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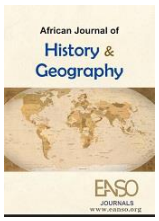

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Original Article

Women, Indigenous Beer and Brewing for the Market: A Cottage 'Industry' in Colonial Nairobi: 1920 - 1939

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ABSTRACT

Existing studies on women entrepreneurship in colonial Nairobi largely focused on women in prostitution, hawking and itinerant trade. Women in indigenous beer enterprise remained unstudied. This leaves a dearth in scholarship which this study sought to address. The objective of the study was to examine the development of entrepreneurial brewing of indigenous beer in Nairobi City from 1920 to 1939. The study discussed the factors that led to the rise of women's indigenous beer enterprise and the reasons for its resilience in colonial Nairobi despite a raft of measures instituted by the colonial government to suppress it. It focused on continuities and changes that took place in indigenous beer production, marketing and consumption following the commoditization of traditional beer in Nairobi city in the early colonial period. The study employed a qualitative design based on a historical approach. Data was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Collected data was verified for authenticity, consistency and reliability. It was then analyzed qualitatively and presented in line with the objective of the study. The study revealed that indigenous beer emerged as a factor in commercial life in African locations in Nairobi and was produced and sold by women. Measures adopted by the colonial government to control indigenous beer entrepreneurial activity of women largely failed to curtail it. This is because it provided inexpensive alcohol for the urban low-income earner, particularly during the Depression years. New techniques and tools replaced the traditional brewing tools and mechanisms. The traditional brewing tools and mechanisms were replaced by new techniques and tools. The study is significant because it provides important data on women's domination of specific income-earning niches in the urban milieu in colonial Kenya.

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INTRODUCTION

The documentation of the social history of beer that largely emerged in the 1960s has offered quite interesting items of scholarship. This has become part of an attempt to historicize the lives of the urban poor, especially women. Various researchers began focusing on what studying beer production reveals concerning the Africans' lived experience of colonialism. Significant attention was drawn to the role of beer as a tool of imperial control and a substantial source of revenue for the colonizers. A pioneering study conducted by Pan (1975) affirmed the long history of beer brewing and drinking by Africans prior to contact with Europeans. The author indicates that following European penetration, beer attained enormous economic value within the new colonial system. The study asserts beer drinking had an important social-economic function.

Bujra (1975) focused on early African migration to Nairobi. She demonstrated how the city became split into distinct racial zones. Within the African location of Pumwani, Bujra (1975) notes that there were women who worked as prostitutes and brewers. These women were able to accumulate savings which equalled or even surpassed those of men. The scholar asserts these women bought land and houses in their own right, establishing a basis for their own wealth and power and were able to establish themselves independently of men. The assertion that beer brewing and prostitution were legitimate forms of work for these women entrepreneurs was an important contribution to the historiography which affirmed urban women's agency in early Nairobi. Though this work provides a strong basis on which to anchor the current study, its main concern was prostitution, thus it paid only marginal attention to entrepreneurial beer brewing.

At about the time of Bujra's (1975) study, other notable scholars focused on the presence of African women within urban centres in the early colonial period from around the 1920s through the 1950s. This literature attempted to celebrate such women as freeing themselves from African patriarchy and the competing demands of settler capital. Schmidt's (1991) work falls under this strand of literature. She argues that colonial African women were under dual oppression as indigenous and European structures of patriarchal control interacted and mutually reinforced each other, transforming into new forms of subordination. Thus, colonial African women's subordination did not just result from European imposed policies. According to Schmidt (1991) therefore, African women in colonial Zimbabwe during the 1920s and 1930s were subjected to domination by the African men in rural spaces and by the powerful forces of the new colonial order in urban spaces. Women in settler urban spaces including prostitutes and beer brewers managed to subvert not only the patriarchal structures but also the colonial order by penetrating wage-earning urban niches. Schmidt (1991) regarded these women as forerunners of liberation in the context of women's dual oppression. This work is quite significant to the current study as it recognizes the ways in which gender intersected with racism and class in early colonial Africa.

The counter-narrative that emerged from this perspective is that economic activities do not take place in a vacuum. Though some women managed to acquire a decent wage in early colonial towns, this did not allow them to escape the intersecting

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racial and gendered pressures of their circumstances. Their limited economic achievement did not necessarily imply complete liberation and social mobility, as their relative prosperity took place within a racist settler matrix and controlling pressures of the colonial order (MacPhee, 2017:70). According to Willis (1999), the literature splits into two schools with regard to how to conceptualize the women brewers in early colonial towns. One has celebrated beer as a source of women's freedom, by offering them a way into the cash economy, enabling women to overcome attempts by the state and men to exclude them from the colonial capitalist system. The other school decries the encroachment of the capitalist economy, where, in the words of Willis, beer became 'an instrumental force in the unravelling of the non-commercial social ties that once offered security and autonomy of another kind' (Willis, 1999: 339).

