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**Beer Drinking and Social Experience in an African Society**

An Essay in Formal Sociology

by Ivan Karp

*Introduction*

With few exceptions (Beidelman, 1966; Douglas, 1966, 1975) little attention has been devoted to the analysis of social forms in African societies, particularly to the transformations that social forms undergo in situations other than the mundane and practical. Mutual commensality, the sharing of food and drink, is one such form.

The ethnography of forms of mutual commensality is a subject that has rarely been explored in African contexts, although we know that eating and drinking are activities that are redolent with symbolic significance (Levi-Strauss, 1978).

In this paper I shall demonstrate that commensal beer drinking provides a synthetic image in terms of which Iteso represent to themselves contradictions in their social experience. In the widest sense, I believe that beer drinking is Iteso social theory. In the complex of belief, custom, and attitude surrounding beer drinking, the Iteso express an implicitly held set of ideas about the nature of their social world and their experience of it. I shall argue, moreover, that it is not possible to obtain a full understanding of the Iteso conception of their social world and their experience of it by conceiving of their thought as an abstractly held structure. Their conception of the social world is not only, and perhaps even primarily, “thought.” It is both “lived” and “felt” as well. In this sense to speak or write of an African system of thought is to abstract from the stream of events an arbitrarily selected part of an African world.¹

In the following sections of the paper I shall describe various as-
pects of beer drinking and beer parties in Southern Iteso life and thought. I shall be concerned to document the manner in which it pervades Iteso social activities. Following that I examine the relationship of beer drinking to the contexts in which it is found, and the role that beer drinking plays in defining those contexts and realizing the goals of the persons in the situations. Then I describe the beer party, the actual context of beer drinking, in terms of the patterns of social relations that are exhibited in the party and the way these social relations relate to basic categories of Iteso social life. This leads me to return to the theme of mutual commensality and social experience. I argue that beer is a symbol of diffuse solidarity and unencumbered sociability which expresses the ideal form of relations among men that Iteso would like to achieve. The association of beer drinking with sorcery and poisoning, however, points to the inability of Iteso to achieve desired forms of relations among men. They are unable to know if the external forms of behavior that they observe do in fact conform to internal states and intentions. Their dilemma is existential, part of the human condition. The complex of beliefs and attitudes surrounding beer drinking is a reflection of the Iteso response to this dilemma.

The Pervasiveness of Beer

The Southern Iteso are a para-Nilotic-speaking people who live across the Kenya-Uganda border in the region between Lake Nyanza (Victoria) and Mt. Elgon. Their social organization is based on a pattern of dispersed households formed into local groups that are vaguely bounded and defined idiosyncratically according to the different social positions of the persons consulted. These groups, which I call neighborhoods, are termed adukete by the Iteso, from the verb akiduk, "to build," and refer to a group of people who have built together and share mutual obligations to aid and defend each other. In addition, the Iteso are patrilineal and have dispersed lineages which unite primarily for the performance of ritual.

Beer drinking is an activity whose frequency brings it to the daily attention of every person living among the Iteso. In the afternoons of almost every day old men gather their beer straws and carriers, hollow poles in which to store the reed straws, and wander through neigh-

borhoods in search of beer. The informal status of elder, achieved when one has married sons, entitles entry to many sorts of beer parties from which men without this status would be otherwise barred. During the harvesting season, there is a wide choice of parties to attend and the growing year is punctuated by beer parties organized to celebrate different events or to engage neighbors in help on some agricultural task. During the dry season, when stocks of grain are low and beer is scarce, people complain about its absence. A concern for beer drinking is evident even during those times when it is not available. This statement holds true even for the few people who do not drink beer. They attend and are an important part of beer parties. They both give them and attend them. Hence we may see that the unwillingness or inability to drink beer does not lessen to any great degree the importance of beer drinking in any person's social life.

In addition to beer made from finger millet, the Iteso also make beer from maize and, occasionally, bananas. The drinking of the latter two kinds of beer, however, is an individual affair. Maize and banana beer are drunk from glasses or gourds, while finger millet beer is always drunk from a pot with siphons. When they speak of the other kinds, it is ajono kekurididi, maize beer, or ajono kemuzungu, European beer.

Finger millet beer might more properly be called an alcoholic, nourishing gruel. The beer is made from ground flour which has been wrapped in leaves and buried in the ground for one week. It is then baked in an open pan over a fire. The flour is placed in a pot and germinated finger millet seed is added as a yeast. Water is also added, and the result is allowed to sit for four to seven days. On the day of drinking, boiling water is added to this fermented mixture in the pot to make a drinkable potion. The Iteso take considerable local pride in their beer and often make invidious comparisons with the beer of some other area. Thus, the people of Lukolis who let their beer ferment in the pot for seven days regard the four-day fermented beer of Amukura as weak and tasteless.

The elaboration of beer drinking is a striking feature of Iteso culture. There is a highly developed vocabulary associated with beer drinking activities. A number of separate verbs are used to refer to highly specialized activities such as "pouring hot water into a beer pot" or to refer to the act of "cleaning a beer straw." There are seven special terms to refer to different stages of fermentation of millet beer,
the distinctive Iteso beer, as opposed to other forms of beer. Only with regard to cattle is the Iteso vocabulary as well developed. Another aspect of beer drinking that indicates its importance to the Iteso is its association with effective social relations. Relations among persons in Iteso society can be conveniently divided into two categories, potential and actual. Any extensive or long lasting social relations among the Iteso will be found to be with persons who share beer together in some regular fashion. In this regard an anthropologist can make an assertion for the Iteso that is similar to Evans-Pritchard’s for the Nuer (1940), that no matter which subject he wished to investigate, he found himself returning to the subject of cattle. For the Iteso no matter what area of their life is being examined—economics, ritual, or kinship—beer drinking will be found to be a part of it.

It is not simply a matter of beer drinking as a frequent but unnoticed aspect of Iteso life and culture. Iteso express an awareness of the significance of beer drinking in their lives. When I was first introduced at the chief’s weekly meeting during my research, one of the first questions asked about me was “Emase ajon?” (“Does he drink beer?”). I was to find that a frequent inquiry during the course of two years’ research.

One indication of the awareness Iteso have of the presence of beer drinking in their lives can be found in greetings. Iteso greetings may be elaborate and courtly, but follow a standardized pattern. Greetings are exchanged, followed by inquiries about health (generally treated seriously), followed by questions about food and beer. Thus, one typical set of greetings follows the text given below. [Recorded between two adult men meeting on a path in front of my house.]

Yoga. I greet you.
Yoga-di. I greet you also.
Ab’akiro? What news? (lit., “What are the words?”)
Mam’akiro. No news. (lit., “No words.”)
Ing’alejo? How are you feeling?
Ang’aleong. I am fine [may be answered in elaborate descriptions of illness].
Eng’ale aberu’kon? How is your wife? [An elaborate series of these questions may be asked about various persons the questioner knows in the family of the person questioned.]
Edeka. Ing’alejo? She is sick. How are you?
Ang’aleong. I am fine. Where is the beer?

An’ajon?
Oreka Seferio. At Seferio’s home. It is the beer of the small pot. [Implying that there really is not enough for the questioner if he were to attend.]
Nesi ajon nukitabo. [Implying that there really is not enough for the questioner if he were to attend.]
Ai ilos’jo? Where are you going?
Osokoni. To the market.
Kedara. Good bye. (lit., “Keep well.”)
Kedara noi. Good bye. (lit., “Keep well very much.”)

The questions “Inyo inyamio ore’kon?” (“What are you eating at your home?”) and “An’ajon?” (“Where is the beer?”) are part of the customary forms of greeting. They may be asked even if the inquirer is not looking to eat and drink. Eating and drinking communally are indices for the Iteso of socialibility (see below). Greetings are more than just fillers in conversation. They are means for both signaling and testing the quality of the relations that exist between actors, “supportive exchanges” or “rituals of reassurance” as Coffman (1971) calls them. The questions about mutual commensality in greetings indicate that there is an awareness that expressions of both politeness and solidarity are associated with eating and beer drinking. Thus, references to beer drinking may serve as suitable markers of sociability in casual conversation.

