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ABSTRACT: The article focuses on the informalization of the African beer industry in Salisbury, Rhodesia, from the early 1960s to 1979. For a long time, scholars have associated the informalization of the African beer industry with the activities of small-scale operators (shebeen queens and kings). True, African small-scale operators dominated the African informal beer industry, as several scholars have shown. However, this focus on the activities of small-scale beer sellers overlooks the role played by large companies in the development of the informal beer sector. In Rhodesia, Heinrich’s Chibuku Breweries Limited played a critical role in the informalization of the African beer industry by, among other factors, disregarding aspects of the African Beer Act and taking advantage of the loopholes in the Act. Through these means, it was able to penetrate the Salisbury market, a monopoly area of the rival Liquor Undertaking Department of the Salisbury City Council.

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Introduction

The way we managed to break into the municipal area was by [illicitly] sending thousands of complimentary cartons to . . . Harare in the new convenient ‘shake-shake’ containers. This meant a loss of sales by Municipal Rufaro Brewery [and] eventually, they agreed to sell both Chibuku and Rufaro at the Municipal beerhalls.¹

In the epigraph above, W. Purcell, Heinrich’s Chibuku Breweries’ (HCB) public relations officer in charge of sales in the 1960s, explains how his company penetrated the Greater Salisbury (now Harare) market, then a legal monopoly of the Liquor Undertaking Department (LUD) of the Salisbury City Council (SCC) since 1911.² In that year the colonial state passed the Kaffir Beer Ordinance, a piece of legislation that gave municipal authorities a monopoly in the production and marketing of African beer in areas under their jurisdiction.³ At the heart of Purcell’s explanation is an important economic development that scholars who write on the business history or economic history of Zimbabwe have so far ignored, that is, how big businesses informalize some of their operations not only as a way of undercutting competitors, but, more importantly, as a way of breaking into new markets in which they are not allowed.

In explaining the expansion of big companies (including Multinational companies) during the post-Second World War, most scholars emphasize the conducive macro-economic environment that saw the expansion of the global economy, particularly in the 1950s, 1960s up to the mid-1970s.⁴ They emphasize in particular the expansion of economies of scale and of the middle class. Writing about New York’s informal economy, one scholar claimed that “[t]he historical forms assumed by the expansion [during the postwar period], notably capital intensity, standardization, and suburbanization, deterred the process of informalization.”⁵ Rarely do scholars link the post-Second World War growth of companies in Africa with informality. Many scholars believe, as Aili Mari Tripp does, that in most parts of Africa “informalization has been not a strategy of large capital but rather a response of workers and their household members to failing real wages as a result of general economic decline.”⁶ They narrowly associate informality with periods of economic distress when lack of opportunities in the formal sector force people to enter the informal sector. Since the post-Second World War period
witnessed remarkable economic growth and an expansion of the scales of production, few scholars associate it with informality.

For most scholars, therefore, the emergence and expansion of the informal sector stemmed largely from lack of opportunities in the formal economy. These scholars thus view informality as a copying mechanism adopted especially by marginalized groups. Scholars who write about the alcohol industry, for example, tend to attribute the origins and development of African-owned shebeens to poverty among urban residents. Explaining the origins and development of shebeens in South Africa, two prominent scholars note that “[i]n common with other informal earning pursuits the origins of the particular activity [shebeens] must be linked to a working through of proletarianization processes in South Africa. More specifically, the expansion of shebeening in urban township areas is inseparable from the emergence of a condition of black structural unemployment, especially among newly proletarianized Black women.” They additionally note that “[f]urther impetus to the growth of shebeens derives from the situation of poverty-in-employment experienced by Black households under the circumstances of South Africa’s labour-coercive economy.”

Another related strand of literature associates informality with post-colonial economic decline that many Sub-Saharan African countries experienced. Many of the scholars who subscribe to this view trace this decline to the 1970s world-wide economic crisis which, they contend, reduced opportunities in the formal sector. Others attribute the decline to what they believe to be misguided economic policies adopted by some African leaders after gaining independence. In general Africanists have been slow to appreciate the existence of the informal sector during the colonial period. Writing about small-scale mining activities in Tanzania, C. S. L. Chachage, for example, notes that “Informal” or “second economy” channels of accumulation and power are just “as much a product of the post-colonial state as they are purely state-based forms of accumulation.” What all this scholarship shares is not only a concern with small-scale operators, but also the tendency to associate informality with constrained economic opportunities. The focus on small scale operators, particularly as it regards the alcohol industry is justifiable, especially for the pre-Second World War period: they brewed and sold much of the alcohol retailed in the shebeens. More significant, however, the focus on shebeen queens and kings allowed scholars to capture African agency, one of the primary concerns of Africanists since the 1960s.

