or drank in the past, generally deal with a great deal of suffering. There is a significant body of scholarly work on the phenomenology of suffering, particularly the expression of physical suffering. Several anthropologists and other scholars conducting ethnographic studies of people who experience various forms of physical suffering have argued that the meaning of things such

as physical pain are culturally constructed. While the physical effects of various ailments are universal, individuals embody meanings through intersubjective engagement with local ideas and norms. It is noteworthy that a similar argument has been made by MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) concerning drunkenness (see chapter 3); while the physiological impacts of alcohol on the human body may be near universal, the emotional responses and interpretations thereof are cultural and therefore learned.

To illustrate the extent to which people engage in intersubjective meaning creation about their own suffering, several phenomenological anthropologists and other scholars have examined the experience of physically disruptive ailments such as nerves and chronic pain. Many parallels can be drawn between the experiences reported in these studies and the experiences of emotional pain described by participants in this research. Low (1994), in her work on people's expression of their experience of nerves, or *nervios*, in both Costa Rica and Guatemala, stated that there is a widely documented relationship between high incidences of nerves and social and political upheaval. We can observe a parallel with the anthropological literature on drinking, summarized in chapter 3, which demonstrates connections between perceived excessive drinking and the socio-political conditions that affect colonized peoples. Moreover, as discussed in chapter 7, drinkers and other community members in Chisasibi express direct links between problematic use of alcohol and other intoxicants - and drunken states by extension - and a social and political context of colonial disruption.

Individuals who experience suffering are deeply aware of these links. According to Low (1994), patients reporting nerves, much like drinkers who participated in this research, made explicit connections between their experiences of nerves and circumstances of their lives. For example, many *nervosa* patients described family discord, domestic abuse, or death in the family as disruptive elements of their lives. Others testified to political or social distress and poverty. Low (1994) cited Finkler (1989) who argued that "nerves signify the *embodiment* of generalized adversity and recreates in the internal world of the body the perceived contradictions and disorder of the external world" (p. 174, cited in Low, 1994, p. 142). Building on this argument, Low (1994) proposed that "The embodiment *is of nerves*, [emphasis added] and nerves is constructed by local discourse and institutions, then expressed and acted upon as a *metaphor* of

social, psychological, political or economic distress. The relationship between nerves and embodied distress, therefore, is culturally mediated, both in terms of what forms of distress cause suffering and in terms of its metaphorical expression” (p. 142).

Drinking may be an embodiment of distress and adversity caused by colonial disruptions in Indigenous communities or it may be that the embodiment is of drinking, with drinking expressed as a metaphor for this distress and adversity. Regardless, a deeply embodied and emotional relationship clearly exists between the lived experiences of drinkers and wider social conditions. It is also clear, from the intersubjective engagement that comes through in the stories of drinkers, that this relationship is heavily shaped not only by personal experience but through cultural mediation. Ideas about what it means to be a drinker and what it feels like, emotionally, to be a drinker are developed through embodied engagement with learned histories of the community and of people within it. As with nerves, then, drinking and drunkenness are socially constructed as embodiments of colonial interference with the ideal Eeyou life. The emotional responses that drinkers experience and express before and while drinking, as well as the meaning they attribute to them, are culturally mediated.

Other scholars have made similar arguments for the social construction of the meaning of physical ailments. Legrand (2013), in her phenomenological analysis of anorexia, described the symptoms of anorexia as “intersubjectively meaningful” (p. 187). She discussed the social construction of the sensation of hunger and of other sensations involved in eating and its impacts on the body, and thus of one’s emotional relationship to food. She also argued that symptoms contribute to these meanings rather than being a “hidden carrier of meaning” (Legrand, 2013, p. 187).

Similarly, with respect to chronic pain as experienced by patients in New England, Jackson (1994) has argued that “pain always has meaning, always is ‘socially informed’. Thus, rather than speak of pain as physical sensation with overlays of meaning, we need to speak of pain as permeated with meaning – permeated with culture” (p. 210-211).

Physical and emotional experiences of nerves, anorexia, and chronic pain, then, are inherently social and cultural insofar as people who experience them engage in local cultural knowledges about the meanings of these experiences. They also reflect on their own social and familial lives

in relation to their experiences of these ailments. To be clear, saying that these meanings are socially and culturally constructed is by no means meant to imply that they are somehow unreal or imaginary. Rather, the intersubjective engagement involved in this process, to which Desjarlais and Throop (2011), Csordas (1994), and Strathern and Stewart (2011) all referred in their discussions of embodiment, demonstrates agentive interpretation and meaning making.

For the drinkers who participated in this research, the meaning of the painful emotions they experience – and therefore embody - and the relationship of these emotions to their drinking is socially and culturally constructed in similar ways, through their personal reflections on and intellectual engagement with their lived realities. As discussed, their lived experience of the world includes public discussions about historical causes of drinking, which provided opportunities for reflecting on how these causes have affected their own lives and contributed to their emotional states. Community views about the effects of long-term colonial disruption, such as the fur trade, residential schools, and the relocation from Fort George contribute to the meaning drinkers give the emotional states that are factors in their drinking.

Further, public discussions of issues related to drinking, such as domestic and sexual violence, along with their own exposure to the effects this behaviour has on themselves and on people around them contribute to painful feelings of shame and anger. This is demonstrated in the reflections of Tabitha, Tad, Codie, and others who talked about the impacts their drinking had on immediate family members. Therefore, not only are they reflecting on the impacts their life experiences have had on them, but they are also engaging with community knowledge of, for example, the nature of intergenerational trauma and applying these perspectives to their own lived experience. These intersubjective reflections contribute to the meaning that drinkers attribute to the painful embodied emotions that they described.

But their lived experience also includes drinking and drunken states and the reactions of other community members to them when they engage in this behaviour. Their knowledge of the fearful reactions of other community members (see chapter 9) – both because they experienced these reactions as recipients and because they sometimes experienced these reactions directly when they were sober and interacting with other drunken individuals – affect the meaning they give to

their own social position within their families and communities and to their agency within them (see chapters 10, 11, and 12).

8.2. Drinking and the Expression of Embodied Emotions

As discussed, embodiment refers to the ways in which individuals experience the world through their bodies, but also engage with and interpret these experiences and make meaning for their lives in intersubjective ways. Emotions are a crucial aspect of embodiment insofar as emotions are experienced and interpreted through intersubjective engagement with others during one's daily life. Jensen and Moran (2013) defined intersubjectivity as "The encounter with others and the manner in which humans are co-subjects cooperating together or conflicting with one another" (p. ix). Desjarlais and Throop (2011) have emphasised the importance of a consideration of intersubjective experience in ethnography as our lifeworlds include shared experiences with other people who all have their own life experiences and worldviews. Emotions are a part of the intersubjective process, then, as engagement with the experiences of one's life, including interactions with others, contributes to one's emotions and to the meaning one attributes to these emotions.

If embodied emotions themselves are signs of agency, insofar as one's understanding of these emotions requires active engagement with cultural and social knowledge, they are also required *for* agency in the form of action. Rietveld (2013), for example, has described emotion as "changes in action readiness" (p. 38). Similarly, Lyon and Barbalet (1994) have extensively argued that embodied emotions are the basis for action and a sense of having agency in the world. Indeed, emotions contribute to intersubjective interpretation and meaning creation as one's own emotional state has impacts on the reactions of others with whom one engages. Lyon and Barbalet (1994) emphasised that "emotion has social consequences" (p. 58) and affects the nature of one's social relationships:

Thus, the embodied agent cannot be treated simply in terms of how his or her experience of the world forms the basis of knowledge. This is not sufficient to explain action. Feeling must be integrated in an account of both the experience of the world and the understanding of action within it. An understanding of emotion and its foundation in sociality is part of and makes sense of embodied experience, and in turn locates within the body the basis for its agency in the world. Thus, emotion is essential

to any conception of social life as a link between embodiment on the one hand and the practical activity of social life, that is, the praxis of the body, on the other (p. 62).

Emotional states emerging through the acts of experiencing the world and intersubjective engagement with other emotional and cognitive beings become embodied and help shape further action and experience. The emotions that drinkers embody and experience as contributors, enablers, or products of drinking are not only results of agentic engagement with the elements of their lifeworlds. They are bases for agency insofar as these emotions are involved in further intersubjective evaluations that individuals make about themselves and their actions. Drinkers participating in this research have explicitly stated that their emotions contributed to their drinking *and* that the resulting drunkenness has affected their emotional state, either by temporarily obscuring their pain or by giving them opportunities to vent them. This obscuring or venting of pain often takes place in the context of social interactions and communication with others.

8.2.1. “Please Bring Me My Wine!”: Drinking as Both Expression and Numbing of Pain

Drinkers, like all other people, interpret and make meaning for their lived experience and for the emotions that emerge thereof through intersubjective engagement. This agentic process of engagement with local knowledges takes place through active reflection, as seen above. However, this engagement is pursued during experience itself. For drinkers, life experience, or life as lived, includes drunken states. In these states, as is the case with myriad ecstatic or altered states that anthropologists study, individuals experience physical and emotional sensations that are both acted on in the moment and embodied to become part of the person’s history. Given the importance of drunken states in the lifeworlds of drinkers, I would be remiss in not considering them as sources of knowledge and insight.

Drinkers who participated in this research talked about drunkenness with mixed feelings. On one hand, drunkenness helped them with their stated goal of alleviating emotional pain, instilled positive feelings about themselves, and facilitated social interactions. On the other hand, there were negative aspects of drunkenness that were readily acknowledged, such as a feeling of lacking control, scary experiences, and enhanced emotional pain.

In terms of alleviating the painful emotions described above, participants stated that they had more positive feelings about themselves at certain stages of drunkenness compared to a lot of the shame they typically felt when sober. According to Tad, being drunk was a positive experience as the pleasant feelings overshadowed stress and sadness: "It's just fun. For a while, you don't have to think and worry about all your problems or think about how shitty you've been feeling" (34 years old, Chisasibi November 15, 2010).

Individuals who were in drunken states when I spoke to them affirmed, as described in chapter 2, that drinking was fun and festive. Despite occasional angry words, drunken individuals encountered in public were generally cheerful, and conversations were interspersed with laughs and jokes. Drinkers overtly spoke about the importance of joking in these states, and how it allowed them to alleviate negative emotions.

The importance of joking and laughing was also highlighted during private gatherings. This occasion, described in my fieldnotes from June 12, 2011, illustrates this:

At one point, they played the inevitable "Hotel California". As usual, everyone sang along - who doesn't know the lyrics to this song anyway?!? Cindy was pretty toasted by this point and sang the loudest of all. Everyone cracked up when she shouted the lyric: "Please bring me my wine!", lifting up her own glass of wine. After the song was over, Cindy continued to be noisy for a while, laughing drunkenly at her own jokes. Graham looked back and forth between her and me, probably thinking about why I was here in town, and said to me: "It's good to let that out once in a while. But they're safe here, so it's ok."

Later in the evening, Cindy talked about how she continued to need these periods where she could just let go and not think about her inner pain too much while she worked on healing.

Particularly at the beginning of one's drunken state, drinkers said they enjoyed a happy buzz that facilitated social interactions. Dean, in recalling his days of drinking, said "It gives you a boost, you know? A sense of belonging" (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011). Codie, Gavin, Tabitha, and many others also spoke about the positive feelings associated with feeling close to others when they were drinking. "I couldn't be affectionate the rest of the time", recalled Tabitha (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011). Codie related that "When I was out with them... yeah, we had some fights sometimes... we were close though. We told each other a lot, that we cared about each other, that we were glad to see each other" (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

For some drinkers, drunkenness afforded feelings of bravery and resistance, particularly to police authority. Codie shared that, when he was drunk, he felt a certain level of invincibility: “They couldn’t get to me. I was the big tough guy. Untouchable. And that felt good” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). He also talked specifically about the police when describing his past public drinking: “I had no respect for those guys. I kinda felt like doing what I was doing was a way of, ya know, flipping them off” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Gavin also reflected on an anti-police sentiment that he felt while wandering the streets in a drunken state with other drinkers: “It’s a way of showing them they can’t control us” (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011).⁵⁸

Resistance to police authority also came up in conversations during public encounters with people who were drunk. Many variations of negative statements about the police, such as “fuck the cops” were peppered throughout these interactions, for example. In each case, either police officers had walked or driven by, or I had asked a question about whether they were worried about police intervention. Several field anecdotes illustrate this.



Figure 14. – Graffiti on a shed between houses in Chisasibi. Photo credit: Jacky Vallée.

One encounter took place with a group of six men in their 20s and 30s on a weekday afternoon on the dirt trails between the houses in the town centre. Most of them were quiet and, while they swayed slightly and had cans of beer in their hands, they were able to engage in coherent

⁵⁸ A deeper discussion of resistance is provided in chapter 10 in the context of a discussion of choice.

conversation. However, one of them was very loud and exuberant and made frequent exclamations about his greatness. The others repeatedly tried to get their loud friend to quiet down.

After the 4th or 5th time that one of the guys tried to quiet down the one who was very drunk, I asked if they were worried that he was drawing unwanted attention to them, and that it would attract the police. They laughed. Miles said: "We don't give a shit about cops or anyone. He's just annoying - Ehhh!" (November 5, 2010).

On the morning of April 13, 2011, an actual interaction with a police officer preceded exclamations of anti-police sentiment. I had been chatting for about 10 minutes with a mixed-gender group of mildly intoxicated drinkers by the commercial centre:

At one point, an Eeyou police officer came by and spoke to them in Eeyou. Dale answered politely and then told me that the officer said they couldn't go inside the commercial building. The cop had seemed friendly about it - he even smiled - and didn't bother them other than that. The interaction was pretty smooth. However, I heard "fuck the cops" two or three times after that during our conversation, and one guy laughed and made a loud proclamation about needing to pee as he headed inside, shortly after the cop walked off. Everyone except Dale followed him.

After a bit more conversation, I asked Dale about his interactions with the police, given that possessing alcohol in Chisasibi is illegal. He smiled and said "I'm not afraid of cops" (24 years old, Chisasibi, April 13, 2011).

Notwithstanding the association of drunkenness with the ability to express defiance or affection while eclipsing painful emotions, drinkers acknowledged that drunkenness had negative features as well. Being drunk was seen as something that made them more likely to do things that they would not normally do – this is discussed in chapter 11 in the context of agency and moral evaluation. In addition to this, there are some unpleasant or frightening sensations that were attributed to drunken states. In line with the view shared by many community members that people are not themselves when drinking, several research participants who identified as drinkers shared that, in certain states of drunkenness, they felt out of control. Codie elaborated on this sensation by describing how he could see himself committing actions, such as violence toward his girlfriend, as though it were someone else acting in his place. "It's like I was watching a movie of someone who looked like me" (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Agatha, in a rare instance

when she talked about her own past as a drinker, shared that she felt possessed by a spirit when she was in drunken states (Agatha, March 29, 2015, 46 years old, Montreal).⁵⁹

Some other participants talked about times that they felt they were being threatened by malevolent people or supernatural forces. Everett, who was a regular heavy drinker at the time of this research, related two instances of this. In one case, he remembered running home from a party while drunk and feeling as though he was being chased by other people from the party. When he turned around, he could not see anyone, but he recalled feeling their presence and hearing their footsteps. Another incident concerned black robed spirits that were surrounding his house to keep him from leaving after he had come home drunk. Adam, who had stopped drinking several months before we met, also spoke of frightening spiritual experiences. An ardent Christian, he associated the frightening things he encountered while drunk with demonic forces that he attributed to alcohol: "Drinking is evil. Alcohol is evil" (22 years old, Chisasibi, May 22, 2011).

Another negative feature associated with drunkenness is the tendency for painful emotions to become enhanced once the initial "high" had faded. This was noted in the previous section but merits some consideration here. Drinkers who recalled being drunk could point just as easily to times when their anger and shame was made worse by their drinking after initial feelings of joy and connection. "I don't know, man, at the end of the night I always wonder if it's worth it. I felt great for a while, then everything comes rushing back 10 times worse: the anger, the self-hate...it's just shitty" (Codie, 35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

Paradoxically, though, it is in drunken states that many drinkers felt comfortable *expressing* these painful emotions. As with the greater facility in showing affection and friendship, drunkenness was often a time when people felt free to share their feelings and even cry about them. Dale, when sober, acknowledged that he was only able to open up when he was drunk. The shame was overwhelming when he was sober. He still felt it when he was drunk, but he was able to talk about it and balance it with other things, like the excitement of going to the bush and his pride in his Eeyou identity. On June 12, 2011, Cindy, mentioned above, also shared that she was able to talk

⁵⁹ This is also discussed further in chapter 11 in a consideration of the phenomenon of shifting agency.

about her process because she was in a drunken state. She said that she never talked so openly about her feelings and her personal life when she was sober, but assured me that she was sincere: “None of this is fake, alright?”

8.2.2. Drinking as a Phenomenological Act of Communication

Situations of drunkenness afford opportunities for drinkers to verbally express their emotions, whether it be sadness or anger about their personal situations or resentment toward police authority. An exploration of the phenomenology of suffering is provided above to support the argument that the meaning of embodied suffering is constructed through intersubjective engagement. The analyses presented in these works are of physical suffering. However, the arguments these authors present with regards to the expression of physical suffering can be applied to the ways in which drinkers express their emotional suffering or use drunken states to facilitate the experiencing and expression of less painful emotions.

Indeed, phenomenological studies of physical suffering go beyond discussing the ways in which the meaning of suffering is constructed and embodied. They discuss how the *expression* of suffering can be located within a shared system of communication and understanding. Therefore, not only does one understand and make meaning of their suffering through intersubjective engagement, but one also knows how to express their suffering in a way that others will understand because of this same engagement.

There is general agreement among scholars of the phenomenology of suffering on the need for action, in the form of communication, in response to physical suffering. Morris (2013), for instance, referred to chronic pain as disruptive to one’s lifeworld. In response to this disruption, actions to rebuild that world are needed. Jackson (1994) has also discussed the need for action in response to pain: “pain – that quintessentially private sensation, experience, emotion – depends on social action to make it ‘real’” (p. 217). These actions take the form of communication of pain symptoms. For drinkers in Chisasibi, drinking and drunkenness are actions in response to the disruption that is their emotional pain. The emotional suffering that drinkers described as contributors to their drinking, as well as the ambivalence that they have embodied, are *expressed*, or communicated through drunkenness. As Low (1994) has argued with nerves, then, drinking

and drunkenness can then be said to act as communication of social breakdown and the distress that goes with it.

At the same time, drinkers indicated that the act of drinking has a specific goal: to reduce – albeit temporarily – the impact of painful emotions and to feel more pleasant ones. As described above, many research participants affirmed that drunkenness allows for the expression of camaraderie and rebellion, notwithstanding their ambivalence and their acknowledgement that there are negative experiences that arise during states of drunkenness. Whether these emotions are ephemeral and arise out of drunken states, or if they are merely uncovered by these states is irrelevant to this argument. What *is* relevant is that drinkers associate these emotions with drunkenness and attach positive meanings to them, and, by extension, to drunken states.

Some scholars of the phenomenology of suffering have argued that the symptoms of suffering emerge when there are no words to describe this suffering. Jackson (1994) argued that pain resists “everyday-world language”:

A pain-full body occupies a world different from the everyday world. Just like the ineffable worlds of dreams, day-dreams, or deep religious or musical experience, the pain-full world has its own system of meaning and the inhabitants have their own forms for communicating that meaning. We can say that this world has its own language, its own cognitive-affective style (Jackson, 1994, p. 213-214).

Similarly, Legrand (2013), in her study of anorexia symptoms, has argued that symptoms “occur when speech is muzzled, they come out when words are missing” (p. 190) and that “symptoms would not have meaning *on their own*, but only when inserted into the signifying *chains* delivered by a given patient” (p. 190).

While many community members in Chisasibi state that drinkers should talk about their feelings while sober, several drinkers who participated in this research shared that they had great difficulty expressing emotions outside of drunken states. Indeed, the emotions expressed during states of drunkenness, whether they were painful or joyful, were much less present when I encountered drinkers in states of sobriety. If they were able to discuss them with me in an interview setting, it was because they had already spent much time engaging in reflection on the matter. Indeed, most of the drinkers who participated in the interview component of this

research were either former drinkers or current drinkers who indicated that they were, or had recently been, in a period of deep reflection about their choices (see chapters 9, 10, and 12).

However, they also indicated that in previous phases of their lives as heavy drinkers, they felt unable to use words to express their suffering, whether it be pain, anger, or shame. Getting drunk was a means to alleviate this suffering, albeit temporarily, but it was also a means to *express* it, particularly when it was done with other drinkers. As with Jackson's (1994) chronic pain sufferers, being with other drinkers helps foster a sense of commonality – one does not need to explain the need to drink to fellow drinkers.

As with any communication, the expression of physical suffering requires an audience – real or imagined - for it to be communicative in nature (Legrand, 2013). But, again, as with any communication, meaning is not always received in the way that it is intended. As such, the communication of suffering becomes responsive to social and cultural ideas about appropriate expression of this suffering. For instance, Morris (2013) has indicated that chronic pain is not expressed the same way as acute pain and is therefore not interpreted the same. Contrary to acute pain, the expression of chronic pain tends to be suppressed. Similarly, Jackson (1994) has shown that, in the ethnographic context of chronic pain sufferers in New England, outward expressions of pain such as grimaces and moans are perceived as allowable for temporary pain but lead sufferers to feel they are not taken seriously if these expressions are ongoing. On the other hand, they are not taken seriously either if they suffer in silence.

These works indicate that communication through the expression of symptoms is understood differently among fellow sufferers than between sufferers and non-sufferers. However, in the case of the emotional suffering embodied by drinkers, the suffering is shared and professed by many others in the community of Chisasibi, as with Indigenous communities across Canada and around the world. In the same way that people in the ethnographic contexts mentioned in the studies of physical suffering share symbolic understandings of the symptoms of physical suffering, I argue that people in Chisasibi – whether they drink or not – share the understanding that certain kinds of drinking and drunkenness are expressions of emotional suffering. They also share an understanding of the origins of this suffering: centuries of colonial disruption and its ongoing

impacts on contemporary realities. So, I suggest that it is not so much the case that community members who are not drinking or drunk at a given time misunderstand the suffering that is expressed through drinking and drunkenness. Rather, it is a disagreement about how this suffering *ought* to be expressed – a theme that is explored in more depth in chapter 9 along with a discussion of ambivalence about the norms concerning social control.

If expressing physical suffering to those who do not share it is fraught with the possibility of misunderstanding, being with others who understand makes it easier to communicate without having to explain one's pain. Indeed, even if chronic pain sufferers, for instance, disagree about the causes and treatment of their pain, there is mutual understanding "about the phenomenological experience of pain" (Jackson, 1994, p. 217). As described by drinkers, being with other drinkers is comforting. The camaraderie and joking, along with the sense of caring for others and being cared for, is a strong pull, despite awareness of potential negative consequences such as violence toward each other and toward others or increased emotional pain.

8.3. Conclusion

Research participants who identified as drinkers demonstrated processes of agency through their interpretation of their embodied emotions with reference to the macro and micro level circumstances of their lifeworlds. In other words, their capacity to engage as makers of meaning is one way in which one can argue that they are not passive victims of colonial history, despite the important ways in which this history shapes their lived experience. Not only was Codie, for instance, able to express that he was "just in so much pain" (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011), but he and others were able to identify the sources of their pain at multiple levels. However, agency clearly goes beyond the interpretation of socio-political and economic realities and the emotions that arise within them. It includes, among other things, the ways in which people interact with others and make decisions about their actions (this latter idea is explored in depth in chapters 10, 11, and 12).

These aspects of agency are not detached from that of embodied emotions of course. Rather, emotions are central to other aspects of agency, as Lyon and Barbalet (1994) suggested. Indeed, embodied emotions are acted upon in contexts of drunkenness. On one hand, drunkenness

serves to alleviate these emotions, but on the other, it provides a channel for their expression. This overview of drinkers as people who embody emotions through intersubjective engagement with cultural knowledge and who express these emotions during personal life experiences helps set the stage for further discussions of community relations in the context of a dry community and of the self-evaluation as willful agents and as moral actors.

Chapter 9 - “Don’t Talk to Drunks”: Community Ambivalence about Drinking, Drunkenness, and Social Control

A large portion of my time in Chisasibi was spent wandering the community. This wandering was not idle. I was spending them where many of the people I wanted to connect with spent their time: along the paths between the houses, next to the commercial centre, or other spaces where I would often encounter groups of drinkers. These were the “drunks” I had been warned about so many times: the people I had not only chosen to *not* ignore, but from whom I wanted to hear. Despite what some friends and other community members had told me, they did indeed have things to say about drinking and a host of other topics. Among those topics was a feeling of being rejected by other community members.

Meanwhile, if the initial reaction to the idea of talking to people who were drinking or drunk seemed appalling to people who issued those warnings against it, deeper conversation revealed much more complex perspectives. People who encounter drunken individuals, whether they themselves drank at the time of this research or in the past, have ambivalent feelings. On one hand, they feel compassion toward people who are obviously in pain – a pain that they intimately understand. On the other, they worry about personal safety.

Linked to these concerns are views of drinking as transgressive in nature. The most obvious transgression is of a legal nature, given the presence of a by-law that prohibits alcohol. But drinking, and related behaviours, are often seen as culturally and socially transgressive. Drinkers, it is said, have lost their culture and are unable to engage in appropriate social interactions based on cherished Eeyou cultural norms. Within this complex blend of views lies ambivalence about accountability. Chisasibi is a community where people strive to maintain a balance between values and norms associated with an ancestral way of life and the appropriation of Western institutions, such as the justice and policing systems. In this context, the path toward something that would help deal with problematic drinking in a way that promotes both healing and accountability is hard to find.

9.1. Drunken Encounters in Chisasibi

Not all drinking in Chisasibi happens in extreme ways, and not all of it happens in public. Indeed, the latent acceptance of private and moderate drinking is discussed in chapter 10. However, public encounters between people who are drinking or drunk and those who are not elicited reactions that shed light on a range of community views about drinking more generally, especially to the point of drunkenness. These were opportunities to engage with people, whether they were drinking and drunk or not, as they were responding in spontaneous ways to the encounter. These exchanges and observations of people's reactions to each other provided insight into the ambivalence that permeated community views about drinking and drunkenness. Therefore, these kinds of encounters are discussed here to illustrate some of these views. Descriptions of these encounters are based on observations, discussions during such encounters, and on the accounts of similar encounters by community members.⁶⁰

9.1.1. "I Don't Want to Talk to Them Either": Hanging Out with Public Drinkers

The drinkers that I encountered in the community in the daytime and who were in states of drunkenness were often on their way to or from a party, or in search of more alcohol from bootleggers. In some cases, they had been thrown out of a house and were continuing to drink by a shed. It was extremely rare for me to walk by a group of drinkers without them interacting with me first. Their initial greetings tended to be loud and exuberant compared to the quiet demeanour of most people in the community as they went about their daily lives, emphasizing the drunkenness of the individuals. Further interaction was calmer with bursts of laughter or shouting. The typical pattern of such interactions is described in chapter 6.

A striking feature of these encounters was the reaction of drinkers to other people walking by. Not only did they initiate interactions with me; they initiated – or at least attempted to initiate –

⁶⁰ To be clear, the goal of this discussion is not to analyze the discursive nature of these interactions. My lack of ability to communicate in or understand *ijiyiyuimuwin*, my lack of knowledge of the subtleties of Eeyou non-verbal communication, and my lack of knowledge about specific inter-personal relationships between drinkers and passers-by make this impossible.

interactions with nearly anyone who walked by. For the most part, passers-by ignored the drinkers I was hanging out with. Silence, as discussed further below, is an advised strategy during such an encounter. People who did respond to drinkers usually made a quick statement without slowing their pace. This is illustrated in my fieldnotes from April 13, 2011:

As we chatted, many people passed by on their way in and out of the commercial building. Many people gave brief glances in our direction and looked away or at the ground. On occasion, people would stare at our group. Once in a while, one of the group members would say something in Eeyou or English to a passer-by, who would either give a brief response or not say anything at all.

As the people who did respond generally spoke in *iiyiyuyimuwin*, I could only get a sense of what they had said based on the reactions of the drinkers who had been addressed. One such reaction was “Well, I don’t want to talk to them either!” (Fieldnotes, September 21, 2010). Others simply swore at the people who ignored them, then quickly turned their attention back to their own group. When the context allowed for it, I asked what had happened and why they were mad at the people who had passed by. There was occasionally mention of an existing conflict between the individuals, or of the perception that someone who was once a friend was no longer talking to them. Generally, they simply complained about people ignoring them.

Early encounters with drinkers demonstrated that they were used to being ignored. When I responded positively to their approaches, drinkers often expressed surprise and made statements about how they did not think I would talk to them, since most other people did not – especially strangers. For example, the expectation that I would ignore drinkers came up the first time I ran into Miles, Orson, Lyle, and a few other men who appeared to be in their 20s and 30s on one of the paths between the houses.

They were walking in the uneven step that was characteristic of drunken people walking in the community. They were heading toward the town centre, in the opposite direction that I was. Miles was the first to approach and acknowledge me with a “Hey hey hey!”. One of the men who accompanied them was in a seemingly extreme drunken state and came forward quickly and burst out into a series of proclamations about his greatness. Although Miles had originally

seemed to want to talk, he apologized for his loud friend and said that he would get him away from me:

I said: "It doesn't bother me. I don't judge. We all have our moments." Miles exchanged glances with 2 other guys, Orson and Lyle, and they stopped walking to chat with me. The others stood by, quietly, except for the one who had first approached me. He kept circulating in the area, continuing to loudly proclaim his greatness. The other guys asked me what I was doing in town, and when I told them, they seemed interested but still a bit reticent. I told them I had business cards, but I said I was shy to pass them around since it felt pretty formal. But they insisted that I give them all one. Even one of the quieter guys who didn't say anything reached over to get one (November 5, 2010).

When I expressed surprise that they wanted something so "business-like", some of the men laughed and expressed that they were surprised someone would offer them one. In the conversation that followed, they indicated that people who came to the community to do research usually only talked to the same people: band council members, people involved in land disputes, and people renown in the community for having cultural knowledge.

When I asked people who were drinking publicly why they thought people ignored them, there was generally very little response. Everett, who I met on April 13, 2011, the day after I had gone on the radio to talk about my research, said that he felt people looked down on him and other drinkers. He explained that hearing me talk about drinking in a non-judgemental way got his attention because it was rare that he heard anyone speak that way. "They all think less of me. Of all of us. Because we drink. We're not bad people!" he exclaimed. Some drinkers acknowledged that other community members were afraid of them. "I guess they think we'll pick a fight with them or something," said Walt (September 21, 2010).

Usually, though, people had no response. The following encounter illustrates the usual pattern. My son was being babysat by a friend one evening and I was walking back home to get something before going to a talent show at the community centre. I was approached by two women, Bernice and Margery, sharing a can of beer near my apartment behind the school. After a bit of conversation, they asked me if I could give them and their friend Clint a ride to Chinatown. I accepted, and then they asked if they could go inside and use the bathroom first. When I

accepted this as well, Bernice loudly proclaimed how nice I was. She continued to express this once we were on our way:

As we got into the car, Bernice kept saying: "You're so nice to give us a ride like this! Usually, no one wants to help." My response: "As long as no one throws up in my car, it's fine!", made Clint laugh. I asked Bernice and the others why people would ignore them when they asked for help. The mood turned grim for a moment while they thought about it but no one seemed to have an answer on the spot. Instead, Bernice asked me again where I worked. When she found out that I worked at the school, she asked if I knew Bernadette, who worked there too, and we continued to talk about mutual connections until we got to the house in Chinatown (Fieldnotes, May 20, 2011).

While I obtained very few answers to the question of why people ignored them when they were drinking or drunk during these encounters, later conversations with drinkers yielded some perspectives. In interviews, several respondents who identified as drinkers said that when they were sober, they avoided people who were drunk: "I stay away from drunks when I'm not drunk and just out in town, shopping or hanging around" (Codie, 35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Some respondents acknowledged that they felt judgemental toward drinkers, even if they were drinkers themselves, when they were in a sober state, *especially* if they were in the process of quitting or had recently quit. For example, Adam said "Now that I know better, I guess I do judge that behaviour" (22 years old, Chisasibi, May 22, 2011). However, most respondents felt that it was their own shame that led them to avoid drinkers in those moments. "You've been there, with them, ya know, and you know what they've been up to. And they know what you were up to, maybe a few nights before. So when you see them, you're ashamed because you see yourself, and you don't like what you look like. You're also afraid of what they'll say about you" (Gavin, 36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011).

The anecdotes described above show that many first encounters with people who were drinking or drunk in public were highly shaped by the expectation of being ignored. Their reactions to the very fact that I actively wanted to talk to them often showed surprise and interest. That said, it is important to acknowledge some elements of the context of these encounters. For one thing, my encounters with drinkers were significantly different than their encounters with other non-drinkers in the community. I was not an established community member, and I was not related to any of them, which very likely affected how they would react to me. Their interactions with

me were not likely representative of their interactions with their fellow community members to whom one could be related and with whom one might have shared experiences, drunken or otherwise. The ways in which I was approached by drinkers and drunken people likely shares a greater resemblance to the ways in which they approached others in my situation: “white” and other non-Indigenous people who were in the community for varying lengths of time.

Furthermore, the ways other community members responded to the groups of people I was talking with may have been at least partly a result of my presence. During my interactions with groups of drinkers, I was usually physically encircled by group members, and as such could see the ways in which people looked at or ignored the group from within the point of view of the drinkers. But according to many people in Chisasibi, it is rather unusual for an outsider to the community to stop and talk with “drunks”. So, I cannot know whether the reactions of others during my conversations with drinkers were typical or if they were mostly showing surprise at an outsider hanging around with drinkers. From the words of the drinkers in these situations, being ignored was a common occurrence. However, it is impossible for me to know whether things happen in similar ways at other times.

