



# Folklore

---

*Electronic Journal of Folklore 61*

# **Folklore**

Electronic Journal of Folklore

<http://www.folklore.ee/folklore>

Printed version

Vol. 61

2015

Folk Belief and Media Group  
of the Estonian Literary Museum  
Estonian Institute of Folklore

# **Folklore**

Electronic Journal of Folklore  
Vol. 61

Edited by Mare Kõiva & Andres Kuperjanov  
Guest editors: Aimar Ventsel & Art Leete

Tartu 2015

Editor in chief	Mare Kõiva
Co-editor	Andres Kuperjanov
Guest editors:	Aimar Ventsel & Art Leete
Copy editor	Tiina Mällo
News and reviews	Piret Voolaid
Design	Andres Kuperjanov
Layout	Diana Kahre

Editorial board 2015–2020: Dan Ben-Amos (University of Pennsylvania, USA), Larisa Fialkova (University of Haifa, Israel), Diane Goldstein (Indiana University, USA), Terry Gunnell (University of Iceland), Jawaharlal Handoo (University of Mysore, India), Frank Korom (Boston University, USA), Jurij Fikfak (Institute of Slovenian Ethnology), Ülo Valk (University of Tartu, Estonia), Wolfgang Mieder (University of Vermont, USA), Irina Sedakova (Russian Academy of Sciences).

The journal is supported by the institutional research funding IUT22-5, the state programme project EKKM14-344, and the Estonian Literary Museum.

Indexed in EBSCO Publishing Humanities International Complete, Thomson Reuters Arts & Humanities Citation Index, MLA International Bibliography, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, Internationale Volkskundliche Bibliographie / International Folklore Bibliography / Bibliographie Internationale d'Ethnologie, DOAJ, C.E.E.O.L., ERIH (B), Scopus

**Editorial address:**

Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore  
Vanemuise 42–235  
51003 Tartu  
Estonia  
phone: +372 737 7740  
fax: +372 737 7706  
e-mail: [folklore@folklore.ee](mailto:folklore@folklore.ee)  
home page: <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore>

All rights reserved

© Folk Belief and Media Group of the Estonian Literary Museum  
EKM Teaduskirjastus / ELM Scholarly Press  
Estonian Institute of Folklore  
Authors  
Design Andres Kuperjanov

ISSN 1406-0957  
doi:10.7592/FEJF2015.61

# CONTENTS

Introduction: Drinking and Fun in the Arctic Art Leete, Aimar Ventsel	7
Breaking the Code: Strategies of Alcohol Addicts Tatiana Argounova-Low, Platon Sleptsov	11
The Sooner You Drink It All, the More Time You Will Have Thereafter Kirill Istomin	27
Hangover Joachim Otto Habeck	47
Monolingual and Bilingual Practices: Reversing Power Relations during a Festivity in Pondala Laura Siragusa	65
'Do You Respect Me?' Drinking as a Social Catalyst in the Reindeer Herding Communities of European Russia and Western Siberia Stephan Dudeck	89
How to Enjoy a Teetotal All-Night Party: Abstinence and Identity at the Sakha People's Yhyakh Eleanor Peers, Stepan Kolodeznikov	117
The Historical-Ethnographic Image of the Drinking Peoples of the North Art Leete	135
METHOD SECTION	
Ethnographic Research among Drinking Youth Cultures: Reflections from Observing Participants. <i>Daniel Briggs, Ivan Gololobov, Aimar Ventsel</i>	157

DISCUSSION	
Reflections and Thoughts about the Social and Cultural Role of Alcohol.	177
<i>Natalia Struchkova, Aimar Ventsel</i>	
RESEARCH REPORT	
Pentecostals and Charismatic Protestants in the Republic of Komi and Nenets Tundra. <i>Art Leete, Piret Koosa, Laur Vallikivi</i>	185
IN MEMORIAM	
Ants Viires	193
NEWS IN BRIEF	
Memory, Remembering, and Legend: Estonian Folklorists' 10th Winter Conference. <i>Mare Kalda</i>	195
Folklore Collection at the Estonian Folklore Archives in 2014 and President's Folklore Collection Award. <i>Astrid Tuisk</i>	197
BOOK REVIEWS	
Reflections on Indigenous Adaptation in Western Siberia. <i>Art Leete</i>	201
From Elf-Tendril to Poison-Harm. <i>Jonathan Roper</i>	203

## INTRODUCTION: DRINKING AND FUN IN THE ARCTIC

*Art Leete, Aimar Ventsel*

We initiated the Arctic workshops at the University of Tartu, Estonia, in 2010. The first three meetings concentrated on discussing the problems of movement in the North.<sup>1</sup> The fourth workshop, *Drinking and Driving Is So Much Fun*, was held from May 31 to June 1, 2013.<sup>2</sup> The progression from one theme to another does not make much sense at first glance. In general, the Arctic region remained in the focus of our forum and the title of the workshop suggests movement, but actually, what is the connection? The title served as an academic provocation and also indicated how the participants perceived it (see, for example, Dudeck 2013: 93). We adopted the idea for our workshop title from the song *Drinking and Driving*, which was recorded by a British punk band, The Business, in the late 1970s, and became an instant hit among beer-loving punks. The song associated drinking with fun and collective action (to put it mildly), demonstrating that beer-drinking can be evaluated as a process involving positive social meaning.

At the same time, the organisers also attempted to initiate discussion about the integration of ambivalent alcohol experiences and narratives into anthropological research (ibid.).

Therefore, we can say that punks are not the only group of people who believe that drinking is related to the pleasant side of life and is unavoidable in certain situations. The use of alcohol and its social meaning as a topic of research has an impressive history. In Arctic studies, however, alcohol is primarily contextualised from the negative side: everybody seems to know that in the Arctic alcohol is related to violence, suicide, decline of indigenous traditions, culture shock, and other misfortunes that result from excessive drinking. The scholar's task here is to warn of the damage that alcohol causes, and demand restrictive methods to limit access to alcohol. Notwithstanding the scholarly approach to alcohol use, people still continue to drink, an activity primarily associated with leisure time, joyfulness, and celebration. Every scholar who has



*Vodka. Saily settlement, Yakutia, Russian Far East.  
Photograph by Aimar Ventsel 2015.*

conducted fieldwork in the region knows that alcohol is deeply embedded within many rituals, such as the greeting of an honoured guest, the demonstration of masculinity, or as part of religious ceremonies.

This workshop at the University of Tartu was arranged to explore the topic and seek answers as to why people drink in the Arctic, and whether there is anything specific in the use of alcohol that distinguishes this region from others. During the workshop, we examined a wide range of papers that discussed the social, political, cultural and medical meanings of indigenous and non-indigenous alcohol use in the Arctic. Our aim was to discuss how alcohol's agency is conceptualised in the region, and how these concepts vary in different ethnic, religious, gender and age groups. Also, we were interested in the role of alcohol in field research situations and in how questions of fieldwork ethics are related to this.

During the workshop, several papers were dedicated to the analysis of general problems of alcohol addiction as such, as well as to the history of alcohol

discourses in the Arctic. Particular case studies touched upon the Khanty, Sakha, Nenets, Veps, Finns and Russians' alcohol-related social issues as well as the ritual context of drinking. Not all of these presentations made their way into this collection; yet, we hope that the specific flavour of the workshop's intellectual atmosphere is reflected in our special volume.

Interestingly, last but not least, this particular workshop gained an unexpected amount of public interest in Estonia. The organisers of the workshop were interviewed by radio stations and newspapers, coverage of the workshop (<http://blog.ut.ee/to-drink-or-not-to-drink/>) was fourth among the ten most read texts in the blog of the University of Tartu in 2013 (see <http://blog.ut.ee/the-top-10-stories-of-2013/>). Despite the long history of academic research on Siberia and the Far East in Estonia, the media and the general public have shown only a limited interest in it. Alcohol, apparently, was the turning point. This gives evidence of how science could, by choosing attractive topics for scientific events, gain more public exposure, as well as further evidence that alcohol matters.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> About earlier workshops, see Leete & Ventsel 2011, 2012, 2014. About the 4th Arctic Workshop, see also Dudeck 2013.
- <sup>2</sup> The workshop and this paper were supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory, CECT) and Estonian Research Council grants IUT34-32 and PUT590.

## REFERENCES

- Dudeck, Stefan 2013. Drinking and Driving Is So Much Fun. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 93–95. Available at [http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/article/view/163/pdf\\_106](http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/article/view/163/pdf_106), last accessed on June 4, 2015.
- Leete, Art & Ventsel, Aimar 2011. Introduction: World Routes in the Arctic. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 49, pp. 7–12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2011.49.worldroutes>.
- Leete, Art & Ventsel, Aimar 2012. Dynamic Discourse and the Metaphor of Movement: Preface to the Special Issue. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 3–7. Available at [http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/article/view/115/pdf\\_76](http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/article/view/115/pdf_76), last accessed on June 4, 2015.

Leete, Art & Ventsel, Aimar 2014. Preface to the Special Issue: Departures and Returns in the North. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 3–6. Available at [http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/article/view/182/pdf\\_120](http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/article/view/182/pdf_120), last accessed on June 4, 2015.

## **BREAKING THE CODE: STRATEGIES OF ALCOHOL ADDICTS**

*Tatiana Argounova-Low, Platon Sleptsov*

**Abstract:** The article addresses the problems related to alcohol abuse and its medical treatment called ‘coding’. The treatment by ‘coding’ subjugates alcoholics to a relationship between them and other more dominant agents. Despite such pressure being very powerful, we argue that alcoholics develop their strategies and ways to manoeuvre and manipulate these dominant relationships. The article explains why treatment by coding is often ineffective.

**Keywords:** alcohol, alcoholism, coding, Sakha (Yakutia)

### **INTRODUCTION**

This article presents a new approach to a problem that has existed for a long time. This paper highlights issues around alcohol abuse and its treatment in Yakutsk, Sakha (Yakutia). In this paper we focus on the treatment generally known as ‘coding’ (*kodirovanie*), and analyse some personal stories regarding such treatment. In the stories that we listened to and followed, we observed a certain pattern of behaviour in alcohol-dependent people and their responses to treatment. Such observations gave us the possibility to interpret these patterns as certain stratagems used by alcoholics.

Going back to Yakutsk after a long interval, one experiences a storm of personal stories, which for this study became a gateway for understanding the effects of alcoholism and alcohol-related consequences, which had become commonplace in the last few years. Friends, relatives, acquaintances, neighbours – everyone seems to have a distressing story to tell about alcohol-related problems in their families. These stories, often heartbreaking, become part of the narrative in Yakutsk: an acquaintance who had to wear a thick layer of make-up to cover bruises on her face and arms – traces of her drunken husband’s violence; another story told by a furious female whose husband was robbed of a large sum of cash while he was drinking, on the way to another city to purchase a new car; an elderly disabled mother who had to cope with the alcoholism of her son, her sole carer. Narratives like these ones are most vocal and most heard.

Alongside accounts of divorces and accidents, there are recurring stories about attempts to beat alcoholism, curb it and undergo treatment. Yet again, these stories are often narrated by a family member: an exuberant wife or a mother telling of the successful treatment of her husband or son. More often than not, these are stories of repetitive treatments, happening again and again. It seemed a recurrent pattern with many alcohol-dependent people: being coded – drinking freely – being treated again. We decided to look into this pattern and offer our understanding of the situation and a possible explanation as to why the coding offered to alcoholics is often ineffective.

While interviewing persons who identify themselves as alcoholics, we have realised that in public discourse on alcohol abuse the voice of an alcoholic remains unheard most of the time. Bestowed with guilt, the alcohol-dependant people are not given a chance to speak out. In this article we decided to retain voices of people whom we interviewed and thus to give them an opportunity to participate in this discourse, present their narratives, and demonstrate their agency.

Both authors have long been fascinated with the theme of alcohol dependence and its treatment, particularly with its effects on the family. We have carried out participant observation as well as longitudinal interviews with various people who suffer from alcohol addiction, and their family members. The names of these people have been changed, as have some of their details, to protect their anonymity.

## **CURRENT SITUATION IN SAKHA (YAKUTIA)**

Drinking patterns among Sakha fit into stereotypes of native drinking in other parts of the world, especially in the North. And just like the remote Arctic places that Hugh Brody describes, these patterns of drinking can be illustrated with the same “eruptions of violence, chronic social disarray, and mindless disregard for all that people are supposed to hold sacred – children are neglected, homes burned down, friends are attacked” (Brody 1977: 33). Medical practitioners often explain high alcohol dependence among native people by a low tolerance to alcohol, which is a result of their biological or genetic make-up. We are inclined to disagree, following Brody (1977), Spicer (1997), and Samson (2003), who opined that there are different social and cultural explanations for native drinking habits.

According to the information provided by the SakhaPress information agency, in 2011 there were 23,019 people who suffered from alcohol dependence from the total 958,528 people in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), and every year the

number of alcohol-dependent people increases by approximately 5%. In 2012 about 30,000 residents were registered as having alcohol dependence and suffering from alcohol-related psychosis (SakhaPress 2013). These numbers, of course, are not precise, as they indicate only registered patients who sought help from accredited services.

An internet site that provides consultation to people suffering from alcohol addiction revealed the seriousness of the problem with alcohol. From 481 people who responded to a questionnaire on the website, 34.7% replied that they had tried all possible methods to treat their alcoholism but nothing had helped. The rest of the respondents were convinced that alcohol addiction could be treated in hospital or with the help of private practitioners, including healers and shamans (Patrov 2010).

Indeed, the growing number of clinics and private practitioners offering a cessation of alcohol dependence is obvious in Yakutsk. It is almost impossible to provide an exact number of existing clinics offering help as such practitioners are not necessarily formally registered. Frequent advertisements in the newspapers, on television and the Internet make it obvious that such services are in great demand. We visited a number of clinics operating in the city, and remain under the impression that anti-alcohol treatment has turned into very profitable business enterprise. At present, five narcological hospitals and 30 narcological clinics operate in the republic with 54 psychiatrists specialising in narcology. In *Krasnaya Yakutia* (Red Yakutia, a narcological hospital in Yakutsk) alone, more than 3,500 patients are admitted and treated annually. And this number continues to grow (Tumusov 2011). Many movements, non-governmental organisations and political figures in the republic are campaigning towards a reduction in sales and banning access to alcohol altogether. And this is why this fight is hard to win.

## **ALCOHOL AND THE STATE**

In her impressive study, Patricia Herlihy (2002) presents a history of the use of vodka and alcohol in late Imperial Russia and the politics that surrounded its production and consumption. Using historical data and statistics, she correlates the production of vodka and alcohol and the state monopoly thereof. Alcohol production was always one of the priorities for the state, for alcohol production, sales and high taxes on alcoholic drinks constituted one of the main revenue items in the Russian state budget. The problem of alcohol, however, concerned many medics and psychiatrists, and in the 1920s some experts already articulated alcoholism as ‘the disease of our country’ (ibid.: 36). Being

of 'strategic importance' for the state, the question of rampant alcoholism has yet to be resolved.

Vladimir Bekhterev of the Psycho-Neurological Institute in St. Petersburg, the leading expert in alcohol studies in Russia in the 1920s, found a way out of this conundrum by suggesting a formula of moderate consumption of alcohol and making the statement that "capitalism, not alcohol, is 'the fundamental evil of our era'" (ibid.: 49). This was a convenient formulation for the state; presented in this way, alcoholism was a disease of consciousness, the mind, and the body.

"The body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it..." (Foucault 1995 [1975]: 25). Such an interpretation of alcoholism and the perception of alcoholics, their bodies and their minds has become part of what Foucault calls the "political technology of the body" (ibid.: 26). Indeed, alcoholism, together with juvenile delinquency, crime and other disturbing social phenomena, was given a consistent ideological explanation and as 'a disease of capitalism' it had to be removed or at least separated from society (Efron 1960; Korolenko et al. 1994). Directives of the Soviet of People's Commissars in 1926 highlighted "compulsory treatment of alcoholics who constitute a social danger", and on the whole "social and psychological pressures for treatment were powerful" (Efron 1960: 312). The prophylactic anti-alcoholism work of the clinics was to highlight the destructive effects of alcohol as being incompatible with Soviet morality (ibid.: 313).

With this formulation the state was able to carry on with the production of alcoholic drinks, mainly vodka. "Social problems, and alcoholism in particular, according to official Soviet ideology are the products of a diseased and disorganised economy and society, i.e. of capitalism" (Field 1955: 105). Indeed, already in 1934 the Communist Party announced that socialism in the country had been achieved and capitalism eliminated, and the problem with alcoholism in the Soviet Union had been eradicated (Transchel 2006: 153). Since the problem of alcoholism had been 'solved', the production of vodka was increased and was now in the controlling hands of the central government. Such measures undeniably contributed to increasing alcoholism in the country but were explained by the remnants of capitalist consciousness that clouded the minds of some Soviet citizens. Allegedly, by 1940, the sales of alcoholic drinks were higher than those of meat, vegetables and fruit put together (Herlihy 2002: 154). From then on the state combated drunkenness at work and in public places by administrative measures.

The notion of alcoholism thus received a peculiar inflection similar to the notions of insanity and madness in Foucault's analysis (1989: 62). The notion implied the perception of alcoholism as an ideological crime and treatment

involved the police, in addition to medical staff and psychologists. *Vytrezviteli* (infamously known as sobering-up stations) and labour rehabilitation centres (LTP) were run by police forces (Solomon 1989: 264; Transchel 2006: 155). People caught drunk in public places were placed in sobering-up stations for the night (Efron 1960: 312). The punishment for drinking was not only a fine; it also included obligatory notifications sent to the authorities and employers. A public notice with the name of a person, address and work place was displayed on a public notice-board accompanied by a cartoon mocking the drunkard. The whole incident resembled a public show trial.

Similar attitudes continued throughout the Soviet period and by the late 1960s the rhetoric of the elimination of alcoholism in the country became part of the hegemonic discourse of communist ideology (Yurchak 2003: 480–481). The split between ideological performance and its representation meant that stiff ideological clichés were produced, the slogans wrapped and induced through perpetuation at congresses, meetings, and posters, but the meaning of the slogan was emptied in the process or even before that. “*Pianstvu Boi*” (We will beat drunkenness) in reality had little meaning and the production of alcoholic drinks meanwhile continued to increase.

In their discussion on the lasting effects of the Soviet hegemony, Kharkhordin (1999) and Yurchak (2003) point to a dichotomy between official and hidden selves of the Soviet citizen. The official self would be present at meetings and would formally disapprove alcoholics. At the same time the hidden intimate would indulge in alcohol consumption, possibly straight after an anti-alcohol meeting. This created an effect of hidden alcoholism: from fear of being chastised or of punitive sanctions, many alcoholics went underground and carried on without the much needed treatment (Korolenko et al. 1994: 1273–1274).

With Gorbachev’s ascent to power in 1985, the attitude to alcohol, its perception and treatment changed drastically. In the first two months in his new role Gorbachev adopted a resolution entitled *On Measures to Overcome Drunkenness and Alcoholism* (Herlihy 2002: 154). Alcohol became less easily available: the age limits were raised, opening hours for the sale of alcohol amended and vineyards were obliterated or converted for the production of soft fruit juices. In the same year, monthly alcohol rations per household were introduced to limit general consumption. Vodka was in short supply and temporarily turned into a currency; bottles of vodka purchased with coupons were used as payment for manual labour to plumbers and electricians, who were pleased to receive such payment in kind. Gorbachev’s campaign also increased the amount of home-brewed alcohol. A quick alcoholic drink was made by fermenting sugar and yeast in large glass jars. Plastic gloves, instead of the lid, would stand upright waving in the air, signalling the readiness of the home brew. The drink was known by

the popular name “Hello to Gorbachev”. All in all, this anti-alcohol campaign revealed how important alcohol was for the country’s coffers. Gorbachev himself admitted that his anti-alcohol campaign contributed to a 49 billion rouble deficit in revenue, allegedly on a scale comparable to the Chernobyl disaster (Korolenko et al. 1994: 1271).

So the anti-alcohol campaign failed, as did the Soviet Union, and later market economy conditions brought the relationship to alcohol in Russia to another extreme. Heavy alcohol advertising, availability and cheap prices took the alcohol problem to new heights, above other social issues. Yet, unlike in the past, there was none of the obligatory moralistic preaching, no public meetings and no propaganda about the harmful effects of alcohol. From a public issue that society combated, although ostensibly, alcoholism reverted to the hidden domain, where alcoholics and their families had to deal with it on their own.

## **CODE FEAR**

The cure for alcoholism in the Soviet Union was associated with a method of treatment introduced by Alexander Dovzhenko, a psychiatrist and psychotherapist. Although the method of hypnosis had been known in Russia since 1904, it was Dovzhenko who took it further, developing and adopting the method for group therapy (Herlihy 2002: 46). Our aim is not to evaluate the effectiveness of this form of treatment, but to focus on the mechanism of the treatment and investigate our interviewees’ attitudes and approaches towards encoding.

Much can be said about the personality of Alexander Dovzhenko, who certainly exploited his authority and influence to establish unconditional belief in the effectiveness of the treatment and his unique abilities as a doctor (Fleming et al. 1994: 360). The hypnotic séances were almost theatrically set, with suspended silences and a dramatically intimidating atmosphere. An old documentary depicts Doctor Dovzhenko during one of his séances. In a darkened room, a spotlight is centred on the imposing figure of the doctor in his white gown, slowly pronouncing every single word. Dovzhenko starts the process of treatment that he termed ‘encoding’, which was based on instilling fear in a person (Ivanov 2012). In this process of non-invasive lobotomy, an injected seed of fear into a person’s mind was to govern all his future actions.

Coding relates to the method widely known as stress psychotherapy and, in Dovzhenko’s interpretation, involved three stages. During the first stage the doctor selected, interviewed, and prepared the patients. The second stage involved a séance of hypnotic therapy that stressed the doctor’s role in the treatment. Dovzhenko’s crucial phrase: “During this hypnotic séance I will insert in your

brain an anti-alcoholic, anti-narcotic psychic code” was to convince his patients that a stable centre in their brain would prevent cravings for alcohol in the future (Fleming et al. 1994: 360). The third stage was the ‘encoding’. The doctor closed the eyes of the patient and pressed a spot on the head until it produced pain and sprayed ethyl chloride into the patient’s mouth, which produced various somatic symptoms. The practitioner ‘encoded’ the patient for a certain period of time chosen by the patient. The session ended with the patient signing the forms to state his or her full understanding of the consequences (ibid.). At the end of the treatment Dovzhenko used to pronounce his most important phrase of the treatment: “You drink – you die” (*Vyp’esh – umresh*). The fear of death instilled in the brain of the patient was the very code that was to prevent the patient from drinking.

An accidental discovery of the anti-alcoholic properties of a chemical compound changed the treatment procedure. In 1946, at a car manufacturing plant in France, it was observed that the men who were engaged in rubber vulcanisation developed an aversion to alcohol. Tetramethylthiuram disulfide, also referred to as thiram, when inhaled, produced a sensation of alcohol aversion and since then it has been widely used as a basis for a great variety of alcohol-aversive drugs (Anticol, Antabuse, Esperal). Administering these drugs, now widely used in Russia, causes severe adverse reactions when combined with alcohol, ranging from breathlessness to nausea and vomiting. The association with unpleasant reactions and the fear of them induces alcohol cessation.

A great variety of medical treatments for alcohol addiction spiralled from Dovzhenko’s technique, but they all have one common aspect – they use the fear of death as a method of treatment. In all anti-alcohol treatments a therapist administers a substance to convince the patient that drinking might lead to their death. The causes are not normally clearly explained to the patient, which makes the fear even more profound. Patients whom we have interviewed were not provided with full information about these drugs, most of them were simply threatened by adverse harmful effects or even death to stop them drinking.

The process of treatment and insertion of a code, as well as the overall manipulation of the mind and body, serves to illustrate Foucault’s notion of the “political technology of the body” (1995 [1975]) and Certeau’s “inscriptions of the law on the body” (1984: 139). To inscribe discipline on people’s bodies, “the scriptural apparatus of modern discipline” uses a variety of tools that can also be reserved for later use. These tools are made for restricting, confining, disciplining, and punishing the body (ibid.: 131). Our case study adds another method to the panoply of ways and methods for disciplining, restricting the body, and its overall “zombification” (Magalif 2011).

## PERSONAL STORIES

What follows are narrations of events, some recollections as shared with us by three informants. We think these stories are important and illustrative, as they reveal the ways alcohol-addicted people subvert decisions about their treatments and also reveal the factors that influence this decision-making.

### Artem

As our main informant, Artem felt it was important to take part in the research and answer our questions about his alcohol dependence. He made a special effort to talk us through it, explain things and make certain aspects clearer for us. Having been friends for a while, we were familiar with his personal life over a long period. His youth in the 1960s–70s was filled with the relaxed ideological climate, music of the Beatles and partying, and drinking was a significant part of his growing up. He twice committed crimes while being drunk and was sentenced both times.

In the summer of 2011 we witnessed Artem and his family members after a serious car accident that happened when he was returning from work. He had drunk at work with his colleagues and was several times over the limit when driving home. He failed to negotiate a sharp bend and flew off the road into a broad and low ditch. He had a remarkable escape, with only a few cuts on his forehead; his car, however, was beyond repair.

It was either his lucky escape or the fact of losing the car that prompted Artem's decision to stop drinking again (*zaviazat'*). Later that evening he was sitting in front of us, plasters covering the cuts on his face, still slightly drunk and high from what had happened. He kept repeating the details of the incident, frequently stressing the fact that he did not have a car. His car, relatively new and costing a substantial amount of money, had been bought with contributions from family members. Now, with his older daughter sitting next to him, Artem was ashamed and feeling guilty, but, above all, sad at the inconceivable thought of walking or taking public transport.

As the evening progressed into night, the withdrawal symptoms started kicking in and Artem's mood changed to more depressed, quiet, and hostile. His older daughter, afraid of further developments, invited a private practitioner, who advertised post-binge detoxification on the Internet. The cost of treatment, approximately £50, was discussed and it was decided that Artem's daughter would cover the expense. That night after the treatment she held a vigil and, as prescribed, would give him the next instalment of sleeping tablets and water

to continue the detoxification process. In the morning Artem, miserable, but without a headache, made his way to work by bus.

It was made clear to Artem that no members of the family would contribute to a new car if he continued to drink. Five days later, determined and completely dry, he got to the Narcological Centre to be coded. He had been there many times before. On the way, and in anticipation, he kept telling us about the procedure, stressing the physical side of the experience: injection, slight sickness, heat in the stomach area. "But afterwards," he says, "it is good, such a freedom, no desire to drink at all. Anybody could drink in front of me and I would not care."

It was obvious that Artem was familiar with the centre and its methods. He recognised the female doctor from his previous visits; however, she did not acknowledge him. While the doctor explained, Artem kept interrupting, saying that he knew the procedure from his previous visits. Finally, when he went to the cashier to pay a sum equivalent to £60, he asked if there was a discount for regular customers, to which the cashier retorted rather crossly.

The doctor asked Artem about the desired length of the coding. Artem's initial proposition was a year and a half, but the doctor increased it to two and a half years. Artem had to repeat after her the length of the intended time. He mentioned his preference to undergo treatment anonymously, merely for the reason to avoid appearing on the police and insurance records.

The nurse administered two injections, both in the area of Artem's upper back. He reported an unpleasant feeling and a slightly painful sensation of heat in his body and around his stomach. Artem stayed lying in bed for an hour, deep in his thoughts, sighing heavily from time to time. Before we left the room, the nurse explained to Artem the negative effects of drinking again. These explanations were rather vague, non-specific, but they contained a clear message about adverse effects: medicine reacting with alcohol would destroy the liver; its functions would degrade; the irreversible destructive processes could lead to a lethal end. As proof of her warning, the nurse pointed to two large glass jars in the room: both containing liver specimens with blisters and ulcers, an illustration of cirrhosis of the liver.

While we sat on a bench to let Artem recuperate, we silently observed people walking in through the door of the Narcological Centre. An elderly gentleman brought a younger man, possibly his son; a young woman with a man, her husband; a woman, about 40, on her own. At some point the young man surreptitiously escaped and his father started to erratically scurry along the corridor, reluctant to believe that his son would not be coded this time. When we left the clinic, it got busier in the corridor with people about to get coded.

The sociality that alcohol creates is difficult to replace; quitting drinking is often perceived and admitted by alcoholics themselves as a predicament.

People who stay dry for a certain period often report a feeling of isolation and loneliness. So maintaining sobriety is difficult and going back to drinking is regarded as a re-union with drinking associates and friends (Brody 1977; Samson 2003). For Artem, sociality is probably one of the main reasons for drinking. Even if he stays dry, his colleagues' and friends' beckoning gradually becomes overpowering and he goes back to his usual drinking. The patterns become clear and repeat themselves more often: he is sober and with a new job, under pressure from his family, mainly his grown-up children. Artem never abstains for the length of the time he is coded for; it is several months until he cannot stand the loneliness and isolation any longer. He creates new connections, gains new drinking associates and regains old friends. This lasts until he loses his job due to alcohol. Then he spends time drinking heavily on borrowed money without a job, the pressure from his family increases and after a while he is forced to go to the clinic again.

### **Kostia**

A gregarious, charming and fun-loving man, Kostia likes socialising and most of his friends are his drinking associates. Like Artem, he belongs to the generation for whom alcohol and being drunk were part of growing up. He started drinking a lot more recently, and on several occasions disappeared from home for weeks. Eventually, Kostia's wife threatened that she would leave him unless he underwent treatment.

In this case, drinking and the sociality that comes with it actually imply employment. Working in a creative industry, Kostia's colleagues are happy to share work contracts and assistance. Being at the workshop, doing jobs, often collectively, implies heavy drinking sessions. Conversely, staying sober, avoiding his normal circles after treatment and confining himself to home, means a lack of information about job opportunities, a lack of potential contracts, and money. Kostia, due to insistence from his wife, got encoded, as it suits both him and his wife to abstain for a period of time. However, sooner or later, disgruntled by his own idleness, Kostia goes to his friends, where commissioning contracts and thus payments are available. In this pattern money and drinking are in stark contrast to the lack of a job, money and sobriety.

Paul Spicer has argued about the (dys)functional approach to drinking that highlighted complex positive and negative aspects of native drinking (Spicer 1997: 307). Drinking is a very pleasurable activity for determined drinkers and that is why they are often guilt-free about their drinking (Brody 1977: 39). Another functional aspect of drinking is that it is an activity creating

or re-affirming social connectedness between those who drink. This aspect of sociality, as a rule, implies egalitarianism: “There is one guy who drinks with us regularly; when he quits, he despises us, becomes arrogant, and thinks he is better than us. But a few days or weeks later he is back drinking with us.” Kostia’s quote here stresses the social and egalitarian aspect of drinking and explains why quitting drinking is understood as an attempt to lift oneself above others (Spicer 1997: 317). It is due to this profoundly social nature of drinking that quitting becomes a difficult task. Due to the necessity to socialise, as well as the necessity to earn money, Kostia has worked out his own strategy that allows for periodical drinking and staying sober.

### **Nikolai**

Sceptical, with a sarcastic smile, Nikolai belongs to a younger generation. Now in his mid-thirties, he has been steadily drinking for ten years. Nikolai is divorced from his wife due to his alcohol addiction and admits to being an alcoholic. His drinking bouts can last for weeks, and afterwards, crapulent, sick, and without money, he turns up at his mother’s house. Here he recuperates and, usually with financial and moral help from his mother, he arrives at the clinic to get encoded. Nikolai has held a series of jobs from which he either walked out himself or was fired.

Sitting at the table with the local newspaper open on the vacancies section, a mobile phone in his hand, he searches for short-term contracts. Short-term contracts might be a hindrance to many, but they are an advantage to Nikolai, for they are conveniently short and accommodate all his requirements. He quickly finds a suitable job, and after a quick phone call, submits his updated CV to the company to start his new job just a few days later.

Upon completion of his contract and getting all the money in one lump sum, he is free to indulge in drinking until he uses up all the money. On the insistence of his mother he tries the hospital treatment in *Krasnaya Yakutia*, where he stays for the whole duration of 21 days, receiving treatment. Nikolai gets sober again for a period of time, but after a few months he goes back to his social circles, where he gets the attention and appreciation of his friends and the cycle starts all over again.

Alternating short-term job contracts and sobriety with drinking periods for some is the sign of a lack of willpower and control. On the other hand, we argue that it is strategic thinking on Nikolai’s part in order to accommodate his addiction. The fact that Nikolai gets coded but does not last long, is interpreted

by his relatives as '*sorvalsia*' (lost a grip), implying lack of inner strength and the fact that overall circumstances and alcohol were more powerful than him.

Alcoholics, like our main informants, often find themselves under pressure from family members, circumstances or economic demands to stop drinking. It is required of them to contribute to the family, and society demands they stick to the rules. However, there is also a strong obligation to stick to the other social circle: social ties and drinking associates. The coding in this scenario then is a way to appease the 'official' self, only to return later to the 'hidden intimate'.

The pattern of pressure, followed by treatment and then by a dry period, is repeated over and over again, and the relationship between dominance and order on the one hand and subversion and resistance on the other becomes apparent. People whom we interviewed were able to adapt to such demands and steer between the outside pressures and their own desires. This adaptation can be considered as the response of alcoholics to demands from the outside, but it also is a manipulation of certain situations (e.g. Artem securing money for a new car if gets encoded). We argue that these strategies for alcoholics, developed out of necessity or carefully calculated, are the reason for their multiple treatments by coding.

## **BREAKING THE CODE**

It has now been established that treatment for alcohol dependence in the Soviet Union was an element of ideological subjugation on the state's part. Manipulation of the body and understanding it within the system of punishment, confinement, and correction brings us to the point, stressed by Foucault (1995 [1975]: 26), that the power that is exercised on the body should be considered within the ideas of strategies, tactics and manoeuvres of both the dominant and dominated. Such an execution of power inexorably brings confrontations, conflicts and struggles and produces the hidden transcript, according to Scott (1990: 27). Often such counter-struggles are not 'official' but 'hidden', following arguments made by Scott (1990), Kharkhordin (1999), and Yurchak (2003).

During the period of abstinence, alcoholics are controlled by the code of fear that has been 'inserted' in their brain. From that moment and for the rest of their lives, abstinence is a yardstick against which their actions are measured. There is the presence of the watchful eye, of a doctor, wife, mother, and the refrain of a nagging question: would they resist the temptation to drink? Would they endure? The interviewees we have chosen for this study underwent repeated treatment: two of them had encoding done more than twice, and one interviewee had been coded more than six times. For their partners and family members,

these repeated treatments attest to the alcoholics' absence of strength, low willpower and lack of determination to continue with sobriety. Such repeated coding in vernacular corresponds to the word '*sorvalsia*' associated with falling, flying off, or losing grip.

Although alcoholics themselves often talk in the same idiom of being weak and unable to see it through, it transpires from their interviews that there is a considerable element of deliberation. In each case we have observed how coding for alcoholism, although dominantly presented and administered, is sabotaged. We have offered some examples, merely as illustrations, of how alcoholics subvert the suggested, and imposed, coding. We argue that by breaking the code alcoholics demonstrate their agency and gain their autonomy.

Agency as a capacity to act presupposes some resistance. Laura Ahearn (2001: 115) warns us against a too simplistic understanding of agency and that it should not be equated to resistance. We consider that oppositional agency for this particular case study would be a plausible and productive way to analyse this piece of research.

*Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And "Power," insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement. (Foucault 1978: 93)*

## CONCLUSION

In this article we have aimed to address alcoholism, an urgent social issue that has serious negative effects on the native community in Yakutsk, Sakha (Yakutia). We have used observation techniques and interviews to gather and evaluate the situation related to treatment of alcohol by coding.

Historically, alcohol production and distribution have always been in the hands of authorities and governments. Drinking was ideologised and from the perception of alcoholism as an ideological weakness, a disease of the mind, all consequent attitudes and aspects of drinking were perceived within this framework.

Treatment for alcohol by coding, as developed by Dovzhenko, meant to do exactly that – submit and dominate people who were weak in their passion for alcohol. These methods are further applied by members of the families, wives scolding their husbands, mothers blaming sons for failing their hopes, children

resenting parents for an unhappy childhood. An alcoholic is quintessentially guilty and an über-dominated individual.

This paper is an attempt to look at things slightly differently by including the interpretation of our interviewees into the analysis. We have argued that despite the fact that alcoholics are ‘bullied’ individuals, by breaking the code they exercise agency and thus can strategically manipulate the pressure and demands from outside.

\*\*\*\*\*

Slowly walking along the rows at the city market, Artem runs into his old pal whom he has not seen for a long time. Standing at a distance, we can hear their loud exclamations of excitement, punctuated by swearing, and energetic slapping of each other’s shoulders. Artem’s friend, and his drinking associate in the past, is now at the end of his encoding term. He is in anticipation of a relaxing period and is already planning a party. He says he will take some time off, get back to his pals, drink for a couple of months to his heart’s content. His small but lively market business requires attention and he cannot completely abandon it. He will get coded again, surely, but that is later. For now he has other important things to consider.

## REFERENCES

- Ahearn, Laura M. 2001. Language and Agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 30, pp. 109–137. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.30.1.109>.
- Brody, Hugh 1977. Alcohol, Change and the Industrial Frontier. *Etudes/Inuit/Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 31–46. Available at [http://www.jstor.org/stable/42869285?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/42869285?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents), last accessed on May 27, 2015.
- Certeau, Michel de 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Available at <http://danm.ucsc.edu/~dustin/library/de%20certeau,%20the%20practice%20of%20everyday%20life.pdf>, last accessed on May 27, 2015.
- Efron, Vera 1960. The Soviet Approach to Alcoholism. *Social Problems*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 307–315. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/799327>.
- Field, Mark G. 1955. Alcoholism, Crime, and Delinquency in Soviet Society. *Social Problems*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 100–109. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/798709>.
- Fleming, P.M. & Meroyan, A. & Klimova, I. 1994. Alcohol Treatment Services in Russia: A Worsening Crisis. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 357–362.
- Foucault, Michel 1978. *The History of Sexuality*. Volume 1. Transl. by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books. Available at [http://monoskop.org/images/4/40/Foucault\\_Michel\\_The\\_History\\_of\\_Sexuality\\_1\\_An\\_Introduction.pdf](http://monoskop.org/images/4/40/Foucault_Michel_The_History_of_Sexuality_1_An_Introduction.pdf), last accessed on May 27, 2015.

- Foucault, Michel 1989. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel 1995 [1975]. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books. Available at [http://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Foucault\\_Michel\\_Discipline\\_and\\_Punish\\_The\\_Birth\\_of\\_the\\_Prison\\_1977\\_1995.pdf](http://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Foucault_Michel_Discipline_and_Punish_The_Birth_of_the_Prison_1977_1995.pdf), last accessed on May 27, 2015.
- Herlihy, Patricia 2002. *The Alcoholic Empire: Vodka and Politics in Late Imperial Russia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ivanov, Gennady 2012. *Kodirovanie v gipnoze. Lechenie alkogolizma, zaikaniia gipnozom (metod Dovzhenko)*. [Coding by Hypnosis. Treatment of Alcoholism, Stutter by Hypnosis (Dovzhenko's Method).] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZseTTmnS2I>, last accessed on June 3, 2015.
- Kharkhordin, Oleg 1999. *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*. Berkeley & London: University of California Press.
- Korolenko, Caesar & Minevich, Vladimir & Segal, Bernard 1994. The Politicization of Alcohol in the USSR and Its Impact on the Study and Treatment of Alcoholism. *Substance Use and Misuse*, Vol. 29, No. 10, pp. 1269–1285.
- Magalif, Aleksei 2011. *Kodirovanie – lechenie zapretom*. [Coding – Treatment by Prohibition.] Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRUbdSTNDDw>, last accessed on May 27, 2015.
- Patrov, Aleksandr 2010. *Kodirovanie po Dovzhenko (emotsional'no-stressovaia psikhoterapiia)*. [Coding by Dovzhenko (Emotional Stress Psychotherapy).] *Osvobozhdenie*. [Liberation.] Available at [http://narcofree.ru/metodi\\_lecheniya\\_alkogolizma/osobennosti\\_kodirovaniya\\_po\\_dovzhenko](http://narcofree.ru/metodi_lecheniya_alkogolizma/osobennosti_kodirovaniya_po_dovzhenko), last accessed on May 27, 2015.
- SakhaPress 2013. *Pochti 30 tysiach zhitelei Yakutii stradaiut alkogolizmom i alkogol'nymi psikhozami*. [Almost 30 Thousand Residents of Yakutia Suffer from Alcoholism and Alcohol-Related Psychosis.] June 12. Available at <http://www.sakhapress.ru/archives/139851>, last accessed on May 27, 2015.
- Samson, Colin 2003. *A Way of Life That Does Not Exist: Canada and the Extinguishment of the Innu*. London & New York: Verso.
- Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Solomon, Susan Gross 1989. David and Goliath in Soviet Public Health: The Rivalry of Social Hygienists and Psychiatrists for Authority over the Bytovoi Alcoholic. *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 254–275. Available at [http://www.jstor.org/stable/152227?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/152227?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents), last accessed on May 27, 2015.
- Spicer, Paul 1997. Toward a (Dys)functional Anthropology of Drinking: Ambivalence and the American Indian Experience with Alcohol. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 306–323. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/maq.1997.11.3.306>.
- Transchel, Kate 2006. *Under the Influence: Working-Class Drinking, Temperance, and Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1895–1932*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Tumusov, Petr 2011. *Uspekh Lecheniia – v Formirovanii Chelovecheskoi Voli*. [Success of Treatment is in the Formation of Will Power.] *Meditsina RF*, No. 4 (60). Available at <http://www.medicinarf.ru/journals/709/8544/>, last accessed on June 3, 2015.

Yurchak, Alexei 2003. Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 480–510. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0010417503000239>.

## THE SOONER YOU DRINK IT ALL, THE MORE TIME YOU WILL HAVE THEREAFTER

*Kirill Istomin*

**Abstract:** Many reindeer herders of the Taz tundra have problems with excessive alcohol consumption and most of them are fully aware of these problems and the risks associated with them. In order to mitigate these risks, the reindeer herders have built up a range of strategies for alcohol consumption, which aim to limit this consumption to periods and circumstances when the damage (in economic and social terms) it produces is likely to be less significant, to shorten the periods of drinking (*zapoi*), and to limit the amount of alcohol available. For example, reindeer herders choose their camping places in such a way that the distance between them and the village is big enough to deter the herders from starting for the village in the middle of the night to bring vodka. Nowadays, this strategy seems to affect the migration patterns in important ways. Other strategies include limiting artificially the space available in a reindeer sledge (or on a snowmobile) when going to the village (which would limit the number of vodka bottles the herder can bring back), trying to consume (preferably in a big company of other herders) all the alcohol one has as soon as possible, and some others. The paper analyses these strategies using the theory of alcohol craving developed in the field of addiction psychology. It shows that the strategies can indeed be effective in the circumstances of the nomadic way of life, but they become maladaptive once nomads settle in villages.

**Keywords:** alcoholism, drinking strategies, Nenets, nomadism, reindeer herding, small peoples of the North

### INTRODUCTION

Anthropological research on alcoholism and alcohol consumption among the aboriginal peoples of the Eurasian North has so far focused on three main topics. The first is the assessment of the scale of alcoholism and alcohol consumption among the native northerners, as well as its social, medical, and cultural consequences. Studies devoted to this topic are often based on quantitative medical, demographic, and sociological data and frequently take a rather alarmist perspective (Pivneva 2005; Nemtsov 1997; Bogoyavlenskiy 2010; Pika 1993). The second topic is the perception of alcohol and alcohol consumption by the people of different northern cultures and the analysis of different functions al-

cohol plays in northern communities (Semke & Bohan 2008; Sidorov & Shubin 1994). Many papers in this collection also focus on this topic. Finally, quite a few studies, most of them published in Russian, try to explain the origin of alcoholism and heavy drinking among native northerners as a sociomedical problem. These studies frequently relate this problem to the social and economic policies and processes of the recent past – collectivisation, forced sedentarisation, social marginalisation due to the influx of population from the south, etc. – and, therefore, stress the responsibility of the dominant society for alcoholism and its consequences among the native northerners (Kozlov et al. 2002; Klokov 1996; Bogoyavlenskiy & Pika 1991; Pivneva 2005).

Although I agree that all these topics are interesting from the academic perspective and important from the social and political ones, I would argue that an important component is missing. All these studies depict northern communities and their members as helpless victims of alcohol and of the social consequences of heavy drinking. This is true even for those few studies that observe some important social functions played by alcohol and, therefore, do not view it only in a negative light (see papers in this volume). Indeed, while alcohol consumption can sometimes have a positive impact, in the sense of establishing or strengthening social bonds, the negative consequences of excessive drinking are rather obvious and they definitely outweigh the positive impact. However, it is important to keep in mind that these negative consequences are also obvious for the native northerners themselves, and the natives can, and do, actively search for ways to mitigate them. This includes developing strategies for minimising alcohol consumption, consuming alcohol in less dangerous and harmful ways, minimising the potential of drunken conflicts, keeping economic losses related to drinking in check – in other words, everything that the native northerners themselves often refer to as ‘knowing how to drink’ (*umet’ pit’*). This aspect of the alcohol-related practices – the different ways the native people themselves use to deal with their alcohol-related problems and urges – has deserved relatively little attention so far. On the other hand, as my fieldwork experience suggests, these ‘practices of (non)drinking’, as I would propose to name them, play a very important role in the everyday life of native northerners and can explain many aspects of their behaviour that would otherwise seem irrational and maladaptive.

In this paper I am going to describe and analyse the practices of (non) drinking, which I observed among Nenets reindeer herders of the Taz tundra in the southern part of the Gydan Peninsula (Tazovsky raion, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Russia). The paper is based on the material that I collected during four fieldwork sessions, each lasting from 2 to 4 months (11 months in total), which I carried out among reindeer herders in the reindeer herding

enterprise *Sovkhoz Tazovsky* between 2006 and 2012. During these fieldwork sessions I joined the migration of reindeer herders, taking an active part in their day-to-day activities and performing observations, among others, of their drinking practices. Since I do not enjoy drinking alcohol, I did not participate in the drinking parties myself, and in the beginning this created a feeling of uneasiness among the herders. However, by the end of the first fieldwork session, the herders got used to my not drinking alcohol (in fact, a rumour was spread that I was 'coded', i.e. made a non-drinker by medical means) and their feeling of anxiety disappeared. They easily consumed alcohol in my presence, and they willingly replied to my questions about how and when one can avoid drinking. Since I do not speak Nenets, I communicated with the herders in Russian. The information obtained from interviews as well as my observations were recorded in the form of field notes. I did not use a tape recorder, because the herders clearly felt uneasy about being recorded and often directly prohibited my use of it. As alcoholism and drinking habits are sensitive topics, I have chosen not to cite my informants by name but have marked their statements by the place and year only.

The principal aim of the analysis of the collected data offered in this paper is to establish why and under which conditions the practices of (non)drinking work or fail to work. In other words, I am going to establish what exactly makes these practices effective in preventing excessive drinking and which factors limit their effectiveness. In formulating my aim in this particular way, I consciously remove the questions of meaning and interpretation, which are so dear to the hearts of modern anthropologists, from the focus of my analysis. This does not mean that I am going to ignore these questions altogether: indeed, as I will try to show, the herders' understanding of alcohol and their own relation to it is a part of the mechanism that makes the practices effective in some, and ineffective in other, situations. My aim in this paper is to explain the practices rather than to interpret them, to show how they work, rather than to establish what they are 'in a sense'. This choice is made on purely practical grounds: I think that at this particular moment, an understanding of the mechanisms that support the practices of (non)drinking is more useful for the population of my field site, including my informants, than an account of different senses and interpretations related to them. This decision regarding my paper has informed the choice of the theoretical background, as will be described in the next section.

The discussion in this paper will proceed as follows. Firstly, I will dwell upon the theoretical background used in this paper, with a special focus on the mechanisms behind the so-called alcohol craving, one of the main components of alcohol dependency, which, as I will try to demonstrate, is exactly what the practices of (non)drinking are dealing with. Then, using this information as

a background, I will describe the practices of (non)drinking among the reindeer herders and explain why, when, and under which conditions they can be effective. Finally, I will discuss how these practices affect the behaviour of reindeer herders in different situations, and assess their relative benefits and costs.

## **IN SEARCH OF A THEORETICAL BASE: PHENOMENOLOGY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ALCOHOL DEPENDENCY**

Cross-cultural research on alcoholism was initiated more than 40 years ago with the classical work, *Drunken Comportment*, by Craig MacAndrew and Robert B. Edgerton (2003 [1969]). In this seminal work the authors demonstrate that drunken behaviour varies greatly between cultures and social settings and, therefore, there is no such thing as universal drunken behaviour and universal effects of alcohol on humans. Both the short-term and long-term effects of drinking are produced by ethanol, which has a particular impact on the human brain. The authors, therefore, urge to incorporate cultural and social factors into the previously purely medico-biological models of alcohol-dependent behaviour and alcohol addiction. They seem to hope that their work would eventually lead to a broad interdisciplinary cooperation between anthropologists, sociologists, physiologists, and medical practitioners in providing a theoretical explanation of the phenomenon of alcoholism and mitigating its consequences.

Unfortunately, just as with many other interdisciplinary research projects involving anthropologists, this project has fallen victim to the interpretative turn that occurred in anthropology beginning in the late 1970s. Instead of working together with natural scientists on broad models to explain the impact of alcohol on humans, anthropologists redirected their attention to uncovering the meaning of alcohol and the values associated with it. Most anthropological research on alcoholism up until now has been of this type, and it has yielded some important achievements (see Chrzan 2013; McKnight 2002). Unfortunately, these achievements were of little interest for physiologists and medical workers seeking to build up an explanatory model for the phenomenon. On the other hand, physiologists and medical workers also lacked theoretical and methodological resources to incorporate cross-cultural data into their model. Therefore, the trans-cultural addiction studies (as the physiological and medical cross-cultural research on alcoholism came to be labelled) consisted mainly in collecting statistical data on alcohol consumption, alcohol-related diseases, alcohol-induced violence, and endogenic alcohol production across cultural groups, and then running ANOVA models in order to check if cultural identity was an important predictor of these social and medical problems (Semke &

Bohan 2008). Although most of the studies demonstrated a significant difference between cultures in all the mentioned indexes (and, therefore, the role of culture as a predictor of alcohol-related problems was proven beyond a reasonable doubt), no theoretical account explaining how culture is related to alcoholism has so far been offered. It was only recently, after dissatisfaction with the interpretative stance began to spread amongst anthropologists, that interest towards joint explanatory models, as envisaged in the *Drunken Comportment*, started to get re-established (Glasser 2013 [2011]).

Despite this recent development, we still have very little in the sense of a theory that can be used to analyse the mechanisms and effects (in a physiological, psychological, economic or behavioural sense) of the cultural-specific practices related to alcohol consumption, rather than the cultural meaning and significance of these practices. Since this particular work focuses on mechanisms and effects rather than on meaning and significance, this lack of theory represents a serious problem. The best way to deal with this problem is to follow the advice of John Berry and colleagues given in their classic introductory overview of cross-cultural psychology (Berry et al. 2002): to start with a general model produced by a synthesising science (human biology, general psychology, physiology, etc.) and describing the relevant phenomenon on the level of human species, to look for parts in this model in which culture can play a variation, and to probe into whether the cross-cultural variation in any of these parts can explain the observed phenomena.

It seems to me that the most appropriate general model into which the practices of (non)drinking can be incorporated as 'variation players' in order to explain mechanisms, reasons, and conditions of their (non)effectiveness, is the model explaining mechanisms of alcohol craving. Indeed, it is commonly understood now that alcohol craving plays a very central role in alcohol dependency, and that no explanation of this dependency based solely on the metabolic effects of alcohol is possible (Zavjalov 1990). Unfortunately, this understanding, which would sound self-evident for an anthropologist, represents a relatively recent achievement for psychological and physiological addiction studies, which traditionally detested any phenomenological entities as explanatory variables; accordingly, it was only relatively recently that the psycho-physiological mechanisms behind alcohol craving became a particular focus of studies (Anton 2000).

However, even before the special studies on craving were started, many specialists on alcohol dependency noticed that alcohol craving and the behaviour it produced had much in common with the so called obsessive-compulsive syndrome (Modell et al. 1992a). For a long time, the similarities between the two psychiatric conditions were believed to be only superficial. Specifically, it was pointed out that the two conditions had very different etiologies. Furthermore,

it was believed that an alcoholic finds a certain pleasure in his or her drinking habits, which makes him/her phenomenologically very different to a person suffering from the obsessive-compulsive syndrome. The latter does suffer from his/her condition in the very literal sense of this word (*ibid.*). However, the early studies on phenomenology and behaviour symptomatic of the craving for alcohol, performed at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, immediately showed that the similarities between the two conditions were deeper than believed (Modell et al. 1992a; Anton 2000). So deep were these similarities that the so-called obsessive-compulsive scale, the basic instrument used by psychiatrists to assess the severity of the obsessive-compulsive syndrome, as well as to plan its treatment and predict its outcome, could easily be adopted to assess the severity of alcohol-related problems and predict the outcome of their treatment (Modell et al. 1992b). Furthermore, recent brain imagining studies indicate striking similarities in brain physiology of the two conditions: the patients with a severe alcohol craving have basically the same abnormalities of brain activation in comparison to healthy people as the patients with the obsessive-compulsive syndrome (Anton 2000). All this suggests that although the etiologies of the two conditions are indeed different (which excludes the classification of alcoholism as a form of OCD), their pathological mechanisms and phenomenology, at least as far as the psychiatric and neurological side of alcoholism is concerned, are very close if not similar.

Thus alcohol craving is similar to OCD in the respect that it has two principal components (Penzel 2000). The first is intrusive thoughts that focus, in this case, on the alcoholic beverages and the process of consuming them. These thoughts, which are difficult or even impossible to resist or expunge from the mind, produce uneasiness and anxiety often also anger and fear. The second is a compulsive behaviour aimed to reduce the anxiety by means of active search for obtaining and consuming alcoholic beverages. This behaviour is compulsive because, in contrast to what was believed before the late 1980s, alcoholics neither get nor expect any gratification from it. On the contrary, most of them are fully aware of its irrational and destructive nature and can foresee its negative effects on their health and social standing. They, however, feel compelled to engage in this behaviour as the only escape from their obsessive thoughts, despite being fully aware that the relief is only temporary and that the intrusive thoughts will soon return. Therefore, the sufferers engage in the compulsive behaviour against their own will, often feeling helpless and depressed by the negative consequences of this very behaviour. Numerous stories about people committing suicide because they were tired of drinking confirm this fact.