Iteso are aware that their patterns of beer drinking are unusual by the standards of the ethnic groups surrounding them. Among the other societies of Western Kenya, communal forms of beer drinking are on the decline and the traditional millet beer has been replaced by maize beer. Although the Iteso grow considerable maize and make some of it into beer, they assert that it is prohibited on ritual occasions and unsuitable for large parties. In their opinion the decline of communal beer drinking in their neighbors is an indication of their unneighborliness.

Beer Drinking in its Contexts

Beer drinking is a pervasive feature of Iteso social life and culture. The connections between beer drinking and other aspects of Iteso life are not random, however, no matter how ubiquitous. In order to understand the significance of beer drinking among the Iteso and the nature of the interconnections with their society and culture,
I shall examine three aspects of beer drinking more systematically. The first aspect is economic. Beer drinking as an activity has a use value for Iteso, and it may be seen as related to both production and economic exchanges. The second aspect is situational. Beer drinking is an important part of a large variety of contexts. Thirdly, beer and beer drinking are, themselves, symbols whose significance will aid in explicating Iteso ritual. The explication of Iteso ritual will, in its turn, aid in the understanding of beer as a symbol.

Beer drinking is of considerable importance for the conduct of economic activities. The pragmatic aspect is fairly obvious but nonetheless important. The Iteso economy is based on a form of mixed herding and agricultural activities. Iteso are a sedentary people occupying an area of relatively high rainfall. The main subsistence crops are cassava and finger millet (eleusine), while maize and cotton are raised for cash. There are two growing seasons, one long and one short. Rainfall is plentiful in the aggregate but extremely erratic from one year to the next and very localized. Hence, Iteso experience a high degree of uncertainty as to whether rain will be either sufficient or too great during a given year or whether the paths of rain will fall in their area in even a good year. As a result, their main crops, cotton, maize, and finger millet, may be destroyed if not picked immediately upon ripening. Large labor inputs in short periods minimize the dangers of sudden rain and hail.

Iteso use beer parties to organize work groups that will provide a high labor input in a short period of time. Large scale tasks, such as the mudding or thatching of houses, are also performed by groups of persons “working for beer.” The economic motive for giving beer parties is particularly apparent during the weeding and harvesting seasons, but these sorts of beer parties are to be found at all times of the year. The work performed may often be greater than the cost of the beer provided. The provision of beer for labor is not direct. It is part of a complex series of reciprocal exchanges. A person who is unwilling to cooperate in work parties himself is unlikely to find anyone coming to his working parties. Beer is not the item exchanged for labor in communal forms of cooperation among the Iteso. The beer party is instead the vehicle through which cooperation is achieved.

I have no doubt that some other social form could serve as a mechanism for facilitating delayed labor exchanges. I am equally certain that beer drinking is such a mechanism among the Iteso. Although I do not have sufficient numerical data to substantiate this impression, beer drinking is a medium for both equal and unequal exchange. There is a tendency for elders to extract labor from their juniors through the medium of the beer party. Senior men who are in the parental generation are not expected to work at the work parties of their “children.” On the other hand, labor exchanges among equals may be facilitated by the medium of beer parties. One type of beer party, Ajono nuk'ekitai, “beer for a piece of work,” occurs when a working party from one neighborhood is invited to another to perform a specific task. Friendly rivalry between neighborhoods predominates on these occasions, and my Iteso informants asserted that this provides an excellent means for young men, without a store of social credit, to obtain labor for onerous tasks.

The important question for this analysis is to discover how participation in beer parties can operate as a “generalized medium of social interaction” (Parsons, 1963; Turner, T., 1968) such that future intentions to interact in a cooperative fashion are indicated in the beer party, in spite of the absence of specific contractual arrangements. The answer lies in the meaning that beer drinking has for Iteso, to be considered at greater length in the next sections. Both participation in beer parties and the giving of parties are tokens of essential sociability, and sociability indicates to Iteso a willingness on the part of other actors to participate in social and economic exchanges. Thus, participation in the beer party and the week that precedes it are taken as a sign that persons are willing to honor nonspecific obligations. The importance of this for long-term calculations is patent (Bloch, 1973). Neighbors, who are defined by Iteso as “people with whom one shares beer,” are the primary source of labor supply for large-scale tasks. The very definition of a neighbor, with implications of generalized reciprocity, is associated with the sharing of beer. (See Karp, 1968A for a more elaborate discussion of neighborhood values and beer drinking.) In the context of work and labor exchange the beer party can be used both to provide the means for the completion of tasks and to store up credit for future tasks on the part of the participants. Like money, beer provides a measure of value in terms of which actors establish credit and bank labor. Unlike money, the measure so provided is imprecise and subject to manipulation as well as having a limited sphere of circulation.

If beer drinking is found in contexts where labor exchanges occur,
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It is not the only situation in which beer drinking plays a part of the occasion. Virtually all important or extraordinary occasions among the Iteso are accompanied by communal forms of beer drinking. Beer drinking is a social mechanism for indicating that situations are special, and Iteso conceptions of festivity are defined in terms of beer drinking. There are no festive circumstances, no instances of celebration among the Iteso that do not call for beer drinking in one form or another. Even major holidays in the Catholic Church are occasionally celebrated with beer parties.

Iteso nomenclature for the various sorts of celebrations reflect the significance of beer as a context marker. One can announce, for example, that *Apunyas*, the mortuary ceremonies, are going to be held at the home of so-and-so next Friday. This is not a frequent means of referring to the event, however, and there are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, it is not sufficiently specific because there are a variety of ceremonies held at different times that make up the complex of mortuary ceremonies. Secondly, it does not stress the aspect of communal sharing in the way that the reference to beer drinking does. Instead, it is more customary to refer to the ceremony or celebration that is to be held as "ajono nuka [blank]." ("the beer of the blank").

The example of *Apunyas*, the burial and mortuary ceremonies, is instructive in this regard. In these ceremonies beer is not a central theme. It serves, instead, as a means of expressing the transfer from one stage to another in the ceremonies. In this sense, it is not what Turner has referred to as a "dominant symbol" but is an "instrumental symbol," a symbolic form that is related to the ritual process as a means for achieving the purposes of the rite (1967). At any stage of the various mortuary rituals the members of the beer party constitute a gathering of mourners and the context of beer drinking can be seen as the appropriate vehicle for expressing the customary sentiments.

The complex of mortuary ceremonies can be divided into five stages. Each stage is a step in the progress of the dead person from the world of the living to the world of the dead. A different sector of his or her social personality emerges at each different stage of the ritual complex. Thus, the mortuary ceremonies are a complex *rite de passage* in which the transition from the status of living to the status of dead is achieved. In the first stage, which begins at a person's death, kinsmen and neighbors gather for the funeral. Burial and mourning take place over a period of two days. After the funeral, the people of the household plus those of the minimal lineage who are not normally resident in that home (*ere*) remain secluded there. Ceremonial bathing and head shaving take place. Beer is brewed by the married women of the household to end the initial period of mourning. This beer is called *Ajono Nukilongiet*, "the beer of the bathing."

In stage two, no agricultural work may be done until beer can again be prepared (usually about ten days). When the beer is brewed, the widower or widow goes to the fields and begins to hoe. He or she is then followed by all the other adults of the home. They return to the homestead and drink the beer, which is called *Ajono Nukunumiet Asoma*, "the beer of the return to work."

Stage three takes place six months to a year after the death has occurred. When enough finger millet has been collected, another beer is brewed. This is prepared from grain collected both by the women of the home and the daughters who have married out. All potential mourners are invited to the home, with the exception of affines. The people who participated in the burial drink from one pot. Each lineage of the clan that is represented at the ceremony ideally has its own pot to drink from, and neighbors and other kinsmen also have theirs. Each group drinks in a different house and is consequently separated from the others. This beer is called *Ajono Nukumurwoi*, "the beer of the hindlegs," after the parts of the cow given to the clan during sacrifice.