Finally, as mentioned several times in this work, I cannot assume anything about the drinking behaviour of community members who walk by groups of people who are drinking. Indeed, as attested to in discussions with people who identified in a variety of ways with reference to their drinking status, one can identify as a former drinker and still engage in various levels of drinking. Therefore, it is quite possible that passers-by are people who drink in private, in moderation, on occasion, or even in the same manner that the people they are seeing. It is impossible and inadvisable to make any generalizations about why people ignore those who are publicly drunk or drinking based on observed behaviour. Indeed, that is not the point here.

Rather, in keeping with the phenomenological imperative to take informants seriously and to be inclusive of altered states, it behooves me, as a researcher, to take seriously the perception of drunken respondents that they are systematically ignored. And in keeping with the argument that their embodied painful emotions are expressed *while drunk* and even *through the state of drunkenness itself*, it is also possible to surmise that the emotions they experience during these

states become embodied whether these perceptions have a basis in objective fact or not. In other words, whether passers-by ignore them out of judgement, fear, or self-preservation, the emotions elicited by their silence – sadness, frustration, anger, shame – remain. Their perceptions of rejection are very real to them, regardless of their degree of accuracy. And it is these embodied perceptions that guide their behaviour and their interpretation of their place in the community. If they believe that they are not cared for or taken seriously, refusals by others to talk to them reinforce that belief. Their connection to other drinkers who feel the same way both intensifies, and is intensified by, this belief.

9.1.2. “Not When They’re Drunk”: Silence, Fear, and Ambivalence in Encounters with Drinkers

In situations where I was spending time with community members, or just part of the crowd with no particular social affiliation, I was able to see these kinds of encounters from the perspectives of community members who were not drinking or drunk. It is nearly impossible for me, as a non-Eeyou, to make definitive statements about the emotions conveyed by people when they looked away from drinkers, changed their facial expressions, or remained silent. However, these observable patterns coupled with what people generally said about their own encounters with people who were drunk provided enough information to ascertain that ignoring people who are drunk is considered the best course of action.

As the chapter title suggests, one of the most frequent pieces of advice I received during my master’s research, during social visits, and early in my doctoral research was “Don’t talk to drunks”. Usually, this phrase was followed by advice about safety:

After the Pow Wow, Antonio [one of the members of the family I was staying with, a man in his forties who did not currently drink] offered me a ride home. When I said I felt like walking, he said to be careful walking around at night. “Stay away from drunks - they’ll just cause trouble,” he said with a fatherly tone (Fieldnotes, August 8, 1998).⁶¹

⁶¹ It is worth noting that these warnings were more frequent during my master’s research as I conducted it before my transition from female to male. It may be that women are perceived to be in even greater danger from “drunks” because of the potential for sexual violence. As a male-presenting person and a visible outsider, I was possibly in less danger of drunken violence.

To be clear, drinkers are included among those who expressed concerns about the presence and behaviour of “drunks”. As indicated in the previous section, research participants who identified as drinkers were among those who claimed to not talk to people when they were drunk. Indeed, even people who were in drunken states themselves sometimes gave similar advice as Antonio, as is seen in the following interaction by the river during my master’s research:

I came up to a red pickup truck that was slowly driving in my direction. The driver had his window open and leaned out to ask me who I was. “Are you a nurse or something?” [During my first stay in Chisasibi, this was the most frequent question I was asked.] I could smell beer on his breath. I told him I was a student but I was too shy to say much more than that. He asked me what I was doing, and I said I was looking around, getting to know my way around town. “Well...be careful...there are a lot of drunks around” (Fieldnotes, August 25, 1998).

People not only warned me to ignore those who were drunk; people I was hanging around with during daily activities in town acted on their own advice, sometimes with choice words under their breath. The first time this happened was during an encounter in 1998, described in the introduction to this dissertation. I was walking with a woman I had just met and who was talking to me about her family’s role in land rights struggles. As we approached a man that I knew, and who was in a drunken state at the time, she spat out “Drunks!” under her breath and led me in a different direction to get away from him (August 10, 1998). Most encounters I observed or was a part of when I was not hanging out with drinkers themselves followed a similar trajectory, with people making a quiet comment to me about the presence of “drunks” and either reminding me to be silent or inviting me to walk in another direction.

At other times, there was minimal interaction, which appeared to be enough to satisfy the drinkers who had approached but which still indicated a lack of desire to engage. For example, the following anecdote occurred on a weekday afternoon when I was helping an older couple strip bark off wooden poles to make a *miichiwaahp* behind their house.

So I spent about an hour or so stripping bark. It was mostly silent work. About a half hour into my time there, I spotted a group of men walking along the path in our direction. They were walking with the familiar stagger that showed they were intoxicated and a couple of them were carrying cans of beer. As they got closer, I saw the couple I was working with glance at them and quickly glance away, sharing a look and then focussing on their work again. When the group finally got to where we were,

one of the men asked us if we had a cigarette. The woman, not looking up from her work, replied, in a deliberate but neutral tone: “No, we do not.” As usual, when I was with people who obviously disapproved of drinking, I was unsure of how to react to the drinkers. So I simply handed the guy a couple of smokes with a smile. He said: “Yeah!” and continued walking with his group (Fieldnotes, April 20, 2011).

When people talked to me about their encounters with people who were drinking or drunk, they described similar strategies. Caitlin, Adam, Zoe, and others described how they would deliberately look away and walk straight ahead without stopping when they ran into groups of drinkers. Caitlin explained that “The only thing you can really do is try to ignore them. There is no point in trying to talk to them” (43 years old, Chisasibi, April 13, 2011).

Some research participants described encounters with drunken individuals in their workplaces such as various stores, the hospital, and the school. These encounters were usually described as disruptive and frustrating: “They just show up and you can’t understand anything they’re saying. They’re in your face and you can’t really ignore them” (Sabrina, 24 years old, October 20, 2010).

At other times, people’s reactions to public drunkenness were one of resignation and humour. Arielle, an Eeyou co-worker who was discussing her prior experiences as a high school student in Chisasibi, laughingly described how a fellow student had arrived in class drunk. The presence of a drunken student was not unusual, but she felt it was funny because the teacher commented that even though the student was drunk, he was the only one who had done his homework (February 28, 2011). I also observed reactions of laughter during one incident in the commercial building:

While I was chatting with Cassandra on the bench [in the commercial building], there was a guy who had passed out from drinking on a table in front of the coffee shop. People walking by looked at him and smiled, even the seniors who always hang out there. Some younger people laughingly played with the guy’s clothes. Even Cassandra [who was aware of my research project] giggled and said: “Well, there’s a drunk for you right there.” Eventually, one of his friends, also drunk as we could tell from his stumbling, came to wake him up and, with a lot of difficulty, guided him out of the commercial centre (January 12, 2011).⁶²

⁶² It is important to note here, as well, that the presence of laughter in reference to incidents involving drinking or in the presence, as above, of someone who is drunk and unconscious does not necessarily imply levity. Eeyouch often say that they laugh in all situations, including tragic ones such as funerals.

In the latter anecdote, of course, there was no risk of interaction with the drunken individual. But in the usual scenarios, the drunken individuals are awake and active. The safest course of action in the eyes of many is to ignore them.

When that cannot happen because of the context, discomfort is expressed in the presence of drunken individuals even when there is no immediate threat of violence. Several anecdotes from my field journal illustrate this. One of them occurred early during the present research:

When I was waiting in line at the cash [at the Northern store], I heard a high, uneven laugh. I looked over toward the nearest aisle and there were 3 young men who were obviously drunk. One of the young men held a big bag of chips. He addressed the man who was in line behind me in Eeyou. This man replied and nervously laughed with the drunken young man. Meanwhile, people in other lines gave quick glances and turned away. The man behind me looked back and forth from the youths to me. Finally, he said to me in English, with an apologetic tone: "They're drunk." I smiled, shrugged, and said: "Meh, it happens to all of us." He returned an uncomfortable smile and a tentative nod (August 7, 2010).

As was done with drinkers in the previous section, I now turn to the question of why: why do people who are not drunk themselves abstain from talking to those who are? As previously mentioned, some drinkers who made it a practice, while sober, not to talk to people who were drunk indicated that they were ashamed or embarrassed by the behaviour of drinkers and were afraid to be associated with them. Research participants who did not identify as drinkers, however, spoke of fear and danger.

As indicated above, warnings to not talk to "drunks" often included warnings against danger; there is often fear that drunkenness could lead to verbal aggression and violence. Friends frequently expressed anger about the number of "drunks" that wandered near their home. "I'm gonna put a sign that says 'No drunks'," exclaimed Agatha one time in frustration during a conversation about her weekend (March 29, 2011). She was afraid to let her grandchildren play outside out of fear that they would be harmed by "drunks" walking by.

Melinda had similar concerns. As described in chapter 7, she expressed resentment that drunken individuals often barged in on public events where they were not wanted: "And if you tell them

to leave, you always worry they'll get violent, or shout, or something like that. There's no easy way to deal with that. We all want to stay safe" (56 years old, Chisasibi, October 21, 2010).

Incidents of violence involving people who were drunk were frequently recounted by research participants. The people involved were usually known by the person telling the story. Zoe, for example, told me of several incidents where she witnessed drunken violence in public. One of these incidents involved her cousin and her cousin's boyfriend in the centre of town: "They were having an argument right there in public and hitting each other!" (26 years old, Chisasibi, March 7, 2011). Indeed, many acts of drunken violence are said to happen between people who are drunk. However, fears about being subject to such violence are very common. "I would worry about that [talking to drinkers]. Be careful. They can turn on you if you say the wrong thing", elaborated Zoe when I was telling her about my project (26 years old, Chisasibi, November 10, 2010).

This fear of aggression on behalf of drunken individuals is often shown by non-Indigenous community members as well. When discussing my research with colleagues during breaks at the school, I frequently received warnings to be careful from fellow school workers who were non-Indigenous. For example, Wasim described how he would actively avoid crossing paths with groups of drunken individuals when he saw them, even if he had to go out of his way. He warned me to be careful, as he felt they could be very dangerous (November 16, 2010).

Overall, the reaction to a discussion of, or the presence of, people who are drunk is one of fear or anger. However, this reaction is nearly always permeated with ambivalence; if "drunks" as a category are scary, individuals who are drunk, especially drunk on a regular basis, are suffering and in need of help and compassion. But help and compassion are hard to offer precisely because drunken people are scary. Therefore, many people expressed mixed feelings. They have ideas on how they *should* respond to drunken individuals, but often feel unable to act on those feelings because of fear.

These feelings were expressed by community members multiple times in conversation. Caitlin, for example, explained that "I feel bad for them. I think they are dealing with a lot of pain and

they need to express it. I get that! And I'd love to listen to them and try to help. But not when they're drunk. I just never know when they'll get aggressive - they can change their mood really fast! I can't take that chance" (43 years old, Chisasibi, April 13, 2011).

Similarly, Agatha, who was cited above as complaining about "drunks" near her home, had strong reactions when I described the typical avoidance reactions I noticed in others when I was hanging around chatting with drunken individuals or the advice I was given to ignore "drunks". She angrily said that she would never say anything mean to someone who was drunk. She expressed disappointment that people had told me to ignore drunken people since she considered them to be humans worthy of respect. "But it's hard to not be frustrated with them in that state," she conceded (46 years old, Chisasibi, August 20, 2010). Brent expressed similar thoughts: "When I see them like that... well, it's just sad that they wind up in that situation," he said, shaking his head. "When you talk to them, you have to tell them that it's ok to talk. To let it out. They need that!" (57 years old, Chisasibi, October 7, 2010).

The ambivalence expressed by community members toward people who drink or who are drunk in public is deeply shaped by the knowledge that all the community members have of the colonial roots of what is considered excessive drinking. They may initially express negative judgements about public drinking and drunkenness, or any drinking that is considered extreme and leads people to engage in problematic behaviours. However, further discussion reveals that they also feel compassion for people who have been subject to the same social disruptions as they have. But since the fear of aggression often overrides that feeling of compassion, people in drunken states are not necessarily aware that there are people out there who care about their well-being. Attempts made in the community to "deal with" drinking, while they may come from a place of caring and a desire for collective healing, are often perceived as attempts at control, a point which is elaborated in chapter 10.

9.1.3. Shared Worlds of Pain: Conflicting Views of Emotional Expression

In the previous chapter, I provide an overview of some of the work of phenomenologists studying the experience and expression of suffering. A key point in that discussion is that physical suffering

represents a disruption to one's lifeworld. This suffering needs to be expressed; however, the communication of this pain is often done without words (Jackson, 94; Legrand, 2013). Among those who share similar pain, a language of pain develops which is easily understood amongst themselves but less so by others: "the pain-full world has its own system of meaning and the inhabitants have their own forms for communicating that meaning. We can say that this world has its own language, its own cognitive-affective style" (Jackson, 1994, p. 213-214).

I then apply this model to drinking and drunkenness, based on what drinkers who participated in this research shared with regards to their emotional states. In the case of the emotional suffering they reported, embodied painful – and other - emotions are often expressed while drinking. However, drunkenness itself can be viewed as an expression of pain, with its own language, given the extent to which drinkers acknowledge emotional pain as the most immediate contributor to their drinking to the point of drunkenness. The difference between Jackson's (1994) pain-full world, in reference to physical pain, and the pain-full world of drinkers in Chisasibi is that people who are not in a drunken state have been subject to the same kinds of pain. They are collectively sad and angry about the long-term effects of colonisation on Indigenous peoples, their own community, their families, and themselves. Many of them have been exposed to the same disrupted and disruptive family dynamics. Indeed, the compassion that engenders much of their ambivalence about ignoring people who are drunk is based in their own intimate familiarity with colonial disruption.

Where the divergence emerges, then, is in the respective views of how one ought to express one's pain. The pain-full language of drinkers is different from what is considered acceptable expression not because it expresses a discredited or unbelievable pain; it is different because the behaviour that is associated with it is, in its own right, perceived as inherently disruptive and inductive of pain.

As indicated above, many people refer to the need to talk about one's feelings but maintain that this must be done while sober. In their view, people are unable to act appropriately according to local social norms of interaction while they are in drunken states. However, from the point of view of drinkers, they are acting and communicating appropriately according to the *language of*

the world they are currently sharing with each other. What Jackson (1994) describes as language, or any form of communication that is specific to pain applies here. When drinkers who participated in this research are drinking or drunk, and expressing their suffering through these actions, they are in a world separate from regular day to day existence. This world includes its own set of norms, and by communicating according to these norms, they are engaging in ways appropriate to that world. That this intertwines with ideas about will, agency, and accountability is clear, and this is discussed in chapter 11. For this chapter, however, I move to a discussion of ideas about transgression, as the expression of pain through drinking is often perceived as transgressive in a few ways.

9.2. Drinking as Transgression: Beyond Harmful Impacts

There are very real harms linked with certain kinds of drinking, observed by Chisasibi Eeyouch and non-Eeyou scholars alike. These are described in chapter 2, and include family violence, sexual violence, and suicide, among others. Whether drinking causes these other phenomena, contributes to them, or is correlated with them is an unresolved matter. But the connections are clear and acknowledged by all research respondents. Beyond these impacts, it is relevant to talk about how drinking, particularly drinking considered extreme and leading to drunkenness, is viewed as transgressive.

Chisasibi is a dry community; the mere possession of alcohol is effectively a transgression of the law. On one hand, one could argue that this serves, to a certain extent, to categorize people who contravene this legal norm as deviant. Levy and Kunitz (1974) described how theories of deviance could be applied to alcohol use, especially use that is socially perceived as abusive. The labeling theory, for example, holds that no behaviours are inherently deviant. Rather, people in power in a society define which behaviours and people are labeled as deviant.

However, from the compassion that people in the community express toward people who *do* act in this transgressive manner, it appears to be less a case of labeling people as deviant and more a case of ambivalence about how to address the issue of widespread drinking. Indeed, in the holistic view that is characteristic of many Indigenous worldviews, one's actions do not only affect

the self – they affect the entire community. From the discussion of the myriad social issues associated with drinking, mentioned above, the wider impacts of drinking become very clear. But there are also affective impacts perceived at the level of cultural identity and social interactions.

Indeed, from the way in which people refer to “drunks” and “zombies” and to the phenomena of drinking and drunkenness, drinking is not only considered legally transgressive, but it is also considered culturally and socially transgressive. But given the disruption to which cultural and social codes have been subject, alongside everything else about Eeyou lives, there is much ambivalence about how to address this multi-faceted transgression.

9.2.1. Drinking as Cultural Transgression: Threats to Identity and Culture

After taking a greater interest in drinkers during my master’s fieldwork, it became clear that the risks of verbal aggression and physical danger were not the only concerns people in Chisasibi had. Many people, during both my periods of fieldwork, expressed the feeling that “drunks” had lost touch with their culture. In 1998, the initial impression people had of me as an anthropologist was that I was there to learn all about Eeyou culture: hunting, fishing, and ceremonies, for example. When I showed interest in talking to anyone who was perceived as a drunk, people would let me know in clear terms that I had nothing to learn from them about Eeyou culture and that I would be wasting my time. A friend of mine, with whom I stayed in contact during the years between my two periods of fieldwork, summarized this general feeling when I told him about my doctoral research idea when it was in its embryonic stage, during a social visit in the summer of 2007: “You want to talk to drunks? Why would you want to do that?! They have nothing to say!”

Further, observations about my interactions with people who were drinking or drunk during my master’s research led some people to express assumptions that I was too busy partying to get any research done. Indeed, friends and mentors reminded me several times over the course of my first stay in Chisasibi that I should be more careful about who I talked to and focus more on the people they recommended: Elders and recognized cultural knowledge holders. In their view, “drunks” were not only dangerous; they were lost and had turned away from their culture.

Adelson (2000) has provided an illustration of how alcohol is construed as a transgression by Eeyouch who adhere to what they consider to be traditional norms. During her ethnographic work among the Eeyouch of Whapmagoostui, a community north of Chisasibi, she became aware that many people promote a view of Eeyou identity and well-being that largely adheres to norms such as those discussed above. These Eeyouch took a holistic view of health and well-being that goes beyond an individual's physical and mental health and includes relations between humans and between humans and the land. In this worldview, all things that negatively affect an individual's health and well-being affect their community. Lessard (2007) reported the expression of a similar sentiment among the Eenu of Mistissini. This is, of course, a reflection of the dialectical relationship between individual autonomy and interdependence. In this ideological framework, the act of drinking in and of itself is a transgression not only because it is construed as physically and mentally unhealthy for the individual who consumes it, but because it impairs the individual's ability to engage in the social functioning of their group.

Moreover, the Whapmagoostui Eeyouch with whom Adelson (2009) worked tended to perceive alcohol, as well as store-bought food, as unhealthy because of their non-Indigenous origin. Many Chisasibi Eeyouch expressed this sentiment as well; unlike bush food, which helps them feel healthy and connected to their heritage and land, Western goods brought them a host of problems, such as diseases and alcoholism: "All these things...they're not ours. We were healthier without them, but now we're kind of stuck with them" (Brent, 57 years old, Chisasibi, October 7, 2010).

Similarly, pan-Indigenous spiritual movements hold alcohol as an undesirable symbol of Western intrusion that corrupts the integrity of Indigenous identity (Bousquet, 2005). These movements, in which traditions from across the continent are blended to revive traditional modes of communion with nature and to enforce Indigenous solidarity and identity, have made their way to northern Quebec. At the yearly Pow Wow, for example, there are strong warnings against intoxication at the event, as is the case with Pow Wows in general.

However, even in these relatively small communities, it is important to remember that there is a plurality of spiritual worldviews. This is demonstrated with respect to Chisasibi in chapter 1.

While several of the major ideological frameworks to which people refer locate drinking in the realm of transgressive behaviour, not all of them attach the same significance to this behaviour. Spiritual movements that make specific reference to local Indigenous or pan-Indigenous traditions hold negative views of alcohol based on its association with European conquest. For example, participants in the annual Chisasibi Sundance, which I attended for the first time at the end of my doctoral fieldwork and have continued to attend over the years, often refer to alcohol as a key destructive element to the health of their community.

However, Anglican and Catholic missionaries, themselves active participants in this very conquest, have long condemned abusive drinking in Indigenous communities (Dailey, 1968, Gélinas, 2005, Morantz, 2002). More recently, Pentecostalism has spread among northern Indigenous communities and, with it, the idea that one can find peace and salvation through the abandonment of sinful behaviour such as drinking (Bousquet, 2005). Similarly, Dorais (1997) has stated that Inuit people who want to stop drinking adopt this religion to enable them in their quest. In the case of these Western-based religious movements, then, alcohol is transgressive simply on the grounds of ideological constructions of morality whereas Indigenous spiritual movements locate drinking as a factor that actively erodes self and group identity and function.

It is clear from the above discussion that drinking is widely seen as a transgression of norms; drunkenness not only carries a risk of violence and self-destructive behaviour, but potentially interferes with the ability of individuals to engage in culturally accepted ways with members of their families and communities. Furthermore, it constitutes an element of interference with Eeyou culture. This was made evident in the expressions of doubt I received when I showed interest in having discussions with “drunks”; “drunks” are out of touch with their culture, it was said, implicitly or explicitly, on several occasions.

9.2.2. Drinking as Social Transgression: Interfering with Norms of Interaction

Conversations about drinking in Indigenous communities, including Chisasibi, primarily take on a dimension that labels drinking and drunkenness as transgressions of social norms. The loudness

and talkativeness that often accompanies drunkenness is contrary to the quieter and more subtle mode of expression that is valued by many Eeyouch. To help establish why drunken behaviour, even when it is not violent, goes against social norms that are valued in the community, I turn to a wider body of knowledge about social norms that have long informed inter-personal behaviour among Indigenous peoples of the North.

Most people in Chisasibi and other Indigenous communities in Northern Quebec no longer live in the bush full time. But as discussed in chapter 1, elements of the bush way of life are considered important to maintain. The social norms typically described by Chisasibi residents and by scholars in relation to peoples of Northern Quebec today therefore stem from a history of a hunting and gathering way of life.

As such, these social norms are highly adapted to the dynamics of daily living with a limited number of people in close quarters. Until a few decades ago, subarctic and arctic peoples still practiced nomadism for a large part of the year, spending most of the time with small kin groups and only gathering in larger groups in the summer. Given the environmental hazards in which people negotiated their existence, group cohesion and solidarity were essential to survival; “The safety, well-being and survival of everyone depended on every other member of the camp” (Pachano, 2020, p. 57). The avoidance of overt conflict was therefore crucial. Self-control with regards to emotional expression was an important strategy to avoid group disintegration. Thus, the expression of aggression was highly discouraged among Indigenous peoples of Northern Quebec and Northern Canada (Briggs, 1970; Brody, 1975; Jaccoud, 1995; Niezen, 2009, Hallowell, 1955).

During my first trip to the bush with a Chisasibi friend in 1998, the importance of avoiding conflict was made clear to me. My friend and host had to reassure me about the constant wisecracking between him and other guests: “Ahhhh, it’s only joking. You know, it relieves tension” (Leclerc, 2001, p. 133). Banter and laughter were direct ways to avoid conflict.

Although group solidarity was an important feature of social life in the bush among northern Indigenous peoples, individual autonomy was highly prized. Preston (1986), based on the life

history of an elderly Eeyou woman, described how individuals would go to great lengths to avoid encroaching on the autonomy of another by imposing their opinion of what that person should do. Leacock (1978) has argued that all individuals were autonomous with respect to the fulfillment of their tasks among the Innu-Naskapi. Even parents respected the autonomy of their children. Similarly, parental authority among the Inuit of Sugluk on the Ungava Peninsula took the form of guidance rather than power (Graburn, 1969). And according to Brody (1987) Inuit parents in the East Arctic adopted an ethic of non-interference with regards to their children's behaviour with the assumption that children were capable of making mature decisions.

The insistence on respect for individual autonomy and the related ethic of non-interference is reflected in inter-personal communication patterns. Speech was and is used carefully as a mode of communicating information because it carries with it the potential to impose one's will over another, thus interfering with their autonomy. For instance, direct questioning is perceived by many Northern hunting societies as intrusive since information could easily be obtained by listening to others (Brody, 1987). Similarly, Ferrara (1999) indicated, based on her fieldwork in an Eeyou community, that the act of asking a direct question is an imposition since it requires a direct answer. Spielmann (1998) also describes this based on his work with the Anishinaabe of Pikogan.

To the extent that the social norms described above continue to inform social interactions in the context of contemporary Indigenous communities, excessive drinking and drunkenness are perceived as potential transgressions. It has been noted by Chisasibi residents and various scholars that, when drunk, individuals engage in forms of social interaction that are usually avoided in a situation considered ideal by many Eeyouch. Kupferer (1979), for instance, noted that Eeyou drunken demeanour varied from talkative friendliness and loud speech in the early stages of drunkenness to verbal and physical aggressiveness in the later stages. While the expression of aggression is in direct opposition to learned norms, as indicated above, extreme talkativeness is contrary to the usual quiet co-presence that signifies comfort among Eeyouch (Ferrara, 1999; Leclerc, 2001).

9.3. Ambivalence and Accountability: Dealing with Transgressive Drinking

It is noted above that many individuals have mixed feelings about drunken people who they encounter in public spaces. On one hand, drinking is seen as something that is of colonial origin and that may lead to behaviours that transgress social norms relating to interactions. This makes drinking itself an act of transgression. On the other hand, there is recognition that widespread social disruption has led many people to states of despair and that drinking is a coping mechanism. Therefore, these individuals are entitled to a certain level of compassion.

To complicate matters further, there is uncertainty about what to do about drinking, even when it is perceived as transgressive. Along with social norms associated with bush life, the mechanisms by which to maintain these norms are highly valued. However, the context of village life makes these mechanisms difficult to act on. Moreover, Euro-Canadian modes of social control are subject to feelings of ambivalence since many view the pain that is evidenced by excessive drinking to be a matter for processes of healing rather than justice.

9.3.1. Accountability and Social Control Mechanisms in Bush Life

As with the social norms described above, social control mechanisms by which people ensured adherence to social norms were also embedded in the social fabric that accompanied bush life in times when the majority of Eeyouch and other northern Indigenous peoples still practiced it as their primary way of life. It was expected that individuals engage in inter-personal relations through reciprocity but that they abstain from interfering with the individual autonomy of others. As such, Eeyouch, Inuit, and other peoples of the north were afforded a certain level of individual autonomy while still being held accountable to the collective. Although interdependence and individual autonomy may appear contradictory, it appears that the balancing act between them was inherent in the social systems of northern peoples. Social control took place within this delicate balance.

Among the Eeyouch, Innu-Naskapi, and Inuit in times when subsistence was centered on a foraging way of life, there were no central and formal authorities that held power. Even though

individuals were awarded prestige for their hunting skills, they had no formal authority over others. People would choose to follow those with more skills and experience (Brody, 1987; Henriksen, 2009; Lips, 1947).

In terms of encouraging adherence to social norms, gossip and public opinion were therefore widely used. This informal means of social control helped to deter potential transgression and to indirectly reprimand individuals who had transgressed the norms (Jaccoud, 1995; Lips, 1947). There is evidence that, among the Inuit for example, serious transgressions that would threaten the survivability of a group or smaller transgressions that were repeated by the same individual could be subject to punishments such as abandonment or even execution (Jaccoud, 1995). Lips (1947) also indicated this to be the case among the Naskapi of the Lac St-Jean and Mistassini areas. However, for the most part, the ethnographic data consistently demonstrates that an ethic of non-interference prevented direct intervention in most cases of transgressive behaviour.

Brody (1987), for example, noted for many northern groups that the foolish behaviour of an individual would elicit little reaction from peers, who would simply choose an alternate course of action, rather than try to compel the individual to change their behaviour. Preston (1986) argued that social competence among the Eeyouch entailed the ability to assess whether to intervene in a situation. If an individual's actions, or lack thereof, could result in harm being caused to another, it was the third party's responsibility to intervene despite the potential assault to the first individual's autonomy. Otherwise, in contexts associated with bush life, it was assumed that people would learn from their own experiences over time without having to be given direct instruction, which would be an assault to their autonomy (Darnell, 1981).

In 2007, during a social visit to Chisasibi between periods of fieldwork, I had another opportunity to take a trip to a friend's hunting camp. A conflict that occurred brought home both the social sanctions of overt conflict and the lack of interference in a very experiential way. My emotional outburst during a prolonged and intense political discussion led to two full days of silence. Nobody told me that I needed to change my behaviour. I was simply avoided and life, including conversation, carried on as usual among everyone else.

9.3.2. Drinking: From the Bush to the Village

From the above, it would appear that drinking and drunkenness are incompatible with life in the bush. However, neither of these was unknown in bush environments. Niezen (2009) reported that drinking parties were a common occurrence in camps of the past. However, alcohol was only available in limited quantities, except for homebrew. Therefore, drinking did not prevent people from fulfilling their obligations. Henriksen's (2009) transcription of the testimony of Kaniuekutat, an elderly Innu hunter reveals that, in the middle of the 20th century, people would drink in villages for fun but would return to the country to hunt and fish. Dorais (1984) also indicated that this was the case for the Tuvaalummiut Inuit of Quaqtac in Northern Quebec in the 1960s.

Bush life, because of the work required to survive and the cosmological taboos associated with human-animal relations, provided discipline that did not need enforcement by humans (Lessard, 2007; Niezen, 2009). Niezen (2009) quoted an Eeyou who referred to the bush as a "natural disciplinarian" (p.66). Kaniuekutat also reminisced about how the work involved in bush life prevented alcohol abuse (Henriksen, 2009). Further, Kaniuekutat mentioned that Innu hunters would avoid drinking before feasting on caribou since eating this meat with alcohol in one's system would be a sign of disrespect toward the caribou spirit (Henriksen, 2009).

As described in chapter 1, maintaining access to the land is highly valued in Chisasibi. Hayes, 1998; Henriksen, 2009; and Oosten and Laugrand, 2002 have recounted how individuals from various communities ascribe a sacred nature to the bush. Niezen (2009) described the bush as a space where people effectively resolve conflicts. Several people in Chisasibi referred to the bush in general or to their familial hunting camps in similar ways. "When we're out at our camp...it's family time, ya know. We get to bond together and relax together," explained Tad (34 years old, Chisasibi, April 27, 2010).

In another conversation, Tad commented that, even when he went to the bush with friends instead of with his wife and children, he avoided bringing alcohol. Beyond the practical reason of handling guns, he said "There is no need for it there. It feels so good and peaceful to be there. So who needs to get drunk" (34 years old, Chisasibi, March 2, 2010). Although I did encounter people

who were heading to their camps with varying quantities of alcohol, most of the people I spoke with corroborated Tad's view above of the bush as a place of peace where alcohol is not needed.

The reported psychological impacts of time spent in the bush support these views. Kirmayer et al. (2000) inferred from the results of health surveys in Eeyou Istchee that excursions to the bush by members of contemporary Eeyou communities are beneficial. They argued that, in addition to the lack of access to alcohol and greater access to bush food, the bush environment still provides contact with nature, a sense of spirituality and family solidarity. Town life, it would appear, is fraught with pressures that lead many individuals to experience psychological distress which in turn leads to the abuse of alcohol and other substances. Similarly, people in Whapmagoostui often associated village life with alcohol because the norms that are naturally enforced in the bush are not present in town (Adelson, 2000).

From the above, it appears that social control mechanisms associated with bush life are difficult to apply in contemporary town life. There are several possible reasons for this. One obvious factor is that the obligations regarding labour are different. As noted above, the work involved in basic survival in the bush considerably lowers the possibility for long-term and disruptive drinking. Town settings, however, are characterized by low employment rates. Boredom and idleness, particularly among youth, is rampant (Jaccoud, 1995; Petawabano et al., 1994).

Another factor to consider in the applicability of traditional social control mechanisms in town life is the perceived Westernized nature of town life itself. Some of the larger communities, especially, take on urban characteristics such as anonymity that make it easier for transgressive behaviour to occur (Niezen, 2009; Tanner, 1999). The discussion of the community relocation from Fort George to Chisasibi in chapter 7 echoes these concerns.

9.3.3. Traditional Social Control Versus Euro-Canadian Justice

There is some debate about whether the social control mechanisms espoused by the Euro-Canadian justice system are more effective in a setting that has been largely shaped by Euro-Canadian political systems and residence patterns. However, it is also unclear whether informal mechanisms considered traditional and associated with bush life such as gossip and non-

interference are effective in an environment where the group cannot rely on cosmological and subsistence-based imperatives to maintain social norms.

According to Jaccoud (1995), for example, there is much ambivalence among the Inuit in Nunavik communities regarding the relative applicability of traditional and Euro-Canadian modes of social control. On one hand, there are individuals who consider the Euro-Canadian justice system better in dealing with problems that they associate with colonial intrusion, such as alcohol and substance abuse. Jaccoud (1995) suggests that this position stems from feelings of powerlessness over these relatively new phenomena and an internalized view that traditional ways are primitive compared with more modern systems. On the other hand, some other individuals completely reject the Euro-Canadian system and wish to replace it with more traditional ways of dealing with deviance from the social norms.

For the most part, though, people have specific criticisms about the functioning of the Euro-Canadian system that reflect the differences in ideology that drive the respective social control mechanisms of Euro-Canadian and Indigenous societies. Jaccoud (1995) reported that many Inuit were concerned with the punitive nature of the Euro-Canadian system and, especially, of incarceration. Rather than encourage healing, they stated that incarceration leads to lower self-esteem and confusion which, in turn, exacerbate anti-social behaviours such as alcohol and substance abuse. According to both Jaccoud (1995) and Niezen (2009), many Indigenous people feel that imprisonment outside of people's home regions keeps people away from the social networks that would ideally help the troubled individuals discard their problematic behaviours and re-integrate society.

This points to a fundamental ideological cleavage between Indigenous and Euro-Canadian worldviews with regards to social control. Whereas Indigenous views emphasize the reestablishment of order and healing, the Euro-Canadian system seeks to blame and punish (Jaccoud, 1995; Niezen, 2009; Oostens & Laugrand, 2002). One system is characterized by the tendency to gather as a community and enforce social bonds and the other is characterized by social isolation of the individual.

