

A. Kelk Mager, *Beer, Sociability, and Masculinity in South Africa*

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Beer, Sociability, and Masculinity in South Africa by Anne Kelk Mager focuses on the history of beer drinking in South Africa by African and white South Africans from the mid-twentieth century to the present. The introduction gives a detailed historical overview of the drinking of alcohol in South Africa – an activity that has been inextricably associated with the social, cultural, economic and political history of the region. Colonial perceptions of the role of alcohol with regards to individual populations were ambivalent at best – on the one hand control over alcohol distribution generated significant revenue for the colonial state yet there existed the strong belief that Africans were particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of alcohol consumption which presented problems for social control.

The foundation of alcohol consumption among African drinkers in the twentieth century was the so-called Durban system, developed in the early twentieth century, which was later adopted nationally by the apartheid state. The Durban system was a municipal monopoly over beer drinking and the revenues derived from these municipal beer halls

was used to administer Africans in the urban areas – Africans were thus paying for their segregation.

Mager however moves beyond this oft-discussed aspect of the history of beer drinking in South Africa, focusing instead on the making of masculinity and the way in which sport and liquor were linked. Related to this is the social aspect of alcohol consumption, evident in the shebeens for instance. The 1961 lifting of the prohibition of liquor allowed for the increasing consumption of “clear beer”. From the colonial era “clear beer” or malt beer was associated with “civilisation” and distinguished from sorghum or “kaffir beer”. As such the consumption of “clear beer” symbolised the adoption of a more urbane identity and was linked to black aspirations. Underpinning the history of beer drinking in South Africa from the mid-twentieth century was the role of South African Breweries (SAB). This company linked itself with, and helped to define, the masculine culture of beer drinking through its advertising and support of sporting events, particularly black soccer tournaments and rugby matches drawing on tropes of white settler masculinity.

The first chapter, “Illicit Drinking, Prohibition, and Sociability in Apartheid’s Townships”, focuses on the illegal trade in liquor in the urban areas of South Africa, evident from the 1920s. This illegal trade increased dramatically in the middle of the twentieth century, coinciding with the formation of South Africa Breweries which had a virtual monopoly in the existing beer market and a keen desire to gain access to the black market. These factors were to have a dramatic impact on the culture of black consumers of alcohol.

Mager recreates the world of the shebeens in the first half of the century. Under the control of the almost mythological figure of the shebeen queen – the epitome of the financially independent woman who nevertheless employed young women in order to attract male customers – shebeens formed the locale for social drinking. This however only applied to the more “respectable” establishment. In others, men simply drank to experience the mind-numbing effects of intoxication. The romanticised sociable version of shebeen culture was however still a strong one with the combination of music, dance and alcohol.

In 1961 with the formation of the Republic of South Africa and its subsequent withdrawal from the Commonwealth, South Africa became increasingly isolated. The market for alcohol was now confined to the local level. Within this context, the prohibition on black drinkers was lifted and they were now able to legally purchase liquor from municipal liquor traders in the townships. The year 1961 also marked the events of Sharpeville and the increased state repression that followed. Within the tense climate, the lifting of prohibition was portrayed as an example of state magnanimity, the state’s desire to capitalise on the lucrative black market for alcohol notwithstanding. State revenue derived from liquor taxation contributed to the development of the Bantustan system, an extension of the Durban system under apartheid.

The lifting of prohibition and the availability of legal sources of liquor did little to affect the trade of shebeens. There was however a tremendous increase in the consumption of “clear beer” bringing with it increased levels of intoxication and all the associated social ills. Traditional brewing declined as ready liquor supplies were available for purchase from the municipal bottle stores. This contributed to the increased number of drinking establishments headed by men, with shebeens no longer the sole preserve of

the shebeen queen. SAB was able to capitalise on this period of change and growth, illegally supplying black shebeens and white liquor traders. Here, Mager is able to skilfully interweave the political, social and economic aspects of beer drinking in the townships of South Africa.

The emphasis, however, is on the economic sphere in “If you Want to Run with the Big Dogs: Beer Wars, Competition, and Monopoly”. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s saw the National Party government treading a fine line between appeasing Afrikaner interests while supporting those of big business. Afrikaner nationalists opposed English domination over the beer industry, epitomised by the London-based SAB. The decade of the 1950s had seen SAB’s expansion towards a beer monopoly which had enjoyed no small support amongst National Party members, with South Africans forming the majority of the company’s shareholders. The 1970s however, saw the attempt to challenge the dominance of SAB in the form of Louis Luyt Breweries which went on to form a conglomerate with Anton Rupert’s Oude Meester brewery. Luyt and Rupert portrayed themselves as representing Afrikaner defiance of the English monopoly of SAB but internal conflict led to Luyt buying out Rupert and going on to form Intercontinental Breweries (ICB). ICB found it an uphill battle competing with the market dominance of SAB and was eventually incorporated into SAB, giving the latter a virtual monopoly over the beer industry. SAB extended this through the process of vertical integration, controlling and owning the outlets that were selling its products.

