

Poverty and Wealth in Traditional African Societies: Considerations Regarding Wealth, Well-Being, and Nutrition in the Ganda and Nyoro Societies, c 1800 to 1875

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INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem

The question of nutrition and nutritional status has not, with the exceptions of famines (see Shipton 1990: 353-394), been adequately dealt with for the period of pre-colonial Africa. The issues of malnutrition and everyday suffering are difficult to detect, for they are less visible and less dramatic than the larger subsistence crises, such as famines. The scanty source materials available for researchers rarely speak about these issues, and in order to find out something about the biological well-being of pre-colonial Africans one must be ready to read between the lines, and to apply the results from other branches of research instead of strictly limiting oneself to the historical source materials and familiar historical methods. The first serious attempt to deal with the issues of wealth and well-being in pre-colonial Africa was Helge Kjekshus's famous *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History* (1977). Kjekshus argued that due to the increased contacts with the outside world in the late 19th century the Tanganyikan peoples were exposed to severe food shortages and famines. Using photographic evidence to enhance his point, Kjekshus shows how kwashiorkor was prominent in the 1890s and even before, claiming that the earliest European travellers in Tanganyika, and in Africa in general, may have misunderstood the signs of famine and malnutrition (Kjekshus 1977: 138). Juhani Koponen (1988: 153) mentions in his work how Richard Burton suspected non-venereal syphilis was common in Tanganyika in the 1850s, and that many people suffered from ulcers, skin diseases, tumours and desquamations. Today, it is known that congenital syphilis was usually confused with the symptoms of protein deficiency by the early European travellers, missionaries, and medical professionals, and that only in the 1930s did kwashiorkor begin to be recognized as a common, independent disease (Iliffe 1998: 86; Worboys 1988: 208). However, the injuries and symptoms described by the early

travellers are those generally present in cases of kwashiorkor and marasmus; alterations in skin and hair pigmentation, oedema, fatty infiltration, swollen tissues, dermatoses, combined with heavy mortality if the disease is not properly treated (Brock and Autret 1952: 11). The photographic evidence provided by Kjekshus, presenting five boys with swollen stomachs approximately aged between three and ten years, clearly shows the vulnerability of the children in the cases of food shortages and famines.¹

Many modern African historical studies mention the issue of malnutrition, but usually do not penetrate to the core of the problem. Authors who have recently dealt with the nutritional questions in pre-colonial Africa include Curtin (1982: 371-382), Eltis (1982: 452-475), Webster (1986: 447-463), Brabin (1984: 31-45), Chrétien (1988: 92-115), and Rijpma (1994: 54-63). Curtin and Eltis trace the nutritional situation in Africa before the 19th century, but their articles are more general in nature, and do not specifically deal with the issue of malnutrition. Rijpma's article deals primarily with the pre-colonial period claiming that malnutrition on a large scale was introduced in Africa at the onset of colonialism. Webster and Chrétien also deal with the pre-colonial times, although their major concern is the colonial period and, in the case of Chrétien, also the historical roots and cultural factors related to dietary practises in Africa. Brabin presents an interesting view about polygyny and nutritional stress, mainly focussing on the pre-colonial African societies.

When speaking of malnutrition, or more specifically under nutrition,² we are dealing with an extreme form of poverty. John Iliffe (1987), in his study concerned with poverty in Africa, makes a difference between relative poverty and absolute poverty, i.e., between the poor and the really poor people. In every society there are poor people in relation to the material well-being of the society in question. According to Iliffe's definition, the poor people are those who constantly have to struggle against physical want, while the very poor people are those who have, for some reason, failed in their struggle and experience either chronic or acute physical want (Iliffe 1987: 2).³ Iliffe further divides poverty into the structural and

¹ Kwashiorkor commonly occurs in children over one year of age, while marasmus occurs in children under one year, both contributing to the high rate of infant mortality. See Suskind (1977: 3-6).

² According to Harrison (1987: 21): "...malnutrition is the most acute physical expression of absolute poverty: it is poverty imprinted on human flesh and bone."

The difference between malnutrition and under nutrition may be described as follows: "Malnutrition... is a broader term defined as 'pathological state', general or specific, resulting from a relative or absolute deficiency or an excess in diet of one or more essential nutrients. Under nutrition is primarily due to inadequate intake of calories whereas malnutrition is caused by inadequacy of particular, or several, essential nutrients, thus a person who is undernourished is also malnourished, though the converse may not hold (Kakwani, 1986: 1)."

In this paper, malnutrition and under nutrition are used as synonyms.