With specific reference to drunkenness, this ideological dissonance becomes especially problematic. The aggressive behaviours associated with drunkenness are subject to punitive and preventative measures such as arrest according to the Euro-Canadian justice system. However, according to traditional modes of social control, these behaviours would be dealt with by kin in more informal ways. It appears quite possible that this tension creates confusion and ambivalence with regards to how a community might deal with drinking behaviours that it views as problematic. The non-intervention of community members who adhere to what they see as more effective and traditional social control mechanisms is criticized by those who adhere to the formal, punitive measures of the Euro-Canadian justice system (Jaccoud, 1995). On the other hand, police intervention in phenomena linked with drinking are subject to distrust because of their base in Euro-Canadian ideology and their corresponding lack of concordance with Indigenous values (Niezen, 2009).

9.4. Drinking, Accountability, Healing, and Justice in Chisasibi

These issues are best resolved at the community level. I have always been taught that public shaming causes more harm than it does healing. I believe we must always centre healing above harm, even when we hold people accountable (Jesse Wenté, quoted in Deer & Barrera, 2020, December 17).

This quotation by Ojibwe film critic and journalist, Jesse Wenté, refers to a 2020 controversy about claims to Indigenous identity among filmmakers. However, it ties in well with the ambivalence that is present in the community when it comes to holding people accountable for their drinking and for what they do when they are drunk. While some espouse the use of a punitive western system for a problem that has western origins, others reclaim ways that are centered on community values.

All the considerations described in this chapter thus far came into play in discussions about drinking, accountability, justice, and healing with Eeyou research participants and other community members. Widespread drinking in ways that are problematic and dangerous is a direct result of colonial disruption and pain. People who are not in a drunken state recognize the historical, social, and psychological reasons for which people drink, as they experience these

effects themselves, and therefore have compassion for people who are drinking or drunk. At the same time, drinking is harmful as well as legally, culturally, and socially transgressive, and this leads many to avoid contact with people who are in drunken states when they encounter them in public. It also leads people to kick drinkers out of their homes in many cases, which partially explains why so many people can be seen drinking and in drunken states in public places.

Because of the harmful impacts of drinking and its transgressive nature, there are concerns about accountability. There is a commonly expressed idea in Chisasibi, and in other communities, that drinkers are not actually responsible for their actions while they are drunk. Again, there is a striking parallel with Low's (1994) research on *nervosa* in Costa Rica. In this specific location, *nervios* is "explained as a disease of the nerve-endings or of the brain which causes a person to feel or act inappropriately" (p. 146). According to Low (1994), the behaviours in which nerves sufferers engage are opposite of the cultural goal of "being tranquil" (p. 146). While this is a widely expressed explanation of nerves, sufferers themselves describe feelings of a loss of control, or not feeling like themselves when they have a nervous attack.

However, even if people are not considered to be themselves in drunken states, this does not absolve them of all responsibility or accountability. In the eyes of many in Chisasibi, the individuals in question made the choice to drink in the first place. "Everyone has the choice of whether to pick up that bottle in the first place," related Brent, "And everyone can make the choice to put it down" (57 years old, Chisasibi, October 7, 2010). So even if people are not considered to be responsible for their actions *while they are drunk*, they are considered accountable in a larger context.

The question remains: if people are accountable, then how are they to be held accountable? The prohibition by-law aims to address drinking in terms of its legally transgressive nature and adheres to a Western punitive approach to accountability. However, not everyone agrees on the desirability of this approach.⁶³ Even among those who support the by-law, there is an

⁶³ There is a wide range of views about whether the by-law is effective and even desirable, which is discussed more thoroughly in the context of local views about choice in chapter 10.

acknowledgement that it does not work, as evidenced by on-going rates of drinking and related issues.

Some people blamed the relative proximity of Radisson, which makes it easy for people to obtain alcohol despite the by-law. Others blamed bootleggers and the police force's perceived failure to stop them. However, Brad, a non-Indigenous police officer, complained that while people often blamed the police force for not doing their job with regards to catching bootleggers, those same people failed to notify the police when they witnessed incidents of bootlegging. "We get calls when there is a drunk in the house, or when someone sees a drunk passed out in a field or somewhere, but people buy and sell booze and drugs out in the open and no one tells us. No one wants to denounce someone they know" (37 years old, Chisasibi, November 3, 2010). Some community members agreed and there were frequent comments about how people should report bootleggers to the police. "People really need to call the cops when they see this! Otherwise, they never get caught and they just keep selling!" said Agatha (47 years old, Chisasibi, March 29, 2011). However, she explained how people are often hesitant to tell on people that they know, particularly when the individuals in question are family members.

People appeared less reticent to report drunken people to the police, however. For example, a neighbour we had during my doctoral research was preparing for a shopping trip to Val d'Or and advised me to call the police if I saw any "drunks" around their home. Brad, the above-mentioned police officer, complained that people over-reported people who are drunk and wished that people would help them instead. "There isn't much we can do with them if they haven't done anything serious. They spend the night in there [pointing back to the police station, which included a small number of cells] then they're back at it" (37 years old, Chisasibi, November 3, 2010).

In addition to being perceived as ineffective, the by-law and the police system do not necessarily address the culturally and socially transgressive aspects of drinking. In contrast, the idea that learning and practicing the cultural elements of bush life provides a path toward sobriety and a good life is quite prevalent in Chisasibi and in other northern Indigenous communities. As described above, not only is the work involved in this life intense enough to prevent heavy

drinking; being out on the land provides peace of mind and healing (see, for example, Niezen, 2009, Adelson, 2000, and Kirmayer et al., 2000).

Indeed, many initiatives to help youth overcome problems related to drinking and other intoxication behaviours involve bush teachings. For example, an initiative in collaboration between the Chisasibi Miyupimaatisiun Committee and the Nishiyuu Department of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay brings groups of youths out to the bush in the company of Elders who offer traditional bush teachings (Chisasibi Wellness, 2014; Radu et al., 2014, Radu, 2015).⁶⁴ The maintenance of ties to the land and associated cultural elements is therefore not only a primary driver of community values and cultural affirmation, as described in chapter 1. It is also seen as a way in which to collectively heal because, as Brent affirmed with regards to drinking and associated issues, “Remember, it’s not about *justice*, it’s about *healing!*” (57 years old, Chisasibi, October 7, 2010). If heavy drinkers are often perceived as having lost their culture, perhaps helping them reconnect with that culture can play a role in their sobriety. These initiatives are therefore widely lauded.

There is more ambivalence in the community about how to deal with the socially transgressive nature of drinking and associated behaviour, particularly in everyday life in Chisasibi, away from the peacefulness of the bush. While the social control mechanisms described above formed part of a holistic cultural system in times when Eeyouch lived the bush life full-time, they are difficult to maintain in a village context, as indicated above. This was made particularly clear in public and private conversations about youth drinking.

9.4.1. Youth Drinking and Intergenerational Conflict about Social Control

The topic of youth drinking in Chisasibi and elsewhere provides an example of how conflict about social control is related to ambivalence about how to deal with behaviour that is seen as transgressive. As discussed thus far, the prevailing views expressed by people in Indigenous

⁶⁴ *Miyupimaatisiun* is translated by the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (2012a) as “well-being”. Adelson (2000), based on fieldwork in the Eeyou community of Whapmagoostui, translates it as “being alive well”, a concept that includes but goes beyond physical health and nutrition. It includes the pursuit of traditional activities such as hunting and the web of relations that is associated with these activities.

communities in Northern Quebec, including Chisasibi, point to drinking and drunkenness as problematic and transgressive behaviours that are both a result and a source of social disruptions. However, it is interesting to note that many of the informants in the studies that document these views were seniors and other adults.⁶⁵

When describing these views, authors such as Adelson (2000) and Niezen (2009) frequently referred to the perspectives of seniors who based their views on what they perceive as traditional patterns of behaviour. Brody (1975), Hayes (1998), Henriksen (2009), Lessard (2007), and Jaccoud (1995) all described how older adults frequently expressed their disapproval of youth behaviour. This disapproval usually included criticisms of the drinking patterns of youth, the lack of respect toward adults and seniors, and the lack of discipline on behalf of parents.

Indeed, many of the conversations about alcohol use in Chisasibi and related topics, such as violence and suicide, concern youth. “They start so young,” commented Agatha. “Before 10 even, sometimes” (46 years old, Chisasibi, August 20, 2010). There is literature that supports the view that there are high rates of drinking among youth. Anctil and Chevalier’s (2008) statistics, for example, collected in the years preceding the present research, demonstrate that Indigenous youth in Northern Quebec between the ages of 12 and 29 had the highest rate of binge drinking compared to other age groups. Similarly, the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (2012b) reported that “The average age for first use of substances is 11-12; and in the past five years, we have seen more and more instances in which children as young as eight or nine are using substances. Nearly half of youth aged 12-17 drink regularly, and drinking rates peak at ages 18-29. Teenagers, the largest group in Eeyou Istchee’s population, binge drink more often than older people” (para. 2).

Despite the tendency for people to identify youth as the main actors in problem-drinking, it is important to stress that not all Eeyou youth drink. Both Hayes (1998) and Lessard (2007) affirmed that many Eeyou/Eenou youth, in Chisasibi and Mistissini respectively, felt that adults

⁶⁵ I use the term “senior” rather than “elder” to make a clear distinction between people of older generations and people granted the status of Elder, which is more about wisdom and guidance than about age. According to several friends in Chisasibi and other Indigenous communities, not all Elders are seniors and not all seniors are Elders.

stereotyped them by assuming that they all drank. Both authors noted that there was a wide range of drinking behaviours among youth. Among the young people who did engage in drinking, Hayes (1998) indicated only a portion of them engaged in the heavy drinking that community seniors described on a regular basis. Further, those who did engage in heavy drinking tended to limit their drinking binges to the weekends and perceived this behaviour as a fun escape from boredom rather than a way to cope with personal problems or psychological despair.

Youth in Chisasibi who do not drink often participate in speaking out against youth drinking. For example, Angatookaluk (2017) wrote an article for the *Waaskimaashtau* newsletter in which she told her own story of overcoming addiction. In this article, she shared that a boyfriend had introduced her to alcohol and that this led to many other problems. She encouraged her fellow youth to move away from these behaviours and to live a healthier life.

I also encountered some youth who had negative feelings about youth drinking. During my first stay in Chisasibi in 1998, when I was 25 and a youth myself, I spent some time with fellow youths in the parking lot behind the commercial centre one night. There was some moderate drinking, with a handful of cans of beer shared between 6 of us, but no drunkenness. One youth asked me what I thought of all the teenagers hanging around drinking. When I responded that I saw many who did not drink, and who were just hanging around with their friends, he stressed that if we waited a while, we would see many teenagers and even children who were drinking or drunk. Similarly, some of my students at the high school occasionally stayed behind after class and shared their concerns about friends, siblings, or cousins who drank.

During my doctoral fieldwork, some adults corroborated the view that the phenomenon of youth drinking is oversimplified in public discussions. For example, there are people who have observed that many youths who drink do so in smaller quantities than is commonly thought. During the Community Spirit Walk that took place on March 7, 2011, I chatted with Keith, a man in his 30s who worked for a regional entity and who was a father of 2 high school children. In his view, youth drinking was no bigger of a problem in Chisasibi than down south. He felt that a lot of young people want to feel the freedom of having a couple of drinks, just like anywhere else.

Graham shared similar sentiments: “Some of them just have a few and call it quits. Not everyone drinks the way everyone says they do” (42 years old, Chisasibi, April 18, 2011).

Similarly, Michel, a non-Indigenous teacher who had been living in Chisasibi for nearly a decade and who had gotten to know many students, explained that many young people drank in harmless ways. *“J’en vois souvent, dehors, en train de boire. Je leur parle, parce que...bien, pourquoi pas. Et la plupart du temps, ils sont là en train de partager une caisse de 12 à 4 ou 5 personnes. On s’entend tu pour dire que c’est pas ça qui va les tuer? Je les vois le lendemain, à l’école, pis ils ont l’air bien réveillés”* [“I often see some of them, outside, drinking. I talk to them, because . . . well, why not. And most of those times, they’re there sharing a case of 12 between 4 or 5 people. I think we can agree that this won’t kill them? I see them at school the next day and they seem to be wide awake”] (45 years old, Chisasibi, April 8, 2011). Obviously, François is an outsider, notwithstanding the length of time he has spent in the community and the relationships he has formed. Therefore, his vision is necessarily limited to what he sees outside the students’ homes, and to what they are willing to tell him. However, his ongoing observations of groups of youth are still indicative of variability in how youth relate to alcohol.

There are also people who view youth drinking, even in its more extreme forms, as a normal phase. Keith, mentioned above, explained that most Eeyou youth grow out of it, just like most non-Indigenous youth do, once they have gone through their rebellious phase. Tad agreed with this view: “It’s normal, when you’re young. I mean, I’ve been there. You’ve been there. We all want to have fun at that age. We grow up, have kids, we calm down a little” (34 years old, Chisasibi November 15, 2010).

The decrease in overall rates of alcohol use among Indigenous adults that is reported in several publications (Robinson, 1986; Simard et al.; 1996 and Kirmayer et al., 2000) supports this view if one considers that heavy drinking is, indeed, a behaviour that young people abandon as they age and as they reintegrate values instilled by their elders. Similarly, Westermeyer (1979) pointed out that drinking behaviours varied over the course of an individual’s lifetime in Indigenous nations in the United States at the time of his work.

Despite the views described here, which diverge from the very common concerns about excessive youth drinking, the above-mentioned ambivalence about social control is salient. As Lessard (2007) demonstrated with the Mistissini Eeyou, criticisms by adults regarding the behaviour of youth are not usually acted upon in the sense of imposing sanctions. Indeed, there is little actual interference in the lives of youth. While this may reflect the powerlessness that seniors feel with regards to problems with which they are unfamiliar (Adelson, 2000; Jaccoud 1995), it may also reflect an ongoing tendency to use informal modes of social control. Lessard (2007) indicated, for example, that adult discourse in Mistissini reflected an ideology that allows for long-term learning. In keeping with the tradition of individual autonomy, individuals learn from their own experiences and there is allowance in these systems for people to learn and to assimilate the lessons of their elders over time (Darnell, 1981).

A similar tendency is seen in Chisasibi. Many adults decried the behaviour of youth. My first conversations in the community, as I walked around and got to know people, nearly always included a comment about youth and drinking. In the view of many, youth were the main drivers behind mass drunkenness and related problems in the community. But many also complained that parents are not strict enough with their children. The lack of interference by parents and other adults, like that described by Lessard (2007), could be influenced by embodied norms about the importance of individual autonomy, which runs counter to the norms associated with western institutions such as policing and schooling. But like the tendency to not report bootleggers to the police, it is denounced by those who promote a more active approach in the prevention of drinking, even if that means using non-Eeyou strategies.

Despite the lack of actual interference with the lives of youth, some youth have expressed that they felt that adults were interfering with their lives. Indeed, some drinkers acknowledged that, in their younger days, a part of the joy of drinking and being drunk was a sense of rebellion against grown-ups who they perceived as trying to control them. Similarly, one young woman who I met during my master's research asserted that "We're surrounded, you know? There's nothing to do here and they watch us all the time" (Leclerc, 2001, p. 111). Niezen's (2009) work in Chisasibi also affirmed that there was resentment on behalf of Eeyou youth toward seniors who went on the

community radio station to publicly shame them for their behaviour, including drinking behaviour. These feelings of resentment against adult control are not unique to Chisasibi, of course. Brody (1975) indicated that Inuit youth in the Eastern Arctic felt as though their parents were spying on them.

On a related note, Carol, an Eeyou school board worker in Chisasibi, felt that community members who publicly shame youth by making claims about them having lost their culture and language do a disservice to youth who are trying to find their way. Seeing as youth who *do* stay in school are too busy to take part in many traditional activities in the bush, she explained that it made no sense to blame the youth themselves for not living their culture and even feeling alienated from it. "It won't make them want to learn it if they are made to feel ashamed of something they have no control over," she said (38 years old, Chisasibi, May 27, 2011).

Despite the pressure they may feel from adults and seniors, youth in Chisasibi and elsewhere actively reclaim their autonomy and their freedom to make their own decisions (Hayes, 1998; Lessard, 2007; Niezen, 2009). Furthermore, as Hayes (1998) has argued, they exercise agency in finding new ways to express the social competence and adaptability encouraged among their elders in new social contexts.

It is nearly impossible to miss the resemblance between this generational divide and the one commonly found in many Euro-Canadian communities. On a subtler level, though, it is important to note that this divide not only includes diverging views on the drinking behaviour of youth but on the enactment of social control mechanisms themselves. In other words, drinking is one element of contention among many in the generational rift between adults and youth.

In short, the desire to transmit behavioural codes, along with other elements of Eeyou heritage, to the following generations, leads many Eeyou adults to despair about the tendency to drink among youth. However, as with their adult counterparts, Eeyou youth engage in a variety of forms of drinking, ranging from the extreme patterns described in the literature on Indigenous drinking, to occasional and moderate drinking, to complete abstinence.

9.5. Conclusion

There is a variety of views about drinking in Chisasibi among all age groups. Some view drinking as a problem that requires strict sanctions. Others view drinking as a choice that is available and one that is possible to make in a responsible way (see chapter 10). However, even people with strong views against drinking feel ambivalent about how to respond to people who are drinking or drunk. Should they report them? Should they simply avoid them? Should they talk to them? Peoples' explanations about how they choose to react, which is not always the same way they think they *should* react, offer insight about the ambivalence that shapes interactions between people who are drunk and people who are not.

Concerns about the health of individuals, families, and the community itself strongly relate to feelings about the retention of Eeyou identity and heritage after several centuries of colonization. Within this web of concerns lies a variety of views that collide and intersect concerning drinking behaviour, which is indicative of engagement with local Eeyou and Euro-Canadian worldviews. It is again important to reiterate that the various views that exist do not necessarily take form in opposing groups of people. Very often, as reflected in the various community perspectives on the functioning of local institutions, on the alcohol by-law, and on interactions with public drinkers, individuals carry with them multiple perspectives. With this dissertation, it is not my desire to pose one ideological stream as “truer” than the other regarding drinking, drunkenness, or how to deal with these and related phenomena. Rather, these perspectives are provided as being a part of the context within which Eeyou drinkers, past and present, have experienced life, formed their worldviews, and forged their identities.

The conflicting perspectives present in the community manifest in concrete ways: people's reactions to wandering drinkers, public and private statements about drinking, and the choices made by individuals concerning the acquisition and consumption of alcohol. As such, the presence of people who are visibly drunk elicits strong emotions, such as the advice of “Don't talk to drunks”, and expressions of ambivalence during daily life. The experience of being a drinker, then, is at least in part marked by these emotions and expressions of ambivalence in addition to being shaped by individual experiences of and ambivalence about what it means to

be a member of this community. The lifeworlds of drinkers include encounters with community members who express a range of perspectives on their behaviour and identities. The agentive processes of emotional embodiment and intersubjective engagement with these views is therefore a fundamental part of their daily lived reality.

Despite widespread views about drinking in the community which could be read as a support for the passive role of drinkers in the face of colonial history, there are many, including people who are against drinking, who acknowledge the agency of drinkers. This acknowledgement is often couched in judgmental terms about “making the wrong choice”. However, it is an important concession; drinkers, despite their behaviours during a state of drunkenness being out of their control, are still seen as having some control over their lives as they chose to drink in the first place. This is in line with what many research participants who identified as drinkers say about their own experiences of drinking.

Chapter 10 - "I'll Drink if I Want": Volition and the Choice to Drink

The conflicting feelings in Chisasibi about social norms and social control in relation to drinking reflect a level of ambivalence regarding the delicate balance between living by ancestral norms and incorporating Western procedures. Drinking and drunkenness are seen as transgressive and disruptive to people's capacity to abide by salient social norms. Drinking is also seen by many as a primary source of disruption, related to a wider web of social problems, which therefore needs to be controlled. At the same time, valued social norms also promote personal autonomy and refraining from interference. What is the best approach to take, as a community, to curb what is perceived as excessive drinking that causes more problems for the population?

Tied in with this ambivalence is the nuanced view of the choice involved in drinking. Many say that drinkers are not themselves when they are drunk, and that they are not in control of their actions in that state. However, there is still a concern with choice. When a person is *not* drunk, they can choose not to drink – notwithstanding views people may have about the nature of addictions. If people can make the choice to drink or not, then, they can be legally and socially accountable for that choice, even if further actions are perceived as being out of their control. This recognition of choice opens the door to exploring an area of agreement between those who choose to drink and those who choose not to at any given time.

The matter of choice was a central concern in my conversations with research participants, whether they identified as drinkers or not. It was particularly salient among those who drank to various degrees at the time of this research. In all cases, there are links with legal, social, and political conflicts and their normative implications in the community. And notwithstanding community and academic narratives that locate drinking in framework of colonial causality or addiction, the perspective that one has willful control over one's actions is striking.

In public encounters with people who were drinking or drunk, this was often couched in expressions of rebellion. Private discussions in interview settings or during small festive

gatherings elicited deeper discussions about the importance of choice. Two main sub-themes emerged from these discussions. On one hand, drinkers affirmed the right to choose. Laws that regulated their access to drinking were perceived as a contravention of their rights. On the other hand, many drinkers affirmed their capacity to choose. Notwithstanding the frequently repeated phrase in Chisasibi that people are unable to drink responsibly or in moderation, several research participants, including people who did not identify as drinkers, asserted that moderate drinking was both possible and desirable. Further, occasional indulgence in drunken states could be done in a responsible manner.

This chapter outlines the importance placed on these two aspects of choice and places them in the context of wider community tendencies toward the tacit acceptance of moderate drinking. Then, the concept of willing, or volition, is explored through a phenomenological lens that outlines various aspects of willing such as feelings of ownership, effortfulness, and anticipation in relation to action.

It is important to remember that this dissertation does not address the issue of addiction. It is true that, according to some medical models, the addictive nature of alcohol could potentially nullify an argument that drinkers are agents. However, the goal of this dissertation is not to deny objective realities, such as the biological or medical nature of addictions, anymore than it is to deny social and cultural structures that frame the lives of drinkers. Rather, it is to highlight *the views and experiences of drinkers*. Therefore, this discussion of agency is applied to the perception, expressed by research participants, of themselves as agents and to the agentive processes that are evident in their reflections on their choices and actions.

10.1. The Right to Choose: Prohibition and Choice

As described in chapter 2, there is a by-law that prohibits possession of alcohol in Chisasibi. In the community, there are mixed feelings expressed about this prohibition on behalf of people who identified as drinkers as well as those who did not. Several research participants said that they did not like the idea of prohibition but felt that there was no other way. “It’s true that it’s a restriction of freedom in a way. But if we don’t do that, the problem [with drinking] will be even worse,” related Graham (42 years old, Chisasibi, April 18, 2011). A former heavy drinker who still

drank in moderation at the time of this research, he discussed this matter with me during a social visit in the year following my doctoral dissertation. Zoe, who had grown up with a father who was a heavy drinker, agreed that prohibition is necessary in the community: “If it weren’t for by-law, there would be even more drinking. People would be drunk all the time. It’s already a problem but it would be even worse!” (26 years old, Chisasibi, November 10, 2010).

While many individuals agreed with the idea behind the by-law, they often expressed that it is only needed because of people who cannot control their drinking. Zoe elaborated in specific reference to local Eeyouch that “Most of them can’t drink in moderation! That’s the problem here! We wouldn’t need that law if they could learn to drink normally. Some of us can, and we do. Well, I don’t anymore but when I did, it was in moderation” (26 years old, Chisasibi, October 19, 2010). During casual conversations, older students tended to express similar sentiments; the by-law would not be needed if people learned how to drink in moderation.⁶⁶

However, some people are categorically opposed to the by-law. This came to light during a workshop I held at the Youth Centre early in the spring of 2011. “It’s not the answer,” said Caitlin, who identified as an infrequent and moderate drinker. “I don’t believe in prohibition. It just makes people want it more” (43 years old, Chisasibi, April 13, 2011). Gavin, who called himself an “ex-drunk” but who professed to drinking regularly, laughed and ardently agreed: “Right! It’s like that everywhere. When they had the prohibition in Canada, they saw that people just made their own. People always want what they can’t have!” (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 13, 2011).

Contrary to the people who expressed that the lack of a by-law restricting alcohol would lead to more consumption and abuse, some people felt that having alcohol available in stores and even in a bar would lead to more responsible behaviour. “I mean, if there was a bar, people would just go there and drink. They’d all be there together and drunk instead of walking around all over town with their booze and causing trouble,” explained Gavin. “Sure there would be trouble sometimes, but no more than anywhere else” (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 13, 2011). Dean, a former drinker, agreed with this assessment and expressed that a better solution to restriction would be to

⁶⁶ It is of note that I only recorded these views expressed during participant-observation if the students were over 18 and if they were not my students, to avoid a conflict of interest. These views were generally expressed spontaneously in response to learning about my research in the community.

provide a safe place for people who were intoxicated (from alcohol or drugs) so they could talk and get help. “If they had a place to go to, there would be less chance of them freezing in the winter or even getting into fights. There could even be people around to help support them so they could express themselves” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011). These ideas are consistent with the harm reduction approach described in chapter 5.

Other detractors from the ban discussed the lack of positive role models for children that results from not being able to openly drink. “Parents who drink responsibly would be good role models for their kids” said Carol (38 years old, Chisasibi, May 27, 2011), “but that’s not an option now. So all they see is extreme drinking out in the streets. Some people do drink safely at home, but they have to hide. It’s all hush hush. That’s not healthy.” Similar views were expressed by some of Vitenti’s (2018) Atikamekw and Anishinabek research participants in Manawan and Lac Simon. Their perspective is that bans simply lead to revolt, and that a better alternative would be to teach moderation and to encourage a healthy relationship to alcohol. As such, drinking could become more about facilitating communication and sharing (p. 82).

In addition to these concerns about the effectiveness of prohibition, some people claimed that it was a discriminatory practice. “When you think about it, it’s giving different rights to different people”, reflected Dean (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011). Brad, a non-Indigenous police officer, also showed discomfort with the bylaw. “It actually goes against the Canadian Charter of Human Rights,” he said (37 years old, Chisasibi, November 3, 2010). These two individuals, like some other community members who did not drink at the time of this research and who had concerns about the impacts of drinking on the community, were still ambivalent about the discriminatory nature of legislating access to alcohol.

Similarly, some Anicinabek respondents in Inksetter and Bousquet’s (2018) research expressed resentment that strangers imposed restrictions on their behaviour, including accessing and consuming alcohol, even if they perceived alcohol as a negative element in their lives (p.12). While the by-law is legislated by the local band council in Chisasibi, it is sometimes seen as an extension of colonial law, enacted through the nation on its own people. In Gavin’s view, for instance, the by-law is reminiscent of the Indian Act. Indeed, from 1884 to 1985, the Indian Act made it illegal

for First Nations people to purchase or consume alcohol (Joseph, 2018). “Except now it’s our own people... just like with sweats and other things, they think they get to decide about what’s good for us and what’s not” (Gavin, 36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011).

10.1.1. “I’ll Drink if I Want”: Resisting Prohibition

Drinkers frequently expressed ideas around rebellion or resistance, either against local authorities, their families, or the community in general. Comments that included these ideas were less about *why* people drink and more about *attempts of others to keep them from drinking*. Perceived agents of control included the police, the colonial legal system, and members of their families and community.

In a similar vein, some participants expressed that drinking, in a context where it is both a legal and social transgression, is a means of appropriating the freedom of choice. It was often stated that the choice to drink is made as a direct affront to a by-law that is seen as an assault to individual rights, as described above: “Why should we be treated different just because we’re Native? Fuck that. White people can go into a store in their own town and buy beer if they want. We deserve the same right” (Tad, 35 years old, Chisasibi, January 23, 2011). Tabitha added that, despite her current views against drinking, she did not agree with the by-law because everyone has free choice. “When I still drank and did drugs, I was even more against it. I didn’t like it if anyone tried to control me, and this LAW...well that was even worse, right? This law telling me that I couldn’t have a good time if I wanted” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011).

Several drinkers explained that their sentiment of revolt was not only directed at the legal institutions such as the police or the legal system, but also at family and community members, who they often perceived as people who were attempting to control them, especially when they were drinking. As cited in chapter 8, for instance, Tabitha described her former drinking habits as stemming, in part, from her resistance to her mother’s authority: “A lot of my drinking was almost like a revolt against her, against authority, because I was so mad” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011). Adam, cited earlier as saying that his primary motivation to start drinking as a youth was peer pressure, also acknowledged that there was an element of rebelling against older family members. “I paid more attention to what other kids were doing. Like a lot of kids. We band

together against our parents. Our parents telling us not to drink, but other kids telling us we should drink...of course we're gonna drink! But it burns when the parents are the ones who showed you how to drink. It's like uhh...rebellling by doing what they're doing when they tell you not to. It's weird" (22 years old, Chisasibi, May 22, 2011).

Gavin also touched on the sense of feeling that others beyond family were trying to exert control when he related that "The ones who don't drink now, well, they used to drink. And just because they stopped, they want us all to do the same. But I refuse that. I'll drink if I want. It's not up to them to decide" (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011) Tad agreed that "There is this vibe against anyone who drinks. I get it, but it's really annoying and sometimes it makes me want to drink more even though I don't drink that much anymore. Back then, though, it was part of it for me. Like, fuck you, you don't get to tell me what to do. I still feel that way...about a lot of things. I get mad" (34 years old, Chisasibi, January 23, 2010).

This sense that family and community members were attempting to control the behaviour of drinkers was frequently expressed by people who were drinking or drunk in public areas. For example, reactions to passers-by would often include swears and comments about people not minding their own business. "Pffft! What do you know, you f*ing idiot!", said Devon to a passer-by one time, before continuing to grumble about people who tried to tell him what to do (Fieldnotes, September 21, 2010). A similar sense of oppression was expressed by a young woman, Julie, during my 1998 stay: "We're surrounded, you know? There's nothing to do here at all and they watch us all the time" (Leclerc, 2001, p. 111). These kinds of comments clearly demonstrated a sense of alienation and feelings of anger against what was perceived as oppression from both within and outside the community.

Even when resistance or rebellion are not indicated as motivating factors for drinking, a sense of resistance is still often cited as a positive outcome of drinking and drunkenness, especially public drinking and drunkenness. As Dean indicated, there was a positive feeling of rebellion that came with choosing to drink as a youth (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011). Similarly, Codie, who described his past as a drug dealer and bootlegger, explained that he had his own reasons for drinking, mostly due to emotional turmoil stemming from his childhood. However, he still enjoyed

the feeling of being a rebel when he was drunk. “It felt kinda fun...being the bad guy. Going against the rules” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

The sentiment that drinking is a right and that it provides an avenue for displaying rebellion is corroborated in some of the literature cited in chapter 3. Some authors have argued that drinking was a latent means of rebelling against assimilative pressure by asserting an Indigenous identity that was associated with drinking and drunkenness (see, for example, Lurie, 1979; Honigman, 1979; Honigman, 1980). Some of the respondents to this research did associate drinking with resistance to the police or to the by-law that prohibits possession and consumption of alcohol. To the extent that the justice and political systems to which these factors of authority belong come from a wider colonial system, they are perceived as assimilatory, and respondents discussing politics and colonialism have often asserted this.

However, much of the desire for resistance expressed by drinkers is aimed at fellow community members. To a certain extent, both the police system and the by-law on prohibition are seen as impositions by their own people even if they originally come from an outside system. At the time of this research, the police department, which already included several Eeyou officers, was in transition to being Eeyou-run. Also, the by-law was created by the local band council (see chapter 2). Further, rebellion against parents and older community members is also discussed in chapter 9 as an aspect of drinking, particularly for youth. Many young people have expressed a sense of being controlled or judged by other community members. There is little evidence, in this research then, that drinking is associated with Indigenous identity by people who participated in this research.

Rather, as discussed in chapters 3 and 7, drinking tends to be associated with colonial interference. As among the Eeyouch of Whapmagoostui (Adelson 2000), people of Chisasibi often see alcohol itself as a Western product that is detrimental to the well being of the Eeyouch. Agatha summed up this position by saying that “This didn’t come from us. It’s not ours. We’ve only had alcohol since the fur trade and it all went downhill from there” (46 years old, Chisasibi, August 20, 2010). The ideas that drinking is the result of colonial disruption and that it contributes to further disruption are present in the words of many – though not all - research participants

who identified as current or former drinkers. It is therefore impossible, based on this research, to assert that drinking and drunkenness are associated with Indigenous identity and therefore a means of resisting assimilation.⁶⁷

I am by no means suggesting the opposite: that drinking and drunkenness are forms of resistance to over-identification with Indigenous identity, as Roy (2005) reported among Innu, where drinking was symbolic of the higher status afforded to white people. Indeed, most research respondents, whether they identified as drinkers or not, expressed strong identification with Eeyou and Indigenous identity and culture. This is discussed in more depth in chapter 12. Nor am I asserting that rebellion or resistance to control exerted by the community is a primary motivating factor to begin drinking among most drinkers. It has already been established, in chapter 8, that the primary motivation reported by participants is the need to alleviate painful emotions stemming from a life experience marked by colonial disruption at the levels of community and family.

Based on the discussion above, however, it is possible to state that for many who engaged in drinking or drunkenness, at the time of this research or before, a feeling of rebellion was *felt* and *asserted* in response to what is perceived as attempts at control from both within and without the community. This rebellion is tied into divergent views about social control, discussed in chapter 9.

As with other contemporary features of life in Chisasibi, such as western educational, health, and justice systems, drinking and drunkenness are among those things that *can be appropriated* on Eeyou terms, according to several respondents. If there are strong differences of opinion on whether it is proper or healthy to do so in the community, there are also differences of opinion on the extent and ways of appropriating many other aspects of colonial society. For some, such as those who espouse complete abstinence, the problems outweigh any possible benefits. The choice of the individual affects not only their own well-being, but that of the entire community,

⁶⁷ I do not say this to invalidate the claims of other scholars who have gathered such data in their own research in other Indigenous communities. Further, it is possible that older community members may have a different perspective than the people who participated in this research. Given the target population for this research, the question is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

given the web of social issues described in chapter 2. But for those who believe it is possible to drink in moderation, or to occasionally indulge in heavy drinking in a safe context (see below), it is considered a valid choice. Attempts to interfere with that choice, which go against the ethic of non-interference embraced by many Eeyouch (see chapter 9) are what provoke a sense of rebellion.