One interesting fact about the obsessive-compulsive syndrome is that both the intrusive thoughts and the anxiety they provoke can often be greatly re-

duced – or even disappear – in situations where the compulsive behaviour becomes physically impossible or when the person genuinely believes that he or she cannot indulge in such behaviour (ibid.). This is as if the disease – which can normally easily break the person's will and powerfully compel him or her to behave in a certain way – gives up and stops torturing its victim, if he or she simply cannot behave as compelled, no matter how he or she wanted to. Thus, an excessive drinker does not usually suffer from the intrusive thoughts about alcohol if he or she is in a forest, or alone at sea, where buying and consuming alcoholic beverages is impossible. However, the intrusive thoughts immediately come back once the excessive drinker returns to a settlement or ashore and alcohol becomes available again. This is the main reason why the forced deprivation of alcohol by means of involuntary confinement is a very ineffective method of treating alcohol dependency. While patients may feel good during the confinement and can say they do not have any desire for alcohol (and indeed subjectively feel so), the craving immediately returns once the patients are released from their confinement and alcohol becomes available again.

One can immediately see where culture can 'play a variation' in this model. Being a powerful instrument of interpreting the world and the situations encountered by a person, culture can influence personal beliefs about what is and what is not possible in any particular situation. Furthermore, being a powerful instrument shaping human behaviour, culture can guide a person into situations with particular sets of perceived possibilities. Therefore, cultural practices can, in theory, manipulate alcohol craving by guiding a person into situations with a specific perceived availability of alcohol. Since alcohol craving is the most important factor in alcohol consumption, this manipulation can be a very effective way to stimulate or prevent alcohol consumption. In the following sections I will try to demonstrate that the practices of (non)drinking among the Nenets indeed utilise exactly this mechanism.

## **PRACTICES OF (NON)DRINKING AMONG THE TAZ NENETS**

The Nenets are indigenous people populating a huge territory of tundra and northern taiga of the Eurasian North, from the Kola Peninsula in the west to the Taimyr Peninsula in the east. During the last Russian Census (2010), approximately 45,000 people indicated Nenets as their ethnic background, which makes the Nenets numerically the biggest of the small-numbered aboriginal peoples of Russia. Traditionally the Nenets have been nomadic reindeer herders and almost half of them (about 20,000) still negotiate the tundra and taiga with reindeer herds. The Taz Nenets, which are the primary focus in this

paper, are a group of the Nenets living in the so-called Taz tundra, the southern part of the Gydan Peninsula. Administratively, the Taz tundra represents the southern part of the Tazovsky raion of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug of the Russian Federation. The town of Tazovsky with a predominantly Russian population of approximately 6000 is the administrative centre of the region, while the rest of the territory (except for the small village of Gas Sale) is populated almost exclusively by nomadic Nenets, who account for almost half of the whole population of the raion.

A popular opinion in Russia (and, up to a certain degree, around the world) is that native Siberians are excessive drinkers. This concerns also (or maybe even particularly) reindeer herders, who are famous for their consumption of large amounts of strong alcohol every time they come to the village. This is what one Russian inhabitant of the Tazovsky village boldly stated to the author:

*Seeing a sober reindeer herder is a very rare occasion and we do not welcome it, because the only thing such a sober reindeer herder would do is beg for a bottle of vodka or money to buy one. Reindeer herders are sober only when they do not have money to get drunk. (personal communication, Tazovsky 2006)*

This popular opinion is reflected in some academic works (e.g. Semke & Bohan 2008), which actually state beyond any doubt that alcoholism (in the sense of physiological dependency) is widespread among native tundra nomads.

Any sufficiently careful participant observation of the life of reindeer herders immediately reveals, however, that this popular opinion is wrong. Indeed, as it was already mentioned by Anatoly Mukhachev (2001), Nenets reindeer herders drink surprisingly little, particularly if compared to the local settled and predominantly Russian population. Thus, the reindeer herders do not drink at all during the late spring, summer and early autumn, when travelling in the tundra is restricted, settlements are inaccessible for tundra dwellers, and alcohol is simply not available. This period of abstinence lasts from 4 to 6 months and can be interrupted by one or two periods of drinking that usually last for 2 or 3 days, and follow an occasional arrival of a helicopter with cargo from the village or a visit by a travelling tundra merchant (*kommersant*). In winter, alcohol consumption also depends on accessibility to the settlements, which, in turn, depends on the weather, the distance to a settlement from the current position of the herders' camp, as well as the means of transport (a snowmobile, a reindeer sledge) the herders possess. All these factors vary unpredictably and, therefore, the periods of alcohol availability, which can last a few weeks, get replaced by equally long periods when alcohol is unavailable. In other words, alcohol is simply unavailable for the reindeer herders for the greater part of

the year and, therefore, they have to stay sober most of the time. I would definitely not argue that alcoholics (meaning the people with a physiological rather than psychological dependency on alcohol) are absent among the Nenets, but their need to consume alcohol regularly and effectively prevents them from pursuing the traditional nomadic way of life and binds them to a settlement. Alcoholics cannot live in the tundra, due to the scarcity of alcohol there. Indeed, the majority of herders I observed seemed to be able to stand long periods of abstinence with little effort.

On the other hand, when alcohol is available, the reindeer herders tend to consume it intensively and in large quantities. What is more important, this intensive alcohol consumption has some definite traits of obsessive compulsiveness. Indeed, as many ethnographies mention, and as many of my colleagues who have worked with the Nenets can attest, the herders change profoundly and abruptly once they come to a settlement or migrate to a place where the settlement is in close proximity. In these situations, many herders first become observably anxious and their anxiety grows as the perspectives of obtaining alcohol become more real. The urge to get and consume alcohol comes a bit later. In many cases I observed how the herders tried to resist this urge for some time, which visibly caused acute suffering. It was rather hard and surprising to see how people who had just spent many weeks far away from the village in a balanced and cheerful mood, suddenly became depressed, angry, ceased to sleep normally, abstained from food. Finally they gave up and departed for the village, often secretly and at night, to spend several days or even weeks drinking there. Only when their physical or economic conditions dictated that they stop, would they return to the camp, exhausted and intoxicated. However, after several days of recovery, their anxiety came back and, after another few days, they surrendered to it again. It is easy to see that this pattern corresponds closely to that of obsessive-compulsive syndrome, which gets temporarily offset by the impossibility of the compulsive behaviour, but returns every time a change in the situation makes this behaviour possible. This is further supported by the fact that, as far as I could see, only young reindeer herders could sometimes express positive emotions about the prospect of getting access to and consuming alcohol. This is probably related to the fact that socialising, which accompanies and gets facilitated by the alcohol consumption, is more valuable to them and its value sometimes outweighs the probable economic losses and social risks related to drinking. Among older reindeer herders, the emotions were more complex: while they actively sought the possibility to consume alcohol, if they believed that this possibility existed, they did not seem to enjoy it at all. Rather, they saw the seeking and consuming of alcohol as a kind of duty that they had to perform against their will, simply because avoiding it was impossible. This

clearly compulsive-obsessive character of alcohol consumption further supports the choice of the alcohol craving model, explaining the practices of non-drinking found among the Nenets.

The best place to start describing these practices is probably the observation many ethnographers are familiar with, not only among the Nenets, but also among other indigenous peoples of the Russian North: the observation that native northerners almost never store alcohol for later consumption, but try to consume all the alcohol they have immediately, in the shortest possible period of time. In this period, the amount of alcohol consumed by a single person per unit of time can be very high and exceed all reasonable norms both from psychological and medical points of view. Furthermore, it is common among the Nenets to invite others – relatives and friends – to take part in the alcohol consumption, and the number of people invited is usually proportional to the amount of alcohol. I have never observed Nenets herders consuming alcohol alone, probably because they live in compact groups (nomadic camps called *okolodok*), where sharing is obligatory. This sharing serves, of course, various social and cultural functions. Still, in the case of sharing alcohol, it is remarkable, first of all, that it is often shared with people from other nomadic camps, who are specially invited to take part in the consumption. Secondly, it is interesting that the Nenets themselves often rationalise their behaviour in terms of speeding up the alcohol consumption: quite a common statement would be something like, “Jelya has brought so much vodka that it would take us too long to drink it up; we should call the third brigade to help us!” (personal communication, Taz tundra 2006) Statements like these usually take for granted the need to consume all the available alcohol as fast as possible. When asked to explain this need, Nenets informants usually say that drinking takes time from work and, which is probably the most interesting statement, from rest. The phrase by one of the informants that I made the title of my paper provides a particularly good example: “The sooner you drink it all, the more time you will have thereafter: to sleep if you like, to chat if you like, to work if you like.” (personal communication, Taz tundra 2010) It should be clear that this statement indeed makes much sense: one important negative consequence of consuming a considerable amount of alcohol is the time lost while drinking and during the recovery period. Increasing the speed of consumption, achieved, among other things, by increasing the number of consumers, can indeed be one of the ways to minimise this loss. Of course, limiting the amount of alcohol could look like a more rational way to achieve the same end from both medical and economic points of view. However, if, as I argued before, alcohol consumption is a compulsive behaviour, this alternative can simply be unavailable for the

herders, while the strategy 'drink it all as soon as possible' can have, besides the economic, also a psychological payoff. The following story can explain why.

During one of my fieldwork sessions, I got stuck in a reindeer herding camp where all the males were completely drunk for several days after a visit to a village and, for about five days, all the work, including the daily rounding up of the reindeer herd, had to be performed by three women. It should be noted that among the tundra Nenets excessive drinking represents mostly male behaviour. This does not mean that women cannot drink excessively, but, just as in the case of physiological alcohol dependency, abuse of alcohol by women seems to be incompatible with the nomadic way of life and the traditional system of labour sharing between sexes. In this system, women have to perform most of the day-to-day subsistence tasks, such as making firewood, keeping the chum (nomadic tent) warm, providing water, cooking food, etc. Their failure to perform these duties, even temporarily, due to alcohol abuse, immediately makes life in the tundra impossible. It is commonly believed that families where women start to drink excessively should abandon the nomadic way of life and settle, because otherwise they would simply get frozen to death. Although the excessive drinking by males can also lead to economic breakdown of the family through loss of reindeer, it does not put the lives of the family members into immediate danger. In the situation described, however, the economic prospects of the whole nomadic camp were endangered, because the three sober women, despite my doing the best to help them, could not manage all the work of pasturing that is normally performed by a team of four skilled men. It was clear that we were going to lose quite a few reindeer if the males would not recover and go to search for them. I therefore proposed to the women to steal the remaining alcohol from the males and hide it. I said that this would force the males to recover and start working. I argued that once they would recollect the dispersed herd and, therefore, decrease the threat of reindeer loss, we could return the alcohol to them and let them finish it in peace. The women, however, explained to me that the thing I was proposing was something that young stupid girls would usually try, while wise adult women would know that doing that was too dangerous:

*You see, males can stop drinking only if they are sure that there is no vodka in the camp. To be so sure, they should be 100% certain that there is no vodka hidden by us. If, when they ran out of vodka, they would suspect that there can be some extra bottles hidden by us, they would never calm down. They would keep asking us if we really do not have vodka and so they would continue thinking about vodka all the time and finally would leave for the village again. (personal communication, Taz tundra 2006)*

The only way to avoid this danger, the women say, is never to steal and hide vodka and encourage the males to drink everything they have as soon as possible and in a company as big as possible. Indeed, the males know that knowledgeable women would adopt this strategy for their own good and, therefore, they would know that if they cannot find any vodka then there is indeed no vodka in the camp.

These statements clearly indicate that the described practice is related to the effect the perceived impossibility of compulsive behaviour produces on the obsessive anxiety (see the theoretical section of this paper). In order for this effect to take place, however, one should genuinely believe that he or she cannot indulge in the compulsive behaviour. The physical absence of alcohol in a reachable proximity, if the person believes in this absence, is indeed a good ground to think that alcohol consumption is physically impossible. However, the absence of alcohol in the camp is obviously not enough here: one should also genuinely believe that the probable sources of alcohol outside the camp are also inaccessible. These include, first of all, the settlement and, secondly, other herders who are likely to have vodka and be willing to share it (note that the practice described above presupposes sharing of vodka). The easiest way to render the settlements inaccessible is, of course, by moving away from them. Indeed, reindeer herders uniformly stated that one should not camp too close to the settlement and explained this by three factors: poachers, dogs, and the danger of excessive drinking. Interestingly, the last factor was the most operative in defining the distance from the village. The herders explained it was a general rule that one should camp so far from the village that there would be no temptation to go there in the middle of the night to buy vodka. In other words, one should be far enough away from the village to perceive going there as a big journey that is likely to last more than a day. As some of them stated, those who fail to obey this rule and camp closer to the village end up losing their reindeer, because they cannot stop drinking and let the animals wander on their own accord. Obeying this rule, on the other hand, would also solve the problem of poachers and dogs, because neither usually go further away from the village than a half-day trip.

Observing how this rule is obeyed by the herders reveals much about their perception of distance and the notion of journey. Thus, it is intuitively clear that the temptation to leave for vodka during the night should essentially depend on the type of transport available. For example, given the same distance between the village and the camp, this temptation should be stronger among those herders who have snowmobiles, in comparison to those who do not have them and have to rely exclusively on reindeer sledges. Indeed, the former can cover a longer distance in a short time. We can suppose, therefore, that poor

herders – those who do not have snowmobiles – have to camp closer to the village. Indeed, that is exactly what observations show us. Thus, when the village of Tazovsky gets surrounded by reindeer herders' camps in winter, the camps without snowmobiles always make up the inner circle, which is surrounded by the outer circle of camps with snowmobiles. Although this fact admittedly can have a number of explanations, the reindeer herders do refer, among others, to the factor of alcohol avoidance: "Mikhail can live close to the village – he does not have a snowmobile to go for vodka all the time." (Semyon Habd'u, Taz tundra, 2009)

Another interesting example in defining a safe distance from the village can be the role of the Taz River, which is one of the major rivers of Western Siberia. In its lower course, it represents a peculiar labyrinth of islands and flows about 30 to 35 km wide. In winter, the interconnected flows turn into excellent snowmobile roads, but navigating them requires a good knowledge of the spatial layout of the labyrinth. Reindeer herders usually lack this knowledge and, when crossing the Taz, they usually follow the tracks left by the semi-settled Nenets fishermen, who live and fish in the Taz River all year round. The town of Tazovsky is situated on the left bank of the Taz. An interesting fact is that the reindeer herders believe the place on the right bank of the Taz, just on the opposite side from the village, to be very good for winter camping: they hold that this place is both close enough and distant enough from the village and, in fact, compete with each other for the right to camp there. However, the left bank of the river at a distance of 30–35 km from the village is believed to be too near for safe camping. This distance, which can be covered by a snowmobile in about two hours, is believed to represent no challenge that could discourage one to go and buy alcohol. It seems like crossing the Taz River, which can in fact take a shorter time than covering the same distance on the shore due to a much better travelling surface, is still perceived as a big journey, solely due to it being fairly unusual for the herders and being related to reliance on others' travelling knowledge. This is enough to assure the herders that the alcohol on the opposite side of the river is not readily accessible and, therefore, to deal with their obsessive thoughts.

Dealing with other herders as potential sources of alcohol is less straightforward. The first thing to be mentioned here is that the reindeer herders, on their way to and from the village, tend to use established trails made by many people who travelled such tracks before them. These trails tend to go along frozen rivers and hill ranges, which makes travelling conditions better and allows the preservation of petrol. The same tracks, therefore, tend to be used from year to year. Many reindeer herders have told me that it is common wisdom not to camp along these trails. The danger of economic loss due to excessive

drinking was offered as justification. They said that those who camp near the trail are going to have too many visitors and about half of them – those who are travelling back from the village – are going to come with alcohol, which could be enough to keep the hosts drunk most of the time, and certainly much longer than would be economically safe. On the other hand, despite such wisdom, there are reindeer herders in the Taz tundra who camp near the tracks and, if I am not mistaken, do this quite deliberately. Such people play an important role in tundra life, because their chums (nomadic tents) are widely used by other herders for night stays during their journeys to and from the village; I would reiterate that many herders try to choose camping places in such a way that these journeys would take more than a day. For this important role in tundra-to-village communication, the road-keepers are rewarded by frequent and easy access to alcohol, which is, of course, a poor asset in my opinion as well as in the opinion of many herders. On the other hand, the road-keepers also get access to certain supplies, such as bread, butter, pasta, tea, etc., that the travellers bring from the village and often leave, in small quantities, in gratitude for the night's stay. For the road-keepers, who are mostly very poor, this could be a significant reward that can justify their strategy. Further research is needed, however, in order to clarify this.

Although avoidance of camping near the tracks is clearly a strategy to avoid meeting a herder with alcohol to share, in other situations the herders clearly seek to meet such a person. Thus, once reindeer herders hear that someone from a camp nearby has just returned from the village, almost all of them immediately recall a variety of important and urgent grounds to visit that camp. As far as I can judge, this is a rule with very few exceptions and it can represent a compulsive reaction to the availability of alcohol in the proximity. On the other hand, it is exactly the uniformity of this reaction that almost guarantees that any amount of alcohol that is transported from the village to the tundra gets consumed in a very short time, which, as I have argued above, is likely to have a number of positive economic as well as psychological consequences. Another probable effect is that it makes it irrational to buy alcohol in large quantities. Indeed, it is easy to see that once the amount of alcohol one buys and transports to the tundra exceeds a certain threshold, every extra unit of alcohol bought would only increase the free-loading of others rather than bring any sort of satisfaction or profit to the buyer. This brings us to the final class of practices I would like to discuss: the practices that limit the amount of alcohol one buys in the settlement and brings to the tundra.

These practices are, as it seems, aimed to deal with the urge to buy as much alcohol as possible during every visit to the village, sometimes at the expense of other goods or services. The most basic and the most important of them is

the famous 'iron rule': buy other goods first and alcohol later. In accordance with this rule, a reindeer herder who comes to the village should first buy all the products he or she needs apart from alcohol and pack these products on the sledge. Only when these products are bought and packed, can one proceed to buy alcohol. This rule limits the amount of alcohol one can buy, first of all, by decreasing the funds available for buying it. It also limits the amount of alcohol one can transport to the tundra by limiting the available space on the sledge. The latter is probably even more important than the former, because one can often raise money by borrowing it from others, selling private belongings, or even reindeer, or by small-scale earnings, for example, by giving the village people a ride on a reindeer sledge. However, one cannot increase the carrying capacity of one's sledge and/or the power of one's snowmobile engine. Hence, some reindeer herders go even further by artificially decreasing the carrying capacity of their sledges when going to the village. Thus I have observed several instances when the herders who left for the village loaded their sledges with heavy and sizable items such as fishing nets or sledge runners, which are very valuable in the tundra but cannot be of any value in the village. The herders explained that these items would be transported to the village and then back to the camp and that their main purpose was to limit the amount of goods one can buy in the village – since one would hardly throw away a new net or a sledge runner; one would rather limit one's greed for goods. Since food and manufactured goods are always bought first and vodka later, one can presume that the main function of this unnecessary cargo is to limit the amount of vodka.

## **THE CONDITIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PRACTICES OF (NON)DRINKING**

All the practices of (non)drinking that have been discussed so far make perfect sense given that their function is indeed to help cope with or eliminate the anxiety related to the obsessive-compulsive mechanisms of alcohol craving. This explanation, however, clearly points to the objective limitations of these practices. The most important of them is quite obvious: these practices are designed in fact not so much to deal with excessive drinking but rather to minimise its economic and/or social consequences. In this sense, the Nenets are quite similar to some modern psychiatrists, who believe that, for many psychiatric syndromes, modern medicine should not so much look for ways to eliminate the symptoms (which is in many cases impossible anyway), but rather help patients to adapt to them and, by so doing, minimise their negative consequences.

Secondly, as the analysis clearly suggests, such practices can only be effective if two important preconditions are met. First of all, the supply of alcohol should be predictable and limited to a few geographic locations (settlements and trading posts), which are relatively distant from each other. Secondly, people who rely on the strategies should have a nomadic way of life. Indeed, only if these two preconditions are in place can one regulate the availability of alcohol by physically moving towards or away from the centres of its supply. If the preconditions are not met and the regulation of alcohol availability is impossible, the practices can become profoundly maladaptive. For example, for former reindeer herders who settle in villages, hardly anything can be more devastating than the habit of consuming all the available alcohol in the shortest amount of time. I would even cautiously suppose that the terrible alcohol-related problems usually experienced by former reindeer herders – the problems which often cause their death – can at least partly be explained by their failure to abandon the tundra drinking practices in their new settings. Similarly, little can be more dangerous and devastating for the tundra dwellers than travelling merchants (*kommersanty*) who bring alcohol to the tundra and, therefore, make it available in geographical locations it was not available before. In a way, similar to the herders' settling in a village, the arrival of a merchant immediately renders the practice of consuming all available alcohol as fast as possible maladaptive. Thanks to this practice, the herders are ideal clients for an alcohol-selling merchant: they can consume almost any amount of alcohol in almost no time and, furthermore, pay almost any price for it. For the herders, on the other hand, the arrival of such merchants always means a great deal of damage in both economic and medical terms. Historical literature on the Nenets is full of examples describing how herders sold their whole herds and sometimes even their individual freedom to merchants, because they could not stop consuming the alcohol merchants made constantly available for them (see, for example, Islavin 1847; Maksimov 1984; Kertselli 1911).

Furthermore, it may seem rather ironic, but it appears as if the described practices of (non)drinking – the reindeer herders' way to deal with alcohol-related problems – are largely responsible for the popular image of Nenets herders as alcoholics consuming much more alcohol than the settled villagers. As I tried to demonstrate in this paper, this image is wrong. However, it can hardly be surprising, given that most outsiders observe Nenets herders only in the village or during short visits to the herders' camps. Since anyone who comes to a camp from the village is supposed to bring some village goods including alcohol, all these observations are made in situations when a certain amount of alcohol is available and, in accordance with the described practice, should be rapidly consumed. On the other hand, if one sees a group of people consuming

large quantities of alcohol in almost no time, it is only natural for him or her to conclude that such people drink heavily.

As all these examples show, the practices of (non)drinking are a tricky cultural asset that can be both a blessing and a curse.

## CONCLUSIONS

Many studies that focus on the problem of excessive alcohol consumption among the Russian native northerners depict these people as helpless victims of their alcohol craving. However, the native northerners are certainly fully aware of their alcohol-related problems and the damage their excessive drinking causes to them, both in medical and economic terms. In order to avoid or at least decrease this damage, many native northerners seem to resort to particular behavioural strategies, which I suggest to name the practices of (non)drinking. The prefix 'non' is written in brackets here, because the aim of these practices is not so much to help people stop drinking, but rather to decrease the economic and social damage related to drinking. Admittedly, decreasing the amount of alcohol consumed is one way to achieve this aim. However, there can be other ways, and some of them include, in fact, a temporary intensification of alcohol consumption.

The practices of (non)drinking employed by the Taz Nenets are a good example. It seems like these practices represent an attempt to regulate the alcohol craving by playing with one particular peculiarity of this craving, which it has in common with the obsessive-compulsive syndrome: this craving for alcohol decreases greatly or even disappears completely in a situation where a person genuinely believes that alcohol is inaccessible and cannot be rendered accessible right now, whatever efforts one would invest. In order to regulate their alcohol craving, the Nenets try to create situations in which alcohol is physically inaccessible to them (or at least they genuinely believe it to be so), and stay in such situations for as long as possible. This is achieved by camping far away from the settlements (the sources of alcohol), by artificially limiting the carrying capacity of the means of transportation used for visiting settlements, and by avoiding camping close to the tracks of other herders who go to and from the settlements. In the cases where alcohol occasionally still gets to the camp (which happens relatively frequently due to visitors, tundra merchants, and trips to the settlements that herders have to take to buy necessary supplies, get medical and certain social services, sell their goods and/or cash their salary), the common practice is to consume it as fast as possible and in as big a company as possible. This causes a short-term intensification of drinking, yet

still limits the damage caused by alcohol by shortening the period of time spent on drinking and, therefore, decreasing the economic losses.

These practices of (non)drinking seem to be rather effective: contrary to popular opinion, Nenets reindeer herders consume less alcohol than most settled villagers, native or otherwise. However, as it is not difficult to notice, these practices can function only in specific geographic and cultural settings, where sources of alcohol are limited to sparsely situated settlements and people, being nomads, can regulate their access to these sources by moving towards or away from them. If geographic or cultural settings change, the practices can suddenly become maladaptive. Thus it can be supposed that one of the reasons reindeer herders often drink themselves to death after settling in a village is that they continue, deliberately or not, to follow the tundra practice of drinking all the available alcohol as soon as possible. Of course, following this practice is a rather bad idea in a village where the supply of alcohol is limitless. Similarly, tundra merchants who bring large quantities of alcohol to the tundra can inflict serious damage on the reindeer herders' economy, because the herders who resort to the drink-it-all strategy cannot help but consume all the alcohol the merchants bring.

In short, the practices of (non)drinking represent a response by the reindeer herders to their own alcohol-related problems, which is adapted to the specific geographic and cultural settings of reindeer-herding nomadism. They are inapplicable in other settings. As many settled Nenets say, reindeer herders who settle in a village should learn many things and learning how to drink while living in a village features highly among them. I hope that the analysis made in this paper sheds some light on the source and nature of this particular problem and, therefore, helps to mitigate it.

## **MANUSCRIPT SOURCES**

Fieldwork materials from the years 2006, 2009 and 2010 in possession of the author.

## **REFERENCES**

Anton, Raymond F. 2000. Obsessive-Compulsive Aspects of Craving: Development of the Obsessive Compulsive Drinking Scale. *Addiction*, Vol. 95, pp. 211–217. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1046/j.1360-0443.95.8s2.9.x>.

- Berry, John W. & Poortinga, Ype H. & Segall, Marshall H. & Dasen, Pierre R. 2002. *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bogoyavlenskiiy, Dmitriy 2010. Russia's Indigenous Peoples of the North: A Demographic Portrait at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century. *Sibirica*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 91–114. Available at <https://www.deepdyve.com/browse/journals/sibirica/2010/v9/i3>, last accessed on June 9, 2015.
- Bogoyavlenskiiy & Pika 1991 = Bogoiavlenskii, Dmitrii & Pika, Aleksandr. Nasil'stvennaia smertnost' u narodov Severa (na primere Kamchatki i Chukotki). [Mortality Caused by Violence among Arctic Peoples (on the Examples of Kamchatka and Chukotka).] In: A.I. Chistobaev (ed.) *Raiony prozhivaniia malochislennykh narodov Severa*. [Regions Populated by Small-Numbered Peoples of the North.] Geografiia i khoziaistvo, No. 4. Leningrad: Izd. Geograficheskogo obshchestva SSSR, pp. 162–182.
- Chrzan, Janet 2013. *Alcohol: Social Drinking in Cultural Context*. New York: Routledge Chapman & Hall.
- Glasser, Irene 2013 [2011]. *Anthropology of Addictions and Recovery*. Waveland Press, Inc.
- Islavin, Vladimir 1847. *Samoedy v domashnem i obshchestvennom bytu*. [Samoyeds in Private and Social Life.] Sankt-Peterburg: Tip. Ministerstva gosudarstvennykh imushchestv. Available at <http://webirbis.aonb.ru/irbisdoc/kr/2012/07kp138.pdf>, last accessed on June 10, 2015.
- Kertselli, Sergei 1911. *Po Bol'shezemel'skoi tundre s kochevnikami*. [A Trip across the Bolshezemelskaya Tundra with Nomads.] Arkhangel'sk: Gubernskaia tipografiia. Available at <http://leb.nlr.ru/edoc/330600/>, last accessed on June 10, 2015.
- Klokov, Konstantin 1996. *Kochevoe olenevodcheskoe naselenie: otsenka vozmozhnostei etnosotsial'noi adaptatsii i razvitiia*. [The Nomadic Reindeer-Husbandry Population of Russia: The Concept of Ethno-Social Adaptation and Development under Modern Conditions.] Sankt-Peterburg: NII Geografii Sankt-Peterburgskogo gos. universiteta. Available at <http://www.arlis.org/docs/vol1/A/49219278.pdf>, last accessed on June 10, 2015.
- Kozlov, Andrei & Vershubskaya, Galina & Kozlova, Maria & Shmitt, L. 2002. *Modernizatsionnyi stress u korenного naseleniia Severa Zapadnoi Sibiri*. [Modernisation-Related Stress among the Aboriginal Peoples of Western Siberia.] Moskva: Institut Etnografii i Antropologii RAN.
- MacAndrew, Craig & Edgerton, Robert B. 2003 [1969]. *Drunken Comportment: A Social Explanation*. Clinton Corners, N.Y.: Percheron Press.
- Maksimov, Sergei 1984. *God na severe*. [A Year in the North.] Arkhangel'sk: Severo-Zapadnoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo.
- McKnight, David 2002. Anthropological Views of 'the Problem of Drinking'. In: *From Hunting to Drinking: The Devastating Effects of Alcohol on an Australian Aboriginal Community*. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 10–19.
- Modell, Jack G. & Glaser, Frederick B. & Cyr, Louis & Mountz, James M. 1992a. Obsessive and Compulsive Characteristics of Craving for Alcohol in Alcohol Abuse and Dependence. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 272–274. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1530-0277.1992.tb01375.x>.

- Modell, Jack G. & Glaser, Frederick B. & Mountz, James M. & Schmaltz, Stephen & Cyr, Louis 1992b. Obsessive and Compulsive Characteristics of Alcohol Abuse and Dependence: Quantification by a Newly Developed Questionnaire. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 266–271. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1530-0277.1992.tb01374.x>.
- Mukhachev, Anatoly 2001. *Puteshestvie v mir olenevodov*. [A Journey to the World of Reindeer Herders.] Novosibirsk: Nauka.
- Nemtsov, Aleksandr 1997. Potreblenie alkogolia i smertnost' v Rossii. [Alcohol Consumption and Mortality in Russia.] *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, No. 9, pp. 113–116. Available at <http://ecsocman.hse.ru/socis/msg/269466.html>, last accessed on June 10, 2015.
- Penzel, Fred 2000. *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders: A Complete Guide to Getting Well and Staying Well*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pika, Alexander 1993. The Spatial-Temporal Dynamic of Violent Death among the Native Peoples of Northern Russia. *Arctic Anthropology*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 61–76. Available at [http://www.jstor.org/stable/40316338?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40316338?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents), last accessed on June 10, 2015.
- Pivneva, Elena 2005. Etnodemograficheskie aspekty problemy alkogolizma u malochislennykh narodov Severa. [Ethno-Demographic Aspects of the Alcoholism-Related Problems among the Small-Numbered Peoples of the North.] In: Elena Pivneva & Dmitri Funk (eds.) *V poiskakh sebja: narody Severa i Sibiri v post-sovetskikh transformatsiakh*. [Searching for Oneself: Peoples of the North and Siberia in Post-Soviet Transformations.] Moskva: Nauka, pp. 65–84.
- Semke, Valentin & Bohan, Nikolai 2008. *Transkul'tural'naia addiktologiya*. [Trans-Cultural Addictology.] Tomsk: Izdatel'stvo Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta.
- Sidorov, Pavel & Shubin, Sergei 1994. Etnicheskie osobennosti alkogol'nogo psikhoza u nentsev. [Ethnic Peculiarities of Alcoholic Psychosis among the Nenets.] *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, No. 7, p. 89. Available at <http://ecsocman.hse.ru/text/18915231/>, last accessed on June 10, 2015.
- Zavjalov, Vladimir 1990. Clinical-Psychological Approaches to Alcoholism: Multiple Versions of Alcohol Dependence. In: Bernard Segal & Caesar Korolenko (eds.) *Addictive Disorders in Arctic Climates*. New York: The Haworth Press, pp. 15–30.

# HANGOVER

*Joachim Otto Habeck*

**Abstract:** Even though hangover is a widespread phenomenon in many societies, it has received very scant systematic attention in social sciences. This article is based on publications from different disciplines (medicine, cultural history, social anthropology, sociology, etc.), my own observations, and interviews with fellow social anthropologists. After a general outline of the phenomenon, I will focus on some psychological aspects of hangover: guilt and vulnerability, but also the idea of complicity. These seem to combine in different ways not only in the self-perception of hung-over individuals: they also inform social perceptions of the consequences of excessive alcohol intake. They may be related to specific practices and patterns of drinking (as exemplified by observations from Siberia and the Far North of Russia), though large-scale comparisons are methodologically and ethically problematic. Examining the interrelation of hangover, responsibility, and transgression, the article concludes that the social perception of hangover involves different modes of human non-perfection.

**Keywords:** alcohol hangover, complicity, guilt, veisalgia, vulnerability

Notwithstanding countless books and articles on alcohol consumption (in Russia and elsewhere), hangover has remained a very enigmatic topic. This article, initially prepared for the Tartu 2013 workshop on the particularities of alcohol consumption in the Far North of Russia, emerged from my interest in the rites and practices of excessive drinking, the idea of transgression, and the question of how people describe, and deal with, the 'day after'. If practices of drinking bear certain cultural specifics<sup>1</sup>, can we suppose that experiences of hangover do so, too?

While not claiming to give a definite answer, in this article I shall try to lay some groundwork for a cross-cultural study of hangover (*pohmel'e* in Russian<sup>2</sup>). With the aim to give a first appraisal of how hangover is defined and explained, the first part of the article draws mainly on medical literature. Later, the focus will be on those aspects that fall into the psychological rather than physiological domain: here I rely on interviews that I conducted with eight fellow social anthropologists and one medical expert in 2013 and 2014, as well as on my own observations.

## HANGOVER RESEARCH: A FIRST APPRAISAL

Despite the abundance of scientific contributions on alcohol, alcohol abuse, alcoholism, prevention and ways of dealing with alcoholism, surprisingly few studies have dealt with hangover as a medical phenomenon. Occasional scientific articles on the topic of hangover appeared before 1990. Since then, we can witness a steady stream of publications, including several useful literature reviews (e.g. Swift & Davidson 1998; Wiese et al. 2000; Verster 2008). The most recent contributions include a study on the interrelation of hangover symptoms (Penning et al. 2012) and a special issue on hangover effects on workers' behaviour (i.e. performance at work) in the journal *Current Drug Abuse Review* (editorial by Frone & Verster 2013). Considerable progress in research has been made: now the chemical processes inside the body during and after alcohol intake are understood much better than twenty or thirty years ago. However, authors still differ on just which symptoms to include in hangover assessments and whether or not to include psychological aspects (e.g. Rohsenow et al. 2007: 1315).

Initially, there were attempts to look more closely at the psychological aspects of hangover, notably in Harburg et al. 1981 and 1993, but these have hardly been pursued in later research. Possibly, psychological aspects were considered too complex and insufficiently understood for detailed analysis. Having said that, in the last decade there has been some notable interest in the question as to how hangover impairs cognition, for example visual and spatial impairment of the body (e.g. Stephens et al. 2008), reaction time (McKinney & Coyle 2004) and memory deficits (Ling et al. 2010).

Earlier (and also some contemporary) research has sometimes confused hangover with the symptoms of withdrawal of alcohol from individuals with alcohol addiction. Hangover and withdrawal have occasionally been examined as interdependent (e.g. Span & Earleywine 1999) and certain similarities between the two can be identified (e.g. Swift & Davidson 1998: 57); however, the two are not the same (Penning et al. 2010), and a hangover is not necessarily connected with alcohol addiction (Harburg et al. 1981; Wiese et al. 2000). Rather, hangover is simply the consequence of alcohol consumption, or some certain excessive amount of alcohol consumption.

### Symptoms of hangover

Let us look briefly at how hangover is described medically. *Veisalgia*, to introduce the medical term, is commonly seen as a combination of symptoms. As mentioned, opinions vary as to which symptoms to include. The most compre-

hensive list is given by Renske Penning and colleagues (2012: 249, Table 1), who also provide percentages of individuals who indicated suffering from the respective symptoms, from among a sample of students of Utrecht University. The list includes: fatigue (reported by 95.5 per cent of all students); thirst (89.1); drowsiness (88.3); sleepiness (87.7); headache (87.2); dry mouth (83.0); nausea (81.4); weakness (79.9); reduced alertness (78.5); concentration problems (77.6); apathy (lack of interest/concern) (74.0); increased reaction time (74.0); reduced appetite (61.9); clumsiness (51.4); agitation (49.5); vertigo (48.0); memory problems (47.6); gastrointestinal complaints (46.7); dizziness (46.0); stomach pain (44.7); tremor (38.9); balance problems (38.6); restlessness (36.8); shivering (34.4); sweating (33.9); disorientation (33.8); audio-sensitivity (33.3); photo-sensitivity (33.1); blunted affect (29.9); muscle pain (29.4); loss of taste (28.0); regret (27.1); confusion (25.8); guilt (25.2); gastritis (23.4); impulsivity (22.7); hot/cold flashes (21.4); vomiting (20.8); heart pounding (19.4); depression (18.9); palpitations (17.0); tinnitus (16.8); nystagmus (16.1); anger (10.1); respiratory problems (9.7); anxiety (7.4); suicidal thoughts (1.8).

Altogether, one will find this a remarkably motley list. Apart from the fact that certain items cannot be clearly separated from each other ('gastritis', 'stomach pain', and 'gastro-intestinal complaints' may refer to the same condition), we can also observe that some items describe clearly physiological states whereas others, notably 'guilt' and 'regret', indicate exclusively psychological phenomena. The latter will be discussed in the second half of this article.

### **Alcohol intake and the metabolism of hangover**

How has hangover been described in terms of metabolism? To cut a complex and multi-stranded story short, several researchers are convinced that acetaldehyde is one of the key substances involved (evidence for this is discussed by Penning et al. 2010). The human body usually reduces alcohol (ethanol) to other substances: these are acetaldehyde in the first step and acetic acid in a subsequent step. The intermediate stage, the temporary increase of acetaldehyde in the human organism, is held to lead to some of those symptoms described above, notably nausea. Thirst and dry mouth simply stem from dehydration caused by the diuretic properties of alcohol, and dehydration can also cause headache and drowsiness.

Other chemical substances mitigate or aggravate the state of hangover. Different drinks contain different congeners.

*Congeners, the byproducts of individual alcohol preparations (which are found primarily in brandy, wine, tequila, whiskey, and other dark liquors),*

*increase the frequency and severity of hangover [...]. Clear liquors, such as rum, vodka, and gin, tend to cause hangover less frequently.* (Wiese et al. 2000: 899; cf. also Chapman 1970; Rohsenow & Howland 2010)

Tiny amounts of methanol are also contained as congeners in some drinks (there is a certain break-even point when the dose of methanol is not just a congener, but rather acts as a highly toxic substance). In addition to the above factors, hormonal changes occur during and after heavy alcohol consumption (Penning et al. 2010).

It has been established that an alcohol intake of 1.5 grams of alcohol per kilogram body weight is very likely to produce a hangover, starting several hours (usually the next morning) after alcohol consumption (Wiese et al. 2000: 900). However, and this is important to note, there is no *straight* connection between quantities of alcohol intake and intensity of hangover (Harburg et al. 1993). Some people (about 20%) drink comparatively high doses of alcohol and get really drunk – and yet they claim that they do not experience any hangover symptoms. Other people (another 20%) drink small to medium amounts and claim that they do not get tipsy (or drunk); and of these, despite their *not* getting tipsy or drunk, some experience *very* severe hangover symptoms the next day (ibid.).

It has been postulated that the same amount of alcohol intake will have more severe effects on women than on men. Moreover, if we believe Ernest Harburg et al. (1981, 1993), hangover is a gendered *and* age-related phenomenon: after consumption of equal amounts of alcohol, young women seem to experience more intense feelings of hangover than older women. Moreover, the hangover experience of young women seems to be less related to the amount of alcohol intake than that of men of the same age. In other words: Harburg claims that a young man's hangover is likely to get worse with a higher intake of alcohol, whereas the same is not true for women.

In the context of analysing drinking patterns in the North of Russia and Siberia, it is apposite to draw attention to the finding that in some individuals “genetic variants of the ALDH enzyme permit acetaldehyde to accumulate. These people routinely flush, sweat, and become ill after consuming small amounts of alcohol” (Swift & Davidson 1998: 58). ALDH stands for aldehyde dehydrogenase; it facilitates the reduction of acetaldehyde to acetic acid, as mentioned above. It is this observation that resounds in numerous lores and casual comments on the assumed incapacity of Siberian indigenous peoples to digest alcohol. Indeed, cases of rapid flushing, sudden excitement and irritation, and several hours of restless ‘wandering’ have been reported by some anthropologists from different parts of Siberia (and I have witnessed them

myself). Yet it has – to the best of my knowledge – never been reliably established whether different ethnic groups or regional populations show particular patterns of said genetic variant.

### **Hangover Indexes and other ways of measuring**

One would expect that each symptom is measured in some way in its own right, and this is what was done in the above-mentioned study by Penning et al. (2012). In earlier publications (again, Harburg et al. 1981 and 1993) researchers seemingly simplistically *combined* the different symptoms to define severity. Here is their Hangover Severity Index (HSI):

*No signs: gets drunk, but reports no hangover signs.*

*Weak: any or all of these three symptoms: headache, diarrhea, or loss of appetite.*

*Mild: anxiety and / or stomach pains.*

*Strong: any one of blackout, tremor, or thoughts of suicide.*

*Very strong: anxiety plus any one of blackout, tremor, thoughts of suicide.*

*Severe: two or more of blackout, tremor, or suicide thoughts.*

(Harburg et al. 1993: 416)

Another study (Newlin & Pretorius 1990, quoted in Earleywine 1993: 417) measures the severity of hangover differently, reporting five hangover symptoms, which include: “got a headache while drinking”, “vomited after drinking”, “regretted my behavior while drinking”, “forgot some things that happened while drinking”, and “woke up too late the morning after drinking”. However, to my mind, the last item of the list is a consequence rather than a symptom in its own right.

It should be emphasised that ‘guilt’ and ‘regret’ are found in many definitions and also many self-descriptions of being hung-over. Not all authors follow this approach, however. Rohsenow et al. (2007) developed an Acute Hangover Scale based on different items: thirst; tiredness; headache; dizziness; loss of appetite; stomach ache; nausea; heart racing; and (for dubious reasons) also the item ‘hangover’ itself. Guilt is explicitly not included as an item – it is considered a cognitive reaction rather than a symptom: “Some [earlier] experiments have used [---] hangover symptoms plus cognitive reactions such as guilt (e.g. Span & Earlywine [sic] 1999).” I shall turn to these aspects in the next section.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF HANGOVER

The interviews that I conducted with eight fellow social anthropologists in 2013 and 2014 elicited many of the physiological conditions mentioned in the medical studies; they did not elicit any additional ones (unless increased libido is considered a physiological rather than psychological condition). With regard to psychological aspects, my interviewees identified certain moods, which can be summarised as follows:

1. *Guilt/regret/remorse*, sometimes expressed as a rhetorical question of whether last night's fun was really worth the suffering of the present moment. This relates to a sense of silly or irrational behaviour, of not anticipating the consequences of alcohol intake.
2. *Vulnerability*, expressed either as the felt need to retreat to one's bed (or 'den', private space, etc.) and to be left alone, or as the feeling that one has exposed oneself before others, shown his or her 'soft spot', demonstrated imperfection, and thus rendered oneself as vulnerable.
3. Some rather positive emotion for which I use the word *complicity*. It stands for some interviewees' observation that they feel sympathetic with others around them also suffering from hangover, that the party has created a certain intimacy, that the other has also shown imperfection and – as one interviewee expressed it – has also shown to be 'human'.
4. *Slowness* in mental processes, e.g. the felt inability to deal adequately with multiple or quick sensory input. Related to that, one person described the state of observing himself as if from a distance.
5. In two cases, *thoughts about suicide* were mentioned in connection with very severe forms of hangover.

In what follows, I shall limit myself to exploring the first three items – *guilt*, *vulnerability*, *complicity* – and try to interpret them in the light of existing literature, but also present more details from my interviews. I shall argue that these aspects of self-perception reflect public perceptions on alcohol consumption and ideas about individual agency.

### Guilt

With regard to the first item, some authors have claimed that a certain interaction exists between the feeling of guilt and hangover severity. Hangover can be a self-fulfilling prophecy: the more you feel guilty about your drinking (or your drinking habits), the greater is the likelihood that you will experience a hang-

over. To quote again Harburg et al. (1981: 1009), they suggest that “drinkers who feel guilt may partly induce hangovers in themselves”.<sup>3</sup> Reversely, we may come to formulate the hypothesis: the less you feel guilty about your drinking (or drinking behaviour), the better for you because you are less likely to experience a hangover, or at least your hangover will be more moderate. This statement reflects some of the older publications on the topic, notably one by Chafetz (1976: 49): “When we’re tense and uptight while taking alcohol, we’re more predisposed to hangover.”

Since guilt is a concept highly loaded with cultural connotations, we can start speculating about hangover in societies with different preferences of how and when to drink – and different attitudes toward shame and self-contempt. To draw a connection between sociologist Max Weber’s renowned *Protestant Ethic* (Weber 1958 [1930]), his ideas on asceticism (cf. Treiber 1999) and the element of guilt in hangover may seem somewhat audacious; however, several authors do argue that a connection can be seen between Protestant ethics and social acceptance of alcohol consumption (Levine 1993; Nolte 2007). Harry Levine describes how temperance and abstinence became politically promoted in some societies, notably in northern and north-western Europe. Public concern about alcohol abuse, he says, is more widespread in Nordic and Anglo-American societies than in those of the European South, where Catholicism is dominant, even though people in the latter have a higher per capita intake of alcohol. In his view, public concern with temperance is embedded in the social history of Protestantism. Levine refers to Weber’s findings that rationality, self-control, and self-restraint are characteristic virtues of the Protestant ethic.<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, Frank Nolte (2007) argues that addiction is a social construct, the initial basis of which can be found in the Protestant idea to temper the desires of the body, and the fear of losing control over one’s emotions (see also Spode 1993: 64–65, 124ff.).

Public responses to hung-over individuals vary: they may include elements of ignorance, aggression, contempt, condescension, pity, sympathy, and acquiescence. We may suppose that public perceptions and discourses about hangover shape the experience of hangover to some extent. Moreover, these perceptions and discourses tend to be pronounced differently in different societies and historic periods.

With regard to the historic and regional differences in drinking practices, the findings presented by historians Hasso Spode (1993: 16–75) and Wolfgang Schivelbusch (1990: 38; also quoted by Nolte 2007) are particularly revealing. Describing drinking habits in Germany in medieval times, they both assert that if an individual attempted to leave the drinking company before getting completely smashed, others around the table would see this as a sign of disrespect

or cowardliness. This reaction, reported in the German context as a thing of an earlier period, is very present in Russian drinking culture, where individuals prevent each other from severing the bond of complicity with the question: “Do you respect me?” (*Ty menia uvazhaesh’?*). The question is a rhetorical one, as the affirmation of respect will require the continuation of the session. Such cycles of showing respect are then repeated *ad nauseam*. Sometimes they end in aggression, violence, and irrevocable loss, about which more below.

In comparison, then, in the Russian context it is despicable to quit the company of drinkers; whereas in the German context it is rather despicable to miss the point of quitting. Hence my assumption that the aspect of guilt in hangover is stronger in ‘temperance’ societies – perhaps not even *stronger*, but *more strongly individualised* or inward-oriented.

### **Vulnerability or non-perfection**

Vulnerability stands for two phenomena: first, the reported tendency to avoid social contact and to retire to some quiet place; second, the knowledge that one has temporarily failed to be sensible and thus shown one’s imperfection. A colleague that I spoke with made the point that drunk people seem to be more humane; they are no longer those super-efficient beings that they are expected to be by the usual norms. Rather, they show a certain form of non-perfection, and exactly that makes them humane (in Russia: *chelovecheskii*). From this vantage point, the state of being hung-over shows a person’s capability to leave behind the idealised, stiff conventions of proper behaviour and attain a different, more down-to-earth mode of existence.

On the example of the House of Culture – communal arts centres that can be found in numerous communities in Russia – I have elsewhere argued that even in these institutions, the task of which is to promote refined taste and good manners, occasional drinking bouts take place, as if people sought to undo or deny the pervasive call for perfection and self-disciplining that reverberates in the pedagogical and cultural sphere (Habeck 2014: 130–133). With reference to the same setting – the House of Culture – Sántha and Safonova (2011) have demonstrated how the highly idealised, staged performance of cultivation and self-perfection requires active undoing, the destruction of that idealised image, a reassertion that the show is over, a return to ‘real’ life. A period of heavy alcohol consumption provides a simple and straightforward means to achieve this: the hangover marks the beginning of a new cycle – a new start in the game of cultivated self-presentation.

The aspect of cleansing and catharsis also comes to the fore in a quote from a novel *Russland To Go* by Wlada Kolosowa (Kolosowa 2012: 159–160), which is cited in a recent study on the meaning of *tusovka*, by Christian Buchner (2013: 7). Kolosowa writes (my translation from German):

*For me, tusovka<sup>5</sup> is a feeling, in the first place... The expectation that there will be more to eat than anybody could ever devour, and more to drink than is good, and that everybody will go home being tired and in high spirits. [...] The hangover after a good tusovka has a cleaning rather than punishing [effect]. The headache is not just a consequence of the fun, it is a proof of it. It gives reason for joy. If you wake up the next morning in a good mood and without a hangover, you are yet to expect the sobering experience.*

Noteworthy is the word ‘cleaning’ in the above quotation. Anna Stammler-Gossmann reported at the 2013 Tartu Conference that drinking permits one to get down to zero, to reset oneself physiologically and psychologically.

Several interviewees remarked that in Russia people seem to show a certain kind of mercy, or at least tolerance, toward drunk individuals. According to that logic, it is more excusable if someone is drunk or even impaired for several days by *zanoi* (i.e. a state of inebriation that lasts several days or weeks). As one colleague stated, to be drunk is not a bad thing, it seems, because it is a means to withdraw from sober and dismal everyday life. If connotations of what everyday life is all about are grim then perhaps there is less reason to feel guilty when you drink, and when you are drunk. From such a vantage point, a hangover simply signifies the tough return trip from having revealed one’s ‘true self’ (cf. Pesmen 2000: 183). However, there can be an alternative motivation for showing patience or mercy towards hung-over persons – the temporary ‘loss of self’ of the drinker rather than the revelation of ‘true self’, as shall be explained below.<sup>6</sup>

## Complicity

The notion of complicity<sup>7</sup> is used here to refer to the *shared* experience of hangover. People were having a party and now, in the phase of hangover, realise that they share the same state. They remember that they collectively participated in the drinking, that they collectively went through a period of euphoria. The collective act of ‘letting go’ has created a certain intimacy, and the shared feeling of hangover adds another aspect to that intimacy. In other words, together they were revealing their ‘true selves’ (see above) and now together experience

the feeling of non-perfection. All this creates a certain bond between them. This shared experience also sets them apart from others, notably from those who are 'in control'. Superiors at work, for example, should exert control over their employees, which requires them to show exemplary (rational) behaviour and induce their employees to do the same, rebuking them for excessive drinking. It is the collective non-compliance with the norms that creates the feeling of complicity.

There are many examples when groups try to turn hierarchical relations into those of equality – at least temporarily – by 'drinking down' the person that has a higher status. The attempt to achieve social inclusion by means of drinking together can be observed not only in workplace settings but also in many other contexts, as described by Koester (2003), to whom I also owe the idiom of 'drinking down'. Drawing on my own experience in various local (including urban) communities in Russia, I was often put to the test, had to sit and drink with the people I intended to live with, so as to acknowledge that I am also 'human'. This exercise is needed to undo – again, temporarily at least – the hierarchical position of *uchenyi* (taught person), and to subvert the norms and expectations that come with the highly loaded status of *nemets* (German). My new acquaintances and I collectively underwent a period of exuberance but also the suffering that followed it. Such episodes provided the basis for complicity and a certain degree of intimacy. While speaking about my own fieldwork, I know of many colleagues who also have experienced rites of drinking as being checked out.

It should be added here that the emphasis on the *temporality* of this intimacy is due to the fact that a switch back to the official, idealised, role-model behaviour can happen easily. In other words, the complicity of today's hangover neither prevents nor contradicts highly formal and restrained interaction on the following day. Such switching between different frames of references is described as somehow typical for Russia (or Russians; see Sántha & Safonova 2011: 86) and stands in some contrast to cases of excessive drinking in England or Germany, where 'losing face' collectively creates a longer-lasting reminiscence and bond of complicity. The loss of face was induced not by some external agent, but by the individual's own decision – or weakness of deciding the point where to stop. The idea of switching back and forth between states of polite distance and drunk affection has its limits, however: if drinking bouts lead to irreversible destruction or even lethal consequences, the return to the frame of polite and restrained interaction becomes unthinkable. Sometimes during my fieldwork I had the impression that collective drinking entails pushing one's luck, moving oneself into a critical state, approaching the limit of disaster and trying to stop right in front of it.

### Being in charge – or not

Heavy drinking can lead to a condition when one or several persons get into a rage, 'driven' by something, possessed by some power, and/or seemingly bereft of control over the 'self'. Some external agent is taking over. One might say: this or that person is not fully themselves, and one has to show mercy once the rage has stopped and the hangover has set in. Even though the individual may completely deny responsibility for the deed, he or she can still be held responsible for the consequences. While it may seem hard and provocative, it may make sense to analyse violent episodes that unfold during collective drinking bouts, and many an anthropologist working in Siberia has provided sad and dreadful stories of people being killed in a drunken fight. Such a deed cannot be reversed and the loss is irrevocable. Less tragic but still troubling are cases of drunk individuals destroying tables, lamps, china, or other objects. Precious as they may be, their replacement can be arranged comparatively easily.

When witnessing cases of material destruction, I was often surprised by the levels of tolerance, forgiveness or even ignoring the damage. An explanation can be offered, albeit a highly speculative one: since excessive drinking is pursued with the purpose of losing control and of reaching a state of transgression, the risk of collateral damage is part of the picture. This risk is acknowledged by the drinkers who 'get crazy', and those who have to live with the resulting havoc. The damage can be declared to have been caused by some external agent.<sup>8</sup> Forgiving the person through whom the negative force has emanated is easier if the damage can be repaired.

A few inconclusive thoughts on the question of personhood and agency shall be added here. Returning to the notion of guilt and that of non-perfection, it may be worth juxtaposing them in terms of individual responsibility. Both the 'guilt' perspective and the 'imperfection' approach have one thing in common: they imply a weak (or impaired) personality. This weakness is seen as personal failure of the hung-over individual in the former perception, but as externally caused in the latter. Since no individual can hope to ever attain complete perfection, non-perfection is ultimately inescapable. Can we assume that non-perfection is less to be blamed on the individual than on some *force majeure*, and that hangover guilt is blamed more on the individual himself or herself, who failed to act responsibly? Can we further say that one form of shortcomings is helplessness, whereas the other is self-induced? Can we say that both are different degrees of control? And if these different degrees of control are individual, or experienced on the individual level, can we say that there are corresponding social ways of dealing with them, namely pity in the one case and contempt in the other?