³ The physical or biological want means that the individual is no longer able to satisfy his or hers basic biological needs, i.e., to satisfy his nutritional needs essential for the maintenance of

conjunctural. Structural poverty means a long term poverty due to the personal or social conditions and circumstances, while conjunctural poverty is usually a temporary stress situation faced by normally self-sufficient individuals and societies. Structural poverty appears in resource-ample and resource-scarce societies; in a resource-ample society it is caused usually by the inability to exploit the labour resources even though such a commodity as land would be abundant. In resource-scarce societies, there is usually a large, unemployed labour reserve but a shortage of land. Iliffe says that the transition from land-rich poverty to land-scarce poverty has taken place all around the world, due to population growth, and that the same process is going on in Africa in the 20th century. Iliffe argues that the structural poverty in Africa before the 20th century was mainly land-rich in nature, meaning that the poor people were those who lacked access to surplus labour and who were thus unable to exploit the resource base. He continues by saying that structural, land-scarce poverty has only recently entered Africa dismissing the idea of African rules controlling the use of vital resources such as land, thus causing structural, land-scarce poverty (Iliffe 1987: 4-6).

It is the purpose of this paper to briefly describe the distribution of wealth and well-being in the late 19th century in two neighbouring interlacustrine kingdoms, Buganda and Bunyoro-Kitara.

Well-being refers to material as well as physical, or biological, well-being, which refers to an individual's nutritional and health status. It is assumed that the accumulation and distribution of wealth depended on the shifts in political and military power on intra- and inter-societal levels, and that these shifts had considerable consequences for the accumulation of wealth and the distribution of material and biological well-being between and inside the societies in question. Thus, this paper is also about poverty, whether structural or conjunctural, or relative or absolute. It is an attempt to reconstruct a small part of the African historical reality from the basis of information provided by modern research and some of the early authors, and to decide whether the picture thus obtained could be accurate on the basis of our modern knowledge about nutritional questions and the African past.

B. The Sources

The sources consist of the narratives of early European travellers and of modern research. The former is used to describe the conditions in the kingdoms from the 1860s onwards, while testimonies concerning earlier times is obtained by using available modern research on the subject. The amount and nature of narrative sources available vary according to the time and the place. There is more evidence available concerning the 19th century Tanganyika compared to the Great Lakes region, or other areas in the interior, because the caravan routes between the interior

basic metabolism, immunocompetence, and physical activity.

and the Swahili trading posts on the coast of Indian Ocean were frequently used by European explorers and missionaries from the middle of the century onwards (see Bennet 1974: 210-228). The narrative sources in European languages appear after the 1850s in greater volume, but the first half of the century, as well as the earlier history in general in the Great Lakes region, is constructed on the basis of archeology, anthropology, and oral tradition. It must be emphasized, however, that these reconstructions are not flawless, and many aspects remain in dispute.

The travel accounts of the early European travellers provide an interesting but a very problematic source material. The explorers and travellers presented in this article form a heterogenous group of men; their social backgrounds varied from middle-class to aristocrat, and their motives were a combination of scientific curiosity and sheer egoism and self-interest. Though their motives and social backgrounds might have been different from each other, they had many things in common. None of the authors mentioned in the following pages had a scientific education. Speke and Grant were former soldiers, Baker was a rich aristocrat engaged in hunting and adventure, and Stanley was an ambitious journalist. Judging from their backgrounds they were men whose former occupations required courage, strength, and enthusiasm, and in this way they were quite suitable for their ambitious undertakings in Africa. Naturally, their descriptions of Africa were affected by their personal motives. Speke, being determined to verify Lake Victoria as the source of the Nile, was primarily interested in the lands by the lake shores, mainly Buganda. Grant, who accompanied Speke, had more time to concentrate on the description of the ordinary life of the Africans, since his companion did much of the geographical work needed. Stanley, on the other hand, wanted to his travel accounts to bring him economic benefit and personal prestige, and he used the opportunity to make his description as vivid and fascinating as possible to make it interesting for the readers. Others too were concerned about their personal prestige, and they might have edited their original notes in a more reader-friendly direction. This is possible, for all the authors completed their travel accounts on the basis of their diaries which they kept throughout their journeys. In this sense, the travel accounts are all secondary sources, whose testimony has been modified by the very actors themselves. This is a serious flaw in the writings of the early travellers, and, in the absence of the original manuscripts, we must be careful readers; the manipulation of the texts to attract more readers may have distorted the picture they give of African reality. Another fact that might have distorted the picture was the physical and mental condition of the explorers. During their journeys in Africa all the authors presented here were occasionally ill. This fact must have affected their judgement; when you are hungry, in fever, wet without spare clothes, and afflicted by the mosquitoes, your primary concern is your own poor condition, and not the objective description of the people and their manners, which, through the veil of obscurity and frustration, begin to appear strange and annoying (see Rotberg 1970: 1-11 *passim*).