10.2. The Capacity to Choose: Moderate and Private Drinking in Chisasibi

If the views of community members are more nuanced than outright rejection when it comes to people who are drinking or drunk, the views of drinking more generally are also much more nuanced than initial observations may lead one to think. Much of the discussion thus far, especially the material in chapters 2 and 9 pertaining to widespread community views about drinking, might imply a dominant view that vilifies all forms of drinking. Initial reactions to the topic of drinking are often phrased in ways suggesting that drinking is inherently bad and that there is no acceptable way to drink. Yet, my research indicates that even among those who support strict measures against drinking, there is a level of acceptance of moderate drinking.

From the material in chapter 9, we see that public drinking and drunkenness are met with mixed feelings; while people tend to feel compassion toward people that they perceive to be in a difficult situation, there are fears about personal safety in the presence of drunken individuals or groups. The prevailing concerns of community members and of the literature about Indigenous drinking in Chisasibi and elsewhere focus on specific kinds of drinking and drunkenness that lie within Bacon's (1991) "exotic range" (p. 21): binge drinking, public drinking, and drinking that can lead to aggression and violence. For instance, Robbins (1973) indicated that among the Naskapi of the Schefferville area, the drinking that was highly criticized was the drinking that led to disruptive behaviours, not moderate or private drinking.

There is literature that shows that acceptance of private and moderate drinking exists, and has existed, in other Indigenous communities. Westermeyer (1979) referred to the large variety of drinking patterns described in ethnographic accounts among Indigenous peoples in the United

States at the time of his work. Similarly, Bousquet and Morissette (2009) have argued that Algonquian peoples in Quebec have a wider range of relationships with alcohol than what is often portrayed in academic literature. While the stereotypical behaviour of binge drinking and drinking to extreme levels of drunkenness is present, many Indigenous individuals either abstain or engage in moderate and discrete forms of drinking. Both Heath (1987) and Westermeyer (1979) have argued that the high visibility of binge drinking is what leads many observers to believe that it is the predominant pattern.

Initial discussions about drinking in Chisasibi did tend to focus on public drinking and drunkenness, danger, and the lack of capacity for moderate drinking. As such, the by-law forbidding alcohol possession in Chisasibi is widely supported and there are individuals in Chisasibi who advocate complete abstention. As discussed above, there are many Eeyouch in Chisasibi who agree with the idea that their fellow Eeyouch are generally unable to drink in moderation. However, it is important to note that not all drinking behaviour is universally condemned in Chisasibi. Deeper discussions with Chisasibi residents show that not everyone sees drinking as inherently problematic. Like other cultural elements that are seen as “imported” from Western society, willingly or not, some kinds of drinking behaviour have been incorporated by individuals in ways that are seen as harmless.

Therefore, many people in Chisasibi expressed that they felt that it was acceptable to drink on a moderate and casual basis: a bit of wine with dinner, a beer after work to relax, or a few beers on occasion during a party with trusted friends and family. “We can drink like white people too,” said Danielle (25 years old, Chisasibi, January 22, 2011). Several people, often young mothers, said that drinking in moderation at home was a good idea: “My children know that I have 2 glasses of wine in the evening, but I don’t get drunk. That way, they’re learning that it’s OK to drink in moderation, I think,” said Winnifred during a workshop on alcohol (29 years old, Chisasibi, June 5, 2011). Carol, cited above as expressing concerns that the by-law leads even responsible drinkers to hide, agreed with this assessment: “If kids had more role models showing them to drink in moderation, then maybe they wouldn’t grow up to think the only way to drink is to get completely drunk” (38 years old, Chisasibi, May 27, 2011).

On several occasions, I participated in gatherings and dinners in people's homes where moderate drinking was present. Either two or three individuals would spontaneously get together to share a small or moderate quantity of alcohol, such as a case of 12 among 3 or 4 people, or there would be a planned party with close friends and relatives. In the latter case, it would usually be a family friendly party where children were present, food was shared, and alcohol was one element among many features of the party. In other words, the party was not primarily a drinking party. These contexts are described in greater detail in chapter 6.

These events demonstrate that there are many people who see moderate drinking, or even occasional indulgence in heavier drinking, to be a normal part of life. Some of the individuals present at these parties are outspoken about the behaviour of "drunks" and "zombies". For instance, people such as Graham and Phoebe, who were present in one or more of these gatherings, have been cited in this dissertation as supportive of the by-law and attempts to curb bootlegging and excessive drinking. But they do not view alcohol as inherently bad or disruptive. In their view, as explained to me during one-on-one conversations, alcohol can be used in moderation in a healthy and safe way. "A drink with friends now and then is not a problem," said Graham (42 years old, Chisasibi, April 18, 2011). Phoebe agreed: "The problem is people who can't drink in moderation! That seems to be most people around here, especially young people. But people who can just have a few drinks... well, they kind of have to hide. But that's ok. And it doesn't hurt anyone anyway. No one gets out of control" (36 years old, Chisasibi, May 10, 2011).

While it may be tempting to see private drinking as a hidden phenomenon, many visits to Radisson showed that people openly purchased alcohol with no attempt to hide. At any given time, spending time in front of the grocery store showed Eeyouch from Chisasibi coming openly out of the store with cases of beer or bottles of wine and liquor. Similarly, people from Chisasibi went in and out of the bar or openly had beer or wine with their meal in the restaurant. The identities of these people ranged widely in age, gender, and occupation. There were youths, adults, and seniors; women and men; school workers, hospital workers, and band council employees who could be seen purchasing alcohol at the store or at the bar.

It is possible that some of these individuals only drank outside of the community and associated acceptable drinking with non-Indigenous locations. Some individuals did say that they felt more comfortable drinking when they were in non-Indigenous towns, such as Val d'Or or Gatineau. In their view, drinking is only problematic in the context of the community: "Drinking isn't a problem. It's drinking *here* that's a problem, because of everything we've been through. If I'm down south, in a white town or something, I'll have a beer or two. No problem. It's just different. Over there... well, I'm just sitting there quietly having a drink like anyone else. Here, it doesn't look too good. I don't want to help make things worse" (Brent, 59 years old, Chisasibi, October 7, 2010).

The homes of non-Indigenous community members, such as school or hospital employees, were common locations for dinners that included drinking. This drinking was moderate but mild intoxication was often present. I frequently witnessed Eeyouch drinking unselfconsciously along with their non-Indigenous colleagues in the context of dinners between teachers, for example. "It's different, ya know? Like it's something that's part of white culture, so it's normal when I'm in a white person's place" said Danielle (25 years old, Chisasibi, January 22, 2011).

Notwithstanding the general negative views about drinking, then, many people in Chisasibi do make the distinction between drinking that they consider to be transgressive and drinking that they consider relatively harmless. When they refer to problematic drinking, they are generally referring to drinking that leads to the possibility of violence and disruption as opposed to moderate and private drinking. However, concerns about the more extreme forms of drinking have an impact on the ways in which drinkers discuss their own choices. Tacit acceptance of moderate drinking notwithstanding, it is clear to drinkers that even moderate drinking can make them a target of suspicion for more problematic behaviour and cast their responsibility into doubt.

10.2.1. "They Need to Just Cut Loose Sometimes": Balancing Responsibility and Indulgence

Many participants who drank at the time of this study professed to drinking in moderation most of the time but acknowledged that they occasionally indulged in drinking to the point of

drunkenness. Overall, they felt that they were capable of making these choices despite a tendency to reject drinking that led to drunkenness and possibly other behaviours. They did, of course, acknowledge the risk that drinking in certain contexts could entail. Therefore, while drinking is considered a valid choice by many drinkers, former drinkers, or even non-drinkers in Chisasibi, there is a recognition of a necessary balancing act between responsibility and indulgence. This balancing act demonstrates the recognition that the presence of an ethic of non-interference is only effective if individuals exercise their autonomy in a way that allows one to live up to their social and familial roles. This requires staying away from situations where things could get out of their control.

The capacity to make responsible choices in this way came up most frequently in discussions with individuals who had responsibilities in the community. Either they had families to take care of, paid employment, or volunteer tasks for which they were accountable. Several people expressed that they did not want their drinking to interfere with the fulfilment of these responsibilities. “My family, my wife and kids...they have to be my priority. If it weren’t for them, I’d still be drinking a lot more than I do. I still drink more than my wife would like. I try hard...for her,” explained Tad (34 years old, Chisasibi, November 15, 2010). Similarly, Gavin and Codie both told me that they do not get drunk as often as they used to. “I have a little girl now. It’s not the same” (Codie, 35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

On the other hand, there is a clear need to indulge on occasion, according to many people. Life is stressful and the above-mentioned responsibilities weigh heavily. “I just need to relax on the weekend sometimes, ya know? With four kids...my wife is the one who goes out and works these days. I need a job, but I also have the kids to think about. It’s a lot,” said Tad, referring to how he continues to indulge on occasion, even though his wife would prefer that he not drink at all (34 years old, Chisasibi November 15, 2010). Winnifred, who explained that she drank two glasses of wine every evening and hoped to teach her children to drink in moderation, concurred that the stresses of parenting weigh heavily and that indulging in a bit of drinking can help alleviate them. “I love them, of course I love my kids! But being a mom is really hard. I have my two little glasses of wine in the evening. I don’t get drunk, not hurting anyone. Just a few minutes to relax after the younger ones are in bed and I can take a break” (29 years old, Chisasibi, June 5, 2011). Graham, a

professed former alcoholic who only drank in moderation and never to the point of drunkenness during the time of my fieldwork, even suggested that occasional drunkenness was a means of relaxing and taking a break from everyday responsibilities. “It’s not for me anymore - I don’t want to be drunk. But I understand that for some people, they need to just cut loose sometimes,” he explained (42 years old, Chisasibi, April 18, 2011).

The experience of balancing responsibility and indulgence is shaped by the knowledge of the widespread condemnation of drinking in Chisasibi. Legally, the previously discussed by-law makes the very possession of alcohol transgressive. Therefore, even moderate drinking carries potential stigma even though it is commonly known that people will overlook drinking that does not lead to commotion or violence, as discussed in chapter 9. The general perception of drinking and drunkenness as threats to Eeyou culture, community, and well-being make even moderate drinking questionable according to social norms, and if many overlook moderate drinking, there are still many who are very wary of it or who disbelieve that it is even possible. “It’s hard to stop at one,” said Tabitha, when I asked her if she thought that it was possible for people to drink in moderation. “Who says it will stay at that level?” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011). Knowing that many people in the community feel this way leads people who have a stake in how they are seen to be extremely cautious.

For some individuals who abstained from public or heavy drinking, this caution took the form of enjoying moderate quantities of alcohol in their homes with close family and friends. In these cases, the explanation given was that, unlike many community members, they were able to drink in moderation: “Most people around here...I think they don’t know how to just have one or two and then stop, ya know? A few of us can. I can. But I’m discrete about it, ya know? I don’t want to influence anyone in a bad way or get into any arguments with anyone” (Phoebe, 36 years old, Chisasibi, May 10, 2011). This made their choice to drink in secret a legitimate one, as they would not be causing problems in the community or getting into fights. But they did not shy away from acknowledging that they also had concerns about their reputations. As a young man explained to me in 1998, during my first fieldwork period, “I only drink at home. I work for [local entity] and it would look bad, even if I don’t drink a lot”.

There are some contextual choices that were described by research participants who identified as moderate drinkers or even former drinkers, that demonstrate this exercise of caution and balance. As noted above, some individuals only drank outside of Chisasibi and Radisson. Participants who acknowledged that they engaged in drinking to the point of drunkenness during this research also exercised caution in their own ways. Gavin, who identified as a former drunk, but who still drank to the point of drunkenness from time to time, explained that he became more careful about where he drank despite feeling the need to rebel. “I have to be careful. People are really quick to judge. Sometimes I want to go walk around when I’m drunk, like I used to. Just to walk around and see people I know. But I know people will point fingers. Sometimes I do it anyway” he said (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011).

Other respondents avoided large gatherings of drinkers. A large part of the accounts of drinkers corroborates the main views expressed about drinking parties in the community: that they are loud and that there is a risk of fighting and sexual assault. Tad, who continued to drink at the time of this research but who tended to avoid these parties due to his family responsibilities, is one of the people who commented on the risk of violence. “You know me, I’m a smart ass. So it doesn’t take much to get into a fight. It’s easy to rub someone the wrong way” (34 years old, Chisasibi, November 15, 2010).

This was the case for most of the people with whom I participated in the small impromptu gatherings described in chapter 6. Rather, they tended to keep to small, trusted groups of friends and relatives to engage in drinking that might lead to drunkenness as a way of avoiding unwanted attention. In some of these gatherings, friends and other research participants would get progressively drunk and begin to discuss strategies to obtain more alcohol later that night. Throughout the evening, people would typically text or call people and report back to other people in the room about which bootlegger had access to what, and for what price. If someone left to acquire alcohol, there would be discussions about the best ways to avoid notice.

Some individuals, often those who were trying to quit or reduce their drinking, explained that they occasionally got drunk at small private parties such as those described in chapter 6. As described, these parties were not drinking parties as such. They were usually casual get-togethers

between relatives and colleagues. One such event was Graham's party, described in chapters 6 and 8. There was a variety of levels of drinking and drunkenness at this party, and those who drank moderately or not at all expressed compassion and support for those who became more intoxicated. Cindy, for example, who called a lot of attention to herself by loudly singing and laughing, did not receive any criticism for her behaviour. Even her friends and relatives who were not drunk themselves laughed with her and continued to sit with her well into the night.

That night, both Graham and Cindy explained that this was a context where people who really needed to "cut loose" could do so, particularly in cases where they were on the path to stop drinking altogether. People were there to look out for each other, and these individuals could get drunk while still supported by loved ones, and without the risks that come with drinking alone or at large parties, where there is often violence and sexual assault. In addition to being protected from stigma, then, those who drank at these gatherings, whether moderately or not, were safe from harm.

In sum, while there is frequent commentary in Chisasibi on the lack of ability to drink responsibly, several research participants countered this view. From their accounts, it is possible for Eeyouch, like anyone else, to drink in moderation. Lack of moderation, some of them felt, is taught, which concurs with literature on the subject (see chapter 3). Some of them also feel that drinking to the point of drunkenness is acceptable if done on occasion. In their general view, it is each person's choice to indulge when and how they see fit, and that it is possible to do this while still living up to one's familial, work, or other obligations.

However, even though there is widespread knowledge that moderate drinking takes place in people's households, to be seen in a drunken state can harm someone's reputation. Visible public drinking and especially drunkenness could be interpreted by others as indicative of a longer-term problem and proof that moderate drinking or controlled occasional binging is impossible. People who only indulge on occasion are aware that to be seen drinking in Chisasibi leads to these assumptions and, possibly, to stigma. There may be a widespread desire among research participants to resist and rebel against forces that render drinking transgressive, and the corresponding stigma associated with drinking, as discussed in the previous section. However,

people still reported a desire to avoid that stigma if they could. Drinking, moderately or not, in private settings was one way to obtain relief from responsibility without the risk of stigma.

10.3. Agency and Willful Action

It is clear from the discussion above that drinkers place much importance on the theme of choice. There is variation on what are considered the right choices when it comes to drinking and drunkenness. However, the idea that individuals *make choices* when it comes to drinking is one thing that nearly all participants, regardless of drinking status at the time of this research, agreed upon. If the capacity to make choices is considered, by some, to be compromised when one is already in a drunken state, there is still an acknowledgement that one originally chose to put themselves in this state. This widespread acknowledgement of choice, and the responsibility that goes with it, allows us to discuss the matter of perceived agency in relation to decision making processes.

Chapter 4 provides an initial discussion of the concept of agency as employed in this dissertation. Agency is generally considered to be a capacity of acting on the world. Duranti (2006) provided a working definition of agency in which he outlined three criteria: that one has control over their actions, that one's actions has impacts on oneself and others, and that these actions are subject to approval or disapproval by others.⁶⁸ In this chapter, I discuss the first criterion, and turn to the other two in chapter 11. It is important to note that Duranti's (2006) criterion for control does not necessarily entail conscious planning, but rather an emphasis on the "possibility of having acted otherwise" (p. 452). This is helpful in considering the view that drinkers have of themselves as beings who can enact choices between possible modes of action.

To help locate the importance of one's self-perception as one with choice, or control over one's actions within the broader discussion of agency, it is useful to explore some literature pertaining to the anthropology of willing, or volition. Willing is an agentive process that tends to be defined

⁶⁸ Duranti's (2006) work focuses on agency and language, and his model of agency is applied to speech as action. However, considering that drinking is a communicative act (see chapter 8) his discussion is useful here. Further, his work has the specific aim of bridging linguistics and "social theory" oriented fields such as anthropology and sociology.

in academic literature with reference to the choice to act (Mattingly, 2010, p. 32).⁶⁹ Stewart and Strathern (2010) have stated that “The idea of the will implies agency and choice between possible actions. It also implies a kind of determination to carry out an action once it has been chosen; a positive drive to accomplish an action” (p. 79).

Throop (2010) outlined three phenomenological aspects of willing, or volition: own-ness, anticipation, and effortful-ness. He defined “own-ness” as a recognition of one’s own control over one’s action, or that one has initiated an action (p. 22). Like Duranti’s (2006) caveat that actions need not be planned for one to have control over them, Throop’s (2010) discussion of own-ness is inclusive of prereflexive acts. Moreover, the focus of Throop’s (2010) discussion of own-ness is the *perception* of control rather than an idea of control as objectively measured by someone other than the actor.

Anticipation, or goal directedness, the second aspect of will, includes either the imagining of an act *or* the action of engaging in an act with a specific goal in mind (Throop, 2010, p. 22).⁷⁰ The idea of anticipation through imagination is like Stewart and Strathern’s (2010) position that “imagination comes into play as a creative force in shaping how people exercise their will” (p. 79). They also elaborated that a part of will is imagining and evaluating the potential outcomes of an action. Therefore, “the idea of will mediates between intentions and desired outcomes, overcoming resistance and ambiguity” (Stewart and Strathern, 2010, p. 86).

This emphasis on imagination as a part of will resonates with the discussion of embodiment in chapter 8. One perceives experiences the world through their senses, and this experience is interpreted and rendered meaningful through engagement with others as well as with locally available discourses. The imagination with which an individual can project and evaluate a potential action is shaped by these interpretations and meanings.

Finally, Throop (2010) described effortful-ness, the third phenomenological aspect of willing, as the “feeling of doing” or the experiencing of something as “an act” (p. 22). Garro (2010), in her

⁶⁹ See Murphy and Throop (2010) for a rich discussion of the history of the anthropology of willing, which includes related concepts such as desire, intention, and motivation.

⁷⁰ While goal directedness is included in the same category as anticipation, it is a *possible* element of will, given that planning and reflection are not considered necessary aspects of own-ness or control over action.

discussion of willing, also placed an emphasis on the “feeling of doing” (p. 44) and “embodied action” (p. 46) as opposed to just thinking one may have done something. This is also in line with the literature on embodiment, discussed in chapter 8, with its focus on lived experience as something that is perceived through bodily senses.

10.3.1. Choice and the Self-Perception of Drinkers as Willful Agents

Throop’s (2010) phenomenological aspects of willing, along with Duranti’s (2006) first criterion for agency, can be applied to the views expressed by research participants about drinking and choice. From the discussion at the beginning of this chapter, it is clear that research participants of all drinking statuses considered themselves to be capable of choice. Some claimed the right and capacity to choose, either in general or in selected contexts, while others argued that drinking was categorically a bad choice. These ideas about the choice to drink, in turn, fed into people’s choice-making when it came to changing their drinking behaviour, as is seen in the following chapter.

This speaks to the importance that research participants placed on the right and the capacity to choose to drink, and the recognition that they could make different choices. While they widely referred to their life experiences and broader social and historical phenomena within which these experiences were located to explain their *need or desire* to drink, they still perceived themselves as having control over the *choice* to drink. In other words, they experienced own-ness, or a sense of initiation of action, when it came to their own drinking.

The explicit goal of achieving a state of drunkenness to alleviate painful emotions, such as anger and shame, was another primary theme in my discussions with research participants, particularly during interviews or private gatherings, although the issue occasionally came up in discussions with public drinkers (see chapter 8). This suggests an anticipation, while in an emotionally painful state, that being in a drunken state will provide relief. That drinkers are aware that the relief is short-lived does not contradict that this relief is their goal. Indeed, a phenomenological approach allows for such seeming contradictions.

The sensations of drinking and of being drunk are felt at the level of the body and given meaning through intersubjective engagement with others around them. Indeed, research participants

repeatedly referred to the act of drinking. During interview discussions, they remembered acquiring and consuming alcohol in the past. And they talked about drinking as they were drinking, during gatherings or encounters in public. The idea of drinking was far from theoretical, but rather a lived phenomenological experience. In many cases, it was a daily lived reality.

One might argue against ascribing these aspects of willing to drinking by stating that, during many instances of drinking, these aspects are not all present. It is, of course, much easier to identify these aspects with respect to the act of beginning to drink than it is for continuing to drink while one is already in a drunken state. However, Throop (2010) elaborated on the relationship between these aspects of willing by clarifying that they are, to a certain extent, independent from each other (p. 23). He provided examples of actions that excluded, at least on the surface, one of the three aspects, such as driving a familiar route without actively remembering the route one took upon their arrival. In this case, a sense of own-ness might be tenuous, as it might be in situations where one engages in further drinking while already in a state of drunkenness. Regardless of whether all instances of drinking include all three aspects of willing in an immediately identifiable way, however, they generally include at least two. With Throop's model (2010), they therefore still qualify as willful acts.

Throop (2010) argued further that one can generally make connections between the three aspects even when some are more obvious than others. As previously discussed, drinkers may not always be held accountable for their actions while drunk, which would mean that further drinking is seen as out of their control. However, they are *perceived*, by themselves and others, as responsible for beginning to drink in the first place. I therefore argue that the instances of drinking under discussion, regardless of the context, are *perceived as willful acts*, or choices, by participants in this research, either in the moment or upon later reflection.

It is also helpful to consider another important aspect of Throop's (2010) discussion of the phenomenological aspects of willing: that of temporality. In his model, these aspects become *vectors* of willing, taking place in the "moment-to-moment unfolding of an act" (p. 23). Attention to own-ness, effortfulness, and anticipation changes over the course of an action: "Various phases of the act, when understood in the context of streaming temporality, may be differently

configured according to articulated projects or may be undergone in a pre-reflexive immersion in the activity in progress” (p. 26). In other words, will can be oriented *toward* action in progress, not necessarily just toward completed acts. As such, Throop (2010) incorporated acting to achieve a goal and acting in response to one’s past trajectory, including past choices, in his model of willing.

This temporality of willing is useful in understanding the ways in which research participants considered themselves as “owning” their choice to drink despite their experiences, while drunk, of not feeling like themselves. As described in the ethnographic portion of this chapter, and reiterated several times above, people who drink nearly always consider the initial act of drinking to be a choice; they “own” this choice. And they actively engage in the effort to obtain and consume something to drink. They anticipate the achievement of a certain state: typically, relief from painful emotions or a greater ability to connect with a social network.

As a drinking episode unfolds, they interact with others and their physical state changes because of alcohol. Their actions become oriented toward the action in progress, which is drinking, usually with others, and engaging in the kinds of behaviours that are associated with drunken states, which vary by context. The relative attention to own-ness, effortfulness, and anticipation/goal directedness may shift over this unfolding. Actions, such as further drinking or instances of what would be considered, locally, as excess demonstrations of emotion (see chapter 9), may be felt as “owned” and effortful in the moment, but may lack a sense of anticipation as the action is oriented toward the *now*.

Whether an individual still perceives drunken actions, and even drunkenness itself, to be “owned” once they are no longer in a drunken state is subject to the kinds of reflections described in this chapter. These reflections, much as the reflections on the painful emotional states that research participants identified as immediate causes for their desire or need to drink, are reflective of a deeply agentic process of intersubjective engagement. As with their emotions, the actions of drinkers are embodied, and they are interpreted and given meaning with reference to one’s life story and to available worldviews concerning morality and social norms.

10.4. Conclusion

Eeyou drinkers who participated in this research affirmed both their *right* and *capacity* to choose when it came to drinking. These views are at once in line and at odds with what many other community members express about drinking. The dominant view in the community tends to appear favourable to prohibition. Many people have strong concerns about the impact of excess drinking on the well-being of their families and community, and view drinking as culturally and socially transgressive. However, deeper discussion reveals that even among people who espouse these views, there is ambivalence about the efficacy and legitimacy of prohibition. On one hand, something needs to be done about one of the biggest contributors to violence and suicide. On the other hand, a measure such as prohibition is a violation of choice, and as such, violates the principle of non-interference in the autonomy of individuals. The assertion of one's right to choose, then, is located within a complex community-wide dilemma.

Tied into this dilemma are questions about whether Eeyouch were willing and able, in general, to drink in moderation or in otherwise responsible ways. Supporters of the by-law expressed that, despite its discriminatory nature, it was a needed remedy for the social ills related to drinking *because* of the lack of ability or will to drink in moderation. Other people who agreed about the nature of the links between extreme drinking and problems such as violence and suicide felt that the by-law made the situation worse because it rendered moderate drinking invisible. Prohibition prevented more responsible forms of drinking from being modeled because people felt they had to hide to avoid the stigma associated with *all* drinking.

Drinkers who asserted that they could make responsible choices exemplified this. Notwithstanding the very visible nature of purchasing and consuming alcohol in Radisson, for instance, many drinkers exercised much caution in drinking and acquiring alcohol back home in Chisasibi. Whether it was by drinking or getting drunk only with small groups of trusted friends and family or being strategic about errands to obtain more alcohol from bootleggers without being seen by people who could cast doubt on their status as responsible parents or workers, drinkers who shared their views with me made it a point to avoid stigma.

In these assertions of the right and capacity to choose, and the sentiment captured by Gavin when he said “I’ll drink if I want!” (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011), there was an assertion of one’s perception of oneself as a willful actor. The ways in which drinkers talked about their choices showed various phenomenological aspects of volition. Drinkers owned their choice to drink and saw themselves as having control over that initial choice, notwithstanding the possible changes to their ability to choose that could come as the drinking event unfolded. Anticipation of a drunken state, which would alleviate the suffering that many of them identified as contributors to their drinking, drove them to make that first willful choice. Drinking, as a physical act, and drunkenness, as a physical state, were experienced in an embodied way, providing a sense of effortfulness.

Another important area in which the idea of choice was manifested was that of decisions about possible changes to one’s levels or frequency of drinking. Ideas of will remain pertinent in that discussion. But will, and the autonomy that it can represent, become framed within wider issues of accountability and the evaluation of one’s actions against different sets of norms. As I discuss in the following chapter, this process also manifests the deep intersubjective engagement that is characteristic of the interpretation of embodied emotions as well as the continued sense of oneself as a willful agent.

Chapter 11 - “In the End, You Have to Figure Things Out for Yourself”: Choice, Volition, and Moral Agency

The previous chapter highlights the importance of the self-perception of drinkers as willful actors who have the right and capacity to make choices about their drinking. It is also important to discuss how considerations of will and choice are bound up in the acknowledgement of accountability. Many drinkers are careful about when and how they make their choice to drink because of their awareness of stigma that tends to be applied to all signs of drinking, notwithstanding a tacit community approval of moderate drinking. That this stigma is tied into local normative frameworks deriving from cultural and social ideals is clear (see chapter 9). But it also ties into moral frameworks. Drinkers are aware of this, and both the normative and moral codes come into play in their discussions of choice, particularly with regards to choices about changing their drinking behaviour. When they talk about past or ongoing personal dilemmas about whether they should quit or reduce their drinking, they are clearly willing to take accountability for their actions, and for the fact that their choice to drink sometimes leads to unfavourable or harmful behaviours.

In this chapter, I use the variety of views shared about decisions of whether to quit or reduce their drinking as a springboard for a discussion of volition and agency as they relate to available normative and moral frameworks. Accountability and the assessment of one’s behaviour, by the self and by others, are salient themes. The specific issue of ambivalence regarding the attribution of accountability to people in states of drunkenness allows us to consider the matter of volition and agency with respect to actions that may be perceived as unreflexive or habitual, as well as the idea that the concepts of volition and agency themselves are subject to culturally specific ideological frameworks.

11.1. “You Have to Figure Things Out for Yourself”: Choosing to Quit or Reduce One’s Drinking

Given the widespread condemnation of drinking in the community, it is no surprise that many research participants brought up their thought process about the issue of quitting. Much of the public community discourse, for instance in local community media, around the control of drinking focusses on ways to quit. Research participants sometimes echoed these views.

For several drinkers, the growing realization of the impact that their drinking had on themselves and on their families led them to re-evaluate the choices they were making so that they could stop hurting themselves and others. For some, it was necessary to completely abstain from drinking to achieve this. For these individuals, quitting was a means of achieving personal growth, allowing them to be better spouses and parents, and happier people in general. Adam had stopped completely only a few months before we met. In his view, alcohol is too powerful to maintain at a moderate level: “You quit or you don’t. Slowing down is not the same thing. You’ll just get aught up in it again” (May 22, 2011, 22 years old, Chisasibi). He also spoke about how quitting alcohol had brought him out of the painful state he was always in and how he now felt more motivated to pursue his education. Tabitha, who had stopped several years before, said “I’m stone cold sober now and I plan to stay that way! My kids matter more than anyone, and I regret more than anything how much I hurt them when I was drinking and smoking [marijuana]” (April 12, 2011, 44 years old, Chisasibi). Dean echoed these sentiments: “You reach this point where you have to grow up. You have to take responsibility. Especially when you settle down and start having kids. I woke up and saw the cycle I was in and I wanted to stop it, for their sake. For me, that means no more drinking, at all” (Dean, April 3, 2011, 44 years old, Chisasibi).

In many of these cases, the individuals in question went on to help others who want to stop drinking: “I enjoy helping out, now, the way others helped me [stop drinking] in the past. I have some projects in mind and I’m pretty excited about it,” (Dean, April 3, 2011, 44 years old, Chisasibi). Tabitha also expressed joy at helping others quit: “Anyone can come to me and I’ll take them under my wing” (April 12, 2011, 44 years old, Chisasibi).

Some individuals who were drinking, moderately or heavily, at the time of my fieldwork, indicated that they wanted to quit for similar reasons as those expressed by Tabitha, Dean, and Adam. Cindy, who was at Graham's party as discussed in chapters 8 and 10, and Virginia, who I met while she was drinking outside with a group of young men one morning, both shared that they wanted to quit but did not know how. Indeed, as discussed in chapter 8, the failure to quit was a significant source of shame for many participants. But despite the shame, the resolve to find a way to quit and the firm belief in the necessity of quitting was expressed by many who felt that their drinking, at that time, was causing problems for themselves and others.

Other research participants felt that abstention was not the only available choice toward personal growth or improved family relations. Some of the individuals cited in previous chapters, such as Tad and Gavin, felt that it is possible to indulge on occasion while still maintaining their responsibilities. While they recognize that their previous patterns of frequent heavy drinking, binge drinking, or public drinking were problematic to themselves and to others, they chose to reduce the frequency or quantity of their drinking rather than quit: "I still drink and get hammered sometimes, go out walking around with all the other drunks. But I live in two worlds. Because I've been working on my shit. And I can work on my shit and improve myself and still go out and have fun sometimes" (Gavin, 36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011).

According to Gavin and others who chose to reduce the frequency or quantity of their consumption rather than to stop altogether, drinking is not the problem in and of itself and abstaining does not necessarily fix the problems that led one to start drinking. "They can stop drinking but it doesn't necessarily make the problems go away. They just learn what to do and what to say so that people think they fixed all their problems. But to really get better, they have to take responsibility for themselves and that doesn't always happen just from quitting" (Gavin, 36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011). Similarly, Caitlin, who acknowledged that she used to drink to excess but now only drank in moderation, related that "Alcohol is not bad. You can put a bottle there [pointing to the floor] and it won't do anything to you. It's what's inside people that comes out when they're drunk. Even if they stop drinking, they don't change. My ex stopped and he's still miserable [laughter]" (43 years old, Chisasibi, April 13, 2011). Dean, who stopped drinking completely, partly concurred with this idea: "Well, you can stop drinking but that's not enough to

fix all your problems. You gotta work on the deeper stuff too. [...] In the end, you have to figure things out for yourself” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011).

Other individuals expressed more ambivalence regarding their choices. Winnifred, for instance, expressed mixed feelings about her habit of having two glasses of red wine every night. She felt that she had managed to reduce her drinking to an acceptable level in the preceding years, but she was still concerned about whether it was still too much: “They [my kids] accept it and tell me ‘It’s ok Mom.’ But I worry about it too. I can’t stand the thought that I hurt them. Because I used to drink a lot” (29 years old, Chisasibi, June 5, 2011).

For some, the non-linear path to sought-after self-improvement through quitting or reducing led to some confusion. Codie, for example, alternated between periods of binge drinking, abstinence, and moderation. He acknowledged that he chose these different paths, hoping to find the one that would work for him. “Sometimes I think I should stop completely. And I do for a while, and it feels good. But it doesn’t last, eh. So, I think I should try to just slow down” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). In this discussion, he shared that he saw life as a place to learn from experience, and that figuring out one’s path takes time. A conversation with Holly and Cindy during a cigarette break outside during Graham’s party illustrated this as well:

Things were silent for a while, then she [Holly] said: “I drink too much.” She talked about her personal problems for a bit: a recent break up, abuse that had happened in her life, problems with her kids. “I’m trying, ya know. But now I don’t drink alone at least. I drink with my friends. That way I don’t get into trouble. I don’t go to those big house parties either. It’s not safe there, ya know?” (Fieldnotes, June 11, 2011).

and

Cindy lit another cigarette and told me she wanted to stop drinking. “I’m gonna quit. I’ll get better. I have to give up gambling too. Christ. I just need time, ya know.” She perked up and smiled. “But tonight we’re having a good time,” she said as she lifted her glass up in a “cheers” kind of way (Fieldnotes, June 11, 2011).