## CONCLUSION

The expectation of how one will be judged by others surely has an influence on self-perception in the state of hangover, and hence the notions of guilt, vulnerability, and complicity. A number of important factors have been left out of the picture: the reason for getting together; the composition of the drinking company; the emotional and physical constitution of the drinkers before getting inebriated; the presence of other people, be they sober or of a different company; etc. Reducing the situatedness of each particular drinking event to some standard situations is a necessary step to arrive at some general characteristics of hangover. Further cross-cultural examination of hangover would have to include a larger range of factors. Having said that, the general thrust of this article was to highlight central aspects of personal non-perfection, and how individual or collective non-perfection is evaluated socially: this evaluation ranges from a perceived failure (of the drinker to behave responsibly) to perceived humanity (of the drinker to be 'just an ordinary' person) and through to perceived helplessness (of the drinker to resist the spirit that takes over).

While it is easy to assume that the above interpretations co-exist in various combinations in different cultural contexts, it is methodologically and ethically problematic to uphold or study this on a large, 'cross-cultural' scale, for three reasons. Firstly, even though alcohol consumption is accompanied with numerous rites and collective expectations, physiological and psychological consequences are nonetheless experienced in individual ways and cannot be easily generalised. Secondly, the stark contrast between the sanitised scientific discourse on alcohol intoxication and the informality that usually surrounds talks about hangover has an impact on the ways in which we can explore the notion of hangover. Thirdly, cross-cultural research on hangover is ethically problematic if it merely leads to reinforcing old stereotypes about the alleged propensity for drinking among certain ethnic groups.

It is fair to conclude, however, that different perceptions of guilt, vulnerability, and complicity do not only inform people's judgements on the person who has drunk too much, but also the drinker's own self-perception. In a cyclical way, these perceptions are likely to shape the actual hangover experience and to provide the psychological experience on the basis of which the next drinking bout occurs.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Aimar Ventsel for giving me the opportunity to present my thoughts on hangover at the 2013 Tartu Conference, and for many years of creative intellectual exchange. It was easy to conceive the initial idea for this article, but it was hard to write. This text is of exploratory style, meant to be developed and corroborated by further evidence. It will hopefully provide a starting point for discussing the phenomenon of hangover beyond the domain of medical studies wherein it is being examined thus far. The process of interviewing revealed that hangover constitutes a topic not easily spoken about. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who were willing to share their thoughts. I am also grateful to Art Leete, Erwin Schweitzer, and others who provided valuable comments on earlier versions of this article.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> It would be impossible to sketch out here the manifold strands of public discourse, official and informal, on alcohol consumption in Russia. Others have worked toward that goal (e.g. Koester 2003, Pesmen 2000, and Nemtsov 2011, to name just a few), and the two conferences in Tartu have added insights from the Far North and Siberia. It is safe to state, however, that there is a particularly widespread concern with alcohol consumption in all parts of Russia, and a vast amount of stories and rites that come and go with drinking.
- <sup>2</sup> When being asked how to translate 'hangover' into Russian, most of my interviewees replied "*pokhmel'e*", a noun that has *hmel'* (Eng. 'hop') as its root and from which the reflexive verb *pokhmelit'sia* is derived. *Pokhmelit'sia* means: to cure a hangover by drinking more of the same. Two other nouns for 'hangover' came up in the interviews: *sushniak* (literally: 'a dry one') refers to the symptom of thirst; *bodun* (initially meaning the quality of male ungulates fighting head to head) expresses a severe hangover. Both words are colloquial. *Pokhmel'e* seems more general and more frequently used.
- <sup>3</sup> The process behind that is not quite clear, but, as these authors claim, it is statistically significant. The way guilt is diagnosed is problematic, however. The studies rely on a single yes-or-no question to diagnose guilt in hangover: "Do you ever feel guilty about your drinking?" (Harburg et al. 1981: 1001; 1993: 415). Dissatisfying as it is methodologically, there seems to be a point of departure in Harburg and co-authors' findings about the relevance of guilt in hangover. Later medical studies mention it but do not really pick up on the concept.
- <sup>4</sup> Levine (1993) also argues that modern society requires the self to take responsibility, though his reference to Emile Durkheim's work on suicide does not appear fully convincing to me for his argument.

- <sup>5</sup> The Russian term *tusovka* has a range of meanings, including ‘party’ and ‘company’.
- <sup>6</sup> No chemical substance has yet been shown to *prevent* a hangover once alcohol ingestion has happened. The only way to avoid it is to drink *less* alcohol or *no* alcohol. There are, however, certain methods to mitigate some of the symptoms. These comprise the classical recommendation to drink water in order to restore the amount of water in the dehydrated body. The question of how to deal with a hangover has been discussed in several of the medical and psychological articles quoted (e.g. Swift & Davidson 1998) and also beyond. In a compilation made by the folklorist Frank Paulsen in Detroit and other North American cities in 1957–1961, we find several hundred folklore recipes on how to cure a hangover. They can be arranged into these categories: food, juice, milk and ice cream, liquor and beer, mixed drinks, food combined with liquor, sex, medical treatment, avoidance, hair of the dog (drinking a certain amount of alcohol the next morning), and miscellaneous. Since no other publication mentions sex as a hangover cure and since it is of emotional importance, I find it worth mentioning. Sex is considered a remedy against hangover because it provides relief, as Paulsen (1961) states. Hung-over individuals are more affectionate than sober people, as one of Paulsen’s male informants says: “You may not believe this, but people are more affectionate when they’re hung over. I’ve heard from both men and women that the best way to get over a hangover is have intercourse.” (ibid.: 159) Interestingly, this seems to be in contrast with medical researchers’ finding that apathy – the lack of interest – is a hangover symptom reported by some respondents in clinical studies. The state of being more affectionate does resonate with the idea of *vulnerability* (see below), inasmuch as it denotes impulsivity ‘unshielded’ from politeness and well-controlled behaviour.
- <sup>7</sup> I borrow this term from Hans Steinmüller: contradictions between official and vernacular forms of representation “bind people together in intimate spaces of self-knowledge” (2010: 540). “Those who share a sense of the same intimacies form what might be aptly called a ‘community of complicity’.” (ibid.: 541) It should be noted that the regional and thematic context to which I apply the term ‘complicity’ differs from his.
- <sup>8</sup> A further analysis of this assumption could build on studies that discuss different styles of causality attribution (Istomin 2012) or multiple, co-existing world interpretations (Oelschlaegel 2014) with regard to indigenous peoples of the Far North and Siberia.

## ADDITIONAL SOURCES

- Interview with Stephan Dudeck, Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, Finland, on 10 May 2013.
- Interview with Florian Stammler, Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, Finland, on 18 May 2013.
- Interview with a fellow social anthropologist from Russia (anonymous), on 18 May 2013.
- Interview with Ina Schröder, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany, on 5 February 2014.
- Interview with Malgorzata Biczuk, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany, on 6 February 2014.
- Interview with Tatiana Barchunova, Novosibirsk State University, Novosibirsk, Russia, on 12 February 2014.
- Interview with Jan Holthues, medical expert, The Jewish Hospital, Berlin, Germany, on 16 February 2014.
- Interview with Ludek Broz, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, on 21 February 2014.
- Interview with Simon Schlegel, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany, on 28 February 2014.

## REFERENCES

- Buchner, Christian 2013. *Die Rolle von Tusovka in urbanen und jugendkulturellen Kontexten in Südwestsibirien: Analyse eines ethnographischen Fallbeispiels im Abgleich mit der internationalen sozial- und kulturwissenschaftlichen Literatur*. Master's thesis, Faculty of Philosophy, Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen.
- Chafetz, Morris E. 1976. *Why Drinking Can Be Good for You*. Briarcliff Manor, New York: Stein & Day.
- Chapman, Loring F. 1970. Experimental Induction of Hangover. *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, Supplement, Vol. 5, pp. 67–86.
- Earleywine, Mitchell 1993. Personality Risk for Alcoholism Covaries with Hangover Symptoms. *Addictive Behaviors*, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 415–420. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0306-4603\(93\)90058-H](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0306-4603(93)90058-H).
- Frone, Michael R. & Verster, Joris C. 2013. Alcohol Hangover and the Workplace: A Need for Research. *Current Drug Abuse Reviews*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 177–179. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2174/1874473706999140108154704>.
- Habeck, Joachim Otto 2014. *Das Kulturhaus in Russland: postsozialistische Kulturarbeit zwischen Ideal und Verwahrlosung*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
- Harburg, Ernest & Davis, Deborah & Cummings, Michael K. & Gunn, Robert 1981. Negative Affect, Alcohol Consumption and Hangover Symptoms among Normal Drinkers in a Small Community. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, Vol. 42, No. 11, pp. 998–1012. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15288/jsa.1981.42.998>.

- Harburg, Ernest & Gunn, Robert & Gleiberman, Lillian & DiFranceisco, Wayne & Schork, Anthony 1993. Psychosocial Factors, Alcohol Use, and Hangover Signs among Social Drinkers: A Reappraisal. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, Vol. 46, No. 5, pp. 413–422. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0895-4356\(93\)90017-U](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0895-4356(93)90017-U).
- Istomin, Kirill 2012. Once Again on the Problem of Alcoholism and Suicide among the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North: Can Attribution Style Be a Factor? *Sibirica: Interdisciplinary Journal of Siberian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 1–19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3167/sib.2012.110301>.
- Koester, David 2003. Drink, Drank, Drunk: A Social-Political Grammar of Russian Drinking Practices in a Colonial Context. *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 41–46. Available at <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/aeer/article/view/343>, last accessed on May 21, 2015.
- Kolosowa, Wlada 2012. *Russland to Go: Eine ungeübte Russin auf Reisen*. München: Goldmann.
- Levine, Harry G. 1993. Temperance Cultures: Alcohol as a Problem in Nordic and English-Speaking Cultures. In: M. Lader & G. Edwards & C. Drummond (eds.) *The Nature of Alcohol and Drug-Related Problems*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 16–36. Available at <http://www.hereinstead.com/Temperance-Cultures.pdf>, last accessed on June 2, 2015.
- Ling, Jonathan & Stephens, Richard & Heffernan, Thomas M. 2010. Cognitive and Psychomotor Performance during Alcohol Hangover. *Current Drug Abuse Reviews*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 80–87. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2174/1874473711003020080>.
- McKinney, Adele & Coyle, Kieran 2004. Next Day Effects of a Normal Night's Drinking on Memory and Psychomotor Performance. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, Vol. 39, No. 6, pp. 509–513. doi:10.1093/alcalc/agh099.
- Nemtsov, Alexandr 2011. *A Contemporary History of Alcohol in Russia*. Huddinge: Södertörns högskola.
- Newlin, David B. & Pretorius, Mary Beth 1990. Sons of Alcoholics Report Greater Hangover Symptoms Than Sons of Nonalcoholics: A Pilot Study. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, Vol. 14, No. 5, pp. 713–716. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1530-0277.1990.tb01231.x>.
- Nolte, Frank 2007. "Sucht": zur Geschichte einer Idee. In: B. Dollinger & H. Schmidt-Semisch (eds.) *Sozialwissenschaftliche Suchtforschung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 47–58.
- Oelschlaegel, Anett C. 2014. Plural World Interpretations: The Case of the Tyvans of South Siberia. *ANTHROPOS*, Vol. 109, No. 2, pp. 551–566.
- Paulsen, Frank M. 1961. A Hair of the Dog and Some Other Hangover Cures from Popular Tradition. *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 74, No. 292, pp. 152–168. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/537784>.
- Penning, Renske & Nuland, Merel van & Fliervoet, Lies A.L. & Olivier, Berend & Verster, Joris C. 2010. The Pathology of Alcohol Hangover. *Current Drug Abuse Reviews*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 68–75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2174/1874473711003020068>.
- Penning, Renske & McKinney, Adele & Verster, Joris C. 2012. Cognitive Aspects: Alcohol Hangover Symptoms and Their Contribution to the Overall Hangover Severity.

- Alcohol and Alcoholism*, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 248–252. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/alcal/ags029>.
- Pesmen, Dale 2000. *Russia and Soul: An Exploration*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Rohsenow, Damaris J. & Howland, Jonathan & Minsky, Sara J. & Greece, Jacey & Almeida, Alissa & Roehrs, Timothy A. 2007. The Acute Hangover Scale: A Measure of Immediate Hangover Symptoms. *Addictive Behaviors*, Vol. 32, No. 6, pp. 1314–1320. doi: 10.1016/j.addbeh.2006.10.001.
- Rohsenow, Damaris J. & Howland, Jonathan 2010. The Role of Beverage Congeners in Hangover and Other Residual Effects of Alcohol Intoxication: A Review. *Current Drug Abuse Reviews*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 76–79. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2174/1874473711003020076>.
- Sántha, István & Safonova, Tatiana 2011. *Pokazukha* in the House of Culture: The Pattern of Behavior in Kurumkan, Eastern Buriatia. In: Brian Donahoe & Joachim Otto Habeck (eds.) *Reconstructing the House of Culture: Community, Self, and the Makings of Culture in Russia and Beyond*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 75–96.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang 1990. *Das Paradies, der Geschmack und die Vernunft: Eine Geschichte der Genussmittel*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Span, Sherry A. & Earleywine, Mitchell 1999. Familial Risk for Alcoholism and Hangover Symptoms. *Addictive Behaviors*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 121–125. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0306-4603\(98\)00002-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0306-4603(98)00002-1).
- Spode, Hasso 1993. *Die Macht der Trunkenheit: Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte des Alkohols in Deutschland*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Stammler-Grossmann, Anna 2013. 'Alcoholity': Images, Values, and Control. "Drinking and driving is so much fun": Arctic workshop of the University of Tartu, May 31–June 1. Conference presentation.
- Steinmüller, Hans 2010. Communities of Complicity: Notes on State Formation and Local Sociality in Rural China. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 539–549. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01271.x>.
- Stephens, Richard & Ling, Jonathan & Heffernan, Thomas M. & Heather, Nick & Jones, Kate 2008. A Review of the Literature on the Cognitive Effects of Alcohol Hangover. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 163–170. doi: 10.1093/alcal/agm160.
- Swift, Robert & Davidson, Dena 1998. Alcohol Hangover: Mechanisms and Mediators. *Alcohol Health & Research World*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 54–60. Available at <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh22-1/54-60.pdf>, last accessed on June 2, 2015.
- Treiber, Hubert 1999. Zur Genese des Askesekonzepts bei Max Weber. *Saeculum: Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte*, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp. 247–289. doi: 10.7788/saeculum.1999.50.2.247.
- Verster, Joris C. 2008. The Alcohol Hangover: A Puzzling Phenomenon. *Alcohol & Alcoholism*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 124–126. doi:10.1093/alcal/agm163.
- Weber, Max 1958 [1930]. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Transl. by Talcott Parsons, with a foreword by R.H. Tawney. New York: Scribner.

Wiese, Jeffrey G. & Shlipak, Michael G. & Browner, Warren S. 2000. The Alcohol Hangover. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, Vol. 132, No. 11, pp. 897–902. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7326/0003-4819-132-11-200006060-00008>.

## MONOLINGUAL AND BILINGUAL PRACTICES: REVERSING POWER RELATIONS DURING A FESTIVITY IN PONDALA

*Laura Siragusa*

**Abstract:** This paper aims to demonstrate how people can shift prevailing power relations when engaging in distinct bilingual practices, especially in convivial settings in a remote, yet familiar to the speakers, rural environment. My paper is based on extensive fieldwork conducted among Veps, a Finno-Ugric population, traditionally living in rural settlements in north-western Russia. Most elderly Vepsian villagers are bilingual and can speak Vepsian, their heritage language, as well as Russian. In their daily bilingual practices, they tend to conform to the overarching language ecology and to employ Vepsian and/or Russian, depending on the dominant forces (including language ideologies) present at the time of speech. This often means speaking Russian in the presence of Russian-only speakers and in more institutional settings. Such practices tend to match ideologies and language behaviours which already emerged during the Tsarist era and Soviet times. However, by introducing a vignette situated in Pondala, a Vepsian village in Vologda Oblast, I show how Veps can reverse uneven relations of power once the ordinary social dynamics are shaken. This paper finds its argumentation on three key concepts: language ecology, and power and agency in the heritage language.

**Keywords:** agency, bilingual and monolingual practices, convivial settings, language ecology and power, Vepsian heritage language

### INTRODUCTION: VEPSIAN *HERITAGE LANGUAGE* AND LANGUAGE ECOLOGY

The day started a little differently from the ones I had already spent in Pondala, a Vepsian village of 36 permanent residents, mostly over 60 years old, in the Babaevo district of Vologda Oblast (see Figs. 1 & 2). By the time I woke up, Nadezhda Pavlovna, the director of the local *Dom Kultury* (Rus. 'House of Culture'), with whom I was staying, had already warmed up the wooden stove, fed the dogs and chickens and made a few trips back and forth to the House of Culture.<sup>1</sup> We were going to celebrate *Den Pozhilykh Liudei* (Rus. 'Day of the Elderly') on that day, October 1, 2013. And Nadezhda Pavlovna was responsible

for the cultural activities. I found her standing next to the window rehearsing the sequence of the planned activities. She asked me where she could find the CDs for the music since they had gone missing from the House of Culture. She later found out that a neighbour had taken and burned them on to his faulty computer; thus, he had damaged the quality of the sound. There would be no music during the festivity! “What kind of *prazdnik* (Rus. ‘holiday, festivity’) is it if people cannot dance?” she asked out loud as if to herself.<sup>2</sup> She then swore in Russian in her rage for which she later apologised. Using bad language was very unusual for Nadezhda Pavlovna since she had demonstrated to generally avoid engaging in conflictual verbal behaviours. The other villagers also stressed how important it was to use a positive vocabulary, not to upset and/or offend anyone verbally. But that was an exceptional day, I soon discovered – a convivial day when people were allowed to turn the more usual order of things upside down, also in regard to verbal practices.



**Figure 1.** *Pondala, a Vepsian village in the Babaevo District of Vologda Oblast, Russia.*  
*Photograph by Laura Siragusa 2013.*

Just like Nadezhda Pavlovna, the other villagers in Pondala are bilingual as they master their *heritage language*, Vepsian, as well as Russian. Heritage language can be translated as *ičemoi kel'* in Vepsian, which literally means *own language*. I have deliberately chosen not to translate this Vepsian phrase as 'mother tongue' or 'native language' and, instead, to adopt the phrase *heritage language* in English. Indeed, my choice hints at a political discourse on heritage, which cannot be dismissed when dealing with a minority language, such as Vepsian (Strogalshchikova 2008). Vepsian is traditionally spoken among Veps in rural settlements of the Republic of Karelia, Leningrad and Vologda Oblasts in north-western Russia (Grünthal 2011; Puura et al. 2013). The Vepsian language comprises three distinct dialects (northern, central, and southern) (Zaiceva 1995). The northern-speaking Veps, also referred to as Veps of Lake Onega, live either in Petrozavodsk or in villages along the south-western shores of Lake Onega, in the Republic of Karelia (see Fig. 2). Central Vepsian speakers are based in both Leningrad and Vologda Oblasts. Their dialect can be divided into central-eastern and western Vepsian, such as the one spoken in Pondala. Southern Vepsian is spoken in the Boksitogorsk province of Leningrad Oblast. The Vepsian language has a long-standing oral tradition and only in the 1920s–30s during *korenizatsiya* (Rus. 'indigenisation'), a group of scholars from Leningrad Oblast created a standard form and introduced it in the education system (Kettunen & Siro 1935; Salminen 2009; Setälä et al. 1951; Strogalshchikova 2008). In 1937, however, Vepsian was abruptly forbidden in the public domain and only in the late 1980s a group of activists from the Republic of Karelia took on the duty to revitalise it by creating a new standard form and promoting it for publishing and educational purposes (Puura et al. 2013; Strogalshchikova 2008). Such activities provided several results: one of those was positioning Vepsian politically. In 2000, Vepsian obtained the status of national language (alongside Karelian), while Russian remained the official state language, according to the Languages in the Republic of Karelia Act (Strogalshchikova 2004). In the same year, Veps gained the status of *minority indigenous peoples* of the Russian Federation, which also granted them the status of *minority indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East* in 2006 (Strogalshchikova 2008: 23).

Beside this reason, ongoing debates on the meaning of *heritage* have pushed me towards choosing the phrase *heritage language* when translating *ičemoi kel'*. In this paper, Vepsian heritage language refers to communicative and experiential practices that find their origin in the past, and also to those practices that are constructed today in the engagement with the present language ecology; hence, it focuses on its dynamicity. This choice matches the study made by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) and Smith and Akagawa (2009), who appreciate

heritage not as something 'lost and found, stolen and reclaimed', but rather as 'something new in the present which has recourse to the past' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 149). This way the phrase *heritage language* encompasses both the oral communicative practices prevalent among Vepsian elderly villagers, and the new domains of Vepsian mostly used among the urban Vepsian youth (those in their late twenties / early thirties). Even though I will not focus on the latter aspect of language use, it is worth mentioning that the Vepsian youth employs Vepsian standard form often for written purposes, especially in Petrozavodsk; hence, they contribute to the creation of new domains.

Last, my choice to employ the phrase *heritage language* closely links to the Russian phrase *rodnoy yazyk* (lit. *own, native language*) also used among bilingual Veps in reference to Vepsian, where *rodnoy* has its root in the word *rod* (Rus. 'family, kin, clan'). *Rod* is also found in such words as *rodstvennik* (Rus. 'relative, kinsman'), *narod* (Rus. 'people, nation, folk'), *priroda* (Rus. 'nature') (Paxson 2005: 59). And in this sense the use of the phrase *heritage language* adequately summarises the perception that many Veps (especially elderly villagers) displayed towards their mother tongue, i.e., as a way to relate and reach out to the surrounding rural environment, its human and non-human beings.

This paper explores bilingual practices in the Vepsian heritage language and Russian with reference to uneven relations of power. Maintaining that Veps engage in specific bilingual communicative practices in accordance with the dominant forces in which they find themselves (e.g. language ecology), I show how they also demonstrate agency and retain power by overturning the more ordinary *status quo* during convivial events, such as the Day of the Elderly in Pondala. Such festivities instigate untypical language practices where people may reveal attitudes of dissent and reversion of power hierarchy through their bilingual skills. When employing the phrase *language ecology*, I refer to contemporary ideas of interaction and socialisation with the world through oral (but also written) practices (Garner 2004; Mühlhäusler 1996; 2000). I put 'written' in brackets on purpose since this practice is not at the centre of my present discussion and, henceforth, I will not pursue it. More specifically, Garner (2004: 36) defines it as a 'holistic, dynamic, interactive, situated' phenomenon. This implies that people speak in accordance or discordance with the dominant forces (including language ideologies) present in one place at a specific time. In other words, the speakers negotiate their relations, sometimes manifesting to retain more agency and gaining social power through their speech acts. And I borrow the definition of *agency* from Ahearn (2001: 112), in which 'agency refers to the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act', particularly focusing on bilingual behaviours as strategies of inclusion and exclusion, and inversion of socially accepted power relations. Veps have demonstrated to try and avoid conflict in

their speech acts also in order to maintain the fragile socio-political balance in which they find themselves; yet, they might drop such speech strategies when ordinary life is subverted, as is the case of the festivity in PONDALA. The paper is structured in such a manner: stemming from a historical summary of Vepso-Russian relations, I will focus on the power and agency of bilingual practices with reference to language ideologies developed in cities and villages. Thus, I will present the festivity in PONDALA, linked to a discourse around power and agency in language.



**Figure 2.** Map of the territory with Vepsian settlements (striped sections), adapted from Mullonen (2012). PONDALA is indicated in the centre of the map.

## VEPSO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN HISTORY

In order to better appreciate how power relations between Veps and Russians are intertwined with contemporary social practices, including language use, I will provide a brief historical synopsis for this north-western Russian territory. When making reference to Russians, I do not aim to reinforce ideas of ethnic or bounded groups, as per the Soviet model, which went as far as believing that such boundedness could be observed, studied, and enclosed in categories, often based on biological assumptions (King 2011; Slezkine 1994). Mixed marriage and movement within the USSR contributed to breaking down some of these constructed boundaries; so, when making reference to Russians, I am alluding to those who claim Russian nationality and whose heritage language is Russian, and also to those who represent political power and with whom Vepsian activists and villagers have difficult relations. The latter often live in urban settings and cover administrative and political roles. In this section I aim to contextualise uneven relations of power, given the rise of specific ideologies already in the past, and to show how those are strictly convoluted in contemporary everyday social practices. Despite recognising the violence of some historical events and how these might have affected Veps, in this paper I also allow and do not disregard agency on behalf of the speakers when negotiating their speech acts; hence, I do not hint at these historical events as a cause-and-effect and one-way vector linearity, but more as a display of complex relations which existed in the past and still continue in the present.

According to the available historical documentation, Veps have never retained political power in this north-western territory of Russia. On the contrary, they have been split under more than one political administration since the Tsarist time, despite living in a rather compact territory. This territory used to be even more compact. Indeed, in the fourteenth century the area covered by Vepsian settlements enclosed a larger territory, reaching Lake Beloye in the south, Lake Ladoga in the west, Lake Vygozero in the north, and Lake Lacha in the east (Mullonen 2012) (see Fig. 2). After several conflicts between Sweden and Russia in the sixteenth century, the Vepsian traditional territory began to demean (Kolesov et al. 2007). In 1617, with the peace of Stolbovo, the Swedes obtained the land comprising the Karelian Isthmus and northern Ladoga, where in 1632 they founded the city of Sortavala (*ibid.*) (see Fig. 2). In response, Russians built a fortress on the eastern shore of Lake Ladoga and founded the city of Olonets (see Fig. 2). The Vepsian population was then split into two administrations: part of Veps went under the Novgorod administration, part under Olonets.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many migrants reached this north-western territory, since timber, iron, and mining industries had devel-

oped here. Such a huge and sudden movement of people caused a lack of land, which forced many to migrate elsewhere (Strogalshchikova 2008). Among those, two Vepsian colonies left north-western Russia and reached the *guberniya* of Irkutsk in 1911–1913, and a third colony arrived there in 1927–1928, supported by the migration policy that was in place at the time (Strogalshchikova 2008). It appears that throughout the period of Tsarist rule, the political authorities chose not to take an active role in fulfilling the Vepsian needs. Immediately after the October Revolution, the Soviet authorities took a provisional change of direction in the policies for indigenous peoples. However, the actual motivations behind such decisions appeared to be driven primarily by centralising ideologies. Indeed, as soon as the Soviets came to power, they re-organised the territory, dividing it into a hierarchy of regions (Kurs 2001; Smith 1999). Nonetheless, a unified Vepsian land was never established and Veps remained administratively split (Kurs 2001: 72). Yet, the census carried out in 1926 showed a growth in the number of those who claimed Vepsian nationality (32,773 in total compared to 25,400 in 1897), the majority of whom (24,186) lived in Leningrad Oblast (Strogalshchikova 2008). At the time 8,587 Veps lived in the Karelian territory. Such an increase in the number of Veps was possibly due to the positive effects of *korenizatsiya* and the attempts to promote Vepsian standard form also in the education system.

However, this favourable period soon came to an end. The political programme to promote the national cultures and languages was not sustainable and did not always match the general objectives of the Soviet Union. So, the mid-30s witnessed a sudden change in policies. The immediate result of this was seen in the educational measures taken by the regional authorities. While Vepsian was the language of instruction in the Vepsian villages of Leningrad Oblast until 1936, Finnish was adopted in the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (KASSR). However, Vepsian became the language of instruction for Veps in the KASSR in 1937, while it was abolished in the Vepsian villages of Leningrad Oblast, where Veps had been deprived of their national status and were not included in the list of nationalities in the 1939 census (Kurs 2001: 73). These continuous political changes had an impact on the population, and also on their language use, as many elderly villagers still recollect.

The initial Soviet project aimed to overcome backwardness and elevate the non-Russians to a higher cultural level by providing literacy to all the nationalities. Indeed, such derogatory attitudes towards indigenous languages and cultures found their roots in previous missionaries' activities. The Five-Year Plan and the *Soviet prescriptions* for development (Anderson 1991: 13) did not succeed and their legacy is still visible in the attitude that many Russians and non-Russians bear towards the minority languages and cultures. It comes as

no surprise that using Russian words instead of Vepsian synonyms became more prestigious among the villagers; some dropped Vepsian once and for all, especially in those villages closer to urban centres where ideologies of progress and civilisation were more strongly felt (author's field notes 2010, 2013).<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of the Five-Year Plan not only left Veps in a state of underdevelopment compared to Russians, but it also changed entirely the structure of the villages, the lifestyle of the villagers, their habits and traditions. Stalin introduced into the village life the *kolkhozy*, or co-operative farm organisations, and the *sovkhozy*, or state farms, which all peasants had to join. Those who tried to oppose the collectivisation were mostly identified as *kulaks*, or rich land-owners, and were either deported or killed (Shearer 2006; author's field notes 2010, 2013). The animals that Veps highly regarded as a food provision and part of their *sebr* (Veps 'community') also began to fade away. Besides the social transformations that took place within the villages, changes also began to occur in the composition of the population in urban as well as rural settings. Movements from the village to the city started taking place more and more regularly after the October Revolution (Leasure & Lewis 1967). Between 1926 and 1937, official figures show that the urban population of the Soviet Union doubled, from about 26 to 52 million (Shearer 2006: 200). In Karelia, the urban population rose by 325,000 (Conquest 1986). The growth in the population of Karelia was also due to the construction of the railroad, which was built from St. Petersburg to Murmansk through Karelia (Laine 2001). This enabled many loggers to move north for work, especially from Belorussia and Ukraine (Yegorov 2006). Besides the northwards movement within the USSR, immigration also consisted of some 25,000 Finns moving into the Soviet Union from Canada, the United States and Finland between the 1920s and 1930s (Gelb 1993). Karelia had become a multi-ethnic republic with a population composed of indigenous groups (such as Veps, Karelians and Russians) and immigrants (such as Finns, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Tatars) (Kostiainen 1996). This clearly facilitated communication in Russian, especially in the city, where more people came together.

In the mid-1930s, Stalin began to mistrust certain ethnic groups as he suspected they could have loyalties outside of the Soviet Union (Shearer 2006: 211). Among those groups were Germans, Poles, Finns, and the Asian groups of the Far East (Shearer 2006). Consequently, Finns and other ethnic groups closely associated with them became the primary target of Stalin's repressions and of the great mass purges of 1937–1938, including Veps (ibid.: 212). By the end of the 1930s, Veps had lost their status as an ethnic minority in Leningrad Oblast (Klementyev et al. 2007: 13). The census carried out in 1939, right after Stalin's mass purges, presented the following situation: the Vepsian popula-

tion had dropped from 24,186 in 1926 to 15,571 in Leningrad Oblast, while the number had risen from 8,587 to 9,388 in Karelia. However, it should be noted that the Vepsian rural population had dropped both in Karelia and Leningrad Oblast, that is from 8,474 to 6,504 and from 24,045 to 14,424, respectively (Strogalshchikova 2008).

Vepsian village life was further revolutionised by the human losses during the Winter War and World War II, and by the huge migration that took place at the end of the conflict. At least 400,000 people, among whom were Karelians, Veps and Finns, moved to Finland (Mead 1952: 52). Between 1939 and 1959, the Vepsian population dropped by about a quarter (Strogalshchikova 2008). The land had been ravaged and devastated. Many men had either left or died. For many years, women outnumbered men in the Vepsian villages and this also disrupted the traditional village lifestyle. This phenomenon was, in fact, typical across the USSR. Moreover, the assimilation policies that followed Stalin's death continued to compromise life in the villages. The policy promoted by Khrushchev between the late 1950s and mid-1960s represented one of the main agents that determined Vepsian movement from the villages to (mainly) the cities. At the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961, Khrushchev expressed the need to redistribute manpower (Grandstaff 1980: 21). The policy of *liquidation of the villages without prospects* was then launched (Yegorov 2006). This policy classified the villages into two categories, those *with prospects* and those *without prospects*. The latter stopped being provided with any investment in public services and infrastructure (Kurs 2001: 73). Since its promotion, this policy affected the traditional lifestyle of Veps (and other village dwellers in Russia) irreversibly (Strogalshchikova 2008). It caused migration mainly to urban areas and made the remaining villages larger and further apart from each other. Indeed, during my fieldwork, some villagers also explained how they moved with their families to larger villages, in which the Vepsian dialect was different, and how they were ridiculed for this (author's field notes 2010, 2013). Given such language ecology and language ideologies, some then decided to drop speaking Vepsian, embracing mainly Russian. The concept of *language ideologies* follows the paradigm by Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) and Schieffelin et al. (1998), i.e., they comprise belief systems shared by members of a group and these extend to language. Besides, the number of mixed marriages grew and this compelled many to stop speaking their heritage language in favour either of Russian or of the heritage language of their spouse (Kaiser 1994). This was particularly the case in the cities where ideas of civilisation also contributed to the language choice made by the speaker, since Vepsian was still considered backward as opposed to Russian. Indeed, these verbal practices reflect the overarching language ecology, comprising ideologies, where languages are classified

in line with specific social hierarchies. Such a situation also hints at identity issues as some of the Soviet citizens began identifying themselves as Russians, despite their Vepsian (or other) origin (author's field notes 2010, 2013).

As previously mentioned, in this section I did not focus on the cause-effect relationship between the present-day situation and these historical and often violent events. Instead, by presenting this historical synopsis I aim to show how relations between Veps and Russians have often been tense and difficult. These convoluted relations continue today and they are often intertwined with the ideologies and language behaviours that feed such an uneven playing field. Veps, or those who claim Vepsian nationality, very carefully employ their heritage language in the presence of non-speakers of Vepsian. And it could be argued that this reflects carefulness and protection from unequal power relations that years of violent (although, sometimes a more subtle violence) policies have reinforced.<sup>4</sup> But it also alludes to a Vepsian localised rural epistemology, according to which demonstrating respect towards the environment, its human and non-human inhabitants, guarantees protection and safety for the villagers. It is no surprise that the reversion of such widespread hierarchies and power relations occurs in places where Veps feel safer, in the more remote villages – those surrounded by *the woods*.

### ***Living in the woods***

Before elaborating on the social symbolism and practices convoluted in the phrase *living in the woods*, it is important to clarify the concept of power in relation to language. Indeed, in this paper its conceptualisation is at least twofold, depending on the language ideologies I am referring to, and the overarching language ecology. In the section above, power is construed as a political instrument used by a few to gain control over others, reinforcing inequality and altering – sometimes irreversibly – people's everyday life and, consequently, their communicative practices (Blommaert 2010; Philips 1999). In other words, language decline is perceived as an indicator of social inequalities, while language maintenance enacts the efforts to reverse those inequalities, by giving power to the underprivileged. In this section, power gains a different colouring, which Guss (1986) and Cruikshank (2005) also make reference to in their work. These scholars claim that the oral form of the language carries power for some indigenous groups. That is, the groups described by Guss and Cruikshank appreciate that verbal practices might influence the course of life events and exercise power in the spoken word when engaging with the world.

These two descriptions of power in language use can overlap, as appears to be the case of the Vepsian ways of speaking. Indeed, my work with Veps led me to interpret their *careful* verbal practices as a way to prevent complications and conflicts, and to guarantee social agreement both when engaging with Russian speakers and when dwelling in the woods. Overall, they appreciate that spoken language has the power to influence life events for better or for worse, so it needs to be used carefully. Veps are often depicted as *ostorozhnye lyudi* (Rus. ‘careful people’), and they also tend to describe themselves this way. And this description appears to encompass also their bilingual practices. Demonstrating carefulness conveys avoiding verbal conflict and maintaining an equal condition for everyone, in which nobody stands out against the other beings. Once these conditions are guaranteed, Veps are ready to be open and share experiences of unity and social cohesion. If these conditions are not met, however, they might shut any channel of exchange and communication, and sometimes use verbal practices against those who, voluntarily or not, caused harm.

Besides being depicted as *careful people*, Veps are also described as those *living in the woods*, a connotation to which I want to draw particular attention with reference to verbal practices. The phrase *living in the woods* represents a double-edged sword, since for the urbanites this often means being far from *civilisation* and *modernity*, but it also means safety and being well-fed for many villagers. It appears that early-Soviet ideas of modernity still permeate some of the ways that the city dwellers comprehend life and its evolutionary stages. Instead, the elderly villagers tend not to view the woods as indicating a lack of civilisation. They tend to understand the forest as a place rich in produce (such as berries and mushrooms), a protection from external forces, where the Vepsian language serves to avoid conflicts and to maintain relations with the other, human and non-human, inhabitants of this territory (author’s field notes 2010, 2013).

The city-dwellers of this north-western territory of Russia often appraise places as civilised or not civilised, which echoes the Soviet discourse on evolution and backwardness. Civilisation can comprise a number of domains and metaphors, most often linked to the family *khozyaystvo* (Rus. ‘housekeeping and farming’). For example, people who live in brick flats or houses are considered more civilised than those living in wooden flats or houses. Electric cookers and stoves are regarded as more civilised appliances than those functioning with gas. Houses or flats with a bathroom and a toilet connected to the sewage system are also deemed as civilised. All such civilised appliances and technologies are often missing in the villages, *in the woods*, while they are available in urban areas. *Living in the woods* has become synonymous with *away from civilisation* and loaded with negative connotations among this north-western multi-ethnic

population. Paxson (2005: 128) also acknowledges how for Russians the woods often represent a place of both ‘munificence and malevolence’, due to the abundance of fruits and general products, but also as they may disorientate those entering. In any case, both qualities are *wild* for Russians.

Urban dwellers have adopted a complex attitude towards those living in the villages. On the one hand, they look at them as not civilised enough and put them in a lower rank in social hierarchy. On the other hand, they perceive the relational power that the villagers have established with this rural environment and often demonstrate fear of it. Entering a foreign land means putting oneself at risk. The forest, for example, is a place of danger and venturing into it can cause trouble and even lead to death, as one is exposed to foreign forces (Paxson 2005; author’s field notes 2010). The Russian fear of the other and suspicion of what is foreign forces Veps to speak Russian in the presence of Russian speakers. Indeed, Veps often claim to adopt Russian in the presence of only-Russian-speaking interlocutors. This is also visible in public places such as the shops and post office in the villages. They often justify their language choice as a matter of good manners and politeness; but, in fact, this is also a means of avoiding conflicts and securing safety. By speaking Russian, Veps reassure Russian-only speakers that nothing bad is being said about them. In other words, the person to whom they speak dictates their language choice. Politeness is not the only reason for taking on such a bilingual strategy as people are continually in the process of building their practices (language practices, too). And they can demonstrate agency in multiple ways, even when apparently submissive, since for some protecting themselves and their co-villagers is more important than preserving or imposing their heritage language.

Besides, embracing Russian ways of speaking may mirror those practices when Russian was forced on to people. The majority of elderly Vepsian villagers use Russian words when describing their work and school years, such as *kolkhozy* (Rus. ‘collective farms’), *prepodavat’* (Rus. ‘to teach’), *predmet* (Rus. ‘subject’), *urok* (Rus. ‘class’) and *ekzamen* (Rus. ‘examination’). They also tend to provide numbers in Russian. These words come from memories of the time when Vepsian was prohibited and Russian words were adopted to cover most domains of life outside the domestic environment. Referencing back to these days, therefore, triggers the use of Russian. Similarly, memories that depict conversations with Russian-monolingual individuals also prompt the use of Russian. As it were, Veps appear to continuously negotiate their speech acts with the dominant ecology, constituted by human and non-human beings, memories, ideologies, and urban as well as rural settings.

The more remotely from urban influence the village is located, the more one is likely to hear mainly Vepsian heritage language. This is primarily the case

with the villages I visited in Vologda and Leningrad Oblasts. Veps often believe that a respectful relation with the forest can guarantee them safety, and this is often reflected in their ways of speaking. Monolingual Vepsian practices help Veps maintain a dialogue with the animals and the spirits dwelling in this territory, also because such a dialogue may prevent the occurrence of conflicts and difficulties. Indeed, the relations with the animals display both closeness and care. On the one hand, elderly villagers perceive the animals as part of their *sebr* (Veps ‘community’). Hence, they believe that the animals can speak their heritage language. *Kaži miaugub* (Veps ‘the cat mews’), *kägi kukkub* (Veps ‘the cuckoo cuckoos’), *lambaz bäläidab* (Veps ‘the sheep bleats’), *kana kotkotab* (Veps ‘the chicken clucks’) are some examples of the use of onomatopoeia in Vepsian when reproducing the sounds made by animals. If the animals come from outside the *külä*, then the villagers exhibit the need to speak Russian to them.<sup>5</sup> Irina Yuryevna owns several goats in Pondala and she once explained how she had to speak Russian to them since they were not born in the village. She clarified, “Or else they would not understand.” On the other hand, the villagers watch carefully the behaviour of the animals as this might convey important messages which are not necessarily auspicious. The messages not only concern seasonal instances, but also future predictions. For example, Veps traditionally believe that when the hawk cries, the rain will come or that when the cuckoo calls, the barley will not grow (Vinokurova 2006: 70, 90). It will grow when the cuckoo stops calling (ibid.: 90). It is also said that when the raven caws, somebody will die, and the same goes for the night owl (ibid.: 76, 84). Some of these interactions still perpetuate today, and the villagers displayed concern when the messages were interpreted as unwelcome and bothersome (author’s field notes 2010, 2013).

Monolingual practices also allow Veps to engage with the *hengid* (Veps ‘spirits’) that inhabit the *külä*, although some villagers might not reveal their belief in them right away (author’s field notes 2010, 2013). This was not the case in Pondala and in other Vepsian villages in Leningrad Oblast, where the elderly villagers closely monitored my language behaviour, and often suggested that I use language carefully and positively so as not to upset the spirits. Indeed, I was often advised to refrain from swearing in the *kül’bet* (Veps ‘sauna’), to always thank the forest spirits upon departure, not to say that I would be quick in some activities as the speed and outcome of my actions did not depend on me, but on the host of the environment in which I found myself. Some of those spirits are *mecaizand* (spirit of the forest), *vedenižand* (spirit of the water), *pertinižand* (spirit of the house and land where the house is built), *kül’betižand* (spirit of the *kül’bet*, sauna) where the Vepsian word *ižand* means the head of the house, the host. Some Vepsian villagers, called *tedai* (literally, ‘the one who

knows the way’) or *noid* (Veps ‘sorcerer’) have learned from their predecessors of the ways to negotiate with the spirits. They can perform Vepsian *zagovory* (Rus. ‘charms, enchantments’) in order to reach a compromise with the spirits and find lost cattle in the forests and swamps, decide where to build a house, how to settle disputes, etc. (author’s field notes 2013; Vinokurova 2006).<sup>6</sup>

Vepsian elderly villagers also claim to experience unity between the environment and themselves when employing their heritage language, and more specifically their dialect of origin. This enables them to react more spontaneously to life events and to feel closer to their emotions. As some claimed, they could ‘better express what they were feeling’, when speaking their dialect. This unity is also expressed in the coming together of speech acts and physical engagement. Communicative practices happen via spoken language as well as physical engagement (Bateson 1972; Hanks 1996; Ingold 2004), when dwelling in the forest, fishing, attending funerals, or visiting the deceased in the cemetery (author’s field notes 2010, 2013). In this sense, speaking the heritage language can function as a tool to attune to the environment and oneself. Yet, Veps are aware of the power embedded in their heritage language and know that the desired social agreement might crumble as soon as language is misused.

Indeed, monolingual Vepsian practices may not always open channels of communication, foster unity, and guarantee safety. In a few cases Veps warned me that they could turn their back to me and become vengeful in case I harmed them in one way or another. The villagers in Leningrad Oblast told me stories of how the local *noid* could engage in verbal enchantments in order to damage others (AKNTs; author’s field notes 2013). So, they suggested that I should be careful. When trust is not gained, these monolingual practices have the power to influence life events against those who caused harm. However, while the *noid* may engage in such verbal practices behind the curtains and not show him/herself out in the open, I witnessed how certain communication channels could be closed during festivities taking place in Pondala. The festive atmosphere, aggravated by abundant alcohol use, and protection from *the woods*, enabled Veps to bring to light some of the tensions they generally repress in favour of social agreement and safety.

## REVERSING POWER RELATIONS IN CONVIVIAL SETTINGS IN PONDALA

I will now return to the initial vignette and describe the event that took place on the Day of the Elderly in Pondala, with reference to power relations and bilingual verbal practices. Pondala is an example of a remote village, only partly

influenced by the rhetoric and practices widespread in the city. It is 25 km from the closest village (Kuya) and 60 km from the local administrative centre (Timoshino). The roads leading to Kuya and Timoshino are mostly surrounded by forests and swamps and the road is only partly paved, making it difficult to reach the village. Besides, public transport to Babaevo (i.e. the closest and biggest urban centre) runs only once a week – if it does! There is no mobile phone connection and only a few villagers have a landline. Some public phone boxes are scattered around the village, but they only function with a phone card that can be bought at the post office and is not always available. Vepsian activists and city dwellers often claim that the partial isolation has enabled Veps to maintain communication in their heritage language and safeguarded them from external, and possibly unfavourable, forces.

By midday a total of 15 people, mostly women, had gathered at the House of Culture from different parts of the village. Indeed, the overarching *külä*, Pondala, is divided into six sub-districts, separated by the River Ivoda and the forest. These are Kindaevo, Nikonovo Gora, Bereg, Sloboda, Aksyonovo and Turzhino. This year three visitors also attended the event. One of them was Ekaterina Ivanovna, a former resident of Pondala, who had moved to Narva, Estonia, during her youth. Ekaterina Ivanovna makes regular visits to her niece in Pondala. She understands Vepsian, and the longer she stays in the village, the more fluently she speaks it. Then there was Anastasia Yuryevna, a Russian friend of Maria Alekseyevna, who is a local Vepsian villager. Anastasia Yuryevna lives in Babaevo and often visits her friend in Pondala in the summer. This implies that all the other villagers not only have seen her before, but also know details of her private and personal life. Despite her frequent visits to Pondala, she does not speak Vepsian. Lastly, there was me – a researcher interested in Vepsian matters. During my stay in Pondala I engaged with almost every villager and spoke Vepsian as much as I could, employing Russian when I was particularly tired.

The festivities lasted all day long. Nadezhda Pavlovna had organised some activities to start the celebrations. As soon as we arrived, the attendees read some poems, performed some games, sang *chastushki*<sup>7</sup>, and awarded prizes that the local administration had granted. At this point and not surprisingly, all the guests performed in Russian, since it is the language associated with political and administrative matters. Then we all sat around the table and the initial formal tone of the event was abandoned. I sat at the right end of the table, next to a group of Vepsian village women (which I will not identify individually since they share a common social function for the purpose of this paper). I was also sitting opposite to Anastasia Yuryevna and Maria Alekseyevna. At the beginning of the event Anastasia Yuryevna and Maria Alekseyevna spoke Russian,

whereas the other women spoke Vepsian to one another. As the atmosphere became more convivial and alcohol was being consumed in large quantities, language dynamics and interaction changed rather drastically.

At first, drinking facilitated opening the channels of communication, but it also later hastened the closure. During the event, Anastasia Yuryevna consistently praised her friend Maria Alekseyevna for her cooking skills, often addressing her as “the best cook and nicest person in the village” (Fig. 3). In the beginning Maria Alekseyevna accepted the compliments silently, waving at her friend and indicating her to stop. When these compliments became persistent, Maria Alekseyevna told her friend that “she did not understand anything”, and turned her back to her, dropped her Russian language once and for all and continued speaking Vepsian to the other women. Veps often describe themselves as modest people and do not like to stand out in the crowd, neither for the better nor the worse. In fact, this appears to be a common behaviour also among Russian villagers as it secures a greater social cohesion (see also



**Figure 3.** *The Day of the Elderly in Pondala on October 1, 2013. All the villagers contributed to the event by bringing homemade cakes, sandwiches, salads, and drinks. Photograph by Laura Siragusa 2013.*

Olson & Adonyeva 2012: 234; Paxson 2005: 72–73). By accepting the compliments from Anastasia Yuryevna, Maria Alekseyevna would have put herself in a vulnerable position amongst her co-villagers. Hence, she not only refused to be referred to as the “best villager”, but she also refused to speak Russian, which the villagers generally perceived as an indicator of the world outside of the *külä*, and the world of political power, often dominated by Russians.

Anastasia Yuryevna had become embroiled in a hostile situation. This also emerged soon, through other bilingual language practices the villagers adopted. Indeed, the women who were sitting next to me began laughing rather openly at her, while speaking Vepsian among one another. They only spoke Russian to her when they decided to interfere with her private life which they did not consider exemplary. Ekaterina Ivanovna was sitting at the other end of the table and silently observed these verbal interactions. As a city dweller herself who had faced some integration difficulties in Narva, she could sympathise with Anastasia Yuryevna and her position as an outsider. Yet, complying with the other villagers, she suggested, “Nastia [Anastasia Yuryevna], you need to learn Vepsian. You have often visited the village, so it is time to learn the language! This will help you.” Indeed, the women did not employ such discriminating language practices with me as I had already shown my interest in the Vepsian language and culture. And many of the villagers appreciated it and made reference to how they had often corrected me and taught me to speak Vepsian, i.e. their dialect, *properly*.

I should also indicate that the villagers in Pondala tend not to drink heavily during the week, or when no particular celebration is taking place, in contrast to the dwellers of other villages in Leningrad Oblast which I visited during my fieldwork. I could not find any evidence in the connection between present-day drinking patterns, historical events, and the geographical distribution of Vepsian settlements. Vinokurova (1996), who has deeply investigated Vepsian traditional practices, has shown that northern Veps consumed a very limited amount of alcohol in the past. Northern Veps were not accustomed to brewing and/or drinking beer. They mostly consumed *kissel*, milk and turnip *kvas*.<sup>8</sup> Strong spirits were only consumed during festivities and Vinokurova (*ibid.*: 48) claims that, in fact, their presence was ‘mostly symbolic’. During festivities, the favourite drinks were *chay* (Rus. ‘tea’) (possibly, as a symbol of wealth), often enjoyed with a pie made with milk and/or *tvorog* (Rus. ‘cottage cheese’) (*ibid.*: 47). Overall, women rarely drank, unless they attended a wedding (*ibid.*: 48). Girls would refuse to dance with someone who was clearly drunk. Central western Veps used to drink also turnip *kvas* like northern Veps, which they made when they baked turnip cakes (Mullonen & Zaitseva 1969: 42). Milk and a third kind of *kvas* from *tvorog* were also among their customary drinks. Wine

used to be too expensive and they did not buy it (ibid.). Mullonen and Zaitseva (ibid.: 219) reported that central western Veps used to have similar drinking habits as those in Leningrad Oblast. They also brewed beer right before joining some kind of festivity. Veps in Pondala demonstrated to have maintained such a drinking pattern; that is, to be drinking spirits and alcohol mostly during convivial events.

It is not uncommon that people use abusive language during convivial and drinking events. Specific practices and behaviours are socially acceptable during recreational times (Gusfield 1987). Bakhtin (1984: 10) demonstrated how convivial events, such as the Carnival, “celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions”. Harvey (1991: 2) made similar considerations when observing language use in the Southern Peruvian Andes, and explained that generally “drunken speakers tend to be far less sensitive saving face than sober speakers, and their words are thus more likely to lead to insult or embarrassment”. Price (1975) also stressed how drinking helps them to release their inhibition and express themselves more freely, and I would add that it helps bring to the surface social and political tensions, language attitudes, ideologies and practices, which would otherwise remain in the shadows.

The vignette in Pondala reveals linguistic strategies adopted by bilingual speakers of Vepsian and Russian in a rather isolated Vepsian village, and their social symbolism. These strategies reflect language and social ideologies among Vepsian villagers which, otherwise, people disclose more subtly (if at all). For example, close Vepsian friends had often remarked on how they did not favour displays of grandeur which they considered to be spread “among Russians”. They disclosed that Veps were more modest and not “as loud” both in their ways of speaking and in their general ways of presenting themselves socially. They also regarded Vepsian women as less boisterous in their way of dressing and this was considered proper female behaviour. Yet, these observations were often done behind ‘closed doors’, on a personal level, secretly. Otherwise, Veps demonstrated to quietly accept and ‘tolerate’ (as some stressed) behavioural differences among the multi-ethnic territory in which they lived. These conceptual differences find expression in the oral use of the language in Vepsian rural territory, matching both traditional Vepsian epistemologies and long-established political tensions. Engaging in bilingual and/or monolingual practices can open or close channels of communication and experiences of *unity* with other human and non-human beings, and the environment, once the *status quo* is shaken. Hidden tensions and attitudes towards power (in this case symbolised by a Russian woman) came to the surface during the festivity in Pondala. The attendees revealed

language attitudes and verbal demonstrations of dissent against prevailing social norms which Veps rarely manifest in everyday life. This vignette exhibits a complex scenario in which tensions and power in the heritage language and *the woods* converge. The Vepsian villagers demonstrated how verbal practices in the heritage language and Russian are closely convoluted in exclusion and inclusion techniques and in reversing power relations.

The ideal social agreement that Veps look for when engaging with the spirits, human and non-human animals *in the woods*, and when engaging with non-Vepsian speakers, was openly dropped as soon as alcohol was consumed abundantly and they could support one another. The villagers demonstrated agency when they empowered themselves with the ability to manage relational channels through bilingual and monolingual speech acts. They not only allowed openness and unity with the world but also closure. Similarly, Billé et al. (2012) adopted the metaphor of a “slightly complicated door” when referring to geopolitical frontiers. Indeed, employing specific language strategies means that somebody is being discriminated against, or put aside, voluntarily or not, from certain social activities and experiences.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the desired social agreement, tensions and uneven power relations can suddenly become apparent via mono- and bilingual verbal practices. Among Veps, avoiding verbal conflict often guarantees safety. When engaging with humans and non-humans in traditional rural settlements, this often implies refraining from swearing, using positive language, being respectful and thankful for what is given by the land. When engaging with non-Vepsian speakers in north-western Russia, this might also imply embracing a monolingual (Russian) way of speaking. Dropping such soothing and reassuring oral practices may harm the population; thus, Veps prefer to either engage in conflictual verbal practices secretly or avoid them entirely. This continuous negotiation with the overarching language ecology, comprising rural and urban settings and prevailing metaphors and ideologies, reveals agency and power in verbal practices. This paper has shown how the thin balance upon which political and social tensions reside might break during convivial settings in a remote village of the Vologda Oblast.