In addition to the physical and mental stress experienced by the travellers, their judgement was also affected by the prevailing ideas and ideologies of the western world. All the travellers represented the values and ideas of their own culture and time. In Victorian Great Britain, or in the United States, the social Darwinist ideas were popular not only among the leading politicians, thinkers and scientists, but among the upper and middle classes as a whole. Thus, our explorers' world views were affected by the ideas of superiority of the European culture and the white race. This racism occasionally manifested in bitter comments about the Africans; their intelligence, their manners and customs, and their physical appearance. Although many of the notions concerning Africans were more or less neutral, in this sense the racial prejudices are evident in the writings of all our early authors. It must be also remembered, that these people were writing to an audience with certain expectations. The reading British upper and middle classes were also preoccupied by social Darwinist ideology, and they liked to read about exotic, savage cultures which were seen to represent the earlier stages of the evolution and development of human societies. Therefore, the expectations of the large reading public manipulated the journals of the travellers; there were certain topics that had to be covered in the certain way for the interests of the readers to make the book sell (*ibid.*).

The problem with modern research, and in the same time its richness, lies in the myriad interpretations of the existing evidence. In this sense, any attempt to clarify the situation with new interpretations is likely to add to the prevailing confusion. Remembering these difficulties, this paper, based on the combination of several different views, tries to illuminate the issues usually left uncovered, and to add something new, even though very little, to the wheel of confusion.

1. THE NORTHERN INTERLACUSTRINE REGION TO 1800

1.1 PRE-COLONIAL BUNYORO-KITARA

Before the middle of the 18th century the supreme power in the northern Great Lakes region was the Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom. In the south, the Nyoro kingdom stretched to Toro, and to the shores of Lake Edward and Lake George. In the north, the area of Wadelai on the eastern bank of the Nile recognized the Nyoro domination, as well as the areas on the banks of the Nile as far as Lake Kyoga and southern Busoga. In the south-west, the kingdom stretched to the Katanga river and towards the kingdom of Buganda on the northern shore of Lake Victoria. The eastern border ran across Lake Albert and continued to the south along the Semliki river. The Bunyoro proper, the heartlands of the kingdom, was the area east of Lake Albert.

According to Beattie (1971: 8), the Nyoro society was a segmentary society permeated by the principle of inequality.⁴ In the centre of the Nyoro state was the king, or *omukama*, belonging to the royal Bito clan, owing the land as well as its people. *Omukama* was the highest political authority; beneath him were his chiefs appointed to their offices directly by him. Many of these chiefs were of Bito origin, but chieftainship was not restricted to the members of the royal clan; anyone showing remarkable skills or crafts could be appointed to office. The chieftainship was territorial, which meant that king's officers took care of the general administration of the region and tribute collection for the king as well as for themselves. The ranks of these chiefs varied from regional administrators to village headmen (Webster et al. 1992: 796-797; Beattie 1971: 115; Richards 1960: 99-100, 103-104).

Beneath the royal clan were the common people, the Iru, belonging to a number of totemic clans. They were almost totally excluded from political power, unless they could acquire wealth and prestige to a degree which distinguished them from the others of their own class, or if they, for some reason, managed to gain the popularity of a higher chief. The first alternative must have been very uncommon, while the second seems quite realistic. Between the ruling elite and their subordinates were the Huma cattle keepers, usually regarded as prosperous people clearly distinguishing themselves from the Iru. The Huma were a remnant of an ancient ruling aristocracy of Bunyoro-Kitara, who had lost their political power to the Bito but preserved their aristocratic status and way of life. Living a nomad life they usually attached themselves to the chief of the region, paying tribute to him as well as the king (Beattie 1971: 129, 135).⁵

The *omukama* ruled his country with the help of his bodyguard, the *barusura*, which consisted mainly of outcasts and captured slaves (Baker 1867: 240-241). The highest ranking territorial chiefs were under constant surveillance by the king, and they were requested to stay in the capital. Although the chiefs were regarded as 'king's spears', there were frequent uprisings against the central authority. Political rivalry inside the Bito clan led the centrifugal tendencies on the outlying districts of the kingdom. The succession wars between the princes were devastating, and if the political rivals were not killed by the new king, the civil wars could go on for several years between the king and the rebellious princes. These wars caused political, social and economic disintegration, which eventually caused the decline of the heterogenous, internally fragile Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom (Beattie 1964: 28; Kiwanuka 1968: 604).

The economic basis of the kingdom rested upon peasant agriculture, herding, manufacture, and trade. The main staples grown by the Iru were finger millet, sweet

⁴ However, there was not such rigid caste-like discrimination as in Ankole. See Richards (1960: 100-101).