Some scholars thus praised the entrepreneurial brewers as liberated urban dwellers while others questioned the capitalist structures which limited the opportunities that women could access in towns. In works of the later 1990s, the narrative began to move past this dualistic delineation of subjugation and entrepreneurship, to a focus on using the effort of female brewers as a way of examining the limits and contradictions of colonial state control and understanding (MacPhee, 2017:9). One such work is Willis (2002). The scholar argues that in 19th century East Africa, the use of beer in ritual had more to do with influence in this world and the goodwill of male elders, than with communion with the gods and the spirits (Willis, 2002: 68-69). This work illustrates how exposure to caravan trade and the subsequent access to new goods paved the way for alternative forms of power, including one based on youthful drinking, and another based on women selling beer and sex (Willis, 2002:89). Colonial rulers in early 20th century East Africa acted in concert to deny young men and women access to beer. In this regard, the sale of indigenous beer remained largely suppressed and all types of imported European alcohol were forbidden to Africans. As colonial rule became more established and colonial anxieties over law and order receded, however, local governments were permitted to exploit the revenue benefits of indigenous drinks, which were now sold under licence. Nonetheless, women across the region, in defiance of colonial bans, brewed and sold native beer in rural homes and urban drinking places, illustrating the limits and contradictions of colonial state power.

Various historians have mentioned the social and economic role of beer in the making of colonial urban society in Kenya. Ngesa's (1996) study was among the pioneering works on women traders in colonial Nairobi. She suggests that as early as 1902, Kikuyu women living in Pangani prepared and sold indigenous beer known as *njohi muratina* which became very popular among Africans (Ngesa, 1996:39). Distilled beer from Pangani was 'exported' and sold all over Nairobi. According to Smedt (2011), the quantities of beer produced in colonial Nairobi increased tremendously and distilled alcohol became a subject of colonial control. Smedt (2011) highlights some aspects of change in indigenous beer brewing such as raw materials and types of brewing equipment, on which this study is hinged. Similarly, Kiruthu's (2006: 107) averment on women brewers coming up with new ingredients and recipes that would add to the potency of traditional beer validates women's agency in indigenous beer enterprise.

Problem Statement

Various historians across the world have studied how different societies sustained their indigenous beer cultures over time. The historiography of this topic has revealed that indigenous beer is a fundamental component of peoples' social and economic life. Some of the scholarship addressed the intersection between alcohol, gender, and economic relations in different societies. At the advent of colonial rule, traditional beverages serve varied purposes like rituals, marriage negotiation and festivities. Men had preferential access to beer and women were mostly responsible for brewing a variety of alcoholic beverages. This situation was altered when the money economy was

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introduced by colonialists. Commoditization of economic relations brought many changes in all aspects of African societies including norms on beer brewing and consumption. Indigenous beer took a new dimension as an item of trade and income generation, especially by women. This study examines salient aspects of entrepreneurial brewing in Nairobi city with women as the key actors in this form of enterprise.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to analyze the factors that contributed to the dynamism and resilience of indigenous beer entrepreneurial activity of women in Nairobi city in the period 1920-1939.

Research Question

What economic and political factors contributed to the dynamism and resilience of indigenous beer entrepreneurial activity of women in Nairobi city in the period 1920-1939?

METHODOLOGY

- **Location of the Study**

Generally, the study covered Nairobi city. The specific location where the research took place was, however, Mathare which encompassed parts of the neighbouring Pumwani and Pangani estates, being major centres of indigenous beer entrepreneurship. Mathare is an informal settlement occupying approximately 73 hectares of land and located approximately 3 kilometres from Nairobi Central Business District. From both geographical and historical points of view, Mathare also encompasses part of the neighbouring Pangani and Pumwani estates. These were key African settlements that emerged as centres of alcohol production in colonial Nairobi. Pumwani is the oldest African settlement still in existence in Nairobi. It covers an area of approximately 16 hectares. Pangani is located near the Mathare River on the verge of the Karura forest.

- **Research Design**

This study adopted a descriptive research design that allowed the researcher to conduct a field survey. The researcher was able to carefully explore the research problem beyond the surface level in order to gain an understanding of continuity and change in the indigenous beer entrepreneurial activity of women in colonial Nairobi. This encompassed data collection from the archives and conducting oral interviews. Data was also gathered from secondary sources such as theses and articles which aided in the realization of research objectives.

- **Target Population**

The target population comprised respondents of both genders with knowledge of matters pertaining to the entrepreneurial brewing of indigenous beer through participation, experience and observation. Participants included active and retired women entrepreneurs, clients and government administrators. Government administrators included police officers both active and retired, chiefs and headmen. The age limit for the informants was between 25 and 105 years.