However, Africanists’ fixation on retrieving the agency of marginalized groups, the subalterns, has come at a cost, for they have largely overlooked
the role of big capital in the informalization process and in doing so they have reduced the concept of informality to copying mechanisms by small-scale operators in the face of adversity. Informative as the approach is, it tells an incomplete story of the informal sector, particularly of the alcohol industry. This is because whereas the bulk of the African beer that was consumed in Salisbury shebeens before the Second World War was homebrewed, and retailed by African beer entrepreneurs themselves, by the 1960s the situation had changed. Most shebeens now retailed beer produced by big breweries, including the LUD and HCB. And in Salisbury shebeens that served African beer, Chibuku was the most popular beer brand. Yet, it was a contraband product until September 1979. How then are we to explain HCB’s penetration and dominance of the informal African beer sector in Salisbury, a legal monopoly area of the SCC since the promulgation of the 1911 Kaffir Ordinance?

That HCB was able to break the monopoly of the SCC in the production and marketing of African beer primarily because the latter produced an inferior product is well known. Little known, however, is how the company broke this monopoly given the fact that it was a monopoly that was protected by an Act of Parliament. This article examines the strategies that HCB used to break this monopoly. It argues that HCB was able to penetrate the Salisbury market by informalizing some of its operations such that by the late 1960s its Chibuku brand was the most sought-after African beer, despite the fact that it was illegal to drink it in Salisbury. HCB’s informalization process involved, among other things, disregarding aspects of the African Beer Act and engaging in unconventional marketing strategies meant to influence the drinking taste of African imbibers in Salisbury—what scholars call guerrilla marketing. Unlike companies that most scholars have focused on that informalized some of their operations as a strategy of reducing production costs in difficult economic environments, HCB did not informalize some of its operations in an environment of economic distress. Like most countries, Rhodesia experienced rapid economic growth during the post-Second World War until the mid-1970s. HCB itself expanded exponentially in the 1960s and 1970s. For HCB, informalization was an industrial strategy meant not only to position itself to compete better with a rival entity that enjoyed legal monopoly in Salisbury, but also as a way of penetrating a new market it was not allowed to sell its products in. So, rather than using informality as a solution in times of crisis, HCB used it as a means of expanding its operations during good times.

To make this argument, the article relies heavily on close reading of SCC internal correspondences, reports and its correspondence with the central government. These records show that SCC officials closely
monitored HCB’s activities in and around Salisbury, for they believed that the company’s activities were hurting the profitability of the LUD. The SCC officials complained to the Central Government and to the British South Africa Police (BSAP) about the activities of HCB. Of course, the SCC officials who wrote these reports were not impartial observers of the scene. However, although some of the documents might have exaggerated the activities of HCB and were written with the intention of influencing the BSAP to commit more manpower to suppress shebeens that sold a competitor’s beer products, they shed some light on the activities of HCB. And in the absence of HCB records, we have to glean as much information from these records as we can. These SCC documents are corroborated by interviews with contemporaries. Taken together, these sources suggest that HCB played a critical role in the informalization of the African beer industry in the 1960s and 1970s. This is, however, not meant to downplay the initiatives of Africans. I deliberately chose to emphasize the role of HCB in the informalization process not to suggest that shebeen kings and queens played a lesser important role, but so that the salience of HCB in this process is more evident.

