

TRADING ON INEQUALITY: GENDER AND THE DRINKS TRADE IN SOUTHERN TANZANIA

Maia Green

Throughout sub-Saharan Africa the consumption of alcoholic beverages is a valued accompaniment to leisure time. The range of drinks consumed is varied, as are their origins. In urban settings prestigious imported and manufactured brews are favoured by those who can afford them, while members of the elite consume expensive foreign brands of spirits. Among the urban poor, and in rural areas, domestically produced drinks continue to dominate the market and local drinking habits (cf. Nelson, 1978, 1979; Saul, 1981; Suggs, 1996). Alcohol plays a role in contexts other than recreation where it is commonly a requirement for ritual activities and celebrations. The meanings attached to drinking are context-specific (Long, 1992). Associated with commensality, incorporation and the embodiment of kinship, drinking can mark relations of equality, hierarchy and, in the case of the work party, co-operation (cf. Pottier, 1985b). Alcohol also has a significant place in the constitution of relations between people and spirits. Offerings of beer and other drinks are made at various stages of the funeral process, at territorial and other shrines, and to remember the dead (Sangree, 1962; Colson and Scudder, 1988; Carlson, 1990).

In East Africa¹ the ritual consumption of alcohol usually requires the use of domestically produced drinks, derived either from the natural fermentation of tree saps or brewed from fruits or grain. The exception to this is the distilled beverages, produced for leisure drinking only, which are often mixed with potentially lethal doses of industrial alcohol. Although these spirits are illegal in most countries they remain popular with the poor, especially in urban areas, despite efforts to control them. Sap-derived drinks are extracted by, and remain the property of, men (cf. Ngokwey, 1987: 114). Beers brewed for sale from a variety of grains are produced by women, who retain rights over their allocation and disposal.² This division of labour and ownership of resources has implications for gender inequality and household food security in areas where grains are staple foods. Women who brew must choose between diverting household grain supplies into beer production or using up scarce cash to purchase brewing inputs, whereas male producers can sell fermented tree saps without impinging on household food supplies or savings. Gender differentiation encompasses the social context of alcohol consumption. Although many women enjoy a drink in private, the public

¹ Industrially manufactured drinks and spirits are acceptable as ritual offerings in many parts of West Africa, precisely because they are prestigious and have high status.

² There are exceptions to this. Sangree describes how, in western Kenya in the 1960s, membership of Protestant Churches prevented women from brewing beer. Women welcomed Church prohibitions on drinking and brewing which freed them from labour obligations to husbands, whereas men, who were less likely to adopt Christianity, continued to drink. The men got round the withdrawal of female brewing labour by brewing themselves (1962).

consumption of alcohol is predominantly a male activity (Ngokwey, 1987: 120; Huby, 1994: 235; Suggs, 1996: 600). Consequently, throughout the continent, women's production of beer for sale facilitates the redistribution of cash between men and unrelated women in contexts where alternative income generation options for women are limited (Colson and Scudder, 1988: 71; Bryceson, 1989: 432; Ferguson, 1990: 127; Howard, 1994: 248).

Although the ritual use of alcohol remains important in much of Africa, it is arguably the economic situation since the 1970s which, despite aggressive marketing campaigns by industrial brewers, has virtually guaranteed the perpetuation of domestically produced alcohol for consumption and sale.³ High inflation, falling wages and low producer prices in most African countries have pushed incomes down and forced people to diversify livelihood strategies. In rural and peri-urban communities in East and Central Africa the purchase of locally manufactured drinks by men with money continues to be central to the viability of poorer households, particularly if they are female-headed (Nelson, 1978, 1979; Clark, 1984: 351; Little, 1987: 304, 1992: 108; Colson and Scudder, 1988: 114; Smith and Stevens, 1988: 553; Bryceson, 1990: 42; Hirschmann and Vaughan, 1993: 96). Beer drinking in the Africa of the 1990s can no longer be understood in Karp's terms as the practical enactment of *local* 'social theory' (1987: 83, my emphasis). Nor can brewing be explained as a mere extension of the kinds of 'domestic' activities in which women have conventionally engaged (Nelson, 1979: 299; Colson and Scudder, 1988: i). Women brewers throughout Africa have systematically adopted new technologies, brews and techniques in response to changing market opportunities, in the process transforming home brewing from the production of small quantities of beer based on local food crops into a transnational cottage industry based on purchased inputs. Activities associated with the production and consumption of alcohol now constitute a key site for the translocal construction of gender relations through the dynamic articulation of local and national economies.

This article explores the economic logic of the domestic drinks market and its place in the subsistence strategies of men and women in a rural district in southern Tanzania, where women's brewing coexists with men's monopolisation of the sap alcohol markets. The seasonal availability of sap alcohols, combined with the district's integration into national grain markets, creates a short-lived opportunity for some women to supplement their income from the production and sale of maize beer, an opportunity made possible by the unequal economic interdependence of men and women and of different regions of Tanzania. The seasonal expansion of the market in maize beer occurs at a time when maize prices are high and household grain stocks spent or minimal. Brewers must choose between their immediate consumption needs and investing their small reserves of cash or grain in beer

³ In parts of Southern Africa local brewers have to compete with industrially produced cloudy beers, which have limited the potential of domestic brewing as a source of income (Colson and Scudder, 1988). In areas such as parts of rural Zambia where the distribution of industrially produced cloudy beers has declined since the 1980s domestic brewing has re-emerged to fill the gap in the market for cheap beer (Long, 1992: 157).

production in the hope that it will generate longer-term profit. As in other parts of Tanzania, this choice is idiomatically expressed through the contrast between 'eating' (*kulia*) and 'generation' (*zalisha*) through which grain, and the money to which it is explicitly compared, can be made to reproduce itself through careful investment.