The acknowledgement that changes in drinking behaviour are non-linear and require time to “figure things out” echoes ideas about learning and growing among the Eeyouch and other northern Indigenous peoples. Runnels (2007) has indicated, based on interviews with women in Chisasibi, that the prevailing local attitude toward personal growth does not follow the linear path that is prevalent in Western societies. As mentioned in chapter 9 in the section on youth drinking,

Lessard (2007) and Darnell (1981) have also discussed the idea, present in many Indigenous nations, that learning happens over the course of life experience rather than from interference by direct instruction. In the experiences of research participants who had grappled with the dilemmas involved in the decision to quit or to reduce and who have gone back and forth between different options, the lessons learned in the process have contributed to their growth and learning. This is discussed in more depth in chapter 12.

Regardless of their views on the matter of quitting or reducing alcohol consumption, all participants agreed that the desire to belong played a role in the extent to which a person would be able to follow through on their choice. Drinking and drunkenness connected them with a social network of others who engaged in these behaviours. Knowing how to fit in with other drinkers had become a primary mode of belonging for them, and quitting would bar access to their most comforting social network. “It’s hard to stop when all your old drinking buddies are around. That’s why so many people fail when they try to quit” (Gavin, 36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011). In instances where an individual perceived that network as causing more problems than the benefits it provided, a will was often expressed to leave both the behaviours and the people behind by leaving Chisasibi altogether. “I need to get out of here, go do some kind of treatment. I keep trying to quit but I fail because of how things are here,” Clyde related (23 years old, Chisasibi, December 10, 2010). Cole’s words echoed this sentiment: “As soon as I finish school, I’m leaving. It’s no good here. I just get into trouble all the time because of the people I used to hang out with” (21 years old, Chisasibi, June 2, 2011).

For most respondents, though, the pattern of quitting, restarting, and quitting again went on for years, often at least partly due to the primary social connections they had with others who drank. This pattern was ongoing at the time of this research for the majority of those who identified as current drinkers. Codie, for example, related that “It’s hard to connect with my family because of it [his past behaviour]. But it’s easy to hang out with people if I pick up a bottle” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

These views align with those of scholars who have described fears among Indigenous drinkers that abstinence from drinking would lead to social ostracization (see, for example, Bousquet,

2005; Brody, 1970; Roy, 2005; & Stevens, 1981). This was also recognized by some in the community who did not drink at the time of this research. Dean, in recalling the period of his life during which he stopped drinking acknowledged that the social aspect made it difficult. “You feel like you belong with them, so it’s hard to let that go. It’s the hardest part. That’s why in my work, I want to give them some other way to belong, to help with that” (Dean, 44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011). Tabitha, also cited above as someone who aimed to help people quit drinking, used a religious path to encourage a sense of personal identity and belonging outside of social circles centered on drinking.

In sum, there is a range of views on whether it is necessary to abstain from drinking to solve the problems caused by drinking. This is related to the range of views about whether drinking itself is a problem and whether it is possible to drink in responsible ways, which are discussed in chapter 10. What unites these views is the rarely questioned assumption of choice. The circumstances of one’s life, at both the macro and micro levels, and the painful emotions that emerged from them, may have contributed to one’s drinking. But each person has the choice to drink, the choice of *how and when* to drink, and the choice to quit or reduce their drinking. However, these choices are made with reference to the observations about the impacts of one’s actions on others. This brings up the question of the assessment of one’s actions according to these impacts and, therefore, according to local normative and moral frameworks.

11.2. Social Norms, Morality, and the Assessment of One’s Actions

With the choice to act generally comes accountability for the consequences of that act. In chapter 10, I referred to Duranti’s (2006) working definition of agency with a focus on the first criterion of having control over one’s actions. Here, the second and third criteria for his working definition of agency come into play. One of these was that an action has impacts on the self and on others. The other was that this action be subject to approval or disapproval by others. Both criteria generally touch on the related ideas of social norms and morality, as norms about behaviour and interaction usually refer to the wider domain of moral values. When it comes to drinking in Chisasibi, it is established in chapter 9 that drinking, drunkenness, and the behaviours that accompany them contravene Eeyou norms of interaction. This is inherently harmful, according to

community members, as it disrupts and disables harmonious relationships. But it is also immoral in the eyes of many, either because it runs counter to what it means to live by a certain set of values (Eeyou values or the values associated with one of the locally active branches of Christianity, for example) or because it causes physical harm to the self and to others. For this chapter, then, moral values and social norms are discussed together to frame the issue of the assessment of one's actions, by self and other, with reference to the impacts one's actions has in the world.

Both the reflective processes of ascribing agency to oneself and attributing meaning to one's actions obviously take place within a given social and cultural context, inclusive of political, economic, and historical forces. Accordingly, much of the anthropological, and other, literature on agency and volition refer to these contexts in discussing the ways in which people evaluate actions – *their own and those of others* - according to moral and normative aspects of available worldviews. However, rather than simplistically locate volition as *subject* to these systems, as though there were a static set of norms and moral values by which people assessed their actions, it is important to consider the complexity of the relationship between lived experience, or lifeworld, and cultural norms and values.

Hallowell (1955), in his discussion of the relationship between the self, culture, and experience, elaborated on the idea of a culturally constituted behavioral environment. He stressed that "An intelligible behavioral environment has been constituted for the individual that bears an intimate relationship to the kind of being he knows himself to be and it is in this behavioral environment that he is motivated to act" (Hallowell, 1955, pp. 85-86). Hallowell (1955) insisted that this behavioural environment is not an objective static entity to which people respond. Rather, people respond to this environment *as they perceive or experience it*. In the words of contemporary phenomenological anthropologists, this behavioural environment is intersubjectively constructed.

This behavioural environment provides, among other things, orientations allowing individuals to be aware of themselves as willful actors in relation to others around them. The ability to appraise oneself and one's actions is highlighted as an important feature of this self-awareness, and

“implicit in moral appraisal is the concomitant assumption that the individual has volitional control over his own acts” (Hallowell, 1955, p. 106). Indeed, Garro (2010) has posited that Hallowell’s (1955) argument that self-awareness unfolds over time with respect to “a specific historical-cultural setting, and in the context of particular social relationships” (p. 42) can be applied to volition as well as to self-awareness.

Garro (2010), elaborating on Hallowell’s (1955) work, pointed out the intricate connection between volition, morality, and social and cultural contexts: “the intertwining of the volitional and the moral, and their embedding in interpersonal relations and local moralities, make clear that an understanding of volition cannot be divorced from particular social and cultural settings” (p. 42). In particular, she focused on two notions of willing. One of these emphasizes volition as it is related to “desiring and wishing” (Garro, 2010, p. 46), with a focus on what matters to a person. The other centers embodied action, or the sensation of doing – in line with Throop’s (2010) discussion of effortfulness – and posits that this action can then be measured against local morals and norms.

The importance of considering morality and norms in relation to the act of weighing options is also present in Taylor’s (1985) philosophical discussion of human agency. He defined “moral agency” as a “reflexive awareness of the standards one is living by (or failing to live by)” (p. 103). He emphasized two degrees of evaluation that humans, as moral agents, use to make decisions. A weak evaluation, illustrated by the choice of which dessert to pick off a tray or where to go on vacation, entails little moral dilemma. An individual chooses based on their preference in the moment. A strong evaluation, however, is deeper and entails self-awareness and analysis based on an individual’s knowledge and values. Taylor (1985) stressed strong evaluation as a richer element of human agency and as a necessary contributor to moral agency. It requires a deep awareness of the knowledge that is available to an individual and entails a moral dilemma in which the individual is aware of the impacts of their actions and of the social perception of these actions. This type of evaluation and the knowledge used to engage in it obviously are linked with one’s social and cultural context.

However, as mentioned above, it is important to avoid casting the normative and moral frameworks that are associated with a given social and cultural context as monolithic entities to which people are subject. Taylor (1985) acknowledged that part of the process of evaluation includes questions about one's own use of available "yardsticks". Rather, he argued that one's own "deepest unstructured sense of what is important" guides one's moral evaluations (Taylor, 1985, p. 41). This is in line with Garro's (2010) point, above, that willing is tied to what matters to a person.

In the discussion of one's evaluation of one's own actions according to moral values and norms, it becomes apparent that the way in which one judges themselves often refers to the ways they believe others will judge them. But considering the individual variation in how people *relate* to a nominally shared set of values and norms, and which norms and values matter to a person, complexifies one's evaluation of their actions.

Garro (2010) brought up some further complexities in relation to the idea of a behavioural environment. She stressed that not all individuals within a community necessarily share the same one, which is concordant with the idea of this environment being intersubjective. Some elements and reference points may be shared, but this "environment" is not, as mentioned above, a static or discrete entity. So, while people may share "culture" and the ideals that accompany it, people's perceptions and relationships to ideas, norms, and values vary based on their own experiences. In her own work with an Anishinaabe community in Manitoba, for instance, she observed a great level of variation in the extent to which people relate to what are considered traditional norms and morals. Indeed: "intersubjectively shared cultural knowledge" (Garro, 2010, p. 50) from traditional lifeways or worldviews are not always shared within a community. Further, "divergent interpretive possibilities may co-exist side-by-side" (Garro, 2010, p. 51) and can be drawn from to explain action. In the case of her research, community members varied in whether they were willing to attribute illness to "bad medicine", a concept deriving from what many see as traditional Anishinaabe knowledge.

It follows, then, that people can evaluate their own actions against a variety of moral and normative frameworks; that people can, as part of that evaluation, take account of the effects of

their actions on themselves and others in accordance with these multiple frameworks; and that people can evaluate their actions with or without consideration of how *others around them* evaluate their actions. This does not necessarily happen in a systematic way where a person examines their actions with a series of moral and normative frameworks one after the other. The reflective process is messier than that, as people deal with dilemmas and uncertainty (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011). As experience unfolds, some frameworks, or blends thereof, take more appeal or pertinence than others as preoccupations change. Accordingly, Garro (2010) has suggested that one's orientation toward a particular behavioural environment can change over time. This is in line with Throop's (2010) discussion of temporality and changes in attention to the various aspects of willing.

The moral and normative codes to which one refers are therefore highly contextual and subject to interpretation through the lens of lived experience. Garcia's (2014) work invites us to consider moral engagement and the evaluation of action in contexts that go against prevailing moral systems. Based on her work with heroin users in New Mexico, she has argued that "morality is shaped by the exigencies of everyday life, including addiction, mental illness, and incarceration" and that "these pressure points are not opposed to morality; rather they hold it as well. Morality is manifest in and throughout these points, yet it too often goes unnoticed or is undervalued by dominant moral discourses" (p. 52).

Garcia's (2014) work centers the relationship between a mother and daughter who have become drug partners. Holding to a promise to take care of each other, according to the needs of each, they both supplied each other with drugs and took care of each other in cases of drug-induced illness:

For Eugenia and Bernadette, the arts of care included small gestures meant to ease pain. Produced at the intersection of individual agency and social constraint, these gestures were articulated through rituals of heroin use. They may have wounded as much as they healed. Nevertheless, they were oriented toward relieving the pain of the other and, as such, they were moral acts, embedded in the everyday context of shared vulnerability and difficult life circumstances (Garcia, 2014, p. 56).

This example is helpful not only because of its alignment with the above discussion of the moral and normative frameworks that people use to assess their own and other's actions. It also helps

to highlight the importance of considering how people who engage in marginal or stigmatized behaviours not only have access to dominant worldviews to assess their own actions but have access to a worldview that emerges from their experiences with others who are similarly marginalized or stigmatized. Much like the mutual understanding of ways to express embodied pain, discussed in chapter 8, people who drink have a mutual understanding, at least when they are drinking, of what matters in terms of social norms and moral values.

11.2.1. Self Evaluation and the Choice to Drink: Moral and Normative Frameworks

Self-assessment according to moral and normative frameworks and a consideration of the impacts of one's actions on others are central to the model of agency employed in this research. It is therefore important to consider how these processes are demonstrated by the perspectives and experiences shared by research participants. It has been established and reiterated throughout this dissertation that there are multiple streams of thought in Chisasibi which intersect in ways that allow people to draw from a wide range of value and moral systems in understanding and justifying their choices. This intersection also leads, as we have seen, to some ambivalence in these reflections. However, I suggest that drinkers intersubjectively construct and interpret their own behavioural environment at this intersection, and that this environment is inclusive of the various perspectives used in the community to assess or judge drinking behaviour.

In line with the discussion of will and temporality from the previous chapter, I also argue that the moral values and norms they use to assess their own actions vary over the course of time. They vary over the duration of a given drinking episode, but also over the course of one's longer-term life experience. The embodied emotions that are experienced at different stages, in different states, and in different contexts are interpreted and willfully acted on with reference to one or more normative and moral "system". Depending on the context, an individual may have different pulls toward different moral and normative codes. To the extent that research participants express that they choose to drink and that they can choose to change their drinking behaviour, these choices are made with reference to widely shared norms and values, whether they view their actions as *being in line* with those norms and values or not.

During sober interview discussions or informal conversations with current drinkers, they tended to refer, at least initially, to the widely expressed sets of assumptions about the nature of drinking. They explained, as described in chapter 8, that they actively chose to drink or to continue drinking out of a desire to alleviate pain caused by difficult life experiences and how these experiences were shaped by a history of colonial disruption. Many spoke of choosing to drink in efforts to live up to the expectations of others. They spoke, in some cases, of the medical model that posits addiction as the driving force behind their drinking. Several of them spoke, as outlined in this chapter, of spiritual or cosmological aspects of drinking, with references to alcohol or drinking as evil and quitting as spiritual healing. When referring to these “mainstream” community views, which derive from both local and Western conceptions of health, justice, and the body, they expressed negative judgements toward their own actions, including actions performed while in drunken states, such as violence toward people close to them.

This judgement referred, in large part, to their knowledge of how they were perceived by others, but also to the effects they observed on others. In some cases, they acknowledged that they kept drinking despite the harm they were causing others in doing so, and that this led to further emotional pain. In the contexts in which they related these views and judgements, they attributed importance to similar sets of moral and normative codes as other people in Chisasibi did.

It is generally in these contexts, also, that participants discussed their consideration of choices about reducing or quitting alcohol consumption, or about when and where to drink. These considerations referred to widely shared morals and norms but also to moral and normative views that are less commonly expressed in public fora in Chisasibi. The necessity to quit and completely abstain from alcohol is widely conveyed in local media, from a variety of perspectives: that drinking is both a response to colonial disruption and a disruptive element in Eeyou existence in and of itself; that drinking goes against religious (usually Christian) norms; or that drinking stems from addiction. Current and former drinkers who want to or have quit frequently refer to these, as discussed in chapter 10 and in this chapter. However, many current and former drinkers, as seen in the previous chapter, referred to alternate moral and normative perspectives of drinking: that drinking is not a problem in and of itself; that moderate drinking or occasional drunkenness

are possible and acceptable; or that drinking is an inalienable right. In cases where individuals are ambivalent about these choices, there is reference to multiple streams of thought.

In my encounters with people who were drinking or drunk during public encounters or small private gatherings, the references to moral and normative codes shifted. All were still available, but the perceptions and priorities were different. These participants generally emphasized the right to choose, including the ideas that drinking is a form of active rebellion against authority figures such as the police force or local and colonial governance systems and that Eeyouch, like anyone else, are entitled to drink and to experience the sensation of drunkenness, with the emotional relief and social connection that it entails.

Research participants who engaged in public drinking and drunkenness, at least those I encountered in the daytime, were typically already in drunken states as their wanderings in town in search for more alcohol often came after all-night private drinking parties. These behaviours may come with public stigma given that other community members will see them in these states. But whether they cared about local norms or not, the attraction of continuing to hang around with their drinking mates as well as the possibility of obtaining more alcohol outweighed the attraction of avoiding the public gaze.

There is, of course, variation in the extent to which people are willing to flout dominant norms around drunkenness. Unlike the drinkers that I encountered on many weekday mornings who, as mentioned, were usually out looking for alcohol after having spent the night partying and drinking, the people who hung out with me in my apartment for impromptu gatherings avoided big parties but still followed opportunities to obtain alcohol once they were intoxicated. For instance, at the end of several of these gatherings, friends would begin to text their contacts to find out where they could obtain more alcohol. The gathering would usually end when someone had found a source. However, this always took place in the evening and the people involved discussed strategies for discretion on their way out. Their reputation mattered to them, so they navigated local norms while still following opportunities to obtain something that went against those very norms.

In these contexts, their solidarity with each other in the face of forces they perceived as controlling outweighed preoccupations with living up to community expectations, although these preoccupations were not completely absent. Indeed, the moral and normative community expectations that acted as reference points for willful action in these states were more often oriented toward their fellow drinkers and assessed accordingly, in a similar manner as that described by Garcia (2014) among the heroin users with whom she worked. As Murphy and Throop (2010) stated, with reference to Stewart and Strathern's (2010) work, "while individuals always find themselves embedded in multiple layers of social obligations and culturally shaped value systems that often impinge on the expression of inner desires, these layers are always weighted differently in different contexts" (p. 14). For drinkers, the social obligations and value systems that are weighted most heavily during episodes of drinking are not necessarily the same ones that have primacy during later reflections. But the important thing is that they perceive themselves as willfully acting with reference to a set of social and cultural norms.

Two points emerge here. On one hand, we can say that going against established norms and values *is* a norm and value of its own in certain circumstances, and that willful action is assessed accordingly. As Jessor and Jessor (1977) and Suissa (1998) have argued, and as documented in this dissertation, not all individuals have the same level of adherence to local norms about drinking behaviour. This is in line with Taylor's (1985) reasoning that moral self-assessment includes a questioning of the norms against which a person measures their actions. He argued that an individual only feels negative judgement toward themselves to the extent that they agree with the judgement that others pass on them.

It also corroborates Hallowell's (1955) discussion of the behavioural environment within which one willfully acts as one that is shaped by life experience and perceptions. The experiences of drinkers, with other drinkers, shape their sense of morality and norms at least as much as their exposure to and engagement with widely shared community values. The norms and morals they share among themselves are often the most accessible and appealing to refer to when they are in drunken states. But they are still available for reference during later periods of reflection.

On the other hand, we can say that accountability to others and a consideration of the impacts one's actions have on others generally retain a place of preoccupation. From the description of community views in this and in previous chapters, it is widely acknowledged that drinking and drunkenness have impacts on the self and on others. The physical and emotional affects of these behaviours were reiterated by most research participants. For example, Codie, Tad, Tabitha, and others discussed the ways in which drinking made existing painful emotions worse after the initial relief (see chapter 8). They also discussed how a person's drinking behaviour can harm people close to them. In some cases, participants spoke of this harm from the perspective of both one who was harmed by another person's drinking and one whose behaviour has harmed others.

It is also clear that drinking and drunkenness are subject to the judgement of others. Chapters 2 and 9 outline the degree to which community members, including people who drank at the time of this research or in the past, criticize the drinking behaviour of others. Further, in chapters 9 and 10, we see that drinkers are aware of the stigma and judgement attributed to their drinking. While they are often not considered responsible for their actions while they are in drunken states, their choice to drink is still subject to criticism, as are those actions for which they are not considered responsible (the matter of accountability is discussed in more detail below).

Depending on the framework to which one is referring to interpret and make meaning of one's actions, though, the way in which one assesses those impacts and the people to whom one feels accountable may change. In some situations, the harm caused to loved ones by a person's drinking takes precedence and is involved in reflections on whether one should make different choices. In other situations, the mutual support one offers others who are drinking takes on more immediate importance and is involved in what may appear as unreflexive or habitual behaviour. Regardless of the context, research participants made it very clear that they "owned" their choices and that they actively assessed and re-assessed these choices, which points to their self-perception as willful agents according to the model of agency under discussion here.

11.3. Agency and Drunken States: Ambivalence and Accountability

The issue of accountability for actions performed while in drunken states merits some further consideration, given that there was ambivalence on this matter among research participants of

all drinking statuses. As reiterated several times, most research participants, in their discussion of drinking as a choice, affirmed their responsibility for the general act of drinking. However, there were frequent statements about feeling as though they were under the control of alcohol *while they were in drunken states*.

Codie, for example, described prior incidents of extreme drunkenness when he committed violent actions by which he was abhorred. A self-professed pacifist who spoke adamantly against violence toward women and children, he remembered, with remorse, times when he hit his girlfriend. "This is not me. This is not who I am. My mother even used to tell me 'You're not being yourself'" (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Other research participants who recalled their own drunken episodes made similar statements: "I was just out of control when I was drunk. I really didn't know what I was doing" (Tabitha, 44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011).

Further, there is a widely expressed view in Chisasibi that drinkers are not responsible for their actions *when they are drunk*. These actions, including verbal or physical aggression, drunk driving, and further drinking, are not considered to be under the control of people who are drunk. Accordingly, many research participants made assertions about the lack of control of *other* people who were in drunken states: "When someone's drunk, they don't know what they're doing. They're not really themselves. They're...someone else during that time," explained Brent (57 years old, Chisasibi, October 7, 2010). A few research participants referred to the idea that alcohol was or contained a spirit that could possess an individual. Agatha, for example, explained that the spirit of alcohol would take over a person if it was disrespected, or used in an abusive way (46 years old, Chisasibi, August 20, 2010).

Notwithstanding the view of many in Chisasibi that people in drunken states are not in control of their actions, "drunks" are still at least partially blamed for the impacts of these actions, both by others around them and by themselves. However, respondents who recounted their experiences with the drinking of others expressed ambivalence about the extent to which they blamed those whose drinking harmed them. On one hand, research participants of all drinking statuses expressed anger, frustration, and fear toward people who were drunk and toward their actions: belligerence, physical and sexual violence, and public drinking and drunkenness themselves.

Many expressed resentment that people in their lives continued to drink despite the harm they caused others. Zoe, for example, described her anger at her former boyfriend for his violent tendencies when drunk. She also expressed frustration at what she felt was a lack of priorities: “It made me feel like the bottle was more important than me” (26 years old, Chisasibi, March 11, 2011). On the other hand, they also expressed understanding of where the person’s drinking came from and the feeling that perhaps the person’s drinking was not completely their fault. Tabitha’s citation in the first part of this chapter, for example, about her resentment toward her mother was tempered by her understanding of the impacts of her mother’s experience in residential school. This ambivalence toward “drunks”, derived from the blend of frustration, fear, and compassion, is described further in chapter 9 and complexifies the discussion of agency among drinkers, especially when they are in drunken states.

As with the evaluation of one’s own choice to drink, then, the evaluation of one’s actions while in a drunken state can be performed with reference to a multitude of perspectives by any individual, and this evaluation can shift over time and in different contexts. Whereas the self-assessment as willful agent with respect to one’s right and capacity to choose to drink is abundantly demonstrated in the words of research participants, views of the drunken self as willful agent fluctuate.

11.3.1. Accountability and Habitual Action

What arguments would support the existence of, or at least the *perception* of, any sort of agency on behalf of someone who is in a drunken state? Anthropological literature on agency and volition provides an avenue for thinking about drunken actions as agentic to the extent that these actions *have impacts* and that they are *subject to judgement by others*. In particular, it is relevant to consider what has been written about the inclusion of habitual or unreflexive action in discussions of agency.

As discussed above, Duranti (2006) postulated that agentic actions are under one’s control, *even if they are not planned*. He argued, with regards to speech – which implies applicability to other communicative actions – that “there is a type of routine monitoring of one’s actions in the (familiar) world that is not subject to the same level of analytical rationalization that becomes

necessary when we are asked to provide an after-the-fact account of those actions” (Duranti, 2006, p. 454). Similarly, Throop (2010) argued that prereflexive acts can be subject to own-ness, or the perception that one has control over their own actions. His discussion of the temporality of willing is inclusive of what can be seen as involuntary action since “the initial situation revealed by description is *the reciprocity of the involuntary and the voluntary*. Need, emotion, habit, etc., acquire a complete significance only in relation to a will which they solicit, dispose, and generally affect, and which in turn determines their significance” (Ricoeur, [1950] 1966, p.4, cited in Throop, 2010, p. 25).

The concept of affordances is also useful in thinking about the agency or will involved in actions performed while in states of drunkenness. Several scholars, particularly in philosophy, use this concept to discuss the interface between things external to the individual, such as structures and life circumstances, and a person’s agency, specifically in the form of capacity for action. Citing Gibson (1977), Romdenh-Romluc (2013) defined affordances as the variety of actions available to a person, including those that are possible, required, or attractive. Rietveld (2013) elaborated that the “multiplicity of affordances in our surroundings attract or repel us. Their affective allure is often strong enough to induce a switch from our current activity to another ‘I can’” (p. 37). These affordances are influenced by one’s current emotional state, thoughts, desires, and imaginings (Romdenh-Romluc, 2013, p. 10-12). As is the case with the reflective moral evaluations described above, Rietveld (2013) stated that what a person cares about, along with changing concerns, motivate the way they act, even in these cases of “unreflective skillful actions” (p. 38). Further, affordances derive largely from one’s *perception* of their environment, not just the environment itself (Romdenh-Romluc, 2013, p. 10-12). Jensen and Moran (2013), in their discussion of affordances, or “how the world appears to the embodied agent” (p. x), affirmed that this appearance includes memories, fantasies, and other thoughts widely perceived to be imaginary. This emphasis on action as response to one’s perception of the world is in line with anthropologists cited above, such as Hallowell (1955) and Throop (2010) who stressed the important role of perception based on lived experience in action-oriented volition.

In their discussions of affordances, Romdenh-Romluc (2013) and Rietveld (2013) have argued against the dominant view that agentic action requires deliberate intention. Indeed, habits and routines provide affordances for certain actions without the need for thought inasmuch as the frequent performance of an action leads to more opportunities for doing it (Romdenh-Romluc, 2013, p. 13). However, Romdenh-Romluc (2013) also clarifies that repeated and habitual performances of an action *contribute* to the salience of an affordance rather than determining a course of action.

Similarly, Rietveld (2013) has elaborated on how both the ability to step back and reflect *and* the ability to engage in “unreflective action” (p. 37) are *active responses* to the range of possible actions, or affordances, available to a person. He thus described agency as going beyond the ability to reflect, but inclusive of responding, with or without reflection, to changes in circumstances, solicitations, or concerns typical of lifeworlds, as phenomenological anthropologists understand them. Indeed, “these possibilities for action constitute a basic form of freedom, the freedom characteristic of unreflective action” (Rietveld, 2013, p. 38). In this perspective, reflection is an affordance among many available to people in the course of their ordinary activities: “Seen from *within* an episode of unreflective action of adult human beings, a possibility for reflection can be lived as one of the affordances in a field of possible actions” (Rietveld, 2013, p. 39).

Romdenh-Romluc’s (2013) and Rietveld’s (2013) insistence on the inclusion of habitual behaviour in discussions of affordances and agency tie into discussions of agency and moral evaluations, developed above, insofar as unreflective action is subject to moral evaluation to the same extent as reflective action. For example, Duranti’s (2006) working definition of agency includes the idea that, for an action to be agentic, it needs to be subject to the judgement of others and to have impacts on the self and others. Similarly, Garro (2010) extricated a position implicit in Hallowell’s (1955) discussion of volition with reference to a culturally constructed behaviour environment: that behaviour is appraised in reference to morals in place regardless of the intention or will behind them. Similarly, Romdenh-Romluc (2013) has pointed out that one can still be blamed for the result of a habitual behaviour; one can also be perceived or perceive oneself as having control

over habitual behaviour as one can intervene and change it. This is in line with Duranti's (2006) working definition of agency.

Clearly, actions performed while people are in drunken states, which are often described in ways that are akin to habitual or unreflexive behaviours, have impacts on themselves and others – impacts that last beyond the episode of drinking. In conversations and academic literature about the impacts of drinking on the people of Chisasibi and other Indigenous communities (see chapter 2), drinking is widely held to contribute to social disruption and discord such as family violence, sexual violence, and suicide. People in drunken states are considered more likely to commit violent acts such as suicide, fighting, sexual abuse, and so forth. Further, regardless of whether drinkers took the time to reflect or not before drinking, they can be and frequently are blamed for the impacts of their actions as they are said to have control over whether they drink in the first place. The assumed shared knowledge about what happens when people drink too much should be enough, according to many, to convince people to abstain from becoming drunk in the first place or to change their drinking behaviour.

A sense of own-ness can help understand why drinkers overwhelmingly express remorse for actions performed while in drunken states, such as verbal or physical violence, even if they are nominally not considered responsible *while in these states*. Indeed, "To feel guilty is to conceive of the self as an agent capable of good or bad choices" (Hallowell, 1955, p. 106). One could have chosen not to drink, or to stop drinking before one approached the point of drunkenness. This is supported by the tendency of research participants to consider themselves accountable for their drunken actions when reflecting on them later, as they give significance to these actions with reference to their initial choice to drink. In their view, this choice still makes them subject to blame for further results of this action. Those who recalled the harm caused by their actions during drunken episodes accepted that they were the authors of these actions, even if they did not completely feel like themselves at the time (this aspect of the drunken experience is discussed further below). Those who described choices involving discretion by drinking at smaller gatherings with trusted people also acted on the knowledge that they might initiate unwanted actions. The contexts in which they drank to "cut loose", away from stigmatizing eyes, included the company

of people who could help circumvent behaviour that would be dangerous to themselves and others.

Further, in line with the discussion of affordances as immediate opportunities for action, we can state that the actions in which people engage while they are in these states are based on the perceptions and preoccupations *in the moment*. This was illustrated in several instances of people being pulled in a direction opposite one they had just chosen to take:

When the other men were back outside, decisions were being made about what to do next. Dale and Everett both indicated that they wanted to come to my workshop that evening and that they were therefore going to go find a place to sleep. Then, after some rapid Eeyou conversation with one of the others, who had started walking off toward the houses, it turned out that someone had located some more alcohol. Everett followed and left Dale to look at me with uncertainty. I felt that he wanted to talk but talking would have to wait until another time when there was less at stake (Fieldnotes, April 13, 2011).

Immediate preoccupations that pulled on people who were in drunken states, based on these sorts of interactions and on incidents related during interviews and casual conversations, ranged from the desire to connect with others or to express certain emotions, finding and consuming more alcohol, engaging in sexuality, sobering up for work, and so forth. These perceptions and preoccupations were shaped by embodied emotions, including memories of past experiences, which are, over the course of one's life interpreted with reference to broader social phenomena – an agentive process in and of itself. And whether they are actively reflecting on them at the time, the sets of norms and moral values to which they have access are embodied and acted on.

Given the presence of the sense of ownness and of effortfulness (since people remembered physically engaging in the act of drinking as well as the sensation of drunkenness, even if that sensation involved being controlled), and the identifiable impacts of drunken actions, we can attribute at least a certain level of will or agency to these actions. And given that people in drunken states act on available affordances based on the logic of their state at the time, we can consider that, in line with the discussion of fluctuating normative and moral frameworks, will or agency can only be considered relative to one's context at the time. In other words, agency and will *while drunk* have their own moral and normative frame of reference which diverges and yet overlaps with broader frames of reference in the community.

11.3.2. “I Wasn’t Being Myself”: The Shifting of Will

Several scholars working with concepts of volition and agency have discussed the phenomenon of shifting agency or will, wherein one has means at their disposal to attribute agency for their actions to an external entity. It is worth considering this idea in relation to the above discussion of unreflexive or habitual actions with reference to drunken states, particularly given the ambivalence with which people assign or accept blame for these actions.

Duranti (2006) has argued, with reference to agency and speech, that the extent to which agency is assigned to an individual, and to which the person’s actions are evaluated by others, varies along with the multiple degrees of will that are understood to be behind these actions. On one hand, we can argue, as I do above, that there is at least a degree of agency that can be assigned to actions taken while drunk when considering that actions *in the moment* are responses to preoccupations in that moment, and that one is considered to be capable of different actions even when they are unplanned. Further, from the reflections of research participants, there is a willingness to accept responsibility for these actions because of their recognition of the impacts, on themselves and others, of their actions while in drunken states. On the other hand, the view espoused by many in the community, and expressed through the concept of “zombies” described in chapter 2, that people are not themselves when drunk can be seen to provide a culturally sanctioned means to deny responsibility, or at least will.

In outlining the dimensions of agency in language, Duranti (2006) elaborated two primary aspects. One relates to performance, which broadly touches on the ways in which a speech act asserts certain things about the world and has consequences on this world. This relates to the above discussion of the impacts of drinking. The other primary aspect of agency relates to encoding and it is here that Duranti (2006) stressed that “all languages have ways of representing agency”, that “there is variation both across languages and within the same language in the way in which agency is represented”, and, most importantly for the present discussion, that “all languages have ways of mitigating, that is, modulating some of the properties of agency” (p. 460).

Duranti’s (2006) reasoning applies directly to declarative and grammatical aspects of speech. However, there is ethnographic literature that supports similar reasoning applied to worldview

and cultural frameworks. Groark (2010), Garro (2010), and Stewart and Strathern (2010), in their discussions of will in a variety of cultural contexts, all refer to “culturally prescribed ways” to mitigate responsibility for willful action “by situating the will outside the acting subject” (Murphy & Throop, 2010, p. 15).

It is worth noting that these works often describe references to non-human entities or forces as the external agents to which one may refer in this mitigation of responsibility.⁷¹ For example, Groark (2010) elaborated on a certain type of dream described by the Tzotzil Maya people of Highland Chiapas in Mexico, in which a person could obtain messages from divine beings about special roles they should undertake. His descriptions are reminiscent of other ethnographic case studies of individuals engaging in and explaining spiritual activities, often including ecstatic states, based on their self-reported engagements with divine beings (see, for example, Kendall, 1993). Groark (2010) used the existence of this type of dream to illustrate a local worldview concerning volition “in which the most experientially ‘willful’ component of the person—the waking self of daily life— is also viewed as only partially agentic, subject to the intentions, desires, and wills of other agents, located both internally and externally” (Groark, 2010, p.58). He argued “that this particular dream genre provides a cultural affordance allowing for the exercise of a sort of ‘disavowed volition’” (Groark, 2010, p.68). Similarly, Stewart and Strathern (2010) demonstrated how, in multiple cultural contexts, people had access to cosmological explanations for their actions, and the responsibilities that these actions entailed.

