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Social and Economic Utility of *Omuramba*, the Chiga Sorghum Beer

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Omuramba has a variety of uses among the Chiga of Uganda. Edel, Ngologoza, and Ndebesa remarked on its conventional uses in connection with the Chiga religious, economic and social activities. A cross-cultural survey reveals certain common constituents of these customs among the Bantu tribes of East Africa.

Recently the present author has observed the uses of *omuramba* in the Chiga tribe. Some new customs which came into being in response to socio-economic changes under the impact of the West were observed. First, the purchase of beer with money led to the establishment of a new standard of social ranking among the farmers. Second, it stimulated the circulation of local products and money. Third, it enlarged a cleavage between the well-off and the poor among the local residents.

The consumption of *omuramba* has had, thus, an effect on the spread of a money economy and on the changes in the traditional power structure in the local community.

INTRODUCTION

A careful reading of certain ethnographic writings reveals the wide and important roles beer has played in the traditional ways of life. This finding coincides with the present author's field observation among the Chiga of Uganda in 1968 and 1975, twelve months in total. Their sorghum beer, *omuramba*, took a very significant part in the social and economic activities in the rural area around Kabale, the capital of the Kigezi District. At each village trading center, there were a couple of local bars alongside the motor road. Almost every evening both men and women gathered at one of the bars to enjoy drinking and chatting until late at night. Now and then sub-village chiefs held informal court in the front or back yard. Primary school teachers and those who had returned from labor emigration often told about their new experiences and knowledge to the bar attendants. The local policemen always stopped at the bar to arrest criminals or tax defaulters who had been in exile for a couple of years. Wage earners and sellers of agricultural products readily spent a considerable portion of their money here at the bar. A clear demarcation emerged between those with a good cash income and those earning a small sum, for the former could drink and treat beer lavishly but the latter were likely to wait for a generous share of a treat.

The sorghum beer naturally had close connections with their traditional customs and beliefs. In the old days every housewife processed the raw materials and the husband received his guests with the home-brewed beer, used it to conciliate the ancestors, and sent it to the chief as tribute. When a magical practitioner revealed a resentment of one of the family members by an ancestor, the family head built a small thatched hut and offered meat and beer for appeasement. The Chiga performed rites of passage in which *omuramba* was indispensable, too. At any settlement of a dispute the arbitrator and the litigants requested beer to effect the reconciliation. At parties people followed a rule of drinking order in accordance with their age and sex. Thus a group of values, feelings, and attitudes centered around the sorghum beer so that it contributed to the maintenance of the social order and the cohesion of the Chiga society.

The present author repeatedly sat at the bar with the villagers during field work. His experiences were supplemented by his sitting at court sessions, and duplicating the litigant records of the lowest formal courts, the third grade magistrates courts. At the bar, quarrels and fights were apt to start and lead to violence [OMORI 1977b: 292, 297].

There are some instructive writings by an anthropologist [EDEL 1957], an aged Chiga administrator [NGOLOGOZA 1969] and a group of specialists in the specific tribe [DENOON 1974]. They describe the beer drinking customs in detail, but systematic treatment or examination of *omuramba* drinking had not yet been attempted by these writers. The present author wished to organize the rich but varied information into an arrangement and look carefully at the utility of beer in connection with the daily activities of the Chiga farmers. To this end a wider reading of ethnographies of the other Bantu tribes seemed most profitable, for it might lead the researcher to the relevant points.

Hunter [1936], Richards [1939], and Kriges [1943] paid considerable attention to indigenous beer uses. Hunter observed the Pondo beer drinking in relation to their collective work, ritual performances, and money making. They brewed it from maize and served it as a reward to those who helped in weeding, cultivating, and house building. As this form of reward was a tribal rule, the Pondo did not want to join in the building of a church or a school at which no beer was served. Beer was necessary at birth, death, and medical treatments. It had the special ritual effect of cleansing impurity, and at the termination of ritual abstinences after birth and death the Pondo washed their hands with beer. Selling beer was an important source of cash income for the housewives, even though the sale was illegal without a licence [HUNTER 1936: 88-98, 253-256, 443].

Richards enumerated a number of uses of beer among the Bemba. They brewed it from millet and used it for 1) entertainment, 2) payment of social obligations, 3) tribute, 4) reward, 5) rituals and 6) money. At any brewing the brewer had to send a portion to the village headman as well as to the brewer's son-in-law. Everybody in the village, in practice, could come to the parties but had to observe the drinking rules based on sex and age. The helpers at a house building were rewarded with beer, too. At the first fruit ceremony and thanksgiving rites women brewed the millet beer to appease the ancestors [RICHARDS 1939: 76-80, 147, 252, 378-379].