GENDER AND DRINKING IN THE HIGHLANDS

I conducted fieldwork among people defining themselves as Pogoro, who live in the central highland section of Ulanga District, in the south-west of Tanzania. The district comprises the Mahenge highlands, a rugged plateau rising to 4,000 ft above sea level, surrounded by rolling hills and narrow valleys, gradually leading down to the broader Kilombero river valley on the western side and the river Luhombero in the south (Jatzold and Baum, 1968: 17). Ulanga is not unrepresentative of other rural districts in the country whose dispersed populations are ill served by basic infrastructure, social and agricultural services. Regarded by government and residents alike as a marginal and underdeveloped district, Ulanga is locked into a marginal and underdeveloped region by poor transport to the regional capital, Morogoro, and bounded on its eastern side by the Selous game reserve, which effectively severs economic links with the coast. The Pogoro population of the highlands are small-scale farmers who, like their counterparts in other rural districts, struggle unsuccessfully to meet their household food needs from farming and depend for much of the year on the market to supply the maize which is widely regarded as the food staple.

Ulanga is typical of rural Tanzania in other ways; the drinking of local beers and sap alcohols is the main male leisure activity (cf. Narayan, 1997: 33). Men of all age categories drink, but it is considered inappropriate for younger men to drink if they lose control and lapse into drunkenness. Regular drinkers tend to be older men who have accepted status as adults, for whom drinking provides an opportunity to talk over the affairs of the day and relax in the company of friends. Although women are less likely than men to participate in public drinking, they are not wholly excluded from it. Indeed, women are expected to participate in the public consumption of beer which is an integral part of ritual proceedings and celebrations—for example, at marriages, puberty rituals and the various events held to 'remember' the dead which constitute the extended funeral process. While recreational drinking is not socially acceptable for younger women, older women can, and do, participate in collective drinking, either at drinks 'clubs' within villages, at brewers' houses or at the homes of relatives and friends. However, women generally do not go to drinking clubs unless they are in the company of male relatives or husbands, and only a minority of older women are regular drinkers.

Drinking in Ulanga, as elsewhere in Tanzania, is conceptualised as a fundamentally social activity premised on sharing and hospitality. Drinking alone is neither valid nor admitted to. Etiquette demands that drink must be shared and passed around the assembled company in a container rather than served to individuals in individual vessels. Therefore, whether drink is served in large or small cups or containers, these are passed from person to

person to drink from and pass on. The social nature of drinking means that it takes place either at people's homesteads or in temporary shelters, usually constructed in residential sections of a village, where drink is brought for sale. These shelters are locally known as *klab*, from the English 'club', to differentiate them from the permanent 'bars' found in urban centres. Commonly situated in concrete buildings, bars are associated with what are thought of as 'modern' (*kisasa*) fashions, where individual clients, generally male, sit at tables and are served manufactured beer in bottles by young women. In Ulanga, outside the district capital of Mahenge and Malinyi, the other town to the west of the district, there are only 'clubs'. As clubs are generally built for a season, or even a brew, they are fairly transient constructions of bamboo, loosely thatched with grass or dried banana leaves to provide shade. Drinkers sit on low benches built into the walls of the shelter, passing containers of drink between them. Although the small salaried class of government officials and teachers may aspire to frequenting bars, rather than clubs, economic realities mean that clubs are all that most can afford, even where bars exist in the locality. As a bottle of manufactured beer retails at between eight and ten times the price of a measure of maize beer, representing around 5 per cent of an average primary school teacher's monthly pay, clubs attract a cross-section of the district's population, most of whom have limited cash incomes.

The drinks market in the highlands is strictly seasonal.⁴ During the long wet season and its aftermath, when the smaller streams transecting the highlands are brimming with water, *ulanzi*, a drink of fermented bamboo sap, is both plentiful and cheap. The variety of bamboo which produces *ulanzi* is planted alongside river banks and water sources. Although the canes flourish in the highland areas as well as in the lowlands, a greater density can be planted in flatter areas of land, alongside river valleys, giving lower-lying areas an advantage in production. Sap is extracted from the canes through a cut in the stem and collected in bamboo tubes which are left hanging on the tree. The alcohol content of the sap increases the longer it is out of the plant. During the wet season, canes are cut morning and evening, producing several litres of drink. Probably introduced from the Mbeya area to the south-west during the 1930s and 1940s, *ulanzi* is now sold by the beer bottle as a standard measure. Prices fluctuate according to availability. *Ulanzi* is cheapest at the height of the wet season, between November and May, when prices fall to around 40s (about 4p sterling) a bottle. In lowland villages along river valleys, where virtually all adult men own canes, prices are even lower, to the point where demand for bought *ulanzi* is minimal. In the highlands, even when it is in short supply, a standard beer bottle of *ulanzi* is cheaper than the standard litre measure of maize beer. *Ulanzi* has a pleasant taste, gets people drunk quickly and is very popular with drinkers.

Ulanzi canes are usually owned by men, and the specialists who cut the sap are male. Some women participate in the *ulanzi* trade, buying the drink

⁴ For an account of seasonal beer production prior to the commoditisation of maize and the adoption of *ulanzi* see Culwick and Culwick (1994: 72).

in bulk at source for resale at their houses or at village 'clubs'. Women who trade in *ulanzi* often walk several kilometres to buy more cheaply from lowland villages. Reselling *ulanzi* is a viable source of income only when it is plentiful in the valleys, and only really profitable when highland supplies have finished. By May the *ulanzi* supply is beginning to dwindle, by July even a large clump of canes yields only three or four bottles, and by August it is finished altogether.

GRAIN BEERS

During the dry season, when the *ulanzi* is finished, people must find something else to drink. The dry season drink is beer made from maize, known specifically as *tekawima*, or more generically as 'beer', *pombe* in Kiswahili or *ujimbi* in Kipogoro. It is made from germinated ground maize and germinated finger millet. The finger millet (*ulezi*) which provides the malt needed for fermentation to occur is not grown in the district but imported from northern Tanzania. *Tekawima* is brewed and drunk in small quantities throughout the year, and is commissioned from women brewers for weddings and celebrations. It is also commissioned for drinking at the series of events which complete the funeral process, usually held at the height of the dry season, in the extended lull between harvest and planting. *Tekawima* for leisure drinking is not subject to any special restrictions concerning its manufacture or consumption. It can be brewed by anybody, although brewers are usually women, served in any kind of container and is explicitly intended for sale. In this it is sharply differentiated from the beer which is an integral part of rituals addressing the community of spirits. Beer for funerals is kept apart from any kind of association with the market, money and industrially manufactured items as well as, through certain prohibitions on brewers, being dissociated from human sexuality and reproductive processes.