Garro’s (2010) work with an Anishinaabe community in Manitoba on the perception of will in the use of “bad medicine” adds further perspective to this discussion of shifting will. She proposed that “while embodied action typically supports inferences that a self is involved in action, a variety of culturally based constructions permit inferences that ‘volitional control’ and impetus for action is situated in another person” (p. 46). To support her argument, Garro (2010) described the various perspectives and experiences shared with her by field informants. One experience shared by a participant involved a request made to a medicine man capable of using “bad medicine” to make others sick upon finding out that such medicine had been used against the asker’s family.

⁷¹ See De Fornel (2013) for an interesting discussion of the attribution of agency to non-human entities.

The medicine man asserted that the asker would ultimately be the willful agent even if the medicine man was the one engaging in the acts that would cause harm. In this case, will and the corresponding responsibility for the effects of an action were shifted from the actor, the medicine man, to the person who was requesting that this action take place. According to Garro (2010), then, there are contexts in which it is desirable for a person to be able to feel as though their actions are willed by someone else.

It could be tempting to apply this model directly to drinkers who could shift the will or agency, and therefore the blame, onto alcohol itself for their actions while drunk. However, nuance is required. There are some participants who indicated that people drank with the specific goal of giving up or at least freeing themselves from the perceived restrictions of local norms *for the duration* of drunkenness. For example, Tabitha expressed that “For a lot of people, drinking is a way to express their emotions and what they think, or to socialise” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011).

As discussed in chapter 9, local norms referring to ancestral Eeyou ways tend to promote emotional restraint. While the discussion of painful emotions is encouraged by some, it is acknowledged that it is very difficult to do while sober. Unlike some anthropologists who have described social connection as a latent function of drunkenness, though, Tabitha implied the presence of volition in the use of drinking for the purpose of displays of emotions that would usually be considered inappropriate. In the intersubjectively constructed normative framework that is available to drunken individuals, these displays become appropriate while the wider normative frameworks that render them inappropriate still provide the “out” of drunkenness.

In the same vein, drunkenness as a facilitator of sexual behaviour was brought up by a few respondents. Tabitha, for instance, commented that drinking makes it easier to connect with someone a person is attracted to (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011). Similarly, Gavin commented on the sexual opportunities present at large drinking parties: “You wouldn’t believe what happens at these parties! I mean, this one time, there was this girl [*laughs*]...she was kissing four or five different guys one after the other. And then...well, you wouldn’t believe it!” (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011). He did not pronounce himself on whether he thought that this level

of promiscuity was a good or bad thing, but he acknowledged that, when looking for connections, going to a party and getting drunk facilitated sexual action: “Being drunk is a great excuse to get laid” (36 years old, Chisasibi, May 15, 2011).

Similarly, some sexual behaviours that are stigmatized become more acceptable when one is drunk, and the knowledge of this was a motivator, in the views of some research participants, to get drunk, or at least feign drunkenness. According to Danielle, bisexual, lesbian, and gay youth would often drink and find parties where they could meet people of the same gender with whom to engage in sexual relations.⁷² She indicated that, to avoid the stigma associated with alternate sexualities, one could “follow the bottle” and then “blame” drunkenness – real or feigned - for any behaviour that could be interpreted by others as inappropriate (25 years old, Chisasibi, January 22, 2011). Gavin also indicated that the promiscuous sexual activities that were prevalent at big drinking parties could easily be attributed by participants to “being drunk”: “Most of them would never do that sober.” (36 years old, Chisasibi, May 15, 2011). These examples highlight the possibility of an “out” for people who wanted to engage in behaviour that is not harmful in the way that drunk driving, suicide, or physical violence might be, but that may be perceived by some in the community as immoral or non-normative.⁷³ These can be considered as examples of a situation where, as Garro (2010) argued, it can be seen as advantageous to ascribe volition for one’s actions to someone or something else.

However, when it comes to drunken actions such as violence or drunk driving – those actions that are widely decried by community members as being directly related to excessive drinking - there is little evidence in the words of research participants that drinkers regularly use drunkenness to disavow responsibility for their actions, at least not during sober reflections. It is, of course,

⁷² As is documented both by Two-Spirit or Indigenous LGBTQ writers and Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars (see, for example, Vowel, 2016), one of the many impacts of colonization and assimilation attempts has been the decreased acceptance, among Indigenous peoples, of individuals with same-gender attractions. Therefore, individuals that Euro-Canadians would generally describe as homosexual or bisexual are led to feel intense shame in Indigenous communities on account of the stigma that has arisen over the past few centuries.

⁷³ The prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections as well as the issues of consent and sexual violence are obviously at play and are discussed in local media in relation to the loss of judgement associated with drinking. The point I am making here is that sexual behaviours that do not involve rape, coercion, or violence do not appear to be denounced, locally, in the same way that drunken physical violence and drunk driving are. Forms of sexuality such as same-sex relations and sex with multiple partners are stigmatized, but not necessarily associated with drunkenness.

impossible to assert that this never happens. I can only assert that research participants did not do this in my presence, and that no research participant attested to anyone close to them seeking to deflect blame for their harmful drunken actions. Notwithstanding the possibility that some individuals might sometimes claim that their actions while drunk are not of their own volition, and that they are not to blame, the point remains that, upon reflection, participants still acknowledged own-ness of the act of drinking to a point of drunkenness and recognized the impacts of that choice. Their collective insistence that drinking is their willful choice is maintained even in discussions of a perceived loss of control while drunk.

An interesting point, however, is that *the possibility* for mitigating will and agency exists and is made available in the words of community members, even those who decry what they perceive as problematic drinking in their community. The idea that “drunks” and “zombies” are not themselves while drunk, and that they have no control over their own actions is frequently shared *about people in general* if not about the self. This view may not be adhered to by everyone in the community; it nevertheless exists as a culturally available explanation for a person’s perceived loss of control.

Access to this explanation may provide one of many ways of making meaning for one’s decision to drink, as is the case in Tabitha’s, Danielle’s, and Gavin’s examples above. It might also provide motivation to feign drunkenness in certain situations. Danielle, for example, specified that one did not need to actually *be* drunk to ascribe one’s sexual desire to drunkenness (25 years old, Chisasibi, January 22, 2011). Gavin also talked about the possibility of “faking it”, but with reference to maintaining the appearance of ignorance: “Ya know, sometimes people fake it. It’s a way to keep from sharing some of our knowledge. People can think we don’t know stuff, about sweats and some of the sacred things. Sometimes you need to let them keep thinking that” (36 years old, Chisasibi, May 15, 2011). Gavin’s views about spiritual activities that were secret even from some of the well-known practitioners of ceremonies considered traditional was uncommon among those expressed to me by research participants. But the idea that people could pretend to be drunk to maintain a certain image was occasionally voiced. This is in line with some of the anthropological literature reviewed in chapter 3 (see also Sharp, 1994).

However, this avenue for shifting volition is not sufficient for anyone to shift *agency* or to completely avoid being blamed for their drunken actions. If anything, it may be possible to state that different aspects of willing can be ascribed to different states and that this shifts over the unfolding of a drinking episode. Before any episode of drinking occurred, they were aware of what was to come based on embodied memories of past episodes or observations of other people who were in drunken states. Rietveld (2013) referred to the freedom implied by a field of affordances as the “freedom to be bound by the world’s solicitations” (p. 25). We can similarly conceive of a person’s choice to drink, knowing what they know about drunkenness, as a choice to become temporarily bound by the solicitations of drunkenness. Indeed, drinkers perceive themselves as willful agents who make choices about the frequency and level of drinking in which they engage. However, it is also acknowledged that there are certain stages of drunkenness in which one loses one’s will. But the larger sense of agency still attributes accountability for any unwilled harmful acts that result. This provides for the co-existence of ideas about a lack of control *while drunk* with the own-ness and effortfulness of volition. Further, the knowledge and willful anticipation of what a drunken state may entail can give meaning to the affordance and choice to drink until drunkenness. With this comes the ultimate responsibility for what happens once they have made that choice, a point on which research respondents were nearly unanimous.

11.4. Conclusion

Chisasibi drinkers may or may not be perceived as moral agents *à la* Taylor (1985) by others in their community. But considering the perspectives shared by drinkers in this research, and the ways in which they took ownership of their choices, they clearly perceived themselves as willful agents. Research participants in Chisasibi who identified, to various degrees, as drinkers, had a wide range of thoughts about their right to drink, about their capacity to make responsible choices about drinking, and about the decision of whether to quit or reduce their drinking. In many cases, people were comfortable with the decisions that they were making. Others fluctuated between the affirmation of their right to drink and the desire to quit. And yet others were frustrated with their perceived lack of ability to stop drinking. And yet an overarching theme was brought up again and again: that of choice. Drinkers, especially those who saw themselves as being caught in an undesirable pattern of drinking, did not necessarily believe that they made the

right choice, even at the time they were making it. But they were quite aware that they were making *a choice* and that they had the power to make a different one.

It is also clear, from the reflections of research participants, that they considered themselves accountable for their choices pertaining to drinking. They shared views that indicate that they perceived themselves as willful agents insofar as they were engaged in the process of strong evaluation in weighing their choices, with reference to various streams of thought about moral values and social norms. Their reflections about drinking were heavily tied to broader community concerns about well-being, political autonomy, and the impacts of ongoing colonial disruption. The multitude of worldviews that intersect in their daily lives provide a wide array of ways in which to consider the impacts of their actions.

To be sure, the process of evaluation and making choices is not always straightforward and is sometimes contradictory, as seen in the words of individuals who have conflicting thoughts about their own choices. But a phenomenological approach in anthropology, with its focus on life experience and the shifting perspectives that this entails, considers the ambiguity inherent to the dilemmas of life to be an important source of knowledge (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011). It is acknowledged that as one's story unfolds, a person's understanding of their own role and agency shifts (Throop, 2010).

Further, even within an individual worldview, different forms of knowledge exist which may either complement and enable each other or contradict each other. As Jackson (1996) acknowledged, "The knowledge whereby one lives is not necessarily identical with the knowledge whereby one explains life" (p. 2). If the knowledge used to explain life refers to different and often competing worldviews and the knowledge used to live life is shaped through human interactions with life experience, those two forms of knowledge interact and inform each other. This does not contradict or minimize the level of agency of the individuals in question. Rather, it demonstrates the intricacy of the processes involved in personal agency.

Finally, both Throop (2010) and Stewart and Strathern (2010) have suggested, in their cross-cultural works on will, that it is insufficient to consider models of will and agency and apply them to different cultural contexts. Rather, they have proposed that the nature of will itself varies cross-

culturally, with a focus on different aspects of will or even on different *sources* of will, subject to context and circumstance. For Throop (2010), this meant that there could be different cultural considerations of which aspects of will were to be prioritized in assigning volition. Stewart and Strathern (2010) proposed that there were different cultural conceptions of how will could be derived partly from the self and partly from other sources.

In the context of this research, I propose that the interpretation of the nature of will varies across moral and normative frameworks, which in turn vary over the unfolding of drinking events. At all times, an individual has access to a multitude of frameworks to make meaning for their experiences. But at different stages, some may be more appealing than others. As captured by Dean's statement, which inspired the title of this chapter: "In the end, you have to figure things out for yourself" (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011).

What remains constant is the intersubjective nature of this interpretation and meaning making. The moral and normative frameworks to which this chapter heavily refers are intersubjectively constructed. What is left to discuss, after the issue of agency and will with respect to the choice to drink, is the matter of self-perception and identity that is bound up with this self-assessment of one's choices. I turn to this in the final chapter.

Chapter 12 - “Not Just a Drunk”: Willful Orientation Toward Who One Wants to Be

From the discussion on will, agency, and accountability in chapter 11 emerges the idea that a significant component of self-perception and self-identity is tied to how one measures their actions against available normative and moral frameworks. These frameworks include dominant ones within the community, but it can also include ones that are specific to smaller, alternative groupings, or contexts. I argue, in that chapter, that drinkers refer to both kinds of frameworks in assessing the morality or impacts of their drinking behaviour. This can vary based on emotional state, level of sobriety or drunkenness, and so forth. I further propose, in both chapters 10 and 11, that what remains stable despite these moral and normative self-assessments is the self-perception as willful actor.

Based on the work of scholars who address concepts of will and agency, I argue here that this self-perception as willful actors is located within a wider web of self-identification and personhood. As with the assessment of one’s actions, the perception and identification of the self are both grounded in a variety of available worldviews and take shape through the processes of embodiment and intersubjective engagement with these worldviews in the course of lived experience. That there is temporal or contextual variation in this perception and identification reflects the phenomenological focus on the lifeworld, or life as lived. Things expressed *in the moment* reflect preoccupations at the time. An unfortunate consequence of writing them down is that the written word often gives the impression of permanence. But it is important to remember, throughout this analysis, that shifts in thinking, even when contradictory, do not invalidate those “in the moment” thoughts and feelings, even when they are coloured by drunkenness. Rather, they emphasize that agentive engagement and meaning creation happen in each moment with reference to a variety of cultural, social, moral, and normative frameworks.

This focus on temporality extends beyond immediate contexts, though. This culminating chapter considers both a contextual sense of self, which refers to cultural ideas about self-hood and

behaviour, and a longer-term sense of self. Assessing oneself according to local ideas of what it means to be Eeyou, and local behavioural norms provides a constellation of ways in which research participants identified themselves at the time of this research. But participants also emphasised their aspirations about the future, particularly regarding spiritual fulfillment, family roles, and professional development. These aspirations were strongly tied to a sense of the self in development. The extent to which changes in one's drinking behaviour played a role in these aspirations varied; quitting or reducing one's drinking could be a step toward achieving something else or it could be the goal one was seeking with the means of another set of achievements. As with the ethnographic material in chapters 8, 10, and 11, this chapter centers the perspectives and experiences of research participants who drank heavily or frequently at the time of this research, whether they were in the process of quitting or reducing their drinking or not, and of those who actively identified as former drinkers.

12.1. Who One Is: Embodiment, Personhood, and Self

In their delineation of the overlap between the concepts of embodiment and personhood, Strathern and Stewart (2011) have highlighted two aspects of personhood. One is the area of culturally agreed upon ideas and concepts. The other is that of practice: "what people actually do, how they negotiate interactions in their lives" (p. 389). They argue that this latter aspect more closely captures the process of embodiment as what happens in our lives is felt through bodily senses and, of course, embodied.

It is nevertheless relevant to consider the first aspect, particularly since related ideas are intrinsic to many of the views shared by research participants. Following this, I discuss the idea of self that emerges from participants' reflections on the impacts of their choices, which touches on the second aspect of personhood that Strathern and Stewart (2011) highlighted. Finally, I bring these two facets together to reaffirm, in this fresh light, the agentic nature of self-perception and self-identity as well as the perception of self as willful agent.

12.1.1. “I’ll always be Cree”: Eeyou Cultural Pride

As the wider community struggles to maintain a sense of Eeyou heritage in a context of globalization and colonial influence, many drinkers also point to common ideas about Eeyou culture in the formation of their own identities and aspirations. One of the topics that stimulated the most passion in my conversations with drinkers was Eeyou culture and identity. In chapter 8, I described some instances when research participants expressed shame in relation to their Eeyou - or Indigenous - identity and of their perceived lack of facility in the English language. In other cases, they expressed shame that emerged from what they felt was a lack of competence in their own culture. However, drinkers – sometimes the same people who expressed this shame – often expressed positive feelings in relation to cultural belonging, language knowledge and use, and aspirations toward certain behaviours or activities related to ancestral lifeways. Tad, both during interviews and casual hangouts, frequently referred to aspects of “Cree culture” in talking about his life. “I get white culture, and there is a lot about it that I like. But I’ll always be Cree” (Tad, 34 years old, Chisasibi, March 2, 2011).

Expressions of “Cree pride” were often bound up with knowledge of the Eeyou language, *iiyiyiyimuwin*. Despite having once shared that he sometimes wished he were white (see chapter 8), Dale also said “I’m proud to be Cree. And I’m glad I know my language” (Dale, 24 years old, Chisasibi, April 29, 2011). Impromptu language lessons were a very common occurrence when I was hanging out with groups of drunken individuals in public. In most cases, I brought up the topic, but it nearly always stimulated great interest among the people with whom I was talking. There were two incidents, one during each of my fieldwork related stays in Chisasibi, during which an individual would actively refuse to speak *iiyiyiyimuwin* or discourage me from trying to learn. But for the most part, people willingly shared their knowledge and some individuals, at least in the moment, took the challenge of teaching this *whampstagooshiyou* (white man) very seriously: “‘You hang out with us, man. You’ll learn about hockey and we’ll teach you to talk, ahhhh,’ he [Devon] said with a laugh” (Fieldnotes, September 21, 2010). The types of words and phrases they taught me ranged from references to drinking to common things people might say to one another (“How are you feeling”, for example).

The second most frequent aspect of Eeyou culture that was emphasised had to do with skills involved in bush life.⁷⁴ Many research participants, whether drunk or sober, showed interest in bush activities commonly associated with an ancestral Eeyou way of life. Hunting, tracking, fishing, steering a canoe, plucking a goose, repairing a snowmobile were all sources of pride for those who could claim these skills and sources of aspiration of those who sought to learn them. Simply spending time at their families' bush camps was also a highly coveted experience. Both Tad and Caleb, for instance, enjoyed discussing bush activities when they spent time drinking in my apartment. Both men showed interest in discussing and participating in bush activities. Together and separately, they recounted stories of time spent in the bush, including learning bush skills or humorous incidents that had happened to them as part of these activities.

This enjoyment of bush life was also shared by drinkers during my master's fieldwork. During a conversation with a group of drunken young men, in which they were decreasing in coherence, someone brought up a past hunting trip in which they had all participated.

As the men ate, they started telling me about the time they had gone goose hunting at the point where James Bay and Hudson Bay meet. All of a sudden, in spite of their drunkenness, they became extremely coherent and passionate. They told me about the funny mishaps that had happened and how many geese they had caught. (Leclerc, 2001, p. 120).

Aspirations toward greater participation in bush life sometimes increased cultural pride for those who have had the opportunity to learn the associated skills. For those who have not, the lack of knowledge of these skills could sometimes lead to shame. While this is unfortunate, it also reflects engagement with the local imperative to preserve a way of life that is threatened by colonial influence and the local tendency to view these skills as a necessary part of Eeyou identity.

Indeed, there was overlap between the topic of bush life, and access to it, and political resistance and resilience linked with being Eeyou, or Indigenous. Tad, Caleb, Gavin, Tabitha, and many others proudly talked about Eeyou culture and what they perceived as an Indigenous tendency toward resilience in adapting to changes brought about by colonial interference. Tad, for instance, would frequently make assertions that Eeyouch were tough. Caleb concurred; cited in chapter 7 as

⁷⁴ The term "bush" heard in expressions such as "in the bush" refers to hunting and trapping camps located on family-based territories spread out through Eeyou Istchee.

elaborating on the impacts of colonial disruption on his community, he acknowledged that it took resilience to be able to adapt to these circumstances. A previously cited anecdote from my master's research, in which I was drinking in the woods with Don and Alex, illustrates this as well:

Don continued: "But we'll fight them! We're always gonna win in the end. The Cree is strong and will always survive. The white man is weak. He'll lose when we really start fighting back" (Leclerc, 2001, p. 151).

As with other community members, research participants who identified as current or former drinkers associated Eeyou resistance and resilience with the fact that so many people still hunt, trap, and fish, and know the skills associated with these activities. "We know how to survive out there, even though they tried to take it away from us. We can find our own food, make our own clothes. That's a big part of being Cree for a lot of us" shared Gavin (36 years old, Chisasibi, May 15, 2011).

12.1.1.1. "We Look Out For Each Other No Matter What": Eeyou Values in Practice

Beyond the above traits commonly ascribed to Eeyouch, drinkers often made it a point to mention that, while drinking and drunk, they practiced key values that they associated with Eeyou culture – at least amongst themselves. They may have been practicing them in an unorthodox context, according to the dominant community norms. But in their view, at least when they were drinking or drunk, these were valid contexts in which to demonstrate their cultural competence.

The two most often mentioned values or practices were reciprocity and humour. In the introduction to this work, I mention Sammy, the "drunk" I ignored once during my master's research in Chisasibi after a previous encounter several days before. One of the first things Sammy said to me when I met him, as he helped me carry some groceries around, was "Well, Crees always help each other out" (Leclerc, 2001, p. 111). After I shared my iced tea with him, he also talked about the importance of sharing.

During other hang outs with drunken individuals during my 1998 stay in Chisasibi, the same ideas about sharing and helping each other were expressed multiple times. Cigarettes, alcohol, and even cannabis were shared with each other and with me, with no expected return. My one mention of pitching in to help pay for alcohol, since I was concerned that it was quite expensive

to get alcohol from bootleggers or from Radisson, was met with incredulousness. Jerry, the person who had offered me a can of beer, exclaimed “Hey! That’s insulting!” (Leclerc, 2001, p. 99).

The importance of sharing was reiterated in my interactions with public drinkers during my doctoral fieldwork. As mentioned above, cigarettes and alcohol were passed around freely. While I never contributed or accepted alcohol in these situations, I was often one of several providers of cigarettes. From the outside, providing something that is widely considered toxic to one’s friends or relatives may be seen as transgressive. However, from the point of view of drinkers, this kind of sharing is seen as an action that fits with the imperative placed on reciprocity in their ancestral culture; it is simply something that Eeyouch do.

The topic of sharing did not come up in conversation as frequently in the small private gatherings that I attended. However, sharing was demonstrated on a regular basis with people I saw on multiple occasions. People shared beer, liquor, cigarettes, and cannabis freely with whoever was present. If sharing was discussed at all, it was usually in the context of bush activities: sharing equipment, the catch, and so forth.

It is, of course, impossible to assert that all drinkers live by the value of sharing, and that those who claim to hold this ideal always practice it in their daily lives. The important point here is that they value this behaviour enough to assert it as one they aspire to live by, and that is a significant part of who they say they are. And who they say they are, despite the label of “drunks” that is assigned to them - at least at the time they are drinking - are Eeyouch who are capable of exercising Eeyou values while also being part of a group within the wider society where people have their own sets of priorities and interests.

To some in the community who view alcohol as inherently bad and who view drinking as a transgressive act, sharing an intoxicating substance may not be seen as compatible with Eeyou values. However, as with Garcia’s (2011) work among heroin users, the act of sharing an intoxicating substance is considered a moral act among those who use it. In reference to their own moral and normative framework, they are doing good, helping to fulfil someone’s need. And

in reference to the wider moral imperative, they are also doing good as they are participating in networks of reciprocity.

It is widely known among anthropologists that reciprocity, particularly of the generalized kind where there is no expectation of immediate return, has a self-serving aspect. Giving means that others will see the giver as worthy of receiving later on. Notwithstanding this perhaps cynical view, people who discussed it focussed on the way in which it tightened their social bonds. “It’s a way of showing we have each other’s backs. There is always someone who will share” explained Dale (24 years old, Chisasibi, April 29, 2011). This tendency toward reciprocity and social bonding has been noted by other ethnographers. Brody (1970) and Spicer (1997), for example, wrote about the importance of sharing alcohol among the Indigenous drinkers with whom they worked. They, among other authors cited in chapter 3, have demonstrated that alcohol sharing is conducive to social bonding.

In addition to sharing, reciprocity in the more general form of helping and looking out for friends was also manifested in the kinds of things people talked about at almost every interaction. During impromptu language lessons by public drinkers, terms related to friendship and caring were highlighted as being of utmost importance. And the theme was elaborated on in English as well. Drinkers frequently told me how they looked out for their friends and felt that their friends did the same in return. Dale and Everett, two related young men who I frequently saw together during these encounters, nudged each other when talking about this, and reiterated that they would do anything for each other and for their other friends. Indeed, the concern of Dale’s friends and offers to take him home to lie down when he looked sick are one example; his friends no longer appeared drunk and all talk of further drinking ceased for several minutes as they surrounded him, with their hands on his arms and back.

The idea of mutual support was emphasised at small private gatherings as well. If someone left early, to go home or acquire more alcohol, concern for the person’s well-being was expressed until it was known that they had safely arrived at their destination. “I worry...anything can happen out there at night”, said Tad after his cousin’s departure, as he was getting set to go home to his family after we had spent some time drinking in my apartment (April 10, 2011).

Sober interviews also yielded comments about reciprocity, in the form of sharing and mutual support. On one hand, talk of sharing took on a practical aspect. As Gavin explained, “Sometimes you’re the one to pay the bootleggers, sometimes it’s someone else. Or sometimes a few of us pitch in whatever cash we have on us. But we all share with each other at the end” (36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011). When participants talked about their relations with other drinkers, they emphasised the feeling of social bonding that came with reciprocity. “You feel like you’re in it together, in a way. We share what we have. And we take care of each other too,” related Codie (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). As with people who talked about reciprocity while they were drinking, interviewees make a link with Eeyou values. Gavin, for example, explained that “Sharing meat or sharing booze – it comes out to the same. It’s what we have to go on” (36 years old, Chisasibi, May 15, 2011).

Joking was another value that was commonly brought up by research participants when discussing Eeyou culture. It was often highlighted by people who were in drunken states, either in public or at private gatherings. In addition to a lot of mutual teasing and self-deprecating humour, people actively talked about the importance of joking and laughter while they were drinking, and they associated this with being Eeyou rather than with their drunken state. Devon and Walt, for example, in addition to giving me language and hockey lessons, continually reminded me that Eeyou laugh all the time, and that I needed to joke and laugh to fit in with them (September 21, 2010). Similarly, Tad frequently reminded me during social get-togethers that “Crees know how to laugh at themselves” and to never take anything too seriously, even if, or especially if, the person laughing was drunk.

Interviewees also talked about the importance of joking and laughter. Tabitha remembered how much laughter was involved in her past as a heavy drinker. “We had really wild times back then. We laughed so much. We were always joking around about something” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011). Tad, who often reiterated the importance of joking when he was drinking, reaffirmed this during an interview as well: “It’s good to laugh. Crees love to laugh. We do it sober, drunk, whatever. Just laugh, and not take anything too seriously” (34 years old, Chisasibi, March 2, 2011). Apart from Tad, there was less of a tendency for people to emphasize the link with Eeyou values, when sober, when it came to joking and laughing. Unlike people who were in drunken

states at the time, they were more likely to discuss laughter and joking as things that were *facilitated* by drinking. Humour may be considered an Eeyou trait, but it is difficult when people are dealing with the painful emotions that contribute to their desire to drink. “It’s a temporary relief. You get drunk and you can laugh for a while, forget about the pain until it comes back,” shared Codie (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Codie and others acknowledged that the greater facility to laugh also contributed to easier social relations with fellow drinkers as it could help alleviate tensions that would arise when people were drunk: “There is a lot of fighting among drunks, but a good joke can avoid that sometimes” (Gavin, 36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011).

In Chisasibi, and likely elsewhere, the social bonds maintained by reciprocity and joking go beyond being a by-product of a shared state of intoxication. Based on the actions and words of the drinkers with whom I spent time in Chisasibi’s pathways and parking lots, and the words of sober interviewees who drank at the time of this research or in the past, social connections were actively sought and valued. As demonstrated in chapter 9, there is tendency to ignore drunken individuals and groups by many people in Chisasibi and there is a level of stigma ascribed to those who engage in public drinking and drunkenness. Most drinkers and former drinkers with whom I worked were keenly aware of this, and expressed feeling like they did not belong, at least not when they were drunk in a public location. “Yeah, nobody wants to talk to drunks. I know there are people who’ll only talk to me if they know for sure I haven’t been drinking” (Gavin, 36 years old, Chisasibi, April 28, 2011). Sharing with and caring for each other shows the value they place on connections amongst each other in the face of what they perceive as rejection by the wider community. Among each other, drinkers feel they belong. “We help each other, all the time. We look out for each other no matter what” (Everett, 22 years old, Chisasibi, April 29, 2011). As explained by Codie (see chapter 11), this bonding is one of the things that makes it difficult for people who *do* want to quit or reduce their drinking.

12.1.2. Cultural Ideals of the Self

Hallowell (1955) has argued that we must “assume that the individual's self-image and his interpretation of his own experience cannot be divorced from the concept of the self that is characteristic of his society” (p. 76). In his view, the self is culturally constituted, and is largely

shaped by local concepts of self. These help the individual understand their own nature as well as that of others. His reasoning aims to approach a bundle of questions:

By what cultural means is self-awareness built up in different societies? How do individuals view themselves in terms of the self that they know? What are the cultural as well as the idiosyncratic factors in their self image? What is the time-span involved in the continuity of the self as culturally defined? What relation is there between varying self concepts and differential behavior? What is the relation of the self as culturally constituted to the needs and goals of the individual as culturally defined? (Hallowell, 1955, p. 81).

I do not purport to answer all these questions in relation to the self-perception of drinkers based on the views expressed to me during this research. However, it is noteworthy that these questions largely parallel some of the arguments I present in this dissertation, particularly in relation to fluctuations in how people identify in relation to cultural ideas of the self and to evaluations of the self in relation to behaviour.

With regards to the cultural constitution of the self from the point of view of research participants, it is significant that, aside from their drinking behaviour, one of the most prominent topics of conversation in relation to the self was cultural identity. As noted above, drinkers enthusiastically talked about their relationship to Eeyou culture in ways that strongly aligned with wider discourses in the community about what it means to be Eeyou.

This idea of cultural competence is relevant here. Spielmann (1998), who worked with the Anishinaabe community of Pikogan, has defined cultural competence as the knowledge of what is needed to “act appropriately” (p. 70-71). This includes knowledge of the cultural codes involved in personal interactions such as asking for favours, dealing with confrontations, engaging in reciprocity, and maintaining harmony. The codes considered ideal by the Anishinaabe with whom Spielmann (1998) worked are very similar to those of Eeyouch in Chisasibi, as described in chapter 9.

Whether they were talking about their competence in relation to practices associated with bush life or in relation to values involving their personal connections with others, drinkers placed these at the centre of who they were *as people*. Their drinking behaviour may have come up as a factor that frequently interfered with their full experience as cultural participants or with their cultural

competence in certain areas. But it never completely eclipsed this core of who they felt they were. The point here is not whether they always practiced things like reciprocity or prized bush skills. The point is that they *identified and valued* them as ideal Eeyou characteristics and considered that they were competent in their expression of these characteristics at least some of the time.

The tendency for many in the community, including some drinkers, to assert that cultural loss or being disconnected from one's culture was a primary contributor to problem drinking supports the importance of cultural identity. One point of contention is that people who are not drinking at a given time may perceive people who are drinking or drunk as failing to engage in cultural norms in appropriate ways (see chapter 9). However, from the point of view of drinkers while they are drinking, it is possible to engage in Eeyou norms in their own way: by sharing alcohol or by looking out for the safety of their fellow drinkers, for example. This line of thinking is reminiscent of that of Hayes (1998) who argued that youth in Chisasibi exercised agency in finding ways to express the social competence and adaptability encouraged among their elders in new social contexts. These ways of expressing culture may not be recognised from the outside. But they are nevertheless felt and expressed.

In any case, drinkers often voiced a strong sense of being Eeyou and the cultural competence that accompanies this self-identity. Sometimes, Eeyou identity was spoken of with reference to actions in which people engaged while they were drinking. For example, in the case of public drinkers, this was often expressed with reference to their relations with their drinking network while they were drinking or in a drunken state. But very often, this aspect of the self stood on its own with no connection to their status as drinkers. Some research participants with whom I chatted when they were sober and reflecting on their drinking maintained this position when they referred to their Eeyou identity, especially in the case of drinkers who felt mostly in control of their drinking or who had stopped completely. Tabitha, Tad, and Gavin are examples of people who spoke favourably about their Eeyou identities. For Tabitha, her abstinence from drinking allowed her to feel properly Eeyou. For Tad and Gavin, their Eeyou identity was strong regardless of whether they drank or not. However, some drinkers expressed shame when they discussed their Eeyou identities. This generally came about with reference to frameworks from the dominant settler state where whiteness and a mastery of English are prized. But shame also came

about in reflections about guilt over one's drinking behaviour or, more specifically, harmful actions taken while in drunken states.

12.1.3. Agency, Behaviour, and the Self

The concept of agency employed in this work concerns the creation of meaning through engagement with available knowledge, other people, and institutions. According to Taylor (1985), there is a relationship between one's self-identity, as created at least in part through this engagement, and the choices one makes through strong evaluation (see chapter 11). One's choices are informed by one's self-perception and, in turn, further affect that very perception of self and one's self-identity: "Our identity is therefore defined by certain evaluations which are inseparable from ourselves as agents" (Taylor, 1985, p. 34).

The nature of social norms regarding drinking are expressed in the dominant ideologies present in Chisasibi. People know how their behaviour is likely to be interpreted if they choose to drink, especially in public. An individual choosing to engage in behaviour such as drinking, that may be perceived by themselves or others as right or wrong, is taking into account their own sense of self and how their self-identity will be validated or invalidated by each action, which requires the awareness described above (Taylor, 1985). Individuals who know what the norms are and how their drinking behaviour and their very identity will be perceived according to these norms, are in a position to manipulate their social identity. Since the identity that is established or maintained occupies a position of stigma within a community, it may seem counterintuitive to say that agents willingly adopt this identity. However, it is important to remember that norms are intersubjective and that new intersubjectivities are created among people who make similar choices.

As argued in previous chapters, there is variation in the importance attached to assessment by others. This can vary by context, and it can vary over time. But most importantly, at any given moment, it is inherently related to what is important to the individual. Indeed, as Garro (2010) and Taylor (1985) have argued, what matters to the individual shapes the way in which they engage with available frameworks. The phenomenological approach considers that what matters to an individual may change over the course of daily life, particularly in instances where

drunkenness is a common feature. This is in line with Throop's (2010) analysis of the vectors of will, with the relative attention placed on these vectors changing over the unfolding of an event.