⁵ It must be emphasized that the Bito were a single royal, patrilinear, and exogamous clan, the Huma were a aristocratic class of herders divided into several clans, and the Iru were the peasants, often regarded as a servant class.

potatoes, peas, beans, and plantains, which were mainly used to make plantain beer, or *mwenge*. The Iru owned sheep and goats, as well as poultry. The cattle were kept in large numbers only by the Huma cattlemen and the members of the Bito clan. The main raw materials for manufacturing industries were salt and iron. Salt was produced mainly in Kibiro by Lake Albert, and from the so-called salt lakes region around the Lakes Edward and George. Iron was obtained from rich deposits in the Ruwenzori mountains. The salt lakes region was a vivid market location, where the salt and iron were exchanged for various products coming from various locations; barkcloth and dried plantains from Buganda and Busoga, hides and skins from the Nyoro main lands, canoes from the riverine and lacustrine peoples, luxury items, and so on. This trade was under the control of the *omukama*, whose tax collectors took their share of the merchandise for the king. Trade was also carried out on the other frontier markets of the kingdom, as well as on the local level (Beattie 1971: 15; Baker 1867: 95; Cohen 1989: 282-284; Kamuhangire 1979: 72, 74-75).⁶

Besides all the ritual and political aspects of the kingship, it also had a significant economic role. The *omukama*'s court consisted of several palace officials, each with his or her own expertise; ritual leaders, musicians, cooks, herdsmen, potters, smiths, soldiers, traders, and so on. Usually the different occupations were the specialities of certain clans, which meant that all the clans of the Nyoro society were represented in the *omukama*'s court. In this way the king tied himself to the traditional society, i.e., the clans. According to Beattie, there existed a system of reciprocal exchange of gifts; the people paid tribute to the king, and the king acted as a distributor of the wealth he gathered. His capital constantly moved from one location to another, collecting gifts and tribute on the areas of plenty, and distributing them to the areas of want and scarcity (Beattie 1964: 13-32 *passim*).

The decline of Bunyoro-Kitara began in the middle of the 18th century. The weak kings and the rivalry inside the Bito-clan led to increased civil strife, and eventually to territorial losses in northern and southern frontiers, which enabled the rising kingdom of Buganda to take over the leading position in the northern interlacustrine area (Webster et al. 1992: 796-799).

1.2 THE RISE OF BUGANDA

Before the 18th century Buganda was a tiny kingdom on the northern shore of Lake Victoria, ravaged by the bloody succession wars and the disputes between the headmen of the clans and the king, or *kabaka*. Due to its rather limited territory, the economic basis of the kingdom was narrow compared to that of Bunyoro-Kitara. The power of the *kabaka* was diminished by the *bataka*, the clan heads, who

⁶ For more on the market system, see Uzoigwe (1979: 25-66).

controlled the land and its produce, and who considered the king to be merely a *primus inter pares*. This political weakness combined with the limited agricultural economy seemed to cause Buganda to remain in a minor role in the northern interlacustrine region (Webster et al. 1992: 799-800; Were 1974: 177). However, the contrary happened, and the 18th and 19th centuries saw a gradual rise of the kingdom to the leading role in the interlacustrine Africa.

A number of works concerned with the history of Buganda connect the rise of the kingdom to its favourable climate, fertile soils, and agricultural economy based on plantain cultivation. According to this 'banana theory', the cultivation of plantains required much less labour compared to grain based cultivation, meaning that the agricultural tasks could be left entirely to women, while men could be engaged in political, administrative, and military activities. This free manpower then contributed to the military superiority of the Ganda over their neighbours.⁷

The validity of the banana theory has been questioned, for - according to the critics - it does not successfully explain the rise of Buganda. Many other societies in Africa also subsist mainly on plantain cultivation, among them the Soga, but they never accomplished the same as the Ganda. It is true that plantains guaranteed a steady and abundant source of food, which, however, was not sufficient for subsistence, but needed to be supplemented with other foods, such as peas and beans (Were 1974: 178; Wrigley 1959: 8-9). The theory does not seem to explain the growth of royal power over the clan heads, which was essential to the strong political and military organization, which in turn enabled territorial expansion. Kottack (1972: 372) has argued that Ganda resistance against the Nyoro imperialism, in order to protect the local markets vital for Buganda, put the Ganda in a defensive position, which favoured strong military leaders. The king's prestige grew due to the successful resistance, and a group of distinguished military commanders loyal to the king emerged. The spoils of war were distributed by the king to his loyal followers, and new territories were given to his chiefs to be governed for the *kabaka*. Eventually the king was strong enough to challenge the authority of the *bataka*, both economically and politically, and to position his own men to watch and control the dealings of the clan heads. It may be argued that the emerging Ganda nationalism, due to the defensive wars against the Nyoro, which were only possible because of the extra manpower available for the military purposes without substantial losses to the economy, eventually increased the king's power over his subjects to a degree which superseded the *bataka*. This process was completed by the end of the 18th century, during which the *bataka*, as well as the religious officers of the Ganda, had lost control over the kingship and political matters. The practice of killing the rival royal princes was established by the *kabaka* Semakokiro, which greatly reduced the internal strife (Richards 1960: 45-

⁷ See for example Jorgensen (1981), Davidson (1969), and Kiwanuka (1971). However, Kiwanuka (1971: 148-149) stresses the role of the military force in the process of broadening the kingdom's economic basis.