Funeral beer is brewed by female members of the extended family from maize which is either donated by mourners or purchased with cash they have contributed to meet funeral expenses. Funeral events, like any kind of offering directed at the dead or the spirits resident at territorial shrines, also require another kind of beer made only from sorghum. This is because the ancestors and territorial spirits do not consider maize to be the true food crop and, as people who were alive in the past, demand beer made from what was the crop of the past (Green, 1993).⁵ Various prohibitions surround the manufacture and serving of beer for spirits (*ujimbi wa mahoka*), which must be cooked in clay vessels and served only in cups made from wood or woven bamboo. It should not be placed in industrially manufactured containers of glass, plastic or metal. To do so would not be in keeping with the requirements of the particular representation of the past which constitutes the basis of ritual practice, which is locally defined as 'customary' or

⁵ Shrine spirits among the Shona demand a similar range of prohibitions. For a full account see Lan (1989).

'traditional' (*jadi*) (Green, 1993). Beer made for the twice-yearly offerings to territorial spirits is prepared by male shrine diviners and their male assistants. Beer for spirits of the dead, offered in the context of funerals, may be cooked by women but only if they are beyond their reproductive years and have not had sexual contact prior to the soaking of the grain.

Tekawima made for sale is brewed by women, replicating a division of labour in the domestic drinks industry common throughout Eastern, Southern and Central Africa. Men do know how to make beer. Indeed, male relatives of shrine diviners (*mbui*, sing.) assist in the preparation of beer for offerings, but most men do not do so for sale. This is partly explained by the fact that the brewing process involves a series of activities, such as grain processing and cooking, which are considered specifically female and symbolically elaborated as such (Herbert, 1993). These activities are often house-centred, and can thus be performed alongside women's other tasks and made to fit in with the constraints on women's time. Perhaps more significantly, because most men have access to female labour from wives, sisters or daughters, they can obtain benefits from female brewing without recourse to brewing themselves. Freed by the division of labour from the burdens of child care, food processing and water collection, men also have greater access to a range of alternative income-generating opportunities than women, and may not regard brewing as a particularly profitable activity.⁶

Although some maize beer is available throughout the year, especially on Sundays and festivals, it comes into its own at the height of the dry season, between June and October. During this period *tekawima* is available in most villages every day of the week, and committed drinkers can be sure of finding it. The seasonal increase in the production of *tekawima* for sale is obviously related to the end of the *ulanzi* season and to the increased amount of leisure which people have at the least busy time in the agricultural calendar. However, the temporary expansion of the market in maize beer occurs at the time of year when the maize supplies in most households are low or finished and what is locally described as the time of 'hunger' (*njala/njaa*) has begun to consolidate itself. The price of maize in the market is two or three times that of the months immediately following the harvest and will continue to rise until the next harvest is over. Yet, despite complaining of 'hunger', enough men are prepared to spend what money they have on drinking rather than eating to make it worth while for some women to spend what money they have on grain for brewing rather than food. As we shall see, this strategy is determined by the context of local economic opportunities and a division of labour in which the ultimate responsibility for feeding households falls on women's shoulders, allowing women to transform men's self oriented consumption into a means of sustaining households other than their own.

⁶ These include charcoal burning, selling *ulanzi*, wage labour and mining.

WORK, FOOD AND THE ECONOMY OF HUNGER

Like the majority of southern Tanzanians, the Pogoro population of Ulanga District are farmers rather than livestock keepers. A minority of wealthier people in highland villages raise pigs in small numbers, but most confine their stock keeping to chickens and ducks. As poverty and wealth in Tanzania are strongly correlated with the ownership of livestock and other assets (Collier *et al.*, 1986), it seems likely that rural incomes in Ulanga are below average, even for a country characterised by international criteria as one of the poorest in the world (Narayan, 1997). Household assets are minimal, making people vulnerable to food shortages in times of crisis. Although land within the district as a whole is fertile and plentiful, localised land shortages in the vicinity of some of the larger villages created through state resettlement policies in the late 1970s impose production constraints on the community, forcing people to divide their time between village homes and farmland, or, in some cases, to abandon villages, and with them opportunities for easy access to social services, altogether (Maghimbi, 1990: 258).

The highlands surrounding Mahenge are well watered by permanent rivers and have a mix of soil types and climates, depending on altitude. The quality of land varies considerably from location to location. Even where a person has managed to secure good productive land, economic opportunities are restricted by limited access to markets, capital and the credit to invest in agricultural production. In the highlands proper the main food crop is maize, grown in a ninety-day cycle, supplemented in some areas by dry rice. Hill rice is not grown in the plateau area surrounding Mahenge, largely because it requires slash-and-burn techniques which are not viable where settlement is dense and land is in short supply. While cotton, rice and groundnuts are grown in the lower valleys, no crops are grown on a commercial scale in the highlands proper, an area too cold for cotton where rocky terrain and declining productivity work against large-scale production. While coffee could theoretically provide an alternative source of income for highland farmers, problems of input supply and the collapse of the co-operative system, through which export crops are still sold in rural areas, further reduces the viability of a sector which was only ever weakly established. Beans, pigeon peas, plantains, cassava, sorghum, sweet potatoes, groundnuts and bananas are grown by most highland households. A proportion of this produce is sold locally or exchanged informally between neighbours. Highland dwellers with access to capital or transport strive to cultivate distant rice plantations in the valleys in addition to their highland fields. Rice always sells at a higher price than maize, and makes a good investment, being sold for cash, exchanged for labour or traded for salt and second-hand clothing brought in by entrepreneurs from the capital city.