Another aspect that varies with changes in frames of reference is that of one's feelings toward one's actions in relation to the self. Garro (2010) built on Hallowell's (1955) discussion of the self in relation to moral responsibility, or one's orientation toward a cultural available behavioural environment. She argued that individuals within a cultural community did not uniformly adhere to a shared behavioural environment, or moral framework.

Correspondingly, it is established in chapter 11 that drinkers referenced more than one normative and moral framework in their assessment of their actions. When evaluating their actions with reference to the normative and moral framework that exists among drinkers while they are drinking or in drunken states, drinkers expressed positive feelings about their actions. This is highlighted above with discussions of drunken reciprocity, for instance. However, drinkers who shared their views with me during periods of sobriety referred to their actions in a different way. For example, when drinkers who were struggling with decisions about whether to quit or reduce their drinking talked about their actions, including the choice to drink or actions they took while drinking, they talked about them in light of more widely held views in the community. With this switch in their frame of reference came expressions of guilt and shame about harmful actions they had committed. Examples of this are provided in chapter 11.

In addition to the established argument that drinkers perceive themselves as willful agents with the right and capacity to choose, then, the guilt expressed by some current or former drinkers *affirms* their view of themselves as capable of making choices. In terms of the self in relation to one's actions, Hallowell (1955) has asserted that "implicit in moral appraisal is the concomitant assumption that the individual has volitional control over his own acts" (p. 106). Further, he discussed guilt as a feeling that emerges from a sense of responsibility for these acts: "To feel guilty is to conceive of the self as an agent capable of good or bad choices" (Hallowell, 1955, p. 106). This is in line with the position espoused in previous chapters: that drinkers perceive themselves as agents who are capable of choosing whether to drink or not. And this agency is

referenced even when discussing actions taken while in drunken states, when they do not always perceive themselves as being in complete control of their behaviour.

The above discussion highlights the relationship between agency and identity. Like the intricate relationship between worldview and lifeworld, the relationship between an individual's choices and their identity is dialectical. An individual, or agent, makes deep, often moral evaluations about their choices based on their self-perception and what they believe others' perceptions of them to be. In turn, their choices feed their identity.

Harking back to Strathern and Stewart's (2011) discussion of personhood in terms of both one's actions, especially in relation to others around them and the cultural ideas that are available, connections can be made between the two lines of discussion of the self elaborated above. Strathern and Stewart (2011) affirmed that the action-based aspect of personhood was more closely related to embodiment than the idea-based aspect. However, drinkers' views of themselves as Eeyouch, with all the culturally shared ideas of what that means, demonstrates embodiment and agentive engagement.

Duranti (2006), in his discussions of agency and language, argued that a component of agency was that one's actions were subject to evaluation. This is described and applied to the current research more deeply in chapter 11. But he also argued that evaluation is not just about morality; it is also about performance, one of his proposed dimensions of agency. Performance, in his view, has to do with how an action might "contribute toward construction of culture-specific acts and activities" (Duranti, 2006, p. 454). In other words, one's actions are agentive when they demonstrate knowledge, or cultural competence. This argument helps make a clear link between the aspects of cultural identity expressed by drinkers and the way they act - or say they act - to demonstrate their cultural selves and their selves as agents.

Furthermore, their engagement with local ideas of what constitutes the cultural self is indicative of embodied values. Wisniewski (2008) identified social dialogue as a crucial element of people's own perception of themselves as agents, for example. He emphasized the "dialogical self" that engages with others and with social institutions in an ongoing process of development of the self and of those institutions. Received knowledge, beliefs, and norms have an impact on the

individual's perception of life and experiences; each individual consciously engages with them to create meaning. We can apply this reasoning to drinkers' views of themselves as willful actors and agents. But we can also apply it to their views of themselves as Eeyouch. Engagement with received community knowledge and values as well as agency with respect to evaluating the impacts and likely outcomes of decisions are tied in with the ways Eeyou drinkers, past and present, create meaning in their lives. This meaning creation enables individuals to establish a sense of self-identity in relation to their heritage as Eeyouch.

12.2. Embodying Change: Spiritual, Familial, and Professional Aspirations

Notwithstanding the insistence by people in drunken states that they were happy with their choices and their identities, most research participants attested to a desire for change in their lives. This change did not always involve abstaining from drinking. The idea that one could improve themselves without abstention from alcohol and the parallel idea that one could stop drinking but not actually change are presented in chapter 11. As discussed, change takes time and is fraught with pitfalls.

One common argument against the idea that drinkers are willful agents is related to the time it takes many people to change their drinking behaviour. However, there are persuasive arguments rooted in phenomenological and other scholarly work that support ideas of will and agency that are not centered around immediate change in a person's behaviour. Rather, it is possible to view the related ideas of will and agency through a lens of longer-term transformation, during which previously discussed ideas of embodiment and engagement take place.

Before putting this argument in ethnographic context, it is necessary to recall a few things. First, for many drinkers who participated in this research, present or past drinking behaviour played a significant role in the process of defining and asserting self identity. As previously mentioned, people who were drawn to participate in this research from the point of view of drinkers tended to be individuals who drank heavily either during the time of this research or in the past. Others who participated but primarily from other points of view – concerned relatives, workers for a

local entity, and so forth – sometimes acknowledged that they had their own past experiences with a significant level of drinking. But they did not express to me a strong identification with this part of their life. Therefore, it is important to note that this discussion focuses on the views expressed by people who were, at the time, or had in the past, put a lot of thought into the relationship between their drinking behaviour, their perception by others as a “drunk”, and their overall identity.

Second, the embodied emotions of shame and guilt have been presented as elements emerging from the lived experience of drinkers, which included their interactions with other community members. If these, along with other painful emotions, were highlighted by drinkers as contributors to their drinking behaviour, they also contributed to *who they felt they were*. As Strathern and Stewart (2011) have suggested in relation to embodiment, “sensory experience with its awareness of emplacement in landscapes, feeds strongly into memory and helps to form a residue of experience that stays with, and can transform, a person after time” (p. 393). Memories, when sober, of one’s drunken behaviour; knowledge of the impacts of one’s drinking on loved ones; one’s failure to stop drinking despite this knowledge; and feelings of inadequacy as parents, partners, workers, or students were all shared as sources of embodied shame and guilt. These emotions contributed to their sense of self, as expressed in contexts in which affordances for deep reflection were present. And that sense of self was often painful, leading many to actively seek change in their lives.

So how did drinkers talk about change? From their positions of both pride and shame, and their views that they were indeed willful agents, with the rights and responsibilities that accompany this status, what did they aspire to in terms of change in both behaviour and identity? Below, I provide an overview of how drinkers referred to a wide range of aspects of their lives when thinking about who they were working on, or had worked on, becoming and how they incorporated these aspirations into their evolving sense of self. Clearly, this process involves the same kind of intersubjective engagement that has been presented in this dissertation with regards to the various aspects of will and agency under discussion. In addition to aspirations toward culturally sanctioned activities discussed above, drinkers referred to multiple areas when thinking of the future. The desire to participate in one of the various spiritual streams present in

their community, to be a good parent, or to seek a career are shaped by engagement with community values while contributing to the ongoing process of meaning creation that arises through such engagement.

12.2.1. “These Ceremonies Give Me Strength”: Religion, Spirituality, and Change

Many drinkers and former drinkers also included pride and interest in religion and spirituality in their expressions of self-identity, community belonging, and aspirations. As is the case with the more general topic of cultural identity, engagement with local ideas is evident in the words of drinkers. There are three main spiritual trends in the community: spiritual aspects of bush life, involving relationships between humans and the land; various branches of Christianity, such as Anglicanism, Catholicism, and Pentecostalism; and rituals and ceremonies often referred to as “pan-Native”.⁷⁵ Many current and former drinkers referred to one or more of these forms of spirituality in discussions of their identity and aspirations. These aspirations may deal with feelings of well-being or with becoming a better person in general.

For some drinkers, spiritual aspects of bush life, such as the relationships between humans and the land, were expressed in the midst of discussions of bush activities and Eeyou identity. For example, Dale described the feelings of spiritual well-being he associated with hunting: “It feels great to be out there, to be one with everything” (24 years old, Chisasibi, April 29, 2011). Tad, who was generally disdainful of religion and spirituality, also admitted to a heightened sense of oneness when in the bush (34 years old, Chisasibi, March 2, 2010). These feelings of unity found in the bush were often expressed in tandem with aspirations toward greater participation in bush life and related activities, such as hunting and fishing, as mentioned above.

Other individuals focused their spiritual interests in one of the locally active branches of Christianity. While Christian ideology is acknowledged as not having an Eeyou or even Indigenous

⁷⁵ Examples of these activities are sweat lodge ceremonies, which are purification rituals; Pow Wow celebrations; and the Sun Dance, an annual ceremony that takes place over multiple days and which involves fasting and flesh sacrifices. The prevailing community perspective is that these activities are not originally Eeyou. Community members therefore have a variety of opinions about whether these activities are acceptable.

origin, its local adherents often explain that Christianity is open to and inclusive of people of all origins, and that Christian values are highly compatible with what are perceived as traditional Eeyou values. “It’s just different words for the same thing. It’s all the same thing...God, Creator...” (Agatha, March 29, 2015, 46 years old, Montreal). Dean, Tabitha, and Adam have all turned to one form or another of Christianity as part of their self-development. A sense of community with other Christians within the same denomination, regular church attendance, and aspirations toward using the word of God to help fellow Eeyouch in need were expressed by participants who identified strongly with a Christian path. With regards to self-fulfillment, Adam indicated that being “born again” helped him improve his sense of self: “God has helped me figure out my life” (22 years old, Chisasibi, May 22, 2011). As described in chapter 11, both Dean and Tabitha expressed that part of their spiritual path, as former drinkers, was to help others in their quests to stop drinking. For both, this was a great source of identity and personal fulfillment.

In other cases, people demonstrated aspirations toward participating in spiritual activities that are sometimes locally perceived as “pan-Native”. Codie, for instance, described how his first attendance at a sweat lodge ceremony had given him a sense of personal empowerment and belonging: “I felt so good for the first time in a long time. Like my life had meaning” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Gavin also spoke highly of the power of sweat lodges: “When they are done in a good way, they can really help people heal” (May 15, 2011, 36 years old, Chisasibi).

Identifying with, and aspiring to, greater participation in one of the available spiritual streams in the community was often discussed by current and former drinkers in direct relation to goals about reducing or eliminating their own drinking behaviour. Adam, quoted above as having turned to the Christian God for his own personal growth, attributed his ability to quit drinking to his rebirth as a Christian: “God is the one that gave me the strength to change” (May 22, 2011, 22 years old, Chisasibi). Tabitha also credited Christianity with her ability to quit her consumption of alcohol and other intoxicants: “I found the path to God and that same path helped me become sober (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011). Several regular participants in sweat lodge ceremonies and the Sun Dance also made connections between their spiritual participation and their ability to stop drinking. For instance, Agatha explained that “These ceremonies give me strength. They bring me closer to God. And this helps me continue on this path [of not drinking]”

(March 29, 2015, 46 years old, Montreal). Codie, quoted above as having a transformative experience in a sweat lodge ceremony, also made a connection with aspirations for a change in drinking behaviours (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

Participants in local Eeyou bush activities and the spirituality that is often seen as inherent to these activities explain that the sense of peace and serenity, combined with the focus on survival that is necessary in the bush, help eliminate the desire or need to drink. Tad explained, for instance, that “There is no need for it there. It feels so good and peaceful to be there. So who needs to get drunk? Besides, it wouldn’t be safe, with guns” (34 years old, Chisasibi, March 2, 2011). For some, possible access to an opportunity to go out on the land influenced decisions about drinking. Dale, for example, aspired to participate in bush activities and reconnect with his family in the process and spoke about his anticipation for the next day, when he would have a ride to Long Point, a common launching spot for canoes on the bay: “It gives me a reason to sober up, at least for a while” (24 years old, Chisasibi, April 29, 2011).

The various spiritual and religious paths available in the community are often held to be important modes of healing for people who want to stop drinking. Indeed, many community members encourage people who drink to seek healing through one of these paths. On the community radio, for example, Pentecostalist gospel shows featuring testimonials from people who stopped drinking by turning to God were frequent.

The idea that traditional bush life, which is considered inherently spiritual, is a path toward sobriety and a good life is also prevalent in the community. Many initiatives to help youth overcome problems related to drinking and other intoxication behaviours involve bush teachings. For example, an initiative in collaboration between the Chisasibi Miyupimaatisiun Committee and the Nishiyuu Department of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay brings groups of youths out to the bush in the company of Elders who offer traditional teachings. (Chisasibi Wellness, 2014).

Not everyone agrees that these practices are sufficient for healing, or addressing the underlying contributors to one’s drinking, however. As discussed in chapter 11, some research participants argued that this healing required more than a cessation of drinking. Gavin and Dean were the

most outspoken of these. They both observed that people could stop drinking and simply mimic sayings that would demonstrate what others expected of them. In both their views, religion provided an easy script in these cases. According to Dean, many people use religion to stop drinking but “not from the inside” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011). They learn to say what others want to hear with reference to religious ideas about abstinence. Dean also felt that religion was not immediately useful to people who regularly drank in extreme ways: “Religion is no help at first. It’s too far up there and it doesn’t cut through the drunkenness” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 3, 2011).

Indeed, participants who identified spirituality or religion as things that had helped them transition from the period of their lives when they drank in problematic ways usually referred to other motivators beyond spiritual or religious practice. These motivators often had to do with their roles and aspirations in relation to family and career, which formed a core part of the sense of self described by many participants, including drinkers.

12.2.2. “Our Family Is the Most Important Thing”: Family Relations and Roles

As is the case with the general population of Chisasibi, current and former drinkers often discussed family relationships early on in conversation. For instance, some of the first questions that many Eeyou residents, including public drinkers, ask new acquaintances deal specifically with family relations. In interviews, Eeyou participants also frequently express the importance of family ties. Clearly, familial relationships contribute to the identity of an individual. As such, one’s various family roles, such as child, sibling, spouse, parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or cousin, play a large part in the ways people express their identities and aspirations.

As described in chapter 8, one’s family environment and treatment by parents and other adults was one of the most frequent factors mentioned when discussing the various influences on a person’s life trajectory. Similarly, when describing themselves – their identities and their hopes for the future – one’s current family situation and one’s role in that family were often at the forefront of the discussion. Codie repeatedly stated that his aspirations concerning the reduction of alcohol consumption and improving himself overall were centred around being a better father:

“I don’t want my little girl to grow up like I did” (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Tabitha explicitly mentioned the importance of her maternal role as well when discussing her identity and her general life trajectory: “I have children counting on me. Everything that I do, I have to think about their well being. And I have my man too. We look out for each other. Our family is the most important thing, even though I want to help everyone else too” (44 years old, Chisasibi, April 12, 2011). Winnifred, cited previously as expressing fears about drinking a moderate amount of wine every day, also identified her children as the focus of her efforts to change her life (June 5, 2011, 29 years old, Chisasibi). And, as previously cited, Tad also had made efforts to change his drinking habits in line with his aspirations to be a better husband and father (November 15, 2010, 34 years old, Chisasibi.)

These testimonies echo the high value that is placed on familial inter-dependence in the community of Chisasibi and in Eeyou society in general. Not only is one’s family role a central part of one’s identity, but the accomplishment of the duties that are associated with that role are a part of one’s aspirations to be a fully contributing member of their family and, by extension, their community. Whether drinkers are referring to general aspirations or to aspirations specific to their drinking behaviours, engagement with cultural values attached to the importance of family relations is significant.

12.2.3. “I Learned a Lot about Myself”: Scholastic and Professional Aspirations

Related to the fulfillment of familial duties are aspirations about professional achievement and the identities that are associated with this specific kind of achievement. Career paths expressed by current and former drinkers ranged from carpentry to teaching to social work to running a business in town. Education was typically seen as the first step toward that goal. Therefore, in line with much of the encouragement in the community for youth to finish high school and pursue higher education, many drinkers use this as a goal to encourage them to change their drinking behaviour: “I want to stop drinking, then go back and finish high school. Adult education” (Codie, 35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011). Perry, Dale, and Caleb, who have been cited in this dissertation and who were all in different stages of their own attempts to quit or reduce their

drinking, expressed a similar interest in finishing high school. Others, such as Ryan and Adam, who had recently stopped drinking, had ambitions for college or university. “I know exactly what program I want to do, and where. It’s at this college in Ontario, and it’ll help me be a better artist” (Adam, 22 years old, Chisasibi, May 22, 2011).

As discussed in chapter 11, the process of quitting or reducing one’s consumption is not always a linear one. For many, changing the quantity or frequency of alcohol they consume is a long-term affair, with periods of abstinence and periods of indulgence. This trend is reflected in a fluctuation in school-related achievements for many current and former drinkers. To many workers in the educational system, this is a damaging tendency. However, the work of Runnels (2007) highlights that Indigenous, and more specifically Eeyou, attitudes toward education are not linear. In her interviews with young Eeyou women in Chisasibi, who were in and out of the school system for many years, she demonstrated that time out of the school system is not always perceived as a barrier to success. In other words, completing a high school degree does not, for many Eeyouch, need to happen by a certain age or stage in life. Learning continues to happen even outside of the classroom during periods of absence from school.

Many drinkers and former drinkers who were currently experiencing or had experienced schooling in a non-linear fashion expressed similar sentiments. What they had already achieved was not lost or destroyed by a period of absence: “It doesn’t matter that I didn’t do it all at once like they say you’re supposed to do. It got done” (Tad, 34 years old, Chisasibi, February 17, 2011). For some, the struggle involved in finding one’s way back, even multiple times, is part of the learning process and achievement: “I learned a lot about myself that way. And I’m not done.” (Codie, 35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

Overall, the ways in which drinkers, past and present, expressed their desire to accomplish certain goals and become better at fulfilling their social and familial responsibilities echo local imperatives about what all community members should strive for. Harming oneself harms one’s family and community. However, helping oneself helps all of those with whom one relates. So, the quest to reduce or eliminate drinking from one’s life is often linked to goals that will enhance a person’s chances for scholastic and, later, professional achievement. These achievements will

help them provide for a family that they either already have founded or hope to found and participate in the well-being of the wider community.

12.3. Who One Wants to Be: Willful Reorientation and Transformation

Based on a phenomenological analysis of will, I argue in chapter 10 that one's sense of self as a willful actor can fluctuate over the course of an event. In chapter 11 as well as above, I argue that one's changes in preoccupation over the unfolding of an event can similarly have an impact on how one sees oneself and one's actions in reference to various available normative or moral frameworks. These shifts can affect the extent to which, in any given moment, a drinker considers their drinking behaviour – past or present - to be a core part of their self-identity. Over the longer term, similar shifts can affect people's trajectory toward change in *what they do* and, correspondingly, change in *who they are*.

The struggle to achieve the desired goal of quitting or reducing one's drinking can be long-lasting. Some drinkers who took part in this research felt that they had achieved a state in which they were comfortable after many years, and, as reiterated multiple times, this did not always mean they had completely stopped drinking. Others were so new to this struggle, they sometimes expressed hopelessness about ever making it. Most participants were somewhere along this spectrum, with changing views and levels of motivation from day to day. For the most part, though, people persisted in seeking avenues for change. It might take several years, but like those who professed a persistence toward a desired goal of finishing high school, despite being in and out of school, drinkers who wanted to change showed persistence toward their person goals related to drinking, even when they alternated between periods of sobriety, moderate drinking, and heavy drinking. The fact that one rarely followed up on the decision to "stop tomorrow" should not obscure the longer-term change in which research participants were engaged, either at the time of this research or in the past. And it certainly does not invalidate their self-perception as willful agents.

Several authors have discussed long-term change and the interrelation of concepts of embodiment, engagement, will, and agency. Strathern and Stewart (2011), for example, discussed embodiment and personhood with reference to transformation over time. As

mentioned above, the emotions that one embodies through life as lived are processed and lead to changes in one's personhood, including ideas about the self and one's actions.

Archer (2000) has brought ideas of emotion and agency together to discuss how people demonstrate agency in ongoing efforts to realign themselves and their identities. This realignment takes time. This realignment is manifest in people's routines and continued commitment to being who they are or want to become, as well as in internal conversations in which "the subject strives to narrow the gap between that which they have become and that which they would be" (p. 301). Archer (2000) insisted that, regardless of whatever other circumstances one may find themselves in, in interaction with the various areas of human life, "the internal conversation is never stifled: we remain active agents in our own lives and do not become passive objects to which things happen – this is our human power of personal integrity" (p. 249). In Archer's (2000) view, then, failure to achieve something leads to further internal conversation and realignment rather than a definite end.

Mattingly (2010) also highlighted the role of internal dialogue in her analysis of will. Her description of will involves a process of reorientation of the self that goes beyond discrete moments of choice. She argued that will, and therefore agency, involve the internal struggle that is a part of a person's process of defining a long-term sense of self. She thus proposed that the internal realignment involved in willful reorientation is just as significant as observable behaviours.

It is important to stress that, despite the terminology, this realignment is not strictly an internal process. It involves engagement with external knowledge and objective realities. Mattingly (2010) argued that willful action takes its meaning only with reference to larger life stories, one's own and those of others, and all the circumstances that have affected these stories. Re-orientation of the self is a community affair as "the self that is narratively constructed is not an individual achievement, but a self constructed in community" (p. 36). Will, and the self-awareness that she associates with it, therefore develop through narrative, or a construction of one's own story that considers myriad sources of knowledge.

Further, Mattingly (2010) described the moral environment within which reorientations in relation to willing take place as inclusive of other individuals with their own moral orientations. The intentional shift toward being a different kind of person involves meaning creation which, according to Garro (2010), requires engagement with “culturally available narrative frameworks to temporally order, however tentatively, a culturally plausible unfolding of events” (p. 47). Similarly, Wisniewski’s (2008) view of agency includes the dialogical self that actively engages with others, as well as with institutions, as a central element of one’s self-perception as an agent. In other words, people engage with all available knowledge and life experiences to make sense of their own life stories and to make meaning of their own identities and actions.

This position on willing helps bring many of the themes and arguments present in this dissertation together. The embodiment of emotions through life experiences, the creation of meaning for these emotions and experiences through intersubjective engagement, the interpretation of experiences and actions through the lens of varying moral and normative frameworks are all a part of the process of willful reorientation and are agentic in nature. Further, the views of the self that emerge from this process shift along with contexts, states of being, and the preoccupations that accompany them. One can speak of fluctuation along temporal and contextual lines when thinking about the unfolding of a specific event, as does Throop (2010). But one can also speak of it with reference to longer-term change.

12.3.1. “I’m Not Just a Drunk”: Drinkers and Willful Reorientation

Drinkers who shared their aspirations with regards to cultural participation, spiritual experience, familial roles, and scholastic or professional achievement exemplified the process of reorientation described above. Their internal conversations, shared sometimes as hindsight and sometimes as they were happening, demonstrated ongoing assessment of their current selves in reference both to past actions and projected or desired goals. Indeed, research participants at various places along the spectrum between regular heavy drinking and complete abstinence all spoke of themselves in ways that suggested that change was a long-term affair that referred to longer narrative arcs: their own and those of others around them.

Many participants spoke of this process of change early in our discussions. For instance, people who held their past as heavy drinkers as a significant part of their identities - whether they were abstinent at the time of this research or not - spoke adamantly about the benefits that changes in their drinking brought to them and their families. As previously mentioned, for instance, both Dean and Tabitha spoke of their trajectories toward sobriety as having been driven by a reorientation toward a stronger focus on taking care of one's family and fostering a relationship with God. Agatha and many others I met in ceremonial contexts spoke in similar ways but referred to pan-Indigenous spiritual traditions such as sweat lodges and the Sun Dance rather than of Christian traditions.

That said, there was variation in the level of confidence with which people spoke of the stability of these new orientations of the self. While Tabitha, Adam, and Agatha affirmed someone could change for good, Dean and Tad expressed concerns about how easy it was to slip back into old patterns. Tad acknowledged, for instance, that while he no longer went to big parties like he did when he was younger, he still sometimes succumbed to the temptation to drink to excess. He did it with a smaller group of friends, but still had concerns about how easy it was to get lost in drinking: "It doesn't take much. You remember how good it felt and...that's it!" (34 years old, Chisasibi, November 15, 2010).

Further, there was acknowledgement of the long-term nature of change. Graham talked about how he had gone from being a violent and angry heavy drinker to a peaceful and artistic moderate drinker and how this involved much introspection about the impacts of his actions on others. He also discussed how his passion for a career in the arts had helped motivate him along with the desire to be a better father. He felt that moderate drinking was an acceptable behaviour as it did not prevent people from reaching their goals. But reorienting from heavy drinking to moderate drinking takes time: "It didn't happen overnight, that I became able to just have 1 or 2 beers" (42 years old, Chisasibi, April 18, 2011).

Largely due to his own experience with the process, he tended to hold space for people who were at different stages of their own reorientation. As described in chapters 8 and 10, he quietly supported and watched over friends and relatives who felt the need to get drunk, acknowledging

that sometimes that need was overpowering and required an outlet. Provided it was done in a safe context, the person could remain safe. Like Dean and Tabitha, he sought to help people as a part of his own new sense of self and personal narrative. But unlike them, he did not advocate abstinence as a necessary goal.

Gavin, who has been cited in this dissertation as decrying the idea that abstinence on its own could fix people's problems, explained the process of change similarly; it is a long-term process that requires much internal work and self-assessment. For him, the answer was a treatment centre that supported people through deeper psychological changes beyond the cessation of drinking. At the time of this research, he continued to drink sporadically, sometimes to the point of extreme drunkenness while maintaining that he could manage his behaviour and avoid harming others because of the long-term process of healing in which he had been engaged.

For many, the process of change, either in drinking behaviour or in increased focus on spiritual, familial, or professional aspirations, had meaning in and of itself. Codie often spoke of his experiences through life as lessons. "We were put here to learn, and I think I've already learned a lot. Everything that happens to you, you're meant to learn from it. And I keep learning more with all the new experiences. It's a cycle, it just continues" (35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

Based on these expressed views, we see that changes in drinking behaviour were often desired by participants and other aspirations were a part of reaching that goal. When the primary aspiration was to stop drinking, for instance, other aspirations – often spiritual – were posited as means to this end. Positive experiences in this area then often became the main drive, with changes in drinking being a means to achieve them. But changes in drinking behaviour were not always an end in and of themselves. Many people asserted that having larger goals is what encouraged them to change their drinking behaviour. This was often the case for family roles or professional aspirations. Others felt able to meet their goals, such as family responsibilities, without giving up drinking completely. Within the larger narratives of their lives then, drinking was one factor among others that was involved in their reorientations or shifts from who they felt they were and who they wanted to be.

Within all this there is an acknowledgement of and engagement with the community view that drinking can be a barrier to success on the scholastic, professional, familial, and social level, and therefore a barrier to long-term change. Rather than see drinking as a defining feature of their identities, though, many drinkers see their own aspirations as the foundation of how they wish to define themselves. Drinking may be a hindrance or a barrier, but it is not who they consider themselves to be as individuals and as community members: “I’m a drunk but I’m not just a drunk. I need to work a few things out. But I have plans. Things I want to do. I’m not just a drunk” (Codie, 35 years old, Chisasibi, April 16, 2011).

12.4. Conclusion

Given the topic of this research, it would be all too easy to leave the impression that research participants centered the topics of drinking and drunkenness in their lives. Of course, the topic of my research oriented conversations toward these topics. However, both in interviews and in impromptu conversations in Chisasibi, research participants talked about many topics. Sometimes, these topics intersected with that of drinking. But many other times, these topics of interest stood on their own as factors in how people saw themselves and their current or projected roles in the community: not just as “drunks”. Moreover, as a counterpoint to frequent expressions of shame by current and former drinkers, described in chapter 8, there were frequent expressions of pride. This pride was expressed both in terms of their capacity to fulfill social and professional roles in their community and in terms of their belonging to the local Eeyou community. In both aspects, references were made to *who one is or wants to be* and *what one can or wants to do*.

Willing and agency may be hard to attribute to drinkers, particularly when they are in a state of drunkenness, or when they are in a cycle of drinking and abstinence as described by several research participants, without a clear sense of how to escape this cycle. But the reflections shared by participants, both in states of sobriety and drunkenness, along with the general acknowledgement that growth and change take time, attest that they are deeply engaged in Mattingly’s (2010) processes of internal struggle and moral reorientation. The life experiences and worldviews of current and former drinkers in Chisasibi, as described and explained in

interviews, make it clear that their identities and aspirations are established and created in large part through this process. Their engagement with their lifeworlds – in particular, the knowledge and ideas present in their communities and their awareness of the multiple factors that have affected the course of their daily lived experiences - contributes to their ideas about who they are, who they can be, and what they can achieve. This is evident in their views about their short and long-term decisions about drinking behaviour, described in chapter 11. It is also evident in their comments about their own identities and aspirations. In line with the idea of will through moral reorientation, it also allowed them to consider the various options open to them, with consideration of the current state of their community and local norms and ideas about drinking and drunkenness.

Along with drinkers' views of themselves as willful agents, as described in previous chapters, the consideration of change over time helps locate the agency of drinkers in Csordas' (2011) model of agency. To recap his argument, the complementary views of the ways in which embodied experience is oriented toward the world help consider agency in a dynamic way. Considering how structures act on people as well as how people react to these structures and acknowledging the ongoing tension between these poles is quite relevant to the view of will as narrative reorientation, as presented in this chapter. As with Throop's (2010) suggestion that attention to various aspects of will shift over the unfolding of an event, I suggest that attention to various aspects of the relationship between the individual and structures also shifts over the course of one's life. Thus people, including drinkers, come to make meaning based on their own perceptions of these shifts.

Conclusion

Chisasibi is a beautiful, vibrant, and complex community. Life in Chisasibi includes participation in a variety of institutions of Western/colonial origin alongside the maintenance and revitalization of cultural elements considered ancestral, primarily based on a way of life associated with the bush. In the course of daily life, these various aspects intersect as people negotiate how to best appropriate Western institutions while respecting values that are considered to be a core part of their identity as a people. Encounters with people who are drinking, or observations of phenomena that are related to the actions of drinkers, emerge as a major cause for concern.

The initial views about drinking shared by many people in Chisasibi confirm the main strands of anthropological literature on Indigenous drinking. More specifically, the view of Indigenous drinking as both a result of, and contributor to, social disruption is salient in the things Chisasibi Eeyouch said in early conversations about drinking, in local media, and at local symposia. As with scholarly literature, colonial disruption past and present is highlighted as a major contributor to trauma in Chisasibi and in other Indigenous communities. Like in other communities, disenfranchisement from ancestral lands, forced displacement, and the residential school experience are among the elements that are said to have led to widespread shared pain among Chisasibi Eeyouch. This pain and trauma have been transmitted throughout the generations; therefore, even the younger generations who did not attend residential schools or experience the relocation from Fort George Island experience devastating levels of pain.

Drinking considered excessive is said to be one of the results of this inter-generational pain, alongside other behaviours considered to be addictions such as drug use and gambling. Eeyouch and scholars, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, acknowledge that drinking and these other behaviours are, to a significant extent, correlated to socially disruptive phenomena such as family violence, sexual violence, and suicide. In other words, all these behaviours derive from the same colonial legacy of social and cultural disruption and trauma. However, drinking is often highlighted as one of the elements that further contributes to and enhances social disruption and causes further pain and trauma.

Therefore, notwithstanding the tendency of people who are drinking or drunk, in public or in private, to strongly affirm the fun and festive nature of drinking, many Eeyouch spoke of drinking and of “drunks” in far from glowing terms. At the time of this research, there was strong public support for the by-law that prohibits all possession and consumption of alcohol in Chisasibi. However, there were a significant number of detractors from the by-law who participated in this research, not all of them current drinkers.

In addition to the colonial model of Indigenous drinking, which locates drinking considered excessive as both a result of and contributor to social disruption, many anthropologists have promoted a functionalist view of drinking in Indigenous communities. Drinking, it is said, fulfills psychological and social functions among a population that has been disenfranchised and disempowered. It helps individuals feel that they can push back against unequal power relations, for instance. It also allows them to express emotions that are normally restrained.

Drinkers who participated in this research acknowledged that they drank to alleviate emotional suffering and that this suffering was related to the ways in which colonialism has affected their families and their community. They also acknowledged that they felt and expressed emotional attachment more intensely while in drunken states, and that a sense of resistance to power – both colonial powers and people in their own community who they perceived as attempting to control them – was a factor in their enjoyment of drinking, if not always a direct cause. To a certain extent, then, these experiences shared by many drinkers corroborate both the colonial model of Indigenous drinking, expressed both by anthropologists and by their fellow Eeyouch, and functionalist models of drinking.

However, the presence and role of agency among drinkers is nebulous both in the words of many Eeyouch, particularly individuals who did not overtly identify as present or past drinkers, and in the anthropological literature. Similarly, the presence of ambivalence in the views of drinkers and other Eeyouch is often obscured in the literature as community views are often presented as though they were homogenous. As noted in chapter 3, a few anthropologists have pointed to the importance of considering both agency and ambivalence when discussing Indigenous drinking. Robbins (1973) and Roy (2005), for instance, both outlined case studies that presented Indigenous

drinkers in Naskapi and Innu communities respectively as acting in agentive ways. Further, Spicer (1997), Lurie (1979), and Stevens (1981) have all described the presence of ambivalence among community members where they did their work. In Spicer's (1997) work with urban Indigenous drinkers, he noted that they had mixed feelings about their own drinking. Lurie (1979) and Stevens (1981) observed that fellow community members of drinkers felt a mixture of fear and compassion toward drinkers.

Overall, though, neither agency nor ambivalence tend to be central themes in academic discussions of Indigenous drinking. On one hand, the colonial model of Indigenous drinking and the functionalist approach both obscure the possibility of agency among drinkers. On the other hand, Indigenous views of drinking are often assumed to be monolithic, with researchers primarily talking with portions of the population who decry excessive drinking in their communities. Little insight is offered about mixed feelings among these individuals or about divergent views on drinking within communities. Further, the views of drinkers themselves are rarely represented in this literature, except for individuals who gave up drinking and promote abstinence.