- **Sampling Procedures**

Sampling in the research context entails the identification and selection of a fraction of individuals from the population of interest and considering them representative of the large group. By studying the sample, we may fairly generalize our results back to the population from which we selected the sample. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents who provided the required information with respect to the beer enterprise as established and undertaken by women in the colonial period. The researcher did not have a definite sample size but strived to interview as many informants knowledgeable on the subject as possible within the designated time frame.

- **Interview Guide**

The study used an Interview Schedule and focused group discussion in the process of collecting data. Key informant interviews are qualitative in-depth interviews with people who have knowledge of a

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research issue. Since the interviewer was not required to strictly follow the question guideline the interview schedule was flexible enough to handle emerging issues from the interviews. The aim was to gather as much relevant information as possible.

- **Data Analysis**

The qualitative method was used to analyze the collected data. Data from secondary sources were subjected to critical evaluation so as to verify its accuracy. There were comparisons and critical evaluation of the data which aimed at reducing prejudice and exaggeration. Data from oral interviews was also compared with documented sources to verify its accuracy and relevance. Oral interviews were crucial in helping the researcher to fill gaps in the archival records. All the data were analyzed using a theoretical framework. Women's agency theory was applied as the prism through which the data was analyzed. This framework enabled the researcher to understand and interpret women's entrepreneurial brewing of indigenous beer in Nairobi City County. The data obtained was then presented in a prose kind of format in the subsequent section.

- **Data Management and Ethical Considerations**

The researcher prioritized confidentiality and informed consent after creating rapport with the informants. The right to anonymity was maintained by avoiding informants' names and identities where needed. Gender sensitivity was observed with regard to interviewing the participants and asking questions. Prior necessary authorization by relevant state agencies was obtained. Academic integrity was maintained through careful acknowledgement of sources to avoid plagiarizing ideas of other people. The purpose and usefulness of the research were explained to the informants and courtesy was observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Commodification and the Rise of Entrepreneurial Brewing Activities by Women in Early Nairobi

Historical researchers have argued that women producers were at the centre of the growth of alcohol as a cottage industry, first in rural areas and later throughout urban Africa (Nelson, 1982; Hausse, 1984; Redding, 1992). Traditional beer entered into the sphere of cash exchange alongside other commodities with caravan penetration of the area around Nairobi in the late 1890s. At the turn of the century, a market for fermented brews already existed in East Africa (Willis, 2002). The spaces in which beer sales took place grew rapidly, as the colonial state entrenched itself and more women found a kind of refuge in this venture (Ambler, 1984:10; Haggblade, 1984: 17). It was these women who turned the camps and bomas of the colonial states into centres of cash trade in alcoholic beverages; for all of them, selling alcohol was a way to get hold of the money which the colonial state tended to put into the hands of men (Willis, 2002:102).

Colonial economic structures increasingly placed cash in the hands of men both in rural areas and in towns. Entrepreneurial brewing was thus propelled by the difficulty which women had in gaining access to cash, which was required to purchase goods in the context of monetized economic relations. Specifically in Kenya, colonial displacement, migration and urbanization resulted in the widespread production and sale of beer in urban centres (Ngesa, 1996; Kiruthu, 2006; Rodriguez-Torres, 1994). Ngesa (1996) asserted that in the early 20th century, some entrepreneurs and commuter traders from rural communities adjacent to Nairobi increasingly undertook brewing of indigenous which was transported for sale in Nairobi, especially on weekends (KNA, KBU/77).

As commodification took root, the structures whereby the elders had been able to control the allocation of beer gradually broke down as was the old social system in general. Allocation of beer came to be controlled according to purchasing power rather than according to social

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rank and age. There was increasing demand for alcohol from young men who earned cash working for European farmers, and those who had migrated to Nairobi to serve colonial state in various capacities. Key among these were soldiers, policemen and porters who were outside local networks of exchange and reciprocity and could obtain beer in no other way. These groups were greatly responsible for the spread of cash sales in urban centres (Partanen, 1991; Willis, 2002). By 1910, drunkenness had come to be a major concern of administrators in Nairobi and adjacent areas, particularly Kiambu and Machakos (KNA, KBU/77; Ambler, 1984; Willis, 2002:147).

A new type of intoxicant that began to be sold in early Nairobi was distilled alcohol. Unlike simple ferments, spirits do not spoil rapidly. They can also be kept in sealed containers since they are not in a state of continuous fermentation. Furthermore, they can be moved and traded far more readily than non-distilled ferments, thus they were always available to people, unlike ferments. Smedt (2011) asserted that the quantities of Nubian gin produced for sale in Nairobi gradually increased beginning around 1904 till the late 1920s, with the distillation process entirely managed by women. By 1930, there was a dramatic rise in commercial production of this beverage. Distillates were widely available to anyone with money and became the preferred drink of many of the urbanized wage-earners and government employees, who, according to Willis were increasingly becoming 'disdainful of the fermented drinks which missionaries and government officials regarded as unhygienic, but legally - and financially - denied bottled beer and whisky' (Willis, 2002:225).