Within a household, defined locally as the group of people who eat together, individuals cultivate their own plots, returning a proportion of what they grow to the main store from which household food is taken and keeping a proportion of the crop to meet personal needs. In the highland villages surrounding Mahenge town, land is not bought and sold. Usufruct rights are obtained from kin or granted by village governments. Women have rights of

access to land, and, in the event of a husband's death or separation, widows and divorcees may return to farm in their natal area. A high proportion of households are female-headed, largely owing to divorce and widowhood. Although short-term labour migration is common for younger men, married migrants tend to take their wives with them, leaving the district permanently or until retirement. The sexual division of labour at the household level makes staying single unattractive for men, who are more likely than women to remarry in the event of a spouse's death or separation. Some women never marry, and raise children in independent households near other relatives (Green, 1999a). Men, women and young people of either sex have their own plots, for which they are responsible, and, although some husbands and wives cultivate together, it is a matter of personal choice rather than an obligation of marriage.

In Ulunga, as in other rural districts in Tanzania, access to agricultural labour largely determines the productive capacity of individuals and households (cf. Maghimbi, 1992a, 1992b: 217). Agricultural tasks are performed by hand with hoes and long-handled knives with which grasses and bush are cleared before burning. In the semi-lowland rice-growing villages which also grow cotton and maize, reciprocal labour arrangements and hired help are used to prepare fields for planting, weeding and harvesting. Reciprocal labour is less usual in highland villages, where casual labour is available to the minority who can afford it. Those who can often prefer to invest labour in more profitable rice production in the lowlands and use profits from rice sales to purchase maize for household subsistence. Highlands maize growers depend on household labour and informal co-operation between kin and friends. The preparation of land is labour-intensive, especially in less fertile areas, where mounds have to be constructed prior to planting. Manufactured fertiliser is not widely used because it is hard to get and because the cost is prohibitively high for small farmers. Yields in the highland area are low, and the acreages planted are insufficient to meet even basic household needs. The average household, consisting of between five and twelve people, cultivates less than two acres of land.⁷ Farmers in hill zones expect to obtain only five sacks an acre in an average year. As this refers to maize on the cob, not grain, it seems likely that yields are significantly less than the 520 kg of maize flour which would be needed to feed a family of five comprising two adults and three children on one meal of maize per day for a year.⁸ Maize is vulnerable to pests in the field and once it is harvested. Monkeys, birds and wild pigs decimate fields. Cobs stored on the rafters are soon consumed by weevils.

The agricultural year is sharply divided between wet and dry seasons. The first rains are expected between October and November, when maize is planted for harvest between late February and early March. Some families

⁷ According to the 1988 census, average household size in Ulunga District is 6.2 (United Republic of Tanzania, 1988: 67). Estimates of cultivated areas were supplied by the Office of Community Development, Ulunga District, in 1991.

⁸ This estimate is based on the comments of farmers who reckon that one *debe* (roughly 20 kg) of maize grain would feed a small household with one meal a day for two weeks.

may have finished this maize by July. Even better-off households, whose cash and labour reserves have ensured that a larger area was planted, will be out of maize several months before the harvest. In this situation, it seems at first sight paradoxical that maize is regarded by highland people as the staple and desired food when, in reality, locally produced maize is in season for only a few months, after which 'hunger enters'. The time of hunger does not, of course, mean that people go without anything to eat. During the hungry season people eat cassava, bananas and sweet potatoes, some missing out on maize altogether, and others cutting back on meals prepared with maize so as to drastically reduce maize consumption. Although root crops and plantains are eaten by many families as often as maize, they are viewed somewhat disparagingly as unsatisfying and tasteless snacks which do not stop 'hunger from hurting' (Culwick and Culwick, 1994: 66). In Ulanga, as in other parts of Africa, both 'food' and 'hunger' are culturally defined (Richards, 1939: 46–7; De Waal, 1989: 73). The time of hunger actually refers to the absence of what is locally defined as proper or desired food. In the highland villages this has been maize since the 1940s, when sorghum cultivation was virtually abandoned in favour of the quicker-ripening and higher yielding crop.

Periods of 'hunger' so defined have a long history in the highlands (Lussy, 1953: 113), and are perhaps endemic to any agricultural system which relies on a seasonal grain crop, produced in small quantities, which is regarded locally as the staple (Richards, 1986). The cultural experience of hunger has, however, been radically transformed during the twentieth century by the commoditisation of food crops and the cash economy. When sorghum was the staple food crop the effects of the hungry season were somewhat mitigated by the provision of rice by lowland villages in exchange for labour, the planting of famine relief crops under instruction from colonial authorities, the local planting of maize as an alternative to sorghum, and the use of gathered foods (Lussy, 1953; Culwick and Culwick, 1994). Hungry-season food shortages are now mediated by the integration of Ulanga into a national grain market created by state agricultural policy in the 1970s which led to massive investment in the maize-producing regions in the southern highlands. The provision of subsidised inputs and transport subsidies ensured that production increased and that maize could be exported to other rural areas, creating, through price controls, the conditions for market dependence in maize-deficit regions. Since the late 1970s hungry-season maize has been widely available throughout the district. The bulk of this maize is not produced locally but imported from Iringa, Ruvuma and Songea. Farmers in those regions produce hybrid maize on a commercial basis, using mechanised techniques and fertilisers (Rasmussen, 1986: 7; Booth, 1992: 256). For them, maize is both a cash crop and a subsistence crop (cf. Little and Horowitz, 1987: 254; Pottier, 1985a: 23). For people in Mahenge maize is a valued subsistence crop and, as other people's cash crop, a food which they buy in the market.

FOOD AND MONEY

Following the gradual liberalisation of the grain trade in the late 1980s (Bryceson, 1993: 118), prices are now officially set by private traders,

although the dominance of parallel grain markets had long ensured that *de facto* local maize prices were well beyond government control (Nindi, 1992: 180; Jones, 1994). Specialist food traders, and people with spare cash to invest, buy maize cheap in the period immediately after the harvest and store it to exploit seasonal demand. The price of maize doubles during the shortage season and triples in the months immediately preceding the harvest. The actual availability of maize to an individual or household now depends on having the money to buy it, at inflated hungry-season prices. In this situation it is quite possible for people to go 'hungry' when vast quantities of maize are available for sale (cf. Sen, 1977).⁹ 'I can complain of hunger because although Mahenge is jammed with maize I have no money,' explained a woman to her daughter-in-law, visiting from maize-rich Songea. From the perspective of this woman, as of most people, food and money are equivalent in the sense that the absence of either implies 'hunger'.