Historical Background

Since 1911, the SCC monopolized the production and marketing of African beer in Salisbury. By controlling the production and sale of alcohol in towns and cities, the colonial state hoped not only to control the leisure time of Africans and hence improve their productivity by minimizing labor indiscipline, which it associated with alcohol, but also wanted Africans to pay the cost of their stay in urban centers. The SCC used beer profits to build residential suburbs such as Mufakose, stadia, and playgrounds, among many other amenities. This system, which came to be adopted in the whole region in varying degrees, was first experimented with in Durban, South Africa, hence its name the “Durban System.” Initially the SCC chose not to manufacture its beer, but to lease out the brewing of beer it sold in its outlets to the South African Breweries. It was not until 1936 that the SCC took over the production of the beer it sold in its outlets. Thus, since 1936 the SCC had complete legal monopoly over the production and retailing of African beer in Salisbury. However, despite this, by the 1960s not only was Chibuku beer widely available in Salisbury’s townships; it was also more popular than the SCC’s own brands. As mentioned above, in explaining this situation scholars have emphasized the role played by shebeen queens and kings in challenging the Durban System and, by extension, in perpetuating the shebeen culture in Southern Africa.
Yet, in Rhodesia, as in South Africa, by the late 1960s, the bulk of the African beer served in shebeens was brewed by big commercial companies; the “seven days” (traditional) brew was disappearing as a commodity of lower-income house shebeens. The disappearance of the traditional brew from the scene is explainable by three developments. First, the police increased shebeen raids in the 1960s, as they suspected—rightly so—that money obtained by shebeen operators was “being made available for lawless[ness] and subversive purposes.”23 With increased police activity, shebeen queens shifted to other types of alcohol which took less time to brew and mature and thereby reducing the risk of being caught by the police. Second, the manufacturers of particularly European beer aggressively marketed their beer at a time the disposable income of many urban workers was increasing. These twin developments resulted in a remarkable taste-transfer at the expense of the traditional “seven days” brew.24 Furthermore, with increased urbanization, the firewood which was used in the brewing process became more and more difficult to get and hence became more expensive. These developments coincided with the coming of HCB on the scene. Given the popularity of Chibuku beer, shebeen queens found it more time effective and more profitable to trade in Chibuku products than in the “seven days” brew.

However, notwithstanding the twin developments explained above, scholars have not yet examined the role played by these companies in sustaining the shebeen sector. HCB’s role in the alcohol informal sector remains underappreciated. To be sure, Rogerson and Tucker discuss the expansion of HCB in the region. They make passing reference to how the company was able to penetrate the Salisbury market.25 As geographers, they understandably emphasized the location policy of the company—that the company was able to undermine municipal producers, including the LUD, by setting up its breweries near the boundaries of the municipalities. However, an approach that focuses on policy alone cannot fully explain what the company did on the ground to challenge the monopoly of the SCC. Put differently, the approach does not adequately capture the institutional agency of HCB. By conceptualizing HCB’s activities in and around Salisbury as part of the company’s informalization of some of its operations, we can go beyond policy in explaining HCB’s expansion and its penetration of the Salisbury African beer market.

**HCB’s Informal Activities**

Before discussing how HCB was able to penetrate the Salisbury market, it is necessary to explain first how the company came into the colony. Marx Heinrich, then a South African based industrialist, founded Heinrich's
Syndicate Limited in Northern Rhodesia in 1955. According to H. Blair, the name Chibuku that Heinrich’s Syndicate was soon to assume was derived from “the book—‘Chibuku.’” This was a brewery recipe book used in Zambia into which details of customers’ responses to the brew were entered after each delivery. The workers then referred the book as an e-book-u, the root of the celebrated name Chibuku.26

From its first stronghold in Zambia, HCB then spread into neighboring countries, first into Nyasaland in 1960. However, the Nyasaland venture was short-lived, for soon after the country gained its independence, the government summarily withdrew the HCB license and closed its brewery.27 It was in Southern Rhodesia that Heinrich’s syndicate registered remarkable success. The syndicate was given permission to operate in the country in 1961 amidst strong opposition from four municipal authorities, namely Bulawayo, Gwelo, Salisbury, and Umtali. Until 1961, the colonial authorities had not allowed private players in the manufacture of opaque beer. In the same year, HCB secured a contract to supply Chibuku beer to the Municipality of Fort Victoria. The Mayor of Fort Victoria opined that the major advantage of contracting to private enterprise was that “the risk of sour beer is reduced to a minimum and, in fact, if the beer is not to the palate of the consumer, the suppliers undertake to replenish the stock with palatable beer.”28

In the process of its expansion, HCB eclipsed the activities of African brewers in small urban centers such as Umtali, Chipinga, and Gwelo. The company was determined to capture the biggest urban market in the country, Salisbury. But there was a hurdle: it did not have a license to sell African beer in Salisbury. Nor was the consumption of Chibuku beer in Salisbury legal. Yet by the late 1960s HCB’s Chibuku beer was not only the most popular African beer brand but was also widely available in Salisbury’s African townships.29