An unspecified number of weeks after this ceremony, stage four begins. Each daughter who has married out of her home will return to her natal home and brew beer for her husband and his agnates and friends who come about two weeks later. The name of this beer, *Ajono Nukakekwas*, "the beer of the forelegs," refers to the forelegs of an animal, traditionally allotted to affines at a sacrifice.

Stage five takes place some years later when the bones of the dead person are dug up. If the dead person was male, a bull is sacrificed; if female, a cow. As this ceremony occurs only after illnesses that can be attributed to the *Ipara*, spirits of the dead, this may be properly called a sacrifice. The beer brewed on this occasion is called *Ajono Nukepunyas*, "the beer of the funeral sacrifice."
bers of the household to normal activities is symbolized by the resumption of work in the fields. Stage three brings together all the mourners, except for affines, into a series of groups that are both separated from each other and united in the single ceremony. Stage four emphasizes the special relations of affines to the household and lineage of the dead person. Finally, stage five includes a communal propitiation of the dead by the living persons who made up his immediate social circle.

In all of these ceremonies it is the beer party that is the vehicle for the enactment of the ritual and one of the means by which the purpose of the ritual is achieved. Through the medium of the sharing of drink a ritual congregation emerges. Moreover, it is not only the living who participate in the mortuary beer drinking and are, as a result, members of the congregation. The Ipara, the spirits of the dead, are reputed to have a liking for food and drink. One of the reasons that Iteso give for performing mortuary rituals at a given time is that the home of the bereaved person has been attacked by the spirit of the dead and the spirit has to be propitiated with a sacrifice and beer. The Iteso believe that spirits of the dead are greedy creatures who beset homes with illness to signal their desire to be propitiated with sacrifices of beer and meat (Karp and Karp, 1979). Funeral sacrifices are held in the morning. Iteso assert that this is done for two reasons. First it is "cool" and the spirits like coolness and, second, the morning, like the evening, is a time when the spirits venture forth, a liminal state "betwixt and between" light and dark. Evenings are periods when spirits are likely to "catch" persons and possess them, while mornings are periods when they appear to be more amiable. Thus many of the funeral rituals are performed at a time when the spirits of the dead are likely to cooperate in them.

Furthermore, it is only in the mortuary beer parties given at funerals that the pot of beer is put directly on the ground. On all other occasions the pot must be placed on a ring; otherwise, my Iteso informants said, the person giving the beer party would be indicating a desire for the death of his or her brothers and sisters. The earth, of course, is the place in which the dead are interred, and some beer and a few straws must be left in the pot for the Ipara to drink the next morning. Hence, the conclusion may be drawn that the mutual commensality which establishes a congregation at mortuary beer parties is not only among the living but between the living and the dead. Beer parties become a symbolic form, an instrument, through which the living and the dead communicate and cooperate.

At mortuary beer parties some customs differ from other beer parties, such as the placing of the pot directly on the earthen floor. This illustrates an aspect of beer parties that is related to the different situations in which they are found. While a core of customs remains the same in all beer parties, other customs vary according to context and serve to define that particular beer party as a special occasion related to the purpose for which it is held. One such custom found is the Ajono nuk'akewas, the beer party held for the affines for the dead person. The invited affines will invariably request that an invited guest, not of their party, be asked to leave. By this means they display their rights vis-à-vis the members of the home. On any other occasion, their request would be considered rude.

In addition to the mortuary ceremonies, there are a wide variety of formal and informal occasions on which it is either required or simply good manners to serve beer. These occasions range from the intimate Ajono nuk'itabo, "beer of the small pot," which is served by a wife to her husband at night to the highly elaborate and prohibitively expensive Ajono Nu'kimutok, the beer parties held to celebrate the birth of twins. A salient feature of the various parties is the association of beer drinking with hospitality. Often when I asked Iteso if I could come to their homes to interview them, they asserted they would be too embarrassed to have me without beer, and I should wait until they could brew some. If I was able to convince them that the visit was "work" and not a visit, then I might be allowed to come. Otherwise, I found them very reluctant to receive me.

In all of these cases the presence of beer marks an occasion as special or extraordinary. By this I mean that beer drinking is associated with what might be called heightened forms of social experience in which a commemorative element is present. This can be seen for the list of different types of beer parties given in the appendix and from the all-purpose appellation Ajono Nu'k'akinumunum, the beer for special occasions, which translates literally as "the beer for celebration."7

The third aspect of the interrelationship of beer drinking with social life is the use of beer as a symbol in ritual. Further examples in which beer is an instrumental symbol will be given in the next section. In this section I wish to discuss the central importance of beer in a
crucial domestic ritual, the ceremony of Akipudun, "to bring forth," the ritual in which the newborn child is first brought out of the house in which it is born.

In this ritual a child is given its first name. Iteño have a variety of names. There are baptismal names, and many Iteño have taken to using patronyms. They are also known by nicknames and age grade names as well. The first name given the child, called the "sucking name," is given at the ritual of Akipudun. The sucking name is the one by which the child will be known to the members of his natal household all his life. It is essentially the name that stands for his individuality, the basic core of the person onto which other capacities are added.

The mother and child remain in seclusion for a period of about three days after the birth. Before they can be taken out of the house beer must be brewed by or, more usually, for the mother, often by her husband's mother, the paternal grandmother of the child. The wives of the male members of the father's minimal patrilineage are invited to the ceremony; others are excluded. At the ceremony the child is held by its paternal grandmother or some other woman who stands in that classificatory relationship to it. The grandmother dips her finger in the beer and places it in the mouth of the child. At that point its mother calls out the name that has been chosen for it. If the child refuses to swallow, other names are chosen until the child finally complies. After the name has been accepted by the child, it can be taken out of the house. This ceremony is one that has been described to me on repeated occasion by Iteño when asked to name one ritual that is characteristic of their culture. Of the many domestic rituals that flourish among them, the naming ceremony is the one which comes most readily to mind in their conversations with me. I suggest that this consciousness may be accounted for by the importance that the ritual of Akipudun has for Iteño conceptions of personhood.

Beer Drinking in Itself

In the preceding section I discussed the connections among beer drinking and three aspects of Iteño culture and society: economics, the organization of situations, and ritual symbolism. In this section I shall examine in detail beer drinking, the beer party, and their relationships to Iteño ideas of sociability. The major difference between this discussion and the preceding one is that I earlier described beer drinking from the outside, in terms of its interrelations with the contexts in which it is found. Thus, for example, some customary usages of beer drinking in mortuary ceremonies were interpreted as resulting from the association of beer drinking with ritual mourning. What remains to be interpreted is the "text" of beer drinking rather than its relations to "context."

When Iteño refer to ajon, "beer," they almost invariably mean finger millet beer and not other sorts of beer. Finger millet is both a food and a ritual substance. The ritual for first fruits must be performed by preparing a meal with finger millet, which is then made into both a starch and a beer. As I have indicated in the preceding sections, mutual commensality, the sharing of food and drink, is an important activity for defining contexts for social and ritual action in Iteño society. It also provides a means through which Iteño express their evaluations of other persons.

Iteño concepts of mutual commensality are connected to evaluations of social behavior. These evaluations are in turn associated with specific contexts or nexus of social relations. Labels that are appro-
priate in one context may appear irrelevant or immaterial in another context. In relations with strangers, for example, standards of appropriateness that are relevant for family situations do not apply. Two significant nexus of social relationships are located in the familial domain and in the neighborhood. For the neighborhood Iteso use two terms, one negative and one positive, to evaluate behavior. The first term, epog, is translated by English-speaking Iteso as "proud," carrying with it associations that are found in our use of the adjective "haughty." Iteso have a vivid image of behavior that is epog-like. Someone who can be called epog, they say, is the sort of person who hides in his hut eating his food and drinking his beer. He is someone who does not participate in the daily interaction that is characteristic of neighborly relations. The reason for this, they suggest, is that the "proud" person does not believe that he needs the generosity of other persons. Hence, the image that is associated with the term is a combination of arrogant self-sufficiency and greed.