Food and money have other commonalities, in their similar capacity to reproduce and be consumed. Both are talked about in terms of an idiomatic contrast between 'eating' (*kulia*) and 'generation' (*zalisha*). The idiom of eating conveys a complex range of associations, from sociality to selfishness. Eating together is an idiom for co-operation, which is premised on an understanding of shared substances and incorporation (Green, 1996). All major cultural events can be described in terms of cooking and eating, from 'eating the cucumber seeds of the novice' (*kulia ntanga za mwali*) at the girls' puberty rites (Green, 1999a) to 'cooking the *sadaka*' (offerings) to remember the dead (Green, 1999b). Eating, like drinking, is an essentially social activity. Meals are taken in same-sex groups and served on a common plate. Just as eating together connotes ideals of co-operation and commensality, eating alone conveys its antithesis, and is associated with the anti-sociality and selfishness of the kinds of people thought to practise witchcraft (Green, 1994, 1997).¹⁰ Eating alone is thought not to be conducive to the production of social relations only to sustenance of the eater. Those with a propensity to eat by themselves are thought to be similarly selfish with money, which, like food, can be swallowed up by a person who has access to it. The 'eating' of money benefits only the eater. Moreover, 'eaten' money is denied what is seen as its inherent capacity to 'breed' (*zalisha*) or generate more money through calculated investment. This capacity, mediated by people, is explicitly compared to the natural fertility of plants, animals and people, which, if properly tended, reproduce and multiply. 'Breeding' money is not regarded as selfish if it is done with appropriate regard for other people. In a context where banking and alternative forms of financial speculation are unavailable to the poor, money cannot generate itself on its own. It must be temporarily converted into assets

⁹ Bratton describes a similar situation in Zimbabwe during the drought of 1983. Many rural households were short of maize, but maize was widely available in local markets, even at the height of the drought. Beer brewed from maize was also available, as people struggled to earn cash to buy food (1987: 236).

¹⁰ These kinds of ideas are common throughout Africa. For example, see Middleton (1963: 263) or Rowlands and Warnier (1988: 122).

which will increase in monetary value, which can then be converted back to money. This logic underlies the widespread strategy of hoarding which, prior to liberalisation, was an important source of income for the waged middle classes in much of Africa, who were able to exploit price differentials between the official and parallel sectors of the economy (MacGaffey, 1988: 169). Hoarding continues to be important in rural areas, where food crops undergo massive price increases between harvest and shortage seasons. In Ulunga, and in districts like it, people with cash to invest in food staples after the harvest can double their money a few months later. For such people money produces money, via food crops, in a far more efficient manner than if they had simply planted crops or invested money in agricultural labour. Just as maize grain is planted to generate more maize, the existence of a regional grain market means that money can be put to work to generate maize, without recourse to local agricultural production. The better-off achieve this through hoarding and reselling when prices increase. Poor women can also take advantage of the grain market to make money or grain 'reproduce' itself through its temporary conversion into beer via the drinks market.

Richer households, where a member is in wage employment or has the resources to cultivate a distant valley rice *shamba*, are able to take direct advantage of the hungry-season market in maize. They either sell stored maize which they bought when prices were low or eat rice sparingly until the price increases to the point where rice profits can be used to purchase maize for household consumption. Poorer households buy what maize they can but otherwise eat bananas and root crops, while the men spend money on beer. Men say that beer is like food. It fills you up and stops hunger from hurting. From the perspective of the individual drinker this is, indeed, the case. Thick beer has a high calorific value and is quite nutritious (Netting, 1964: 397; Heath, 1987a: 129, b: 100; Raikes, 1989: 452; Moore and Vaughan, 1994: 192). Drinking is also something to look forward to at a time when meals are sparse and condiments minimal. But the preparation of beer uses up scarce maize which some analysts have suggested might otherwise be made into food, alleviating hunger at the level of the household (Bryceson, 1989: 432; Raikes, 1989: 453).¹¹ In reality, rural women do not view maize to eat and maize for brewing as alternatives. During the hungry season maize for either has to be purchased for cash. If maize is bought only for eating it is used up quickly. It fills bellies in the short term, but in the long term hunger remains. Brewing, on the other hand, allows money or maize to 'reproduce' itself. Money earned from brewing can be spent on household food or invested in the production of beer. From the perspective of brewers, brewing during the hungry season alleviates, rather than accentuates, hunger.

¹¹ A study quoted by Raikes estimated that in Togo the deflection of grain (sorghum) into beer production resulted in the loss of thirty meals per head annually (1989: 452). Smith and Stevens point out the negative impact of brewing banana beer on household food security in Kagera region, Tanzania, where banana is the food staple (1988: 553).

THE COSTS AND PROFITS OF BREWING

A brief examination of the economics of beer production supports brewers' perception that brewing is a good way to generate money. Most women brew in standard quantities, enabling output and profit to be calculated rapidly.¹² Maize is measured by the *kimbo*, a measure based on the cans in which 1 kg of 'Kimbo' brand cooking fat is sold. Irrespective of what is being measured, one *kimbo* is held to be equivalent to 1 kg. Twenty *kimbos* constitute one *debe*, a measure originally derived from the 20 litre rectangular tins in which cooking oil is supplied to stores. The *debe* is progressively being replaced as a standard measure by the plastic bucket (*ndoo*), which is also reckoned to hold 20 litres of liquid or 20 kg of solids. A standard sack (*gunia*) is reckoned to hold five *debes* or 100 kg. Brewing in an oil drum, which may be hired or loaned for the occasion,¹³ a woman hopes to produce three buckets, or 60 litres, of beer. To do so she has to purchase one *debe* (20 kg) of maize, and between one and three *kimbos* of finger millet, according to taste. Between 1995 and 1996 finger millet sold at between 250 and 300 Tanzanian shillings a kilo. Grain input prices vary according to seasonal availability. Dry-season maize prices in 1996 ranged between 1,600s and 2,000s per *debe* of maize, compared with 800s just after the harvest.