HCB captured a significant share of the Salisbury market using unconventional means beginning in the 1960s. As a first step to penetrate the Salisbury market, it set up breweries strategically to undermine the continuing viability of the LUD. It established its breweries in Seke, Chitungwiza, just outside the municipal boundaries, thus providing a convenient base to smuggle opaque beer to the nearby African townships.30 To facilitate the smuggling of its beer into Greater Salisbury, HCB introduced cartons (popularly known as “Shake-shake” by Africans) that not only made it easier for its drivers to sell beer to anyone while en route to permit holders, (what SCC officials referred to as “roadside selling”) but also made it easier for customers (particularly shebeen owners) to transport the beer. W. Purcell, who joined HCB in 1962 as a public relations officer in charge of sales, explained how the company managed to penetrate the Salisbury market:
The way we managed to break into the municipal area was by [illicitly] sending thousands of complimentary cartons to . . . Harare in the new convenient ‘shake-shake’ containers. This meant a loss of sales by Municipal Rufaro Brewery [and] eventually, they agreed to sell both Chibuku and Rufaro at the Municipal beerhalls.31

A parallel situation developed in South Africa in the 1970s when the South African Breweries (SAB) “began to service . . . illegal retailers [shebeens], unlawfully bypassing the government monopoly.”32 That the SAB and HCB adopted similar strategies in challenging the “Durban System” in South Africa and Rhodesia respectively should not be surprising: HCB was by now a subsidiary of the SAB.

From 1969, the SCC’s African beer sales started to decline, a decline that gained pace in the 1970s. Its packaged beer sales, for example, declined from 10,906,200 liters to 48,500 between 1970/71 and 1976/77.33 Despite the fact that Salisbury’s population was increasing the SCC’s beer profits declined successively from a peak of $ 2.1 million during the 1974–1975 financial year to just below $ 1 million in 1979.34 This decline was, however, not solely a result of the activities of HCB. It was also a result of a significant shift in the drinking patterns and habits of especially members of the African middle class, as a number of them shifted from drinking African/opaque beer to drinking European beer as their disposable income increased during the post-war boom.35 Still, the SCC lost a significant share of its African beer market to HCB. At the end of the 1978–1979 financial year, the Mayor Councillor A. J. W. Wilkins attributed the LUD’s decline in profitability partly to “continued high level of illegal trafficking in a competitive product [Chibuku beer].”36 The SCC eventually agreed to sell its brewery to HCB in 1979 but retained its outlets “as a means of managing an aggressive competitor it could not compete with,” among other factors.37

HCB managed to smuggle its products into Salisbury, working in conjunction with bottle store owners and shebeen operators. Some African business persons with licenses to operate bottle stores in rural areas bought Chibuku beer from HCB in Seke and sold it to shebeens and sometimes operated shebeens themselves. Joyce Hanyani was one case in point. Hanyani owned a bottle store at Zairimwe Township, Wedza, about 120 km south-east of Salisbury. As a bottle store owner in a rural area, she used her license to get different types of beer, including Chibuku, in her two shebeens in Egypt and Jerusalem, Highfield. Matute who owned two bottle stores, one in Harari Township (now Mbare) and another one in Mabvuku, also supplied shebeens in African Townships. The owner of Chiratu Bottle Store at Nzvimbo, Chiweshe also supplied shebeens in Harari Township.38 Some shebeen operators
bought and transported Chibuku beer from beerhalls just outside Salisbury. The LUD officials noticed this development. A year after HCB had established its brewery in Seke rural, Ellert noted that:

A large scale “importation” of Chibuku draught African beer from the Seki Rural Council Beer Hall is taking place, and this beer is finding its way into Salisbury Municipality’s African townships for re-sale at shebeens, in contravention of section 15 of the African Beer Act (cap 93).³⁹

Seke Rural Council Bar was one source of Chibuku beer smuggled into Harare. Chibuku beer was also smuggled from bars in Marirangwe, Goromonzi, and farms just outside Salisbury.