Evidence suggests that most of the distilled alcohol consumed in Nairobi was distilled in Kibera. This became a source of complaints from the colonial authorities (Parsons, 1999; Ngesa, 2006; Smedt, 2011). It was also alleged that Nubi bus drivers of the Kenya Bus Company were largely involved in the distribution of Nubian gin across Nairobi (Smedt, 2011: 160). An archival material noted that 'the very obvious increase of gin consumption in Pumwani' in the 1930s could be traced back to Kibera (KNA, ARC (MAA) 2/l/3). People of all ethnicities also came to Kibera to drink, especially on weekends (Smedt, 2011: 72; Bodewes; 2010). Even Asians and white people would venture into Kibera for a drink, or place an order and have it collected or delivered (Smedt, 2011: 169).

Colonial Regulation and Early Attempt at Controlling Commodification

As early as 1900, colonial authorities portrayed a determination to bring indigenous alcohol production, especially in urban areas under state control. A licence was imposed for the sale of indigenous beer in specified places - initially in various coastal towns, in Nairobi and along the line of rail, and a fee of 15 rupees was imposed for the annual licence (KNA, AG/1/397; Herlehy, 1985). In spite of this measure, colonial officials still argued there was no decline in the beer trade, hence in 1907 the Native Liquor Ordinance banned the manufacture and sale of native liquors (cited in Ambler, 1984: 8). The Ordinance was only partly applied, and specifically in urban areas. It should be noted that liquor regulation was almost non-existent in rural areas, as the headmen, whom the British relied on to control brewing were often corrupt, and liked to drink themselves (KNA, PC/NZA/3/15/144).

An attempt was also made to limit access to sugar, the essential raw material for brewing (Ambler, 1984). From 1912, the administration severely limited imports of refined sugar and banned the operation of crushing mills. A District Commissioner in Central province cautioned that 'unrestricted use of these sugar-mills will increase drunkenness one hundred per cent... a state of general lawlessness can be the only possible outcome unless we limit the opportunities of a *drunken race*' (KNA, AG/1/381). A new law enacted in 1909 considerably raised the punishment for liquor offences, imposing two to three years imprisonment for a third liquor offence. It also, for the first time, introduced a punishment of imprisonment for Africans found

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in possession of intoxicating liquor (KNA, AG/1/351). The effect of these restrictions was to drastically reduce the number of licensed brewers in towns by 1910. This resulted in a loss of income for women and forced them to become more reliant on illicit arrangements such as prostitution.

Examining colonial alcohol policy reveals a serious contradiction in the European approach to the question of beer in Kenya: commercial production of European-type beers (what colonial policy referred to as intoxicating liquor) was to be encouraged while that of African-type beers (now named 'native intoxicating liquors' or simply 'native liquor') was to be suppressed (KNA, PC/NZA/3/15/144). Any sale of 'native intoxicating liquor', was to be strictly for the purpose of meeting a physiological need for an individual, and it demanded no refinement. European and Asian drinking by contrast was a social activity; regulation and revenue-raising should be aimed at facilitating it (Willis, 2002:163).

Despite these measures, beer drinking in Nairobi and adjacent areas was still being described as pervasive (Ambler, 1984:8). This is corroborated by a statement by the Provincial Commissioner warning of potential consequences of excessive beer drinking in Kiambu area (KNA, KBU/77). The situation was exacerbated by the return home from war service of thousands of Carrier Corps recruits. It was observed that these young men were 'wasting their time and money on drink' (Ambler, 1984:9).

In the early 1920s, colonial policy began moving towards a division between rural and urban drinking through a 1921 ordinance which became applicable only to urban areas and some areas of white settlement (Willis, 2002: 129-131). The ordinance was passed in spite of a significant query by the Colonial Office regarding the rationale for limiting its application (KNA, AP/1/1203). This legislation did not allow for any system of regulated sale outside the towns and white-settled areas. Here, the law presumed that there was no sale and drinking was to be controlled under the provisions of the Native Authority Ordinance, which gave the chiefs and headmen power to make orders restricting the manufacture or distilling of native liquors and the supply of such liquors to young persons (KNA, AG/1/381). In urban areas, by contrast, the ordinance provided for a highly regulated system of sale. Adopting the South African practice, the legislation provided for boards which would issue licences to individuals who would make and sell 'native liquor' (KNA, AG/1/381).