The convivial event that took place in Pondala in October 2013 demonstrated a break from the ordinary *status quo*. The consumption of alcohol enabled Veps to restore a balance of power between different agencies. And manifesting power through the use of their heritage language called into question habitual lan-

guage interaction and dynamics which instead reinforce differences of political and social power. Therefore, social drinking can be read as a strategy to re-establish (or reverse) power relations thanks to its potential for liberating one from certain social rules. Such liberation also extends to oral language use. Yet, the village dwellers in Pondala seemed to accept this temporary suspension of ordinary life, as long as it was only temporary. This particularly referred to the use of alcohol. A few days after the convivial event at the House of Culture, the villagers shut themselves indoors in the evenings. This was a habit which they usually did not practice. Yet, a neighbour kept wandering around the village asking for booze, and they passed the message on to one another and decided to close their doors in the evening. In Pondala drinking in abundance initially opened the channels of communication, thereafter interrupting them on the verbal level, until it finally shut down any possible interaction.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Estonian Research Mobility Scheme grant (ERMOS120), the ERC Advanced Grant (Arctic Domus project No. 295458), by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (IUT34-32), and by the Finnish Academy (HuSArctic).

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I have decided to use pseudonyms in this article since I am later presenting a conflictual event and do not intend to expose any of the persons involved in the episode. For a matter of consistency, I use pseudonyms also where no conflict occurred. However, this decision does not comprise those who hold a public position, such as Nadezhda Pavlovna.
- <sup>2</sup> I translated this sentence and other excerpts in the article from Russian into English. I will indicate when otherwise.
- <sup>3</sup> My fieldwork with Veps extends to a few years. I began conducting research among Veps in 2009 and spent a whole year in this north-western territory of Russia. I returned for two months in the summer of 2011 to check my work together with Veps and continue my research. After completing my doctoral studies in 2012, I returned several times to Vepsian villages throughout 2013. In 2014, I mainly visited urban centres, as I was working in the archives of Petrozavodsk and St. Petersburg.
- <sup>4</sup> See Gramsci (1975) on how to obtain hegemony in society through a subtle process of force.

- <sup>5</sup> The forest, the lakes, the swamps, and the rivers are included in the Vepsian word *külä* (Veps ‘village’) (Mullonen 2005), which differs from the words *deriun* (central Vepsian dialect) and *posad* (northern Vepsian dialect), only indicating the village where there is a *pagast* (Veps ‘churchyard’).
- <sup>6</sup> I also found this information in the phonogram archives of the Institute of Linguistics, History and Literature at the Academy of Sciences in Petrozavodsk, in the Republic of Karelia (ANKTs).
- <sup>7</sup> *Chastushka* is an originally Russian rhyming folk poem that Veps also employ in Vepsian.
- <sup>8</sup> *Kissel* is a jelly-looking dessert, made from sweetened juice or milk and thickened with arrowroot or potato starch. *Kvas* is a fizzy drink made from fermented rye bread.

## MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

Fieldwork notes from 2010 and 2013 in possession of the author.

## ARCHIVAL SOURCES

AKNTs = Arkhiv Karel’skogo nauchnogo tsentra [Archive of the Karelian Scientific Centre]

## REFERENCES

- Ahearn, Laura M. 2001. Language and Agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 30, pp. 109–137. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.30.1.109>.
- Anderson, David G. 1991. Turning Hunters into Herders: A Critical Examination of Soviet Development Policy among the Evenki of Southeastern Siberia. *Arctic*, Vol. 44, No. 1, pp. 12–22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14430/arctic1513>.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Available at [http://monoskop.org/images/7/70/Bakhtin\\_Mikhail\\_Rabelais\\_and\\_His\\_World\\_1984.pdf](http://monoskop.org/images/7/70/Bakhtin_Mikhail_Rabelais_and_His_World_1984.pdf), last accessed on April 29, 2015.
- Bateson, Gregory 1972. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution and Epistemology*. Aylesbury: Intertext.
- Billé, Franck & Delaplace, Grégory & Humphrey, Caroline 2012. *Frontier Encounters: Knowledge and Practice at the Russian, Chinese and Mongolian Border*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Blommaert, Jan 2010. *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Conquest, Robert 1986. *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. London & Melbourne: Hutchinson.

- Cruikshank, Julie 2005. *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Garner, Mark 2004. *Language: An Ecological View*. Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Gelb, Michael 1993. 'Karelian Fever': The Finnish Immigrant Community during Stalin's Purges. *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 6, pp. 1091–1116. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09668139308412142>.
- Gramsci, Antonio 1975. *Quaderni del carcere*. Torino: Giulio Einaudi.
- Grandstaff, Peter J. 1980. *Interregional Migration in the U.S.S.R.: Economic Aspects, 1959–1970*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Grünthal, Riho 2011. Population Decline and the Erosion of the Veps Language Community. In: R. Grünthal & M. Kovác (eds.) *Ethnic and Linguistic Context of Identity: Finno-Ugric Minorities*. Uralica Helsinkiensia 5. Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura, pp. 267–293. Available at <http://www.sgr.fi/uh/uh5.pdf>, last accessed on April 29, 2015.
- Gusfield, Joseph 1987. Passage to Play: Rituals of Drinking Time in American Society. In: Mary Douglas (ed.) *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 73–90.
- Guss, David 1986. Keeping It Oral: A Yekuana Ethnology. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 413–429. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/ae.1986.13.3.02a00010>.
- Hanks, William 1996. *Language and Communicative Practices*. Boulder & Oxford: Westview Press.
- Harvey, Penny 1991. Drunken Speech and the Construction of Meaning: Bilingual Competence in the Southern Peruvian Andes. *Language in Society*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 1–36. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500016055>.
- Ingold, Tim 2004. Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived through the Feet. *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 315–340. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1359183504046896>.
- Kaiser, Robert J. 1994. *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kettunen, Lauri & Siro, Paavo 1935. *Näytteitä Vepsän Murteista*. [Samples of Vepsian Dialects.] Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura.
- King, Alexander D. 2011. *Living with Koryak Traditions: Playing with Culture in Siberia*. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara 1998. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley & Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.
- Klementyev et al. 2007 = Klement'ev, Evgenii & Kozhanov, Aleksandr & Strogal'shchikova, Zinaida. *Vepsy: modeli etnicheskoi mobilizatsii. Sbornik materialov i dokumentov*. [Veps: Models of Ethnic Mobilisation.] Petrozavodsk: Karel'skii nauchnyi tsentr RAN.
- Kolesov, Aleksandr et al. (eds.) 2007. *Karelia: Guidebook*. Petrozavodsk: Scandinavia.
- Kostiainen, Auvo 1996. Genocide in Soviet Karelia: Stalin's Terror and the Finns of Soviet Karelia. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 331–342. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03468759608579334>.
- Kurs, Ott 2001. The Vepsians: An Administratively Divided Nationality. *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 69–83. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905990120036385>.

- Laine, Antti 2001. Where East Meets West: The Last Stand of Finns and Karelians in Contemporary Karelia? *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 53–67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905990120036420>.
- Leasure, William James & Lewis, Robert 1967. Internal Migration in the USSR: 1897–1926. *Demography*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 479–496. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2060294>.
- Mead, William R. 1952. Finnish Karelia: An International Borderland. *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 118, No. 1, pp. 40–54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1791235>.
- Mühlhäusler, Peter 1996. *Linguistic Ecology: Language Change and Linguistic Imperialism in the Pacific Region*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Mühlhäusler, Peter 2000. Language Planning and Language Ecology. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 306–367. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14664200008668011>.
- Mullonen, Irma 2005. Vepsian Oikonymy. *Onomastica Uralica 3: Settlement Names in the Uralian Languages*, pp. 51–64.
- Mullonen, Irma 2012. Prirodnye i kul'turnye faktory formirovaniia vepsskoi etnicheskoi territorii. [Natural and Cultural Factors in the Formation of Vepsian Ethnic Territory.] *Trudy Karel'skogo nauchnogo tsentra RAN 4*, pp. 13–24. Available at <http://transactions.krc.karelia.ru/publ.php?plang=r&id=10107>, last accessed on April 30, 2015.
- Mullonen & Zaitseva 1969 = Mullonen, Mariia & Zaitseva, Mariia. *Obraztsy vepsskoi rechi*. [Vepsian Speech Samples.] Leningrad: Nauka.
- Olson, Laura J. & Adonyeva, Svetlana 2012. *The Worlds of Russian Village Women: Tradition, Transgression, Compromise*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Paxson, Margaret 2005. *Solovyovo: The Story of Memory in a Russian Village*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Philips, Susan U. 1999. Power. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol. 9, Nos. 1–2, pp. 194–196. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1999.9.1-2.194>.
- Price, John A. 1975. An Applied Analysis of North American Indian Drinking Patterns. *Human Organization*, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 17–26.
- Puura, Ulriikka & Karjalainen, Heini & Zaitseva, Nina & Grünthal, Riho 2013. *The Veps Language in Russia: ELDIA Case-Specific Report*. Studies in European Language Diversity 25. Mainz & Wien & Helsinki & Tartu & Maribor. Available at <https://fedora.phaidra.univie.ac.at/fedora/get/o:315545/bdef:Content/get>, last accessed on April 30, 2015.
- Salminen, Timo 2009. In Between Research, the Ideology of Ethnic Affinity and Foreign Policy: The Finno-Ugrian Society and Russia from the 1880s to the 1940s. In: Jussi Ylikoski (ed.) *The Quasiquicentennial of the Finno-Ugrian Society*. Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran Toimituksia = Mémoires de la Société Finno-Ougrienne 258. Helsinki: Société Finno-Ougrienne, pp. 225–262. Available at <http://www.sgr.fi/sust/sust258/sust258.pdf>, last accessed on April 30, 2015.
- Schieffelin, Bambi B. & Woolard, Kathrin A. & Kroskrity, Paul 1998. *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Setälä, Eemil & Kala, Juho & Tunkelo, Eemil & Peltola, Reino 1951. *Näytteitä Äänis- ja Keski-Vepsän murteista*. [Samples of the Onega and Central Vepsian Dialects.] Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura.
- Shearer, David R. 2006. Stalinism, 1928–1940. In: Ronald G. Suny (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Russia. Volume 3: The Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 192–216. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521811446.009>.
- Slezkine, Yuri 1994. *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.
- Smith, Jeremy 1999. *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–23*. London: Mac-Millan Press Limited.
- Smith, Laurajane & Akagawa, Natsuko (eds.) 2009. *Intangible Heritage*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Strogalshchikova 2004 = Strogal'shchikova, Zinaida. Problemy stanovleniia natsional'nogo obrazovaniia karelov i vepsov na sovremennom etape. [Problems of the Formation of Karelians' and Veps' National Education at Present.] In: *Sovremennoe sostoianie i perspektivy razvitiia karel'skogo, vepsskogo i finskogo iazykov v Respublike Kareliia*. Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii 31 oktiabria 2002 goda. Petrozavodsk, pp. 41–47.
- Strogalshchikova 2008 = Strogal'shchikova, Zinaida (ed.) *Vepsy: na rubezhe XX–XXI vekov. Po materialam mezhtseional'noi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii 'Vepsy - korennoi malochislennyi narod Rossiiskoi Federatsii: perspektivy sokhraneniia i razvitiia'*. [Veps: At the Turn of the Century. Materials from Inter-regional Scientific and Practical Conference 'Veps – Indigenous Minority of the Russian Federation: Perspectives for Maintenance and Development'.] Petrozavodsk: Karel'skii nauchnyi tsentr RAN.
- Vinokurova, Irina 1996. *Traditsionnye prazdniki vepsov Prionezh'ia (konets XIX – nachalo XX v.)*. [Vepsian Traditional Festivities in the Prionezh'iye (end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th cc.).] Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo PetrGU.
- Vinokurova, Irina 2006. *Zhivotnye v traditsionnom mirovoztrenii Vepsov*. [Animals in Veps' Traditional Worldview.] Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo PetrGU.
- Woolard, Kathrin A. & Schieffelin, Bambi B. 1994. Language Ideology. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 23, pp. 55–82. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.23.100194.000415>.
- Yegorov 2006 = Egorov, Sergei. Vepssko-Russkoe mezhetnicheskoe vzaimodeistvie. [Vepso-Russian Interethnic Interactions.] In: N. Bogdanov & I. Vinokurova (eds.) *Sovremennaiia nauka o Vepsakh: dostizheniia i perspektivy (pamiati N. I. Bogdanova)*. Petrozavodsk: Karel'skii nauchnyi tsentr RAN, pp. 237–248.
- Zaiceva, Nina 1995. *Vepsän kelen grammatik*. [Grammar of the Vepsian Language.] Petroskoi: Petroskoin valtioniopiston kustantamo.

# **'DO YOU RESPECT ME?' DRINKING AS A SOCIAL CATALYST IN THE REINDEER HERDING COMMUNITIES OF EUROPEAN RUSSIA AND WESTERN SIBERIA**

*Stephan Dudeck*

**Abstract:** This paper<sup>1</sup> analyses alcohol consumption amongst the indigenous communities of reindeer herders in the Russian North. It introduces the metaphor of the social catalyst to interpret a broad range of effects and motivations linked with drinking practices and discourses associated with alcohol. An anthropological fieldwork methodology allows entry into the sphere of cultural intimacy in order to understand morally suspicious practices usually hidden from the outside world. A non-normative approach is suggested to escape the moral trap of the 'social problem' discourse. Two main patterns of drinking practices, the 'losing face together' and the 'competitive drinking' spree are identified. Whereas the first can be associated with local traditions, the second is linked with male interaction with and within the settler communities. Transgressive practices causing loss of control are examined for their social function and the different notions of 'strength' associated with drinking practices. All of them serve either to confirm, to transcend or to abandon social boundaries, status roles and relationships, which allows us to speak about alcohol as a social catalyst.

**Keywords:** alcohol, competitive drinking, drinking patterns, indigenous people, losing face together, reindeer herders, social catalyst, transgression

## **ALCOHOL AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC**

Indigenous people in the Russian North and Siberia have to face negative and very persistent stereotypes when it comes to alcohol consumption. They see their image of drunkards and alcoholics as one of the heaviest obstacles towards being respected as equal members of the surrounding society (Leete 2005). These stereotypes present them as weak, helpless, genetically predestined to addiction, incapable of self-control, irresponsible about their own future, or of securing their existence. Ethnographic literature about Siberian peoples recurrently refers to alcohol, describing its negative effects, even up to the

present day (Castrén & Schiefner 1856; Dunin-Gorkavich 1904; Pika 1993; Sidorov & Shubin 1994; Pika & Bogoyavlensky 1995; Tuisku 2001; Dregalo & Ulyanovsky 1998; Koester 2003; Kozlov et al. 2003; Vershubsky & Kozlov 2006; Kozlov 2007; Ziker 2009; Istomin 2011, 2012). The majority of literature deals with alcohol as an unquestionable problem, and its destructive effects on indigenous communities. The question of why indigenous people drink is either avoided, in a few cases associated with a genetic deficiency or social weakness, or attributed to external factors (cf. Khairullina 1994: 152; Levin 1997). The focus on the negative effects of alcohol associates drinking mostly with alcoholism and ignores the fact that often even the most excessive drinking practices, involving physical violence, are not the outcome of pathological dependency, but are socially embedded practices (as described in Koester 2003).

Alcohol is not a new theme in the social sciences, and there is a long tradition of anthropological literature dealing with the drinking practices of indigenous peoples and especially arctic and subarctic groups. Dwight B. Heath has provided several overviews of the anthropological discourse on drinking practices (Heath 1975, 1987a, 1987b, 2000) and Mary Douglas published already in 1987 a seminal reader about the social context of drinking (Douglas 1987). However, Russia and especially the Russian indigenous North remained a terra incognita for the anthropology of drinking. For Russia's urban centres and ethnic Russians this changed in the years after perestroika (Braun 2003; Chepurnaya & Shpakovskaya 2005; Goryacheva 2003; Shchepanskaya 1999, 2007; Timofejew et al. 2006; Herlihy 1991; Sokolov 2005; Mäkinen & Reitan 2006; Sempura & Levin 1997; Zdravomyslova & Chikadze 2000; Nemtsov 2005) but the everyday drinking practices and their social context among indigenous groups remain understudied (with almost only one exception: Koester 2003). A workshop in Tartu in 2013 (Dudeck 2013b) was organised to initiate a change in the situation and encouraged the author of this article to try to draw some conclusions from the by-products of anthropological research focused on other themes.

## **A NON-NORMATIVE APPROACH**

Anthropological literature about drinking (Singer 1986, 2012; Room et al. 1984; Room 1992, 2013; Room & Mäkelä 2000; Douglas 1987; Hunt & Barker 2001; Dietler 2006; Heath 1975, 1987b, 2010; Everett et al. 2011 [1976]; Spicer 1997; Mandelbaum 1965; Marshall et al. 2001; Marshall 1983; Sulkunen 2002) seems to oscillate between two poles and the dilemma of anthropological alcohol studies lies in the predicament of this polarity. Some of the authors claim

that anthropologists systematically underestimate the bad effects of alcohol on community life (Room et al. 1984), while others claim that the discussion on alcohol ignores the important functions of drinking within society (Heath 2007, 2010). Arguments from both sides seem to be valid, but consider a functionalist perspective that examines human behaviour under the aspect of either a positive or negative outcome for social life. Most of them forget the, not so recent, insight that individuals and communities are often very much aware of the negative effects of some practices that play an important role in everyday life and that they are willing to pay the price, a fact described already by Brody (1971) in his seminal study of the drinking practices of urban Native Americans. Too often, social scientists stick to the dominant normative oppositions in the public discourse, which are publicly expressed by indigenous communities as well. An anthropological understanding of drinking requires a look behind the façade of the public discourse to grasp the deeply ambivalent effects of drinking practices in the realm of what Michal Herzfeld (1997) calls cultural intimacy (cf. also Shryock 2004). The fact that most of the social research is dominated by verbal expressions and data gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and written sources fosters the prevalence of the ‘either – or’ perspectives of the western normative discourse. Most social researches of alcohol in indigenous communities focus on this normative approach which derives from specific western arrangements of dichotomies introduced to them in the course of the colonisation process: pathological – healthy, controlled – uncontrolled, constructive – destructive, functional – dysfunctional, normal – deviant. In this paper I shall put aside this normative discourse for the purpose of accessing internal (emic) motivations for drinking that are often not directly expressed verbally.

Anthropological fieldwork in northern indigenous communities that access the realm of cultural intimacy reveals that the distinction between dysfunctional and controlled moderate drinking does not help us to understand why people drink and why they drink the way they do. This becomes especially clear when we look at the normative discourse around drinking – what I would call here ‘alcohol talk’. To the outside public indigenous representatives generally condemn indigenous alcohol consumption as uncontrolled and destructive while in intimate spaces drinking is associated with positive values like fun and relaxation. To outsiders indigenous drinking seems to reveal the social weakness of indigenous communities and their vulnerability if not marginalisation. From the inside, the emphasis is often on strength and masculinity and the closeness of social ties (as emphasised in anthropological research on subarctic indigenous people already in the 1970s: Van-Stone 1980; Honigmann 1980; Hamer & Steinbring 1980a, 1980b; Matthiasson 1975).

The above-mentioned dichotomic approach contains in itself already elements of this ‘alcohol talk’ that make the contradicting and nested normative discourses inside indigenous communities invisible (Gal 2002; Liarskaia & Dudeck 2012). An interpretative approach towards drinking practices, an approach that tries to understand the drinking of Northerners from their point of view has, first of all, to shed all normative pre-assumptions. It does not mean becoming blind to the negative or positive consequences of drinking practices, but it does not start with definitions of what is socially destructive and what is functional. It is an integrative approach that tries to look at patterns of drinking and the normative discourses inside the community that frame and influence drinking behaviour.

## **CONSUMING ALCOHOL**

No other practices of food and psychotropic substance consumption possess such variable and ambivalent potentials charged with cultural meaning and social function as do practices of alcohol consumption. There are certainly communities that use, instead of alcohol, other substances that are highly charged with meaning, like kava or khat (Marshall 1976, 1983; Marshall et al. 2001; Bott 1987; Hunt & Barker 2001). Anthropology has considered drinking to be a cultural performance that serves the institution and confirmation of bonds and borders, social proximity and distance inside society. It is full of a variety of signifiers (symbols) that transport meaning, but as a performance it affects and changes the signified (the drinking humans and their social relations) as well (cf. Room 2013). To understand this forest of symbols one has to pay attention to the context of the occasion of drinking – the time and place, the activity that drinking is part of, and the composition of the company of participants. But more narrowly the details of the act of drinking itself have to be considered as well – the kind of drinks, the ways of drinking, drinking speed and amount, drinking vessels and paraphernalia. All the rules that have to be observed to drink appropriately, and all the rules that have to be violated to provoke criticism in order to confirm the borders of appropriate behaviour or to remove them, form the drinking culture of a social group. One should also not forget the effects of drinking – on consciousness, on emotions, on the body, on mental and physical abilities, on the development of addiction, as well as short- and long-term health effects. Comparative anthropological research has shown that this is not only determined by the biochemical effects that ethanol or other by-products have on the human body and mind but also by expectations and learned behaviour in connection with drunken comportment (Douglas 1987; Lemert 1980; Van-Stone 1980; Hamer & Steinbring 1980b; Marshall et al.

2001). Drunkenness causes, first of all, a change in the ability to act, changes in self-discipline, loss of self-control, changes in the quality (and quantity) of agency, which all are obviously central for practices of drinking alcohol and the narratives linked to it. In Russia the motivation for drinking is often described with the term '*rasslabit'sia*', meaning relaxing with a strong connotation of letting loose and getting weak.

## **ALCOHOL AS A SOCIAL CATALYST**

To conceptualise the role alcohol plays in social relationships, their establishment and negation, I suggest the term 'social catalyst' – a metaphor borrowed from chemistry. A catalyst induces some reaction but is NOT part of the causes and consequences of the reaction itself. The effect of alcohol consumption – light or heavy forms of intoxication – enables certain things to happen that would not happen or would not happen so quickly and easily without it. In this way the notion of a catalyst could be used for the constructive as well as destructive, for the functional as well as dysfunctional qualities of drinking. The metaphor could be seen as a synonym for the widespread notion of alcohol as a social lubricant, but as a catalyst alcohol does much more than only to ease and to enhance. The reactions can be quite different and often contradicting: dividing and uniting, coming close and making enemies.

The term 'social catalyst' serves, first of all, for the comparison of the social effects of drinking and the different drinking conventions that frame them. It has of course its limits. Social processes are by no means chemical reactions and cannot be described as such. The chemical catalyst is not consumed during the reaction and stays unchanged – that is of course not the case with alcohol. The catalyst metaphor is therefore not applicable for the role alcohol plays as a commodity and the whole economy surrounding alcohol based on the consumption of the substance.

## **RESEARCH**

The observations analysed in this paper originate from over 20 years of anthropological fieldwork among indigenous reindeer herders in the Russian Arctic – to be precise, Khanty and Nenets communities. It is important to mention that it would exceed the volume of this paper if I aimed at a holistic description of drinking practices that can be observed among Nenets and Khanty reindeer herders today. I will confine myself to an impressionistic description of drinking

practices that can serve the purpose to underline some aspects that I believe are important and are widely ignored in the literature on indigenous drinking in Russia and Siberia. Stories about indigenous drinking culture in Russia are now usually reserved to the corridor talks of anthropologists when they exchange experiences that are too 'problematic' or ambivalent to present them in papers that are valued for clear evidence and plausible conclusions. Anthropologists' stories about encounters with indigenous drinking in Russia are so similar and comprehensible to each other that they can serve as an identity marker, or the proof of a 'real' initiation into the field of anthropology in Russia or Siberia. A comparison of colleagues' experiences reveals that even the difference between indigenous and non-indigenous drinking habits seems to be similar for most of the Khanty and Nenets communities over a territory that spans more than 2000 km. The only exceptions are recent converts to Protestantism that are famous for their complete abstinence from alcohol (Wiget & Balalaeva 2007; Vallikivi 2009).

## UNCONTROLLABILITY AS THE AIM OF INTOXICATION

"There is no sense in drinking alcohol when you don't get drunk," was the statement of male reindeer herders, when speaking about drinking or specifically about possible controlled drinking. Alcohol consumption without or only with light signs of intoxication does not fit into their concept of drinking at all. This is strikingly similar to other circumpolar indigenous drinking cultures (described in the contributions to Hamer & Steinbring 1980a). While some of the reindeer herders are aware that there are other alcohol cultures, they even experienced alcohol consumption in countries like Germany during their army service, but the tone was incomprehension towards forms of drinking that do not succeed in getting people wasted. The quality of drinks like vodka (the typical Russian spirit) or *braga* (homebrew) was discussed by men mainly due to their ability to make people drunk in an effective way, expressed with the Russian term *vyrubat'sia* (to pass out). When discussing the quality of *braga*, male reindeer herders mentioned different additives that make *braga* stronger, among them the excrements of hare that were believed to make the drink more effective. The benchmark for the quality of the alcohol was considered to be the time span it took to reach a condition when drinkers could not walk anymore and passed out. But it would be a mistake to think that reindeer herders are constantly searching for uncontrolled ways to get wasted as quickly as possible. The restriction of drunken comportment to well-defined heterotopias (a concept derived from Foucault 1986) and the observation and comparison of people's

abilities to get drunk in the 'right' way were also stressed in the conversations. I frequently experienced being carefully observed on occasions of collective drinking. The comments of these observations mentioned my ability to keep up with the pace of drinking of my companions and also the time span until I became drunk. I usually avoided getting hopelessly wasted, going to sleep before getting completely drunk, and in most cases that was accepted due to my status as a foreigner. The tolerance towards quitting drinking earlier than others is generally higher among indigenous reindeer herders than I normally experienced with Russian men in similar situations. Colleagues working among reindeer herders in the same region confirmed my observations. Individual differences in reaching the state of drunkenness are respected, as well as the individual decision to quit the table.

### **RANGE OF PRACTICES: ALCOHOL TALK, HIDDEN PRACTICES**

The small village N. is one of the remotest and most isolated communities in the whole region. One can reach it only by helicopter or by snowmobile in the winter. My first visit to the village took place in the nineties while I met state officials and local reindeer herders, with a subsequent public feast, where I could observe how a whole village got completely drunk. I visited the village again for the yearly official celebration of the Day of the Reindeer Herder almost 15 years later and experienced almost the same thing again. Already before my journey to the village some Khanty friends warned me to be careful with potentially violent villagers, but fortunately I did not experience any personal involvement in dangerous situations. Because of its remoteness the village is dominated by indigenous values and lifestyle.

Drinking started with several boxes of spirit (around 90% alcohol per volume) brought by helicopter pilots and sold to villagers and the local shopkeeper, who diluted it to the degree of vodka (less than 40%). It was a sunny spring day and I spent most of the time outdoors where the activities of the festival like sports competitions and games took place. Meat, broth, bread, and tea were served in a nomads' tent erected especially for the purpose, as well as in the private houses I was invited into constantly during the day. Eating and drinking were always accompanied by invitations to have a drink together, and I observed the increasing drunkenness of almost everybody. At some point I realised that people started to disappear from the scene because they reached a state of drunkenness in which they fell asleep and to my surprise this happened according to chronological age. There was obviously a different speed of getting drunk between the generations. Young people disappeared first, then the middle generation, and finally the elderly.

When I was almost alone in the street with the children, who did not drink alcohol, there was only one last old lady, who had removed even her headscarf, a gesture almost unimaginable under normal circumstances. She was dancing and loudly singing a song. When she recognised me, she welcomed me with a kiss and invited me into her house. She could not get her husband to wake up, and I decided to leave and let her sleep off her drinking spree. Behind the delay in getting drunk was the gradation in self-control that rises with the age of a person as I found out later. Older people are expected to control their drinking more than the young.

The drinking had not ended before the whole supply of alcohol had been consumed in the village. Now encounters involving an open expression of discontent and aggression became frequent. Some villagers were especially angry about the representatives of the state who they saw as the guilty ones for their marginal social position and economic difficulties. The policeman, who visited the village only for the purpose of the meeting, barricaded himself up in the wooden cabin where he was staying overnight, to avoid becoming the scapegoat for the villagers' discontent.

I again experienced the increasing danger of violent outbursts in the village during my second visit to the village at the end of the 2000s. Some internal conflicts had broken out, one of them culminating in a father smashing a bottle on his son's head; also resentment towards the representatives of the state and the oil companies, which had started to work in the surrounding area, became so threatening that the guests had to flee the village in the evening. They spent the night at one reindeer herder's campsite some kilometres away. During the first visit I was shocked by the excess of drunkenness, but later I understood that these are not regular events because the majority of the inhabitants live on their campsites scattered over the tundra where alcohol is not available. The few people in the village only have access to alcohol often less than once a week, when the helicopter or other visitors are providing it for private sale. From the perspective of the reindeer herders the village is considered to be a place outside of normal life and already by its origin associated with the breaking of religious taboos. The village was established by the Soviet authorities at a sacred place in order to cause its profanation. It has become the place where reindeer herders stay from time to time if needed and spend their leisure time drinking alcohol, a pattern observed in a number of colonial settlements (cf. Hamer & Steinbring 1980a).

## **THE TWO MAIN PATTERNS OF DRINKING**

Getting drunk until the stage of losing control over body and mind is almost always the ultimate aim of indigenous drinking in the observed communities, even if there are signs of change in recent years. The nutritional or medical value of alcoholic beverages was never mentioned. Often people were copresent who did not participate in the drinking or who just nipped symbolically at the drinking vessel but stayed completely sober. Some of them explained their temperance with a treatment called coding (*'kodirovanie'*), the only therapy available for the local people who want to stop their excessive and addictive drinking. Elders and women often took a very negative attitude towards drinking and forbade drinking in their presence.

Most of the drinking sprees of the Khanty and Nenets reindeer herders began in a fairly relaxed manner, but sometimes ended in an outburst of conflict and violence, quite similar to the pattern described in northern American native people (Lemert 1980; Hamer 1965; Van-Stone 1980; Hamer & Steinbring 1980b; Robbins 1973). Periodically I was invited to the drinking sprees of young men, often involving non-indigenous youth that showed a different pattern that was from the beginning associated with competition and slight aggression. In the next section, I will describe both patterns in more detail.

## **LOSING FACE TOGETHER**

The first drinking practice the anthropologist encounters, in the field in Siberia, is what I would call the 'integration ritual'. Although it can take on different forms in different communities, the main pattern is the same: the most secure way to include a stranger in a social grouping is to engage him in practices where the involved lose face together in a drinking party. Getting completely wasted together makes sure that from now on the novice is part of a 'community of complicity' (Steinmüller 2010). The result is a state in which the social façade, the social face becomes destroyed temporarily; I call this type of drinking 'losing face together'.

Drinking is in most cases a social practice that unites and integrates the people that gather to drink. During the Khanty and Nenets' conjoint drinking everybody takes the responsibility to secure the amount of alcohol he or she needs individually. The typical drinking method is from one cup that circulates clockwise and is refilled by one responsible person, usually the host of the drinking spree. Everybody drinks as much as she or he wants because there is no reason to refrain from getting drunk.

While staying at a Khanty campsite in spring, I was invited by some young men in their late teens/early twenties to film them, while they were jumping from floe to floe on the melting ice of the nearby river. This kind of fooling around was a way to pass free time and the action, which undoubtedly had to culminate in one of them plunging into the cold water, fitted perfectly with the popular genre of jokes called *'prikoly'* in Russian.

Young people gathered, watched, and constantly exchanged on their mobile phones a huge amount of short video clips showing similar instances of *'bezpredel'* (excess) and *'prikoly'* (gags), and they were eager to produce their own. This popular humour encompassed activities and instances showing people in embarrassing situations, and during the transgression of sexual and other behavioural norms. It often involved violence and other instances where people were depicted losing face and reputation in one form or another.

Out of the blue, one of the guys asked me not to film the 2-litre plastic beer bottle with the camera. Only then did I realise that there was a bottle cruising among the youngsters. They did not show any sign of intoxication yet, but were very eager to prevent being filmed while drinking. I asked for the reason and got the answer that the mass media shows the Khanty always as drunkards, but it was clear that my film material was not meant for broadcasting in public and that they were not drunk. It remained a riddle for some time until I showed, by accident, some other footage I had filmed among the Khanty youth to one Khanty elder. He reacted very strongly when he saw a courting couple kissing each other during a party, where obviously alcohol consumption (even if quite moderate) was involved as well. It was not the kissing and drinking itself that he disapproved, but the filming that transferred the information to potentially any outsider and especially to the elders. The Khanty society and, in a similar yet not identical way the Nenets society, is very much concerned about the informational borders inside their community between genders, age groups, and kinship groups as well as outsiders (Liarskaia & Dudeck 2012). It is often not the content of the activity itself, but the visibility of certain categories of people that makes behaviour appropriate or inappropriate.

Cultural intimacy, a concept borrowed from Michael Herzfeld (1997), can describe the way drinking practices have to remain inside a certain context and the practice itself constructs this intimate context. It was Susan Gal (2002, 2005) who made the point that spheres of privacies are nesting into each other, and I consider drinking practices as one of the major markers that determine the privacies of different groups in the communities I visited. Being invited to a drinking party, or any other activity involving alcohol consumption, including religious rituals, meant to be included in a specific intimate relationship of the participants. I had to learn that people, especially in Khanty communities, are

concerned with the principle that information about these intimate activities should stay inside the group of participants (Liarskaia & Dudeck 2012). Drinking is therefore not considered to be an amoral activity itself. Rather, it is the dissemination of such information that is linked with shame and embarrassment. Alcohol consumption is in this way one of the most important practices that establish and maintain the boundaries of intimacy.

But there are more aspects of the participation in common alcohol consumption that make it a sign of inclusion. The effect of drunkenness is seen as a proof of authenticity and trustfulness of the drinkers; this is a motivation for drinking with the aim of losing face together. By jointly reaching a state of drunkenness, which allows for very little controlled behaviour, one's social reputation is ritually destroyed. Russian sociologist Mikhail Sokolov (2005) called this drinking habit, which he observed with Russian students, an experience of non-identity, a temporary loss of social status and identity. Common drinking can become an important rite of passage for a newcomer, a test to see if he could become '*svoi chelovek*' (our kind of guy). Even the common rhetorical question to force somebody to take a drink: '*Ty menja wazhaesh?*' (Do you respect me?), aims to prevent one's refusal to take part in the shared experience of getting drunk, losing face together, producing a certain kind of intimate relationship. It is clear that only practices that are linked to shame, to the destruction of reputation and status, are able to serve the aim, and alcohol is a perfect means to induce them.

### **COMPETITIVE DRINKING: PROVING STRENGTH**

I also observed another way of drinking, first among Russian males. Drinking companions monitor their partners scrupulously, to see if they drink as much as they themselves, to secure that everybody drinks exactly the same amount of alcohol, and ensure that nobody escapes the common goal of getting drunk. The typical reaction to any attempts of the guest to refrain from further drinking is: '*Ty menia wazhaesh?*' It forces the guest to join the next round until they are completely drunk.

The question of respect combined with the jealously observed equal amounts of drinks is based on the association of male strength and alcohol consumption. The hegemonic concept of Russian masculinity comprises the idea that the ability to withstand copious amounts of alcohol without showing signs of intoxication is proof of male strength. Plenty of male drinking is therefore competitive, establishing hierarchies of masculinity inside male groups. However, the fateful effect of alcohol intoxication leads to an acceleration of the feeling of status insecurity, especially in young men. Therefore, these men often try

to force their drinking buddies to show respect by getting drunk in their presence to convince themselves of their own relative strength or at least their companions' equal weakness.

The associations between strength and alcohol consumption are formed in very different and sometimes even contradicting ways. The concept of male strength is associated with the ability to drink and maintain control longer than others. This idea of strength links political and domestic power with masculinity in a specific way (Shchepanskaya 1999, 2007; Zdravomyslova & Chikadze 2000; Chepurnaya & Shpakovskaya 2005). The socio-political 'weakness' of indigenous groups is thus naturalised through their 'genetic' inability to demonstrate strength by drinking hard and, implicitly, the masculinity of indigenous men is questioned in this way. But there are other perspectives on strength. On one occasion, during an internal discussion with a Khanty elder about the drinking habits of the Khanty, the elder mentioned that Khanty women have the right to get drunk like hard-working men when they visit the village. They work hard in their forest households, so they will not stay abstinent like the Russian women, who do only soft jobs.

On the other hand, strength can be associated with staying abstinent. The best public example for the symbolic association of political power with sobriety is probably Vladimir Putin, the Russian president. An almost supernatural strength is associated with protestant groups evangelising among the Khanty and the Nenets because of their ability to keep their proselytes teetotal. In the indigenous communities the elders often stress these concepts of showing strength through staying abstinent and criticise young people, especially young males, for their weakness, i.e. their inability to refrain from alcohol. Part of the story on strength is frequently the narrative of being a former hard drinker that understood at one point that he had to take life in his own hands.

In opposition to the strength of staying abstinent, competitive drinking aims at the proof of strength of the drinker. Strength in drinking is associated with the ability to retain agency longer than others, either by controlling oneself or by just the physical ability to withstand large amounts of alcohol without showing signs of heavy intoxication. This form of drinking appears usually only between men. If women are present, they are automatically excluded from the competition. Indigenous men, who fear falling prey to the above-mentioned stereotypes of weakness, experience, especially in the company of non-indigenous people, the need to compete in this type of show of strength and the masculinity associated with it. A refusal to take part in such competitions is often prevented with the expression of moral pressure: *'Ty menia uvazhaesh?'* Status insecurity is the main reason why drinking among indigenous males turns towards the competition form especially non-indigenous men are present. The refusal or hesitation

to take part in the competition can easily grow into aggression, especially if the feeling of emerging intoxication accelerates the feeling of insecurity. It can easily develop into a vicious circle that can be stopped only with physical proof of strength through a fight.

The status insecurity that causes aggression in connection with alcohol can be observed among the Khanty and the Nenets also without competitive drinking. It often appears among close relatives, when the feeling of insecurity about respect paid to each other coincides with feelings of insecurity caused by the inability to control oneself due to drunkenness. In these cases gestures of love like kissing can easily be followed by physical violence in a fight between relatives. I have a strong impression that this tendency of conflicts among close relatives distinguishes Khanty drunkenness from comparable Russian forms. The typical village disco fight involving young Russian men rises from doubts on whether they gain respect from some strangers and outsiders at whom the following aggression is directed. The peer group unites and enhances its identity in the fight with outsiders. In the episodes where I experienced fights among the Khanty after heavy drinking, they appeared mostly between close friends and relatives and it felt almost taboo to involve me as a stranger. On several occasions girls asked me to intervene in the fights of their friends. In one case the young Khanty man that seemed completely uncontrollable in his rage directed his fist to a nearby mirror so as not to hit my face.

## **TRANSGRESSIVE PRACTICES: DRINKING AND CONFLICT**

Literature on the effect of alcohol consumption often mentions aggression as an outcome of drunkenness. Anthropologists have shown that inebriated behaviour is as much shaped by the biochemical effects of alcohol as by socialisation and the expectations of the community the drinker is part of (Sulkunen 2002; Marshall 1983). Physical violence and aggression often involving young men under the influence of alcohol is a common feature of everyday life in Russia and most anthropological fieldworkers encounter situations in which they have to cope with the danger of being involved.

During one of my fieldwork seasons I lived with some families of reindeer herders during the weeks before the main festival of the year, the Day of the Reindeer. It is the only occasion when the majority of reindeer herders of the community gather in the tundra to organise a big celebration around a sports competition and a meeting with the head of the reindeer herding enterprise they work for. The weeks and days before were filled with stories about former events and things that I should be prepared to encounter. A prominent place in

these stories was occupied by two themes: alcohol and violence. The feast was not only a place for exchanging news, sports competitions, and courting. My impression was that the unique occasion of the feast, in combination with the effect of alcohol, allows conflicts to surface, which are suppressed and rarely verbalised in the rest of the year. I was told that the occasion also served to punish certain men who had committed an offence, by beating them up collectively. The feast is the culminating point in the life of the reindeer herders' community in the summertime. The density of events, the lack of sleep during the polar day, and the constant consumption of alcohol create an almost surreal atmosphere during those days. One can feel the heterogeneity of time and place, the heterotopia (Foucault 1986), which puts everybody in a strange mood.

One of the most impressive encounters, involving an outburst of violence, I experienced during one of my first visits to a reindeer herders' camp in the mid-nineties. I was the guest of a family and sitting in a conical tent, drinking tea together with some elders, when some young women ran into the tent and asked me in a panic if I could help them to prevent their brothers from killing each other with an axe. My arrival as a guest was probably the cause for the drinking party and I felt obliged to help even if I did not know how to cope with a man armed with an axe. The sisters insisted and when we left the tent the young men lay already on the ground and one of the women had taken the axe out of his hands. Fortunately he was so drunk that he could not coordinate his resistance and was bound by a rope, providing a pitiful image. More than by the axe fight I was struck by the picture of the bound guy that started to cry. I never found out the reason for the conflict but I learned that this event was full of things transgressing the norms of everyday behaviour. Violence against one's own kin is impermissible, tears are usually not shown and women do not use physical power against men, and being displayed in this helpless condition in front of a stranger is a very shameful situation. Everything is forgotten the next day as if it happened in another world because of the exceptional state produced by alcohol.

Aggression directed against the self can also break out. A friend of mine miraculously survived a suicide attempt after a common drinking party motivated by the sudden death of her husband in an accident. When I spoke with her about the event she said she had tested the will of god and that she should not die whatever she will do. Some of the life-risking behaviour under the influence of alcohol that usually young men are involved in looks suspiciously similar to this kind of 'testing one's fate'.

As in 'losing face together', here it is the ability of alcohol to disinhibit, to suspend self-control, which produces the desirable effects. The annual festivals are the only occasion where almost the whole community meets during the

year. They therefore play an important role in community life. I could observe that they are almost the only place to openly act out conflict and change the social fabric by destroying old ties and establishing new ones. Life in small family groups of nomads or in isolated settlements of the semi-nomadic reindeer herders does not allow for conflict to appear during the rest of the year and discussing controversies publicly is taboo. The lack of self-control produced by alcohol consumption allows for violating of taboos and becoming emotional; it also allows for flirting and the display of erotic attraction, and engaging in violent behaviour.

### **ALCOHOL TALK: THE CRITIQUE OF ALCOHOL**

Through the lens of drinking as a social problem, the gaze is narrowed on practices that are considered to be destructive to individual health and to the social fabric. Alcohol problems are in the focus of popular media, and of indigenous activists and scientists dealing with alcohol in Russia (as discussed in Chepur-naya & Shpakovskaya 2005). In expressions of general critique it is the main sign of ill-being, hardship, and the consequences of victimisation of indigenous communities and families. Indigenous mothers, elders, and representatives of the indigenous intelligentsia, which are concerned about the danger of moral degradation, frequently raise the topic of the destructive effects of alcohol. These perspectives are so dominant that I want to contextualise them within the broad range of aspects of the practices in which alcohol plays a role of what I call a social catalyst, even though I can only deal with part of the field in this paper.

One could say that the above-mentioned critique plays a more important role for the social impact of alcohol in the communities than the drinking itself. It may serve the marginalisation of indigenous people as part of racist stereotypes, but it may equally serve the resistance against marginalisation as part of the argumentation of colonial exploitation and discrimination, which caused the social problems. It is an argument for the domination of Russian culture, the inability of indigenous groups to exert self-government and sovereignty in any of their own affairs, and the refusal of rights over resources. It is as well an argument against all the effects of domination when it describes the alcohol problem as a result of deprivation of resources, assimilation pressure, powerlessness, and lack of prospects for economic development.

The critique of alcohol-related problems is not only a matter in relations between colonising powers and the indigenous groups. This is also an important issue inside the community. It is the role of the wives, mothers and elderly men to level criticism at the men who transgress moral boundaries when getting

drunk. It is the role of wives and mothers to take care of the day-to-day economy of their families and to prevent their men from neglecting the prosperity of the family by engaging in generosity and a waste of money. It is the role of the elders to prevent the younger ones from neglecting religious taboos by engaging in sexual laxity, indecent behaviour, and disrespect of traditional social roles. The constant verbal critique is only rarely followed by harsh actions. In practice the women show an incredible patience towards their husbands and sons, and the elders seem to be masters in turning a blind eye to the drunken excesses of the youth. I am nevertheless convinced that it would be a big mistake to draw the conclusion that women and elders have lost their power as bearers of values and tradition. On the contrary, their indulgence supports traditional values by keeping the balance between the different morals of excess and control, which made indigenous cultures so persistent under the conditions of political, economic, and ecological change.

A Khanty elder explained to me: “Do you know why we won the war? Because our soldiers drunk hard. Soldiers were stronger because they could drink harder. Then they were able to fight harder.” *What is good for a Russian means death for a German*, is a common proverb in Russia. Strength, a certain type of strength, is part of the Russian identity. The paradox was that the same Khanty elder, who underlined the importance of alcohol for the victory in the World War, was one of the harshest critics of alcohol consumption in his own community.

He once explained to me that the Khanty expression for the Khanty living in the village means literally translated ‘living by the shop’ (in Khanty, ‘lapka’ means village, as well as shop), with the connotation of the village shop as the main source of vodka. In this way the village as a living place is associated with alcohol addiction and, subsequently, with weakness and moral degradation. The Khanty living in the village are in this perspective not able to secure their livelihood in the forest; they have become dependent on alcohol and the external colonial forces that sustain the northern settlements. Compared to the image of the central village established during the Soviet time as the political, cultural, and economic centre of development and of the civilising process, the perspective of reindeer herders is more ambivalent. They perceive the village as the centre of political power, but, on the other side, also as the place of the socially weak, the dependent. For them it is a morally deeply ambivalent place where opportunities for recreation and joy mix with moral transgression and violence around the official celebrations, meetings, markets and discotheques that are regularly organised and attended by the reindeer herders. For them the village is a place of yearning as well as of moral degradation. It is the antipode to the reindeer herders’ camp: the tundra and taiga are perceived as morally

and spiritually pure, as the centre of indigenous values, as a place for work and family life, and as the basis for economic survival.

The critique of alcohol of that Khanty elder went even further. He explained that in opposition to a majority of today's Khanty he believes that also religious rituals should be performed and offerings made without the consumption of alcohol, and that he did not want me to drink at all with the Khanty youth. Moreover, that he would consider expelling me from his house if he discovered me hanging around with people drinking (he was similarly strict in forbidding me to have contact with the teetotal Khanty converted to protestant denominations). By associating alcohol with the village and moral degradation it was logical to dismiss alcohol from the opposite pole in the sacred landscape of the Khanty. The Khanty associate the downriver Russian-dominated settlements with the underworld and the upstream holy places of the Khanty deities with the power of the heavenly gods and moral purity, while the forest settlements of the Khanty reindeer herders are located in the middle.

As most of the indigenous reindeer herders, he lives in a double-reference frame – the indigenous one and the Russian one, and in practice he did tolerate certain amounts of alcohol to be present in religious rituals. He expressed a quite ambivalent concept of strength and weakness, in connection to alcohol consumption: on the one hand the strength that is expressed by the ability to bear heavy drinking and on the other hand the strength of self-control and abstinence.

In some indigenous communities (e.g. reindeer herders on the Kanin Peninsula) I experienced a clearly expressed gender divide with regard to alcohol consumption. In contrast to the neighbouring indigenous groups, their women were almost abstinent and only the men engaged, from time to time, in heavy drinking. Women had the task to store alcohol and to control the sometimes excessive drinking of their husbands and sons. Most of the decisions in day-to-day life and work were taken by the men, but during drinking parties the usual rules of decision-making became inverted and women took over complete control. The members of one community even expressed the differences to the neighbouring group of reindeer herders by the fact that they differ in respect of what they thought was a sign of a higher moral and cultural level: "Did you see that even their women get drunk at the celebration in the village?" A man from another Khanty group that was tolerant towards women taking part in heavy drinking expressed the group identity in contrast to Russians that consider it inappropriate for women to drink as men do: "Our women work hard, so they can also drink hard."

## **THE SOCIAL MECHANISM: INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION**

I consider competitive drinking and drinking to communally lose face the most important binge-drinking patterns in these northern communities. While the loss of face drinking aims at producing egalitarian relationships, the competitive drinking produces hierarchies.

The form of drinking I call 'losing face together' is the most widespread among the Khanty and Nenets. It serves to break down social boundaries, makes tabooed behaviour possible, and facilitates the integration of strangers and newcomers. It enables the transmission of information in a cultural context in which silence, distance, and the observance of informational borders are the main ways to express respect and morality. The establishment of extraordinary and exceptional situations similar to what Foucault (1986) called heterotopia or Douglas (1987) 'ideal worlds' is enabled and marked with alcohol consumption. It is the intoxicating effect of alcohol towards losing self-control and giving up agency that makes transgression possible and excusable. These are the incidents when, sometimes, strongly tabooed behaviour like promiscuity, incest, homosexuality, physical violence against others and oneself, life- and healthrisking behaviour, lavish wasting of economic resources and other ways of endangering one's own existence take place (Chepurnaya & Shpakovskaya 2005). If the reputation and social face is completely smashed, nobody has to fear status insecurity (Sokolov 2005; cf. for 'face work' also Goffman 1959). If there is no status to be upheld any more in the face of the others, the stress linked to possible disrespect and devaluation is relieved. In this way the 'joint loss of face drinking' counteracts the increased feeling of insecurity during the proceeding intoxication. The greater the suspicion and insecurity about the readiness to reach the complete 'loss of face', the more carefully the speed of drinking is observed. When genders and age groups are mixed and the participants drink out of the same vessel, which is provided by the responsible host, this kind of pressure is absent. Everybody is left to decide on their own, yet according to their social status, how quickly to reach the stage of drunkenness. In this case the young speed up and the elders drink in a more controlled way, and it is left to the responsibility of the individual to show signs of drunkenness as proof of intimacy and trust in the community. In some communities women are excluded from the status-damaging practice and left to observe and control men's transgressive behaviour and to prevent them from damaging their physical health.

Losing self-control allows for a social integration of outsiders into a group and for enhancing group identity. It also enables conflict evolvment and resolution, the splitting or reforming of alliances, scapegoating and score settling.

The mechanism of inclusion and exclusion works miraculously not only with the loss of control but also with the control of drinking. Women, for instance, can integrate the families with the control of uncontrollability of men and develop concepts of female solidarity and strength. The abstinent elders show strength and status in controlling themselves and enhance internal status differences in the indigenous community. In a similar way Christian converts mark group identity by the rigorous moral of teetotalism. The breaking down of borders inside a group has its counterpart in the way alcohol consumption expresses differences to outsiders and confirms social boundaries.

### **SUBSTITUTES FOR DRINKING: IS ALCOHOL THE ONLY SOCIAL CATALYST?**

According to the Khanty reindeer herders themselves, alcohol became a massive problem among the Khanty communities in the Surgut region during the time of the arrival of the oil industry in the seventies and especially the eighties. However, the predictions of complete degradation of the indigenous population and destruction of their communities proved wrong. They managed to preserve their lifestyle of reindeer herders, diversify their economy in connection with the emergence of oil-workers' settlements and towns, and to develop a more controlled drinking culture, as some Khanty elders called it (Dudeck 2012, 2013a; Wiget & Balalaeva 2007; Balzer 1999).

My ethnographic fieldwork was not especially focussed on the history of alcohol consumption, and I can only provide some hypotheses that would have to be proved by further research focussed on the theme. My first suggestion is that the environmentally destructive effects of oil development, resettlement, and the heavy acculturation pressure did not directly provoke drinking in the way of a stress reaction, but affected the possibilities of the communities to apply cultural techniques (among them drinking) to cope with rapid and heavy change. It was more the destruction and devaluation of other cultural techniques, such as religious rituals, sacred places, and oral traditions, and the easy availability of vodka and high prestige of drinking among the oil workers that led to an inflation of practices involving heavy drinking. The tragedy was that exactly at the time when the amount of conflict grew, the traditional possibilities to cope with it, like traditional forms of war and ritual, were less available or not available at all (cf. similar findings in Hamer & Steinbring 1980a).

Recently, a certain change in religious practices has occurred. Some reindeer herders converted to Protestantism and another part revived traditional religious practices with limited and controlled consumption of alcoholic beverages

during the rituals. Both religious movements could be considered to be cultural techniques to cope with change and conflict. On the other hand, a changed attitude of the oil companies and townspeople towards excessive drinking could be observed. Today hard drinking typical of the first generation of explorers and oil workers can only be noted in some badly paid branches of the business and people fear the loss of well paid jobs due to alcohol problems. Young indigenous men copied habits of controlled and limited alcohol consumption, including the switch from vodka to beer, from their Russian peers in the oil towns.

One could say that all cultural techniques that serve the practices of transgression, help to establish heterotopia (Foucault 1986) and *communitas*, to reach the state of liminality (Turner 1969) or collective effervescence (Durkheim 1915), can be considered similar social catalysts to alcohol. The traditional fields to search for such catalysts would be war, religious ritual, and forms of carnival; the modern ones would be sport- and often also music-oriented subcultures. Alcohol could be replaced by other psychotropic drugs but also by dance, violence, erotic and other body techniques. An open question remains what kind of effect the modern media has with its ability to render virtual transgression permanent in popular TV-channels, like a constant rain of sex, drugs, violence, and other forms of moral transgression dripping without a break into the homes and brains of villagers. This constant simulation of transgression could be considered to devaluate and weaken the efficacy of what I here call social catalysts, but it seems that even some traditional rituals retain their power in modern conditions.

## **CONCLUSION**

I would distinguish between two main motivations, or aims, for drinking, which are mutually exclusive, but nevertheless sometimes appear quite close to each other when I drink with my indigenous friends: one of them I would call broadly 'competitive drinking' and the other one – 'losing face together'. I associate the first one with the colonial influence and the second one with traditional indigenous ways of drinking, but this remains a hypothesis that is still lacking enough evidence. Already Mary Douglas (1987) emphasised the dialectical linkage, the interplay of drinking oriented towards the production of community (social cohesion) and drinking linked with competitiveness (individualisation), summing up the uniting and dividing effects of drinking.

If the negative and positive effects of drinking are balanced from the perspective of the community, people see no need to change their drinking practices even if critique is expressed verbally and alcohol consumption is proclaimed to

be a vice (cf. Brody 1971). Only in situations when external factors make alcohol almost the only social catalyst available and increase the overall number of incidents in which people have to apply a social catalyst, its negative effects start to become too destructive for the families and the community.