In the 1960s, HCB invented a new product, beer powder/ instant beer (malt mixed with yeast, which became potable by just adding water), which made it easier for the company to circumvent the monopoly clause of the African Beer Act and penetrate the Salisbury market. Before 1970 the powder was classified as malted grain, a cereal and as such under the African Beer Act, it was not an offense for the company to sell the powder to anyone, nor was it an offence to be found in possession of it.⁴⁰ HCB freely sold this product to shebeen operators who would turn it into potable beer. Even after a magistrate had ruled in 1970 that the powder was in fact beer, and not a cereal, as HCB argued, the powder continued to be found on the black market. Packaged into 15 kg bags that made up to 100 liters of drinkable beer,⁴¹ it matured within 24 hours and would keep for 100 hours. This innovative product had obvious advantages to both the company and the shebeen operators. HCB benefited from reduced deliveries and, therefore, the distance traveled by its vehicles. More significant, the invention allowed the company to sell its product in a market it was prohibited to do so by exploiting a loophole in the African Beer Act. HCB and shebeen operators were able to undermine the SCC because beer brewed from the powder was comparatively cheaper and yet there was “virtually no difference between Chibuku beer produced by Heinrich’s Breweries and the beer . . . produced by individuals [from the powder].”⁴² For shebeen operators, the powder had an added advantage in that it matured within 24 hours and therefore reduced the chances of being caught. “The company’s activities,” the Director of African Administration noted in July 1961, “resulted in a considerable drop in the Council’s production, and an increase in beer brewing.”⁴³

The bulk of the Chibuku beer smuggled into Salisbury ended up in shebeens catering for persons of a lower income. These existed in many forms. Some were held indoors under the guise of tea parties, while others were held in the bushes to avoid arrest by colonial authorities.⁴⁴ They shared one thing: they sold mostly opaque beer; and Chibuku was the most popular
beer in these shebeens. LUD officials knew this. On 6 June 1977, a Rufaro Consumer Panel held a meeting to discuss, among other issues, “why Rufaro is not popular . . . in African Townships, as it appears that the opposition [read Heinrich’s Chibuku] are taking a lot of our trade.”

Africans in Salisbury preferred Chibuku to Rufaro brew because they believed that HCB-produced beer was of better quality than Rufaro-produced beer. Time and again, Africans also complained about the LUD-produced beer’s lack of “a terrific kick” found in Chibuku and the beer’s poor taste. In 1977, a Mr. Nkomo, a member of the Rufaro Consumer Interest Panel, noted that Rufaro beer was often “watery . . . and not worth the money.” In addition, as Stanley Maruta, a bar cashier in the 1970s, explained, “Council-produced beer caused hangover. Chibuku caused no such side-effect.” Not only was Rufaro beer less popular as compared to Chibuku, but it was also less popular to African home-brewed beer.

Chibuku beer was also popular in Salisbury in part because some Africans had already grown accustomed to it in their rural areas before moving into Salisbury where it was prohibited. When Katsande, a member of the Rufaro Interest Panel, told fellow panel members in 1979 that “one of the reasons for this [Africans’ preference of Chibuku to Rufaro beer] was a large number of people coming into Salisbury from the outside had been used to drinking Chibuku beer,” he was describing a process that had started in the 1960s. The process accelerated in the late 1970s when Salisbury experienced an influx of refugees, running away from the effects of the liberation struggle in rural areas.

While the distinction between rural and urban areas makes the discussion clearer, it obscures the fact that many of the male migrants, especially those in blue collar occupations, oscillated between their rural homes and work centers. Many trooped back to their rural homes on weekends, especially those whose rural homes were in the environs of Salisbury, and during the rainy reason. In rural areas where HCB had a presence, including in areas surrounding Salisbury, many Africans drank Chibuku beer unencumbered by laws and regulations that prevented Africans in Salisbury from drinking it legally. HCB took advantage of this untapped transient market that was already familiar with its product. Writing about town-country interactions Eric Makombe notes that “urban markets created some continuity in as far as the dietary intake of most of the African urbanites by supplying the very commodities that they had been used to consuming in the rural area.” In the 1960s and 1970s Chibuku beer was one such commodity that transcended the rural-urban divide.

By sending its beer into Salisbury through a network of its drivers working in conjunction with shebeen owners and license holders, HCB played
an important role in shaping the drinking taste of urban drinkers. Yes, shebeens played an important role in shaping the drinking taste of Africans, as Rogerson suggests in the case of South Africa, for it was in shebeens that some drinkers first tasted Chibuku beer. But by the late 1960s house shebeens were by and large purveyors of commercially brewed beer. It was HCB, not shebeen operators, which played a key role in shaping the drinking taste of Africans as far as African beer was concerned: HCB not only timeously responded to the needs and suggestions of their customers, but also successfully marketed its products (formally and informally) among the African populations. By the early 1970s, HCB had successfully created a perception, real or imagined, that its alcoholic beverages were of better quality than the LUD’s.