In order to brew, a woman also needs considerable quantities of firewood, which she may buy or collect herself, and cash to pay for grinding the germinated grains. In 1996 the price ranged from between 10s to 25s per kilo, depending on the location and power source of the machine.¹⁴ The production process, from soaking to drinking, takes seven days. Beer is sold in one-litre plastic measures which are known locally as 'plastics', and occasionally in larger 2.5 litre paint containers, known as 'sadolins', after the brand name prominent on the side. One 'plastic' sells for 100s. If a brewer sells all 60 litres on the same day as the beer is ready she hopes to take around 6,000s in sales. If a woman collects her own wood but pays for maize, finger millet and grinding, she can expect to make between 2,500s and 3,000s, if the beer sells well, and double her initial investment (cf. Colson and Scudder, 1988: 89; Moore and Vaughan, 1994: 192).¹⁵ The minority who use home-produced maize can generate still better returns.¹⁶ Interestingly, while women who brew assiduously calculate the costs of inputs and relate them to potential sales, they do not account for their labour, probably because they accept that, in the absence of other income-generating opportunities, time spent on brewing is not an opportunity cost.

¹² These measures are standard throughout Kenya and Tanzania.

¹³ Drums sell for around 10,000s each and are too expensive for most women to buy. They can be hired for around 500s.

¹⁴ Electricity has just become available along the main road into Mahenge. Electric machines are cheaper than diesel-powered ones, and attract clients across a wide area, even from villages with diesel machines, because the savings are substantial.

¹⁵ This is based on purchasing maize at 2,000s a *debe* and paying 20s per kilo for grinding. In reality, many women walk to electric mills to take advantage of cheaper milling, keeping production costs down.

¹⁶ Brewers also have to pay a levy on beer production which raises revenue split between village governments and the district council. Current beer tax is 100s, paid over when brewers register on the village rota, and an additional fee payable on the day of sale.

At present, women's returns from brewing are limited by pricing conventions in the district, which mean that maize beer prices remain static irrespective of seasonal changes in input costs. Between June 1995 and September 1996 *tekawima* sold for 100s a litre in all parts of the district, despite seasonal fluctuations in maize prices. According to brewers, beer prices are set by village governments, which raise revenue from beer sales by imposing a tax on brewers. Village governments in turn claim that prices are set by the district council. The extent to which this pricing strategy is a result of district administrative intervention is difficult to determine. District officials deny involvement in price setting and insist that free market principles apply. What seems likely is that current pricing conventions in the district are a combination of the legacy of government price controls and cultural attitudes which accept and morally approve of standardisation. Thus within the administrative subdivisions of the district standardised pricing still applies to produce such as rice and maize, as well as to game and farm meat, and even *ulanzi*. Although the prices of these commodities change throughout the year, at any one time prices will be the same for what is perceived to be the same product. Whatever the origins of beer pricing, both male and female villagers supported standardised pricing, claiming that price differentials could put some women out of business, and that more expensive beer would limit the purchasing power of drinkers. In avoiding competitive pricing women brewers seem to be trading potential cash profits for social capital, ensuring that strong relationships are maintained between themselves, their clients and the neighbours on whom their livelihoods ultimately depend. In practice, despite the changing costs of inputs, standardised pricing probably has less impact on brewers' incomes in Ulanga than it would elsewhere. This is because at the times when maize is cheapest, after the harvest, and most expensive, before the harvest, at the height of the wet season, demand for *tekawima* is lowest, as the market is saturated by the cheaper and more popular *ulanzi*.

LIVELIHOOD VERSUS INVESTMENT BREWING

Although brewing is central to the seasonal subsistence strategies of the majority of rural households in the district, the importance of brewing income and the proportion of time allocated to beer production vary according to economic status. While most adult women know how to make beer from maize, and have the necessary skills to produce it, not all women brew, and most brew only a couple of times a season. In Ulanga brewing frequency is indicative of economic differentiation between the minority of women who brew routinely throughout the brewing season and those who brew only occasionally to meet specific cash needs. For the former brewing is a livelihood strategy, for the latter an investment opportunity. Not surprisingly, livelihood brewers tend to be poorer than investment brewers, and have fewer alternative options for income generation or food production.

Women who brew routinely throughout the dry season are generally household heads, often widows or divorcees. Their households have few able-bodied adult members. Mama O., a 48-year-old widow, is typical of women in this category. Her core household consists of herself and her

mother, who is in her early 70s. The mother is mobile but unable to farm. Mama O.'s main income-generating activity is brewing *tekawima* in the dry season, and the resale of *ulanzi*. She aims to brew twice a month, if inputs permit, at the height of the shortage season. Her cousin, Mama C., a divorcee in her mid-40s, also brews as often as the village schedule and investment cash allow. Mama C., who suffers from periodic bouts of ill health, lives with a teenage daughter who has two children under 3. They farm bananas, cassava and some maize on a small plot near their house, in a crowded part of the village. Their main source of cash income is brewing and the resale of *ulanzi*. Mama M., a single woman of around 30, also makes a living from the drinks trade. She lives with four children between the ages of 3 and 10 and cultivates only a small area. Women who rely on the manufacture and sale of drinks for their livelihood tend to be single, to have restricted access to adult labour at home, and to live in households with high dependence ratios in areas where local access to good agricultural land is limited. They cultivate only small acreages of maize and may not plant sufficient root crops and bananas to meet the annual food needs of their household. Livelihood brewers are more likely to be involved in the *ulanzi* trade as resellers than women who brew only a couple of times a season. The situation of investment brewers is different. More of them are married, or live in households which are not short of labour or where cash is available to pay for casual assistance at critical points in the agricultural calendar. Of the few who are single, and head their own household, most have access to a wage or are involved in other income-generating activities, such as the sale of cooked food, pig breeding or trade. Occasional brewers utilise brewing as a means of achieving a quick profit to meet specific expenditure. Returns from brewing are quicker than from hoarding or from investment in pigs, the other main source of cash for the better-off. Occasional brewers expect to make better profits than routine brewers because they aim to use either home-produced maize or that which they bought at a low price just after the harvest.