The opposite of the person who is epog, is someone who is epaparone. To be epaparone is to be congenial. I find it striking that English-speaking Iteso have used the adjectival form "social" to translate epaparone, "He is social." It was only after I returned from the field that it occurred to me that to be epaparone might indicate, for the Iteso, a correspondence between positive inward intentions and outward behavior. That this may me so is indicated by informants' assertions that a man who is epaparone is "happy with himself" and "likes talking to others in a gentle way, drinking with others, without causing trouble."

The evaluative pair, epog-epaparone, is laden with images of the denial and the acceptance of mutual commensality. While many informants were too polite to accuse Europeans of being epog in my presence, they were quick to apply the word to students who imitated European manners. In addition to the unwillingness of these students to eat and drink in an "African" manner, other features of their behavior were remarked upon. Particularly notable was the insistence of these young men and women in communicating in a language that many of their elders did not understand.

These behavior patterns are interpreted by Iteso as indicating a denial of the rights of others to share in goods, such as foodstuffs, beer, or social relationships. In the case of the use of secret languages, the nonspeaker is refused a share of the ongoing interaction. These denials constitute a violation of what Fortes (1969) has called "an ethic of generosity" that "in many societies may belong to the domain of kinship and familial relations." There are other societies, he adds, in which the "ethic of generosity" is found in groups constituted on the basis of common residence. Such societies as the Iteso and the Nyakyusa (Wilson, 1951) are of this type, where generosity is expected among members of a residential group, such as the Iteso neighborhood. The ungenerous person is not only typified as greedy but sometimes stigmatized as a witch or sorcerer. Thus, among the Nyakyusa, witches are believed to be greedy for meat and unwilling to share their meat with the co-residents of their age villages. Similarly, among the Iteso, hidden greed and envy are said to motivate the sorcerer.

Iteso accounts of the contrast between "pride" and "sociability" suggest that there are two dimensions to the association of generosity with spheres of social relations. The first is the more commonly mentioned refusal to give generously. The second is the complementary refusal to be drawn into networks of interaction, expressed in the refusal to accept proffered generosity. This second aspect of the Iteso "ethic of generosity" can be discovered in the themes of self-sufficiency and self-centeredness found in the concept of epog. To be epog does not indicate simple greediness. It stands also for the refusal to be sociable. For the Iteso the theme of generosity and its denial is closely associated with essential aspects of interdependence. They often asserted that "pride" was foolish. Proud persons, in their opinion, are eventually forced to recognize that their survival depends upon the interdependence among men. In an uncertain environment and world, sociability is for Iteso the basis of reciprocity. It may not be stretching the implications of Iteso statements too far to suggest that, in their view, reciprocity is the basis of social order.

This ethic of generosity is expressed in Iteso thought in an idiom of beer drinking, and the willingness to participate in reciprocal beer drinking is a fundamental part of the definition of the sociable person. Since this is the case, examining the beer party will show that the theme of sociability is implicit in the activity.

The membership of the beer parties vary according to the contexts in which they are held. A party may be inclusive, as in neighborhood parties, or exclusive, as when the funeral beer for affines is held. Beer drinking often begins in the afternoon. Depending upon
the time of day, the occasion, and the amount of beer brewed, the party will last from five hours to three days. The participants sit either on chairs or on the floor around a pot drinking beer. There is rarely more than one pot, but some of the pots fill an entire room and are capable of holding an enormous amount of liquid. Two or three persons often share drinking straws. Music is provided by a radio or phonograph, if one is available, or, if the occasion is sufficiently important, a band may be hired. Sometimes women who have come to drink beer will play drums in what is regarded as a more "traditional" form of music. If the band has a singer, he sings popular Swahili songs, topical songs, and commemorative songs that glorify the persons at the party or the event. There are special songs for the mortuary beers whose function, according to informants, is to "cheer up" the mourners. If the occasion is sufficiently important, special guests may be fed, usually in another house in the compound. Festive food, such as chicken, is served as the relish to accompany the starch.

The following text records some rules of etiquette provided by the people at a large party.

1. Parents must not sit at the side of the door-shutter while in their children's houses.
2. Women must not sit on the chairs. But this is not so to the present young men.
3. Always ask for permission to speak.
4. Do not hold a straw with a left hand.
5. Women should crawl under the straws.
6. Do not walk over the straws.
7. Do not quarrel.
8. Have your straw out of the pot when sneezing.
9. At the door, inside the house, from out, you should always thank the crowd in the house [men only].
10. Turns should be given between the parents with the [married] children to dance.
11. Always sit facing the pot.
12. Don't stand and look into the pot.
13. Introduction of the people by the owner of the home.
14. Women should not sit at the backs of men.
15. Do not wipe the drinking end of the straw [when you are sharing with someone].
16. A woman should not thank the crowd inside the house when she enters the house.
17. Do not drink with a straw without a sieve.
18. Do not force air through the straw to make some bubbling in the pot.
19. Don't drink out of a pot which is placed on the bare floor.
20. When a straw is put out of the pot, remember not to pass between the straw and the pot. Keep the straw next to the pot, then pass.
21. Ask for permission to leave.
22. Say "Good-bye" before taking a step outside.
23. When drinking, always remember to hold the straw with your right hand or both if you wish [not drinking without holding a straw].

This text provides a list of rules that seem complex. They define a simple system of social identities, however. The rules for seating in the beer party produce two concentric circles surrounding the beer pot, an arrangement of considerable significance. The inner circle is composed solely of women, the outer circle solely of men. The only other axis that divides the party is based on a line drawn across the concentric circles from the door to the rear of the house. To the left of the doorjamb, as it is faced from inside the house, sit the men and women who are related to the host as "parents" and "children." To the right of the doorjamb sit the persons who are related to the host as "siblings," "grandparents," and "grandchildren." The effect is to separate all persons who are in adjacent generations into opposite halves of the circles, and to combine all the persons in the same and alternate generations into a single half of the drinking circles.

The kinship system of the Iteso uses a number of components in its makeup, including relative generation, sexual identity, type of genealogical connection, and affinity. Sexual identity and relative generation are relevant on all social occasions in which Iteso interact with other Iteso. In the seating arrangements of the beer party, sex and relative generation combine in such a way as to create three relationships. The first is one of sexual complementarity, expressed in the two concentric circle of men and women. The second is the polar opposition of the successive generations, as Fortes (1966) calls them. In the opposed halves of the circles sit persons who relate to each other as parents and children. In the opposite half to any ego sit his "parents" and his "children." Both predecessors and successors, persons related to ego by ties of filiation, sit opposite him or her. The final relationship is not one of polarity or complementarity, but one of identifica-
Beer Drinking and Social Experience in an African Society

The social world of the beer party is a compressed mode of social experience in which the distinctions in and roles that are relevant outside of the beer party are denied expression. Two avoidance relationships provide exceptions to this generalization, but they may be modified in ritual practice in a manner in which beer plays a crucial role. Both the avoidance relationships are affinal; they are the relationship between a woman and her husband's father and a man and his wife's mother.

In the first, a wife may lift the avoidance by brewing a special beer for her husband's father. The party is assembled, and before anyone can drink, the wife pours boiling water into the pot and prepares a straw for her father-in-law. He draws on the straw, then hands it to his daughter-in-law, and she drinks. After the drinking is initiated in this formal manner, other members of the party may drink. The wife is rewarded by her father-in-law and other members of his generation with small gifts of money. This ritual, usually performed within a year after a marriage, provides the easing of avoidance through the formal and ceremonious sharing of beer through the same beer straw.