47; Webster et al. 1992: 801). Buganda assumed control over new territories, including the iron producing areas in Koki and Buddu, the grazing lands in Singo, and the access to the Nile via Kyaggwe, which brought Buganda the trade connection to the Buvuma islands and eastern Lake Victoria (Webster et al. 1992: 801; Kiwanuka 1971: 148-149). Thus, it seems that the banana-theory has some significance after all; the plantain based economy enabled successful resistance which eventually contributed to the growth of royal power.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Buganda was without question the leading kingdom in the northern interlacustrine area, both economically and politically. The territorial expansion and the rise of the royal power depended on strong military force. To maintain that power a strong, broad economic basis was necessary. It is questionable whether the king would have been able to maintain his loyal military force solely on the basis of the agricultural plantain economy of Buganda. The expansionist politics brought new wealth to the country, hence the army commanders could be satisfied and their support for the *kabaka* secured. The king gained control over the land which was, together with its people, the primary source of wealth. Although the *bataka* remained in control of the traditional clan lands, the new territories were under the *kabaka's* jurisdiction and the tribute was collected in his name. The military power and Ganda nationalism were manipulated to the service of expansionist policies in order to expand the economic basis of the kingship, and to increase its political control over its subjects.

2. THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

2.1 BUGANDA: ELITE ORGANIZED COERCION

David William Cohen notes that the first European travellers in the Great Lakes region, and especially in Buganda, were surprised about the fertile soils and the overflowing abundance of food (Cohen 1983: 1-3, 12). A look at the travel accounts reveals this to be true. John Hanning Speke, advancing to Buganda in 1862 via the southern route together with James A. Grant in order to discover the source of the Nile, described the country they were crossing by the shores of Lake Victoria:

The huts were kept so clean and so neat, not a fault could be found with them - the gardens the same. Wherever I strolled I saw nothing but richness, and what ought to be wealth. The whole land was a picture of quiescent beauty, with a boundless sea in the background (Speke 1908: 224).

On their way to the Ganda capital through Buddu in south-western Buganda, Speke and Grant arrived at a village controlled by a very high ranking Ganda chief:

There was no want of food here, for I never saw such a profusion of plantains anywhere. They were literally lying in heaps on the ground, though the people were brewing pombé all day. And cooking them for dinner every evening (Speke 1908: 225-226).

Similar notions of wealth and abundance are found from Henry M. Stanley writing of Buganda in 1875:

To behold the full perfection of African manhood and beauty, one must visit the regions of Equatorial Africa, where one can view the people under the cool shade of plantains, and amid the luxurial plenty which those lands produce..., (and that the people's) ... very features seem to proclaim, we live in a land of butter and wine and fullness, milk and honey, fat meads and valleys. The vigour of the soil, which knows no Sabbats, appears to be infused to their veins (Stanley 1878: 381).

Cohen argues that the abundance witnessed by the early travellers and explorers was actually generated by extensive tribute collecting and taking. Cohen (1983: 2-3) sees that the basis of the Buganda monarchy during the second half of the 19th century was the state organised collection of tribute, and that the production was to some extent controlled in order to provide surplus needed to maintain the court and the administrative structure of the kingdom. He says that such organised and specialized production had the capacity to produce vast amounts of surplus at short notice. However, Cohen does not convincingly present how this organised specialization was arranged, and whether the peasants around the kingdom subjected to this practise, or was it regionally confined.