HCB also used guerrilla marketing strategies to penetrate the Salisbury market. One of these strategies involved “leaving unattended trailers which clearly indicated the contents to be Chibuku beer, on road verges within the borders of the Municipality and also in close proximity to the Municipal borders,” thereby creating among the African residents of Salisbury a demand for a product that they could only get illicitly. This kind of advertisement was effective in part because it aroused curiosity in Africans for, as one veteran of the industry Caleb Mutsai put it, “prohibition breeds curiosity.” He explained: “If you prohibit something, people would say ‘why is this being prohibited?’ They would want to know why it is being prohibited. That is in part what happened with Chibuku beer. So, the brand became popular.” HCB did not just leave its trailers unattended; its drivers sold beer from these trailers. It was against this backdrop that the SCC officials complained to the central government about HCB’s practice of “roadside marketing” and selling from the vehicle, as explained in detail below.

Furthermore, because of the massive smuggling of HCB’s “shake-shake” cartons into Salisbury, empty cartons not properly disposed became a common sight in areas near shebeens, especially near “speed bars.” Ironically, the presence of these empty cartons in an area “advertised” the availability of Chibuku beer—the very brand the SCC officials were keen on keeping off the drinking spots of Salisbury. It was against this backdrop that in 1978 the SCC proposed “to amend the law to force Brewers to pay a ‘surcharge’ to any local authority in respect of branded beer consumed in, or litter deposited in an area other than the area in which the beer is legally entitled to be sold.” This surcharge, the SCC proposed, could be determined from the cartons certified as having been collected in the area, duly surrendered to the manufacturer, as well as from the police and court records of confiscations duly destroyed. In the view of the council, the amendment was supposed to “assist in ensuring orderly marketing by the brewers by
providing a deterrent to ‘overpromotion,’ recompense local authorities for some of their profit shortfall due to illegal tracking . . . and to overcome the litter problem,” among other functions. In the end this proposed amendment was not included in the amended 1978 African Beer Act.

To prevent HCB from selling to unlicensed buyers, the SCC also sponsored legislation to curb what it viewed as disorderly marketing of African beer in Salisbury. In particular, it was determined to stop the “practice of ‘roadside’ selling as well as selling from the vehicle at the purchaser’s premises.” According to T. B. C. Harding, then the General Manager of Rufaro Brewery, the legislative revisions that the SCC suggested were meant to “ensure . . . orderly marketing by the brewers” and to stop HCB’s “over-promotion” of its products. The SCC suggested the addition of new subsections to the Act “to ensure that no sales of such beer or powder are effected directly from the holder’s vehicle, either by the holder or by the purchaser at any point to the purchaser, including at the point of delivery.” Two of the suggested subsections read:

(iv) shall not, at the request nor with the permission of any person authorized to sell or supply African beer, sell or supply beer powder to any person who is not the holder of a permit issued in terms of the African Beer Act.

(v) shall not sell or supply beer or beer powder to any permit holder in excess of the quantity laid down in the permit.

The above proposed amendments were intended to prevent sales to persons who were not permit holders. As T. B. C. Harding put it, the proposed amendments arose “from long standing problems faced by the Salisbury City Council in respect of the illegal trafficking in Chibuku beer in the area of jurisdiction of the City Council.” Unfortunately for the SCC, the amendments were received too late to be incorporated in the 1978 Act.

The under-the-radar marketing strategies adopted by HCB to penetrate the Salisbury market seem to fall under the general category of ambient marketing, “the placement of advertising in unusual and unexpected places (location) often with unconventional methods (execution).” This strategy “build[s] on a diffusion effect which is realized in an interpersonal or medial way.” Indeed, at least from the early 1970s, despite the fact that drinking Chibuku beer was illegal in Salisbury, knowledge of Chibuku beer spread by word of mouth. One African businessman who owned a bottle store and supermarket in Highfield, M. G. Machipisa, observed this and wrote: “I am of a feeling that Chibuku is doing us a great harm. Why I say this is because I have come across a good number of customers in our outlets during my normal calls who are even recommending Chibuku beer to be better than our
Rufaro beer in the way of strength.”71 Thus by the late 1960s some urban beer drinkers had become HCB’s unpaid advertisers who informally recommended fellow imbibers to drink Chibuku beer instead of Rufaro beer. Little wonder that by the late 1960s Chibuku beer had become the most popular African beer in Salisbury, even though its possession, let alone drinking it, was illegal.