Brewing more than two or three times a season is not profitable for occasional brewers who rely on home-grown maize. Once it is used up, having to purchase maize reduces profits considerably. In addition, the market of drinkers is easily saturated. If too many people have beer on the same day, not all of it will sell and the investment will be wasted. Beer goes bad quickly. The sale price halves on the second day, eliminating profits at a stroke. A strict rota is adhered to in most villages of who will brew and when. Managed by village administrations, ostensibly for tax collection purposes, as levies are charged on beer brews and sales, the rota system has wide support among women. It allows them to plan their brew to minimise competition and, where village executive officers are sensitive to the demands of neighbours, affords them a reasonable chance of accessing beer markets. It does not, in practice, limit the income opportunities of routine brewers. Rather, by restricting the extent to which the better-off can brew, adherence to village rotas protects the access of poorer women to a brewing income. In any case, as routine brewers lack the capital to brew more than once or twice a month at most, the rota system does not mean they miss brewing opportunities. Ever sensitive to the need to maintain the social networks which are the last resort in a crisis, and which provide additional

labour and access to brewing inputs, women who brew strive to co-operate with one another whether they are occasional or livelihood brewers, taking it in turns to brew, sharing and hiring out to each other the necessary equipment like plastics and oil drums, and often coming together in teams to strain the beer or watch over its fermentation and sale.

As long as rotas are adhered to, brewing maize beer outside the *ulanzi* season appears to be a fairly profitable activity. However, when compared with alternative income-generating options open to women it is less profitable than trading. The profits derived from the resale of grain, cloth and other commodities depend on having access to sufficient capital to sustain economies of scale. Women who brew do not have access to that kind of capital. Given the relatively small amount of capital required, brewing is the only viable option for earning a predictable cash income without recourse to agricultural production. Households which manage to achieve a degree of self-sufficiency in food have fewer cash needs, as they are not dependent on the market to obtain root crops and plantains. Such households may lack maize in the hungry season but do not go hungry except for cash. Women who depend on brewing for their livelihood are more dependent on the market for food supplies during the shortage season, and have no choice but to brew or go hungry. They purchase maize in the market in order to produce money with which to buy cheaper food.

TRADING ON INEQUALITY

The drinks market in the Mahenge highlands is premised on a series of inequalities: between men and women, between different classes of rural producer and between different regions of Tanzania. Selling beer provides a critical source of income for certain women at certain times of the year. This opportunity is created by the integration of Ulanga into a national economy and regional grain markets. Mahenge's position as a maize deficit area renders its population dependent on maize imports from other parts of the country, where farmers have benefited disproportionately from agricultural subsidies and investment. Beer brewing as an income strategy differentiates between women who depend on brewing for the purchase of food during the hungry season and those who have access to sufficient labour to reduce dependence on the market for household food needs. Brewing as a source of women's income rests on gender inequality and the sexual division of labour and access to resources in which men consume the beer produced by women and are responsible for the production of, and derive profits from, *ulanzi*.

The seasonality of *ulanzi* production contributes to the creation of an income opportunity for women brewers which depends on male access to income to spend on beer, as well as on the consumption decisions of individual men who choose to buy beer for themselves. Men buy beer because they enjoy drinking, regard beer as food, and view drinking with friends as an investment in social relationships. They do not view the purchase of beer as an alternative to the purchase of grain for their household because the ultimate responsibility for the provision of food at home lies with women (cf. Holmboe-Ottesen and Wandel, 1991). The ultimate irony of the beer trade is that, even though some men choose not to spend money on

food for their family, the money they spend on beer sustains households other than their own. As in much of Africa, the separation between men and women in terms of economic activities and income facilitates the extra-household redistribution of men's cash to unrelated women, in this instance through the sale of beer (cf. Bryceson, 1995; Koda, 1995; Omari, 1995). At the micro-level, brewing provides women with a source of income independent of male kin, the very category of men who have most control over women's labour as fathers, husbands or brothers (cf. Tripp, 1989: 604), but does not reduce overall female dependence on male sources of income. This female earning opportunity is actually created by the *de facto* exclusion of women from access to other sources of income. Although a minority of women in Tanzania obtain formal-sector employment, and many participate in agricultural wage labour, employment options for rural women of limited education are minimal. Women's responsibilities for child care and household food provisioning further restrict access to income opportunities, even in the micro-enterprises which characterise the expanding informal sector (Rutashobya, 1995: 275). Food processing, cultivation and child care take up a significant proportion of women's time, imposing severe restrictions on female mobility. As one of only a limited number of ways of accessing male incomes, women's participation in the drinks trade is ambiguous. It is both an indication of political weakness *and* a potentially empowering economic strategy (cf. Guyer, 1991: 270).

Livelihood brewers in the Mahenge highlands have limited access to agricultural labour or good local agricultural land. Sometimes they lack both. In this their situation is similar to that of women brewers elsewhere in Africa, who rely on brewing as a main source of off-farm income (Richards, 1939: xiv; Colson and Scudder, 1988: 114; Moore and Vaughan, 1988: 539; Hirschmann and Vaughan, 1993: 94). Rather than move to farm elsewhere, or hire labour, women brewers in the Mahenge highlands have opted to take advantage of the regional grain market to produce money, rather than maize. This contrasts with the situation described for parts of Zambia, where women brew in order to invest in agricultural production, either with beer profits or through the use of beer as a payment for agricultural labour (Moore and Vaughan, 1994: 228). These options are not viable in villages around Mahenge. Labour costs are high, making investment in agricultural labour beyond the reach of the kinds of poor households who rely on brewing as a means of buying hungry-season food. The kinds of arrangements for reciprocal agricultural labour which could potentially allow poor women to increase maize production are not widely practised in the highland area. Where they exist, the actual costs of participation far exceed the beer and food which must be provided for the work party. In Ulanga, as in much of Africa, what matters in the calculation of reciprocal labour obligations is the provision of reciprocal labour. Not only are labour-poor households unlikely to have sufficient cash to provide food and beer at the height of the hungry season, when farms are made ready for planting, they can least afford the labour time to participate in reciprocal exchanges. In the face of such constraints, poor women brewers in Ulanga have little choice but to use the drinks trade to buy their way out of the agricultural production of grain, and rely instead on adding value to the agricultural production of farmers from

other regions of the country. This strategy makes more economic sense than paying for agricultural labour, which yields uncertain returns and requires a greater initial investment. It also raises interesting questions about the nature of contemporary rural economies in Tanzania, which, even in non-cash crop-producing areas, cannot be characterised in terms of a 'subsistence' as opposed to 'market' orientation.