Krises [1943: 230] elaborated the conventional uses of beer among the Lovedu:

A multitude of values centre round beer. It is a nourishing food taking the place of meat feasts elsewhere; it is also the food of the gods.... Beer is the medium of goodwill exchanges between neighbours.... Beer is at the basis of the group... of kin and neighbours who often cooperate in economic activities.... Reconciliations are effected by beer.... All the essential reciprocities are maintained by beer; a man returns a borrowed article with beer; a family doctor... expects to be called to the family beer....

The Lovedu prohibited the sale of beer not by law but by custom, even though salt, meat and tobacco were traded freely. In practice, however, beer was traded in the form of gift exchange. All of these authors emphasized the idea of reciprocity with the ancestors, on the basis of beer provision to them after harvesting millet. One could discern the same idea in periodic supplies of beer from a wife's kin to the son-in-law [KRIGES 1943: 60, 62, 77, 78, 99, 240]. This reciprocity strengthened the tie between the living and the dead, and that between affinal relatives.

Specified roles assigned to beer were shown in certain other ethnographic works. First, Wagner [1940: 231–232] saw that among the Kavirondo Bantu the rich could gain prestige and influence by offering sorghum beer. As they did not have any centralized political organization, the village elders were anxious to be the most important local influences, entertaining as many guests as possible with beer. The increasing demand for beer motivated an elder to have more wives so that the women might brew a larger quantity [WAGNER 1940: 68]. Secondly Colson [1958: 85, 105] remarked on the women's exclusive right to brew beer among the Tonga. This right led to the men's reliance upon their wives in offering maize beer to the ancestors. In addition, as they could trade beer with more profit than trading maize itself, men would often ask women to brew beer. This reliance on women, Colson commented, resulted in the improvement of women's status. Thirdly, Beattie [1960: 62] perceived in a Nyoro village the obligatory character of attendance at beer parties. Anyone's absence without an appropriate reason would arouse the suspicion of his being a sorcerer. Participation in beer parties demonstrated one's goodwill towards one's fellow villagers. In this sense beer drinking contributed to the strengthening of the village solidarity.

Beer drinking in an urban situation poses another problem. Southall [1961: 227] cited a case observed in a ward in Kampala. At a bar, lonely immigrant laborers could find comfort and encouragement meeting fellow tribesmen, relatives, and old friends. The laborers at all times suffered from impersonal, unfriendly contact with the people of different tribes at their places of work and lodging. Drinking and chatting with fellow tribesmen at the bar could efficiently release their frustration. Friendship between these customers, however, as indicated by Jacobson [1973: 68–69], persisted on the basis of reciprocity. As disclosed at a bar in Mbale, a town of the Gusi in Uganda, friends should alternately buy drinks. If one violated the rule, friendship would no longer be maintained with the others.

This brief review of some ethnographic writings indicates the extensive uses of

beer in individual tribes. Concerning this question, one may discern the following three categories of constituents, which made up the beer drinking customs:

- 1) participants: kin, affinal relatives, neighbors and friends, chiefs and subjects
- 2) functions: fulfillment of obligations by means of reciprocity, paying reward and tribute
- 3) effects: spurring social interaction and affirming social ties as well as religious ones, promoting the circulation of agricultural products and money

Differentiation and classification of these constituents led the present author to collect and examine in a systematic way the relevant information on beer drinking, which had not yet been attempted for Chiga sorghum beer.

Moreover, from a comparative view point, one must pay attention to beer drinking among the neighboring tribes. The Chiga share in the same language with the Nyoro, Toro and Ankore in Uganda, among whom the closest similarity emerged between the Chiga and the Ankore, not only in their languages but also in their customs. Beer brewing was, however, one of the few exceptions to this similarity. The Nyoro [BEATTIE 1960: 62], Toro [TAYLOR 1962: 60] and Ankore [TAYLOR 1962: 104] brewed beer mainly from plantain. Peculiarly enough, in contrast to these three, the Chiga shared the habit of brewing sorghum beer with the Hutu of Ruanda [MAQUET 1961: 18] who spoke a language almost incomprehensible to the Chiga. A brief illustration of Hutu beer drinking will be given at the end of this article.

1. Sorghum Beer

1) Brewing

Paralleling these tribes, the Chiga made use of indigenous beer in many aspects of daily life. Ssebalijja [1974: 184] documented the Chiga drinking of sorghum beer as early as 1910. He told about an unexpected homicide of a government messenger by the local Chiga farmers after a cordial offer of beer to him. Alongside food, domestic animals, wives, and children, beer was highly valued [TAYLOR 1962: 124]. The Chiga, however, did not take beer as an indication of wealth. Cattle ownership alone constituted wealth. Anything else such as farmlands, a plenitude of food and beer, and number of wives, was something really desirable but was not a symbol of wealth. "Grain supplies are quickly consumed, while cattle endure. Furthermore, grain supplies are easily stolen. Cattle, with luck, multiply themselves" [EDEL 1957: 104-105].