The new legislation however excluded African women in urban areas from holding licences in towns; they could not sell or buy drinks in any township (KNA, AG/1/388). It should be noted that further amendments to the ordinance enacted in 1927 forbid women from making alcoholic beverages in towns even if these were not intended for sale. The effect of the 1920s alcohol policy was to ban traditional drinking in towns as well as any drinking by women. The policy was founded on a clear distinction between urban and rural drinking. In the thinking of Europeans, the problem of alcohol consumption in rural areas centred on young men; in urban areas, it centred on women. Furthermore, according to Willis (2002: 130), rural drinking was to be traditional while urban drinking was a physiological need, which was to be met strictly through tightly controlled sales undertaken by licence-holding men. The foregoing discussion reveals a steadfast determination by colonialists to keep African women from involvement in urban liquor selling. It was argued that women would inevitably begin to drink and ultimately acquire a taste for liquor (KNA, AG/1/386).

To further counteract women's illegal beer enterprise in Nairobi, the Nairobi Municipal Council took the action of setting up a Municipal Brewery for the 'legal' preparation and sale of 'native liquor' to Africans (Bujra, 1975: 222). According to an archival source (KNA, BY/11/48), the plan in effect entailed the colonial state carving out an exclusive vertical monopoly in the cities and areas of employed labour, stretching from factory production down to retailing drinks in state beer halls). The system was regarded as a kind of safety valve, to deter

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Africans from consumption of Nubian gin and other indigenous ferments, products considered more dangerous for the African imbibers (Willis, 1999; Gewald, 2002:41). According to Hausse (1984), the Municipality operated beer halls was the most dominant of the introduced social institutions among urban Africans in the British colonies. The scheme sought not to regulate and tax the sale of indigenous alcohol, but to take over it entirely as a state enterprise. The Municipal beerhall was granted monopoly rights as 'sole providers of beer to the urban African males over the age of 18 on the condition that profits were to go to local authorities - rather than the National Treasury. It was envisaged that profits from the beer were to be dedicated to the provision of basic amenities in African residential areas (KNA, Report of Working Party on the Manufacture and Sale of Liquor, 1961). In effect, what this meant was that beer hall proceeds would foot the bill for maintaining a strict system of residential segregation. An analysis of archival data indicates that in 1924 alone, 3.8 percent of the total revenue for Nairobi Municipal Council was derived from beerhall profits. This made the beerhalls a significant source of Municipal revenue. Indeed, the establishment of another Municipal brewery in Mombasa in 1934 can be regarded as a pointer to the economic significance of the beer enterprise (KNA, AG/1/391).

Municipal beer monopolies were viewed as a form of worker control across Africa. According to Hausse (1984), unregulated alcohol production was considered detrimental to European enterprises because Africans who depended on it could evade work for the Europeans. The consumption of liquor was also thought to have a negative impact on the quality of work of African labourers (Ambler & Crush, 1992:18). The Municipal brewery, on the other hand, could limit its alcohol content and so limit productivity losses from drunkenness (Kiruthu, 2006:163). The nexus between beer and labour provision was articulated in an article in the East African Standard that stated as follows;

The negative effects of the alcohol industry and the uncontrolled distribution of palm wine among the locals have caught our notice. The word 'unrestricted' is used because the laws governing the sale are so lax that anyone can deal in the goods with the payment of Rs 25 per year. To make them useful to the Empire, the savage impulses must be eradicated in order to produce a useful native population that will fulfil the objective for which the large resources invested in the country are partially employed (*East African Standard*, February 24, 1906).

Attempt to impose an official brewing monopoly did not drive women brewers from businesses. Rather, it drove these brewers further into illicit production (Ambler, 2002: 13). This inevitably undermined the profitability of alcohol trade, licit and illicit: the profitability of brewing by urban women was threatened by competition from the municipal brewery; the profitability of state-sponsored beer trade was threatened by the very unattractiveness of its setting (Willis, 2002:116). It is evident the illegal women brewers seriously weakened the municipal monopoly system; as a result, it failed to fully monopolize beer brewing and selling as conceived.

Changes in Production Technology

The rise of cash brewing was characterized by a certain transformation. Recipes changed as new types of beer emerged, the preparation of which took less than the time required for the traditional beer. The quantities of beer produced also increased tremendously and beer was now brewed in new types of vessels (Smedt, 2011:155). Kiruthu (2006: 107) asserts that many women became specialists in brewing different beers and became more efficient in brewing. Evidently, women brewers demonstrated their agency by coming up with new ingredients and recipes that would add to the potency of the beer. Women brewers employed both traditional and modern equipment and technologies. The equipment pool included those improvised for specific operations such as juice extraction, brewing and filtration among others. This illustrates the articulation of the pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production that entailed the retention and modification of some of the indigenous

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technologies. For instance, the traditional pots were replaced with *sufurias*, and 4-gallon petrol tins (Melissa, O.I., 2023).