The ritual through which the avoidance between a man and his
wife's mother is lifted shows, in an even more remarkable manner, the capacity of beer to act as a symbol of incorporation in Iteso ritual. In this ritual the man and his mother-in-law stand facing each other in the shade of the overhanging thatch roof of the wife's sleeping hut, a space treated as a liminal place in other Iteso domestic rituals. Each person takes a mouthful of beer and asperses the other person with it. Having sprayed each other, they are free to interact with each other and share the same beer straw at beer parties.

In both these rituals the beer is an instrumental symbol that serves as a medium for the achievement of the assimilation of separate and antagonistic social persons. One reason for this ritual power of beer may be its physical properties as a liquid. It both takes the shape of the container in which it is put and encompasses or encloses objects which are put in it. It is thus both incorporatable and incorporating at the same time. As such, it is a suitable vehicle for expressing the themes of incorporation and the negation of separation. In another ritual context the liquid properties of water assume the same role. An accused sorcerer may be asked to spray water from his mouth over the person he has been accused of attacking. If the man who sprays the water is, in fact, a sorcerer, his medicine will turn against him and attack him. This boomerang effect is the result of the incorporation of victim to sorcerer produced by the ritual aspersing of water.

A discussion of the incorporating powers of beer returns us to the theme of mutual commensality. Beer is invariably consumed by more than one person at a time. Fortes has discussed the features of eating and drinking that make them appropriate symbols of incorporation. These activities are, he argues, both individual and social, and in contradistinction to other organic activities, can only be accomplished by incorporating permitted items from the external—ultimately non-human—environment. Thus eating is the locus of the indivisible interdependence of the individual, society and environment; and food and drink . . . are exceptionally adapted to serve as the material vehicles of transactions and relationships of binding moral and ritual force. Nothing so concretely dramatizes acceptance—that is, incorporation in the self—be it of a proffered relationship, or of a personal condition, or of a conferred role and status, as taking into one's body the item of food or drink chosen to objectify the occasion. . . . The intangible is thus made tangible—word is made flesh—and therefore assimilable and manageable (1966:16).

The theme of incorporation is manifest in the act of beer drinking and its use in nullifying avoidance in relationships. The husband/mother-in-law relationship is characterized by a much greater degree of avoidance than the wife/father-in-law relationship. When the husband and his mother-in-law negate the separation between them, they do so by standing in a liminal space and aspersing each other with beer. Beer is mixed with saliva and sprayed over the other person. Through the combination of internal and external aspects of the person, the space between the two persons is closed.

Another ceremony, in which beer is aspersed on an object, confirms this interpretation. This is the ritual whereby a new plow is brought into a home. A newly purchased plow may not be brought into a home until the "beer for a new plow" is brewed. As the plow reaches the gate of the courtyard, all the persons of the home asperse the plow with beer as it is rolled into the household. It is then wound with vines that symbolize fertility, and the women of the house make ululations of joy. Any passerby may join the beer party. In this ritual of incorporation, beer is once again the instrumental symbol of incorporation.

These examples indicate that incorporation through the use of beer as a material symbol takes two forms: a strong form in which beer is aspersed and a weak form in which beer is shared through a siphon. In the beer party, it is usually persons who are in the same half of the concentric circles who share straws. Thus, members of adjacent generations such as a father and his daughter-in-law would be unlikely to share a straw together at a party after they have performed the ritual of lifting the avoidance relationship. Although they are separated by the seating arrangements in the beer party, they are joined in the act of drinking simultaneously from the same pot. Large pots allow the majority of persons participating in the beer party to have their straws in the pot at the same time. The act of drinking obliterates the social distinctions established by the rules of the party.

Evidence for this interpretation and the importance of joint consumption can be found in the persistence of this form of drinking among the Iteso. Both communal forms of beer drinking and the consumption of finger millet beer have declined among the peoples neighboring the Iteso. They make beer from maize and consume it out of calabashes, glasses, or empty tins. The finger millet that is grown is sold at great profit in nearby towns. Among the Iteso the pot and
straw remain the primary means for the consumption of beer and are absolutely required in ritual contexts. The pot and straw method of drinking beer is the only practical manner in which beer can be simultaneously consumed by more than one person from the same container. I suggest that the simultaneous consumption of beer may be an important aspect of the communal symbolism of beer drinking, and that sequential consumption is not a satisfactory substitute.

The evidence presented above leads to the conclusion that beer drinking among the Iteso is a form of social communion, a commensal sharing in which persons who participate are stripped of the capacities in terms of which they interact in non-beer drinking contexts. This exclusion is reinforced by the formal pattern of etiquette expected at the beer party. Thus in the beer party and in the act of beer drinking Iteso relate to each other directly and not in terms of the cross-cutting welter of identities and interests that ordinarily divides them.

The following text illustrates the theme of communion through commensality from an Iteso point of view. It was recorded by a friend shortly after he had given the beer party he describes.

A Beer Party in my House

On one of the Saturdays in the month of October of the year 1967, I had AJONO NUKEMUSICO in my house.

To start drinking, at about one o'clock p.m., I had the five boys who had helped me with the mudding of my present house that I still live in.

In the house, they sat on the chairs at the side of the door-shutter next to my bed. A few minutes later, the parents of the five helpers with my parents came in one by one taking the chairs I had placed on the opposite side of my bed.

Just because I knew each group would come with wives, I had some empty sacks spread on the floor for the women to sit. Whenever every woman came in, she crawled under the straws, sitting in front of the husband on the sacks that I had spread on the floor.

To allow people speak, the five helpers chose one of their friends Mr. Augustine to do the job. Whoever spoke without permission was punished by taking out his straw for a while without drinking. All the time a straw was out of the pot and somebody wanted to go out, she or he made sure that did not pass between the straw and pot. All the time a straw was kept next to the pot.

For music in the house, there were two guitars and vocal being played by Mr. Okumu and Oramis. All the time a song was played, either group had a chance to dance. So that they danced in turns as parents do not dance with children at the same time.

All the time a man went out, and when came in at the door inside, he thanked the people before he sat on his chair.

At about seven p.m., I took the five boys with their wives to the other house for a meal. To keep peace in the house one of the parents acted.

When the boys returned, the parents asked for permission to leave. One by one thanked the house and walked out.

When one of the parents pulled his straw out of the pot, he noticed that he was using a straw without a sieve. And that it had remained in the pot. There was a noise in the house, "take out straws and the sieve be taken out." Straws were taken out of the pot, and one boy washed his hands and pushed into the pot to look for the sieve. It was found and then thrown outside at the door. The remaining people pushed in their straws again and continued drinking.

At about eleven o'clock p.m., the two musicians played their guitars and sang a nice song which pleased the house so that nearly all people stood to dance. Mr. Otwanone of the helpers danced wonderfully well. My wife "Willy" was pleased with Mr. Otwanone's style of dancing; she got a full basket of beer-flour and put on the head of Mr. Otwanone as a reward.

For the whole night, people kept on drinking and dancing with much understanding in the house among all the drinkers.

At dawn, I went to the kitchen and brought one hen for my visitors to slaughter. This hen was slaughtered just in the house by one of the five boys, and fire was lit next to the pot for roasting the chicken. They cut it into pieces so that each one of them got a piece after the chicken was ready roasted.

At about eight o'clock a.m., I gave them breakfast which they took and at about 9:00 a.m., they asked for permission to leave. I did not mind their leaving. I released them. They said "good-bye" to me and off they went.

The enumeration of customs in the text is to be expected in a document recorded for an anthropologist. Of greater interest is the description of the progress of the party. The text records a history of increasing engrossment among the persons attending the party. This involvement is punctuated by expressions that serve to mark it, such as the gift of a basket of beer flour to Mr. Otwanone. This type of gift is always accompanied by the women at the party emitting ululations of joy.