The Chiga brewed beer from three different materials: sorghum, honey, and plantain. Presumably they learned how to make honeyed beer from the Ruandan and banana beer from the Toro and the Ankore. Honey was mixed into porridge of millet or sorghum and left for fermentation. The honeyed beer, *nturire*, was strong enough to make the people drunk and occasionally cause death. The government prohibited its brewing, for that reason, in 1927 [NGOLOGOZA 1969: 71]. Banana beer

was widely in use in Uganda except in the Chiga region, where the high altitude and the chilly climate hindered the growth of plantain. Banana beer, *rwarwa*, was brewed after 1910 when Ssebalijja [1974: 170] taught the Chiga to plant plantain. No other tribes in the vicinity except the Hutu had developed such a variety of uses of sorghum beer, which were replaced with banana beer in these other tribes.

Chiga beer brewing was women's work. It was not strictly exclusive or monopolized by women but men were said to brew only bad beer. A collaboration was, in reality, required for brewing. The largest beer pots, being used for fermentation, had to be manufactured by men. In trade, the beer pot was equivalent to a hoe and was not easily obtainable. A communal labor was organized by women within a single household in which beer was about to be brewed. This was the sole opportunity for large scale women's cooperation among the Chiga. Beer was served in wooden trays and baskets, both of which were the farmer's handicrafts [EDEL 1957: 59, 81-85, 92].

The present author collected information about the process of beer brewing. First, the sorghum itself had to be processed before being ground into flour, because harvested sorghum without any processing was red in color and tasted sour. Ashes from the hearth were mixed into the grains, which were then soaked in water from the nearby swamp overnight. After that people stored the grains in a basket for three days. The Sorghum was, this time, dried on mats under the sunshine and the color turned gray and the taste became sweet. The grains were then ready for cooking and brewing. The processed sorghum was stored in each individual wife's thatched granaries and the small quantity necessary for immediate cooking or brewing was taken out to mill. Women milled them into flour using stone mortars. The large pot or a wooden boat was used for fermentation. The flour was mixed into pure water which was later boiled and moved to the earthen or wooden container. After a week the liquid began to taste sour and was again boiled. Intermittently a small quantity of fresh sorghum flour was mixed into the liquid during the following three or four days. Then boiled water was added and when all the liquid became cold, a little quantity of alcohol was mixed into it. Another night passed before the beer, *omuramba*, became ready to serve. The beer was brownish and felt coarse in the mouth. It was presumably as strong as European wine. The amount of beer could be increased by mixing it into cold sorghum porridge and leaving it overnight to ferment.

2) Consumption

When the author visited the Chiga in 1975, *omuramba* was no longer processed in the individual household, but brewed and sold at the local bars. Ritual uses of the beer had vanished but it still retained many of its former uses. The old might complain about the loss of individuality in the taste which they had enjoyed with the home-brewed *omuramba*, but the local bar prospered and became the pivot of social interaction in rural areas. Usually a bar was built near a village trading center where a couple of small shops clustered and a bus stop was located. Buildings were zink-

roofed and mud-walled. In a hut or in one room one saw large containers; the wooden boats were currently replaced with a few used drum cans, one or two of which had bubbling liquid in them because of active fermentation. In the other hut or rooms there were wooden benches and stools for the customers. Under the legal restrictions the bar could open in the evening around four o'clock, but when a drum was ready people could hardly wait for the time and would start to drink even in the late morning. They never stopped drinking, for beer became spoiled within a day or two.

There were three bars at the Buhara trading center where the present author undertook his field work. One of them was run by Karemire, a primary school teacher born in the village, whose youngest brother Bateraine helped the author as a servant and as an informant. The other two bars were run by Bwesikurire and Keihari, individually. Both of them were indigenous Chiga men and had kin and relatives in the vicinity. Bwesikurire, at the age of 32 in 1975, owned a bar, a grocery and a butchery there. Keihari, aged 64, was occupied in running his bar. He had three wives, ten cattle and thirty plans of farmlands. These three bar owners were among the most well-off people around the trading center. In the Graduated Tax Assessment book at the village chief's office, Bwesikurire's tax was listed as 80 shillings for 1975 and Keihari's was 120 shillings. Bwesikurire's monthly income was assessed in the book as 120 shillings in 1974 and the graduated tax was levied from the estimated annual income of 1,440 shillings for the year. These figures closely agree with those for the profits Karemire raised from his bar.* Two drums of beer were brewed at one time and the sale brought 50 shillings, from which 10 shillings were paid to the brew men as wages. The bar opened once every seven days, for each bar opened in turn. Karemire's sister and wife helped to serve beer and so no more wages were necessary to pay. In general the prices of commodities in this area rose approximately to double within these seven years, but some deduction of necessary costs might be granted before the tax assessment. Then the figures for estimated income come closer in spite of the seven years lapse.