With the use of *sufurias*, the method of distillation also changed. Three sufurias were required: one was placed on the fire; on top of it was another one with holes in the bottom, to allow the vapour to pass through; on top of that one was another *sufuria* full of cold water, to cool the vapours below so they would condensate against its cold underside (Smedt, 2011:155). The drops of gin would then fall into a small container that was placed in the middle *sufuria* to collect the gin. An elaborate piping system was used to connect all the *sufurias* and collect the alcohol (Melissa, O.I., 2023). This was an easier and faster way of producing gin, and allowed a higher production, though apparently of a lower quality (less flavour). The big producers had many 'distillation plants' (the three *sufurias*) working at the same time, and often a complicated system with pipes for cooling the vapour and collecting the gin in one central container (Smedt, 2011:155).

According to an informant, many producers were still using petrol tins years later (Mucwe, O.I., 2003). These 4-litre oil tins were sourced by men from petrol stations by men who cleaned them and hawked them to women brewers (Akinyi, O.I., 2023). An informant described the process in the following words;

We used the gallon where kerosene was sold. We would put in the tins and cover them tightly, then put a steam tube, boil the ferment and collect alcohol. We later left the system of the tins because they were getting hard to get. I think the Europeans were withdrawing them to curtail our work. But we later embarked on the use of drums. The market was expanding greatly and people were always developmental (Marimba, O.I., 2023).

The *sufurias* and petrol tins themselves gradually gave way to the use of drums as the scale of brewing increased. The linked changes were highly significant; marking an increase in the clientele (Willis, 2002:227). This change to drums was associated with another innovation by women brewers as they found oil drums physically less easy to manipulate than men. According to an informant (Mzee Aminala, O.I., 2023), most women brewers who had previously been distilling by themselves began to find men to do the heavy work related to the handling of the drums. The labour-intensive process of handling the large quantities produced and large amounts of water and firewood needed also encouraged women brewers to hire assistants (Smedt, 2011: 167). Willis (2002:228) asserts there was a tendency of distillation to generate slightly more complex patterns of economic relationship than fermented brews

Maasdorp and Humphreys (1975) affirm that the increased selling of locally made beer and the availability of oil drums, which made any batch of brew rather larger than it would once have been, helped to transform how people drank beer in Africa. According to Smedt (2011:168), a single yielded between forty and eighty litres of gin: forty litres of a strong and better quality, or eighty litres of a weaker liquor on average.

Women and Indigenous Beer Enterprise in Nairobi During the Depression Years.

The Economic Depression of the 1930s was characterized by a steady rise in the population of Nairobi: from 33,000 inhabitants in 1930 to 49,600 in 1936 to 108,900 in 1944 (Hake, 1977: 52-53). Whereas the town had an African population of 21,000 in 1923, by 1939 the population had expanded to over 41,000 (Anderson, 2001:144). The situation was exacerbated as hundreds of squatters were kicked out of the white settler farms. Many of those evicted went back to the reserves especially in Central Kenya while others flocked to the urban centres more so Nairobi, where they struggled to eke out a living. Money was a very limited resource for women in the newly rapidly expanding monetary economy. This lack of money forced women into such situations of economic hardships as they had not encountered before, pushing a large number of them to Nairobi (White, 1990:154).

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The large number of migrants from rural areas, both men and women promoted the indigenous beer enterprise by patronizing the brewers and consuming the indigenous beer (Ngesa, 1996:39). Much of the illegal brewing took place in Pumwani. This finding is corroborated by the Provincial Commissioner of Ukamba Province who stated in 1926 that 'there is an excess amount of illegal brewing taking place in this settlement' (KNA, PC/CP/4/2/3). It was not always easy for Africans in other locations to travel to Pumwani for a drink as they would also risk losing their jobs. The women beer-sellers took the beer to them (Bujra, 1975; Ngesa, 1996:65).

For women dealers, especially of gin, profits were actually higher during the post-war period than before. The high profits derived from the beer trade kept women brewers in this trade throughout the challenging economic phase. In the early 1930s, a gallon of Nubian gin fetched as much as 12.00 Ksh. and a woman could even sell more than one gallon in a day in Nairobi (Ngesa, 1997:66). Beer sellers therefore made more money than the best remunerated African wage workers, such as supervisors and clerks, whose monthly salaries ranged between 26 Ksh. and 46 Ksh during the same period (Ngesa, 1997:66; Smedt, 2011).

Brewers changed their tactics to accommodate the bigger number and special needs and characteristics of the migrants from rural areas (Smedt, 2011). Different women produced different quantities of beer, depending on their customer base. Big producers produced non-stop, or at least very regularly, which gave them good profits (Ngesa, 1996: 44). Production was high during the last days of the month when wages were paid (Ngesa, 1996: 45). The weekends were the busiest, with waged workers congregating in drinking dens in the African locations. Women who produced good quality beer received a large number of clients. Big producers began hiring assistants to assist them in various tasks. This demonstrates the Agency of women brewers as they created income-earning opportunities for other people. Production was sometimes done at night or in the early morning hours when the police were not around (Ngesa, 1996:101). A focus discussion group affirmed the popularity of the brews produced by the women brewers. Women were the people who actually brewed and sold beer and it was a very big business so much so that 'if you went there during weekends, the whole place was full of people, especially in the evening (Marimba, O.I., 2023).