Conclusion

HCB played a crucial role in the informalization of the African beer industry in Salisbury in the 1960s and 1970s. Previously, scholars emphasized the agency of Africans, be it shebeen queens and kings or patrons, in explaining the origins and development of the shebeen sector. They were right in emphasizing the initiatives of Africans—the subaltern group in the alcohol industry. The approach revealed Africans’ tremendous ingenuity in carving niches for themselves in shebeens, and in organizing against the colonial system in shebeens. Yet by focusing almost exclusively on African initiatives, scholars seem to have ignored important advice by critics of the subaltern theory not “to situate the subalterns outside of the larger hegemonic processes.”72 True, some shebeen entrepreneurs amassed considerable wealth from selling beer illegally, but it was not a case of independent development.73 Emphasis on African agency hides the dependency nature of the relationship that existed between shebeen operators and big brewery companies. Unlike during the pre-Second World War period when the majority of shebeen operators brewed and retailed their beer, by the 1960s the majority of the shebeens retailed beer bought from big breweries, such as Heinrich’s Chibuku Breweries and the LUD of the SCC. That said, without the aid of shebeen operators HCB would not have penetrated the Salisbury market at the time it did.

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Notes

1. File in Delta Archives, Harare, file titled Major W. Purcell’s Notes [no file number and date].
2. Harare should not be confused with Harari, the colonial name of Mbare, a suburb in Harare. During the colonial period Harare was called Salisbury.
3. The 1911 Kaffir Beer Ordinance morphed into the Kaffir Beer Act in 1936, following recommendations of the 1930 Native Affairs Commission. In 1953 the Kaffir Beer Act became the African Beer Act. For details of these changes, see, Nhamo


6. Aili Mari Tripp, Changing the Rules: The Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 22; F. Cooper echoes a similar impression. He defines the informal sector as “a domain outside state regulation, a world of small and often transitory workshops, of traders working in the streets, of illegal activities,” Frederick Cooper, Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 123.


15. Chimhete and Makombe, Accepting the Inevitable, 284.
16. In 1970, there were four organizations in Salisbury that had licenses to buy Chibuku beer for their personnel. These were Army Headquarters at Cranborne, King George VI Barracks, Rhodesia Leaf Tobacco Company and Albatros Fisons Fertilisers Limited. O. F. N Ellert to Town Clerk, 20 August 1970, City Marketing (hereafter CM): Almaks Instant Beer: 1:11.


18. For this kind of discussion read works such as Lauren A. Benton, “Informal Subcontracting and the Informal Sector: The Politics of Restructuring in the Madrid Electronics Industry,” in The Informal Economy, 228–244.


20. HCB denied me access to their documents.


24. For details about the taste-transfer in the alcohol industry, see Chimhete and Makombe, “Accepting the Inevitable,”; and for details about increased advertisement in the industry, see, Chimhete, “The African Alcohol Industry,” 59–65.


31. File in Delta Archives, file titled Major W. Purcell’s Notes [no file number and date].


34. “Chibuku beer available in municipal area in July,” The Herald, Friday, 6 April 1979.


37. For details about this, see Chimhete and Makombe, “Accepting the Inevitable,” 305.

38. Interview with C. Mutsai, Mbare, Harare, 10 July 2003.


46. LUD, Manger to the Director of African Administration, 10 January 1966, CM: Illegal Brewing Activities: 0: 7.


48. Interview with Stanley Maruta, Glenview 8, Harare, 26 August 2018.


53. Interview with Caleb K. Mutsai, Chisipiti, Harare, 19 October 2020; Interview with Stanley Maruta, Glenview 8, Harare, 26 August 2018.
54. For details about this, see Chimhete and Makombe, “Accepting the Inevitable,” 271–309.
56. Interview with Caleb K. Mutsai, Chisipiti, Harare, 19 October 2020.
57. Interview with Caleb K. Mutsai, Chisipiti, Harare, 19 October 2020.
60. “Speed bars” were shebeens which were held in the bush. They were so-called because anyone who attended them had to be prepared to run away from the police at great speed in the event of the shebeen being raided. For details about these kinds of shebeens, see Chimhete, “The African Alcohol Industry,” 48–58.