Because my wife and I attended and participated in beer parties,
we were frequently the subjects of the ritual marking the engrossment of members of the party and their contribution to other people's pleasure, as Iteso described it. Relative strangers were more frequently honored with presents and ululations than neighbors, although this was by no means solely the case. There appears to be a relationship between social distance and the honoring of unusual involvement. The practical logic of awarding engrossment would appear to be that the closer the member of the party, the greater the display of engrossment that is expected, and the further the social or geographical distance the less that may be expected. Hence, as Europeans, who are believed by Iteso to be standoffish and wary of participating in "African" food and drink, our participation was enough to merit an award.

The description of the party given by my friend is characterized by evidence of engrossment, and the party was punctuated by rituals that both highlighted and served to frame the engrossment. In our experience beer parties that were interpreted by Iteso as successful were characterized by the formalization of the evidence of engrossment. This engrossment not only had its own signs but was taken by Iteso in its turn as evidence of "much understanding." The statement "There was much understanding in the house among the drinkers" is revealing. At the time that this text was recorded I had not formulated the hypothesis that for Iteso beer drinking represented intense forms of sociability. I was struck by the "much understanding" phrase and led to pay greater attention to commentary on beer drinking. "Much understanding" is the indication of a successful beer party and its absence the sign that the party has been a failure. Iteso devote a great deal of concern and effort to trying to discover and achieve the communion that they describe as "much understanding." They regard "much understanding" as difficult to achieve and the exclusion of the welter of identities, interests, and antagonisms that are characteristic of interaction outside the beer party as not easy to obtain.

The intoxicating quality of beer is a means for accomplishing both the goal of sociability that is the essence of the beer party and the exclusion of other concerns that are necessary for the achievement of those goals. Iteso maintain a lively interest in the inebriating qualities of beer. The proper length of time for fermentation is hotly debated and different locations are known for the different strengths of their beverages (see above). It is expected that beer as a substance will induce a pleasurable euphoric state and good beer is appreciated both for its flavor and its ability to produce inebriation. The inebriating quality of beer does not produce beer parties that are orgiastic in the vulgar sense of the word. The very organization of the party is designed to guard against this possibility. One duty of the sergeant-at-arms is to call attention to drunken comportment and eject persons who become unruly and obstreperous. The Iteso express considerable concern about such behavior. In their view drunkenness among men leads to fighting and among women to promiscuity. Frequent warnings are given at the chief and sub-chief's weekly meetings about the danger of fighting at beer parties. The very notion of "much understanding" implies for them the absence of antagonism.

The word that Iteso use to describe drunken comportment is instructive in this matter. Amerit indicates a loss of control and can describe an outburst of anger, the intoxication characteristic of marijuana, the irrational qualities of madness, or drunken behavior. Inebriation is not drunkenness so long as the person remains in control of himself or herself. It becomes drunkenness when control is lost. Much of the etiquette of beer parties signals, in my view, continued control and something of the Iteso view of human nature may be glimpsed in their attitude towards drunkenness. By glossing a variety of forms of behavior under the same term they indicate the high value they place on controlled behavior. I believe that the same attitude is expressed in their views of nature. They are not romantics. Their image of nature presents a picture of disorder, chaos, and disease. Nature is either to be avoided at all costs or to be turned into culture. Their ritual embodies the idea that the degeneration of culture into nature is a danger that is continually to be avoided (Karp and Karp, 1979).

The Iteso seek a middle ground between sobriety on the one hand and drunkenness on the other. An interesting contrast may be found with some Latin American patterns of drinking. In the Andes public drunkenness is a ritual obligation during feasts (Harris, 1978). For the valley Zapotec, Selby has described a strikingly different attitude towards extreme drunkenness. Becoming drunk in front of another person opens one to vulnerability and shows that a person is a man of "confidence," one who is both trusting and can be trusted, as opposed to a "political man," a person who places interests above people (1974:27). Here extremely drunken comportment is a form of social relationship, whereas among the Iteso it would prevent all such re-
relationships. Both the Zapotec and the Iteso assert that individuals can behave in a deviant manner when drunk, and Selby describes instances in which actions that are otherwise unacceptable are tolerated from drunks. We have observed similar situations among the Iteso, and think that drunken comportment may be used as an excuse for actions that would not be tolerated under other circumstances. The fact still remains, however, that the Zapotec regard drunken comportment as a means of establishing social relationships, and that the Iteso believe that it makes social relationships impossible.

The complex arrangement of social forms, music and dance, inebriation, the compression of social roles, the celebration of engrossment, the accomplishment of “much understanding,” that is found in the beer party indicates what Iteso desire to achieve in that context. Participation in these social forms may add up to an intensification of the experience of self and other in the absence of aspects of the mundane world that could interfere with such experience. This may be akin to what Turner has termed the experience of “communitas” in ritual (1969). A critical feature of this intensification of social experience is that it is esthetically motivated, by which I mean to indicate that its qualities are subject to judgment and comment, much as art forms are evaluated in terms of esthetic criteria. “Much understanding” and engrossment are two such criteria.

There are two conclusions that may be drawn from the positive side of the Iteso attitudes to the beer party. The first is related to the esthetic dimension of the beer party. The experience of beer drinking and the beer party can be an enhancement of the positive side of the experience of self, society, and other that is found in the mundane world of everyday activities. This enhancement is the result of the intensification of social experience that they seek in beer parties.

The second conclusion derives from the first. The intensification of social experience that is sought in the beer party requires that the space that normally separates the interior self and its exterior manifestation be closed. The distanced self, which observes and calculates from outside, is incompatible with inebriation and engrossment.

These observations are in accord with George Simmel’s perceptive essay on sociability (1974). Sociability, he tells us, is the “play form of sociation,” characterized in its relationship to the everyday world as art is to reality. This relationship is one of both the separation or detachment of sociability from mundane social forms and the transformation of seemingly unimportant or peripheral aspects of the mundane world into the very meaning of sociable situations. Unlike ordinary interaction, sociability exists in and for itself. It depends on the exclusion of interests, drives, and individualizing emotions that are characteristic of other forms of interaction. Simmel recognizes that this exclusion is difficult to sustain. It depends, he tells us, on such aspects of sociability as tact and good form. Ordinary social roles are emphasized to the point of caricature, as in the relationship of coquetry to erotic action, and this causes no embarrassment because it is recognized as play, and not as indicating serious intent.

Simmel emphasizes that the play element does not mean that all constraints on behavior fall away. Instead, the emphasis on “good form” requires that behavior be maintained within definite limits. Otherwise it would not be possible to sustain sociability as such.

... the instant the intentions and events of practical reality enter into the speech and behavior of sociability, it does become a lie—just as painting does when it attempts, panorama fashion, to be taken for reality. That which is right and proper within the self-contained life of sociability, concerned only with the immediate play of its forms, becomes a lie when this is mere pretense, which in reality is guided by purposes of quite another sort than the sociable or is used to conceal such purposes—and indeed sociability may easily get entangled with real life (1974:134, emphasis mine).

The Iteso data confirm Simmel’s brilliant insights. Sociability does, in the Iteso view, “easily get entangled with real life” in the beer party. The exclusion of the welter of identities, passions, and interests that is necessary to sustain the definition of the beer party as a context of pure sociability is not readily achieved. These difficulties are indicative of the darker side of Iteso forms of sociability, to which I turn in the next section.

The “Underlife” of the Beer Party

Violence and sorcery are a dimension of beer drinking that the observer discovers at the same time that he learns about the sociability of drinkers. Iteso believe that the beer party is a place where violence often happens and where sorcery is practiced. A common warning at the weekly chief’s meeting was given against drunkenness and fight-
ing at beer parties. Stories are told of obstreperous persons whose behavior becomes intolerable at parties. While I never saw a fight during the more than two years that I attended Iteso beer parties, Iteso assert that men become drunk and violent at beer parties and that women become drunk and sexually loose on the same occasions.

Many of the rules of etiquette given in the list on pages 98–99 are related to suspicions of sorcery. Beer straws may not be held with the hand around the top. Bubbles are not to be blown in the water. No one should sneeze when his straw is in the pot. All of these regulations are designed to ensure that a sorcerer does not put poison in the straw and blow it into the pot or let it be drawn out of the straw by the person with whom he is sharing.