There are few points that speak against the organized specialization of production by the king. First of all, there are ecological and geographical limitations to production. Plantains flourished in the well watered regions of Buganda, but these lands were poor of minerals and not suitable for cattle keeping. People had sheep and goats, but the royal herds of cattle grazed in the northern parts of the kingdom, near the border of Bunyoro-Kitara, where good land for grazing was abundant. The production of iron and salt was geographically confined, stimulating the inter-regional and local trade. Thus, it may be argued that ecological and geographical factors limited the scope of production leading to regional specialization, a thing which happened quite naturally. Secondly, the tradition of tribute collection around the kingdom, which was well established earlier in history, brought together the items produced in different regions. *Kabaka* received the variety of goods coming from different parts of his kingdom on regular basis, so there was no need to pressure certain kinds of specialized production. In case of shortage of, for example, barkcloth, the tribute or tax paid by the manufacturers was raised, which stimulated the production, and not only that of cloth, in the whole area. The amount of tribute extracted was the determining factor for the amount of production. It was the royal demand for tribute that was reflected in the production,

but nothing seems to imply that the production itself was controlled by the king. The flows of wealth were unidirectional; it is unlikely that there was an exchange of goods between the administrators and the producers, for in Buganda the system was based on coercion; the king did not buy services or products from the peasants, nor did he distribute the wealth to the areas suffering from shortages. If his own country could not satisfy the needs, he ordered an expedition to plunder the neighbouring people; Speke (1908: 211) describes how *kabaka* Mutesa ordered expeditions to Bunyoro-Kitara to plunder cattle, women and children whenever these were short in Buganda.

Thirdly, the personal estates of the king and the royal family, as well as those of distinguished individual chiefs, provided much surplus for the court. Many of these estates were situated in the most fertile parts of the country, but not necessarily close to each other. Being located in a variety of ecological zones, they were capable of producing multiple articles for royal use. Fourthly, besides the regular tribute collected by the king, he also taxed the local trade. Since Buganda was not an ecologically nor geographically homogenous region, the goods of various kinds were exchanged in the market places. The king controlled the local trade with his chiefs extracting usually one tenth as a royal tax. The local producers exchanged their produce for the imported items of iron, pottery, salt, canoes, dried fish, etc. Long distance trade, with its valuable luxury articles, was also regulated and controlled by the king. The Ganda received goods via southern Busoga, Ssesse and Buvuma in the east and south, and via Bunyoro-Kitara in the north. They also established, contrary to Tosh's argument, long distance trading caravans headed for Zanzibar. The seizure of the Buvuma islands and Kyaggwe on the headwaters of the Nile brought Buganda the control of trade between the eastern and southern parts of Lake Victoria (Tosh 1977: 266-270; Cohen 1989: 282-284; Stanley 1878: 396).

Fifth, there was the question of raiding expeditions and the connected issue of labour. According to Speke (1908: 212), cattle, women, and the command over men formed the greatest elements of wealth in Buganda. To increase production and to secure the availability of manpower for military purposes, more labour was needed. Since the agricultural tasks in Buganda were mainly in the hands of women, they also contributed the major labour force of the kingdom. The women and children captured as slaves, usually from Bunyoro-Kitara and Busoga, were distributed by the king to the officers who had distinguished themselves. Since the neighbouring areas were frequently raided during the 19th century, there were no reason to pressure organized production in Buganda, because the items needed could be obtained by plundering. These raids usually yielded great fortunes in the forms of multiple articles, including women, thus being more effective means of acquiring wealth than the peasant based production. For the average peasant, the availability of the female labour was crucial determinant of his wealth and standard of living; if he was rich enough to marry several women, his well-being would be

on a more secure basis. This was, of course, only if he managed to avoid the direct exploitation by the king and his officials.

The last point of argument against the organized and specialized state controlled production is the habit of the Ganda officials to raid and virtually rob their own people. While entering Buganda from Karagwe Speke was told by his guide that in Buganda he should not try to buy any food from the people, for every district chief in charge was supposed to bring him plantains; otherwise he should help himself and take whatever he wished from the gardens. This was, according to Speke, how the king's guests travelled in Buganda - if someone dared to sell anything to the visitors he would be severely punished. Speke tells about their arrival at a village: ... all the inhabitants bolted at the sound of our drums, knowing well that they would be seized and punished if found gazing at the king's visitors. Even on our arrival at Ukara not a soul was visible. The huts of the villagers were shown to myself and my men without any ceremony. The Wanyambo escort stole what they liked out of them, and I got into no end of troubles trying to stop the practice; for they said the Waganda served them the same when they went to Karague, and they had a right to retaliate now (Speke 1908: 220, 223).