Bottled beer was also available at the bars but few of the local residents were rich enough to consume it regularly. They preferred to buy *omuramba* which cost only one fourth or one fifth of the price of the bottled beer. In 1968 sorghum beer was sold in an enamelled bowl, holding nearly a half liter, for one shilling. The same quantity could be purchased for one shilling and fifty cents seven years later. One had to pay cash for each bowl. Without buying any beer one could sit in the bar for hours, just chatting with the others. Commonly, a purchaser of *omuramba* shared in it with bystanders, but obviously the purchaser reserved the right to select the sharers. However, nobody could share his bowl with his senior, for whom he had to buy a full bowl as a gift. With his juniors the purchaser drank a substantial portion first and gave the rest as a favor to the sharers. On one occasion in 1968 the author was invited to a bar by a county chief who was accompanied by minor chiefs. The county chief

* Bateraine told the author that his brother raised about 180 shillings per month in 1968.

bought a bowl, sipped a bit and gave it to the author. The author then sipped a little and handed it to a man who was the chairman of the county chief's council. The chairman did not drink from the bowl but sent it to his colleagues, and sipped from it later when another bowl was handed directly from the county chief. This unexpected incident disclosed the persistent observance of drinking order among the participants.

The author rarely observed a man drinking *omuramba* alone at home. They served an ordinary guest with thin sorghum or millet porridge as refreshment. For an important visitor, the host bought a pot of beer to serve. Usually men drank *omuramba* at the bar, and later when returning home they had their evening meal. The substantial food consisted of millet or sorghum bread and salted bean soup. Occasionally pieces of goat meat or mutton were added or boiled in the soup. Maize, sweet potatoes and cassava were subsidiary foodstuffs. People esteemed sorghum highest among their agricultural products, for they could sell the crop and raise money. Other cash crops such as coffee and plantain yielded poorly and villagers were reluctant to plant these.

2. Traditional Uses of Omuramba

1) Religious Use

Sorghum beer was closely connected to each of the prominent phases of the Chiga religion. They believed in both the nature spirits called *nyabingyi* and *emandwa*, and the spirits of ancestors. On account of the long term contacts with powerful surrounding tribes such as the Tusi, the Ankore, and the Toro, no marked difference could be discerned between theirs and the Chiga ways of spirit worship. Nevertheless sorghum beer had characteristically played a significant role in these cults among the Chiga, especially those associated with *emandwa* and ancestors. This finding would lead to certain ethnohistorical discussions about the Chiga culture in comparison with those of the surrounding tribes. It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper and thus is left to further enquiries.

In the notorious *nyabingyi* cults, which prevailed as rebellious religious movements in the early Twenties, sorghum beer took a minor role in making offerings to the spirits. *Nyabingyi* was supposedly a group of nature spirits which could cause natural disasters and epidemics. In order to avoid misfortune, the Chiga propitiated the spirits, by offering precious properties. Edel [1957: 151-154] specified these as "white sheep, a special kind of spotted cow, and honey beer". When any of them was difficult to obtain, they could be replaced by "sprouted grain, fermented gruel, tobacco, butter, certain kinds of animal skins". The "fermented gruel" may have meant beer but at any rate it took a lower rank. The point here is that in the *nyabingyi* cults "honey" beer was most appreciated and "goats, peas, and potatoes" were rejected as unsuitable offerings. This might imply an alien origin of *nyabingyi* worship. Goat meat was the most precious and delightful food among the Chiga. Peas and potatoes were subsidiary but major constituents of their nourishment. The Tusi of

Ruanda valued honey beer very highly and preferred mutton to goat meat. Edel remarked on a prevalent inference among the Chiga that the *nyabingyi* cults came from Ruanda about four generations earlier.

Denoon [1974: 214] insisted that a distinction between *nyabingyi* and *emandwa* nature spirits was one arbitrarily drawn by scholars, for "neither was a single cult with a uniform doctrine, neither ever had a single organisation, and each merged into the other in terms of practice". As indicated above, however, there existed a clear distinction between the offerings. *Emandwa* were given pleasure with *omuramba* but *nyabingyi* were not. The *Emandwa* spirits haunted magical practitioners who had a cow's horn and fed the specific *emandwa* spirit from an individual horn with the blood of a goat, hen or other animal. The practitioner, being possessed by the spirit, manipulated to apply the most effective herb to the client. Before the performances magical practitioners had to offer beer and meat in the spirit hut [NGOLOGOZA 1969: 39-40]. Edel, on the other hand, wrote that the practitioner fed the *emandwa* spirits from a large sheep horn and served the spirits gruel, blood and milk. She did not mention anything about beer offerings to the spirits but recognized that in the collective dancing people drank beer "to make the spirits rejoice" [EDEL 1957: 141-147]. The present author wishes to suggest that *nyabingyi* were related to unusually serious misfortunes, and *emandwa*, in contrast, were relied upon in connection with minor, everyday accidents and illnesses.