In the case of Khanty and Nenets communities, one can observe how the growing alcohol problem was followed by processes of religious change and revitalisation, the increased application of the anti-alcoholic therapy of *kodirovanie*, and a change in the patterns of alcohol consumption. External measures to fight the alcohol problem failed to acknowledge the social function of alcohol and proved, therefore, to be ineffective.

It remains an unanswered question why health issues or risk factors other than alcohol are treated so differently. Contaminated drinking water through industrial pollution by mainly oil and gas extraction, parasites in fish (opisthorchiasis), environmental toxins, the risk of using new means of transportation like cars and snowmobiles, are no less life-threatening than alcohol consumption. The main difference is that the risks of alcohol consumption are seen in the public discourse as depending on the individual decision of the self and on inherent personal factors like genes or traditions, but not on external factors like the environment or technology.

Alcohol as a social catalyst is applied in Russia's reindeer herding cultures in a wide range of social encounters with a wide range of effects on society. Drinking as a cultural practice is one of the most important lifestyle features to mark social differences due to the variety of possible forms it can take. It is a practice of distinction par excellence in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu (1984). However, in opposite to most other practices of distinction, it has a unique ability to counteract distinction and to break down social differences. Unlike death and violence, which have a similar power, its effect can be relieved or inverted and the status quo ante reconstructed. It can be only a part-time breakdown, a partial destruction, but, nevertheless, with seriously destructive side-effects for one's health. The comparison with death, violence, war, wasteful feasting, erotic and other forms of transgression and excess leads us to the work of George Bataille (1988), who stressed the importance of practices usually considered to be destructive, amoral, and negative for the human existence.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> I must gratefully note the support of the Finnish Academy ORHELIA project, funding decision 251111 from 2011, and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany.

## REFERENCES

- Balzer, Marjorie Mandelstam 1999. *The Tenacity of Ethnicity: A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bataille, Georges 1988. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*. New York: Zone Books.
- Bott, Elizabeth 1987. The Kava Ceremonial as a Dream Structure. In: M. Douglas (ed.) *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, pp. 182–204.
- Bourdieu, Pierre 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Transl. by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Braun, Matthias 2003. Vremja Golovokruzenija – Zeit des Schwindels: Der alkoholische Rausch als Geste kulturellen Beharrens in der Sowjetunion der 1920er- und 1930er-Jahre. *Zeitschrift Für Geschichtswissenschaft*, Vol. 51, No. 10, pp. 896–911.
- Brody, Hugh 1971. *Indians on Skid Row: The Role of Alcohol and Community in the Adaptive Process of Indian Urban Migrants*. Ottawa: Northern Science Research Group, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.
- Castrén, Matthias Alexander & Schiefner, Franz Anton 1856. *Reiseberichte und Briefe aus den Jahren 1845–1849*. St. Petersburg: Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Chepurnaya & Shpakovskaya 2005 = Chepurnaia, Olga & Shpakovskaia, Larisa. Alkohol' i seks: vypil, upal, ochnuksia? (Zametki o kul'turnykh kontekstakh p'ianstva). [Alcohol and Sex: Drunk up, Fallen over, Woken up? (Notes on the Cultural Contexts of the Booze).] *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*, Vol. 5, No. 43, pp. 93–100. Available at <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/43/che17-pr.html>, last accessed on May 20, 2015.
- Dietler, Michael 2006. Alcohol: Anthropological/Archaeological Perspectives. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 229–249. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123120>.
- Douglas, Mary (ed.) 1987. *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.
- Dregalo & Ulyanovsky 1998 = Dregalo, Aleksandr & Ul'ianovskii, Viktor. Evropeiskie nenetsy: adaptivnye vozmozhnosti i evoliutsionnaia plastichnost'. [The European Nenets: Adaptive Capacities and Evolutionary Flexibility.] *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, Vol. 6, pp. 69–77. Available at <http://ecsocman.hse.ru/socis/msg/16476250.html>, last accessed on May 20, 2015.
- Dudeck, Stephan 2012. From the Reindeer Path to the Highway and Back: Understanding the Movements of Khanty Reindeer Herders in Western Siberia. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 89–106. Available at <http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/article/view/114>, last accessed on May 20, 2015.
- Dudeck, Stephan 2013a. *Der Tag des Rentierzüchters: Repräsentation indigener Lebensstile zwischen Taigawohnplatz und Erdölstadt in Westsibirien*. Fürstenberg & Havel: Verlag der Kulturstiftung Sibirien. Available at <http://www.siberian-studies.org/publications/PDF/tdrz.pdf>, last accessed on May 20, 2015.

- Dudeck, Stephan 2013b. Drinking and Driving Is So Much Fun. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 93–95. Available at <http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/article/view/163>, last accessed on May 20, 2015.
- Dunin-Gorkavich, Aleksandr 1904. *Tobol'skii Sever: Etnograficheskii ocherk mestnykh inorodtsev*. [The Tobolsk North: Ethnographic Sketch of the Local Natives.] Vol. 1. Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografia V. Kirshbauma.
- Durkheim, Émile 1915. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Transl. by Joseph Swain. New York: Free Press.
- Everett, Michael W. & Waddell, Jack O. & Heath, Dwight B. (eds.) 2011 [1976]. *Cross-Cultural Approaches to the Study of Alcohol: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. World Anthropology Series. Munchen: Walter de Gruyter. doi: 10.1515/9783110818895.
- Foucault, Michel 1986. Of Other Spaces. Translated by Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 22–27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/464648>.
- Gal, Susan 2002. A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 77–95. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/10407391-13-1-77>.
- Gal, Susan 2005. Language Ideologies Compared: Metaphors of Public/Private. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 23–37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/jlin.2005.15.1.23>.
- Goffman, Erving 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor.
- Goryacheva 2003 = Goriacheva, Nadezhda. Model' potrebleniia alkogolia v Rossii. [The Model of Alcohol Consumption in Russia.] *Sotsiologicheskii zhurnal*, No. 4, pp. 101–107. Available at <http://jour.isras.ru/index.php/socjour/article/viewFile/815/769>, last accessed on May 21, 2015.
- Hamer, John H. 1965. Acculturation Stress and the Functions of Alcohol among the Forest Potawatomi. *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 285–302.
- Hamer, John H. & Steinbring, Jack (eds.) 1980a. *Alcohol and Native Peoples of the North*. Washington, DC: University Press of America.
- Hamer, John H. & Steinbring, Jack 1980b. Alcohol and the North American Indian: Examples from the Sub-Arctic. In: J. Hamer & J. Steinbring (eds.) *Alcohol and Native Peoples of the North*. Washington, DC: University Press of America, pp. 1–29.
- Heath, Dwight B. 1975. *A Critical Review of Ethnographic Studies of Alcohol Use*. New York: Wiley.
- Heath, Dwight B. 1987a. A Decade of Development in the Anthropological Study of Alcohol Use: 1970–1980. In: M. Douglas (ed.) *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.
- Heath, Dwight B. 1987b. Anthropology and Alcohol Studies: Current Issues. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 99–120. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.16.100187.000531>.
- Heath, Dwight B. 2000. *Drinking Occasions: Comparative Perspectives on Alcohol and Culture*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Heath, Dwight B. 2007. Why We Don't Know More about the Social Benefits of Moderate Drinking. *Annals of Epidemiology*, Vol. 17, No. 5S, pp. S71–S74. Available at

- <http://www.annalsofepidemiology.org/article/S1047-2797%2807%2900018-X/pdf>, last accessed on May 21, 2015.
- Heath, Dwight B. 2010. Wanted: A Broader View of Alcohol Studies. *Addiction*, Vol. 105, No. 2, pp. 202–203. doi: 10.1111/j.1360-0443.2009.02748.x.
- Herlihy, Patricia 1991. Joy of the Rus': Rites and Rituals of Russian Drinking. *The Russian Review*, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp. 131–147. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/131155>.
- Herzfeld, Michael 1997. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Honigmann, John J. 1980. Perspectives on Alcohol Behavior. In: J. Hamer & J. Steinbring (eds.) *Alcohol and Native Peoples of the North*. Washington, DC: University Press of America, pp. 267–285.
- Hunt, Geoffrey & Barker, Judith C. 2001. Socio-Cultural Anthropology and Alcohol and Drug Research: Towards a Unified Theory. *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 165–188.
- Istomin, Kirill 2011. “Atributivnyi stil” i problema p'ianstva i samoubiistv sredi malochislennykh narodov Severa i Sibiri. [“Attributive Style” and the Problem of Alcohol Addiction and Suicide among Numerically Small Peoples of the North and Siberia.] *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, No. 2, pp. 89–106.
- Istomin, Kirill 2012. Once Again on the Problem of Alcoholism and Suicide among the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North: Can Attribution Style Be a Factor? *Sibirica*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 1–19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3167/sib.2012.110301>.
- Khairullina, Nursafa 1994. Sovremennye problemy optimizatsii traditsionnogo khoziaistva korennykh narodov Khanty-Mansiiskogo avtonomnogo okruga. [Current Problems in the Optimisation of Traditional Economy of Indigenous Peoples of the Khanty-Mansiiskii Autonomous Region.] *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, Vol. 7, pp. 150–153. Available at <http://ecsocman.hse.ru/data/142/604/1231/038Hajrulina.pdf>, last accessed on May 21, 2015.
- Koester, David 2003. Drink, Drank, Drunk: A Social-Political Grammar of Russian Drinking Practices in a Colonial Context. *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 41–46. Available at <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/aer/article/view/343>, last accessed on May 21, 2015.
- Kozlov, Andrei 2007. Sukhoi zakon dlia poselka i dzhin dlia Predsedatel'ia. [Prohibition for the Village and Gin for the Village Head.] In: V. Konov (ed.) *Sbornik nauchno-populiarnykh statei – pobeditelei konkursa RFFI 2006 goda*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Otkopus, pp. 214–220. Available at [http://www.rfbr.ru/rffi/ru/books/o\\_17321#1](http://www.rfbr.ru/rffi/ru/books/o_17321#1), last accessed on May 21, 2015.
- Kozlov, Andrew & Vershubsky, Galina & Kozlova, Maria 2003. Stress under Modernization in Indigenous Populations of Siberia. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, Vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 158–166. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/ijch.v62i2.17551>.
- Leete, Art 2005. Accounts of Cannibalism, Human Sacrifice, Alcohol-Addiction and Filthiness among Northern Peoples. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, Vol. 50, Nos. 1–3, pp. 241–258. doi: 10.1556/AEthn.50.2005.1-3.15.
- Lemert, Edwin M. 1980. Alcohol in the Life of Northwest Coast Indians. In: J. Hamer & J. Steinbring (eds.) *Alcohol and Native Peoples of the North*. Washington, DC: University Press of America, pp. 49–71.

- Levin, B. 1997. Glavnye faktory alkogolizatsii obshchestva v usloviakh sotsial'nykh peremen. [Main Factors of Community Alcoholisation under Conditions of Social Change.] *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, Vol. 4, pp. 102–108. Available at <http://ecsocman.hse.ru/data/637/499/1217/010.LEVIN.pdf>, last accessed on May 22, 2015.
- Liarskaia, Elena & Dudeck, Stephan 2012. Multiple Privacies – Nesting Spheres of Intimacy in Western Siberian Indigenous Lifestyles. In: M. Carucci (ed.) *Revealing Privacy: Debating the Understandings of Privacy*. Frankfurt am Mein: Peter Lang GmbH, pp. 61–74. Available at [http://www.academia.edu/2175132/Multiple\\_Privacies\\_-\\_Nesting\\_spheres\\_of\\_intimacy\\_in\\_Western\\_Siberian\\_indigenous\\_lifestyles](http://www.academia.edu/2175132/Multiple_Privacies_-_Nesting_spheres_of_intimacy_in_Western_Siberian_indigenous_lifestyles), last accessed on May 19, 2015.
- Mäkinen, Ilkka Henrik & Reitan, Therese C. 2006. Continuity and Change in Russian Alcohol Consumption from the Tsars to Transition. *Social History*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 160–179. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071020600562983>.
- Mandelbaum, David G. 1965. Alcohol and Culture. *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 281–293. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/200597>.
- Marshall, Mac 1976. A Review and Appraisal of Alcohol and Kava Studies in Oceania. In: Michael W. Everett & Jack O. Waddell & Dwight B. Heath (eds.) *Cross-Cultural Approaches to the Study of Alcohol: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. The Hague: Mouton, pp. 103–118.
- Marshall, Mac 1983. “Four Hundred Rabbits”: An Anthropological View of Ethanol as a Disinhibitor. In: R. Room & G. Collins (eds.) *Alcohol and Disinhibition: Nature and Meaning of the Link*. NIAAA Research Monograph No. 12. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, pp. 186–204.
- Marshall, Mac & Ames, Genevieve M. & Bennett, Linda A. 2001. Anthropological Perspectives on Alcohol and Drugs at the Turn of the New Millennium. *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 153–64. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536\(00\)00328-2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(00)00328-2).
- Matthiasson, John S. 1975. You Scratch My Back and I'll Scratch Yours: Continuities in Inuit Social Relationships. *Arctic Anthropology*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 31–37. Available at [http://www.jstor.org/stable/40315860?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40315860?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents), last accessed on May 22, 2015.
- Nemtsov, Alexander 2005. Russia: Alcohol Yesterday and Today. *Addiction*, Vol. 100, No. 2, pp. 146–149. doi: 10.1111/j.1360-0443.2005.00971.x.
- Pika, Alexander 1993. The Spatial-Temporal Dynamic of Violent Death among the Native Peoples of Northern Russia. *Arctic Anthropology*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 61–76. Available at [http://www.jstor.org/stable/40316338?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40316338?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents), last accessed on May 22, 2015.
- Pika, Alexander & Bogoyavlensky, Dmitry 1995. Yamal Peninsula: Oil and Gas Development and Problems of Demography and Health among Indigenous Populations. *Arctic Anthropology*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 61–74. Available at [http://www.jstor.org/stable/40316387?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40316387?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents), last accessed on May 22, 2015.
- Robbins, Richard Howard 1973. Alcohol and the Identity Struggle: Some Effects of Economic Change on Interpersonal Relations. *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 75, No. 1, pp. 99–122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/aa.1973.75.1.02a00060>.

- Room, Robin 1992. Paradigms of Social Research on Alcohol and Drug Use and Dependence. In: Jaime Cohen-Yanez & Jose Luis Amezcua-Gastelum (eds.) *Dependence: From the Molecular to the Social Level*. Proceedings of the International Symposium on Drug Dependence: From the Molecular to the Social Level. Mexico City, 22–25 January 1991. Amsterdam & London & New York & Tokyo: Elsevier Science Publishers, pp. 213–220. Available at <http://www.robinroom.net/paradigm.htm>, last accessed on May 22, 2015.
- Room, Robin 2013. Sociocultural Aspects of Alcohol Consumption. In: Peter Boyle & Albert B. Lowenfels & Harry Burns & Otis Brawley & Witold Zatonski & Jürgen Rehm (eds.) *Alcohol: Science, Policy and Public Health*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 38–45. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199655786.003.0006>.
- Room, Robin & Agar, Michael & Beckett, Jeremy & Bennett, Linda A. & Casswell, Sally & Heath, Dwight B. & Leland, Joy & Levy, Jerrold E. & Madsen, William & Marshall, Mac & Moskalewicz, Jacek & Negrete, Juan Carlos & Rodin, Miriam B. & Sackett, Lee & Sargent, Margaret & Strug, David & Waddell, Jack O. 1984. Alcohol and Ethnography: A Case of Problem Deflation? [and Comments and Reply]. *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 169–191. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/203107>.
- Room, Robin & Mäkelä, Klaus 2000. Typologies of the Cultural Position of Drinking. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, Vol. 61, No. 3, pp. 475–483. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15288/jsa.2000.61.475>.
- Shchepanskaya 1999 = Shchepanskaia, Tatiana. Antropologiiia molodezhnogo aktivizma. [The Anthropology of Youth Activism.] In: V. Kostiushev (ed.) *Molodezhnye dvizheniia i subkul'tury Sankt-Peterburga*. Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo Norma, pp. 262–302. Available at <http://www.poehalynarod.ru/ytt-6.htm>, last accessed on May 25, 2015.
- Shchepanskaya 2007 = Shchepanskaia, Tatiana. Fenomen “komandy” v rossiiskoi politicheskoi kul'ture sovetskogo i postsovetskogo periodov. [The Phenomenon of “Crew” in the Russian Political Culture of Soviet and Post-Soviet Period.] In: V. Bocharov (comp. & ed.) *Antropologiiia vlasti: Khrestomatiia po politicheskoi antropologii. T. 2. Politicheskaiia kul'tura i politicheskie protsessy*. Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo SPbGU, pp. 243–292. Available at <http://www.poehalynarod.ru/a-komanda3.htm>, last accessed on May 25, 2015.
- Shryock, Andrew 2004. Other Conscious/Self Aware: First Thoughts on Cultural Intimacy and Mass Mediation. In: A. Shryock (ed.) *Off Stage / On Display: Intimacy and Ethnography in the Age of Public Culture*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 3–28.
- Sidorov, Pavel & Shubin, Sergei 1994. Etnicheskie osobennosti alkogol'nogo psikhoza u nentsev. [Ethnic Peculiarities of the Nenets' Alcohol Psychosis.] *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, Vol. 7, p. 89. Available at <http://ecsocman.hse.ru/socis/msg/18915231.html>, last accessed on May 25, 2015.
- Simpura, Jussi & Levin, Boris M. 1997. *Demystifying Russian Drinking: Comparative Studies from the 1990s*. Research Reports / National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, Vol. 85. Helsinki: Stakes.

- Singer, Merrill 1986. Toward a Political-Economy of Alcoholism: The Missing Link in the Anthropology of Drinking. *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 113–130. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(86\)90360-6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(86)90360-6).
- Singer, Merrill 2012. Anthropology and Addiction: An Historical Review. *Addiction*, Vol. 107, No. 10, pp. 1747–1755. doi: 10.1111/j.1360-0443.2012.03879.x.
- Sokolov, Mikhail 2005. P'ianka: Issledovanie sotsial'nogo proizvodstva opyta ne-identichnosti. In: O. Pachenkova & M. Sokolova & E. Chikadze (eds.) *Bespredel'naia Sotsiologiya: Sbornik esse k 60-letiiu Viktora Voronkova*. Sankt Peterburg: TsNSI, pp. 83–97. Available at [http://cizr.ru/files/publ/Bespredel\\_Sokolov.pdf](http://cizr.ru/files/publ/Bespredel_Sokolov.pdf), last accessed on June 3, 2015.
- Spicer, Paul 1997. Toward a (Dys)functional Anthropology of Drinking: Ambivalence and the American Indian Experience with Alcohol. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 306–23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/maq.1997.11.3.306>.
- Steinmüller, Hans 2010. Communities of Complicity: Notes on State Formation and Local Sociality in Rural China. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 539–549. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01271.x>.
- Sulkunen, Pekka 2002. Between Culture and Nature: Intoxication in Cultural Studies of Alcohol and Drug Use. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 253–276. Available at <http://cdx.sagepub.com/content/29/2.toc>, last accessed on May 25, 2015. doi:10.1177/009145090202900203.
- Timofejew, Michail & Tschepurnaja, Olga & Schpakowskaja, Larissa & Margolina, Sonja & Sokolow, Michail 2006. Im Bann des grünen Drachen: Trinkkultur in Russland. *Kultura*, Nos. 7–8. Available at [http://www.kultura-rus.uni-bremen.de/kultura\\_dokumente/ausgaben/deutsch/kultura-2006-07-08.pdf](http://www.kultura-rus.uni-bremen.de/kultura_dokumente/ausgaben/deutsch/kultura-2006-07-08.pdf), last accessed on May 25, 2015.
- Tuisku, Tuula 2001. The Displacement of Nenets Women from Reindeer Herding and the Tundra in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Northwestern Russia. *Acta Borealia*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 41–60. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08003830108580525>.
- Turner, Victor W. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Vallikivi, Laur 2009. Christianization of Words and Selves: Nenets Reindeer Herders Joining the State through Conversion. In: M. Pelkmans (ed.) *Conversion After Socialism: Disruptions, Modernisms and Technologies of Faith in the Former Soviet Union*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 59–83.
- VanStone, James W. 1980. Drinking at Snowdrift: An Athapaskan Example. In: J. Hamer & J. Steinbring (eds.) *Alcohol and Native Peoples of the North*. Washington, DC: University Press of America, pp. 31–47.
- Vershubsky, Galina & Kozlov, Andrew 2006. Alcohol-Related Mortality among Indigenous People in the North of Western Siberia. *Proceedings ICCH13: The Abstract Book*. Novosibirsk. Available at [http://www.ict.nsc.ru/ws/show\\_abstract.dhtml?en+125+9063](http://www.ict.nsc.ru/ws/show_abstract.dhtml?en+125+9063), last accessed on May 25, 2015.
- Wiget, Andrew & Balalaeva, Olga 2007. Crisis, Conversion, and Conflict: Evangelical Christianity, Rapid Change, and the Eastern Khanty. *Sibirica*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 1–29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3167/sib.2007.060101>.

- Zdravomyslova, Elena & Chikadze, Elena 2000. Scripts of Men's Heavy Drinking. *Idatutkimus*, Vol. 2, pp. 35–52.
- Ziker, John P. 2009. Profile: Stress, Alcohol, and Demographic Change in Northern Siberia. In: A. McElroy & P. Townsend (eds.) *Medical Anthropology in Ecological Perspective*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp. 298–303. Available at <http://www.e-library.esut.edu.ng/uploads/pdf/8911516965-medical-anthropology-in-ecological-perspective.pdf>, last accessed on July 14, 2015.

## HOW TO ENJOY A TEETOTAL ALL-NIGHT PARTY: ABSTINENCE AND IDENTITY AT THE SAKHA PEOPLE'S YHYAKH

*Eleanor Peers, Stepan Kolodeznikov*

**Abstract:** This paper exploits the interconnections between alcohol use and politics, to examine changing forms of Sakha identification in the Sakha people's northeast Siberian Republic, Sakha (Yakutia). The Sakha people are an indigenous Siberian community; their territories have been under Russian administration since the early seventeenth century. The public event that is this paper's main focus – the Yhyakh – is a shamanic ritual, which has come to be regarded as a quintessential traditional Sakha practice.

Like many other non-Russian communities across the Soviet Union, the Sakha people have been experiencing a cultural revival, in the wake of an intensive attempt at cultural homogenisation during the Soviet era. Moderate Sakha nationalist politicians enjoyed a heady period of political dominance during the 1990s, which ceased with the advent of the Putin administrations. The Sakha people have since then watched the political and economic power of the Sakha nationalist movement fade into nothing, as the central government in Moscow has re-asserted its dominance over the Russian Federation's subject regions. This brief examination of alcohol consumption at the Yhyakh reveals the emergence of new conventions and discussions surrounding pleasure-seeking, physical discipline, and ethnic identification. It shows how the Sakha identification for many has become integrated into projects of personal reformation, as part of a broader acceptance of the Sakha national revival and its aims. The Yhyakh has become a fulcrum for the physical, spiritual and moral aspirations of a nationalist movement that can no longer exert a political influence, but is nonetheless capable of shaping aesthetic and moral values, and physical practice.

**Keywords:** alcohol use, cultural revitalisation, post-Soviet identification, Sakha culture, shamanism, Siberia

### INTRODUCTION

The consumption of alcohol is a fact of everyday life in societies across the world, both past and present: the motivation to alter one's state of consciousness through drinking has been pervasive throughout the centuries, whether or not this alteration is a source of enjoyment. Intoxication and its consequences

are one focus of human behaviour, and as such are integrated into the values and disciplines that both shape and reproduce social hierarchies, and their corresponding identifications and ontologies. Different forms of alcohol use manifest the varying experiences of the body, along with conventions related to pleasure-seeking and constraint, among the world's communities, and the social realities they inhabit. These conventions articulate belonging, in addition to the interrelations between those who can set or exploit the status quo, and those who can merely conform to it. Alcohol use therefore reflects forms of community, identification, and political relationship, as well as their inter-related values.<sup>1</sup> This paper exploits the interconnections between alcohol use and politics, to examine changing forms of Sakha identification in the Sakha people's northeast Siberian Republic, Sakha (Yakutia).<sup>2</sup>

Life in Sakha has been marked over recent decades by the shifting fortunes of the Sakha nationalist cultural revival, which emerged in the late 1980s, along with other non-Russian nationalist movements across the Soviet Union. After more than three centuries of Russian administration, and a highly determined and effective attempt at cultural homogenisation during the Soviet period, Sakha nationalist groups called for a concerted effort to affirm and revive disappearing Sakha cultural forms, and even for a greater level of political autonomy, during the 1990s. Sakha people currently represent the largest ethnic group in the Republic, making up 49.9 per cent of the population; the capital of Sakha, Yakutsk, is now very much a Sakha city.<sup>3</sup> Most scholars agree that they are descended from Turkic communities, who migrated northwards from southern Siberia during the second millennium.<sup>4</sup> Shamanic relationships and practices were integrated into Sakha daily life until the Soviet era, despite Tsarist Russian efforts to Christianise Sakha populations. The public event that is this paper's main focus – the Yhyakh – is a shamanic ritual, which has come to be regarded as a quintessential traditional Sakha practice. Moderate Sakha nationalist politicians enjoyed a heady period of political dominance during the 1990s, which ceased with the advent of the Putin administrations. Sakha people have since then watched the political and economic power of the Sakha nationalist movement fade into nothing, as the central government in Moscow has re-asserted its dominance over the Russian Federation's subject regions.

Following the 1990s national revival, the Sakha population is keenly aware of both its cultural particularity, and the extensive natural resources within the Republic's territory, which are now being exploited by Russian corporations. The Sakha regional administration experiences a need to appease the titular population by sponsoring large Sakha cultural events, such as the Yhyakh (Peers 2010; Sántha & Safonova 2011). The Sakha nationalist intellectuals, who have

retained the objective of reviving the Sakha people's cultural and religious tradition, can benefit from the political establishment's desire to stage sumptuous Yhyakh festivals, while having to negotiate the political interest in reducing Sakha nationalist fervour. A foreign observer might well ask themselves what the contemporary Yhyakh really means, given the increasing similarity of Sakha ways of life to those of their Russian neighbours, and the increasing dominance of the federal government. Is it a pretty show, staged to appease aging Sakha nationalists? Could it just be another of the prominent and expensive public occasions that local administrations use to mollify regional populations across Russia? Or perhaps, as this examination of alcohol use suggests, the Yhyakh in fact manifests a consolidation of Sakha national pride, despite their Republic's lack of political clout?

As the first section of this paper will explain, the Sakha people's Yhyakh ritual has been for centuries a celebration of their community and its status quo – and, as such, is a particularly clear example of the interaction between politics, consumption, and identification. This section describes pre-Soviet Yhyakh rituals and their fate during the twentieth century. In doing so, it will illustrate the impact Russian colonisation has had on Sakha society, and the forms that relationships between pleasure-seeking and social hierarchy can take. The second section introduces the Russian Federation's post-Soviet anti-alcohol campaigns, and their intersection in Sakha with ethnic stereotypes associated with indigenous Siberian alcohol use. The final section examines the changing consumption of alcohol at the newly revived Yhyakh, and the qualities of Sakha identification that are emerging in tandem.

## **POLITICS, PLEASURE, AND THE YHYAKH**

The ethnographic and historical data on pre-Soviet Sakha communities are incomplete and sometimes controversial – and yet these records consistently describe ritual feedings of spirits, called Ysyakh, or sometimes Ysoech (cf. Sieroszewski 1993; Khudyakov 1969; Lindenau 1983).<sup>5</sup> As this section will show, the Yhyakh past and present have manifested the complex interactions of Sakha and Russian elites, and their integration into Sakha society. In particular, the different patterns of recreation and pleasure-seeking at the Yhyakh have reflected the changing configurations of power and economy, incorporating entities as various as Sakha *Toyons*, or princes, Russian colonialists, and the local area spirits.

Successive Tsarist, Soviet, post-Soviet and foreign academic literatures on Sakha culture have generally taken the form of ethnography, or archaeology, and the ethnographic material produced before the Soviet period is both scanty, considering the huge size of the region, and heavily influenced by the Eurocentric perspectives of the German, Polish, or Russian investigators. As one might expect, the fragmented glimpses of Sakha life and culture we catch through this literature reveal wide regional variations on a number of common cultural elements – such as an animist worldview incorporating a pantheon of upper gods and lower demons – and a process of cultural transformation, under the influence of both Russification and interaction with other Siberian peoples, such as the Tungus. The descriptions of Yhyakh rituals also vary widely within this literature. Waclaw Sieroszewski, for example, puts his descriptions of the Yhyakh festivals he witnessed during the 1880s in a chapter on kin relationships, rather than the chapter on shamanic belief and practice (Sieroszewski 1993: 445–449). He distinguishes Yhyakh rituals from shamanic practice as being “joyful and life-affirming” rather than “gloomy” (ibid.: 648), asserting that they were one of the “symbolic celebrations and rituals” that consolidated alliances between kin groups (ibid.: 445). Meanwhile Ivan Khudyakov, writing about Verkhoyansk region in the late 1860s, presents Yhyakh rituals as one of the ways Sakha communities could engage with the spirits (Khudyakov 1969). He describes Yhyakh rituals devoted both to the upper spirits, and to the demons (ibid.: 262); the latter would involve a blood sacrifice, something that now is never associated in public with the Yhyakh and its tradition.

Nonetheless, the Yhyakh always seems to have occurred as a large-scale event, whether it formed part of a yearly cycle, or was celebrating a specific happening, such as a wedding or victory. The Yhyakh seems to have explicitly involved the entire community, rather than the circle of friends and kin immediately concerned with a shamanic healing ritual, for example. This community would include the spiritual entities that inhabited the visible environment. Most accounts of Yhyakh rituals describe long recitals of prayer-poems by a ritual specialist, as he or she offered the gods and higher spirits a range of sacrifices, such as fermented milk of a mare (*kymys*), or white horse hair. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century ethnographers mention circle dances, called Ohuohai, during which large numbers of people would dance for hours, if not days and nights (Khudyakov 1969; Lindenau 1983; Sieroszewski 1993). The poems that accompanied the Ohuohai were seen to have been inspired by the higher spiritual entities, and would praise the generosity and munificence of the gods and spirits; Ohuohai dancers would thus be engaging with the upper spirits, through the aesthetic pleasure of the dance and its poetry (Balzer 1997; Crate 2006a; Peers 2012).

The earlier ethnographic data indicates that the Yhyakh played an important role in affirming and reproducing Sakha communities, and their hierarchies, in addition to its spiritual purpose. Thus Jakob Lindenau writes about an *Ysoech* ritual in the 1740s, during which shamans addressed prayers to the upper gods before the attendees sought and obtained a blessing from their local *Toyon*, in an event that must have articulated a range of power relationships, between both human and non-human entities (Lindenau 1983: 36). Sieroszewski and Khudyakov also specify that nineteenth-century Yhyakh rituals were held by rich individuals for their community, in part to demonstrate their wealth and status (Sieroszewski 1993; Khudyakov 1969). Yhyakh festivals required a considerable outlay: goods had to be provided for sacrifice, in addition to enough expensive food and *kymys* to satisfy guests from the entire area; shamans had to be persuaded to preside over the main ritual; games, horse races and other entertainments also had to be organised. As the above quotation from Sieroszewski indicates, the Yhyakh rituals orientated towards the upper gods were opportunities for enjoyment and recreation. The upper gods and spirits would be praised, as further blessings were sought from them. As part of this, the attendees would enjoy their produce, and the achievements of their sportsmen, horses and artists – while finally having the chance to consume an abundance of food and drink, after the vicissitudes of winter and early spring. The sponsor of the Yhyakh would establish his status, while reinforcing community ties through the shared experience of the ritual. These events, ultimately, combined different forms of pleasure into a celebration of the contemporary order, which itself incorporated overlapping hierarchies of humans, spirits and gods (Peers 2012). Yhyakh rituals enabled their participants both to perceive and re-affirm their places within a continuous cosmological and social status quo. As such, Yhyakh rituals over the centuries have revealed changes in Sakha social differentiation, under the influence of successive Russian colonialist administrations – in addition to the shifting experiences of community and identity that emerged in tandem.

As an event distinguished by the generous consumption of food and drink, the Yhyakh has also reflected the changes in Sakha pastoralism and economic organisation, brought about by Russification. W. Sieroszewski's and A. Middendorf's late nineteenth-century interlocutors were claiming that the Yhyakh was a dying tradition; Khudyakov's informants also described their Yhyakh rituals as much less elaborate than those of the past (Sieroszewski 1993; Middendorf 1878; Khudyakov 1969). *Kumys* was giving way to Russian vodka and tea, as more and more Sakha communities increased their cattle herds at the expense of horses (Sieroszewski 1993; Middendorf 1878). Sakha populations in the regions around Yakutsk in particular were becoming more concentrated and

sedentary; they had also started to grow wheat, under the Russian influence. Cows, although regarded as inferior to horses in intelligence and hardiness, were easier for a settled population to keep, while producing a larger quantity of milk and meat. Hence, Yhyakhs were becoming less common in part because fewer people were capable of providing enough *kymys*. Popular tastes also seem to have been changing: Sieroszewski in particular claimed that the vodka and tea tent was the focus of attention at the Yhyakh he attended, rather than the *kymys* container (Sieroszewski 1993: 446). The changing social and economic order was influencing the perception and pursuit of enjoyment – in this case, towards the experiences generated by drinking caffeine and strong alcohol, rather than *kymys*.

Soviet-era Yhyakh festivals also manifested the massive social and political transformations that took place in Sakha, as the Soviet administration pursued its aim to create a homogeneously modernist, materialist communist society. The Tsarist state's successor was to bring in its own configuration of legitimate pleasure-seeking, power relationship, and community. Although the earlier Soviet administrations discouraged and sometimes forbade Yhyakh rituals in parts of Sakha, they perceived its significance for the Sakha population to be such that an outright ban would have generated serious problems. Instead, successive Soviet propagandists attempted to harness the Yhyakh for their own purposes – for instance, replacing the ritual feeding of local gods and spirits with the presentation of *kymys* to a portrait of Josef Stalin (Romanova 1994: 149). Large, secularised Yhyakhs were organised all over Sakha at the end of the Second World War, to hearten and encourage the Sakha population exhausted by the war effort. As the twentieth century continued, and pan-Soviet systems of education, cultural production and economic organisation reduced the cultural particularity of Sakha populations, Yhyakh rituals either came to resemble the multifarious other Soviet state holidays, or, in some areas, disappeared entirely. Sakha people have described Yhyakh festivals that would commence with speeches from the local administration and party leaders, as did all the other Soviet holidays (cf. Lane 1981). If these Yhyakhs reflected the Soviet-era organisation of power, they also reflected Soviet-era pleasure-seeking – and, in particular, the association between relaxation and drinking alcohol. Sakha people have claimed that the Yhyakh was seen as another chance to enjoy oneself by getting drunk with one's friends, along with the other state holidays and special occasions. Vodka and cognac were consumed in much, much larger quantities than *kymys*, and anyone dancing the Ohuohai was, more often than not, taking part in a folk-dancing competition (Crate 2006a). Since for many people the Yhyakh had become indistinguishable from the other Soviet

holidays, they do not seem to have attached much importance to it – with the exception of some Sakha communities living at a distance from Yakutsk, who continued to experience the Yhyakh as a particularly Sakha form of celebration and thanksgiving (Crate 2006b).

Key members of the Sakha nationalist intelligentsia staged prominent Yhyakh festivals during the late 1980s and early 1990s, as part of their campaign to reassert the worth and relevance of the Sakha heritage. Since then the Yhyakh has become one of the Republic's most important holidays. Hundreds of thousands of people now attend the Republic's largest Yhyakh, put on by the municipality of Yakutsk; every other Sakha settlement in the Republic holds its own Yhyakh, as do many of the Republic's larger institutions, private businesses, and family groups. It provides what is clearly a welcome excuse for Sakha citizens to explore their interest in their traditional culture, in shamanism, alternative medicine and spirituality, while relaxing with their families and friends. The various forms of pleasure-seeking at present-day Yhyakhs continue to manifest the Sakha people's changing cosmological and social setting, and the patterns of identification this setting generates.

As in the past, the current Yhyakh can take innumerable forms, depending on the agenda and means of its organisers. However, an Yhyakh generally includes the ritual feeding of the upper spirits and gods, followed by the Ohouhai; extensive speeches from the politicians and businessmen who are sponsoring the event; eating, drinking and relaxing with family, friends and colleagues; performances of Sakha folk and pop music and dancing; and competitions in traditional Sakha sports. The larger, state-sponsored Yhyakh festivals last for a couple of days, interspersed with a ritual greeting of the sun on one of the mornings. Yakutsk Yhyakh incorporates several sound and concert stages, food stalls, a sports area, horse racing, fashion shows, and a market selling Sakha art, crafts, clothes, jewellery, and souvenirs – in addition to areas where individuals can receive their own shamanic ritual cleansing, healing, and advice. A large part of the festival site is taken up with a series of small enclosures, in which individual organisations and regional administrations host their own rituals, exhibitions, and parties.

The present-day Yhyakh exhibits, in particular, the tensions within both Sakha identification, and the relationships between the Sakha population, their politicians, and the Russian federal government. The effects of Sakha's troubled identity politics, in addition to the increasing influence of foreign cultural products and technologies, are very apparent. Yakutsk Yhyakh is shot through with the ambiguity that surrounds the Sakha identification, whether manifested through the occasion's political communication, cultural production, shamanic

spirituality, commerce, or individual decisions about how to enjoy the holiday. For example, the proclamations about the Yhyakh that are broadcast throughout the ritual claim on occasion that the Yhyakh is ‘a holiday for all peoples’ (*usenarodniy prazdnik*); however, they can also remind the audience that the Yhyakh was initiated by the illustrious forefather of the Sakha people, Elley, as a great Sakha tradition. These announcements are part of the cultural establishment’s effort to encourage the Sakha to respect and value their cultural tradition, which forms a dominant part of the festival’s didactic purpose. And yet the Yhyakh’s organisers also provide their public with wooden sculptures inspired by Korean shamanism, and Native American totem poles; contemporary Yhyakh participants can now enjoy exotic versions of their own tradition, by taking and disseminating photographs of themselves with these sculptures.

In the wake of the cultural revival, many of the Sakha people at Yakutsk Yhyakh really are there to receive spiritual cleansing, as part of engaging with their pre-Soviet shamanic tradition. They may pay particular attention to the Yhyakh’s main ritual, undergo private shamanic healing ceremonies, or attend the greeting of the sun – or they may themselves be helping to administer the various forms of the Sakha shamanic ritual. These people are likely to see the Yhyakh as an occasion that enables them to engage with and articulate their deepest religious and moral convictions, and thus as one of the year’s most important events. Nevertheless, a large proportion of Yhyakh attendees – likely to include many of those who appreciate the Yhyakh’s spiritual aspect – are there as consumers of the various attractions provided by both state and commerce. There are market stalls to browse, for example, fairground rides for children, and an array of food and drink that includes hot dogs, ice creams, and the more traditional boiled horse-meat, served on sticks. The events of the twentieth century have shifted the Sakha population into a mass consumer society, with its corresponding forms of pleasure.

The contemporary Yhyakh therefore reflects the complexity of Sakha society, as it undergoes rapid social change. It stands at an intersection of politics, nationalism, leisure, fashion and spirituality. The following discussion of alcohol use at the Yhyakh will show how drinking has been integrated into the changing meaning of Sakha identification, and the communities this identification has shaped within Sakha. It will reveal a new potential for Sakha identification to generate forms of physical discipline and abstinence.

## **ALCOHOL USE, ETHNIC DIFFERENCE AND GOVERNANCE IN POST-SOVIET SAKHA**

Several acquaintances from Sakha have described the 1990s as a period when the only available pleasure and distraction from the hard work, setbacks, and uncertainty was a bottle of vodka shared with friends. As was the case all over the former Soviet Union, and, indeed, in many other societies, the assumption that a good party involves alcoholic drink could expand into the use of social drinking to cope with large-scale social upheaval. Alcohol may have been a form of release and recreation, but it was also a danger. The risk of abandoning all prospects and relationships to alcohol dependency was high, as was the possibility of being injured, sexually assaulted or killed in a drunken attack. During the early 2000s, the residents of Yakutsk would avoid being on the streets during the winter after 9 p.m., afraid of gangs of young, drunken men.

Most disturbingly, this problem was seen to be culturally specific: the offenders were pinpointed as Sakha university students, who had recently migrated to Yakutsk from exclusively Sakha villages. Longstanding citizens of Yakutsk – whether Russian or Sakha – found these students provincial and bad-mannered, while the former villagers were disgusted to find that many young urban Sakha people did not appear to value their cultural heritage, to the point where they had no Sakha language. Under the influence of alcohol, these tensions could erupt into potentially deadly fights. Alcohol consumption was thus integrated into broader ambivalences within Sakha identification, arising from the differences between urban and rural status, and the intersecting influences of Soviet and post-Soviet cultural homogenisation, with the late Soviet cultural revival. Urban Sakha populations tended to be more closely assimilated into Russia's wider hierarchies, and therefore also mainstream Russian conventions of thought, behaviour, and language (Argounova-Low 2007). The presence of a large, rural Sakha-speaking population, in conjunction with the national revival, brought into question individual loyalties to the Sakha community, and its prosperity. On the other hand, Tsarist and Soviet-era stereotypes about 'primitive', 'uncivilised' indigenous Siberian populations and their inability to manage alcohol combined with the higher, more 'civilised' status of urban Sakha people, and their repugnance at the sometimes violent drunkenness of village students, to create a rift that exacerbated a broader concern about the worth of Sakha culture and heritage.

Government administrations at all levels throughout the Russian Federation were making efforts to discourage drinking during the 2000s, and are continuing to do so. This promotion of teetotalism conforms to Vladimir Putin's public image

as a fit, ascetic, disciplined man, in contrast to the chaotic Boris Yeltsin. To an extent, it is addressing a significant social issue; however, it can also be seen as a method of establishing the government's legitimacy. Local administrations across Russia can show themselves to be energetically solving problems, for the relatively low cost of some prominent anti-alcohol advertisements in public spaces and the mass media.<sup>6</sup> Noticeably, these advertisements tend to cite alcohol use as a dysfunctional behaviour that needs to be eliminated, rather than the underlying social and psychological problems that cause excessive drinking.

The anti-alcohol campaigns in Sakha have been spiced by the worry about an innate inability to handle alcohol on the part of indigenous Siberians, mentioned above. The need to prevent alcohol consumption is now perceived to be strong enough to merit the limitation of alcohol sales in Yakutsk to between 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.; this measure was introduced in 2011. Some rural settlements have had a complete prohibition on alcohol sales. This innate incapacity to drink is now widely conceived of as a genetic deficiency. Many people contend that the European peoples have developed a gene that helps them to manage alcohol, along with their brewing and wine-making traditions. This gene, they argue, is absent in North Asia, since northern indigenous communities, like First Nation societies in North America, have never produced alcoholic drinks. However, Jaanus Harro in his keynote speech at a workshop in 2013 stated that there is as yet no evidence that European people have a gene that helps them digest alcohol, so that they do not become as drunk – only that there is a higher incidence in Asia of a gene that exacerbates the nausea experienced during a hangover (see Harro 2013). Several Asian peoples have developed their own alcoholic drinks – such as the Mongolian milk liqueur, *arkhi*. Indeed, some Sakha consultants are aware of the possibility that earlier Sakha populations also produced significantly alcoholic fermented milk drinks, in common with other Turkic peoples: present-day *kymys* does contain a very small percentage of alcohol, enough to make one light-headed for a couple of minutes after drinking a cup.

In fact, a questionnaire by Tatiana Argounova-Low and Yuri Zhegusov has indicated that ethnic Sakha people tend to drink less than Russians (Argounova-Low & Zhegusov 2013). These research findings corroborate the alcohol use we have observed: if anything, alcohol use is less a part of everyday life among Sakha communities than it is within mainstream Russian society. In contrast to many Europeans, including Russians, most Sakha people do not assume that welcoming a guest involves offering them alcohol. Consuming a small amount of alcohol at meals on a regular basis, with or without company, is much more likely to be regarded as worrying and abnormal behaviour, rather than as just

another personal habit. The majority of Sakha people at the many social occasions we have attended have enjoyed their drinks, without becoming excessively drunk. That said, we have occasionally witnessed Sakha people drinking a large amount of alcohol disturbingly quickly, before disrupting the occasion with behaviour that was often, ultimately, self-destructive. These incidents show why many people in Sakha might be afraid of alcohol consumption. However, the similar exhibitions of excessive drinking we have seen in other parts of Russia lead us to wonder whether the problem can be better understood in terms of a particular legacy of alcohol abuse common to the former Soviet space, rather than an innate and ethnic-specific incapacity to handle alcohol. Whatever the truth may be, a worry about an inherently Sakha capacity to misuse alcohol remains widespread, while the wholesale condemnation of alcohol use continues to be prominent in official discourse throughout Russia.

### **DRINKING AND ABSTINENCE AT THE MODERN-DAY YHYAKH**

The consumption of alcohol at post-Soviet Yhyakh festivals has reflected the changing incorporation of alcohol use into recreation, survival and governance in the broader Russian Federation; however, recently Sakha nationalist activists have added their own spin to the state-sponsored anti-alcohol campaigns that have been occurring throughout Russia, as we will explain below.

In 2011 and 2012, the engineers of the Sakha cultural and spiritual revival described the Yhyakh festivals of the 1990s and early 2000s as much more 'Soviet' and 'theatrical' (*teatrilišovannye*) than the most recent Yhyakhs. These festivals were organised and choreographed by cultural workers who had been trained during the Soviet era, and therefore reflected theatrical and aesthetic conventions ubiquitous throughout the Soviet Union (Donohoe & Habeck 2011). These events were presented to the Sakha population as a revival of their heritage. This population was already having to manage the legacy of the Tsarist and Soviet-era disparagement or repression of many indigenous Siberian cultural practices, and their own alienation from the practices and worldviews of their forbears – in addition to the economic hardships and social crises of the 1990s.

Unsurprisingly therefore, popular reactions to the Yhyakh revival were mixed; people could come to the Yhyakh to take advantage of some free entertainment, rather than to engage with their spiritual heritage. As part of this, they could view the Yhyakh as an excuse for a drink, as many had done during the Soviet era. Some of the people who were bringing alcoholic drinks to the ritual may only have been continuing the older practice of feeding vodka to the

area spirits, as part of a celebration of local human and non-human relationships. However, by all accounts, the alcohol consumption at Yakutsk Yhyakh in particular became a serious problem during the early 2000s. Several friends and acquaintances have told us that they stopped going to the Yhyakh rituals during the mid-2000s, because they were afraid of the drunkenness they would encounter there. The destructive binge-drinking that haunted Sakha had found its way into the Yhyakh, and was making a mockery of the Sakha intelligentsia's commitment to the revival of shamanic spirituality, and traditional cultural production.

The consumption of alcohol at Yakutsk Yhyakh was banned in 2007. It is currently forbidden to bring alcoholic drink onto the festival site, or sell it; policemen check the belongings of people entering the festival during the night. Many Sakha people have commended this ban to us, sometimes also explaining that Sakha people, unlike Europeans, are unable to manage alcohol. Most people prefer not to elaborate on this point; however, a few conversations have indicated that this inability to manage alcohol refers to a propensity to become intoxicated beyond all self-control, unleashing one's potential for both violent aggression and self-humiliation.

The persisting assumption that Sakha people are inherently unable to drink in moderation is perhaps one reason why Sakha nationalist intellectuals and activists are keen to discourage alcohol consumption within Sakha communities. Many of these individuals form a recognisable network within Sakha political, academic and artistic establishments; as we have mentioned, nationalist activists and politicians have an interest in co-operating with each other, even if their fundamental objectives may be very different. Nationalist activists therefore are under an imperative to echo the political anti-alcohol campaigns, in order to maintain their public respectability. And yet prominent Sakha intellectuals do not merely emphasise the negative consequences of alcohol use: many also assert that those who are truly committed to their Sakha heritage respect the teetotal lives of their forefathers, by abstaining from alcohol. This contention undermines the degrading implications within the allegation that Sakha people cannot drink, by re-positioning the colonising Russians as the corrupting influence that introduced alcohol to pre-colonial Sakha communities. An inability to drink in moderation here becomes the mark of a heritage unsullied by a tradition in alcohol production, rather than a manifestation of indigenous backwardness: while the Russian vodka traders are sometimes equated with the white settlers who brought alcohol to Native American populations, with devastating effect. This line of argument emphasises the Sakha people's status as a north Asian indigenous community – at the expense of the Turkic aspect

of their heritage, which, as we have mentioned, implies the possibility that earlier Sakha populations made fermented milk drinks.

Teetotalism has become a prominent part of the lives of some Sakha patriots, to the extent that alcohol sometimes is no longer offered at the formal banquets that take place during regional Yhyakh festivals. This is a very recent change: alcohol was served at the Yhyakh banquet in Khangalass region in 2009; however, an equivalent banquet in 2012 was accompanied only by tea, cowberry juice (*mors*, in Russian), and *kymys*. These banquets are generally hosted by the region's local administration, for the Yhyakh's most notable guests – whether they are eminent businessmen, politicians, intellectuals, cultural workers, or foreign academics. This selection of guests generally includes people who are explicitly concerned with reviving the Sakha heritage. The connections between Sakha nationalist networks and the political elites are close enough for even Russian politicians to moderate their behaviour to suit Sakha nationalist sympathies, particularly at what is emphatically a Sakha national event: we have seen ethnic Russian politicians wear Sakha national costumes, for example. Of course, Russia's elites cannot expect to get away with getting blind drunk at a formal banquet, especially given the official disparagement of alcohol consumption that has been a feature of the Putin administrations. However, a complete absence of alcohol at what is after all a closed event is striking, forestalling as it does the possibility of toasting with alcohol, generally an integral part of celebration in Russia. This change in practice accords with the emphatically teetotal stance prominent Sakha revivalist activists and shamanic practitioners have taken in recent years, and indicates that an avowed repugnance towards alcohol consumption has become a sufficiently powerful norm among Sakha elites to pressure the political establishment into adopting it themselves.

Moreover, the extent to which this norm is shaping conventionally respectable behaviour and values manifests a new quality of Sakha identification. The belief that someone who is genuinely and laudably committed to revitalising Sakha culture eschews alcohol assumes the Sakha identification to entail a conscious aspiration towards self-improvement, which incorporates physical discipline. The Sakha cultural revival therefore is understood to impose criteria for the physical and moral characteristics of those who espouse it as a worthwhile project. Instead of being a potentially embarrassing label for the members of a Siberian indigenous community, the Sakha identification has become for some a quest to change their lives and bodies for the better. These are the people who regard the Yhyakh as a crucial opportunity for spiritual cleansing, and the celebration of their most essential values. Their revived enthusiasm for the pre-Soviet shamanic universe, combined with the effects of

post-Soviet political and social change, has transformed the values associated with pleasure-seeking and community affirmation. Alcohol consumption is now seen as a hindrance to a harmonious relationship with Sakha ancestors, and their deities – and hence as profoundly destructive, rather than a pleasurable social pastime. Small wonder, then, that the organisers of Yakutsk Yhyakh do their best to prevent degrading exhibitions of drunkenness, even if they have to forego the revenue that could be generated from allowing beer stalls.

The Sakha revival is still a work in progress – as is the process of self-improvement many of its proponents have undertaken. There may be several highly disciplined and committed Sakha revivalists who are teetotal, and especially at the Yhyakh; however, there were other individuals at Yakutsk Yhyakh in 2011 and 2012 who successfully smuggled in bottles to have with their picnics. It is still possible to catch sight of a happy family party, sometimes in Sakha national costumes, unobtrusively pouring wine into their plastic cups. The legacy of Soviet-era recreational drinking and the continued presence of mainstream Russian alcohol advertising mean that many are drawn to celebrate their holiday with a drink. These people may only be continuing the centuries-old Sakha practice of self-indulgent consumption at the Yhyakh; however, nowadays they might also be seen to be compromising their status as genuine Sakha patriots.

And yet these individuals, and the people around them, are happy to accept the tensions within displaying one's Sakha national pride by participating in the Yhyakh, perhaps even in national costumes, while consuming European wine or cognac. This acceptance parallels the silent acknowledgement of the cooperation of Sakha intellectuals with politicians and businessmen who do not have the interests of the national revival at heart. Sakha communities and their histories continue to be integrated into broader Russian, and even global, political economies, which continue to shape both national and religious revival, and popular recreation. Like other national revivals around the world, the claim of Sakha revival towards having an authentically Sakha authorship, aim and effect is extremely complex (cf. Asad 1993).

The paradoxes within Sakha alcohol consumption show that the national revival has consolidated itself into consistent categories of identification, value, and aspiration, which are recognised and acknowledged by a large proportion of the Sakha community. Sakha people can now adopt a spectrum of characteristics – including recognisable forms of physical discipline – into their aspirations for their own personal development, and this process of self-development is proudly and self-consciously Sakha. This affirmation of a Sakha identification is paralleled by a loyalty towards the Sakha people as a distinct community

within the Russian Federation, demonstrated by the willingness to disregard the moments when individuals or groups fail to live up to the ideal. The inhabitants of Yakutsk now say that the problems they experienced with drunken Sakha students have abated over recent years: the drunk and violent have migrated to certain troubled areas on the outskirts of Yakutsk, leaving the respectable Sakha mainstream to get on with its business. As the fractures engendered by cultural difference and insecurity have decreased, making irrelevant the previous rift between urbanised and rural Sakha, the Sakha community can now recognise its validity, worth, and common aims. Many Sakha people also recognise an increasing urgency about the need to preserve and promote Sakha culture and heritage, in the face of increasing immigration from China and Central Asia, and the dominance of the overtly pro-Russian federal administration.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the Sakha case shows, alcohol use is embedded into the nexus of value and practice that spans politics, and the everyday treatment of the body. It can thus manifest the deeper shifts in aesthetic and moral value, motivation, and identification, which accompany a changing political landscape. This brief examination of alcohol use at the Yhyakh has revealed that the Sakha identification for many has become integrated into projects of personal reformation, as part of a broader acceptance of the Sakha national revival and its aims. Far from being an expensive show to mollify and entertain, the Yhyakh has become a fulcrum for the physical, spiritual and moral aspirations of a nationalist movement that can no longer exert a political influence, but is nonetheless capable of shaping aesthetic and moral values, as well as physical practice.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The intersection between physical discipline and power has been a topic of scholarly discussion for many decades, most prominently in the wake of Michel Foucault's life and work.
- <sup>2</sup> One of the authors is British; she has been visiting Sakha since 2004, and has been gathering data on the Yhyakh since 2009. The other author is Sakha, and has spent most of his life in Yakutsk, witnessing the events and transformations described here at first hand. Our contentions here are based on the British author's observations, the Sakha author's life experience, and the interchange of our two perspectives as we developed the piece.
- <sup>3</sup> See [http://www.perepis-2010.ru/results\\_of\\_the\\_census/](http://www.perepis-2010.ru/results_of_the_census/), last accessed on April 22, 2015.
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, Crate 2006b; Maak 1994 [1887]; Gogolev 2004; and Jochelson 1933.
- <sup>5</sup> S often becomes h in contemporary Sakha language, and hence our Sakha interlocutors tend to speak about the Yhyakh, sometimes asserting that Ysyakh is a Russianised pronunciation of the word. We follow the contemporary Sakha usage in calling this event Yhyakh.
- <sup>6</sup> A body of literature has been developing on the expansion of governance through positing problems. See, for example, Ssorin-Chaikov 2003, and Gupta 1995.