Grant (1864: 202-203, 208, 211) describes how all the dwellings they came across were systematically plundered, while the inhabitants watched helplessly from a distance how their food and property was taken. From Speke and Grant it is clear that there was a royal order for the chiefs to collect enough tribute for the maintenance of king's guests, as well as to prohibit all trading between the foreigners and the common people and the chiefs. The chiefs were obliged to offer catering for the travellers, so that king's guests would not suffer from hunger during their stay in Buganda. This gesture expresses how Mutesa wanted to show his might and hospitality as a ruler of a great kingdom. There was an obvious reason for this. By the 1860s the long distance trade with the coast had been well established, and the increased violence connected to slave and ivory trade made security a central matter for many African rulers. Firearms found their way to the African interior, and an army of musketeers was a formidable force in theatre of war in East Africa. To guarantee the flow of arms and gunpowder to secure their position the African rulers needed to keep up good commercial and political relationships with the Arab traders. Virtually every caravan heading for the interior was a possible source of arms and ammunition, and so the foreigners were well treated to make trade relations flexible. Every foreigner entering Buganda with a large party was soon met by king's officials, who took care of the caravan as it proceeded toward the country's capital. The foreigners were warmly welcomed since they were seen as possible trading partners or military allies in the times of trouble. This *realpolitik* practised by the Ganda is well presented in Stanley's writings. He says that the visitors in Buganda are first treated splendidly, and asked many polite questions. Finally, however, all that the Ganda really wanted to know

was if the visitor could make gunpowder, manufacture a gun, or cast a cannon, or to build stone houses (Stanley 1878: 406).

Stanley himself became a witness of Mutesa's politics of entertainment and extraction. At the village of Kadzi, the chief Magassa, responsible for the welfare of *kabaka's* guests, ordered a feast for Stanley and his men:

Bring out bullocks, sheep, and goats, milk, and the mellowest of your choicest bananas, and great jars maramba, and let the white man and his boatman eat, and taste the hospitalities of Uganda (Stanley 1878: 185).

Amidst all the plenty Stanley's consciousness started to bother him:

We were not aware how supreme Kabaka's authority was; but a painful suspicion that the vast country which recognized his power was greatly abused, and grieving that the poor people had to endure such rough treatment for my sake, I did my best to prevent Magassa from extorting to excess (ibid.).

The fact that many people rushed for cover when the king's escort approached can be interpreted as a silent resistance to the *kabaka's* predatory politics. The feeding the party of several hundred men meant heavy economic constraint for the community of peasants. The practice of the Ganda soldiers and commanders to extract whatever they wished from the villages was a cause of bitterness and hatred towards the king's officials. According to Stanley, without the total authority of *Kabaka* no one would dare to enter Buganda, for only the fear of the king's punishment prevented people from robbing and killing the strangers (Stanley 1878: 408). Sometimes, however, the tolerance of the peasants ended and concrete violent resistance took place. Grant reported that while marching through the Buganda countryside towards Bunyoro-Kitara one of his men, while fetching water, was speared to death by the angry villagers who were hiding in the thicket. A messenger was sent to the court of Mutesa to report the incident, and his orders were to let the situation calm down and wait until the people had returned to their dwellings and settled down; then he would come and punish them all (Grant 1864: 241).

It is unlikely that the conditions and practices described above would encourage organized production. However, the limitations of trade with foreigners in Buganda was clearly a sign of royal control over the economy. The common people hardly managed to exchange their food for such expensive items as guns and gunpowder, cotton cloth, or medicine, all articles coveted in the court. However, since the coercive policies and increased use of violence in exacting tribute provoked resistance (Cohen 1983: 4) among the people, the *kabaka* wanted to make sure that any access to firearms and ammunition remained in tight control. Political rivalry and opposition had long traditions in the history of Buganda (Webster et al. 1992: 799-800), and it was in the *kabaka's* interests to check his subordinates' accumulation of wealth, including the chiefs. The chief's position depended entirely on the king - according to Speke and Stanley, any offence, or increased popularity, or considerable accumulation of wealth, easily caused him to be 'eaten

up' by another chief, the taking of all his land and people, i.e., his wealth, and usually to confront the king's executioner (Speke 1908: 212; Stanley 1878: 386-393).

2.2. BUNYORO-KITARA; THE RICH, THE POOR, AND THE BEGGARMEN

After leaving the court of Mutesa Speke proceeded towards Bunyoro-Kitara along the Nile river. His description of the Bunyoro countryside was different from that of Buganda; scanty villages, low huts, poor looking people dressed in skins, subsisting on plantains, sweet potatoes, simsim, and millet, as well as on goats and fowls (Speke 1908: 359, 380, 384-385). A different kind of description is found in Samuel W. Baker, an independent adventurer and explorer, advancing to Bunyoro-Kitara from the north in January 1864. Though Baker's attitudes towards Africans were extremely racist, his notions are nevertheless illuminating. Baker described the Nyoro as civilized, compared to the peoples of the north, who he found to be merely naked savages. He praised the Nyoro clothing, manufacture, and iron working skills. Passing through the northern countryside he noted that the lands by the Nile near Atada were populous and well cultivated; plantains, sweet potatoes and eggs were supplied to him and his party in great quantities (Baker 1867: 46-49).