In the Chiga ancestor spirit cults sorghum beer took distinctive roles. Edel [1957: 131-133] stated that most commonly, ancestors were offered goat meat. On certain occasions, when the magical practitioner specifically indicated, beer was offered as a substitute for the meat. Except for grandmothers' spirits being benevolent and helpful, all the other ancestors were malevolent and harmful to their descendants. People buried corpses following strict regulations, but did not build anything at the spot, nor would they later approach the graves. When they were suffering from misfortune and a magical practitioner identified a specific ancestor as being responsible, the family head first built a miniature hut within the compound. After the first sacrifice of a goat the spirit was offered food, beer and meat continuously. Every time they brewed beer, they had to serve all these ancestors in the spirit huts with a small quantity individually.

Omuramba also touched the Chiga traditional taboos. The death bed taboo was the most horrible and had the strongest constraining effect. A dying father could curse his disobedient son and prohibit him from inheriting any of the father's properties and from doing anything with the other offspring. The cursed one could no longer attend beer parties. The oath in effect absolutely isolated the son from the other community members [EDEL 1957: 122]. Another connection with *omuramba* emerged at the occurrence of death, when all the village residents had to refrain from any farmwork for four days. Another four days had to pass before the household members could again go out of the compound. At the termination of the period an animal was slaughtered and sorghum beer was brewed to serve to all the villagers at a feast [NGOLOGOZA 1969: 36-37].

2) Contract and Duty

The Chiga farmers used *omuramba* for concluding contracts and fulfilling duties. The permanent transfer of farmlands rarely occurred but short term borrowing was rather common. There were several ways of borrowing, one of which was on the basis of patronage. The borrower in this case did not have to pay any fee, but had to work for a single day in the lender's field and later had to bring a basketful of the harvested crop. It was, however, the borrower's obligation to bring the lender a pot of beer every time he brewed it. This would last as long as the borrowing went on [EDEL 1957: 102, 106]. Cattle borrowing, by "a kind of client-patron relationship" also conferred upon the lender the same privilege. The borrower had to provide food and beer at each brewing. When he could bring one or more of the cow's calves to the patron, the obligation was finally repaid.

Omuramba, moreover, bore on the transfer of cattle as bridewealth. Edel [1957: 49, 75] cited two types of case. First, when all the cattle had borne calves, a son-in-law sent a sheep and two pots of beer to his wife's father and in return received one of the calves from the latter. Second, if he wished to use these cows for a subsequent marriage, he had to send a pot of beer to the previous owner of the cattle, otherwise the latter could go to the father of the second bride, asking for the return of "other people's cows".

Laborers were repaid in *omuramba*. The actual work of house building was undertaken exclusively by men, but women cooperated in it by brewing a large quantity of beer for the reward. In advance the owner had to dig the house site and collect the necessary materials. Then he called dozens of people to help with the work of building. After completing the building they ate and drank to full satisfaction but no reward in other form was given. Women and children were also rewarded with beer when they fetched firewood or water [EDEL 1957: 83-86]. Cows and beer were given to the craftsmen who made the sacred drum for *nyabingyi* cults. They were members of a specific clan and manufactured the drums with a particular sort of wood. It was believed that the drums caused leprosy if ordinary people touched them [EDEL 1957: 153].

Local chiefs received beer as tribute. According to Ngologoza [1969: 58], at every brewing two pots of beer were owed to, and must be offered to, the chiefs. Any failure to make the offering was punished and all the beer was confiscated. Geraud [1974: 53] cited a concrete example. When a German agent came to the Chiga region in 1897 with his followers, the local residents were ordered to offer beer. They brought very bad beer, which signified their hostility to the group. (A short time later spears were thrown at the soldiers, which initiated a fight killing some of the local residents.) Ngologoza [1969: 9-10, 76] remarked that tribute was not levied periodically, but requested at any time when the chiefs made inspection visits to the villages. The chief collected as tribute cattle, goats, hens, beer, honey, potatoes, and peas.

In the earlier days the Chiga paid tribute to clan elders. These were not tributes

but were rather gifts, for beer and meat were sent to the elders only when people held beer parties and slaughtered animals. On these occasions villagers set apart a gourd of beer and any part of the animal with which the elders were most delighted. The elders cooperated in hearing and arbitrating disputes. They normally inflicted a fine on young men who had not obeyed their parents and the fine consisted of a goat and beer.