## REFERENCES

- Argounova-Low, Tatiana 2007. Close Relatives and Outsiders: Village People in the City of Yakutsk, Siberia. *Arctic Anthropology*, Vol. 44, No. 1, pp. 51–61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/arc.2011.0072>.
- Argounova-Low, Tatiana & Zhegusov, Yurii 2013. Coded: Perception and Treatment of Alcohol Addiction in Sakha (Yakutiia). "Drinking and driving is so much fun": *Arctic workshop of the University of Tartu, May 31–June 1*. Conference paper.
- Asad, Talal 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Balzer, Marjorie Mandelstam 1997. The Poetry of Sakha (Siberian Yakut) Shamanism. In: J. Leavitt (ed.) *Poetry and Prophecy: The Anthropology of Inspiration*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 93–128.
- Crate, Susan A. 2006a. *Ohuokhai*: Sakhas' Unique Integration of Social Meaning and Movement. *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 119, No. 472, pp. 161–183. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jaf.2006.0019>.
- Crate, Susan A. 2006b. *Cows, Kin and Globalization: An Ethnography of Sustainability*. Plymouth: AltaMira Press.

- Donahoe, Brian & Habeck, Joachim Otto (eds.) 2011. *Reconstructing the House of Culture: Community, Self and the Makings of Culture in Russia and Beyond*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn.
- Gogolev 2004 = Gogolev, Anatolii. *Etnicheskaia istoriia narodov Iakutii*. [The Ethnic History of the Peoples of Yakutia.] Iakutsk: Izdatelstvo IaGU.
- Gupta, Akhil 1995. Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 375–402.
- Harro, Jaanus 2013. Alcohol and the Brain ... and Driving. "Drinking and driving is so much fun": Arctic workshop of the University of Tartu, May 31–June 1. Conference keynote speech.
- Jochelson, Waldemar 1933. *The Yakut*. Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. 33, No. 2. New York: The American Museum of Natural History. Available at <http://digitallibrary.amnh.org/dspace/handle/2246/138>, last accessed on April 23, 2015.
- Khudyakov 1969 = Khudiakov, Ivan. *Kratkoe opisanie Verkhoianskogo okruga*. Edited by V. Bazanov. Leningrad: Nauka.
- Lane, Christel 1981. *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in an Industrial Society – the Soviet Case*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lindenau 1983 = Lindenau, Iakob. *Opisanie narodov Sibiri (pervaia pol. XVIII v.): Istoriko-etnograficheskie materialy o narodakh Sibiri i Severo-Vostoka*. [A Description of the Peoples of Siberia (First Half of the 18th Century): Ethnographic Material about the Peoples of Siberia and the North East.] Magadan: Magadanskoe kn. izd-vo. Available at <https://cloud.mail.ru/public/0707efe6851a/15.02.13>, last accessed on April 23, 2015.
- Maak, Richard 1994 [1887]. *Viliuiskii Okrug*. [Vilyui Region.] Second edition. Moskva: Iana.
- Middendorf, Aleksandr 1878. *Puteshchestvie na sever i vostok Sibiri*. [A Journey to the North and East of Siberia.] Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk. Available at <http://books.e-heritage.ru/book/10070614>, last accessed on May 25, 2015.
- Peers, Eleanor 2010. *Print, Power and Personhood: Newspapers and Ethnic Identity in East Siberia*. PhD thesis. University of Cambridge.
- Peers, Eleanor 2012. Populiarnaia kul'tura, poeziia i bogi: izmeniaiushcheesia vzaimodeistvie landshafta, krasoty i dukhovnosti v iakutskom obshchestve. [Pop Culture, Poetry and the Gods: The Changing Interaction of Landscape, Beauty and Spirituality in Sakha Society.] In: N. Pavlova (ed.) *Priroda i kul'tura: Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii (Iakutsk 13–15 iunია 2012 g.)*. [Nature and Culture: Materials of an International Academic Conference (Yakutsk, 13–15 June 2012).] Iakutsk: Izdatel'skii dom SVFU, pp. 70–74.
- Romanova, Ekaterina 1994. *Iakutskii prazdnik Ysyakh: Istoki i predstavleniia*. [The Yakut Ysyakh Holiday: Sources and Understandings.] Novosibirsk: Nauka.
- Sántha, István & Safonova, Tatiana 2011. *Pokazukha* in the House of Culture: The Pattern of Behavior in Kurumkan, Eastern Buriatiia. In: Brian Donahoe & Joachim

- Otto Habeck (eds.) *Reconstructing the House of Culture: Community, Self and the Makings of Culture in Russia and Beyond*. New York: Berghahn, pp. 75–96.
- Sieroszewski 1993 = Seroshevskii, Vatslav. *Iakuty: Opyt etnograficheskogo issledovaniia*. [Yakuts: The Experience of Ethnographic Research.] Moskva: ROSSPEN.
- Ssorin-Chaikov, Nikolai 2003. *A Social Life of the State in Subarctic Siberia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

# THE HISTORICAL-ETHNOGRAPHIC IMAGE OF THE DRINKING PEOPLES OF THE NORTH

*Art Leete*

**Abstract:** In this paper I aim to analyse descriptions of Arctic peoples' drinking as one of the oldest stereotypes concerning inhabitants of the North. I intend to explore philosophical frameworks and ways of observation that influenced the appearance and maintenance of the image of a drinking northerner in literature through the millennia. I have examined different sources that provide descriptions of northern drinking as well as scientific and philosophical texts that reveal how the image of indigenous people and drinking is introduced and supported in the writings of intellectuals in different time periods. I have discovered that since classical antiquity, scholars and travellers have believed that people drink more in the north than they do in the south. Later on, medieval and Enlightenment authors developed this understanding about northern drinking according to religious and philosophical paradigms of their eras. My evidence also shows that drinking was included in the mainstream intellectual discourse concerning the Arctic since the 19th century. From the evidence, I conclude that the appearance and long-term survival of the ethnographic image of a drinking native of the North has been possible because of adaptation of this idea to specific temporary narrative strategies. In different periods this idea of Arctic drinking has been applied to specific theoretical and philosophical settings. This adaptability has made the idea about drinking in the North a rather powerful cognitive model of the northern indigenous peoples.

**Keywords:** alcohol, drinking, image, narrative, northern peoples

## INTRODUCTION

The image of a drinking inhabitant of the North has been established in intellectual tradition, lasting since classical antiquity. During recent centuries, different authors have continued to depict drinking among the Arctic peoples as a characteristic and disturbing element of local life. As one of the most long-standing documented problems among the northern peoples, this theme serves to be explored in order to establish possible circumstances of persistent narrative reflections on drinking.

Western intellectuals depicted the Arctic predominantly as a space of euphoric mysticism and romantic heroism (see Lopez 1986). Drinking constitutes

a concentration point of social problems, thus presenting quite a different angle on the northern regions and exhibiting the northern areas as arenas of sharp social and cultural ambivalence. In the framework of the current study, I approach the northern regions of the world in a rather wide perspective. As descriptions of northern drinking are not often related to specifically defined places in the 'North' or 'Arctic', my use of these concepts is intentionally vague. Older historical and philosophical sources constitute a general conceptual framework of understanding that those peoples that live in the northern side always drink more. I contend that arguments concerning a particular people's habits are derived from this indistinct notion. While analysing modern ethnographic discourse, I concentrate on indigenous groups of Western Siberia and the tundra areas of European Russia (the Nenets, Khanty and Mansi people).

As the topic involves sensitive ethical issues, drinking in the Arctic is not part of a usual contemporary ethnographic discourse. Even if ethnographers who have studied Western Siberia describe the devastating effects of systematic and extensive alcohol consumption in their diaries (see, e.g., Sokolova 2011) or indigenous people being sometimes just tipsy and joyful (see Chernetsov 1987), one cannot find any notions on drinking in their academic works (cf., e.g., Chernetsov 1959; Sokolova 1968, 1972) or popular overviews (see Sokolova 1976, 1981, 1982). In fact, earlier academic works are also characterised by the absence of the analysis of drinking. At the same time, descriptions of alcohol consumption were usually included in the field diaries and popular overviews of the northern peoples' lives.

I am not concentrating my study<sup>1</sup> on actual drinking practices in the North, although these constitute an important frame of reality for my study. In this article I aim to analyse how drinking in the Arctic has been depicted and explained in early ethnographic literature. My argument is that modern descriptions of drinking among the northern peoples received prominent discursive support from the Western philosophical tradition. I intend to demonstrate the way in which this powerful image of drinking northerners has evolved and what kind of intellectual cognitive rules have shaped the development of this persistent image. I also investigate methods of reasoning about the northern indigenes being unable to resist alcohol.

## **GROUNDING DISCOURSES OF NORTHERN DRINKING**

Modern academic discourse on the anthropology of drinking recognises the deep historical roots and the widespread nature of alcohol-related social practices. In many cultures, alcohol is used for arousing bodily sensations, arranging

ritual actions, and confirming social relationships. Alcohol-related practices are surrounded with cultural paradoxes, and are valued both positively and negatively, concentrating around themselves a variety of ethnocentric assumptions (Mandelbaum 1979: 14; Heath 1987: 99–100, 106; Dietler 2006: 230–232, 242).

Significantly for the anthropology of drinking, a peculiar link has been recognised between the indigenous and geographic aspects of drinking. Similarly to the general alcohol discourse, these specific practices of drinking have been mapped among the earliest distinctive features of exotic cultures as such:

*Since classical times, travellers from the oecumene [the known world] crossing the frontiers of civilization have noted, among other exotic phenomena, the way native people use alcoholic beverages and respond to drunkenness. (Honigmann 1979: 30)*

One can find notions of drinking in very early descriptions of people, living far from centres of civilisation. Herodotus wrote in the 5th century B.C. about the Budin people living in the north and east of the Black Sea as great worshippers of Dionysus or Bacchus (Herodotus 1981 [1954]).

In his book titled *Laws*, Plato (4th century B.C.) describes the law of the Carthaginians stipulating that “[---] no one while he is on a campaign should be allowed to taste wine at all, but that he should drink water during all that time, and that in the city no slave, male or female, should ever drink wine” (Plato ICA). Earlier in the same book, Plato compares drinking customs of different peoples. He concludes that the Thracians and the Scythians (both men and women) drink unmixed wine, but the Persians have more moderation (ibid.). Plato does not reflect explicitly on natural conditions but one can deduct a climatic pattern from his approach: the people living north of Greece are described as more heavy drinkers, and southern neighbours as neglecting wine consumption. This observation is in accord with Herodotus’s notes on the people in the North, whose drinking habits impressed the early Greek historian.

Recognition of this geographical drinking pattern becomes more explicit in the works of Hippocrates (5th century B.C.) and Aristotle (4th century B.C.). They believed that environment shapes human culture as well as human psyche (Phares 1991: 24). Aristotle analyses in his book *Politics* the influence of climate on the form of political organisation. According to Aristotle, northerly winds support democracy (as in Greece) and southerly winds encourage oligarchy (as in Cartago). He also makes a few notations on the consequent relationship between climatic conditions, health issues, and drinking habits (Aristotle ICA).

The correlation between climate and drinking is more precisely elaborated by Hippocrates. He considers that the life of those people who live in cities opened to southerly winds and sun but protected from northerly winds is guided

by a number of physiological peculiarities. Among other things, Hippocrates warns that drinking wine is especially tough for inhabitants of the cities with southerly winds:

*A city that is exposed to hot winds (these are between the wintry rising, and the wintry setting of the sun), and to which these are peculiar, but which is sheltered from the north winds; in such a city [--] they do not eat nor drink much; drinking wine in particular, and more especially if carried to intoxication, is oppressive to them. (Hippocrates ICA)*

In order to be correct, it must be admitted that Hippocrates does not approve of drinking in northerly wind areas either. But he is not so strict while discussing drinking in northern conditions. According to Hippocrates, the northern weather is related to looser norms and at least moderate drinking is allowed, as natural conditions enable this to some extent (ibid.).

Thus, Hippocrates argues that drinking in the northern areas is caused or enabled by a specific interaction between climate and the human organism. Although Hippocrates mostly associates his arguments with the harmfulness of drinking in southern areas, somehow an implicit justification of northern drinking can be detected in his scholarly speculations.

Some other classical historians have touched upon the remarkable drinking habits of the North. For example, of northernmost peoples, Strabo (beginning of the 1st century), describes the Sacae who engage in drunken, licentious revelleries (Strabo 1903). Following Strabo, Tacitus (1st century), too, writes of the destructive influence of civilisation on barbarians in connection with the spread of alcohol (Tokarev 1978: 41; Honigmann 1979: 30). Tacitus characterises habits of life in Germania and points out that people have plenty of rest there because of a long winter. The inhabitants of Germania often organise festal meetings or political discussions and drink large quantities of alcohol during these events:

*To pass an entire day and night in drinking disgraces no one. Their quarrels, as might be expected with intoxicated people, are seldom fought out with mere abuse, but commonly with wounds and bloodshed. Yet it is at their feasts that they generally consult on the reconciliation of enemies, on the forming of matrimonial alliances, on the choice of chiefs, finally even on peace and war, for they think that at no time is the mind more open to simplicity of purpose or more warmed to noble aspirations. A race without either natural or acquired cunning, they disclose their hidden thoughts in the freedom of the festivity. Thus the sentiments of all having been discovered and laid bare, the discussion is renewed on the following day, and from each occasion its own peculiar advantage is derived. They*

*deliberate when they have no power to dissemble; they resolve when error is impossible.* (Tacitus 1877)

These classical descriptions of regions favourable for drinking were associated with the Greeks and Romans' neighbours and did not reach farther than Germany and the steppes around the Black Sea. But these regions constituted the border areas of the world, known to intellectuals of the Antiquity. Anyhow, by these descriptions and discussions, the matrix of northern drinking was established. During later periods, travellers and scholars shifted similar descriptions further to the real Arctic, but the standard was still borrowed from these classical accounts of alcohol practices. It must also be considered that these accounts were not simply reproduced but also developed further by adding new layers of meanings to these narratives.

During the Middle Ages, the overall descriptive style of the North remained the same as in the Antiquity. It was mostly due to the effect of the employed narrative strategy that resulted from the circumstance that many people who described the northern peoples had not actually met them (although they frequently claimed that they had). At the same time, descriptions of the Arctic obtained some specific features because real contacts with the northern peoples gradually became more frequent.

Descriptions of drinking became part of a dominant discourse that was aimed to confirm the Christian worldview. Sacred geography determined understanding of travel in spiritual terms. Regions far from the Christian world were supposed to be more sinful. This approach also included projecting drinking habits to the edge of the known world, and areas closer to Christian regions were supposed to follow biblical morals. For example, Eusebius of Caesarea (4th century) discusses the Law of Moses and demonstrates that Cartago laws, which prohibit drinking, are in accordance with evangelical principles (Eusebius of Caesarea 1903).

Another way to address drinking was to provide descriptions of the northern peoples who were rather fond of alcohol. For example, William of Rubrouck (1997: 151) wrote down a story he had heard from the Chinese priests in the 13th century about alcohol-liking savages who inhabited areas north of China. According to this narrative, if one manages to collect blood from these people while they are intoxicated, it is possible to make the colour purple.

In general, descriptions of the northern drinking in the Middle Ages repeated data provided in classical sources or retold stories heard during a few trips made by medieval travellers. At the same time, in contrast to the Ancient Greek and Roman authors, medieval writers shifted the meaning of these descriptions. The discourse of drinking in the North was shaped by Christian ideas about the moral inferiority of those using alcohol. Biblical allusions constituted a concep-

tual core of these descriptions (Heath 1987: 106). Logically, only savages living far from the Christian world could tolerate this sinful practice.

## ENLIGHTENMENT PHILOSOPHY ABOUT DRINKING IN THE NORTH

The tradition of thinking about a specific interrelationship between climate and drinking, initiated in ancient Greece, was developed further and introduced to modern Europe by Charles Montesquieu. Similarly to classical explanations, Montesquieu's theory connects southern areas (or regions closer to the equator) with oligarchy and strict laws (among them restrictions on drinking) that are determined by natural conditions. In northern lands (or the far south), drinking is more compatible with proper human behaviour. Classical Greek authors expressed this pattern in a moderate way but Montesquieu postulates a connection between climate and drinking rather firmly and clearly.

Montesquieu established an understanding of the relationship between climate and a style of culture for modern science, and a firm connection between climate, people's character, and political organisation. While discussing drinking-related laws, Montesquieu connects his thoughts to an earlier discourse, established for the scholarly tradition by Eusebius of Caesarea, Aristotle, and Plato.

Montesquieu argues that there exists an overall imminent connection between natural conditions and rules that shape different spheres of human life. According to Montesquieu, the spirit of people is a product of the phenomena governing them, such as climate, religion, laws and principles of the government, as well as past precedents, habits, and customs. Different governing phenomena can be found to predominate among different peoples. Savage peoples are governed exclusively by nature and climate (Montesquieu 1989: 290–291). Montesquieu is convinced that this interrelated natural and social establishment exists and scholars must be able to reveal the exact nature of this law:

*If it is true that the character of the spirit and the passions of the heart are extremely different in the various climates, laws should be relative to the differences in these passions and to the differences in these characters.*  
(ibid.: 231)

Other philosophers of the Enlightenment also promoted these ideas. For example, concurring with Montesquieu, Rousseau notes that natural factors characteristic of a climactic zone enable to determine the nature of the inhabitants of

that region. Rousseau (1998: 110–112) maintains that cold climates are marked by barbarism and savagery.

Anyway, Montesquieu is the most prominent protagonist of the idea concerning climate and culture being tightly linked. According to Montesquieu, minds and passions are extremely different in different climatic zones. As Montesquieu (1989: 238–239) argues, in northern countries consumption of strong liquor is a necessity because of the cold climate.

Montesquieu also specifically discusses how drinking is related to conditions of nature. According to Montesquieu, the climate determines, among other things, physiological functions of a human body and thus also the drinking habits of a population. Exploring geographical determinants of human behaviour, he considers drinking physiologically inevitable in northern areas:

*In cold countries, perspiration releases little of the watery part of the blood; it remains in abundance; therefore one can use spirits there without making the blood coagulate. One is full of humors there; alcoholic beverages, which give motion to the blood, are suitable. (Montesquieu 1989: 239)*

Further, Montesquieu elaborates the debate, in particular the connection between religious or legal restrictions of drinking and climatic conditions in different regions. As he demonstrates, in the northern lands there exists an unavoidable need for drinking. People in these areas do not have a personal choice in developing their attitude towards drinking. The character of climate has determined it already:

*The law of Mohammed that prohibits the drinking of wine is, therefore, a law of the climate of Arabia; thus, before Mohammed, water was the ordinary drink of the Arabs. The law that prohibits the Carthaginians from drinking wine was also a law of the climate; in effect, the climate of these two countries is about the same.*

*Such a law would not be good in cold countries, where the climate seems to force a certain drunkenness of the nation quite different from drunkenness of the person. (ibid.)*

On the basis of the presented pieces of information, Montesquieu makes a comprehensive conclusion concerning worldwide drinking patterns. According to his theory, one can establish the degree of alcohol consumption of a population by estimating its position in regard to the equator and poles:

*Drunkenness is found established around the world in proportion to the cold and dampness of the climate. As you go from the equator to our pole, you will see drunkenness increase with the degree of latitude. As you go*

*from the same equator to the opposite pole, you will find drunkenness to the south, as on our side to the north.* (ibid.)

It does not mean that we can necessarily observe differences in actual human behaviour. Natural conditions guide our conduct, but sometimes these differences are not explicit. Montesquieu argues that even if people in different geographic surroundings drink alike, their cultural choice must be contradictory. And these opposite cultural strategies may lead to adopting similar social practices concerning alcohol: "A German drinks by custom, a Spaniard by choice." (ibid.)

In general, Montesquieu's approach results in the argument that human beings make their own decisions concerning their actions, but climate serves as an overall determining force behind all human action. In this way, people are forced to incline towards certain kinds of habits. In the north, this package of ecological conduct includes, among other things, drinking.

After Montesquieu, descriptions of the northern peoples' drinking became rather usual in ethnographic accounts. Even if these observations were more structured and differently explained, a certain fatality permeates these 19th-century reports. But all these accounts connect the geographical north and drinking according to the principal pattern proposed by Montesquieu.

## **ACCOUNTS OF DRINKING AMONG NORTHERN PEOPLES AFTER MONTESQUIEU**

Sporadic scientific documentation of the northern peoples' drinking was also conducted in the 18th century, but this account was published much later, only in the mid-20th century (see Zuev 1947: 23). In the 19th century, ethnographies on Western Siberian indigenous groups became more frequent than before. Also, numerous travelogues about Siberia were published during this period. The issue of alcohol consumption was frequently touched upon.

Enlightenment philosophy had a certain influence on this line of thought in the ethnographies of the North. Enlightenment-inspired cognition of a specific pattern of northern drinking grounded a number of later descriptions. The 19th- and early 20th-century northern discursive tradition presupposed that in the North indigenous people are not able to resist alcohol. In general, this view continues Montesquieu's line of thinking.

In the 19th-century descriptions it became rather popular to present the image of an alcohol-loving northern people. Often, the possible reason of northern drinking is not proposed. Contemporary accounts were marked by a general perception of northern peoples as heavy drinkers. Quite a few authors

in that period wrote about the Nenets' and Ob-Ugrians' love of liquor (Latkin 1853: 118; Castrén 1860: 265, 327, 340; 1967: 133–134<sup>2</sup>; Venyamin 1858: 82; Maksimov 1909a [1859]: 379–380; 1909b [1859]: 109; Sorokin 1873: 33; Simonov 1884: 387; Martin 1897: 11; Karjalainen 1983: 22, 32, 33, 64–65, 78; Kannisto 1963: 71–73, 74, 150–151; Kannisto & Liimola 1951: XVII–XVIII; Ramsey 1908: 464, 466; Lvov 1903: 19; Sno 1904: 13; Ostroumov 1904: 27; Kozmin 1913: 37; see also Balzer 1999: 47).

Understanding of fatality in the drinking practice in the Arctic is reflected in the style of these notions as those are presented beyond dispute. Authors do not question the nature of the habit and describe it with an abundance of overwhelming emotions. For example, Mattias Aleksanteri Castrén gives a short but particularly vivid account of Nenets drinking (Castrén 1967: 133–134), summing up with a statement: “A general drinking malaise has taken hold of these poor people.”

Another 19th-century scholar, Vasily Latkin, comes to a similar conclusion by noting that “desire for strong liquors is characteristic of all savage tribes” (Latkin 1853: 121–122).

Russian scholar Alexander Dunin-Gorkavich is also rather definite while discussing drinking habits of the Khanty people. Dunin-Gorkavich (1904: 25) makes simple statements about this issue without any hesitation, for example: “Drinking is widely spread among all the indigenes.” Sometimes he adds a few details that stress the moral inferiority of this habit, arguing that “drinking is the main vice of the indigenes” (ibid.: 33).

The northern natives are described as hopelessly addicted to alcohol but also other narcotic substances. Yadrintsev, another Siberian intellectual, considers the Siberian natives to be passionate, childlike, and in need of cheap, sparkling trinkets:

*They seek instant gratification of feelings and desires. Narcosis of any kind, be it induced by tobacco, alcohol or opium, seduces them and hurls them into a passionate abandonment, and becomes a lethal habit. (Yadrintsev 1996: 29)*

With reference to the Khanty's love of alcohol, Finnish prominent ethnographer Uno Taavi Sirelius offers a famous aphorism that the local Russian population employed around the turn of the past century to characterise the Khanty: “An Ostyak will sell his soul for liquor.” (Sirelius 1900: 13)

These examples reflect the general understanding among the 19th- and early 20th-century scholars and regional intellectuals that drinking is widely spread and deeply rooted among the northern indigenous groups. This conceptual agreement is overwhelming and authors seem to compete in proposing more

colourful statements. The proposed examples indicate that this pattern for describing the drinking habits of people from the North is firmly established among the researchers of the period.

It seems rather usual for the 19th- and early 20th-century authors to stress a drinking habit as common among the Ob-Ugrians and Samoyeds. But we could also find a few exceptions from these overall descriptions of profound and unlimited drinking in the North. A couple of authors have documented regions where indigenous individuals, or even groups, managed to resist to this temptation. Finnish linguist Artturi Kannisto mentions that his sixty-six-year-old Mansi interpreter, Andrian Kharitonovich Matykov, whom he found on the Tavda River, rarely drank (Kannisto & Liimola 1951: XX). Dunin-Gorkavich likewise writes about alcohol abuse and the deterioration of morals among the native communities. In his estimation, only the Kazym and Vakh Khanty were not heavy drinkers, the latter group including some who completely abstained from strong alcohol (Dunin-Gorkavich 1904: 7–8; 1994 [1908]: 41; 1995: 84). Castrén (1860: 78–79) makes a note that the Sami around Lake Inari keep their desires under control and are modest consumers of alcohol, at the same time appreciating the economic power of the alcohol trade. N. Kozmin (1913: 37) reports a case where a wealthy Samoyed made an oath and spent a month in the Solovets Monastery, restraining from vodka during that time. Also, the Tundra Nenets drink vodka rarely (Latkin 1853: 137).

If these researchers felt the need to point out exceptions, it reflects the issue that drinking was considered a routine practice for the Siberian indigenous peoples. At the same time, Dunin-Gorkavich distinguishes whole groups who were not addicted to alcohol. It means that drinking was not actually mapped and recognised as a completely dominant social action.

But in general, descriptions of widespread drinking dominate the discourse about the northern indigenes' leisure time habits. Besides generalised statements concerning native alcohol abuse, some authors also elaborate more on specific issues related to this social problem. One of these matters is related to the question of gender and age. It has been written of the Khanty and Nenets that, in addition to men and women, their elderly women, young girls, and small children were also fond of alcohol (Zuev 1947: 23; Castrén 1860: 134–136, 285; Maksimov 1909a [1859]: 379; Karjalainen 1983: 32–33; Sno 1904: 13). There are other 19th-century authors, too, writing about the spread of alcoholism among the Ob-Ugrian women and children (see Lehtonen 1974: 41).

Another distinguishable theme in this respect concerns the problems that native people got into because of alcohol intoxication. For example, Dunin-Gorkavich (1996 [1911]: 33–35) provides a list of court cases, related to violations of law, committed by the Khanty and Nenets while being drunk. They had hit

other people, vandalised a local jail by ripping off the guards' uniforms, and smashed their housemaster's dishes and windows, as well as sworn at officials.

As the 19th-century authors see it, alcohol makes northern peoples aggressive, which runs counter to their otherwise peaceful demeanour. Archimandrite Venyamin writes of the Nenets of the Mezen tundra that they get into fights or arguments, or kill each other on rare occasions, and when it does happen it is only after they have been deranged by excessive drinking and have lost their senses (Venyamin 1858: 82). It was written about the Mansi that they, too, were only able to overcome their inherent shyness under the influence of alcohol (see, e.g., Sorokin 1873: 33, 50; cf. a similar observation concerning the Sami in Castrén 1860: 76). Castrén (*ibid.*: 158) reports a case when a crowd of drunken Komi attacked him, considering Castrén a witch. He also describes a massive drunken fight, in which Nenets women also participated (*ibid.*: 144). Finnish scholar August Ahlqvist also describes this situation:

*While drinking, he [a Mansi] may actually become enraged and it is dangerous to argue with him when he does. Luckily, he falls into this state only a few times a year, while visiting a town or a church.* (Ahlqvist 1885: 171)

This observation made by Ahlqvist is significant, as it illuminates a discrepancy between descriptions of heavily addicted indigenes and their actual, rather limited possibilities to obtain alcohol during the Tsarist period. As he adequately noted, chances for the indigenous people to obtain alcohol were actually scarce because of their relatively infrequent social, economical, and political contact with urban centres.

Beginning in the 17th century, writers documented merchants' usual practice to trade furs, fish, and reindeer for vodka in the North, also among the Komi, Samoyeds and Ob-Ugrians (see, e.g., La Martiniere 1911: 27, 31, 35, 47–52, 59; Latkin 1853: 106, 115, 121, 127, 150; Castrén 1860: 180–182<sup>3</sup>). During the 19th century, legal restrictions were applied to obstruct the uncontrolled alcohol trade in the North. In the 19th century the northernmost point of the legal alcohol trade was Berezovo, and the other trading centre in Obdorsk was established only at the end of the century. Earlier, trade in Obdorsk had been concentrated at fairs (Castrén 1860: 147, 181–182; Bartenev 1896: 31). The government had prohibited the trade of alcohol among the northern people (Ahlqvist 1885: 171; Sno 1904: 13). At the beginning of the 20th century, a partial state monopoly of the alcohol trade was established in Surgut and Berezovo district, but, as Dunin-Gorkavich estimates, it caused only a hike in prices and spoiling the quality of vodka even more by the merchants (Dunin-Gorkavich 1904: 37; 1994 [1908]: 39)<sup>4</sup>. Castrén (1860: 170, 325) summarises this style of

trade by noting that vodka is “the Siberian amulet”, a common denominator that enables one to trade anything.

It was also pointed out that the impact of cultural contacts played a considerable role in the spread and cultivation of alcoholism among the northern peoples, in particular towards the end of the Tsarist period. By virtue of their contacts with Russians and the Izva Komi, the Ob-Ugrians and Nenets began to be described as heavy consumers of alcohol, and as helpless, imprudent creatures who were therefore inevitably destined for destruction (Islavin 1847: 21–22; Vereshchagin 1849: 263; Castrén 1860: 146–147, 155, 194, 285; Jacobi 1896: 268; Dunin-Gorkavich 1904: 35; 1995 [1903]: 84, 130–139; Sno 1904: 10, 13; Kozmin 1913: 15–18; Anuchin 1916: 23)<sup>5</sup>. Castrén (1860: 174) describes also the tundra Komi as heavy drinkers of vodka.

Throughout the 19th to early 20th centuries, descriptions of northern indigenous people’s drinking habits were rather numerous. Alcohol became a common topic in scholars’ and travellers’ written reports about indigenous life in the wilderness of the Russian North and Siberia. These narratives describe drinking as a common practice among the northern natives. Besides the general portrayal of the nature of indigenous drinking habits, these accounts also include examinations of the specific aspects of this addiction (issues of gender and age, the drastic change of temper of the natives, and social and economic contacts that frame the distribution of drinking among the indigenous population).

From today’s point of view, these descriptions seem to be exaggerated and articulated by the 19th-century authors because of the Enlightenment-influenced evolutionary philosophical frame they vaguely share. These intellectuals had, perhaps, pre-conceived ideas about a spoiled idyll or the inevitability of drinking in the North. Also, specific observed conditions could have led the authors to these rather one-sided conclusions. As the scholars of the 19th century rarely visited places beyond the bigger settlements, they were limited to observing indigenous people predominantly in towns and larger villages where the natives had much better access to alcohol. But it must also be admitted that these scholars described their impressions quite frankly and because of this attitude they documented valuable data concerning social trends of indigenous alcohol consumption of that period.

## **DISCUSSION**

Narratives about drinking in the Arctic are not just a list of descriptions through time. The topic indicates significant conceptual developments over different periods. During Antiquity, complex intellectual views were elaborated concerning

the interconnectedness of climate, political system, and drinking. Medieval writers conducted their interpretation of drinking in a biblical framework. Several modern philosophers, travellers, and scientists started to reinterpret classical views on inevitable drinking in the North. During the 19th century, a more socially sensitive view was developed, as some authors voiced the proposition of regarding alcohol-addicted northern natives as victims of colonialism (see Honigmann 1979).

Early discussions of northern drinking established a historical context for later alcohol studies in the Arctic. Analysis of these historical-ethnographic descriptions and philosophical arguments makes it possible to draw a few general conclusions. These remarks enable one to understand how ideas and images of northern drinking habits are bound together into a distinctive narrative. Besides, these early notes on Arctic alcohol practices reflect overall ways of describing peoples of the North from a specific angle.

Firstly, it can be pointed out that 19th-century scholars conducted a search for multiple causes of drinking, but their empirical observations of alcohol use by the indigenous people were actually rather fragmentary. 19th-century travellers and academics proposed a variety of causes for explaining drinking among the indigenous peoples of the North. During this period descriptions of drinking were exclusively extensive in published accounts of the northern human population.

It can be pointed out that accounts of unchecked alcoholism among northern peoples have been inspired by superficial impressions of the scholars who travelled in Siberia. Local natives were encountered chiefly in towns and at fairs, and in those settings the representatives of northern peoples were occasionally given to drinking. Most of the time, however, they were sober. Living in the forests for months at a time as they did, vodka was unavailable. It was much more readily available among the southern Ob-Ugrians, but harder to procure in the northern areas (Ahlqvist 1885: 171; Lehtonen 1974: 42–43). These observations indicate that drinking was in a few cases understood as “a symbolic punctuation mark differentiating one social context from another” (cf. Mandelbaum 1979: 16; see also Dietler 2006: 235). During the period under discussion, accounts of the natives’ propensity for drinking were connected to the general idea held by the scholars that northern peoples were facing extinction in which alcoholism formed just one, albeit a rather telling, factor.

The factors that caught the attention of the 19th-century travellers and scholars were related to issues of gender- and age-specific drinking patterns, aggressiveness, and troubles caused by alcohol consumption, as well as deviations from the general drinking habit. The emotional consequences of drink, which may vary from aggressiveness to affection, are regulated by cultural

expectations. In common understanding, but also in scholarly literature of a later period, drinking is regarded cross-culturally less acceptable for women than for men. Also the physiological effects attributed to alcohol are considered distinctive among different peoples (see Mandelbaum 1979: 15–19; Heath 1987: 102, 107–110; Dietler 2006: 235–236, 241).

The explanations proposed for the alcohol problem in the North by 19th-century authors included pressure from the alcohol trade (cf. discussion concerning the role of colonial culture contacts in spreading drinking among the indigenous peoples in Honigmann 1979; Heath 1987: 109; Dietler 2006: 232–234), and indigenous peoples natural affection towards intoxicating substances. Specific local cultural patterns of alcohol use as part of a larger cultural configuration were not actually discussed or even mentioned during this rather long period (cf. Mandelbaum 1979: 14–15; Honigmann 1979: 34; Heath 1987: 101; Dietler 2006: 237–241).

Secondly, it is possible to detect traces of ‘Montesquieu’s pattern’ of global perspective in the 19th-century descriptions of alcohol consumption in the Arctic. This model of imagining different peoples’ drinking habits is somehow reflected in Alfred Brehm’s (1891) approach. He compares three indigenous peoples from the equator to the Arctic and shows that a certain gradation can be detected with respect to drinking. Brehm does not mention any drinking habits among the Nubians of the Upper Nile, describes drinking as a ritual practice among the Kyrgyz, and elaborates with an in-depth analyses of extensive drinking among the Khanty people. Although Brehm does not refer to Montesquieuan geographic determinism in this respect, the coincident of providing a similar behavioural pattern is somehow telling.

The dominant northern narrative of alcohol consumption is also supported by historical evidence, provided by Michael Dietler (2006: 234). Dietler highlights the beginning of increased recreational production and consumption of cheap sugar- and grain-based alcohol in the 16th-century Northern Europe. Other 19th-century scholars do not mention Montesquieu or classical authors as their theoretical sources. Also, nobody argues explicitly that the drinking habits of the northern people are caused by the climate or the ‘wind’. By itself, this absence of references is not conclusive. The contemporary scholarly tradition did not necessarily require references to early authors while elaborating discussion on any subject matter (cf. Lotman 1964; Bakhtin 2000). The concept of specific regional patterns of drinking culture was borrowed from earlier travellers and scholars by later researchers (Honigmann 1979: 30). A kind of continuity in detecting culturally specific drinking patterns has also been recognised in later research. These cultural niches cover many separate societies and have main-

tained remarkable consistency through time, from ancient indigenous cultures to contemporary societies (Mandelbaum 1979: 23).

Reflections on northern peoples' drinking habits became usual during the 19th century (but were initiated already in the 1770s by Vasily Zuev). The topic of alcohol consumption was 'in the air' for many scholars at that time. There may well be a kind of cognitive link between the re-appearance of the semi-hidden theoretical discourse and increasing interest in empirical descriptions of northern drinking habits.

Descriptions of northern drinking habits can be seen as part of the same 'turn to cognitive diversity', which was developed by scholars during the 19th century. Travellers and academics started to describe many more aspects of the northern peoples' cultures than their colleagues had done during earlier centuries. Analogically, the other new or rediscovered themes of descriptions (the northern natives being modest, silent, intellectually less developed, etc.) were linked to contemporary philosophical discussions, in most cases implicitly, with just a few relevant references to more or less obvious theoretical or historical sources. This general approach was in accordance with intellectual traditions of the period, as making comprehensive references was not part of the academic demands of the time.

Thirdly, it is relevant to consider that the possible Montesquieuan inspiration became overshadowed by evolutionist intellectual practice in the northern peoples' descriptions of the 19th century. A majority of these drinking descriptions were produced in the framework of progress-inspired academic discourse, which envisioned indigenous social changes as a logical regression. Already Edward Tylor (1920: 53) argued that, from the initial encounter, civilisation spoils the natives. Also Herbert Spencer (1897), a prominent philosopher of the 19th century, argued that the desires of savage peoples direct their personal satisfaction and define their joyful and untroubled lifestyle.

These descriptions of northern drinking patterns can be interpreted as expressions of specific cultural barriers, extreme stereotypes, and ethnocentrism; yet, they are fully acceptable in the earlier research (see Honigmann 1979: 32–33; Heath 1987: 106; Leete 2005, 2014a). Later on, recognised ethical considerations changed in academic society and these descriptions of alcohol consumption in general disappeared from public scholarly accounts. Besides, the Soviet ideology that also shaped ethnographic accounts prescribed the approach that indigenous drinking remained in the past; it was a social evil of the Tsarist time. In fact, the situation with drinking for the indigenous North aggravated considerably (see, e.g., Sokolova 2011). Every ethnographer who has visited the Russian North can corroborate that this is still a painful and sensitive social issue in the region.

I have demonstrated in my study that drinking in the Arctic has been described rather similarly during many centuries but explained by different arguments in early travellers' accounts as well as in philosophical and theoretical literature. In this paper I have discussed the ways in which this long-lasting image of drinking northerners has evolved since classical antiquity. Northern drinking was initially explained by a specific influence of the northern climate, which enables people to drink more freely than in southern regions, or even force them to consume alcohol. In medieval times, drinking was included in the spiritual map of the world and imagined as a characteristic practice for inhabitants of the sinful periphery of the oecumene. Beginning in the 18th century scholars looked to the past, searching for materialistic, natural reasons for the northern peculiarities of alcohol consumption.

The proposed evidence reveals that different authors basically repeat previous data concerned with drinking over a long period of time. At the same time, this continuation is not mechanical but driven by specific motivators and a changing methodological framework. The most long-term frame of explanation, shared by scholars, has been related to interpreting geography and climatic conditions as prominent determinants of culture. Another aspect of this long-term continuation of descriptions is related to the writing method that prescribed the repetition of earlier authors as a criterion of truth (see Lotman 1964). In the 19th century, evolutionary theoretical ideas and more frequent contacts with indigenous groups in the North enabled to produce a seemingly more evidence-based image of the northern peoples. But interestingly, this new cognitive model included similar descriptions of extensive drinking.

Drinking among the indigenous societies of the North is a social problem, but also an aspect of ritual behaviour (see, e.g., Leete 1997, 2004, 2014b; Wiget & Balalaeva 2011; Toulouze & Niglas 2012; cf. Mandelbaum 1979: 15, 19; Heath 1987: 108–109; Dietler 2006: 241). But as we can conclude from the presented evidence, drinking is also one of the oldest topics discussed in regard to the northern peoples' image. It has long been a habit of travellers and scholars to consider drinking as a meaningful practice, characterising life in the Arctic regions.

The initial philosophical meaning of the descriptions of drinking is lost in the course of ethnographic textual practices. Anyhow, it seems that some connotation still remains in regard to original texts, and this textual practice survives through long time periods. Descriptions of drinking often serve as extended poetic metaphors, illustrating a continuous stability of northern images. Real problems of social change, as well as economic and historical developments, are also reflected in these notions.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory, CECT) and the Estonian Research Council (grant PUT590).
- <sup>2</sup> In his diary Castrén also regularly reports about the Sami drinking (1860: 32, 72–73, 76).
- <sup>3</sup> Castrén (1860: 20, 43) describes trading vodka for folklore and linguistic evidence (but also for transportation during a field-trip) among the Sami as a usual academic approach, Vasily Latkin's travel report consists of descriptions of episodes about how he keeps a friendly relationship with the Komi by providing them with vodka (Latkin 1853: 78, 80).
- <sup>4</sup> Castrén (1860: 79) argues that vodka is “the all-conquering negotiator” among the Sami.
- <sup>5</sup> Ostroumov (1904: 22) reports that figures of indigenous gods were also traded for vodka in the north.

## REFERENCES

- Ahlqvist, August 1885. *Unter Wogulen und Ostjaken: Reisebriefe und ethnographische Mittheilungen. Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae XIV*, pp. 133–308. Available at <https://archive.org/details/actasocietatissc141885suom>, last accessed on June 16, 2015.
- Anuchin 1916 = Anuchin, Vasili. *V strane chernykh dnei i belykh nochei (Turukhanskii krai)*. [In the Land of Dark Days and White Nights (Turukhansk Region).] *Znanie dlia vsekh: Obshchedostupnyi zhurnal dlia samoobrazovaniia s kartinami v kraskakh i illiustratsiiami v tekste*. [Knowledge for Everybody: Generally Approachable Journal for Self-Education with Coloured Pictures and Illustrations in the Text.] Petrograd: Izd. P.P. Soikina.
- Aristotle ICA = Aristotle. *Politics*. Transl. by Benjamin Jowett. The Internet Classics Archive. Available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.html>, last accessed on June 12, 2015.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail 2000. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Balzer, Marjorie Mandelstam 1999. *The Tenacity of Ethnicity: A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bartenev, Viktor 1896. *Na krainem Severo-Zapade Sibiri: Ocherki Obdorskogo kraia*. [On the Far North-West of Siberia: Essays about the Obdorsk Region.] Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiia M. F. Paikina.
- Brehm 1891 = Brem, Al'fred Edmund. *Zhizn' na Severe i Iuge: ot polusa do ekvatora*. [Life in the North and South: From Pole to Equator.] Sankt-Peterburg: Izd. F. Pavlenkova.

- Castrén 1860 = Kastren, Aleksander. *Puteshestvie Aleksandra Kastrena po Laplandii, severnoi Rossii i Sibiri (1838–1844, 1845–1849)*. [Travels of Alexander Castrén in Lapland, Northern Russia and Siberia (1838–1844, 1845–1849).] *Magazin zemlevedeniia i puteshestvii*. Geogr. sbornik N. Frolova. T. 6. Sbranie starykh i novykh puteshestvii. Ch. 2. Moskva: n.p.
- Castrén, Matias Aleksanteri 1967. *Tutkimusmatkoilla Pohjolassa*. [Research Trips to the North.] Porvoo, Helsinki: WSOY.
- Chernetsov 1959 = Chernetsov, Valerii. *Predstavleniia o dushe u obskikh ugrov*. [Concepts of Soul among the Ob-Ugrians.] *Trudy Instituta Etnografii*, T. 51. Moskva: Institut Etnografii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia.
- Chernetsov 1987 = Chernetsov, Valerii. *Istochniki po etnografii zapadnoi Sibiri*. [Ethnographic Sources about the Western Siberia.] Tomsk: Izdatel'stvo Tomskogo universiteta.
- Dietler, Michael 2006. Alcohol: Anthropological/Archaeological Perspectives. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 35, pp. 229–249. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123120>.
- Dunin-Gorkavich, Alexandr 1904. *Ocherk narodnostei Tobol'skogo severa*. [Essay about the Peoples of the Tobolsk North.] Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiia M.Stasiulevicha. Available at <http://www.rulit.me/books/ocherk-narodnostej-tobolskogo-severa-get-375733.html>, last accessed on June 16, 2015.
- Dunin-Gorkavich, Alexandr 1994 [1908]. *Nuzhdy Tobol'skogo severa i mery dlia ikh udovletvoreniia*. [Needs of the Tobolsk North and Means of Their Satisfaction.] Shadrinsk: Iset'.
- Dunin-Gorkavich, Alexandr 1995 [1903]. *Tobol'skii Sever: Obshchii obzor strany, ee estestvennykh bogatstv i promyshlennoi deiatel'nosti naseleniia*. [Tobolsk North: Overview of the Land, Its Natural Riches and Industrial Activity.] T. 1. Moskva: Libereia.
- Dunin-Gorkavich, Alexandr 1996 [1911]. *Tobol'skii Sever: Etnograficheskii ocherk mestnykh inorodtsev*. [Tobolsk North: Ethnographic Essay about Local Indigenes.] T. 3. Moskva: Libereia.
- Eusebius of Caesarea 1903. *Praeparatio Evangelica*. [Preparation for the Gospel.] Transl. by E.H. Gifford. Oxonii: E Typographeo Academico. Available at [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/eusebius\\_pe\\_00\\_intro.htm](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/eusebius_pe_00_intro.htm), last accessed on June 16, 2015.
- Heath, Dwight B. 1987. Anthropology and Alcohol Studies: Current Issues. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 16, pp. 99–120. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.16.100187.000531>.
- Herodotus 1981 [1954]. *The Histories*. Transl. by Aubrey Sélincourt. London: Penguin Books.
- Hippocrates ICA = Hippocrates. *On Airs, Waters, and Places*. Transl. by Francis Adams. The Internet Classics Archive. Available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/airwatpl.html>, last accessed on June 12, 2015.
- Honigmann, John J. 1979. Alcohol in Its Cultural Context. In: Mac Marshall (ed.) *Beliefs, Behaviors, and Alcoholic Beverages: A Cross-Cultural Survey*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pp. 30–35.

- Islavin, Vladimir 1847. *Samoedy v domashnem i obshchestvennom bytu*. [Samoyeds in Private and Social Life.] Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografia Ministerstva gosudarstvennykh imushchestv. Available at <http://webirbis.aonb.ru/irbisdoc/kr/2012/07kp138.pdf>, last accessed on June 17, 2015.
- Jacobi 1896 = Iakobii, Arkadii. Ugasanie inorodcheskikh plemen Tobol'skogo severa. [Decline of Indigenous Tribes in the Tobolsk North.] *Zhivaia starina*, Nos. 3–4, pp. 267–272. Available at <http://antropo-logica.com/pdf/jacobii.pdf>, last accessed on June 17, 2015.
- Kannisto, Artturi & Liimola, Matti 1951. *Wogulische Volksdichtung I: Texte mythischer Inhalts*. Ges. und übers. von Artturi Kannisto, bearb. und hrsg. von Matti Liimola. Suomalais-ugrilaisen Seuran Toimituksia 101. Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura.
- Kannisto, Tytti (ed.) 1963. *Artturi Kanniston tutkimusmatkat Siperiassa vuosina 1901–1906: Päiväkirjamaistiinpanoja ja kirjeitä*. [Artturi Kannisto's Research Trips to Siberia during the Years 1901–1906: Diaries and Letters.] Suomalais-ugrilaisen Seuran Aikakauskirja, Vol. 64, No. 1.
- Karjalainen, Kustaa Fredrik 1983. *Ostjakit: Matkakirjeitä Siperiasta 1898–1902*. [The Khanty: Travel Accounts from Siberia 1898–1902.] Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran toimituksia 394. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Kozmin, Nikolai 1913. *Arkhangel'skie samoedy (oчерк ikh byta i verovani)*. [Samoyeds of Arkhangelsk: Essay on Their Daily Life and Beliefs.] Sankt-Peterburg: Izdanie Uchilishchnago soveta pri Sviateishem Sinode.
- La Martiniere 1911 = Lamartin'er, P'er-Martin de. *Puteshestvie v severnye strany (1653 g.)*. [Journey to Northern Countries.] Moskva: Moskovskii arkheologicheskii institut.
- Latkin 1853 = Latkin, Vasilii. *Dnevnik Vasilii Nikolaevicha Latkina, vo vremia puteshestviia na Pechoru, v 1840 i 1843 godakh. Chast' pervaiia*. [Diaries of Vasily Nikolaevich Latkin, from the Time of His Travels to Pechora, in 1840 and 1843. First part.]. Zapiski imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva, kn. VII. Sankt Peterburg: Tipografia Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk. Available at <http://www.booksite.ru/fulltext/komi/3703.pdf>, last accessed on June 17, 2015.
- Leete, Art 1997. Sacrificial Ceremony at Lake Num-To. *Pro Ethnologia*, Vol. 5, pp. 35–55. Available at <http://www.erm.ee/pdf/PEnr5.pdf>, last accessed on June 16, 2015.
- Leete, Art 2004. Ritual, Politics and Mentality: The Nenets and Ob-Ugrians of Siberia. In: Anna-Leena Siikala & Barbro Klein & Stein R. Mathisen (eds.) *Creating Diversities: Folklore, Religion and the Politics of Heritage*. *Studia Fennica: Folkloristica*, Vol. 14. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, pp. 125–135. Available at [http://www.academia.edu/2549002/Ritual\\_politics\\_and\\_mentality\\_the\\_Nenets\\_and\\_Ob-Ugrians\\_of\\_Siberia](http://www.academia.edu/2549002/Ritual_politics_and_mentality_the_Nenets_and_Ob-Ugrians_of_Siberia), last accessed on June 17, 2015.
- Leete, Art 2005. Accounts of Cannibalism, Human Sacrifice, Alcohol-Addiction and Filthiness among Northern Peoples. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, Vol. 50, Nos. 1–3, pp. 241–258. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1556/AEthn.50.2005.1-3.15>.
- Leete, Art 2014a. *Guileless Indigenes and Hidden Passion: Descriptions of Ob-Ugrians and Samoyeds through the Centuries*. Transl. by Katrin Hakkinen. Folklore Fellows Communications 306. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

- Leete, Art 2014b. Sacrifices de rennes et pétrole: dialogue entre rituel et droits des peuples autochtones. [Reindeer Sacrifice and Oil: Dialogue between Indigenous Rights and Ritual.] *Études finno-ougriennes*, Vol. 46, pp. 57–88. Available at [http://www.academia.edu/11007592/Sacrifices\\_de\\_rennes\\_et\\_p%C3%A9trole\\_dialogue\\_entre\\_rituel\\_et\\_droits\\_des\\_peuples\\_autochtones](http://www.academia.edu/11007592/Sacrifices_de_rennes_et_p%C3%A9trole_dialogue_entre_rituel_et_droits_des_peuples_autochtones), last accessed on June 17, 2015.
- Lehtonen, Juhani U.E. 1974. *Kalan myyntiä ja viinan juontia: Kansatieteellinen tutkimus ostjakkien ruokataloudesta ja sen suhteesta ostjakkien talousmuotoon erityisesti 1800-luvulla*. [Trading Fish and Getting Vodka: Ethnographic Study of the Khanty Food Economy and Its Relationship with the Khanty Economic Pattern, Especially during the 1800s.] Helsingin yliopiston kansatieteen laitoksen tutkimuksia 4. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopiston Kansatieteen laitos.
- Lopez, Barry 1986. *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Lotman 1964 = Lotman, Iurii. *Lehtsi po struktural'noi poetike. Vyp. 1 (Vvedenie, teoriia stikha)*. [Lectures on Structural Poetics. Vol. I (Introduction, Theory of Verse).] Trudy po znakovym sistemam I. [Sign System Studies I.] Tartu: Tartu Riikliku Ülikooli Toimetised 160. Available at <http://dSPACE.utlib.ee/dSPACE/handle/10062/41631>, last accessed on June 17, 2015.
- Lvov, Vladimir 1903. *Samoedy (Ocherk)*. [The Samoyeds. (Essay).] Moskva: Tipo-lit. T-va I. N. Kushnerev i Ko.
- Maksimov, Sergei 1909a [1859]. *God na Severe*. [Year in the North.] Chast' vtoraiia. Sobranie sochinenii S. V. Maksimova. [Collected Works of S. V. Maksimov.] Tom IX. Sankt-Peterburg: Tovarishchestvo prosveshchenie. Available at <http://www.booksite.ru/reise/maks/imov/index.htm>, last accessed on July 2, 2015.
- Maksimov, Sergei 1909b [1859]. *God na Severe*. [Year in the North.] Chast' vtoraiia. Sobranie sochinenii S. V. Maksimova. [Collected Works of S. V. Maksimov.] Tom X. Sankt-Peterburg: Tovarishchestvo prosveshchenie. Available at <http://www.booksite.ru/reise/maks/imov/index.htm>, last accessed on July 2, 2015.
- Mandelbaum, David G. 1979. Alcohol and Culture. In: Mac Marshall (ed.) *Beliefs, Behaviors, and Alcoholic Beverages: A Cross-Cultural Survey*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pp. 14–30.
- Martin, Fredrik Robert 1897. *Sibirica: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Vorgeschichte und Kultur sibirischer Völker*. Stockholm: Chelius.
- Montesquieu, Charles 1989. *The Spirit of the Laws*. Cambridge & New York & Port Melbourne & Madrid & Cape Town: Cambridge University Press.
- Ostroumov, Ivan G. 1904. *Voguly-mansi: Istoriko-etnograficheskii ocherk*. [Voguls-Mansi: Historical-Ethnographical Essay.] Perm': Tipografii gazety "Permskii krai".
- Phares, E. Jerry 1991. *Introduction to Personality*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Plato ICA = Plato. *Laws*. Transl. by Benjamin Jowett. The Internet Classics Archive. Available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laws.html>, last accessed on June 12, 2015.
- Ramsey, William 1908. U samoedov Kaninskogo poluostrova. [Among the Samoyeds of the Kanin Peninsula.] *Izvestiia Obshchestva arkhologii, istorii i etnografii pri Imperatorskom Kazanskom universitete*, Vol. 23, Nos. 1–6, pp. 458–471.

- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 1998. *Ühiskondlikust lepingust ehk riigiõiguse põhiprintsiibid*. [The Social Contract.] Tallinn: Varrak.
- Simonov, Leonid 1884. Vymiraiushchee plemia (Istorichesko-etnograficheskii ocherk). [Extinct Clan (Historical-Ethnographic Essay).] *Zhivopisnoe Obozrenie*, pp. 101–130, 249–280, 377–404. Available at <https://vivaldi.nlr.ru/pm000020431/view#page=1>, last accessed on July 3, 2015.
- Sirelius, Uno Taavi 1900. Ostjakkilaiselta matkaltani v. 1898. [From the Khanty Trip in 1898.] *Suomalais-ugrilaisen Seuran Aikakauskirja*, Vol. 17, pp. 1–29.
- Sno, E.E. 1904. *Za Ural'skim khrebtom: sibirskie inorodtsy*. [Beyond the Ural Mountains: The Siberian Indigenes.] Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo O. N. Popovoi. Available at <http://www.tmnlib.ru:82/files/base/books/RK/2011/Sno/index.html>, last accessed on June 18, 2015.
- Sokolova 1968 = Sokolova, Zoia. Preobrazovaniia v khoziaistve, kul'ture i byte obskikh ugrov. [Rearrangements in Economy, Culture and Household of the Ob-Ugrians.] *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, No. 5, pp. 25–39. Available at [http://www.booksite.ru/etnogr/1968/1968\\_5.pdf](http://www.booksite.ru/etnogr/1968/1968_5.pdf), last accessed on June 18, 2015.
- Sokolova 1972 = Sokolova, Zoia. Khanty rr. Syna i Kunovat: Etnograficheskii ocherk. [The Khanty of the Rivers Synya and Kunovat: Ethnographical Essay.] In: N. Lukina & N. Tomilov (eds.) *Materialy po etnografii Sibiri*. [Materials about the Ethnography of Siberia.] Tomsk: Izdatel'stvo Tomskogo universiteta, pp. 15–66.
- Sokolova 1976 = Sokolova, Zoia. *Strana Iugoriia*. [The Land of Yugra.] Moskva: Mysl'.
- Sokolova 1981 = Sokolova, Zoia. *Na prostorakh Sibiri*. [In the Expanses of Siberia.] Moskva: Russkii iazyk.
- Sokolova 1982 = Sokolova, Zoia. *Puteshestvie v Iugru*. [Travel to Yugra.] Moskva: Mysl'.
- Sokolova 2011 = Sokolova, Zoia. *Severnye khanty (Polevye dnevniki)*. [The Northern Khanty (Fieldwork Diaries).] Moskva: IEA RAN.
- Sorokin, N. 1873. *Puteshestvie k vogulam: Otchet, predstavlennyi otdelu antropologii i etnografii pri kazanskom obshchestve estestvoispytatelei*. [Travel to the Mansi: Report Presented to the Department of Anthropology and Ethnography at the Kazan Society of Scientific Experimenters.] *Trudy obshchestva estestvoispytatelei pri Imperatorskom Kazanskom Universitete*. T. III, No. 4. Kazan': Kazanskii universitet.
- Spencer, Herbert 1897. *The Principles of Sociology*. Vol. I. New York: D. Appleton and company.
- Strabo 1903. *The Geography of Strabo*. London & New York: George Bell & Sons. Available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3Abook%3Dnotice>, last accessed on June 12, 2015.
- Tacitus 1877. *Excerpts from Germania*. Available at <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/tacitus-germania-excerpt.html>, last accessed on July 2, 2015.
- Tokarev, Sergei 1978. *Istoki etnograficheskoi nauki (do serediny XIX v.)*. [Sources of Ethnographical Research (Until Mid-19th C.).] Moskva: Nauka.
- Toulouze, Eva & Niglas, Liivo 2012. Native Spirituality in (Re)constructed Personhood: Observing and Filming Yuri Vella. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 51, pp. 133–170. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2012.51.toulouze-niglas>.

- Tylor, Edward Burnett 1920. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*. Vol. 1. London: J. Murray. Available at <https://archive.org/details/primitiveculture01tylouoft>, last accessed on June 18, 2015.
- Venyamin 1858 = Veniamin [Smirnov, Vasilii]. Samoedy mezenskie. [The Samoyeds of Mezen.] *Etnograficheskii sbornik, izdavaemyi Imperatorskim Russkim Geograficheskim Obshchestvom*, Vyp. IV, pp. 19–82.
- Vereshchagin V. 1849 = *Ocherki Arkhangel'skoi gubernii*. [Essays about Arkhangelsk Guberniya.] Sankt-Peterburg. Available at [http://yatbooks.ru/load/literatura\\_po\\_gubernijam/arkhangel'skaja/vereshhagin\\_ocherki\\_arkhangel'skoj\\_gubernii\\_1849g/3-1-0-160](http://yatbooks.ru/load/literatura_po_gubernijam/arkhangel'skaja/vereshhagin_ocherki_arkhangel'skoj_gubernii_1849g/3-1-0-160), last accessed on June 18, 2015.
- Wiget, Andrew & Balalaeva, Olga 2011. *Khanty: People of the Taiga, Surviving the 20th Century*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press.
- William of Rubrouck 1997 = Vil'gel'm de Rubruk. Puteshestvie v vostochnye strany. [Travel to the Eastern Lands.] In: *Kniga o raznoobrazii mira: Dzhovanni del' Plano Karpini. Istoriia mongalov. Gil'om de Rubruk. Puteshestviia v vostochnye strany. Kniga Marko Polo*. Moskva: Mysl', pp. 86–189.
- Yadrintsev 1996 = Iadrintsev, Nikolai. Sibir' kak koloniia. [Siberia as a Colony.] *Iugra*, No. 2, pp. 26–29.
- Zuev 1947 = Zuev, Vasilii. *Materialy po etnografii Sibiri XVIII veka (1771–1772)*. [Materials on Siberian Ethnography from the 18th Century (1771–1772).] Trudy Instituta Etnografii im N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia, T. 5. Moskva & Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR.

# ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AMONG DRINKING YOUTH CULTURES: REFLECTIONS FROM OBSERVING PARTICIPANTS

*Daniel Briggs, Ivan Gololobov, Aimar Ventsel*

*“You can’t trust a person when  
he didn’t have a hair of the dog.”*

(Venechka Erofeev, Moskva-Petushki)

**Abstract:** Increasingly, ethnographic methods in the social sciences are being robbed of their capacity to research problematic social groups given the increased “risk governance” to ethical and methodological practices. Positivism and constructing objective realities of these groups has become the order of the day, which has resulted in a ‘conceptual distance’ from these kinds of social groups. In this article, we advocate for a return to subjectivity using ethnography, and do so through highlighting examples from our experience from numerous projects undertaken with different youth cultures where alcohol is central to individual identities and collective social norms. We show, on the one hand, that this kind of research is possible but it requires the researcher to adopt versatility and fieldwork flexibility, while on the other, in some ways to abandon their ethical conceptions of what they are expected to objectively do and instead engage with the group under study. In the paper, we challenge various ethical and methodological dilemmas related to this kind of research.

**Keywords:** epistemology, ethnography, ‘observing participants’, positionality, youth drinking culture

## INTRODUCTION

Ethnographic research with different youth drinking cultures and in environments heavily associated with excessive drinking – such as those with which we have worked – immediately puts the researcher in situations of choice with regard to the ongoing consumption of alcohol and how to situate themselves with their participants. It is our deep belief that there are no universal guidelines on how a researcher should behave in these situations when his or her participants are engaged in regular, heavy alcohol consumption. We assume that each scholar makes their own decisions on the questions raised by such

challenges. However, methodological and epistemological questions of a study among such drinking cultures transcend the subjectivity of individual choice. How a scholar deals with the challenges posed by an extreme research environment can be justifiably argued on the basis of the author's unquestionable assumptions such as the belief that drinking is a sinful practice. However, the knowledge produced in such studies, as long as it is intended to fall within the scope of academic work, means that the validity of its conclusions should satisfy the demand of critical assessment. In this article, we intend to present critical reflections of our ethnographic actions in the field with youth drinking cultures. We do this in the context of Russian, British and German youth. We do not adopt any theoretical position because our reflections are methodological and are attributable to thick descriptions (Van Maanen 1988), our goal being to "uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects' acts, the 'said' of social discourse, and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures, what belongs to them because they are what they are, will stand out against the other determinates of human behaviour" (Geertz 1973: 27).

We firstly set some context by discussing ethnographic research in the context of youth cultures before outlining the aims we had and methods we used with our respective participants. In the main body of our article we concede that, although our work is situated among different cultures in different social occasions, they share some similarity with regard to the way in which we had to engage with young people and this prompts us to recognise the importance they attribute to their drinking practices and 'drinking stories'. Because of this, we argue that to glean more subjective experiences associated with youth drinking cultures, we too must engage with them in such practices.

## **SOME BRIEF NOTES ABOUT ETHNOGRAPHY**

Ethnographic methods are well established and appreciated in both sociological and criminological drug and alcohol research studies and have provided groundbreaking insights into the various social and cultural practices of different social groups (Anderson 1990; Becker 1953; Bourgois 1995; Briggs 2012; Griffin et al. 2009; Maher 2002; Power 2002; Preble & Casey 1969; Rubin & Comitas 1975; Ward 2010; Young 1971). In addition, ethnographic research methods have also been helpful in understanding youth cultures (Briggs 2013; Hayward 2002; Ward 2010; Willis 1977). Despite this, ethnographic methods which make use of participant observation still receive much opposition within social science research on substance users (Bourgois 1995). This has been linked to the

increased governance of social science research which has taken on an ever more intensified 'risk-assessment' approach (Israel 2004; Israel & Hay 2006; Lee-Treweek & Linkogle 2000). Indeed, across the disciplines of anthropology, criminology, and sociology, there has been much criticism of such research studies which have feared interaction with participants (see Blackman 2007; Curtis 2002; Palmer & Thomson 2010; Sanjek 2000). Various ethical codes that the authors of this article have signed for research purposes in different countries either directly forbid drinking with informants (like the Code of Ethics from AAA in 2000) or condemn such behaviour.

Indeed, we have found that many ethics committees have frowned, and even rejected work we have attempted to undertake, on the grounds that it is 'too dangerous' or raises 'too many ethical issues'. Probably this explains why, to date, few ethnographic studies have been undertaken with youth drinking cultures (Clapp et al. 2007; Hesse et al. 2008; Tutenges & Hesse 2008). Yet, even these studies seem to lack subjective interaction with participants – preferring, in the main, to be objective to social interactions with their participants. They also lack reflection on their role in the field and whether they drank with participants. We face other barriers as well when we try to publish, some journals considering our work 'unscientific' or 'unsuitable'. Shane Blackman (2007: 700) has called this 'hidden ethnography', whereby data is "not released or published because it is considered too controversial". However, we believe that – from the first instance – controversial drinking with informants is an important part of ethnographic research because in contemporary ethnography it is assumed that a researcher in the field cannot be neutral; he or she inevitably affects the field and the practices observed by the very fact of researching their presence (Coffey 1999).

In this article, we show how the particular presence of researchers in the field and their interactions with participants affect actual practices of heavy alcohol abuse, the reality we observe, and the identity of the observed. In the following thematic reflections, which use observations and verbatim quotes based on three research projects with youth drinking cultures conducted in Russia, UK, and Germany, we show the challenges ethnographers face while interacting within youth drinking cultures (Fetterman 1989). As Patton (1990: 474) notes, ethnographic researchers "should strive neither to overestimate nor to underestimate their effect [on the research study] but to take seriously their responsibility to describe and study what those effects are". Such a discussion should assist other scholars to make informed methodological and ethical choices on their strategies (Vanderstaay 2005) when working with similar groups and in environments where regular, heavy alcohol consumption is the norm (Palmer & Thomson 2010).

## AIMS, METHODS AND CONTEXT OF OUR RESPECTIVE STUDIES

In line with other ethnographic studies in the context of youth and alcohol, our methods with youth drinking cultures made use of interviews and focus groups, as well as field observations. The Russian cases are represented in the research conducted by Ivan Gololobov. His study focused on punk scenes, music and artistic underground. It has to be said that punk scene and music underground in general has always been a heavy-drinking culture. Since the late 1970s, when the first punk bands emerged in the USSR, alcohol was an essential part of a counter-cultural identity and an integral element of punk poetic lifestyle. Today, it remains a regular attribute of punk concerts, events, and hanging around or *tusovki*, as well as a usual accessory of individual sub-cultural 'doing nothing'.

The study of Russian punk conducted scenes by Ivan Gololobov was based on an extensive period of 'observant participation' (Gololobov 2014) and two specifically designed field trips. The first part took place in Krasnodar, south of Russia (August–November 2009), and the second in Saint Petersburg (March–June 2010). Ivan joined several youth groups who were affiliated with local punk scenes and followed their creative, leisure, and other activities for several months. However, apart from simply observing their everyday lives, more than 40 interviews with musicians, activists, music journalists, managers, producers, fans, gig goers and regular members of subcultural communities belonging to or related to the punk scenes were documented. Indeed, during this research, it was rare that an interview, conversation, or informal meeting took place without drinking alcohol and most observations were accompanied by excessive alcohol consumption (Gololobov et al. 2014: 124–128).

Similarly, Daniel Briggs conducted his research in and among the excessive alcohol consumption of British young people, except his study was analysing the 'holiday experience'. The arrival of mass tourism from the UK in the 1960s heralded new opportunities for large numbers of British youth to holiday abroad. This was principally around the Mediterranean countries of Greece, Italy, and Spain. In particular, the Balearic Islands of Majorca and Ibiza started to increase in popularity during the 1980s with the arrival of Ecstasy and house music. These islands have since developed a cultural association for music, drugs, and alcohol. As a consequence, many British youth developed an attitude to drinking large quantities of alcohol when on holiday abroad because it signals both 'time to party' and 'time away' from life's routines and responsibilities.

Previous UK research on the drinking attitudes of British youth abroad was largely survey oriented and had failed to sufficiently examine why these

behaviours took place (see Briggs 2013 for the whole story). It can also be noted that the ethnographic research which had taken place on the drinking attitudes of youth on holiday abroad was largely Danish and American. The project on drinking attitudes of British youth abroad aimed at addressing these two issues. Firstly, because the way in which British youth' drinking behaviours had been constructed was largely misunderstood. And secondly, because there was immense public health concern about excessive youth drinking both in the UK and abroad. Having undertaken pilot focus groups (n=6) in the UK, the scholars, led by Daniel Briggs, then proceeded to undertake a short field trip in Ibiza, using ethnographic methods with British youth. The members of the research team undertook observations with British youth in different drinking contexts, which involved 17 focus groups (n=97) in five days. Because many of these young people travelled in groups, field researchers felt it was best to undertake focus groups rather than select people individually and coax them away from their group for one-to-one interviews. Some young people in our sample travelled in groups of up to 20 people, which meant it was problematic to try and prise individuals away from their group. The scholars undertook one focus group with 15 young men – and even then there were a few missing from their party. In this respect, focus groups also enabled researchers to capture the 'group moment' and a real 'atmosphere' of drinking in the holiday context.

The study of drinking practices among youth in East Germany was conducted by Aimar Ventsel. His research also focused on various subcultural youth associations such as punks and skinheads. With regard to the alcohol consumption punk culture in Germany is not much different from the punk scenes in Russia. Alcohol consumption is an integral part of everyday practices, concerts, and other events. It must be mentioned that use of light alcohol, most notably beer, plays a significant role in German working class culture, which is where most of the informants came from. However, unlike Russia, in Germany both working class men and subcultural youth have a tradition of hanging out in pubs, a habit that is also adapted to German punk culture. Moreover, demonstrative consumption of local drinks as part of local identity has shifted from the mainstream society to underground youth subcultures. Therefore, as it will transpire in this text, public abstinence created unnecessary tensions that could have affected the relationship with people under study.

Aimar Ventsel conducted his fieldwork in the East German city of Halle from November 2009 to January 2010 and in December 2010. In the 1980s GDR era, Halle used to be one of the 'punk capitals' of the socialist period and this research was an indirect follow-up of a study undertaken in 2006 and 2007, which examined the economic networks in which members of the local punk scene were involved (see Ventsel 2008). The more recent research focused on

different groups within the town's scene and their links to other cities, with the aim to document East German punk as a semi-autonomous social field. This research mainly focused on hanging around with a particular group in one of four alternative clubs/pubs of Halle. The core group of the informants were all male in the age between 27 and 35. However, through their young girlfriends and other people in local punk community, the researcher also gained access to the 'young punks' (from 17 to 25) and 'old people' (40-somethings), in this way documenting all three generations of local punks. Overall, around 30 interviews were conducted. However, in the same way as in the Russian case participant observation remained the main research method. It included hanging around with punks, going to concerts, visiting their homes, and unrecorded spontaneous discussions.

Alcohol plays an important role in the social practices of German punks. Consuming certain local alcoholic beverages is also a marker for identity; or, as one of the informants said: "When a normal citizen meets his friend to discuss things over coffee, then we meet friends in a pub to discuss things over beer." (Olli, personal communication, 12.10.2010) Although drinking use was not the main focus of Ventsel's research because of its inextricable link to the identity construction, his research paid attention to the forms and norms of alcohol consumption. Moreover, part of his research focused on illegal economies, which is a very sensitive topic for local punks. It is not overstated to argue that some of the informants were extremely suspicious of people from 'outside' showing interest in their un-taxed income, and 'fitting in' was needed for successful research. It can be argued that hardly any formal interview would have been possible before getting to know a person and that usually happened in a club or a bar. We now proceed to outline the principle arguments of our article, beginning with showing on neutral terms that drinking among our respondents was an entirely normal social practice, which aided communication and the development of relations.

## **DRINKING AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE: FOR BONDING**

Sociologically speaking, drinking is first of all a practice of communication. Whether it is a ritual glass of wine, wild wedding party or a pub crawl, drinking alcohol serves to establish certain communicative relations within a drinking community as well as outside of a drinking group. On the other hand, alcohol is different from other intoxicating substances in that in countries where we conducted our research, alcohol – as opposed to drugs – is legal and legitimate. Youth drinking might be viewed by the majority in the UK, Russia, or Germany

as a 'deviant' behaviour and therefore condemned but researchers' involvement and interactions with these groups do not violate laws – that is to say, we have not researched minors and alcohol consumption as our participants have been of the legal drinking age. It is unnecessary to mention that many young people in our respective cohorts saw little harm in the heavy consumption of alcohol. In the Russian context it is often strongly associated with being in a group:

*For example, how I got introduced to local punk movement. It all started when I was 13 and met this Vova, he had a crew in this famous cafe on the corner, punks were also hanging around there. Very soon though I got bored with Vova because of his speeches. Punks were more interesting. We got drunk together and all the things like that. (Val, personal communication, 30.10.2009)*

Drinking is also often associated with close interpersonal relations and friendship.

*I have a friend Dima, he was a punk before, [---] we used to get pissed together, vomited, used to wake up in the morning, were drinking cheap booze, sleeping in dirty garages, were dressed in dirty stuff. (Alex, personal communication, 20.08.2009)*

In the context of British youth abroad, heavy alcohol consumption is the norm and serves to alleviate mundane lives at home while, at the same time, ignite the party atmosphere of the holiday:

*At home, I have work. When I am away, I have two weeks away to get pissed [drunk]. I don't have to get up in the morning, and don't have any worries. Sun, sea, and sangria! It is a different atmosphere. (Tina, personal communication, 06.06.2011)*

*Because you are on holiday, you think I am here to drink, I am here to party. I am here to go out clubbing. That's what it's all about. That is what you are going there for, drink, relax, and have fun. (Steve, personal communication, 05.06.2011)*

And German punks and skinheads are no exception:

*I work here in the village and do quite a boring job. At the weekend, then I go with my mates, this is the time I am looking forward to the whole week. We go to concerts, have beer, have fun. Or we just meet, talk, and have a few beers. This is what punkrock is about, to go to parties, meet people and make contacts. (Paul, personal communication, 12.11.2007)*

Over the course of our projects, we found that such excessive alcohol consumption – while considered the norm among these social groups – has important implications for youth identities. Therefore, by using ethnographic methods with such groups and emphasising the subjective experience, we can learn how narratives are constructed to make sense of the ‘experience of drinking’.

## DRINKING AS AN ASOCIAL PRACTICE: BREAKING BAD

Paradoxically, and despite the aforementioned orientation to establishing social bonds, excessive drinking also regularly involves forgetting, subversion, and destruction of one’s identity. This, as numerous scholars agree, aims at creating a libratory risk (Beck 1998 [1992], 1999; Giddens 1991, 1999). This risk, however, is not only existential, but also methodological as it regularly creates dangerous situations for the researcher. A good example is a drunken story told by Sab – a regular gig goer and an activist of Krasnodar punk scene in Russia – as recorded in a diary:

**Ivan (author and researcher):** *What was your biggest punk experience?*

**Sab:** *I will tell you. Once with Val within two days we got drunk, punched, and saw the sea. All within two days. The story is the following. We are having a drink and then decide to go to Utrish [a popular wild beach and camping site near Anapa and Novorossiisk], buy some wine, drink it all in the bus, so when we are there we are already good enough. We walk to the beach and pass by a bunch of local youth. They don’t touch us, we don’t touch them, but some steps away Val suddenly turns back and shouts: ‘Hey you, do you love Lenin enough!’ Obviously they turned back and punched our faces. We continue further, get to some other locals who are drinking samogon [homemade spirit]. They stuff us with this more so that we completely lose touch with reality. But we remembered that we didn’t have wine anymore, so we decided to go to the village and buy some more. There we met the guys with whom we had had a fight recently, they were already ok, advised us where we could buy some, we went there, got a couple of plastic bottles, and obviously started drinking it straight away. On the way back I fell asleep, woke up when the coast guards were slightly kicking me in the face with their machine guns, they were on duty. I said: ‘I am okay, just had a bit too much’, they left me alone, and continued their way. I then realised that Val went some steps further than me and is probably lying somewhere not that far away and if he is in a bad mood, we are in trouble, because these guys don’t like his type of jokes. I shouted:*

*'Hey, guys, there is another one like me behind the bushes, he is also okay, just don't pay attention to him.'* They laughed and passed him by. That was cool. So that was an experience where within a couple of days we managed to get pissed several times, got our faces punched, saw the sea, and I forgot to mention that when I fell I badly scratched my face, which took weeks to recover. That's a punk experience I had. And I have plenty of stories like that. (Sab, personal communication, 21.08.2009)

Another example is a story of I178, a lead singer from a punk-band and a DIY activist from Saint Petersburg.

**I178:** *Well, I remember Boris; that was a funny thing. We got drunk and went to Lena's place. She lived on the third floor, you know – this kind of old buildings, long staircases, so we had to go up. But we were pissed, B[...] got tired and stopped to have some rest on the way, and we continued. Some hours later we hear him screaming, we go out and find him, he looks horrified. We ask: 'What happened?' He says: 'Imagine, I wake up somewhere, I have no idea how I got there. I see the stairs, realise that I haven't been here before. I look up and see a grey concrete ceiling. I think: Oh my god, it is a cell, I am in a prison cell. What did I do yesterday? Maybe I killed someone and was arrested for that? Oh my god!' He didn't realise that this was simply a staircase on the way to Lena's flat. (I178, personal communication, 08.05.2010)*

The research on the drinking attitudes of British youth abroad also shows a degree of actual danger caused by the excessive drinking. A group of British girls reflect on being drunk and then beaten up by nightclub bouncers and the police in Ibiza. The researchers in this excerpt await the social reaction of the event among the group before displaying their reaction. The result is that a common ground is shared:

**Sunglasses 1:** *They needed three...massive...men to tackle her. Was that necessary? Then I was out there, because I speak Spanish, by then I am completely sobered up, things are crystal clear to me. I was trying to get the other girls out or us back in and speak to the manager.*

[There is then some confusion in the story; about what happens next and some small debate goes on about the order of events]

**Blue-eyed 1:** *Then the police said to us, 'well the bouncers say you are whores', and I said, 'what kind of police are you', and they were like 'fuck your mother'.*

**Sunglasses 1:** *Then I started screaming out abuse to this policeman about his mother in Spanish. Like, if you're gonna give it, you're gonna have to take it.*

[Several of the girls laugh at this]

**Daniel (author and researcher):** [Sounding confused] *Er, ok, fair enough.*

**Blue-eyed 1:** *So this is why we got arrested. He [the policeman] goes 'have you got your passport?' and I was like, yeah, yeah, I have my passport here [imitates pretending to search her pockets, take out the passport but instead suddenly raises her middle finger with a fierce face].*

[All sorts of giggle at this – including Daniel, although I try to keep my reactions neutral]

**Blue-eyed 1:** *Then he leaned in and said 'what did you say', grabbed my hand, [hand]cuffed me and started shoving me all the way to the car, and I was like 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry', and he was like 'fuck your mother and your father'.*

**Sunglasses 1:** *I went after her and I was like, 'why are you taking her?'*

**Blue-eyed 1:** *All I remember was being put in a headlock, being dragged to the car and he kicked me into the car.*

**Other 1:** *How could you do that to a girl???!!!*

**Blue-eyed 1:** *I was just so pissed off [upset], looking out of the window, then he goes over to Sunglasses 1...*

**Sunglasses 1:** *I was just lying there crying, he grabs me, drags me, all my knees were cut [shows us], and then it was like dripping blood.*

**Broad accent 1:** *And I went up to the manager and bouncers or whoever and said, 'this is ridiculous, you have no idea about what is going to happen', and he was laughing in my face and saying 'what you gonna do'.*

**Sunglasses 1:** *So then I tried to find out where they had taken her, and I went to the nearest police station trying to find out where they had taken her. They said 'we don't speak English', so I said fine I speak Spanish. I explained what happened in Spanish and he said 'No'. So I said where can I see her, and he said '30 minutes' walk'. So I said you are going to let me walk with these bleeding knees on this dark road, get raped or killed on this dark road by myself in the middle of the road.*

(personal communication, 01.06.2010)

These stories are sometimes too brutal, but the researcher has to accept them because these drinking-related practices can be important for the group relations:

**Olli:** *I remember when Hammerhead [a German punk band that enjoys a cult status because of direct and politically provocative texts and stage show] played here in Halle. This was in VL [a left wing club], there were lots of hippies [a prerogative expression to 'politically correct' part of the scene]. When the band got to the stage, they were already drunk and the singer was full of coke. We started drinking already early noon to celebrate the concert in the evening. When we turned up, we were already drunk as hell. The singer shouted, 'Welcome to the Hammerhead concert in the Eastern Zone [West German cold war expression to the GDR]'. Hippies shouted something but Loof knocked one down. The band started to play, it was hilarious! In the middle, the drummer threw up upon the drums but kept playing. The puke was on drums and when he hit them, it flew up and covered him. Hilarious. We had a party and when we went home, Loof and Micro were so drunk, I had to carry them. In the time when one fell down and I helped him to get up the other fell down. It took ages to get home!*

**Aimar:** [Unconvincingly] *So you enjoyed it...*

**Olli:** *Absolutely!*

**Aimar:** *Pity I was not there....*

(personal communication, 04.10.2009)

These examples highlight the importance of drinking-related danger in constructing identities when researching these youth groups. However, they also show that these practices are far from being considered 'normal' environments for conducting an ethnographic research. The question then becomes, what should be the position of an ethnographer in such situations? It is obvious that we need to establish rapport with participants of our research. It is clear that in doing so we also become part of the interactions. And in these kinds of challenging interactions we as ethnographic researchers have to make difficult decisions in the context on our own place with regard to the research and the researched.

## OBSERVING PARTICIPANTS: TO DRINK OR NOT TO DRINK?

In this section we reflect on our decisions whether or not to join the practices of excessive consumption of alcohol while conducting research among groups of young people drinking alcohol. We know that the abuse of alcohol implies certain unpredictability of the consequences of its excessive consumption and that group dynamics often play a significant role in alcohol consumption among youth. Therefore the first challenge the researcher faces is how to manage relations and make decisions with potentially drunken participants in intoxicated environments. In the situation of an ongoing carnival of drinking, which does not tolerate hierarchical difference between youth groups, staying outside of the common practice of drinking means either to be excluded from the celebrating group or to be put at risk, if not to potentially destroy, the event itself. Indeed, our youth drinking groups are sensitive about their homogeneity. A non-drinker or a person who is falling out of the general behaviour code of the group (for example, someone who falls asleep while the others are still drinking; who stops participating in drinking, or who refuses to do certain stupid things when the others are 'up for it') becomes downgraded in his or her status and is often excluded from the group. In this example with a focus group of British youth, some young men reflect on taking drugs (instead of drinking), which had implications for group norms:

**Fat man:** *We started drinking at 11 a.m. in the hotel because we are all inclusive.*

**Daniel:** *So roughly how many of them did you drink in the day before you went out?*

**Fat man:** *I had about 8 of these small beers, 7 malibu and pineapples, 7 vodka and fantas, a couple of vodka and orange...*

**Daniel:** *This is before you went out.*

**Fat man:** *Yeah. But this is over 12 hours.*

**Hat man:** *You weren't really drunk though when we went out.*

**Fat man:** *I was feeling it a little bit when we went out. We went to a bar and paid 6€ each and got a pint of vodka and red bull and between us got two bottles of peach schnapps, some shots. So I had the pint of vodka and red bull and then about 8 shots from the two bottles.*

**Daniel:** *Fucking hell.*

**Fat man:** *Yeah, because some people didn't want to do it.*

**Daniel:** *After the shots?*

**Fat man:** *Well that was it.*

**Hat man:** *A few of us were on pills while the others just wanted to get smashed in the bar so when it came around to us we were offered drinks and we declined, it killed the group atmosphere.*

(personal communication, 11.06.2010)

However, this rule applies to ethnographic researchers as well as participants of the youth group. At times, we need to participate in the practice of alcohol consumption to facilitate acceptance in the group and acknowledgement of the culture, otherwise the consequences could damage research relations. For example, an example from the Russian research:

**Sasha:** [A bass player in a band, who just ordered a bottle of vodka]: *What are you gonna drink guys?*

**Roma:** *Tea will do the job.*

**Sasha** [Half jokingly]: *Hmmmm, I don't think we will find a common language.* (personal communication, 01.10.2009)

In such a way, the choice of not drinking with participants makes us capable of keeping our research identity and, one may say, staying objective, but on the other hand this choice threatens the ranks of our research credibility and access to the internal group communication. By drinking with participants, we enter into uncharted territory, which is not covered in ethnographic textbooks and is not structured by the universities' ethical guidelines. However, this strategy gives us a greater chance of documenting practices and attitudes closer to those held by the members of the youth group. In one focus group of British youth in Ibiza, before we joined them for a night out drinking, they downplayed their alcohol consumption. However, once we spent time with them drinking in the local bars, we were able to document how much they drank and their attitudes to alcohol:

*Within a few hours, we are chatting with some young people from Birmingham. Matt, Scott, Steve, and Sarah. Matt is particularly interesting – having had work 'dry up' in the UK, he came out to Ibiza to pass some time. However, in the month he has been here, he is not too sure how much he has spent. He knows he has a £400 phone bill at least. His friend Steve, also out here for a month, has spent £6000. This was mainly on clubs, drinking and taxis. As we sit and talk, Matt estimates he has had*

*around 4 pints of beer in the afternoon. We are invited out with them in the evening to follow events. Because we are all inclusive, we just get our drinks, and they are not soft things either as the measures are half. By the time we meet at 7.30 p.m., another two pints have been drunk and two cocktails each. We each take another two beers and walk down to the boat which will take us to Café Mambo. Café Mambo is where it is said one should go to enjoy the sunset. However, because of our extended chat and drinking in the hotel, we now note that the sun has started to set... At Café Mambo, we try to add up how much we have drunk and Matt estimates four pints and a cocktail but it is clearly more as he has forgotten our drinking between 7.30 p.m. and arriving here. (field notes, 02.06.2010)*

In some cases, not drinking does not only put the researcher in an awkward position but also negatively affects his or her respondents and this can cause tensions within researched groups. One example was in the German case when one of the members of the research group was attending a concert and did not drink heavily, instead choosing to have only one beer. During the concert, and while standing at the counter, he took a few pictures. The following week, he met with the club owners and had the following discussion:

**Herbert:** *You know, some people asked about you in the concert.*

**Aimar:** *Why?*

**Herbert:** *They asked, 'Who is this guy who does not drink and observes everything?' 'Why is he taking pictures?'*

**Aimar:** *Why is it their business?*

**Herbert:** *They thought you might be a [spy of] Nazi[s]. This is how it works here. When you do not know someone and he is suspicious, you ask around. They were really like 'why do you let such people in' and we said that you were ok, that we know you.*

*(personal communication, 11.01.2010)*

Therefore we feel it is important to engage and participate in drinking, not only to facilitate relations but to see how youth drinking cultures experience drinking, the social environment that supports it, and those who also make up the social scenery. In this example, one of the authors has been drinking with British youth for four hours. As the evening approaches, he and his companions were challenged by all manner of willing night-time economy employees [PR workers], trying to persuade them where was 'best to go' and which club had 'the best pussy'. One of the research participants has already confessed

to the researcher that he used to deal drugs back home in the UK, but the relationship has been somewhat bonded by the consumption of alcohol and the participation in their noisy activities up and down the beachfront. This final excerpt captures the essence of what we are trying to do in our studies:

[Thirty seconds later another PR couple approach us with tickets for Eden]

**PR woman:** *I guarantee you, you will pull in there tonight.*

**Irish PR man:** [To all of us in a tone of amazement] *Oh mate, you gonna find some hot pussy in there [laughs to himself]. Want to see my cock?*

**Jay:** *I'm gonna go, I'm paying. I don't give a fuck, how much. Tell me. I have unlimited money.*

**PR woman:** *So you get the bar crawl and entry into both clubs. The water party comes on about 4 a.m. in the morning and that's when the fun really starts.*

**Jay:** [Starts getting his money out and pays for me] *Lets PARTY!*

**Daniel (author and interviewer):** *You can't pay for me.*

**Jay:** [Hugs me] *Come out please, let's go. We have to!! I think you're a top man. I don't know why I like you, mate, but I do. Nothing must come back on me because people can get me in jail and it can affect my family.*  
(personal communication, 01.07.2012)

## **DISCUSSION AND CRITICAL REFLECTIONS**

This article has attempted to make reflections on our participation with heavily drinking youth groups in Russia, the UK and Germany. Our work complements others who have undertaken similar studies in the area and, instead of weaving a theoretical framework to our paper, we rely on reflections made from thick descriptions. We used ethnography to understand particular cultures and the ways they function. In this way we as researchers were faced with the dilemma of engaging in challenging practices at the expense of putting professional credibility at risk. However, at the end of the day we are university academics and no institution would be particularly happy to know that their lecturers were involved in practices of excessive drinking, especially when these practices involve young people. The authors of this article made their choices independently of each other, but these choices were similar. We all agree that we should not

be fearful of engaging in this level of participation with our research subjects because of the potential benefits we can glean from their subjective experiences of drinking. This approach has been met with significant opposition within our respective fields, possibly because it is considered 'risky' (Israel 2004; Israel & Hay 2006; Lee-Treweek & Linkogle 2000), and undoubtedly breaks the established academic norms of ethical conduct, perhaps making it unsuitable or controversial (Blackman 2007).

However, we show in this article that when it comes to engaging with youth drinking cultures it is important to accept drinking as a social practice. It is also important to remain neutral but participatory in reactions to drinking stories and drinking with participants. With regard to the ethical issues of drinking we came to the following conclusions. Firstly, consumption of alcohol is not just a 'bad habit' or one's individual way of escaping reality. Young people in the sites of our research see drinking as a practice in which relations develop and evolve between the individual and a group, and a group culture is negotiated and enacted. In this way, drinking alcohol is celebrated on a social occasion, connects people and facilitates enjoyment – regardless of the negative or perhaps brutal stories. Whether the researcher likes it or not, by working in such environment he/she inevitably takes part in this negotiation. It may be a matter of morals for the researcher. However, it is clear that our morals do not always correspond to the life projects of the young people we research.

Secondly, when we hear brutal or graphic stories of drinking or see the drunken actions of our participants, we show that we are not in a position to judge and have to offer flexibility in the moment, even though we may wholeheartedly disagree with what we hear or see. We may, on occasions, have to endorse it – to play the part: witness Daniel's efforts to drink with participants for four hours as the group walked up and down the beach, with their half-naked bodies soaking the sun as they made lewd remarks to the young women walking past. As we start to learn about the drinking culture, we exhibit reactions and behaviours which will enable us to participate and understand it. Along the way, we make mistakes – such as that of Aimar by drinking one beer at a concert, or Ivan asking for tea when the social expectation was to drink vodka.

In the groups under study, alcohol consumption is not necessarily gender specific. In general, female drinking is not condemned by our research cohorts but valued as a positive sign of being part of the same 'scene'. Therefore, when the male researcher stands in a crowd with a beer bottle in his hand, it does not hinder his contacts with female group members. In many situations, alcoholised events offer an easier way to meet people from the opposite sex and start talking with them. By following unwritten codes of behaviour, like buying drinks

for women, the researcher is also using the opportunity to make contacts with potential informants in an accepted framework of communication. We do acknowledge the gender conflict in undertaking these practices but merely point out that we do so because it is part of the gendered nature of social relations in these contexts.

Lastly, we have come to find that young people tend to create and follow their own social norms when it comes to drinking alcohol. However, when their own norms are in contradiction with the dominant society's norms, they may correct their behaviour so as not to violate mainstream norms (at least not too openly). This all does not mean that they see their own norms as secondary. On the contrary, young people usually value their own group drinking norms more and appreciate people who do follow these norms. Above we have discussed how important is participating in drinking events, which is necessary for the researcher to maintain his or her credibility among the group under study. Another point to consider is that the researcher knows that young people he/she tries to study do drink and by not participating in the party they do not prevent them drinking. From their perspective, young people know that the researcher knows that they drink, especially when the interviews are conducted about alcohol consumption. Refusing to raise a glass, drink a pint, and sink a shot can be especially contradictory when a researcher is a long-term friend or acquaintance with young people and has drunk with them in the past before he/she came back as a researcher – or even if they do not honour the social moment of drinking and evade the common expectation to drink. We therefore feel that the researcher who ignores drinking and positions him/herself outside of the event shows his/her hypocrisy due the situation 'they know that I know that they know'.

## **MANUSCRIPT SOURCES**

Fieldwork materials from 2006–2014 in possession of the authors.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, Elijah 1990. *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Beck, Ulrich 1998 [1992]. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Beck, Ulrich 1999. *World Risk Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Becker, Howard S. 1953. Becoming a Marihuana User. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 235–242. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/221326>.
- Blackman, Shane J. 2007. 'Hidden Ethnography': Crossing Emotional Borders in Qualitative Accounts of Young People's Lives. *Sociology*, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 699–716. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0038038507078925>.
- Bourgois, Philippe 1995. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Briggs, Daniel 2012. *Crack Cocaine Users: High Society and Low Life in South London*. London: Routledge.
- Briggs, Daniel 2013. *Deviance and Risk on Holiday: An Ethnography of British Tourists in Ibiza*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Clapp, John D. & Holmes, Megan R. & Reed, Mark B. & Shillington, Audrey M. & Freisthler, Bridget & Lange, James E. 2007. Measuring College Students' Alcohol Consumption in Natural Drinking Environments: Field Methodologies for Bars and Parties. *Evaluation Review*, Vol. 31, No. 5, pp. 469–489. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0193841X07303582>.
- Coffey, Amanda 1999. *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Curtis, Ric 2002. Coexisting in the Real World: The Problems, Surprises and Delights of Being an Ethnographer on a Multidisciplinary Research Project. *The International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 297–310. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0955-3959\(02\)00116-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0955-3959(02)00116-0).
- Fetterman, David M. 1989. *Ethnography: Step-by-Step*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Geertz, Clifford 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Giddens, Anthony 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Giddens, Anthony 1999. *Runaway World*. London: Profile Books.
- Gololobov, Ivan 2014. On Being a Punk and a Scholar: A Reflexive Account of Researching Punk Scene in Russia. *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 1–13. doi: 10.5153/sro.3486.
- Gololobov, Ivan & Pilkington, Hilary & Steinholt, Yngvar B. 2014. *Punk in Russia: Cultural Mutation from the 'Useless' to the 'Moronic'*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Griffin, Christine & Bengry-Howell, Andrew & Hackley, Chris & Mistral, Willm & Szmiggin, Isabelle 2009. 'Every Time I Do It, I Absolutely Annihilate Myself': Loss of (Self-)Consciousness and Loss of Memory in Young People's Drinking Narratives. *Sociology*, Vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 457–476. doi:10.1177/0038038509103201.

- Hayward, Keith 2002. The Vilification and Pleasures of Youthful Transgression. In: J. Muncie & G. Hughes & E. MacLaughlin (eds.) *Youth Justice: Critical Readings*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 80–94. Available at <http://blogs.kent.ac.uk/culturalcriminology/files/2011/03/hayward-vilif.pdf>, last accessed on April 24, 2015.
- Hesse, Morten & Tutenges, Sébastien & Schlieuwe, Sanna & Reinholdt, Tine 2008. Party Package Travel: Alcohol Use and Related Problems in a Holiday Resort: A Mixed Methods Study. *BMC Public Health*, Vol. 8, pp. 351–358. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-8-351.
- Israel, Mark 2004. Strictly Confidential? Integrity and the Disclosure of Criminological and Socio-Legal Research. *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 44, No. 5, pp. 715–740. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azh033>.
- Israel, Mark & Hay, Iain 2006. *Research Ethics for Social Scientist*. London & Thousand Oaks & New Dehli: SAGE Publications.
- Lee-Treweek, Geraldine & Linkogle, Stephanie 2000. *Danger in the Field: Risk and Ethics in Social Research*. London: Routledge.
- Maher, Lisa 2002. Don't Leave Us This Way: Ethnography and Injecting Drug Use in the Age of AIDS. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 311–325. doi:10.1016/S0955-3959(02)00118-4.
- Palmer, Catherine & Thomson, Kirrilly 2010. Everyday Risks and Professional Dilemmas: Fieldwork with Alcohol-Based (Sporting) Subcultures. *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 421–440. doi: 10.1177/1468794110366800.
- Patton, Michael Q. 1990. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods. Second Edition*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Power, Robert 2002. The Application of Ethnography, with Reference to Harm Reduction in Sverdlovsk Russia. *The International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 327–331. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0955-3959\(02\)00117-2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0955-3959(02)00117-2).
- Preble, Edward & Casey, John J. 1969. Taking Care of Business: The Heroin User's Life on the Street. *The International Journal of the Addictions*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 1–24. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3109/10826086909061998>.
- Rubin, Vera & Comitas, Lambros 1975. *Ganja in Jamaica: A Medical Anthropological Study of Chronic Marihuana Use*. The Hague & Paris: Mouton.
- Sanjek, Roger 2000. Keeping Ethnography Alive in an Urbanizing World. *Human Organization*, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 280–288.
- Tutenges, Sébastien & Hesse, Morten 2008. Patterns of Binge Drinking at an International Nightlife Resort. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, Vol. 43, No. 5, pp. 595–599. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/alcalc/agn039>.
- Vanderstaay, Steven 2005. One Hundred Dollars and a Dead Man: Ethical Decision-Making in Ethnographic Fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 371–409. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891241605275478>.
- Van Maanen, John 1988. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Ventsel, Aimar 2008. Punx and Skins United: One Law For Us One Law For Them. *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, Vol. 40, No. 57, pp. 45–100. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2008.10756618>.
- Ward, Jennifer R. 2010. *Flashback: Drugs and Dealing in the Golden Age of the London Rave Scene*. Cullumpton: Willan Publishing.
- Willis, Paul E. 1977. *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- Young, Jock 1971. *The Drugtakers: The Social Meaning of Drug Use*. London: Paladin.

## REFLECTIONS AND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ROLE OF ALCOHOL

*Natalia Struchkova, Aimar Ventsel*

*Mrs. Lasuria's age [is] close to 130 [...] She considered herself young until five years ago. She smokes one package of cigarettes daily and inhales, a habit she has had for sixty-two years. She drinks a glass of wine before her noon meal and each morning before breakfast a glass of vodka.*

(Leaf 1975: 8)

This description of an old lady comes from a book by Alexander Leaf about his travels to seek, find, and understand the reasons for the longevity of centenarians (people over 100). The reading of the part dedicated to the then Soviet Caucasus region Abkhazia is especially amusing. It turns out that all of the centenarians he visited were relatively hearty drinkers. Most of the old people consumed wine daily and did not hesitate to enjoy a drink Leaf describes as 'Georgian vodka' but is, in fact, a homebrewed hard liquor mainly known as *chacha*, seldom containing less than sixty per cent of alcohol. All these people were respected community workers, still actively participating in physically heavy agricultural work but also travelling huge distances to visit friends, singing in village choirs, or looking after grandchildren. In many places the author goes into philosophical passages about the relation between health and alcohol consumed. Alexander Leaf, an educated middle-class American, comes from a different culture, from a culture where intensive alcohol consumption has been traditionally regarded as a problem, a symbol for the underclass, people who were often seen as 'non-humans'. Indeed, in Victorian England, poor people were seen as 'dirty' and morally deprived, which altogether made them another 'species' compared to their educated affluent co-citizens (Nayak 2003: 76–77). This perception about the lack of morals of poor people also included their imagined uncontrolled alcohol consumption. In the same time period in the USA, any kind of alcohol addiction, i.e. alcoholism, was seen as a particularity of the working classes – “Negroes, Catholics, Irish immigrants, and so on” (McDonald 1994a: 4). Wealthy and educated classes were seen as free from that

evil. Moreover, while ‘alcoholism’ and ‘addiction’ were seen as ‘mental illnesses’ of the poor (Gusfield 1963), then affluent classes were proud of their ‘abstinence’, which was “closely tied in with Protestant notions of self-control” (McDonald 1994a: 2). This attitude helped to develop ‘medical imperialism’, seeing alcohol consumption as a problem and the consumers as deviant (Heather & Robertson 1989: 146). Therefore, the surprise of Alexander Leaf about the ‘normality’ of constant wine drinking in Abkhazian villages could be understood.

On closer inspection, this surprise, however, is more than hypocritical. Western middle and upper classes do consume alcohol. As the historical research shows, there exists certain ‘good drinking’ based on a knowledge of and ability to choose and discuss ‘good wines’. Such knowledge is the product of centuries-long cultural development, where the snobbish discussing of wine became a symbol of belonging to the elite (Shapin 2012). When snobbish and controlled alcohol consumption, or even tee-totality, is ‘good drinking’ in the Western society, then it is not necessarily the case with other societies. Ironically, both public perception and academics tend to associate and measure commitment to Islam with the non-drinking of alcoholic beverages. For example, there are even authors who measure religious radicalisation in Central Asia with the decreasing alcohol consumption (Rose 2002: 105). When Aimar Ventsel, one of the co-authors of this essay, told his Russian friend who knows Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan, from the Soviet era, that during his three-week stay he saw only one drunken person in the streets of the city, and three times somebody walking around with a beer bottle in their hand (and that this was in sharp contrast with Astana, which is the centre of the ‘Russified North’), his friend’s reaction was: “This means Islamisation!” Here we see that for Western/European society alcohol consumption has always been controversial and multi-faceted.

Surprisingly, questions and problems surrounding ‘eastern’ drinking do not differ from ‘western’ drinking as much as one might wish to think. For Westerners Eastern Europe / Russia / Soviet Union have always been associated with spontaneous, enormous, and exotic alcohol consumption. However, at a closer look, controversies surrounding alcohol consumption in Western societies are not dissimilar. Let us take, for example, the (former) Soviet Union. The drinking of alcohol in the Soviet Union was seen as deviant (Dragadze 1994). However, people in the Soviet Union drank heavily, even in Islamic republics (Smith 1976). When ‘Russian drinking’ was considered the ‘bad drinking’, then Georgians from Caucasia accorded the term ‘good drinking’, doing it in a controlled way, combining it with ritualistic toasting (Dragadze 1994; Scott 2012). The Bolshevik/Communist enlightenment mission in Siberia had the ambition to bring ‘culture’ or *kul'tura* to the ‘backward’ peoples of the region. Habeck (2011: 65–66) theorises that the ‘format of culture’ helped to import European

values into Soviet life. Apart from hygiene and illiteracy, the Bolsheviks were also concerned with fighting alcoholism. These values constitute the essence of *kul'tura*. The irony is that the Soviet state was built on and around alcohol: consuming alcohol was essential to the social life, as was the state monopoly on alcohol for the budget (Schrad 2014). All these controversies are also reflected in the historical development of the alcohol culture in the region in which we have both carried out fieldwork – the Republic of Sakha in the Russian Far East.

## **THE MANY FACES OF VODKA IN THE REPUBLIC OF SAKHA (YAKUTIA)**

During the past few years, the consumption of alcoholic beverages in Yakutia has been in constant decline. This is confirmed by local medical institutions who argue that the number of alcoholics is slowly but constantly diminishing year after year.

Moreover, every person who knows the republic has also seen how alcohol is becoming less present at important public and private social events. Notwithstanding the fact that wines and vodka are still part of the traditional culture of celebration, getting drunk is increasingly unpopular. At weddings, funerals, and public events one sees that participants drink more modestly. This modesty is also accompanied by the decrease of alcohol-related criminality and criminality in general. The streets of the big cities in Yakutia are now relatively safe at night – something unimaginable ten years ago.

We would argue that this modesty is a logical result of a certain historical development and could have been forecasted a few years ago. But, in order to understand the changes in the consumption of alcoholic beverages in recent years, we should go back in history.

Alcohol was, of course, known to the Sakha. From the 17th century it was one of the main commodities for change and trade. Historically, vodka was a 'good product'; it was offered to especially dear guests and kept at home for their visits. This was probably related to the high price and complicated access to alcohol. Spirits were seen as part of one's wealth. In this period, only rich people were able to afford alcohol. This situation lasted for a relatively long time, until the 1950s. At this time alcohol became more easily available, also its price decreased.

In the 1960s, in Yakutia, the drinking of alcohol became a common practice in Sakha villages. Alcohol became even cheaper and more available. This period also marked the growth in personal wealth among the rural population. Simultaneously, in the 1960s and 1970s, the control over selling and consuming

alcohol weakened. After the war, rural people started to be paid salaries in cash instead of earlier 'norm days', a token system to purchase food and goods in village shops. Drinking became a sign of success: in villages constant drinking was the sign of a good salary.

The state under the last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, tried to change it and introduced several limits on the sale of alcohol, up to a total ban. Unfortunately, these regulations remained fruitless in Sakha villages and people continued to drink heavily. The only change was that the sale of alcohol moved from state-controlled village shops to private homes or *tochkas*.

The 1990s brought with them a radical change in state control, which almost vanished in the middle of the decade. The disappearance of state control was accompanied by an increase in the volumes of consumed alcohol, the growth of sheer alcoholism, and the beginning of drinking at an even younger age. In a country where drinking has traditionally been an everyday habit, the 1990s were catastrophic. Vodka was not only an object for trade and enrichment but also became part of a certain way of life. Things turned even worse when most enterprises ceased to pay salaries, and vodka often replaced money as an equivalent for payment. This was especially true for rural settlements.

This was a period of spontaneous anti-alcohol movements. One of the first groups that appeared was comprised of people who propagated so-called 'acculturated drinking'. These people were mainly urban Sakha intellectuals who organised social events, accompanied by alcohol, with the goal to teach people to drink modestly. Most of these social events went out of control and ended as average drinking parties. The courage of the proponents of 'acculturated drinking' is amazing; they did not give up and organised a series of events. When we tried to know more about the fate of that group, one informant told us: "They all became alcoholics."

Changes in Sakha drinking habits occurred, however, at the end of the 1990s, with the political and economic stabilisation, and the state was able to pay more attention to vodka consumption. In 2000, the Republic of Sakha as the first region of the Russian Federation passed a law of the Healthy Ways of Life (*zdorovyi obraz zhizni*), which became the basis for further alcohol policy, a policy that supported local grassroots initiatives that fought alcoholism. The mentoring of 'problematic' families in which one or both parents abused alcohol was widespread. These families were put under surveillance not only by the local administration but also by the community. The formation of the community initiative became so strong that several settlements declared themselves 'dry' and banned any sale of alcohol.

Reasons for these new modesty and abstinence initiatives were the growth of wealth and the spread of private entrepreneurship and career orientation,

combined with traditional strong kinship ties amongst the Sakha. The development of market economy and all-Russian entrepreneurship strengthened individual responsibility, career consciousness and the valuation of family ties and personal health. In such a situation, traditional Sakha kinship solidarity and the obligation to support relatives motivated young and old entrepreneurs to control their alcohol consumption in order to increase their wealth. In that period, the government of the Republic of Sakha started to pay more attention to its alcohol policy. In 2010 a fundamental law was passed that regulated trade in alcoholic beverages, a law that was causal in establishing new consumption patterns.

Access to alcoholic beverages was strictly limited from 2 to 8 p.m., with stricter age controls introduced. Apart from the state, several public figures began to propagate modesty and abstinence as a modern Sakha tradition. Alongside these developments, the popularity of alcohol consumption decreased among the ethnic Sakha, especially among young urban and rural intellectuals. Student life changed slowly but radically after 2010. Drinking became condemned by wider sections of the population and this concerned especially public drinking.

In the Republic of Sakha, alcohol consumption is still a problem, as is the illegal sale of vodka. The attitudes have, however, transformed. This is especially notable in the young intellectual and student circles. Once notorious urban criminals, Sakha students have become conscious career builders. Alcohol misuse is currently identified more with poor social groups than personal wealth.

This complex development is impossible to understand without an eye on social, economic and political development in the Republic of Sakha, including individual and group perspectives.

## **REFLECTIONS**

The most important conclusion drawn from the workshop in 2013 was a horror story for all health freaks: alcohol is so deeply embedded in the social and cultural life of the Arctic that there is almost no way to live without it. Alcohol is a part of practically any social event, from meeting old friends to large national official celebrations. The deep intimate meaning of alcohol use was demonstrated by Eleanor Peers's talk about officials who were supposed to propagate teetotal national holidays but did not abstain from a glass or three to celebrate the same holidays in their family circle. The social and cultural meaning of alcohol, its ritual role and symbolically central place in celebrations of different degrees seems to be the only factor that unites all ethnic groups, ages, and sexes in the Arctic. As we discovered, even non-drinking is interpreted

in terms of drinking: non-drinking is a juxtaposition to drinking, not an act in itself. As was shown by several talks, non-drinking in the Arctic is a political symbol or path to voluntary exclusion from social and religious life. The decision to fight against alcohol use and refuse to drink can be interpreted as the denial of the meaning of alcohol, an attempt to depart from the mainstream. As demonstrated by the abstinence movement among non-Russian people in the Russian Arctic, abstinence is related to identity and opposition to Russianness, and non-drinking has become a symbol for ethnic heritage.