Some beer sellers operated in Pumwani where their product offered stiff competition to the Municipal brewery. Others traded in Pangani, Kileleshwa, and Buru Buru (Mucwe, O.I., 2023). The trade however continued to spread to other parts of the town. Indeed, by 1936, the indigenous brew was sold in Muthaiga in the neighbourhood of Karura Forest and as far as Kabete outside Nairobi (Ngesa, 1996:100). The Kikuyu were the main suppliers of the traditional liquor, *muratina*, which was largely brewed with sugar instead of honey (Mucwe, O.I., 2023). This increased profits but lowered the quality. Available evidence revealed that distilled liquor increasingly took the place of fermented beer in the 1930's. An archival material stated that 'the very big increase of gin consumption in Pumwani' could be traced back to Kibera (KNA, PC/CP 4/3/2). Many Kikuyu women became distillers, having acquired the skill from Nubi women while working for them. Another archival source affirmed that 'Kikuyu women began distilling to such an extent that they were almost exchanging positions with the Nubian women (KNA, PC/CP/ 9/15/3).

The popularity of the Nubian gin can be explained by the fact that consumers needed to spend only a little money and they would get the satisfaction of getting intoxicated fast and inexpensively (Kabata, O.I., 2023). Furthermore, gin could be preserved for a long time and transported far away unlike fermented drinks that would become unpalatable fast (Fatima, O.I., 2023). The preparation and sale of beer was one of the very few means that women had at their disposal to support themselves and their families. The beer trade played a big role in enabling the women in Nairobi to overcome the Depression. The social, political and economic problems leading African workers to prefer these brews were aggravated by

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.37284/ajhg.4.1.2719

the economic problems faced by Africans in Nairobi. Most important to the Africans with meagre means, the women were willing to sell on credit (Ngesa, 1996:84). Drinking on credit was sought by more Africans than before, owing to the lack of cash. In this context, the economic advantages accruing to the sellers became even more pronounced (Ngesa, 1996:84-85). As sellers of their own commodities, the women beer sellers also had a more enticing business language compared to the people employed at the Municipal Brewery (Ayiero, O.I, 2023). Smedt (2011:72) corroborates that the women dealing in the beer trade were less affected by the economic changes of the 1930s. Evidently, women brewers offered customers a stronger and cheaper drink, without the inconvenience of restricted drinking hours and the other constraints imposed by the Municipal beer halls.

Several scholars have noted there was rising political consciousness among the African workers in Nairobi during the 1930s (Foran, 1962:57; Gabay, 2018:550). Under these circumstances, the atmosphere in the beer halls was not friendly as Africans drank their beer under the 'watchful eyes of the state' (KNA, AG/1/399). This denied them an atmosphere where they could discuss freely their grievances against the colonial government. On the other hand, the women-owned drinking spaces were freer and more private and were, therefore, preferred by a larger section of the clientele (Ngesa, 1996:84). These were often rooms rented in Pumwani or Pangani by the women brewers (Ngesa, 1996:66). The atmosphere there provided both a sense of belonging and an opportunity to consume a favourite drink, hence attracted many people.

Illicit brewers continued offering a more preferred alternative for the Africans as they sold brands which did not exist at the Municipal Brewery. This finding is in harmony with that of Hausse (1984) who affirmed that Shebeen owners in South Africa offered a cheaper, stronger drink that was more popular than that offered by the Municipal brewery. To be attractive to African drinkers, the state-produced opaque beers had to sell at relatively low prices because they faced competition from tantalizing, higher alcohol-content home brews and the distilled drinks of clandestine shebeens' (Hausse, 1984; Ndimande, 2018). Furthermore, Africans were not receptive to European encroachment over what until that time had been an African-dominated commerce (Hausse, 1984:50).

The increasing level of distillation in the 1930s caused something of a panic in the Government. Women participating in illicit economic activities including brewing and prostitution were always at risk of being arrested and jailed as police raids on the beer traders intensified. Police raids frequently conducted in different parts of the town found large quantities of gin (Smedt, 2011). During one such raid in 1932, a Nubian gin distillery was discovered in Kibera, with more than 30 oil drums used for fermentation. Used to full capacity, this distillery would have been able to produce more than 2000 litres of Nubian gin per week (Smedt, 2011:158). In another raid carried out in May 1933, a number of women brewers were arrested and convicted of selling gin and each sentenced to four months imprisonment (Ngesa, 1996:85). Police raids were intensified not only in Nairobi but also in other parts of the colony. In 1938, the administration established a police station in Kibera, with the sole object of eliminating the gin trade (Ngesa, 1996:100). Proposing the establishment of the police post, the Municipal Clerk stated as follows;

The Municipal Council draws the attention of the government to the state of indiscipline and lawlessness in the Kibera Nubian ex-soldiers' settlement, which constitutes a menace to Nairobi Municipality, and is a source of much drunkenness and crime, and requests the government to take immediate and drastic action to remedy the situation. A police post will assist in reducing the amount of drunkenness and crime which is rife in the area (KNA, ARC (KNA, ARC (MAA) 2/1/3/1938).