Omuramba was an essential means to effect reconciliation. When a young man first built his house, he had to ask his father to survey the house site and his mother to build the hearth. If he neglected to follow this regulation, the young man had to send beer and a goat to his parents, who subsequently offered these to the ancestors for appeasement. Without the offering, angered spirits would send disaster to the young man [NGOLOGOZA 1969: 24]. The same rule was remarked on by Ndebese [1974: 170], concerning the son's duty of labor service to his father. He had to sow crops first for the parents and later for himself. If he failed to do so, the son had to give a pot of beer and a goat to the parents. To neglect it would cause their ancestors to retaliate, and in order to avoid that, a ritual performance by the father was necessary. Ngologoza [1969: 45-47] described a case in which beer was used for reconciliation between non-religious disputants. Around 1909 two Germans came to the Chiga region to establish their overrule. They confiscated a cow from a man, Rukiika, and gave the animal to another, Kigandaire, who had helped the Germans in their expedition. When they left, Rukiika demanded that Kigandaire return the cow. Kigandaire invited Rukiika to his compound, where good beer was brewed and a goat was slaughtered to entertain the guest. In fact this was Kigandaire's plot to assassinate the guest, but Rukiika who had been properly entertained, did not realize the plot and thought that a reconciliation was being effected.

The beer had various uses in connection with marriage. First the bride's father gave a pot of beer to the bridegroom. This signified the coming of the time for marriage [NGOLOGOZA 1969: 29]. Then before her departure from her father's, the bride's maternal uncle brought a pot of beer to the bridegroom for the feast [EDEL 1957: 55]. Upon the bride's arrival at the bridegroom's compound, women of her clan who had married into the bridegroom's clan presented "a beer-tankard" which was accompanied by various foodstuffs including a pot of beer. Two or three months later the new couple paid a formal visit to the bride's father at his compound. The kin of both sides, individually, brought a cow or a goat as gifts for the new couple. Neighbors and friends also came with beads, bracelets and bangles. In return, beer in a large pot was served to the visitors. The feast continued for two or three days. After the feast the bride's father gave a hoe to the bride. After this, "beer for fixing the hoe in the handle" was occasionally brewed and the new couple, the bridegroom's father and the go-between were all asked to attend the party [NGOLOGOZA 1969: 27-33]. Moreover *omuramba* helped to improve the marital relation. At the harvest of a new crop a wife was expected to brew beer and bring it to her parents-in-law, but if she failed to do so, ceremonial amends had to be made. Besides this periodic provision of beer,

a man and his father-in-law were obliged to invite one another every time either of them brewed beer [EDEL 1957: 49, 61].

3) Social Interaction

Omuramba was the appropriate means to show one's hospitality at a formal reception. At weddings, funerals, and religious ceremonies, beer parties were invariably arranged. People, moreover, held frequent informal beer drinking parties among the neighbors on occasions such as house building, cooperative farm work, and helping in miscellaneous activities. The parties had social significance as they designated social ranking, power structure, and networks of rural human interaction. Among the participants, quarrels and fights arose repeatedly, and to a careful observer these troubles unveiled submerged antagonism and gave a clue to understanding certain institutional conflicts in the society. More directly, these happenings released the tension and frustration of the actual disputants and the bystanders around.

Edel [1957: 87] commented that serving food and beer was not only a sign of hospitality but also a means of achieving further informal exchanges. To the kin and those tied with a blood-brotherhood, serving food and beer as well as giving lodging for the night were obligatory. One example of the reception of an important guest is cited by Ngologoza [1969: 64]. In 1919, Ntokiibiri, a mighty and feared rebel, paid a visit with his troop to a sub-village chief, Bikaaku. The chief welcomed the rebels warmly and served beer and goats. Being satisfied and having gotten drunk, they slept in the hut which had been offered by Bikaaku for their lodging. Ntokiibiri was on campaign and had no earlier acquaintance with Bikaaku. If the rebels had not been accepted properly, they would not have lowered their guard against the sub-village chief, and would not have been killed there by a sudden attack of government soldiers, as they were.

Certain abridged illustrations have already been given here of communal beer drinking at weddings, the bride's first visit to her father and the termination of the death taboo. At both formal and informal beer parties, a man had to invite his father-in-law or a brother-in-law. The man, furthermore, could not deny anybody who wished to participate in drinking. If he dared to do so, there would be the danger of a performance of the vengeance magic which caused the victim to vomit [EDEL 1957: 87, 166]. People especially feared the possible revenge of a practitioner of magic. In case one ignorantly refused beer to the person, the angered practitioner would charm one of the attendants into sudden paralysis, or make two of them quarrel, to spoil the party itself [RWANDUSYA 1974: 63]. In earlier days adult men did not allow young, unmarried men to join them in drinking. The sole opportunity for the young men to drink a bit was when they served it to the senior generation. When a young man got married, his father prepared a large pot of beer for a feast, and invited friends and neighbors. With this feast the father achieved public recognition of the son's maturity, and the son achieved the status to attend the men's drinking parties [NDEBESA 1974: 169-170].