The third chapter, “Beer Advertising: Making Markets and Imagining Sociability in a Divided Society”, focuses on SAB’s brand advertising from the 1960s, culminating in the diasporic creation of nationalism and masculinity in the 1990s. From the outset in the 1960s, beer drinking was portrayed as a masculine enterprise drawing upon the tropes of sport, heritage and the golden glow of nostalgia in its creation of a mythic past. The social spaces included rugby and braais, silencing the reality of the segregation of these spaces, not just in terms of race but of gender as well. The spaces for women drinkers were those that were dependent on and under the control of men. Calvinist morality prevailed as women were showed imbibing in the social spaces of “the swimming pool and the patio” (p 51). Just as SAB’s advertising drew upon these stereotypical notions of settler masculinity, a similar ideology underpinned the interaction between drinking and black masculinity. In the shebeens beer was made available in quart bottles emphasising the social nature of drinking and drawing upon the stereotypical image of “the gourd passed around in the rural homestead” (p 52).

Yet SAB was able to stay abreast of change and, in some ways, prescient in its ability to detect. From the mid-1970s, a small fraction of the purchase price of Lion Lager was donated towards the purchase of schoolbooks in the townships, sending sales soaring. A decade later the myth of Charles Glass was used to incorporate English, Afrikaner and black beer drinkers within a male social world. Women, however, remained excluded – Lisa Glass, the actual brewer of beer, was relegated to a supporting role. As the decade drew to a close, Ohlsson’s Lager conceded changing black identities, emphasising a new generation of drinkers and black aspirations, “a black university student, a black musician, and a white youth” (p 57). Its success was however limited. In the post-1994 period of democracy, sport became a unifying factor along with its association with beer drinking. SAB advertisements took on a cast of inclusive nationalism. Mager argues however that although the character of advertising of SAB reflected changing times, it retained its core elements of nostalgia and masculinity.

The golden haze of nostalgia evident in SAB advertising campaigns did not adequately conceal the adverse effects of increased drinking which forms the subject of the subsequent chapter, “Tomorrow will Also be a Hard Day: Antisocial Drinking Cultures and Alcoholic Excess”. Mager demonstrates that from the colonial era until the twentieth century, notions of alcoholism were imbued with the dominant racial and political ideologies. The perception of black drinkers as being predisposed to drinking to excess and hence largely immune from alcoholism meant that little state resources were allocated to their rehabilitation from alcoholism. Two contradictory views of black alcoholism prevailed – the first was that it was a product of social conditions. The apartheid state however espoused the alternative view – black alcoholism was a product of their “deviant” tendencies and hence criminalised. The homelands reflected the adverse effects of increased drinking: here drinking lost its social character, the numbers of female drinkers expanded and alcoholism became more prevalent amongst the educated elites. In the urban areas, the growth of informal settlements and poverty contributed to an increase in alcoholism and with it, domestic violence against women and children. Little help was available for black alcoholics and associations such as SANCA and AA were limited in their ability to deal with growing black alcoholism.

The increase in drinking did not go unchallenged, particularly with the progressively more vigorous political activism of the 1970s, the subject of “Remaking the Old Order: Beer, Power, and Politics”. Generational conflict was evident as young black students, influenced by black consciousness, pointed out the negative effects of drinking alcohol and attacked shebeens. Older men were angered by their presumption and attempt to interfere. Shebeens too attempted to don the guise of respectability, forming associations in order to petition for liquor licences which the state, unwilling and reluctant, eventually granted. SAB too was not immune from the turmoil, facing waves of union action in the 1980s. In the sporting arena, the implementation of the sports boycott meant that SAB – with its emphasis on sport as being so integral to masculine identity – sponsored rebel tours to South Africa which ultimately ignominiously collapsed. They did however, continue their association with sport, sponsoring black soccer and emphasising the association with rugby, beer drinking and white masculinity, particularly amongst the students of UCT and Stellenbosch University with their strong rugby culture.

The period after 1994 forms the subject of the remaining chapters. Heritage became an increasingly important aspect of making and re-making South African identity and SAB positioned itself in a particular manner in this regard, distancing itself from its association with the Durban system. A visitors’ centre was built in Johannesburg and a national monument was created in Cape Town. Both emphasised the European tradition of beer drinking and brewing of which SAB was very much part. As Mager points out, the heritage of SAB evident here was “white, male, and entrepreneurial” (p 118). Shebeen tours offered an alternative heritage but here too heritage was packaged in a way that stressed the romanticised vision of social drinking in the twentieth century. These tours were successful in areas where there was little competition, allowing shebeen owners to prevent a “static” vision of beer drinking in South Africa.

“Global Competition, World Class Manufacturing, and National Economic Restructuring” addresses SAB’s position in the global marketplace where, in terms of labour relations, the onus has been on skills development, thus emphasising the aspirations of the individual whilst undermining collective action. In terms of black

economic empowerment, SAB had little success in raising blacks to senior positions but were more successful in the encouragement of small business entrepreneurs.

Mager concludes with SAB's increasing prominence in the global sphere, culminating in its purchase of the American Miller Brewing Company, which opened up new international markets for the conglomerate. While the newly formed SABMiller was not awarded sponsorship of the FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010, they nevertheless supported the South African national team, a pattern that can be traced throughout their long history.

Anne Kelk Mager's *Beer, Sociability, and Masculinity in South Africa* successfully addresses the complex economic, social and political aspects of beer drinking in South Africa, moving beyond the early decades of the twentieth century – on which exhaustive work has been done – to give a coherent demonstration of the way in which the social activity of drinking beer is a microcosm for the history of South Africa in the twentieth century. Her work marks a fascinating contribution to the study of masculinity and culture in South Africa in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries while creating an opening for a more in-depth analysis of the ways in which masculine identities intersected with or were shaped by cultural and leisure activities.

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