This research aimed to fill a part of that void in the literature. The dissertation does not deny the links between drinking, colonial interference, and social disruption, nor does it deny possible latent functions that drinking might have. Rather, it seeks to complement existing knowledge by highlighting the views of people who are rarely heard in public discourse or in scholarly works. This is in line with a significant body of anthropological work that advocates the inclusion of marginalized voices. A phenomenological approach was used to highlight the lived experience of people who drank, either at the time of this research or in the past, and their perspectives on drinking: why they started, why they continued, how they experienced drinking and being drunk in their community, and what their perspectives were about their own agency and will with respect to the choices they made about drinking.

Obviously, their experiences did not occur in silos. A central tenet of phenomenological anthropology is that individuals interpret their lived experience, or their lifeworlds, and make meaning for their lives in intersubjective ways, engaging deeply with ideas and values that flow

in their communities and with other individuals. Therefore, this research considered the views of other community members as well as the ways in which drinkers responded to these other members and their expressed views.

Among both drinkers⁷⁶ and others⁷⁷, views of drinking and of drinkers were much more complex than the initial views described above would imply. Indeed, there was ambivalence demonstrated in the views shared by research participants, regardless of how they identified. Alongside widespread community adherence to the location of drinking within a web of colonial interference and social disruption, the idea of drinkers as agents turned out to be extensive, with some nuance regarding perceptions of choice, agency, and will.

On behalf of community members who did not identify as drinkers, ambivalence manifested as mixed feelings toward people they referred to as “drunks”. On one hand, so-called “drunks” are to be avoided; they have lost their way and they are dangerous, prone to physical or verbal violence. On the other hand, they are clearly in pain – a pain that is shared by most Eeyouch and most Indigenous people who have been targets of centuries of colonial domination and assimilation attempts. As such, they also merit compassion.

This compassion is difficult to act on, though. Beyond the legal transgression that is inherent to drinking in a dry community, drinking was perceived as a cultural and social transgression. An element of colonization, drinking is often placed in a similar category as store-bought foods: something that contributes to the reduced health of the Eeyouch. Further, the behaviour that is facilitated by drinking to the point of drunkenness is not only dangerous; it goes against values that are associated with bush life – a bundle of activities and ways of being that are associated with an ancestral lifestyle that Eeyouch strive to maintain even in the relatively urban context of

⁷⁶ It is worth reiterating here, for the purpose of clarity, that the term “drinker” is used throughout most of the dissertation to refer to people who self-identified as current drinkers who regularly drank to the point of drunkenness at the time of this research. It also includes people who identified as former drinkers, but who either continued to drink in a variety of ways, sometimes to the point of drunkenness, or who abstained from drinking but considered their past drinking experiences to be a significant part of their identity.

⁷⁷ Other community members were not assumed to not drink or to have never been drinkers, but they tended to address the topic from points of view *other* than that of drinkers and generally did not center this aspect of their life experience or identity. Rather, they identified as concerned relatives of drinkers, as concerned community members, or as people affiliated with one of the local entities such as the health board or school board.

Chisasibi. A particular level of alarm is associated with youth drinking, with much concern shown about the age at which youth and children begin to drink and the extent to which they drink and engage in associated behaviour such as drug use, violence, and unprotected sex.

But dealing with the issue is not simple. The by-law, which many see as effective in reducing the quantity of available alcohol, is also seen as an element of the justice system associated with the dominant Canadian society. The focus on penalizing over healing and restorative justice is decried by some as being antithetical to Eeyou values. Indeed, the bush life, to which drinking is seen as opposed, includes a focus on a different set of ways to prevent and resolve disruptive behaviour and conflict. Individual autonomy and a principle of non-interference are inter-woven with the idea that individuals learn from their own experiences over the course of their lifetime. These ways are difficult to apply in a settled village context with thousands of people in a single community.

In short, people in Chisasibi who are not drinking or drunk – whether they do drink at other times or not – tend to ignore people who *are* drinking or drunk for a variety of reasons linked to the issues described above. From the point of view of drinkers, the expectation of rejection and stigma shapes their experience of being drunk in the community. This expectation and these experiences dovetail with the pain that they seek to alleviate by drinking in the first place.

Indeed, the initial reasons for drinking cited by most participants who identified as current or former drinkers were nearly all linked with emotional suffering. Pain, anger, and shame were most cited as factors that contributed to their initial drinking, sometimes as early teens. And this suffering contributed to their ongoing drinking, even though most drinkers acknowledged that drunkenness was only a temporary reprieve. Many claimed that drinking and drunkenness often made these feelings worse.

The reflections of drinkers on the links between their drinking and their emotional suffering indicated that there was a deep awareness of the above-mentioned colonial roots of drinking. For example, multi-generational trauma from various aspects of colonialism that are frequently described in the community and in scholarly literature was a prevalent topic of discussion. There was also an awareness of the impacts of their drinking on their families and community. Applying

anthropological and philosophical work on embodiment and agency to the experiences and perspectives described by drinkers allows us to consider the agency involved in meaning creation through intersubjective engagement with local knowledge and ideological currents. Further, work on the phenomenology of suffering helps demonstrate that drunkenness can be considered as a means of communicating embodied emotional suffering.

As discussed above, people in Chisasibi who were not drinking at a given time tended to ignore those who were doing so in public spaces. This was not out of a lack of compassion – the pain that drinkers described was also described by other community members. It is a pervasive and extensive pain felt by many individuals who have been subject to centuries of colonial disruption and assimilation tactics. But in the moment, from the point of view of a drinker, the sensation of being ignored became embodied, furthering existing pain and confirming expectations of rejection. And in turn, this often led to stronger feelings toward fellow drinkers who, in the moment, were engaging in a shared experience without the need for explanations.

In addition to their agentic engagement with local knowledge to create meaning for their lived experience, drinkers demonstrated agency through their self-perception as willful agents. During public encounters, casual discussions, and interviews, drinkers spoke extensively about matters of choice. In some cases, there was an expressed *right to choose*, often corresponding to a will to defy authority – parental, judicial, or colonial. There was also an expressed *capacity to choose*; notwithstanding popular community discourse that posits a lack of ability of people in the community to drink in moderation, many drinkers affirmed that they could. Further, many affirmed that drinking to the point of drunkenness was a legitimate choice, and that it did not always signify a problem. Drinkers were not the only people in the community who expressed these views. Some other community members speaking against the by-law, for example, expressed concerns about the contravention of people's right to choose. Some also claimed that drinking to excess can be a normal part of one's path to growth. These were not popular opinions; they tended to be expressed after multiple conversations. The dominant views in the community support the limitation on people's access to and consumption of alcohol and mostly deny the possibility for moderate and responsible drinking.

The affirmation of the right and capacity to choose is examined here through the lens of phenomenological discussions of will. The ways in which drinkers described their right and capacity to choose demonstrates that drinkers tend to acknowledge ownership of their drinking, feel the effortfulness and embodied aspect of the act of drinking, and feel the anticipation of the results of this action (e.g., drunkenness, fun, social bonding, the alleviation of suffering). Regardless of any external views about whether it is possible for drinkers, particularly addicts, to have will or agency, the argument here is that drinkers considered themselves as willful agents. This was true for those who drank at the time of this research as well as those who had stopped.

Notwithstanding the strong conviction that one has the right and capacity to choose to drink, to various levels, and that one is a willful agent, the perspectives of drinkers on their own drinking was not devoid of ambivalence. Discussions on the topic of quitting brought up a range of views on whether it was necessary to quit and about how to go about it. The consideration of whether to quit was strongly tied to the discussion of choice and will. If one has the right to choose, one has the right to continue drinking. If one has the capacity to drink moderately or responsibly (meaning that drinking or drunkenness did not keep one from fulfilling their obligations), one need not necessarily quit. But these questions were also tied to intersubjective engagement with local moral and normative frameworks to assess one's own behaviour and actions – in this case drinking, drunkenness, and actions that result from these.

As many scholars have pointed out, though, it is necessary to remember that no community is homogenous. Multiple normative and moral frameworks can co-exist, and individuals fluctuate between them, depending on context. Engagement with the dominant views that drinking is inherently negative and harmful to the self and to others often led to negative self-evaluations. However, different frameworks emerged from the shared experiences of drinking and drunkenness and could contribute to more positive views of one's behaviour. As such, the context in which drinkers discussed their drinking as well as the contexts to which they referred often shaped the direction in which their reflections went.

Regarding ambivalence, the oft-cited idea that drinkers are not responsible for their actions while they are drunk appears to contradict the strong affirmation by drinkers that they have the right

and capacity to choose. It also appears to contradict the community tendency to cast blame on drinkers for actions considered harmful and problematic. However, a deeper look at concepts of will and agency provides some insight on how drinkers can continue to be considered agents in these situations.

Several scholars consider that will and agency are in effect even in cases of unreflective or habitual action. It is argued that actions have consequences, whether they are reflective or not. Therefore, actors can be and frequently are blamed for those consequences. They also can *change* their behaviour and avoid these consequences. Further, while a specific outcome may or may not have been desired at the beginning of an action, actors and others can link unreflective actions to an initial choice.

Therefore, while drinkers have often reported not feeling as though their actions were of their own will *in moments of drunkenness*, they consistently acknowledge will, particularly ownership and effortfulness, upon reflection on their actions. This exemplifies the idea of shifts in the focus on various aspects of will over the unfolding of an event. They may not have *willed* the harm that they caused, for instance, when they acted in violent ways while drunk. But they *had* willed the state of drunkenness that is seen to have caused the violent action. Whether a specific action while drunk was willed or unwilled, their agency was rarely called into question when they acknowledged their actions. Even in situations where an individual had gotten drunk to facilitate sexual experiences that may have been stigmatized and had used the “excuse” of drunkenness at the time to disavow will, later discussions indicated that the individual maintained a sense of ownership over their actions. This longer-term preservation of a sense of self as willful agent despite experiences during which volition could be questioned meshes with a wider community tendency to hold drinkers responsible for their actions, even when these actions are considered to have an external agent (e.g., alcohol, or the spirit of alcohol).

The perception of the self as willful agent is part of a wider web of identity. Ideas about Eeyou identity, expressed in statements of pride in cultural knowledge, language, and values such as reciprocity, were highlighted in discussions with nearly all drinkers, whether they were drinking or drunk at the time or not. Notwithstanding widespread community views that people drink

because they have lost their sense of identity or that drinking itself is a cultural or social transgression, many drinkers felt that they could engage in behaviours commonly considered to be traditional even if they were frequent or heavy drinkers.

Further, whether drinkers chose to quit or reduce their drinking, there were connections with local ideas of processual rather than sudden change. Drinkers who wanted to or had embarked on the quest to stop or reduce their drinking spoke of spiritual, familial, and career-related aspirations as things that they sought to work towards. An application of anthropological and other literature on will and agency to these experiences highlights that what matters to an individual has a large role to play in how they interpret their identity. As such, this is tied to the earlier discussion of self-assessment; the self-assessment that matters, in the moment, is that which concords to what is important to the person at the time.

An anthropological consideration of will and choice as processes rather than as discrete moments is similar to local Eeyou ideas about change and growth over time. A consideration of will as moral reorientation highlights the ways in which people who worked on changing their drinking and other behaviour did so as a means of *becoming who they wanted to be*: a better parent, one who is more connected with ancestral spirituality or the Christian God, or someone with a degree that could get them a satisfying career, for example.

Through these different considerations of the topics of greatest interest to research participants, I therefore argue that drinkers in Chisasibi are willful agents. They are willful agents to the extent that they deeply engage with local knowledge to interpret their life experiences and embodied emotional states. They are willful agents to the extent that they express emotional states in ways that correspond to both dominant and alternative sets of expectations. They are willful agents to the extent that they *consider themselves* to be willful agents, making both good and bad choices and acknowledging ownership of these choices. Finally, they are willful agents to the extent that they are engaged in ongoing processes of examining their own choices with respect to local ideological frameworks and experimenting with various modes of changing their behaviour to be in greater alignment with the selves that they wish to embody.

Problems with Research

It was not until years after the completion of the research for this dissertation that I became more informed of prominent works by Indigenous scholars, educators, and researchers on the extent to which colonial thinking dominates academic research. Indigenous scholars such as Smith (1999), Battiste (2013), and Wilson (2008) have critiqued Western academia and its tendency to center Western knowledge at the expense of other knowledges. Smith (1999), for example, has argued that the worldviews in which academic disciplines are rooted actively exclude other knowledge systems. Battiste (2013) has described this as cognitive imperialism, in which European-based knowledge is centred without regard for other forms of knowledge.

Eurocentrism is so deeply engrained in the educational system, according to Battiste (2013) that the validity of the knowledge goes unquestioned. True and valid knowledge is perceived as politically neutral, and the European worldview from which academic knowledge derived is not recognized. Similarly, Smith (1999) has argued that “The globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West’s view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of ‘civilized’ knowledge. This form of knowledge is generally referred to as ‘universal’ knowledge, available to all and not really ‘owned’ by anyone” (p. 63). However, as argued by Battiste (2013), “There is no neutral knowledge system. All knowledge about nature is socially constructed” (p. 199).

This helps explain much of the skepticism and distrust with which anthropologists, myself included, are often faced in fieldwork situations. Indeed, during both of my fieldwork experiences in Chisasibi, I heard numerous negative comments about anthropologists and other scholars who have been to the community or to other Indigenous communities. While it is acknowledged by many in Chisasibi that there are some non-Indigenous researchers who have worked with community members in beneficial ways, there is widespread skepticism. A frequent perception of non-Indigenous scholars is that we take information and use it for our own benefit, gaining degrees, professional credibility, and careers, without giving back in concrete and helpful ways, or at least in ways that are considered meaningful to Eeyouch.

The most common complaint that I heard had to do with the ways in which non-Indigenous researchers theorize and apply foreign concepts to what they learn from Eeyou and other Indigenous research participants. In that process, it is often said, researchers filter out much of what is meaningful in the worldviews and realities of participants. One friend, for example, commented that, no matter how he tried to explain and re-explain things to some researchers he had spoken with, “they [the researchers] think what they want anyway”. In other words, he and other Eeyouch who spoke with me about this felt that researchers tend to come with their own topics of interest with little regard for what the people might want from them or from the research projects.

I did my best in this research to centre the views of research participants. However, this dissertation has indeed filtered the responses of participants through the lens of western academic theoretical constructs, undoubtedly in addition to my own biases stemming from my positionality. While I chose an approach that explicitly highlights marginalized voices and that takes seriously the meaning that people give to their lives, I applied a set of concepts to the meanings and experiences expressed through these voices. These concepts are rooted in a way of thinking that is far removed from Eeyou worldviews and may have distorted the original meanings. Further, despite using an analytical approach that considered the contexts in which people spoke, my analysis lifts the experiences and perspectives shared by participants out of the very contexts which give them meaning.

My lack of fluency in *iiyiyuyimuwin* and Eeyou non-verbal communication compounds the issue. Most research participants were fluent in English and had been for their entire lives. Further, due to the nature of assimilation, many were “fluent” in Western ways of being and self-expression as a matter of course. So they met me closer to my “end of things” than I was able to meet them. As a result, I missed out on many of the nuances of the experiences and perspectives they shared.

The present dissertation has largely applied western academic conceptions of will and agency, and therefore still leaves a lacuna with respect to Eeyou considerations of agency and volition in self and other. Throop (2010) and Stewart and Strathern (2010) have suggested that anthropologists working with concepts such as willing and agency explore cultural variations in

how these concepts are conceived. Fluency in *iyyiyuyimuwin* and Eeyou non-verbal communication would be essential to success in this kind of work in Chisasibi, particularly since, like many Indigenous languages, *iyyiyuyimuwin* has a strong distinction between the animate and inanimate. Undoubtedly, worldviews inherent to the language have an impact on local conceptions of volition and agency.

Relational Accountability

Despite the inherent flaws discussed above, and despite the inescapable reality that this work benefits me, personally and professionally, much more than it benefits research participants, I see this work as a marker of accountability. Firstly, and most important to me, the people who participated and who, over the long years since the end of my research project, have encouraged me to complete this work believe that it has value. As mentioned above, a common critique of non-Indigenous researchers is that we come with our own interests in mind. This was very much the case for me. While the interest in the lives of drinkers was based on previous experiences in the community where the topic was repeatedly discussed with me, no one in the community requested that I come do this research. However, those who were drawn to the research felt that it was important.

Most of my respondents, particularly those who identified as drinkers, were not part of the usual pool of research respondents. Many had never participated in an interview before. Without being pretentious enough to imply that their participation had a large impact on their lives, I feel safe affirming, based on what participants shared during and after the research, that it felt good for many of them to share their stories with someone who wanted to hear them, and who was not there to change or “help” them. Once the research was done, several of them expressly wanted the things they shared to be out in the world.

The above-mentioned works by Indigenous scholars may have somewhat disheartened me as I felt that my research was inherently flawed in the ways that these scholars described most Western-based research to be. However, Wilson’s (2008) insistence on relational accountability as a core feature of an Indigenous research methodology reassured me that, at the very least, my friendly and open discussions with research participants, many who became friends with whom I

shared adventures, stories, and sometimes beer, had me on the right track. This research and the resulting dissertation may not have wide impacts on the community. But as a concrete result of the dialogues I had with drinkers, with whom some of my own life experience overlaps, it represents part of my relational accountability to them. In other words, it is my way of saying “I heard you and did my best to honour your words in the best way that I knew how”. In writing this despite the challenges that have slowed me down, I always felt I was fulfilling my ethical duty toward those who believed in this work and felt it mattered.

I have also found reassurance in the words of Erica Violet Lee (2016):

Most non-Indigenous people are more comfortable hearing stories of Indigenous people who have "overcome".

They still can't handle stories that honor our complexities - as if someone who's considered a Indigenous role model, activist, intellectual can't possibly be the same person who uses drugs or alcohol to cope with trauma/mental illness/sexism/colonialism/poverty/school/survival.

No, they want the stories of Indigenous "overcoming", and quite often, those stories of having "overcome" are rubbed in the faces of those whose personal struggles are ongoing.

This is one of many ways that colonialism uses the success of select individual Indigenous folks to shame others. I never want to be complicit in perpetuating that lie, because it is killing us.

So I'll leave it at this: "red road" or not, you deserve love. Do what you need to do to survive, until we build a world that is safer, sweeter, softer. Survive. You deserve harm reduction, health care without criminalization, and access to safer ceremonial spaces (if that's what you want).

Survive. We need you here. Survive.⁷⁸

Potential Benefits of This Research

On the academic level, this dissertation has contributed to fulfilling a part of the void that has been left by decades of anthropological research on Indigenous drinking. The position of drinking within a web of colonial disruption has been made clear by Indigenous and non-Indigenous

⁷⁸ Cited with permission from Erica Violet Lee, obtained via Facebook messenger on January 12, 2016. Erica Violet Lee, two-spirit nēhiyaw (Plains Cree), is a writer and community organizer: <https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/steering-committee/erika-violet-lee>.

researchers. Further, the ways in which drinking fulfills certain latent functions among people in Indigenous communities – as in other communities – was widely documented in the 70s and 80s. As discussed in chapter 3, however, there has been little anthropological work that highlights the agency of drinkers or that centers the extent to which there is ambivalence toward drinking on behalf of drinkers and non-drinkers alike. The argument outlined here does not seek to replace previous knowledge; rather, it complements it and adds to the richness of anthropological views of Indigenous drinking and drinking more generally.

This dissertation also contributes ethnographic nuance to academic discussions of Indigenous drinking. The consideration of the ways in which, for example, Eeyouch in Chisasibi intersubjectively understand and create meaning for the shared pain emerging from centuries of colonial interference helps break down an implied dichotomy between those who drink and those who do not. The complexities of self-identification and expressed experience that are described in this work also may help in this respect.

This research and dissertation do not stem from an interventionist approach, and they are not aimed specifically at professionals in the fields of physical and mental health. However, this work adheres to the worldview expressed by the harm reduction approach, as explained in chapter 5. Without denying that drinking can have very devastating impacts on individuals, families, and communities – which was acknowledged by most drinkers – this work does not seek to judge the choices and actions of those who drink. It is my hope, then, that this work provides avenues for consideration by non-Indigenous professionals in medicine, mental health, and social services. The ethnographic material, in particular, may provide grounds for discussion between professionals and their patients or clients and encourage a compassionate recognition of agency. For example, remembering that drinkers place high importance on their right and capacity to choose, take the impacts of their actions into consideration, and identify with other factors of themselves than just their drinking may help those who seek to support Indigenous drinkers and their families.

Finally, on a wider social level, I hope that people who read this – whether they are Indigenous or not and whether they drink or not – will benefit from the reminder of the complexity of *all* human

lives and experiences. For example, while it may be easy for drinkers to feel as though other people have only disdain for them, this work has brought forth that people in Chisasibi who are not drinking at a given time do not actually lack compassion for drinkers. And while it may be easy for people who do not drink at a given time to think that drinkers are “lost” and have turned away from their cultures, this work has highlighted that being “lost” is not an inherent feature of the lives of drinkers. As moral agents and as dialogical selves, drinkers refer to wider aspects of their identities than their status as drinkers.

The drinkers who shared their stories are “not just drunks”. They are Indigenous, Cree or Inuit. They are youth, parents, siblings, children, or grandchildren. They are students or workers. They are followers of spiritual traditions or blend of traditions, hunters, trappers, and fishers. They are maintainers of traditions and adopters of novelty. Most importantly, they are well-rounded humans who are capable of moral choices and rational thought and who have aspirations for their future and that of their families and community.

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Appendix 1 – Introduction in Local Newsletter, September 2010

Wachiya! Jacky nii. You may have seen me and my son, Jacob, walking or driving around town during the month of August. We're from Montreal where I teach anthropology at Vanier College. I'm also involved in awareness raising about Native rights, LGBT rights, autistic rights and social justice in general. Jacob is 11 and loves music, movies, drama, running around and throwing rocks in the river.

I was here for the first time in 1998 doing research for my master's in anthropology. I was 25 and I realised that I came here more for personal reasons than for academic reasons. I was running away from my life in the south. I had just lost my father to alcoholism and I was recovering from my own alcoholism. Spending time here helped me find a sense of peace and hope that I had lost somewhere along the way. People shared their homes, their food and their lives with me and taught me the value of sharing. The sense of resilience, spirit and generosity that I encountered here made me a better person. The decision to do a PhD project here was largely an excuse to come and spend a year here so that I can see, really, if this is a place that I would ultimately like to settle down in. This time, instead of running away from the south, I ran toward the north.

I decided to deal with a topic that is both important to me personally and important to this community: alcohol. I know it is a very sensitive topic. You all know about the stereotypes that many Euro-Canadians have about "drunken Indians." My goal is not to support these stereotypes – it is the opposite. When I was walking around town here in 98, I did stop to talk to people who were drinking or drunk in spite of warnings from well-intentioned people. I learned that, even in a state of intoxication, there was a sense of spirit that remained uncrushed. I learned that sharing is an important value whether it be sharing material objects or a can of beer. I learned that traditional Eeyou culture was a topic that inspired passion in many of the people who were drinking and that many of them were very angry about what had happened to Eeyou lands and culture through the processes of colonization and neo-colonialism.

Why am I personally interested in the topic? I grew up with heavy alcohol use in the family. Many of my early memories involve a drunken parent and the smell of alcohol. However, I also grew up

with a view that a person who drinks is not evil. My dad never abused me or my mom. He was tender, loving and loved to laugh. The messages I was hearing around me about “drunks” were confusing to me because they made it sound like people who drank were like monsters who had turned away from their society. But that’s not what I saw at home. And that’s not what I saw here when I was talking to small groups of young people sharing cans of beer.

While I’m here, I’m hoping to have discussions with about 120 – 140 people in the community to learn about their perspectives on alcohol. Coffee, tea and snacks will be provided during the discussions! I will suggest some discussion themes, but I will let the person talk about whichever themes are of interest to them with no interruptions by me. The suggested themes will be given in advance to let participants think about the topic for a while. My main focus is to learn about the perspectives of people who drink or used to drink, I also seek to learn the perspectives of people who do not drink. Participants can be Native or non-Native but they must be over 18. On my website, <https://anthrojack.wordpress.com/chisasibi-research>, you can see more about the topics I would like to discuss and learn more about my work.

Everything that participants tell me is confidential. To respect people’s privacy, I will use pseudonyms in my writing, and I will avoid describing participants in a way that would allow people to identify them. Participants can change their minds about their participation at any time. I will do everything in my power to conduct this research in a way that is respectful to everyone. My goal is not to propagate negative stereotypes. Rather, it is to encourage people who rarely get heard to voice their thoughts on a topic that impacts their lives.

Other than research, I would like to volunteer my time and skills to help with any organisations or people that can use them. I’m also very open to learning anything that anyone wants to teach me: the Eeyou language, fishing, hunting, making clothing, skidooring . . . anything. We are very open to spending time in the bush if the opportunity arises. To contact me about the research, volunteering, or anything else (my son and I are still looking for a place to live), please contact me at [Personal contact information redacted].

I look forward to working with you!

Chinskumden!

Appendix 2 – Letter with Themes of Interest

Interested in having a discussion about the impact of alcohol on people’s lives, identities and communities in a non-judgmental and respectful atmosphere?

Wachiyak! Jacky nii. I’m a PhD student in anthropology at the University of Montreal. I’m interested in learning about the role of alcohol in the lives and identities of the people who use it. Many people talk about alcohol in Native communities, but we rarely hear the voices of people who are the most affected by it or who choose to use it. I would like to work with you to change that.

I’m interested in hearing from all community members over the age of 18. But I’m sending a special call out to people who drink, people who used to drink and youth (18-35) as these are groups of people whose voices tend to go unheard.

Your participation would consist of getting together with me at your convenience to have an informal chat about the topic of alcohol. There is a list of suggested themes on the back of this sheet. We can get together wherever you are most comfortable: my home, your home, your workplace or at a resto for a coffee or tea. We can even go out for a drive, a walk or go fishing! Wherever we meet, non-alcoholic refreshments are on me!

I am committed to respecting your privacy. Everything you tell me will remain confidential. You can change your mind at any time about your participation. Most importantly, you will not be judged! My approach is one of respect for people’s life choices and perspectives.

If you want to know more about why I’m interested in anthropology, Native peoples and the topic of alcohol or if you want to know more about my research philosophy, please check out <http://anthrojack.wordpress.com> and click “Chisasibi Research.”

Chinskumden!

Jacky

Here are some topics I am interested in learning more about from community members. These are suggested themes only. Participants are free to discuss whichever topics they feel are relevant to them in whichever order they wish. It is normal that themes overlap and don't follow in a straight line. Also, if other topics come up in the discussion, that is fine too. I am here to learn!

- Your perspectives and experiences as a person who drinks or who used to drink (if applicable.)
- Why you drink or used to drink (if applicable): pros and cons of drinking.
- Your thoughts about how alcohol affects or affected your relationships with family, friends and community.
- How you think alcohol affects or affected your identity.
- Your interests and your wishes for the future.
- Your views on spirituality, healing, justice, Eeyou traditions, work and education.
- What you wish non-Native people knew about your life.
- Views on stereotypes about Native people and drinking

Want to chat about any of these topics, or other related topics, with someone who simply wants to hear your views and who will not judge you? Get in touch!

[Personal contact information redacted]

Appendix 3 – Waaskimaashtau Letter, April 2011

Who is that shaggy haired white guy anyway?

As some of you may remember from an article I wrote for Waaskimaashtau in September, I'm in town working on anthropological research for my PhD. In that article, I shared my personal reasons for wanting to spend time in Chisasibi again and for wanting to do research here. If you missed it, I posted a copy of what I wrote here: <http://anthrojack.wordpress.com/chisasibi-research/waaskimaashtau-letter/>.

Now, I would like to share some thoughts about the changing relationships between Native communities and non-Native anthropologists. I have heard and read that many Native people are wary of anthropologists. It's understandable. Anthropologists have a track record for advancing the goals of colonization, either intentionally or unintentionally. Many non-Native anthropologists have come into Native communities, "taken" information that they then take home and benefit from by gaining credibility in the academic world as "experts" on Native peoples. This can be reasonably seen as another kind of theft: a theft of ideas and knowledge.

In recent decades, there has been growing realization of this problem among anthropologists. Some students have chosen to abandon anthropology as a result, thinking that because of its shameful past, it's doomed. Others, like me, have chosen to try to change it from the inside. We believe that anthropology has the potential to foster inter-cultural communication, exchange and respect. We also believe that anthropology can help foster greater social awareness of human diversity and unity. Finally, many of us feel strongly about our responsibility to make our work useful to the people and communities that share their lives and cultures with us.

I follow a research ethic that focusses on working WITH people instead of "studying them." It's important to me that people who choose to participate in the project do so willingly and because they have an interest in the topic. It's also important to me that people who participate see a potential benefit to them and their community. For that reason, the results of the work will be made available to the community for people to use as they see fit. By the way, if you would like

to read my Master's thesis based on my time here in 1998, it is available at the library: "Friends and Strangers: Experience and Commonality in a James Bay Town."

As for the PhD project, I'm here until July and I'm still very interested in chatting about people's perspectives about the impact of alcohol on people's lives and identity and on community well-being. I don't conduct "formal" interviews, as in "question and answer." Instead, I like to have casual conversations where people are comfortable and feel free to express their views. I'm interested in speaking with anyone over 18 who lives or works in the community. I'd like to send a special call-out to youth over 18 because I want to make sure to include the perspective of some of the people who are the most affected but who are not always heard in Canada. You can get more information on consent, privacy and what participation in this project involves at <http://anthrojack.wordpress.com/>. Click on "Chisasibi research" for the information.

You can get in touch with me [Personal contact information redacted] Finally, if you see a shaggy haired and bearded white guy that looks like me in town, don't be shy to talk to me! I'd love to practice the Eeyou words that I'm learning in the ACTION program with Nellie!

Appendix 4 – Information from Flyer for Youth Session

Are you between the ages of 18 and 35?

Interested in discussing the topic of alcohol in a relaxed, non-judgmental atmosphere?

Want to know more about a research project on this topic?

You are invited to attend a

Youth Discussion on alcohol and identity

At the Youth Centre (where the Internet Café used to be)

Wednesday, April 13 from 2:00 - 3:30PM

Come share *your* views on the topic of alcohol. You will not be judged or asked any personal questions - just your perspectives and opinions on an important topic. You will also be able to find out more about the research project I am doing on the impact of alcohol on youth identity and life experience.

Coffee, tea, juice and snacks will be provided!

For more information:

[Personal contact information redacted]

Appendix 5 – Consent Form

Research project: Identity, worldview and life experience among Cree drinkers: An ethnography of Native drinking in James Bay

Researcher: Jacky Vallée, PhD student, University of Montreal

Research supervisor: Dr. Marie-Pierre Bousquet

A) Information for participants

1. Research goals

The main goal of this project is to understand the life experience and views of young Eeyou people who drink alcohol. There is a lot of misinformation in Canadian society about the use of alcohol in Native communities. Many people rely on stereotypes about Native people. This project will help people see beyond these stereotypes and understand that people who drink have important stories to tell. Another goal of the project is to understand how other people in the community are affected by the alcohol use of their family members and friends. I also wish to understand the different kinds of views there are in the community about alcohol.

2. Participation

Your participation in this research will consist of informal interviews. This means that I will suggest some topics and let you talk about your experiences and views on those topics while I listen. With your permission, I will record your responses on audio tapes. Depending on your level of comfort and interest, we may conduct up to 3 follow-up interviews so that you can go into more depth about your life experiences and tell your story. Also, with your permission, we can meet informally during other activities in the community to talk about community life. During these encounters, I would be observing the life of the town. This is called participant-observation. This knowledge will also be used as data for this research.

3. Confidentiality

The information that you share will be held in strict confidentiality. A different code will be used for each participant and only the researcher will have access to the list of participants and their codes. No private information about you will be published in any form. All information that would allow a third party to identify you will be destroyed after 7 years.

4. Advantages and possible inconveniences

Your participation in this research will contribute to greater knowledge about the experiences and views of Native people who drink and about the impact of alcohol in Native communities. It will also give you the opportunity to talk about your life to someone who will not judge you.

However, talking about these topics might sometimes lead you to remember things that trigger negative emotions. If this happens, please feel free to talk to the researcher about it. He can refer you to someone who can help you deal with these emotions.

5. The right to withdraw

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time, without prejudice, simply by telling the researcher. You can call him, email him or tell him in person. The researcher will not try to persuade you to change your mind and you will not have to justify your choice. If you choose to withdraw from the project, all the information that was gathered up until that point will be destroyed.

You also have the right to indicate to the researcher that some information is not to be used as data. For example, if you say something in an interview that you consider too personal or that you don't really mean, or if something happens during participant-observation that you don't want the researcher to write about, this will be respected.

B) CONSENT

I declare that I have taken notice of the information above and that the researcher answered all my questions about my participation in this project. I also declare that I understand the goals and nature of this project as well as the advantages and possible inconveniences related to my participation in this project.

After some reflection, I freely consent to participate in this research project. I know that I can withdraw at any time without prejudice and without having to justify my decision. I also know that I can ask the researcher to not use certain pieces of information in his project.

___ I will participate in the life histories or interview component of this project.

___ I will participate in the participant-observation component of this project.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Last name: _____ First name: _____

I also consent to having my interviews digitally recorded. I understand that only the researcher will have access to the recordings and that I will be given a copy on CD for my own use.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

I declare that I have explained the goals and nature of the project as well as the advantages and possible inconveniences related to participation in this project. I also declare that I have answered the participant's questions to the best of my abilities.

Researcher's signature _____ Date: _____

Last name: _____ First name: _____

If you have any questions about this research project or if you would like to withdraw from the project, please contact Jacky Vallée, researcher, at [Personal contact information redacted].

If you have any complaints about your participation in this project, please contact the ombudsman of the University of Montreal at (514) 343-2100 or at ombudsman@umontreal.ca.

(The ombudsman will accept collect calls).

A signed copy of this consent form must be given to the participant.