As mentioned above, the participants had to sip beer in order of age and social

ranking. It happened, however, that parties sometimes led to confusion and quarrels. Most of the attendants were interrelated, with kin or affinal ties, and the litigation records reveal the acute submerged tension and antagonism underlying these relations. Presumably, hidden but prevalent frustrations, which had been stirred up in their systems of marriage and inheritance by the impact of Westernization, would burst out when the people got drunk [OMORI 1977a: 184–185].

3. Contemporary Changes

Change has occurred not only in the administrative and juridical institutions but in the uses of beer among the Chiga. First of all the uses in religious activities became extinct. Spreading and recurrent *nyabingyi* revolts provoked the government to interdict people's performances of any sort of relevant cults. In fear of being penalized, the Chiga ceased to follow any of their conventional religious rituals. In the early 1910s missionaries set out to propagate Christianity and readily converted the people. At present there are still a few who are classified as pagans but they actually carry out no specific religious activities themselves, nor believe in any religious dogma at all. *Omuramba*, then, has no use in their religious performances.

In the conclusion of contracts and the fulfillment of official duties, i.e. paying tributes and fines, the beer's use has become a secondary one. In the litigation records one can scarcely find the use of *omuramba* in this connection. In one civil suit, (Buhara village court No. 47 in 1965), a claim was raised concerning cattle borrowing. The complainant claimed a female calf borne by a cow which had earlier been borrowed by the defendant. When it was borrowed, it was stated at the court, the defendant brought a pot of beer to the lender, i.e. the complainant, to effect the contract. The magistrate gave judgment for the complainant and ordered the defendant to give up the female calf. This was, however, an exceptional case, for the majority of farmers nowadays effect their contracts with written documents. At any transaction of cattle or land no ritual or feast is requested any longer. Even in wedding procedures sorghum beer took a less significant role. An informant told the present author about his younger sister's recent marriage, for which he participated in the arrangement negotiations. The kin of both sides had paid visits to the other side repeatedly at the earlier stage, treating the sum of the bridewealth, and at the later discussing the wedding ceremony. Every time a delegation paid a visit, a feast was held and *omuramba* and goat meat were served, but sorghum beer was no longer given as a gift by either side. At a wedding ceremony attended by the present author in 1975, all the guests were first served with bottled beer and later with *omuramba*.

In payments of rewards, tributes and fines, *omuramba* has been given a subsidiary role, too. In communal labors such as house building, clearing and harvesting farmlands, and carrying patients to the village dispensary, every contributor expects to receive the reward in cash. Beer may be served only for entertaining them. Moreover, the government instituted the annual poll-tax as early as 1915 and abolished direct tribute to the chiefs, though during the successive decade or two the chiefs

received goats and cattle on account of the shortage of money to pay the poll-tax [NGOLOGOZA 1974: 281]. In 1931 when Edel [1957: 90] did her field work, the farmers had begun to sell their crops, beer and crafts at markets and to pay the poll-tax in cash. In the 1960s and later beer had been completely rejected for use as tribute or tax. Tax defaulters were fined in cash and usually sent to prison [OMORI 1977b: 296].

The utility of *omuramba* did not lessen at all, in spite of these innovations. As elaborated in earlier sections, contemporary village residents still clung to beer drinking, they consumed it incessantly and in large quantities. Commonly sorghum beer continued to be the major means of entertainment. Bottled beer was preferred, but to the ordinary farmer it was much too expensive to afford all the time. A distilled liquor of plantain, *enguli*, was also available at a reasonable cost. But it was too strong for moderate drinkers. Sorghum beer was the most appropriate and inexpensive drink in the rural areas. Even in the capital of the state, Kampala, where many Chiga farmers were engaged in immigrant labor, there were a few prosperous bars at which *omuramba* was properly brewed and served.

The consumption of sorghum beer at the bar increased the beer's social and economic utility amazingly. The bar grew to be a pivot of social interaction among the village residents. All the important social, economic and administrative activities centered around the place. There were, of course, some other centers, such as the village chief's office, to which the village court was also attached, and the Catholic and the Protestant churches. But the most friendly and incessant activities and interactions took place at the local bars. Everybody, rich and poor, men and women, old and young, crowded there and could join the drinking and chatting at any time and for any length of time. Purchasing and treating created a new social ranking on the basis of monetary income and separated the well-off from the poor. Petty traders, government employees including school teachers, emigrated and returned wage-workers, all attained prestige and influence with their substantial cash income. They spent a considerable portion of their income at the bar. A clerk at the village chief's office told the author that he was spending about one sixth of his monthly wage, 50 shillings, on drinking *omuramba* [OMORI 1969: 74].

