



Booze Territory

Anna Krien

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On a Tuesday morning, I make my way to the Gap View Hotel for a drinking session starting at 10 a.m. I'm told this is one of Alice Springs' three notorious 'animal bars' ... As I wander around, a Sudanese security guard approaches me, his face concerned. Am I lost? he wants to know. In a way, I am. I don't want a beer. It's 10 a.m., for Chrissake.

In *Booze Territory*, Anna Krien takes a clear-eyed look at Indigenous binge-drinking – who does it, why, and what it means. She visits bars brimming with morning drinkers and investigates alcoholic after-effects ranging from extreme violence to extraordinarily high rates of cirrhosis of the liver. This is an essay which never fails to see the human dimension of an intractable problem and shine a light on its deep causes.

Booze Territory Details

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From Reader Review Booze Territory for online ebook

Maddee says

I was going to give this 1 star but the last couple of pages (where she talks about how she's a binge drinker and once got so drunk at a party she shat herself and barely made it home alive) are kind of an interesting moment of what looks like it could be self-reflection

Keira Edwards-Huolohan says

[cw: murder, violence, alcoholism, racism]

I enjoyed this book because it gave me a perspective I'm not often exposed to. I have lived in rural areas, but they have always been predominantly white. The only place I've lived with a significant Indigenous population has been Redfern, but I was too young to understand or care about what was going on around me.

I think that I need to read more about this issue in order to understand it better. I feel like this book could possibly have delved more into Aboriginal perspectives, and talked about how the alcoholism is a symptom of some much deeper issues (as is my feeling). Instead it seemed like a lot of white people spoke about the 'Aboriginal drinking problem'.

That said, it is pretty horrific. I can also understand the desire to drink to destroy the reality around you. To constantly pour it all down your throat and blot out everything, not caring about what happens while you're blacked out drunk. I hope that we can create a place/space/society where less people feel that way one day.

Terrifying of Goats says

A bleak and disturbing travelogue through aboriginal lands wrecked by addiction and violence. Krien observes the hangers on, the wrecked families, the alcohol merchants, without any strong bias, while recounting the legislation and ideological squabble that have led to this situation. There is a good balance of on the ground journalism and academic research, that connects the statistics to the lived reality of the brutal and brutalised places she visits. Absorbing if dismal read.

Lou Heinrich says

Thoughtful essay on governmental policy towards Aboriginal problem drinking.

I enjoy Krien's researched approach, but was unnerved by the lack of blackfella's voices. Where were the elders? The grieving mamas? Instead of just secondhand stories about their opinions. Of course it may be a case of access and translation but there are enough accounts of white people summarising the indigenous experience.

Evan Micheals says

I loved Anna Krien's book "Night Games" so much when I read it a few years ago, that I have been listening to interviews of hers and I like her stuff. I have decided to read everything she has written over the next year.

Booze Territory was the shortest and I was able to smash it out in an afternoon. She investigates the problems with the consumption of alcohol in the Northern Territory Indigenous people, mostly Alice Springs. What I like about Krien's writing is that she presents the narrative, without making explicit what she think or telling you what to think. She is a sane writing, in an era where journalists look for "an angle".

She shows an understanding of the nuances of the issues. The City vs Country divide. People who makes the rules, and the people who have to live with them. Unintended consequences. Human rights vs Community Safety. The ethics of having rules based on the colour of a person's skin when these rules have a measurable effect in improving the welfare of Indigenous people. It is not easy. Can racist rules have positive effects? I can fully understand the well-meaning Publican who is accused of being racist no matter what he does. I can fully understand him washing his hands and allowing people just to get on with self-destruction, when Big City types tell him what a terrible actor he is in the plight of others.

She manages to present the characters in her narrative with sympathy in whatever role they play. I look forward to reading more of her work.

Stephie says

I don't feel like I took that much away from this, other than that Alice Springs has a serious drinking problem. I don't really understand what Krien was trying to argue, or if she was trying to argue anything at all.

So binge-drinking is endemic in certain aboriginal communities? Krien never goes into the 'why', which I would find far more interesting and constructive. She talks about the 'how' -- pubs that open early and serve ridiculously cheap alcohol and the government's mostly failed attempts to prohibit sales. She didn't go into the human rights issues of alcohol and welfare restrictions or really talk about why it has reached that point. It actually felt a bit racist, this white person talking about Aboriginal drinking issues, speaking about them as if they have no autonomy and it's in their very nature to binge-drink. She speaks to various white people about the problem, but never once seeks out an Indigenous person's perspective.

I guess I was expecting this essay to impart some kind of insight or pose some interesting questions instead of being a matter of fact, white person's travel diary of a culture she didn't try very hard to understand.

Ellen says

A thoughtful exploration of a confronting issue. Krien doesn't pretend to know all the whys and wherefores on the topic, but she brings to the table plenty of research and her own personal reflections. Adding Indigenous voices would have made this a more well-rounded piece.