I was unable to discover any evidence that poisoning was practiced at all and only minimal evidence for the practice of magical techniques. Nevertheless, I know of no Iteso who do not believe that sorcery is endemic among them and that most deaths are due to poisoning. This does not result from any failure of inductive reasoning on their part. They are presented with evidence that confirms the beliefs that they hold. They believe that a sure sign of poisoning, the primary weapon of the sorcerer, is swelling of the stomach. As chronic amoebic dysentery, along with other intestinal parasites, is common among Iteso, all Iteso experience the symptoms that they interpret as evidence of poisoning at some point in their lives, and in all likelihood, at several points in their lives. As they do not believe that poisoning is necessarily fatal, their medical histories provide them with continual personal confirmation of their beliefs in sorcery.

Some parts of the Iteso locations are associated with poisoners. I was once invited to drink beer in an area which is famous for its sorcery and where I was not well known. I was told not to drink from the mouth of the well in the marketplace because it was probably smeared with poison and that I should not take a blade of grass to chew on because the sorcerers often used this as means of poisoning victims. During the beer party I asked for permission to go outside. I gave my straw to the man next to me and left. I was followed by an old woman who accosted me. "You're very stupid," she said. I asked why. She replied that I should know that this place was full of sorcerers. Did I wish to be poisoned? I had given my straw to a complete stranger. I replied that I "knew" no one there. (I suggested by my choice of verb that I had no significant social relations with per-

sons in the area.) Why, I asked, would anyone want to kill me. "You're a European," came the reply. "Here, they would kill you out of curiosity!"

Although sorcerers are thought to kill because of jealousy or malice, they are also believed to kill for the indiscriminate pleasure of it. According to Iteso, killing becomes an addiction for them, and in beer parties, one is visibly reminded of the ever present Iteso fear of sorcery. It is customary for hosts to place the straw they give their guest into the beer pot and start the beer flowing. Keeping beer in the straw is a skill and it is not easy to get it started. It is also, however, a sign that the host is willing to drink his own beer and has not poisoned the pot. One of the reasons given for carrying a personal straw is the prevention of sorcery. Sometimes, a small pot will be placed beside the large one and a person will drink maize beer from it by himself. The explanation given for this special treatment is that that man has been poisoned and is unable to drink finger millet beer any longer. I am not sure why being poisoned prevents a person from enjoying finger millet beer.

In one beer party I attended, I was warned not to share straws with the members of the opposite branch of the lineage that was accompanying our group. When I asked why, I was told that they were notorious sorcerers and that as soon as the surviving senior member of the lineage had died it would surely split, as they did not care to risk their lives every time they attended lineage rituals.

When beliefs about sorcery are added to the earlier descriptions, the beer party begins to appear as a phenomenon about which the Iteso have ambivalent attitudes. It is not only a ceremony of human solidarity. It is also an event laden with risk. Iteso often find themselves drinking with persons they suspect of sorcery. The Iteso problem is that sorcery is, by definition, hidden. It is a form of covert conflict disguised under the outward sign of sociability (compare Lienhardt, 1951). The theme of the discovery of hidden intentions exposed during beer drinking comes up often in accounts of disputes. Many of the cases of conflict I collected contained an almost stereotypic scene in which a person discovers that a former friend or close kinsman has harbored antagonistic feelings toward him. As he passes by a house where the "friend" was drinking beer, the friend is heard to say that the person listening is "proud" or selfish. The man takes this to be a sign of jealousy on the part of the friend. Jealousy is an emo-
tion of the sorcerer and it is discovered, paradoxically, through the medium of the beer party, a context in which antagonistic emotions are supposed to play no part. Yet in this frequently related story beer drinking has brought secretly held feelings to overt expression. The sociability of the beer party leads to antagonism outside of it, and the separation of beer party from everyday life is negated.

Suspicions of sorcery are not only confirmed in the Iteso experience of their illnesses and their disputes. They are also, I suspect, confirmed in the Iteso experience of their own emotions. The emotion ascribed to sorcerers and enemies contains an element of projection. The beer party demands a highly predictable and formalized set of social relations among persons. These social relations express the theme of sociability. The sociable person engages in mutual commensality “happily” with other persons. I suggested earlier that the element of willingness in sociability indicates a congruence between the inner and the outer person; participation in the external social form is supposed to be a sign of an identical interior state.

Iteso, in common with other people, do not experience harmony between their interior states and the outward signs of these states. In addition to providing accounts of the strategic value of hiding their own feelings and intentions, they often interpret the actions of persons close to them as masking antagonistic feelings. This is a prevalent theme in their accounts of antagonisms within lineages, and is related to accusations of sorcery. An important locus of poisoning, they believe, is among lineage mates who compete for scarce resources. Here, as in other social spheres, the contradiction of outward sign and inward state is presented to them. Lineage members are among the persons with whom they must drink beer and display the forms of solidarity and sociability. Rituals necessary for the ongoing quality of life, such as mortuary rituals, are impossible to complete without the cooperation of agnates. There are many circumstances in which Iteso believe that the cooperation of their agnates is grudgingly given and dangerous in its consequences. The warning I received about sharing straws with the other members of a lineage who were attending one of the funeral beers is a case in point.

These hidden antagonisms do not result from the act of beer drinking or the beer party. They are brought to the beer party by the persons involved. The same “friend” who is heard to accuse someone of “pride” has been drinking with the person he has denigrated only shortly before. Thus, the Iteso experience of beer drinking has its ambivalent features. On the one hand, the formal definition of the situation reduces the social personalities of the actors to the basic components of the social order. The beer that is drunk is a material symbol of incorporation. The act of beer drinking, as well, may even negate the fundamental constituents out of which the social self is composed.

The ideology of beer drinking associates it with sociability and congeniality. It is the index of the valued social personality. Ultimately, Iteso hope that the beer party will show evidence of the self-involvement that is the indication of its success. On the other hand, beer drinking has an “underlife,” as Erving Goffman might call it (1961). Iteso are suspicious of the genuine quality of the required displays of sentiment and fearful of the consequences of taking the outward sign as true indicators of inward states. Beer drinking expresses both hopes and goals of Iteso relations among men and the fears they have of the consequences of taking men for what they seem to be.

This ambivalence may provide a clue to the fascination that beer drinking holds for the Iteso. In an important essay, Clifford Geertz has drawn the attention of anthropologists to social forms that are cultural obsessions for the people of the societies involved. He analyzes a Balinese cock fight as a form of “deep play” in which status competition among this intensely status conscious people is dramatized (1973). Geertz argues that the cock fight does not really effect any changes of status but that its hold over the Balinese is that the cock fight presents their experience to themselves. The affinities with my analysis of the Iteso beer party should be apparent. There exists an important difference, however. For Geertz “deep play” appears to arise naturally out of participation in social forms that appeal to the social experience of actors at a preconscious level. In the cock fight the primary factors affecting the degree of “deep play” are high stakes betting and high status competitors (441). The Iteso attitude is rather different. For them engrossment is a critical feature of the beer party, but it is not a preconscious experience; nor is it inevitable. Instead much of their action is directed towards achieving it and celebrating that achievement. The beer party is “a managed accomplishment” (Garfinkel, 1967) that is the primary goal of their interaction. In the beer party they recapitulate their experience of the social order of which they are a part. This recapitulation, like their experience, has both a private and a public aspect, which they must manage as well.
They present themselves with the dilemma of the discrepancy between what is displayed and what is felt, both by themselves and others. This is not a particularly Iteso problem. It is, as Geertz stresses, an existential dilemma; that is, a universal human problem cast in a culturally specific idiom (1973:383). The beer party is the Iteso means of imagining the antinomies of their experience of self, society, and other.