The feedback from the first workshop dedicated to the cultural and social meaning of alcohol was surprisingly positive. Several colleagues expressed their appreciation announcing how such an academic event dedicated to alcohol use in Siberia was long overdue. Even stranger was the fact that the organisers had to struggle to find presenters, and encourage people to attend the conference. When talking about Siberianists, most of us have conducted fieldwork in Siberia for a decade or more, and in practice it means we have had to participate in numerous drinking parties, receptions, and just ‘ordinary’ events like birthday parties. In total we have consumed dozens of litres of pure alcohol with the accompanying consequences that occur the day after. However, these numerous litres of alcohol also mean that we know how alcohol is consumed and what rituals surround drinking. In fact, most of us are quite sophisticated and can distinguish between the rules, rituals, and norms concerned with when, where, and how glasses should be raised and emptied. Even stranger and more interesting was the reaction of people when they were invited to the workshop. The standard answer was: “I have never conducted research on alcohol use.” At the same time, people could share their experiences of Siberian drinking habits in a more informal environment, for instance, in a pub. Seemingly, this reaction also demonstrates a lack of flexibility of social scientists, their fixation on their research agenda and topics formulated for their applications for funding. It also shows that we do not trust our experiences and we make use of only a small segment of the material we actually collect. This is a pity, because anthropologists’ unique method of research anthropology – participant observation – supplies us with substantial knowledge of the cultures we spend a sizeable amount of time living with. We are all confronted with issues and topics that do not belong directly to our research agenda. As the previous alcohol workshop demonstrated, we can put these bits and pieces together in order to form a coherent story that helps us, and other people, to understand different cultures, ethnic and religious groups.

When skimming the English-language academic literature related to the social, medical, political, and cultural meaning of alcohol use, the absence of the Arctic becomes obvious. Typical are collections of academic articles written

by Western scholars about Western societies (Holt 2006), in some rare cases Eastern European or tropical countries are added (Douglas 1987; McDonald 1994b). Our assumption is that what we were doing in Tartu was quite different. We tried to conceptualise Arctic drinking instead of just focusing on case studies (Koester 2003) or seeing alcohol use as a problem and a tragedy (Metzo 2009; Segal 1998; Segal et al. 1993). Most of the drinking-related research is very local, limited to a concrete community, religious group, ethnicity, and so on. Art Leete's talk showed that 'out there' exists a popular perception of regional drinking patterns. On the other side, by doing research in such an alcohol-infused region, we should further conceptualise our research methods. This was the reason why the paper by Briggs, Gololobov, and Ventsel was included in this special journal issue: there are moments when signed codes of research ethics fail to provide grounds or appear to be destructive for the research. The workshop offered an opportunity to bring the discussion to a new level, to start theorising on the concept of regional drinking. Of course, we can always fail, but this is the advantage of our more flexible workshop format – to become a basis for such discussions that probably do not fit into more regulated and strict conference agendas.

There is one more thing to address. People bring up plenty of topics when it comes to the discussion about drinking habits, but they often leave out one important factor, which is the state and national policy. It is obvious that the state has tremendous influence on alcohol use. As was demonstrated with the development of the alcohol culture in the Republic of Sakha, and currently all over the circumpolar region, the state heavily regulates alcohol sales. Moreover, the state interferes in drinking patterns usually through taxation to increase alcohol prices. The state punishes the abuse of alcohol and treats victims of alcoholism, as demonstrated by Argounova-Low and Sleptsov in this volume. It can be said that the state has its own interests in the quantities, and in where and when alcohol is consumed. Therefore, in the next workshop in 2014 we added presentations covering regions outside of the Arctic and discussed the state's role in drinking and non-drinking, comparing Arctic drinking and alcohol policy with these regions. We should not hesitate to do this more often because it gives us a fuller picture; and this way we can place our region within the context of more general debates.

## REFERENCES

- Douglas, Mary (ed.) 1987. *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dragadze, Tamara 1994. Gender, Ethnicity and Alcohol in the Former Soviet Union. In: M. McDonald (ed.) *Gender, Drink and Drugs*. Oxford & New York: Berg, pp. 145–152.
- Gusfield, Joseph R. 1963. *Symbolic Crusade*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press.
- Habeck, Joachim Otto 2011. “Thank You for Being”: Neighborhood, Ethno-Culture, and Social Recognition in the House of Culture. In: J.O. Habeck & B. Donahoe (eds.) *Reconstructing the House of Culture: Community, Self, and the Makings of Culture in Russia and Beyond*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Heather, Nick & Robertson, Ian 1989. *Problem Drinking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holt, Mack P. (ed.) 2006. *Alcohol: A Social and Cultural History*. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Koester, David. 2003. Drink, Drank, Drunk: A Social-Political Grammar of Russian Drinking Practices in a Colonial Context. *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 41–46. Available at <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/aer/issue/view/27>, last accessed on June 5, 2015.
- Leaf, Alexander 1975. *Youth in Old Age*. New York & St. Louis & San Francisco & Mexico: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- McDonald, Maryon 1994a. Introduction: A Social-Anthropological View of Gender, Drink and Drugs. In: M. McDonald (ed.) *Gender, Drink and Drugs*. Oxford & New York: Berg, pp. 1–31.
- McDonald, Maryon (ed.) 1994b. *Gender, Drink and Drugs*. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Metzo, Katherine 2009. The Social and Gendered Lives of Vodka in Rural Siberia. In: M.L. Caldwell (ed.) *Food & Everyday Life in the Postsocialist World*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, pp. 199–205.
- Nayak, Anoop 2003. *Race, Place and Globalization*. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Rose, Richard 2002. How Muslims View Democracy: Evidence from Central Asia. *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 102–111. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0078>.
- Schrad, Mark Lawrence 2014. *Vodka Politics: Alcohol, Autocracy, and the Secret History of the Russian State*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Scott, Eric R. 2012. Edible Ethnicity: How Georgian Cuisine Conquered the Soviet Table. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 831–858.
- Segal, Bernard 1998. Drinking and Drinking-Related Problems Among Alaska Natives. *Alcohol Health and Research World*, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 276–280. Available at <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh22-4/276.pdf>, last accessed on June 5, 2015.
- Segal, Bernard & Duffi, Lawrence K. & Avksentyuk, Alexi V. & Thomasson, H.R. 1993. Biobehavioral Factors and Drinking among Alaskan and Siberian Natives: Cross Cultural Collaborative Research. *Arctic Medical Research*, Vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 568–572.
- Shapin, Steven 2012. The Tastes of Wine: Towards a Cultural History. *Wineworld: New Essays on Wine, Taste, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 49–94. Available at [http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~hsdept/bios/docs/shapin\\_Tastes\\_of\\_Wine.pdf](http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~hsdept/bios/docs/shapin_Tastes_of_Wine.pdf), last accessed on June 5, 2015.
- Smith, Hedrick 1976. *The Russians*. New York: Ballantine Books.

## **PENTECOSTALS AND CHARISMATIC PROTESTANTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOMI AND NENETS TUNDRA**

*Art Leete, Piret Koosa, Laur Vallikivi*

Between 2010 and 2012, an extended team of scholars studied contemporary Protestant groups in Russia. The project was labelled *Center for the Study of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in Russia*<sup>1</sup> (CSPCMR) and was led by Aleksandr Panchenko from the European University in Saint Petersburg and Patrick Plattet from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Besides Russia and the USA, scholars from Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, and Estonia were involved in this collaborative research effort. The host institution of the project was the European University in St. Petersburg.

The aim of the project was to analyse the Protestant-charismatic (P/c) Christianity in various regions of post-Soviet Russia. The project proceeded from the notions concerned with global effects of the rapid extension of P/c Christianity in the contemporary world. In the anthropology of Pentecostalism, problems of continuity and change, globalisation and indigenisation, preservation of pre-Pentecostal ontologies, creating the new morality and approaches to economy and politics have been discussed (Coleman 2000; Robbins 2004a, 2004b). The Estonian team's specific task was to analyse contemporary Protestant missions and churches in the north-eastern corner of European Russia, in the Republic of Komi and the European Nenets tundra.

The first Pentecostal churches were established in Russia in the 1920s. Beginning in the 1930s, Pentecostals were persecuted and during the anti-religious campaign of the 1950s and 1960s they became a special target for Soviet repressions. Pentecostals were accused of fanaticism (a stereotype mainly based on the practice of 'speaking in tongues') and even ritual murder. As a result, most Pentecostal churches in Russia continued to exist without official registration (Lunkin 2004; Nikolskaya 2009; Panchenko 2013). Beginning in the late 1980s, numerous foreign Pentecostal missions started to proselytise in the

post-Soviet territories and new ritual elements and ideologies were promoted (emotional praise, rock music, mass healing, and other signs of spiritual gifts and the ‘gospel of prosperity’).

Our project members studied contemporary Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Russia by doing multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork. We aimed to explore different understandings of religious life at official, group, and individual levels. Also, the connections of Pentecostal and charismatic movements with other religious phenomena were under study. Field studies were conducted in the city of Novgorod, the Republic of Komi, Arkhangelsk oblast, Western Siberia, Chukotka, Kamchatka Peninsula, the Khabarovsk region, Krasnoyarsk Krai, and Altai.

The Estonian research team conducted fieldwork among Protestant communities in the Republic of Komi and the Nenets Autonomous Region: the Church of Christ the Saviour (*Rossiiskii soiuz evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, Tserkov' Khrista Spasitelia*) and Komi Evangelical Church (KEC, *Komi Khristianskaia Tserkov' Evangel'skoi Very*) in Syktyvkar, Evangelical community in the village of Don (*Donskaia Khristianskaia Obshchina*) and Pentecostal mission (Russian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (RCCEF), *Rossiiskaia tserkov' khristian very evangel'skoi*) in the Kulömdin district and in the Vorkuta area, regional central mission of RCCEF in Vorkuta, and unregistered Baptists in the Vorkuta region, the Republic of Komi.

From a global perspective, P/c Christianity has been depicted as increasingly replicating itself in different societies but also adapting to cultures into which these movements have been introduced (Robbins 2004b: 129). Russia is a specific region for this interplay of the global and the indigenous. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) dominates the public religious sphere. This firmly established preference makes it complicated for P/c movements to introduce their globalist agenda but also obstructs their indigenisation to a certain extent. We searched for answers concerning problems of the degree of universalisation or localisation of P/c communities' religious practices, continuities with local religious traditions, and specific ‘Russian’ features of Pentecostalism.

We discovered that in the churches under study local cultural peculiarities have been taken into account to differing degrees. In the countryside, P/c churches adapt themselves more to traditional vernacular religiosity and adopt local features. Urban missions apply more strictly their globalist agenda but diverse strategies can be traced also inside the same mission.

The RCCEF Pentecostal Church in Vorkuta unites the intellectualising and emotionalising tradition of Russian Protestantism. On the one hand, the intellectual understanding of the Bible is preached as central. A service – especially in the main church of the union – might be carried out without glos-

solalic prayers. The stress is on reading and explicating God's Word, singing, general prayers. Divine gifts are usually not publicised. Some practices and ideas exemplify tensions between the Nenets vernacular approach to religion and the Pentecostal ideology. The converted Nenets try to adapt to the Pentecostal agenda but a few traditional religious practices remain hidden from the missionaries. We also studied another branch of the same Pentecostal mission in the Kulömdin district. This mission united a very small, unstable and scattered rural community. An indigenous Komi missionary, born in Kulömdin, had a rather indigenised social agenda and he was a big enthusiast of glossolalia.

The KEC in Syktyvkar was established in the Soviet period (in the 1950s). During the post-Soviet era the church has become influenced by the Pentecostals and recognises glossolalia and the charismatic style of church services. Services in the KEC are always conducted in the Komi language, and an ethnic agenda is stressed by different cultural and social initiatives (initiating translation of the Bible into Komi, organising radio shows in Komi, and demonstrating closeness to vernacular religiosity by using Orthodox symbols).

Rupture and discontinuity with the past are the usual qualities of the P/c movements' discourse (Robbins 2004b: 127). In Russia the discourse of rupture functions in a specific way. Our project was especially interested in the idea of 'prosperity gospel' in a post-Soviet capitalistic context, and also explored how both 'godly' and 'ungodly' domains of life are constructed in P/c discourse and practice in Russia.

Prosperity gospel cannot be found in Komi villages as this is in sharp contrast with the local social reality. Anyway, the believers do not condemn wealth in principle and moderately encourage economic success. Don Evangelicals presented to us a middle-aged woman who managed to build a small house after joining the Protestant community, and a man who joined the group and then managed to start a business as a sawmill owner (the only private enterprise in the village). In the tundra, however, the prosperity gospel is totally absent.

The idea of rupture plays an important role among the Vorkuta Pentecostals. A complete break with the past has to be enacted both in words and in deeds. A Pentecostal missionary explained how the use of alcohol and idolatry are tightly related to each other and how they lead many to commit suicide, both physically and spiritually (Vallikivi 2011).

Our task was also to pay attention to collectively maintained plausibility structures that serve as tools for constructing and preserving a unique religious world. Personal narratives reflect key categories, modes of identity formation and forms of religious practices of church communities. Religious life of the P/c communities is also dependant on the previous religious and social background of their members (see Leete & Koosa 2012).



*Pentecostals' house of worship, also missionary's home, in Ust-Kulom (Kulömdin).  
Photograph by Art Leete 2009.*



*Charismatic Protestants' poster in Ust-Kulom settlement, reading: "Christ is hope for Ust-Kulom".  
Photograph by Piret Koosa 2008.*

Testimonials about how one came to God constitute an important genre through which people express their religious identity. These narratives are supposed to bring new people to God and to confirm the believer's experience. Conversion narratives demonstrate that somebody has obtained a common vocabulary and mode of talking about spiritual matters. Excellent knowledge of the Bible and the ability to quote it by heart is highly valued. A pastor from Vorkuta described how at one point 'tongues' engulfed him. His spiritual baptism preceded his intellectual understanding of the biblical message. While evangelising among the illiterate Nenets, the Pentecostal missionaries adapt their rhetoric about the importance of reading the Bible. They stress that the Holy Spirit allows the Nenets converts to be saved without them being able to read.

Opposition from the ROC to Evangelical churches is one important factor prompting cooperation between different Protestant denominations. The Don community, the Komi Evangelical Church, and the Baptist Church in Syktyvkar hold active connections with churches abroad, and such international relations give an eminent reason to place Evangelicals under the contempt of the patriotic discourse (Koosa 2013). While the congregants in Syktyvkar can enjoy their close relationship to the Evangelical church relatively peacefully, it is much more complicated in rural areas. The majority of the people with a strong preference for Orthodoxy are continually challenging the congregations' right to exist.

In the competition between Baptists and Pentecostals for souls, Baptists have been far more successful in the tundra. The small amount of Nenets converts cannot decide where to place their loyalty. From time to time, the Pentecostals visit the Baptist prayer house as well. The Pentecostal missionary does not object to this. Instead, he encourages Nenets families to carry out services together with Baptist families in the tundra. The main Baptist missionary was less eager to cooperate, claiming that Pentecostals were fake Christians who were possessed by Satan. For instance, after the Baptist pastor learned that a Nenets family had been baptised by the Pentecostals, he stopped visiting them.

The Unregistered Baptists attribute two kinds of problems to the Pentecostals. First, the latter are too 'modern' in their outlook and conduct. Second, they speak in tongues without knowing what they are doing, insisting that Paul urged to interpret what was told in foreign tongues. Furthermore, they say that this was highly unlikely that after the early apostolic church this gift was actually active. In comparison to the Unregistered Baptists, the Registered Pentecostals (like the Registered Baptists) are somewhat more liberal and less concerned about the avoidance of worldly attractions. They are not that strict in their dress code, nor do they prohibit watching TV. In addition, they do not stress to the same extent their unique historic role in the development of God's church on earth.

In the Don congregation, the weekly Sunday service is the central regular ritual. Although the pastor emphasises its free form of conduct, it has developed a certain structure and an order of the parts, which is followed by communal tea drinking. The congregation is imagined as a family, and close relations are considered essential to live a truly Christian life. The idea is that it is very hard if not impossible to be a true Christian and learn Christian love in solitude.

One of the most anticipated parts of the service is the singing of religious hymns – several current members of the Don group assert that the joyful songs were the incentive for why they started to visit the services. Some believers create their own songs to praise god. Singing constitutes a way to express one's experience of the sacred, of personal transformation, and the need to share it with others.

Protestant churches in the Republic of Komi considerably adapt themselves to the socio-political reality in the region. They must accept that the local religious field is dominated by the ROC. Anyhow, this adaptation does not necessarily mean the acceptance of all demands proposed by the local ROC bishop and clerics in the districts of the republic. In finding a proper line of action, strategies may vary considerably among different Protestant churches and communities.

Protestant churches adopt some global features of P/c missions everywhere in the Republic of Komi and Nenets tundra. These necessary indicators of proper religious behaviour include a need for reading the Bible and demonstrating one's faith by good deeds. The usual global social indicators of P/c movements (e.g. ideology of prosperity) are modestly and fragmentarily expressed, but nonetheless significant, as they demonstrate that Protestants encourage people to improve their lives.

The religious leaders of P/c Christians tolerate the local historical features of religiosity more readily when the social surrounding strongly supports orthodox religious conduct. It is also possible to observe a few significant local peculiarities in the agenda of P/c movements. They may accept that for a majority of local people, their church has a non-spiritual role in village life (as Don Evangelicals admit concerning the implementation of their social programmes; see Koosa & Leete 2014). The Komi Evangelical Church has adopted a rather strong ethnic agenda that they suppose to be significant for the entire Komi society.

Our comparative study revealed that Baptists are less ready to tolerate spiritual compromises with other churches as well as vernacular religious traditions. Also, in Syktyvkar and Vorkuta, the most important administrative and religious centres of the Republic of Komi, churches tend to be stricter in following their own agenda. Missionaries' individual understanding of faith

plays a more important role in the case of independent churches or missions that are launched far from big administrative and religious centres.

The study of Protestants in the north-eastern corner of European Russia can be developed further by gathering more reliable statistical data, improving comparative methodology and mapping a bigger number of Protestant communities during future field studies. As the region represents an intriguing case for elaborating investigations on the local peculiarities of Protestant development in the Russian North, this study serves as a basis for forthcoming research efforts.<sup>2</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The project was part of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative, coordinated by the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California and supported by the grant of the John Templeton Foundation (see also the web page of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative: <http://crcc.usc.edu/initiatives/pcr/>).

<sup>2</sup> These new ongoing research projects (Estonian Research Council grants PUT590 and PUT712) are related to the study of Protestantism and animism in the same region.

## REFERENCES

- Coleman, Simon 2000. *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Koosa, Piret 2013. Sowing the Seeds of Faith: A Case Study of an American Missionary in the Russian North. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 31–48. Available at <http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/issue/view/12>, last accessed on June 29, 2015.
- Koosa, Piret & Leete, Art 2014. Serving God by Being Neighbourly: Komi Protestants and Local Community Initiatives. *Suomen Antropologi. Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 39–57. Available at [http://www.academia.edu/9385561/Serving\\_God\\_by\\_Being\\_Neighbourly\\_Komi\\_Protestants\\_and\\_local\\_community\\_initiatives](http://www.academia.edu/9385561/Serving_God_by_Being_Neighbourly_Komi_Protestants_and_local_community_initiatives), last accessed on June 29, 2015.
- Leete, Art & Koosa, Piret 2012. The Churches Were Opened and Lots of Missionaries Arrived: Dialogue between Komi Identity and Faith. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 51, pp. 171–190. doi:10.7592/FEJF2012.51.leete-koosa.
- Lunkin, Roman 2004. Traditional Pentecostals in Russia. *East-West Church & Ministry Report*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 4–7. Available at <http://www.eastwestreport.org/articles/ew12302.html>, last accessed on June 29, 2015.
- Nikolskaya 2009 = Nikol'skaia, Tat'iana. *Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast' v 1905–1991 godakh*. [Russian Protestantism and State Power from 1905 to 1991.] Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge.

- Panchenko, Aleksandr 2013. "Sviashchennyi teatr", tonkosti morali i obriady perekhoda: antropologiya global'nogo khristianstva v sovremennoi Rossii. ["The Holy Theatre", Nuances of Morality and Rituals of Transition: Anthropology of Global Christianity in Contemporary Russia.] *Antropologicheskii Forum*, Vol. 18, pp. 215–222. Available at [http://anthropologie.kunstkamera.ru/files/pdf/018/panchenko\\_preface.pdf](http://anthropologie.kunstkamera.ru/files/pdf/018/panchenko_preface.pdf), last accessed on June 29, 2015.
- Robbins, Joel 2004a. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Robbins, Joel 2004b. The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 33, pp. 117–143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.32.061002.093421>.
- Vallikivi, Laur 2011. What Does Matter?: Idols and Icons in the Nenets Tundra. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 75–95. Available at <http://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/issue/view/9>, last accessed on June 29, 2015.

## IN MEMORIAM

### ANTS VIRES

DECEMBER 23, 1918 – MARCH 18, 2015

Ants Viires, the grand old man of Estonian ethnology, acquired this title already years ago. He devoted his life to researching Estonian folk culture and folk life, and showed extensive interests in the field, being, undoubtedly, one of the best-known representatives of Estonian ethnology.

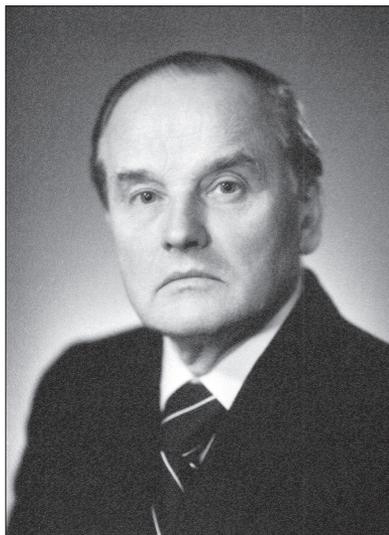
Ants Viires had a broad educational background and a wide range of humanitarian interests. He was admitted to the University of Tartu in 1937, and he first focused on language studies. Yet, during the 1940s he turned his attention to ethnography, graduating from the university as an ethnographer only in 1945. This was a period characterised by several changes of power in Estonia: in 1940 the Soviet occupation abolished the Republic of Estonia, in 1941 German occupation replaced Soviet occupation, and in 1944 the other way round. Around this time Viires established contacts and started working at the Estonian National Museum, which, at the time, was a central institution studying ethnology.

During these tumultuous years Ants Viires worked at the Estonian National Museum and also joined the Tartu (State) University postgraduate programme. In 1955 he defended his dissertation on Estonian national woodwork and was awarded a candidate degree in history. This research into one of the most important spheres of vernacular handicraft was published in 1960 and is still a significant landmark in Estonian ethnology.

As of 1956, Ants Viires started work at the Institute of History at the Estonian Academy of Sciences, where he pursued his career for decades, first at the department of archaeology, where he became head of the ethnology group in 1968.

In 1977 the department of archaeology and ethnography became an independent department of ethnography, with Ants Viires as the temporary head of the department. In 1983, he became head of the newly established independent department of ethnography – a position he held until 1996.

Throughout his career Ants Viires actively contributed to journals of linguistics, history, folkloristics, as well as ethnology, and compiled comprehensive encyclopaedic collections of Estonian folk culture, such as *Abriss der estnischen Volkskunde* (1964, in collaboration with academician Harri Moora). He was co-editor and co-compiler with Elle Vunder of the indispensable *Eesti rahvakultuur* (Estonian Folk Culture, updated edition in 2008), and edited the highly acclaimed *Eesti rahvakultuuri leksikon* (Lexicon of



Estonian Folk Culture, 1995, 3rd print in 2007). His most valuable book about Estonian folk culture, *Vana eesti rahvaelu* (Old Estonian Folk Life, 2004, both in Estonian and English), provides contact with the roots of our ancestors, allowing better understanding of our unique nature and culture. It is obviously no exaggeration to say that the 20th-century Estonian ethnology could hardly be imagined without Ants Viires.

The Soviet period established a distinct institutional division between ethnology and folkloristics. After the war the Estonian State Ethnography Museum was divided into two, and the detached part became the Estonian Literary Museum (including folklore archives), whereas material culture remained at the ethnography museum. These two aspects of the same field were also separated on the university level, and points of contacts between them remained superficial. Ants Viires always viewed ethnography and folkloristics as neighbouring disciplines that should not be studied separately. His knowledge of both material and nonmaterial culture enabled him to draw original conclusions and notice things that researchers with less comprehensive knowledge would not see.

Besides being a researcher, Ants Viires had some other spheres of interest. He translated into Estonian several books, such as *The Doors of Perception* by Aldous Huxley, and Kurt Welker's *Als die Jahre keine Zahlen tugen*, and *Der vergessene Kontinent*; he also published poetry, and a voluminous philosophical poem titled *Seitsme maa ja seitsme mere taha* (Beyond the Seven Lands and Seven Seas).

Ants Viires's impressive academic achievements were recognised and valued both in and outside Estonia. He was a long-term member of research councils of the Estonian National Museum, the Estonian Open Air Museum, and the Institute of History. On an international level we could mention his involvement in the editorial board of one of the most significant European ethnology journals, *Ethnologia Europaea*.

Ants Viires's remarkable scientific achievements have found recognition by several foreign research organisations. He was foreign member of the Finnish Finno-Ugrian Society, the Kalevala Society, the Finnish Archaeological Society, and the Finnish Literature Society, and honorary member of the Hungarian Ethnographic Society. In 1982 he was conferred an honorary doctorate at Helsinki University. He was also foreign member of the Finnish Academy of Sciences and the Swedish Gustav Adolf Academy, and later on an honorary member thereof.

The University of Tartu also elected Viires its honorary member. In 1996 he was awarded the Fourth Class Order of the National Coat of Arms for his remarkable achievements in promoting Estonian ethnology. Ants Viires was also recognised for his great contribution to the scientific life of Estonia by the Open Estonian Foundation, the National Culture Foundation, and the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. He was given Estonian Cultural Award in 2007 for his lifework, and the University of Tartu National Idea Award in 2009.

Ants Viires, a classic of Estonian ethnology, and teacher of several generations of Estonian ethnologists, will be remembered by his academic achievements and his most valuable contribution to Estonian science.

Folklore: EJJ

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MEMORY, REMEMBERING, AND LEGEND: ESTONIAN FOLKLORISTS' 10TH WINTER CONFERENCE

In December 2005, the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum initiated a series of conferences, which turned into a regular specialist winter forum – an invigorating event in the ritual year of the participants and everyone else involved in it. The 2015 Winter Conference was organised by the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu, with support from the Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory and the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. The conference took place at Taevaskoja Tourism and Holiday Centre on February 26 and 27, 2015.

The organising committee (Ergo-Hart Västriik, Kristel Kivari, and Tiina Sepp) offered as keywords for the conference memory, remembering, and legend – concepts that are related to different stages of the heritage process. These concepts in the folklorists' analytical toolbox made it possible to bring to the fore living folklore phenomena and the borderline areas around them. The relevant motto of the conference – life creates stories, stories create life – turned out to be rather inspiring. Both the speakers and the audience re-experienced something that only the format of a winter conference can offer: folkloristic work outside the office in between the certain calm of the beginning of the year and the hectic spring calendar packed with various events. The aspect of remembering was also topical because in November 2014 folklorist Aino Laagus, who had introduced new approaches to legend studies in the late 1980s, would have celebrated her 70th birthday. During the panel discussion in the evening of the opening day, the researchers' former friends and colleagues recalled her as a nice and intelligent person and initiator of various undertakings.

The conference listened to 16 papers and a presentation of a recently published book in the series *Reetor*, titled *Uurimusi tänapäevasesst kujundkeelest* (Research into Modern Figurative Language), compiled and edited by Anneli Baran. Two of the papers, Mare Kõiva's "Zoofolkloristics and Its Dimensions" and Andres Kuperjanov's "Ethnoastronomy and Folk Astronomy", were meant to be presented at the panel dedicated to the borderline areas of folklore.

Tiiu Jaago's presentation dedicated to the notions 'memory' and 'border' in the folkloristics of the interdisciplinary era was a contribution to the advancement of the theory of folkloristics. In her paper Jaago highlighted what exactly the branches of science engaged with memory studies interpret as memory. History as science operates with the knowledge of past facts; folklore is channelled in the heritage history, which associates narratives of the past with the present, whereas biographical studies are concerned with the issues of ways and intentionalities of the presentations of the past.

Mall Hiimäe in her presentation welcomed the tendency of rediscovering memorative narratives. Her own approach to the subject, titled "A Comparative Study of Ghosts in Virumaa Folk Belief", clearly exemplified this viewpoint. As an excellent expert in the domain, she emphasised the regional peculiarities of this area, and symbioses of the creatures familiar in local lore.

In recent years, Reet Hiimäe has carried out advanced research into belief stories. At this conference she discussed, based on older belief narratives, how and under what circumstances non-verbal communication – for instance, with supernatural creatures, dead relatives, or messengers through dreams – is converted into a narrative. These are experience stories, which present the description of the experienced act and the narrator's interpretation of the observed (heard, perceived) situation.

The first panel was followed by presentations concerned with children's studies and folk education. Pihla Siim introduced to the audience a questionnaire carried out within a project dedicated to family migration in Europe, concerned with the stories of mobility told by Estonian children who have moved to Finland. She showed what the children in the families who have migrated to Finland for work think about life and work in a foreign country. Children highlight somewhat surprising details and facts, often of secondary importance at first sight; they invent their own explanations to why they had to move, yet also indicate the reasons their parents have given for moving.

Piret Voolaid, who has been engaged with some borderline phenomena of classical genres, this time cast a glance at the interesting and spontaneous 'out of the mouths of children' sphere, under the title "A Folkloristic Glance at Children's Humour: From Memorable Sayings to Written Stories". As it is part of children's language, we should regard the material as linguistic jokes. At the same time, they can be interpreted as humorous, spontaneous, everyday stories, instigated by children's experience and converted into a story by an adult. As was demonstrated, some of them are reverberations of the adults' world, thereby acting as socio-cultural clues.

Pille Kippar also discussed stories that spread within a restricted lore group (family circle). Her presentation titled "Grandfather's Jäneda-Stories: Shaping Experience into Social Competence" pointed to the possibilities how the older (and wiser) can share knowledge in each situation; for instance, introducing the history and meaning of a place when passing through, and pointing out the correct way of acting in different situations.

The evening panel was dedicated to the categories of belief and religion. Ülo Valk in his presentation "Supernatural as Ontological Liminality: Recollections and Legends of Were-Animals" first pointed out the methods of truth rhetoric used to achieve credibility in legend-telling. He then continued with the introduction of extremely interesting magical practices of animal transformations in Assam legends. Aado Lintrop in his paper "Shamanistic Course as a Model of Heritage Process" showed how practising neo-shamanism can become a community-creating factor. Ergo-Hart Västriik discussed the spread of the ideas of Estonian *maausk* (native faith) and how these ideas have found coverage in the media. The speaker was, above all, interested in the topics and keywords, in connection with which this religious group emerged in the news flow, as well as changes therein. Västriik maintains that *maausk* enjoys a positive image in the media.

Merili Metsvahi spoke about the descriptions of Estonian peasants' sexual life in August Wilhelm Hupel's book "Topographical Notes from Estonia and Livonia", published in the last quarter of the 18th century. Metsvahi regards Hupel's descriptions as a good reflection of ethnographic reality, offering necessary data for studying Estonian family lore. Liisi Laineste's presentation discussed remembering the events of the Second World War and depicting life stories and selected historic events as a series of caricatures. The analytical frame was constituted by the idea of the impact of a conflictual context on

the life narrative and the role of humour therein. Liina Paaes talked about Estonian sign language, loan signs, and the formation and use of new folkloric concepts, discussing both general folkloric terminology and the concepts meant to designate phenomena relates to deaf folklore in Estonian. Ell Vahtramäe in her presentation about Estonian food and national food tried to establish which foods have been defined as national and/or Estonian in the media. The speaker was also interested in how all this related to memory, identity, and consumerist culture, and to what extent a social text is formed.

Anastasiya Astapova's, Margaret Lyngdoh's and Alevtina Solovyova's presentations added cross-cultural dimension to the conference. Astapova's paper, "No Rules – No Trust: Democracy and Rumours about Surveillance", weighed rumours about surveillance activities in contemporary Belorussia. These stories are intensified by the authorities' non-transparent activities and people's doubts about modern means of communication making surveillance relatively easy. Margaret Lyngdoh delivered a paper under the heading "On Why the West is a Taboo Direction among the Khasis". She discussed folklore formation around places of accidents, manifesting Christian and native faith as well as secular beliefs. Alevtina Solovyova's presentation under the heading "Gold Coins, Singing Monks and Restless Places: A Historical Memory of Mongolian Demonological Topics" was based on fieldwork carried out in Mongolia (organised by the Centre of Folklore and Semiotics at the Russian State University for the Humanities) and focused on demonological beliefs in local historic lore. She dwelt upon a story cycle about golden coins in possession of the spirits of Chinese merchants, and a story about mysterious lights and occasional prayer songs in the cemetery of Buddhist monks.

The first conference day was finished by Mooste folk musicians, whose music made the listeners sing along with the performers.

In hindsight it can be said that it was a successful event opening new perspectives and enriching the participants' experience in every respect.

Mare Kalda

## **FOLKLORE COLLECTION AT THE ESTONIAN FOLKLORE ARCHIVES IN 2014 AND PRESIDENT'S FOLKLORE COLLECTION AWARD**

On April 24, 2015, the Estonian Folklore Archives (EFA) summarised the past year of folklore collecting. Jürgen Ligi, Minister of Education and Research, handed out folklore collection awards to the best folklore collectors of 2014. Four people were recognised for their work in this field.

**Liis Reha and Katre Koppel** received an award for collecting the lore of the Viljandi Culture Academy. The gathered material was compiled into a book under the heading *Ühine teistsugusus: artikleid ja esseid TÜ Viljandi Kultuuriakadeemia 60. aastapäevaks* (Common Difference: Articles and Essays Dedicated to the 60th Anniversary of the Vil-

jandi Culture Academy). Liis Reha and Katre Koppel were initiators of this project. The material collected was voluminous: 63 audio-interviews, iterations of interviews (1155 digital pages), 270 digital photographs, and 2 video files. Besides the fact that the collection covers the history of one educational institution, known, throughout its history, under different names (Viljandi Culture School, Culture College, Culture Academy), it reveals the idiosyncrasy of this institution – with its hostels, creative-minded teaching staff and even more creative students – in our educational space.

**Anne Rebane** has handed over to the archives reminiscences of her grandmother, the latter's knowledge of medicinal herbs and of healing with them, as well as about celebrating calendrical holidays at home. She has provided a gripping and warm depiction of the family's life at Lasnamäe (district of Tallinn) at the time when it featured only a few blocks of flats. She has also donated to the museum her grandmother's life story and a notebook with riddles written by her. Anne Rebane has participated in the archives' collection competition and has donated to the archives 101 photographs of her own and her grandmother's sister's families. The photographs depict the life of a family in Haapsalu in the 1930s.

**Eha Võso** has taken part in three last collection competitions organised by the archives. Her writings are fascinating, humorous, and precise in their details. As she has worked as a kindergarten teacher, some of the topics, for example, children's games, are close to her heart; so are humorous stories discussing funny events in the life of kindergarten teachers, which is well known to the writer.

The figures characterising the past year's collection work of the Folklore Archives are rather remarkable. In 2014 the archives received more than 6500 pages of written material, 2000 photographs, and 351 audiovisual items.

This year we have continued with making archival data available by means of the online file repository and information system Kivike. Currently the descriptions of 53,884 items from folklore archives collections are preserved in Kivike, whereas more than half of them were added in 2014.

In 2014 the archives organised a collection competition for home lore, under the heading "Stories about Our Homes", coordinated by Mari Sarv, senior researcher of the EFA.

The collection campaign aimed at mapping Estonians' home experience today: where our homes have been and are situated; whether they are hereditary, bought, rented, or self-established; what we know about our home and its environs and what we want to pass on; how the sense of home emerges; how many homes people have had during their lifetime, and what people feel in the process of moving house.

The campaign resulted in 72 contributions: 774 pages on paper, nearly 1000 digital pages, and plenty of photographs. These items clearly indicate how many times people have moved house (as compared to earlier mode of life), and also refer to the reasons why it has been done. As compared to earlier folklore collections, townspeople's home-related stories are brought to the fore, as well as people's relationships with the urban landscape. Different generations' perception of home is also clearly perceivable: for pupils their home is primarily the place where their parents and family live; university students appreciate, most of all, privacy, the possibility to be and act according to their own will, whereas home as a 'place' seems to be less important. However, the home stories of the older generation are more faceted, interlarded with different life facts,



*Folklore collectors with the Minister of Education and Research, Jürgen Ligi.  
Photograph by Alar Madisson 2015.*



*From the left: Anne Rebane, Liis Reha, Eha Võso, Katre Koppel, Jürgen Ligi.  
Photograph by Alar Madisson 2015.*

memories, and emotions associated with them. The older generation's home stories are presented against the background of war- and post-war years, and experiences related to the war, violence, and repressions, as well as to migrants from the Soviet Union. Later destinies have been strongly influenced by the Soviet-time job placement practice. Many of the contributions by the older generation include stories about losing home for different reasons.

We are grateful to all the contributors and invite everybody to participate in the 2015 collection competition, under the heading "My Landscapes".

Astrid Tuisk

## BOOK REVIEWS

### REFLECTIONS ON INDIGENOUS ADAPTATION IN WESTERN SIBERIA

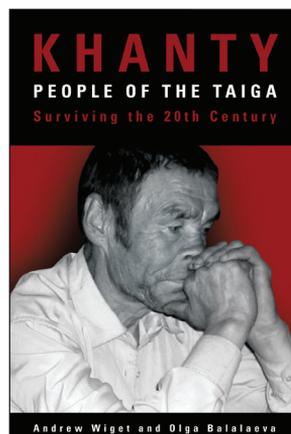
Andrew Wiget, Olga Balalaeva. *Khanty, People of the Taiga: Surviving the 20th Century*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2011. 398 pp.

This monograph presents research about the survival of the Khanty people in Siberia. The main research goals of the monograph are related to discussing contemporary survival strategies of the Khanty. The authors approach the Eastern Khanty comprehensively, covering a wide range of aspects of the Khanty culture and everyday life.

The main arguments of the research concern problems of the Khanty indigenous movements that have been relatively unsuccessful although local indigenous leaders have been quite active and tried to adapt their strategies to continually changing circumstances. The scant success of these movements is closely related to rapid changes in the local economic, social and natural environment. Rapid and large-scale development of the oil industry in the region has decisively changed circumstances of survival for small indigenous communities. Indigenous groups had managed to preserve their way of life, traditions and autonomy relatively well until the second half of the 20th century. However, the oil industry has dramatically changed the pattern of interests in the region. The Khanty were not ready to meet the tremendous pressure (influx of migrants, building of new cities, development of industrial infrastructure, pollution of the environment) they have experienced during the last few decades. Indigenous communities have developed a variety of adaptation tools and skills to manage the situation. Still, the options of the Khanty to improve their survival chances are rather scarce.

The conclusions of the monograph are presented clearly and they deal with the prospective for the Khanty to redefine their adaptation strategies because there is always hope that the situation is still manageable. But the authors also point out a certain need for commitment from the government and local administrations to substantially improve “the fate of the Khanty and other native minorities of the Russian North” (p. 311).

The monograph presents plenty of original field data about the Khanty way of life during recent decades. Reflections on Western Siberian history and the traditional culture of the Khanty are mostly based on previous research, or studies of other contemporary scholars, but this is quite understandable. Especially important is the issue that not too many monographs exist about the Khanty people. This monograph differs from other researches on similar topics because it is obvious that it is based on a very long series of fieldwork, conducted in the same region. The authors are familiar with the



local situation and can tell us the true story of the dramatic changes over a relatively long period of time.

The scope of the monograph is embedded in time and it covers very different aspects of Khanty life. Part of the book provides an overview of the Khanty history and changes in the local religious landscape, social and economic environment. Most of this vast material is provided on the basis of earlier research, done by multiple scholars (of whom most are, or have been, prominent in the field) in different time periods. This historical and descriptive segment serves as preparation for the reader for the main, more contributive part of this research. Chapters that deal with recent and contemporary issues are remarkably sound and the analysis of the indigenous movement can be considered sufficient. The final parts of the book serve as an example of dedicated and high-level research.

The monograph contributes greatly to the studies of the Khanty people. Although ethnographic literature about the Khanty is extensive, this research explores the contemporary situation of the Iugan, Pim, and Tromyugan Khanty groups in a precise, detailed and empathic way. It must also be stressed that the Eastern Khanty groups have not been covered by ethnographic research well enough. This book helps to fill this gap substantially.

The main contribution of this research is related to documenting indigenous everyday realities and native movement attempts among the Khanty in the post-Soviet period. The authors of the research have had continuous contact with these processes for more than two decades. This has enabled them to provide an extensive and reliable documentation of these crucial decades of local Khanty life. The complicated relationship between the local indigenous population, oil companies, and administrative agents is also richly analysed.

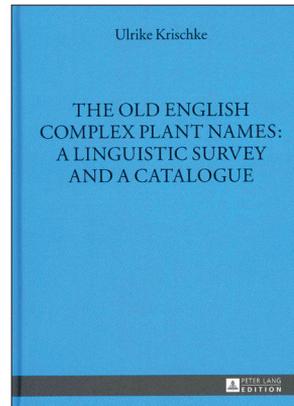
Chapters of the monograph are organised in a logical way, the more important and intensive ones in the final section. The reader is guided towards the understanding of the Khanty people's contemporary culture and social situation through an overview of the regional history, indigenous traditions, and the Khanty worldview.

Art Leete

## FROM ELF-TENDRIL TO POISON-HARM

**Krischke, Ulrike.** *The Old English Complex Plant Names: A Linguistic Survey and a Catalogue.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013. 486 pp.

Krischke belongs to a group of scholars in Munich and Graz who have worked on the *Dictionary of Old English Plant Names*, a resource which is now accessible online at: <http://oldenglish-plantnames.org/>. Seeing plant-names as ‘descriptions in disguise’, Krischke notes that they “encode botanical ‘facts’ such as the colour of the flowers or the efficacy of the plant against thunder and lightning, as well as real distinctions in nature, such as taxonomic super-ordination or sub-ordination” (p. 50), and the book under review can be seen as an attempt to remove the disguises from these descriptions. The work restricts itself to ‘complex plant names’, where *complex* is to be understood as the opposite of *simplex*, i.e. it deals with compound rather than uncompounded forms. Examples of such complex names include *āttor-lāþe* (poison-harm), and *æppel-treow* (apple-tree), just to give two of the examples listed under ‘A’.



The first half of the work is taken up with a ‘linguistic survey’ of the material. Besides the requisite introduction, statement of aims, literature review, discussion of sources, and summary, which also serve to reveal the work’s origins as a University of Munich PhD, we find meatier chapters on topics such as the names’ morphology and semantics, and the question of how language contact may have affected plant-names. Approximately half of the work (pp. 239–423) is then taken up with a ‘catalogue’ of Old English plant names. The entries typically have the following structure: the Old English name, a literal translation of that name into Modern English, and the modern terms for the plant in the Latin, English, and German languages, respectively. (Sometimes the Old English term denotes more than one Linnean species, e.g. *foxes glōfa* was used to refer not just to the plant known in Modern English as *foxglove*, but also to those we know as *thorn apple* and *deadly nightshade*. In such cases, Krischke lists the relevant forms for each referent in all three languages.)

But her entries do not consist solely of lemmata and glosses. Such information is followed by notes on the word’s occurrence in the *Dictionary of Old English* and the *Dictionary of Old English Plant Names*, notices of any illustrations of the plant to be found in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, together with the Latin equivalents for the name provided in contemporaneous texts. Needless to say, these Latin plant-names differ from their modern equivalents – for example, *wulfes-tæsel* (Modern English *wolf teasel* or *wild teasel*), which modern botanists refer to as *Dipsacus silvestris* Huds. was given the Latin equivalent *chamalaela alba* by an unknown English scribe a thousand years ago. Notes on the term’s etymology, morphology, motivation, and associative relations then follow, and the entries conclude, where appropriate, with a series of cross-references. We should also note that plant-names proper are not the only entries in this dictionary,

but also elements of plant-names appear as individual entries, thus *fugel* (bird) appears, due to its occurrence in the plant-names *fuglesbēan*, *fugleslēac* and *fugleswīse*.

Readers of this journal, given that it is the *Electronic Journal of Folklore*, rather than the *Electronic Journal of Linguistics*, will, I guess, be most interested in the information listed under the ‘motivation’, i.e. Krischke’s explanations of what aspect of the plant has been settled upon to provide its name. She discusses the matter at length in chapter 6, where she delineates ten different forms of ‘associative relation’ (e.g. metaphorical similarity, co-taxonomic similarity, co-taxonomic contrast, syntagmatic contiguity, etc.) and thirty different categories of motives behind naming, including the plant’s habitat, shape, size, texture, taste, smell, use in healing, use as food, etc. Names of natural taxa always highlight certain aspects and thus also always place other aspects into the background. For example, the bird known as *blackbird* (*Turdus merula*) in English has a name motivated by the colour of its plumage. We might imagine another English altogether in which the bird took its name from the colour of its beak, and where *Turdus merula* was known instead as *Goldbill*, or yet another English still, where the name came from the bird’s song, *Melody-bird*. But as it is the common English name, it focuses on the colour of the bird’s plumage, and ignores the colour of the beak and the quality of its song.

As luck would have it, the discussions of motivation are often the longest single part of her entries. We find such mythological beings represented as dragons, dwarves, and elves: *dracan-blōd* (the resin of *Dracaena L.*, literally dragon’s blood), *dweorge-dwostle* (*Mentha pulegium L.*, literally dwarf’s dost), and *ælf-pone* (*Solanum dulcamara*, literally elf’s tendril). But the motivation for the application of such mythological names is not always straightforward. *Dracan-blōd* may be a loan-translation (direct, or indirectly via Latin) of a Greek term, rather than a reflection of Germanic mythology (although the author does also note that reference to the resin as ‘dragon’s blood’ is not to be found in the German equivalent plant-name).

Krischke suggests the ‘dweorg’ in *dweorge-dwostle*, which could mean either ‘dwarf’ or ‘fever’, may have a connection with mythology, but is more likely to simply refer to the diminutive size of the plant. However, we seem to be on firmer mythological ground as far as *ælf-pone* is concerned, where Krischke feels confident in asserting that “the element *ælf*: ‘elf’ indicates that the plant is helpful for treating diseases caused by elves”.

But even entries that involve more mundane creatures, such as horses or lambs, are not always entirely straightforward. Krischke’s sources suggest that the ‘horse’ in *hors-elene* (*Inula helenium L.*) is either “a folk etymological rendition of *inula* in analogy to *hinulus* ‘mule’ ... as horse” (p. 336) or a metaphorical use of ‘horse’ to denote, metaphorically, the sense of ‘wild’. Even with such a transparent term as *lambes cærse* (lambs cress), Krischke is unwilling to plump for one of the two possible interpretations – a kind of cress found where sheep live, or a kind of cress eaten by sheep.

Following this ‘catalogue’ of names, the work concludes with a 21-page bibliography, and three indexes (of word-forms, botanical names, and subjects). All in all, it can certainly be said that Krischke’s weighty volume is a worthy contribution to the study of early English language and culture.

Jonathan Roper

## OUR AUTHORS

**Art Leete** is Professor of Ethnology at the University of Tartu, Estonia. His research focuses on the history of ethnographic descriptions, religious changes, and hunting among the Uralic peoples. He has conducted fieldwork in the Russian North and Siberia since the early 1990s.

art.letee@ut.ee

**Aimar Ventsel**, PhD, works at the Department of Ethnology at the University of Tartu, Estonia, as a senior researcher. He has conducted extensive fieldwork in Eastern Siberia, studying property relations, local music business, and identity processes. In recent years he has focused on regional policy, language processes, and identity building in Russian 'ethnic' regions. His second field site is Eastern Germany, where he has been engaged with punk and skinhead subculture.

aimar.ventsel@ut.ee

**Tatiana Argounova-Low** is a lecturer in anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom. With a general interest in Siberia, her publications focus on native communities in Sakha (Yakutia), with a specific interest in contemporary social issues in the area, urban migration, transport, and mobility. Her most recent projects deal with roads, exploring various aspects surrounding roads, and travelling along them.

t.argounova-low@abdn.ac.uk

**Platon Sleptsov** is a lecturer at the Institute of Language and Culture of the North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk, Russia. His primary interests lie in history, national culture, historical and contemporary family, and marriage issues.

s\_platon\_a@mail.ru

**Kirill Istomin** is a senior researcher at the Institute of Language, Literature and History, Komi Science Centre, RAS (Syktyvkar, Komi Republic, Russia). His scientific interests include history, ecology, and techniques of reindeer herding in the Arctic, specific traits of reindeer herders' cognition and psychology (particularly their spatial adaptation skills), and cultural variations in the human-animal interaction. He has also published extensively on the problem of alcoholism and suicides among native northerners.

kistomin@naver.com

**Joachim Otto Habeck** is Professor at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Hamburg, Germany. Earlier (2003–2014) he worked as coordinator of the Siberian Studies Centre at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle. He has published on reindeer husbandry and sedentarisation in the Far North of Russia, vernacular notions of culture, and cultural centres in provincial Russia, as well as diverse aspects of identity in post-socialist settings.

otto.habeck@uni-hamburg.de

**Laura Siragusa** is a research fellow in anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, where she is affiliated to the ERC-funded Arctic Domus project. Her research focuses on ways of speaking among Veps, a Finno-Ugric minority based in north-western Russia. After investigating oral practices for healing purposes, she is now working on verbal and non-verbal communicative practices among human and non-human animals.

laurasiragusa@yahoo.it

**Stephan Dudeck** is an anthropologist working at the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland as a member of the ORHELIA (Oral History of Empires by Elders in the Arctic) project that collects stories from indigenous groups of the Barents region. He finished his dissertation on the persistence of reindeer herders' lifestyles in Western Siberia at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany, in 2011. From 1993 to the present, he has regularly visited Khanty and Nenets reindeer herders in the Russian North and Siberia. Among his interests are adaptations to technological change, visual cultures, resistance, and practices of avoidance.

stephan.dudeck@ulapland.fi

**Eleanor Peers** is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. She has recently started work on an AHRC-funded project on narrative objects, museum work, and memory in Sakha (Yakutia). Her research over the past five years has focused on the Sakha shamanic revival, and has been supported by the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology.

eleanorpeers@yahoo.co.uk

**Stepan Kolodeznikov** is a lecturer at the Institute of Northern Languages and Cultures at the North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk, Russia. His research interests encompass Sakha literature, culture, and language, in addition to pedagogical methodologies.

skolodez@mail.ru

**Daniel Briggs** is Professor of Criminology at the Universidad Europea in Madrid. He is the author of *Deviance and Risk on Holiday* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013) and *Crack Cocaine Users* (Routledge 2012) and co-author of *Culture and Immigration in Context* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014), and *Assessing the Use and Impact of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders* (Policy Press 2007). He is also the editor of *The English Riots of 2011* (Waterside Press 2012).

DANIEL.BRIGGS@uem.es

**Ivan Gololobov** is an associate research fellow at the Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, Coventry, England. He received his PhD at the Department of Government, University of Essex. His research interests include Russian studies, with a focus on post-Soviet Russia; qualitative methods of sociological research; social theory, and in particular, everything related to the role of language and communication in social and

political organisation (post-Marxism, post-structuralism, discourse analysis, philosophy of language), as well as popular culture and new media.

i.gololobov@warwick.ac.uk

**Natalia Struchkova**, historian, PhD, is Dean of the Historical Department at the North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk, Russia, and professor of the Faculty of World History and Anthropology at the same university. She is interested in ritual practices of the indigenous people of Russian Far East, kinetics of Sakha ritual dances, adaption of traditional Sakha rituals to modern society, and Sakha identity.

struna2006@mail.ru

**Piret Koosa** is a researcher at the Estonian National Museum, Estonia. Her doctoral studies at the University of Tartu focus on the relations between Protestants and Orthodox in the Republic of Komi, Russia.

piret.koosa@gmail.com

**Laur Vallikivi** received his PhD from the University of Cambridge in 2011 and is currently a senior researcher at the Department of Ethnology, University of Tartu. His main geographical area of interest is the Russian Arctic, especially the tundra of the nomadic Nenets reindeer herders, where he has carried out extensive fieldwork. His research focuses on religious conversion, post-socialist change, language ideologies, and personhood.

laur.vallikivi@ut.ee

vol. 61

<http://www.folklore.ee/folklore>

- A. Leete, A. Ventsel *Introduction: Drinking and Fun in the Arctic*
- T. Argounova-Low, P. Sleptsov *Breaking the Code: Strategies of Alcohol Addicts*
- K. Istomin *The Sooner You Drink It All, the More Time You Will Have Thereafter*
- J. O. Habeck *Hangover*
- L. Siragusa *Monolingual and Bilingual Practices: Reversing Power Relations during a Festivity in Pondala*
- S. Dudeck *'Do You Respect Me?' Drinking as a Social Catalyst in the Reindeer Herding Communities of European Russia and Western Siberia*
- E. Peers, S. Kolodeznikov *How to Enjoy a Teetotal All-Night Party: Abstinence and Identity at the Sakha People's Yhyakh*
- A. Leete *The Historical-Ethnographic Image of the Drinking Peoples of the North*
- D. Briggs, I. Gololobov, A. Ventsel *Ethnographic Research among Drinking Youth Cultures: Reflections from Observing Participants*
- N. Struchkova, A. Ventsel *Reflections and Thoughts about the Social and Cultural Role of Alcohol*
- A. Leete, P. Koosa, L. Vallikivi *Pentecostals and Charismatic Protestants in the Republic of Komi and Nenets Tundra*

---

On the cover: Vodka. Saily settlement, Yakutia, Russian Far East.  
Photograph by Aimar Ventsel 2015.



9 771406 095006

Folklore EJV

ISSN 1406-0957