Male and female small farmers, who do not produce crops explicitly for local sale or international markets, cannot *subsist* from farming (cf. Hansen, 1994). Off-farm incomes have long been a critical component of rural livelihoods. Rural dwellers, like townspeople, need money to purchase food, clothes and household items, and to buy medicine, pay school fees and taxes. Small farmers obtain cash through the sale of agricultural produce and handicrafts, petty trade and the sale of other assets, including labour. They also take advantage of market opportunities to add value to market commodities, in this case food grains, through calculated investment. The importance of cash in contemporary African economies means that small farmers are not isolated from markets and the national economy. Their income strategies are determined by the economic integration and interdependence of different rural areas, as well as by relations between waged workers and agricultural producers in both rural and urban areas. This integration creates income-generating opportunities in rural areas which are not dependent on a household's own agricultural production or wage labour. Women brewers in the Mahenge area are conforming to what have been described as typically 'urban' patterns of income generation and, in partially opting out of agriculture, are taking advantage of the circulation of cash and grain provided by the national economy. If the boundaries between subsistence and market, rural and urban, appear increasingly blurred (cf. Pottier, 1985a: 23), owing less to historical changes than to the recent shift in analytical focus away from the isolated rural community, another dichotomy between the subsistence-oriented 'traditional' farmer and their 'modern' market producing counterpart also collapses. In a context where virtually all rural dwellers engage in the market, and market strategies determine the production decisions of all categories of rural producer, 'progressive' farming refers not so much to different kinds of income strategies pursued by different kinds of people as to a social status to which the better-off, generally those with a steady source of off-farm income, aspire (Moore and Vaughan, 1994: 116). Seen in this light, the poor rural women who earn a living from beer brewing are not economically conservative subsistence producers but highly astute entrepreneurs, working to balance economic gains and social obligations in the face of severe economic and labour constraints, utilising careful planning and calculation to evaluate appropriate income-generating options and decide between them (cf. Moore and Vaughan, 1994: 540).¹⁷

¹⁷ Tripp makes a similar point about urban women in Tanzania, noting that 'It is only by looking at their own perceptions of options and obstacles, as well as how they go about making decisions in their lives, that we can begin to see urban women more as agents, rather than merely victims of change' (1989: 623).

A distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' as two distinct kinds of economy does exist in Ulanga, in the context of activities centring on the dead and the spirits associated with territorial shrines. These strive to represent what is conceptualised as the 'traditional' economy of the Pogoro, based on sorghum production and non-market commodities, defined in radical opposition to the contemporary economy based on maize and market production. Although these activities seem to establish a dichotomy between two kinds of economy which is, on the face of things, similar to the kinds of dichotomy invoked by social analysts, they are not really concerned with the representation of contrasting economies so much as with the representation of the continuity of the ancestral past through life in the present. This presentation of 'tradition' through the people of the past should not be taken as an historical description of a non-market economy (cf. Toren, 1989: 144). It is, rather, a convenient way of expressing a perceived contrast between life and change on the one hand and, on the other, the continuity which ensues through death and ancestorhood. The recurrence of similar motifs throughout Central and Eastern Africa reveals much about the long history of integration into wider economic fields, as well as the perfect understanding of modern economies held by specialists in 'tradition' (e.g. Lan, 1989: 196).

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the economic logic of the domestic drinks market and its place in the subsistence strategies of men and women in a rural district of Ulanga in southern Tanzania, where women's brewing coexists with men's monopolisation of the sap alcohol market. The seasonal availability of sap alcohols, combined with the district's integration into national grain markets, creates a short-lived opportunity for some women to supplement their income from the production and sale of maize beer, an opportunity made possible by the unequal economic interdependence of men and women and of different regions of Tanzania. The seasonal expansion of the market in maize beer occurs at a time when maize prices are high and household grain stocks are low. Brewers must choose between their immediate consumption needs and investing their small reserves of cash or grain in beer production in the hope that it will generate longer-term profit. As in other parts of Tanzania, the choice is idiomatically expressed through the contrast between 'eating' (*kulia*) and 'generation' (*zalisha*) through which grain, and the money to which it is explicitly compared, can be made to reproduce itself through careful investment.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine la logique économique du marché national des boissons et sa place dans les stratégies de subsistance des hommes et des femmes du district rural d'Ulanga, dans le sud de la Tanzanie, où les activités brassicoles des femmes coexistent avec la monopolisation du marché des alcools de suc par les hommes. La disponibilité saisonnière des alcools de suc, combinée avec l'intégration du district dans les marchés céréaliers nationaux, crée une brève opportunité pour certaines femmes d'augmenter les revenus qu'elles tirent de la production et de la vente de bière de maïs, une opportunité rendue possible par l'interdépendance économique inégale des hommes et des femmes ainsi que de différentes régions de la Tanzanie. L'essor saisonnier du marché de la bière de maïs survient lorsque le prix du maïs est élevé et les stocks de céréales domestiques sont faibles. Les brasseurs doivent faire un choix entre satisfaire leurs besoins de consommation immédiats et investir leurs modestes réserves de capitaux ou de céréales dans la production de bière dans l'espoir de générer des profits à plus long terme. Comme dans d'autres régions de la Tanzanie, ce choix s'exprime de façon idiomatique à travers le contraste entre "manger" (*kulia*) et "générer" (*zalisha*) à travers lequel les céréales, et l'argent auquel elles sont explicitement comparées, peuvent être amenées à se reproduire grâce à un investissement prudent.