NOTES

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1. Some day an enterprising intellectual historian may write the history of anthropological analyses of cultural forms in African societies. If he or she does, then beer drinking may have its place alongside the more standard forms of exotica such as witchcraft and sorcery, spirit possession, and divine kingship. Three features of beer drinking studies might come to the attention of our intellectual historian. First, anthropologists have been concerned to assert that extensive African involvement in beer drinking activities is not pathological. (See especially the articles by Simmons, Sangree, and Netting.) This is a necessary first step in which an activity, such as beer drinking, is shown to differ from similar phenomena in Western societies. In this case beer drinking is distinguished from the seemingly similar forms of alcohol consumption in Western societies, which many scholars regard as an index of social pathology.

While scholarship has distinguished African beer drinking from its Western counterparts, this approach tells us little about the organization of the phenomena. The second feature of African beer drinking studies is that they reflect changes in anthropological fashion. There are, first of all, what might be called the functional studies. Both Walter Sangree (1962) and Robert Netting (1964) have shown that the public nature of beer drinking in two widely separated societies, the Tiriki of Kenya and the Koyar of Nigeria, is related to the absence of alcohol abuse. They also note that beer is a “locus of value” and that social relations in beer parties mirror the social structure of the two societies. As a result, they argue that beer drinking is a means of the control of juniors by elders. Other examples of anthropological fashion include an exchange analysis by H.K. Schneider that concludes that beer selling among the Wahi Wanyaturu is a “levelling mechanism” (1970) and a contradictory assertion by Richard Ott that beer selling in Lake Baringo District of Kenya is a means for the appropriation of surplus value by a class of wealthy peasants (1979). In the ecological vein, Netting notes that beer drinking is a mechanism for the achievement of balanced nutrition in the protein poor diet of the Koyar. More adequate descriptions of beer drinking patterns in various societies are needed to test the general validity of these various conclusions. Finally, T.O. Beidelman (1961) deals with beer drinking in the complexities of ethnic interaction.

The third and most intriguing feature of studies of beer drinking has been the suggestion that beer drinking occupies a prominent part of the topography of the consciousness of many African societies. I cannot prove this assertion without extensive data of the sort not often found in the ethnographic literature. I can tentatively conclude that this might be so from hints found in various sources. Three studies, in addition to those already mentioned, must suffice. In V.W. Turner's study of the Ndembu of Zambia, he describes their work parties as beginning with the display of the pot of beer to be consumed after the tasks have been finished (1957). The form of display may have more to do with the meaning of beer as a symbol than as a material reward, since the labor involved is probably worth far more than the beer consumed. In the absence of further evidence the symbolic gesture is interesting but inconclusive. Peter Rigby's fascinating study of cattle symbolism and sacrifice among the Gogo provides another clue (1971). In sacrificial ritual the Gogo may substitute beer for cattle as sacrificial objects. Symbolic equations are made among the means by which cattle share water, humans share beer, and humans and ancestors share cattle in sacrifice. Thus, beer sharing is, for the Gogo, an appropriate symbol for the creation of a ritual community.

The final example is to be found in Jack Stauder's study of the social organization of the Majangir, an Ethiopian people (1971). The Majangir describe the various levels of their social organization in terms of the goods shared by the members of the different local groups. Thus the neighborhood is described by the Manjangir as a group of people who share "the same coffee," the settlement as persons who share "the same fields," and the community as persons who share "the same beer."

In spite of the symbolic importance that beer drinking appears to have for many African peoples, the studies I have described treat beer drinking either in terms of its functions or as an aspect of some other phenomenon. It is a peculiarity of the anthropological lens that it often enlarges the peripheral features of a phenomenon while at the same time blurring the center. None the less, we may discover in these studies the suggestion that beer drinking is a form of mutual commensality, the sharing of food and drink.

2. See Karp, 1978a and b, for accounts of social organization and social change among the Iteso.
3. The Southern Iteso are predominantly Catholic in religious affiliation.
4. Note, however, the paper by Kopytoff in this volume in which he argues that exclusive concentration on the jural dimension has obscured the fact that not all rites de passage create or mark status changes.
5. If it is a married woman who has died, her husband's lineage is secluded in the home.
An optional ceremony may be added to stage four. The woman who is the mother of a married male who has died or the mother-in-law of a married female who has died invites her opposite number, the other mother-in-law, to her home to drink beer. The beer party for this occasion is called Ajono Nuk'egura. Egura is the backbone of a cow, the part given to mothers-in-law at funeral sacrifice. Beer for money is sometimes called "Beer of the hip" as a joke, after the manner of funeral beers.

I am grateful to John Okelele for pointing this type of beer party out to me. Okelele is a university graduate, and he informs me that one of his first papers for his sociology course was on Iteso beer drinking, which struck him as a remarkable feature of Iteso life as well. Unfortunately, I have not had the privilege of reading Okelele's paper. Incidentally, his name, Okelele, means "a circle of old men drinking beer in the evening." See Fortes, 1973, for similar conclusions about Tallensi names.

In Iteso naming rituals an opposition is drawn between mother's milk and beer on the one hand, and the privacy of the sleeping house and the openness of the courtyard on the other hand. This association is consistent with other rituals of the life course and is a variant of the inside-outside distinction fundamental to Iteso symbolism and social thought. One possibility suggested to me by Randall Packard is that beer may have a "cooling" effect in this naming ceremony. It certainly does in other contexts, and a closer examination of the beer-milk opposition may reveal indications of a fascinating parallel between the structure of Iteso symbolism in birth rituals and that discussed by Luc de Heusch in this volume for the Sotho-speaking peoples.

Iteso culinary symbolism is discussed in Karp and Karp, 1977. A more formal analysis of symbolism than I intend in this article would discuss beer in terms of the structure of Iteso symbolism. Thus I might relate the techniques of beer drinking (which combine all forms of Iteso cookery, rotting, boiling, and roasting) to the role of beer as a mediating symbol. See Lévi-Strauss, 1978, for a formal analysis related to culinary symbolism.

Women may also host parties. Except for Ajono Nuk'aelo (see the appendix) these are smaller affairs. They are brewers of beer rather than organizers of parties. Women can be hosts of beer parties. They often have ajono nuk'ekkita, "beer for work," for example. Even in those contexts they still assume the less prominent roles, and men still assume the coordinating roles in the party. We may say that it is women's labor that realizes the possibility of beer drinking through the brewing of beer. In contrast it is men's activities in the beer parties that allow the activity to come to a successful conclusion. It is interesting to note in this regard that it is believed that if women play the men's leisure game of elee (known as meato in Luganda) they will be unable to brew beer successfully.

In ordinary social contexts relatives who are members of adjacent generations practice a mild form of avoidance. In beer parties they may not dance at the same time except for women and their husbands' mothers. This exception appears to violate the rule prohibiting the mixing of adjacent generations. The exception is apparent rather than real. Iteso women call their husbands' mother tata, "grandmother," The relationship is placed into one of alternate generations rather than adjacent generations. The common status of the women as wives of male lineage members overrides the distinc-

### Appendix

A list of some occasions on which beer is required:

**Ajono Nuk'ennusigo—Beer of Work**
Beer given as a reward to friends and neighbors who have helped a man with a piece of work.

**Ajono Nuk'aelo—Beer of Friendship**
Beer shared by two husbands and wives who have become ritual friends.

**Ajono Nuk'apejo—Beer of the Visit**
Beer brewed for people who have come to visit.

**Ajono K'aber—Beer of Women**
Beer brewed by women (usually not neighbors) who are friends and who cooperate in work.

**Ajono Nuk'afikut—Beer of the Cows**
Beer brewed by the parents of a girl for the parents of a boy on the day that bridewealth is to be decided.

**Ajono Nuk'akiting—Beer of the Cow**
When a father has many cows, he will give one to his son after his marriage. The son then brews for his father and his father's brothers.

**Ajono Nuitolomarie—Beer of the Plow**
Beer brewed by a man upon the purchase of a plow.
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