Due to the heavy police presence in Kibera, the gin that was produced was largely transported to other parts of the Municipality for clandestine

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.37284/ajhg.4.1.2719

retailing mostly by women. While Africans from all over Nairobi would go to Kibera to drink, non-natives organized ways for the supplies to reach them (Smedt, 2011:168-169). Evidently, consumers of Nubian gin were people of all races. The Town Clerk corroborated this finding in a statement that indicated 'the situation in Kibera has improved slightly following the establishment of the police post, but there would appear to be some foundation for the suggestion that the facilities for the sale of gin in Kibera having been substantially curtailed, the gin is being transported to other parts of the Municipality and retailed there (cited in Smedt, 2011: 163).

CONCLUSION

This study focused on women's role in the commoditization of indigenous beer and the development of women's entrepreneurial brewing of indigenous beer in early Nairobi up to 1939. It has been shown how African females as the first permanent residents of Nairobi commoditized indigenous beer in Nairobi. Women thus contributed towards the 'democratization' of indigenous beer and changing norms on beer brewing and consumption in colonial Nairobi. Women demonstrated their agency as they supported their families by selling alcohol to the African labourers in Nairobi. This was crucial to the stabilization of male labour in the town. It is women, many of whom were seeking cash and freedom from miserable rural conditions who created, developed and diversified the indigenous beer cottage industry in the colonial city.

It has been argued that increased commercial availability of alcohol brought about many restrictions to control the drinking, of not just Africans but also Whites. These included rules on where alcohol could be sold and drunk, hours during which alcohol could be served and the issuing of liquor licenses. Nonetheless, we have demonstrated race was central to these regulations. Africans for a long period denied access to 'European' liquors, leaving traditional and local brews as the only option. The study has concluded by demonstrating that alcohol was an arena of substantial contestation in colonial Nairobi up to 1930. Prohibition of indigenous beer sales having failed, the Municipality authorities tried to make beer available for the blacks through a monopoly system. With this shift from prohibition to the initial attitude of control, a new scenario was created which promised more direct competition with the women brewers.

We have shown that during the depression years, there was an upsurge in women's settlement in Nairobi as a result of various economic and social transformations taking place locally and outside Kenya. Brewing and distilling emerged as one of the key economic activities of women immigrants. The chapter has examined some changes in brewing that took place as the scale of production intensified. The analysis of African brewing and drinking in colonial Nairobi demonstrates a part of the daily lived experience of living under colonialism. It has been shown that colonial measures against the brewers had far-reaching consequences on the trade.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Indigenous brewing should be regarded as an act of entrepreneurship and not criminalized. The skill should be institutionalized and taught in skill acquisition centres such as craft centres.
- The government should create more awareness of the benefits of traditional liquor to change people's negative views towards them, which was inculcated by the colonial rejection of the brews.
- Small-scale brewers should be supported financially and technically to formalize their establishments, as these have a tremendous capacity to enhance the economic independence of poor women not only in rural areas but also in towns.
- There should be a clear demarcation between genuine indigenous beer and chemical-laced alcohol with standardization, registration and patenting of genuine products.
- There is a need for a study that focuses on the role of indigenous beer in traditional

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.37284/ajhg.4.1.2719

ceremonies and rituals in Nairobi City County during the colonial period. This would provide interesting perspectives on the non-commercial consumption of these brews in urban settings, considering that their use as a cultural symbol has been diminishing with time. Further research ought to be conducted on the nature of investment of profits by women brewers in Nairobi City County. This will provide a timely synthesis of inter-relation among diverse forms of formal and informal entrepreneurship and on the articulation of indigenous modes of production with the capitalist economies.

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Ayiero Mark, aged 89 years, interviewed on 13th October 2023 at Pangani

Fatima Halima, aged 55 years, interviewed on 17th October 2023 at Kosovo

Gatimu Josphat, aged 91 years, interviewed on 17th October 2023 at Pumwani

Kabata Kioi, aged 58 years, interviewed on 22nd October 2023 at Pangani

Marimba Mama, aged 89 years, interviewed on 10th November 2023 at Mathare 3C

Melissa Hilda, aged 87 years, interviewed on 15th November 2023 at Mathare 4B

Mucwe Elias, aged 81 years, interviewed on 27th November 2023 at Pumwani

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