The farmers not only spent but also earned money at the bar, by selling their sorghum flour for brewing. The chilly climate hardly allowed them to grow cash crops, and wamework was scarce in the rural area without a good education or specialized skills. The farmers could sell land and cattle, if they did not mind losing their essential means of living. As most of the local residents lived on a subsistence income, commercial demands for agricultural products were very low, and in reality they could sell only sorghum to the bars. A court clerk told the author that a farmer could sell a sack of sorghum, around 80 kilograms, for 90 shillings. At the same time he showed a plan of some farmland, approximately 18 ares (90 meters by 20 meters), which could produce about 180 kilograms of sorghum at one harvest. The crop would raise 140 shillings. The farmland itself might be sold for 300 or 400 shillings. These assessments were given in 1968, so the prices may have doubled by 1975. In comparison, dried maize could be sold for only three fifths of the price of sorghum.

They did not apply any fertilizer, either green manure or chemical, to the farmlands, nor did they cultivate the land for commercial purposes, except to grow a small quantity of green vegetables. However, they could earn cash for immediate expenses by selling sorghum. With this money farmers would pay the poll tax and school fees; but again a considerable portion would be spent at the bar, buying and treating *omuramba*. As a result, earning and spending money at the bars stirred up the circulation of agricultural products and currency and to some extent industrial commodities as well in the District of Kigezi.

The increased inequality between the rich and the poor might excite the latter's envy against the former. A suit (Buhara village court, criminal suit No. 44 in 1967) was a case in which a wealthy young man was attacked by a farmer at a local bar. The wealthy young man, Buhire, was buying a watch at his elder brother's bar. All of a sudden a drunken young man, Bi, started a quarrel with Buhire, struck blows, tore Buhire's shirt and injured his finger. Bi, one of the local residents, had not been on bad terms with Buhire but was presumably excited by Buhire's boasting of his good cash income. The litigation record disclosed that Buhire had shown off a hundred shilling bill while buying the watch. He was rich enough to spend a large sum of money on a luxurious commodity, i.e. a watch, which was owned by a limited number of people in the area around 1967. Buhire's affiliation with such a well-off family as the owner of the bar might have intensified Bi's antipathy toward him. This case of violence displayed a submerged difference between the rich and the poor in the rural society. A sharp cleavage in the rural social stratification could be observed in action at the bars.

4. Conclusion

A review of certain ethnographic works revealed marked characteristics of the Chiga uses of sorghum beer. They shared some distinct functions of beer drinking with the other Bantu tribes: improvement of reciprocal relationships between affinal relatives (Bemba, Lovedu); between ancestors and descendants (Lovedu); protection of the housewife's position (Tonga); enhancement of the powerful men in the locality (Kavirondo Bantu). On the other hand some specific functions discerned with certain tribes did not emerge among the Chiga: cleansing ritual impurity (Pondo), manifestation of good-will to the neighbors (Nyoro), and acquisition of fellow tribesmen (Ganda city). The attachment of beer to ritual separation was subsidiary in the Chiga culture. Attendance at beer parties was obligatory solely to specific kin or affinal relatives but was voluntary to others. The absentees were not punished with any religious or legal sanction. In contrast, any refusal to participate by the host was blamed and magical vengeance were feared.

The Hutu in Ruanda stood in close proximity to the Chiga, in the brewing of and making use of sorghum beer. The Hutu repeatedly sent beer as a gift in the relationship between both fathers of a married couple. They built small huts for the ancestors and offered milk or beer. If they were negligent, the ancestors would send

illnesses, sterility, cattle epidemics, or death. Beer was used for a libation for their appeasement. Borrowing cattle on a patronage basis was also practiced here and the borrower had to bring the patron a pot of beer continually [MAQUETT 1961: 69, 87, 129-130]. In Ruanda the Tusi developed a large variety of beer uses but these were only with banana beer, *urwagwa*, and honey beer, *ubwuki*. Except for children, the Tusi did not consume sorghum beer at all. The sorghum beer, *amarwa*, was exclusively used by the Hutu. To clarify the possible correlation between *omuramba* and *amarwa*, further ethnohistorical investigation should be conducted.

Under radically changed circumstances a substantial part of the traditional utility of *omuramba* had almost vanished or been transformed. On account of severe political pressures, the religious uses could not continue. Economic uses were largely lessened and money took the place of the beer's role in paying taxes, fines, and rewards for labor. With the opening of the local bars, however, beer drinking began to assume new roles in response to the changing rural circumstances. First, it set a new standard for social ranking and initiated a reform of the old social order in the society. Second, selling sorghum and buying beer stimulated the circulation of products and money, contributing to the increased use of money and the transformation of the subsistence economy. Third, on the basis of cash sales, beer consumption developed a sharp cleavage between the rich and the poor in the village and led to the intensification of the latter's frustration. These effects, along with the other causes of social tension, might germinate violent movements inside the up to now consistent and fixed rural society, and in this way could make a reorganization of the society easier.

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