Though Kamurasi, the omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara, was cautious in his affairs with the Europeans, Baker seemed to be a welcome guest. Kamurasi anticipated that Baker would become an ally with him against Ruyonga, Kamurasi's brother, against whom he waged a bitter war. The abundance which Baker experienced was arranged, for the chiefs of the region were ordered by *omukama* to supply the guests with food. While enjoying the abundance of the country, Baker described the Iru diet as follows:

Throughout the country of Unyoro, plantains in various forms were the staple article of food, upon which the inhabitant placed more dependence than upon all other crops. The green plantains were not only used as potatoes, but when peeled they were cut in thin slices and dried in the sun until crisp; in this state they were stored in granaries, and when required for use they were boiled into a pulp and made into a most palatable soup or stew (Baker 1867: 170).

In Bunyoro-Kitara the plantain was not as extensively cultivated as in Buganda. Sweet potatoes and millet were the main staples, but due to the war fields were left without proper care, and people had to subsist on plantains and another fruit. In general, the notions of overflowing abundance compared to that of Buganda are rare. This may be partly due to Baker's own attitudes and the way he experienced the country and the people, being weary and ill with malaria most of his stay in

Bunyoro-Kitara. However, the civil war and the Arab slavers from Gondokoro had ravaged the country, and many villages were destroyed and people deserted, or were captured to be sold as slaves. Despite of Baker's prejudices, the hospitality of Kamurasi toward his guest and possible ally flattered him, for he noted that during his stay at Kisoona he received every week lots of food from the king (Baker 1867: 168-169). Trading never entirely ceased due to the wars and raiding. Speke, while sailing towards Bunyoro-Kitara along the Nile, tells how they encountered a party of Nyoro, who had paddled along the Nile to trade with the Soga, their canoes being full of barkcloth (*mpugu*), dried fish, plantains cooked and raw, *pombé* - the banana cider- and other things, obtained from the Soga (Speke 1908: 376). Baker says that every morning the people of the village gathered to sell or barter their goods; milk for beads, which were very popular among the people, coffee for red beads, and tobacco for cowrie shells. Salt from Lake Albert was an important item of exchange in local and regional trade. While navigating Lake Albert, Baker observed that the people living by the shore were primarily engaged in fishing and manufacturing salt, the latter being exchanged for products from the interior (Baker 1867: 92, 171).

From the Baker's accounts of Bunyoro-Kitara it is evident that although the northern parts of the kingdom suffered to a degree from the disturbances, the situation was not the same for the kingdom as a whole. However, the situation changed for the worse by the 1870s. Baker, arriving at Bunyoro-Kitara for the second time in March 1872 as an official of the Khedive of Egypt, wrote:

It is impossible to describe the change that has taken place since I last visited this country. It was then a perfect garden, thickly populated, and producing all that man could desire. The villages were numerous; groves of plantains fringed the steep cliffs on the river's bank; and the natives were neatly dressed in the bark-cloth of the country. The scene has changed! All is wilderness! The population has fled. Not a village is to be seen! This is the certain result of the settlement of Khartoum traders. They kidnap the women and children for slaves, and plunder and destroy where-ever they set their foot (Baker 1874: 136-137).

It was not only the Arabs who devastated the country, but also the civil strife, now between the new *omukama* Kabarega and his rivals. Moreover, the frequent Ganda plundering expeditions caused considerable human and economic losses. In 1864, Baker had witnessed the terrors of Mutesa's feared army in Bunyoro-Kitara. The Ganda swept everything before them; capturing all the women and cattle, and killing a great number of people. They overrun the whole country leaving the survivors to die of starvation and disease. The Ganda were greatly feared according to Baker, which explains why they met virtually no resistance. The same was noted by Speke, who said that Kamurasi never retaliated or counter-attacked when Mutesa stole cattle from Bunyoro-Kitara, even though the stolen cattle were kept close to the border. Speke concludes that this was because Kamurasi and his country were too weak to match the Ganda. However, Kamurasi did retaliate, but

only against those chiefs living on the fringes of the kingdom who had allied themselves with the Ganda against him (Baker 1867: 202-203, 205-206, 226, 230; Speke 1908; 389).

People and cattle in Bunyoro-Kitara were not only stolen by raiders, but they also succumbed in great numbers to disease, one of which was most likely trypanosomiasis. Kamurasi told Speke in 1862 that his cattle were dying in great numbers, and a couple of years later Baker reported the loss of all his animals, cows and horses, 'to the flies.' A similar fate awaited his cows in 1871 after they had spent some months wandering around northern Bunyoro-Kitara (Speke 1908: 422; Baker 1867: 146; Baker 1874: 144, 146). Tsetse fly, the vector of human and animal trypanosomiasis, inhabits the dense bush areas and feeds on wild game. Intensive clearing of the bush, for example the clearing of fields and gardens, usually destroys the habitats of the game and the fly. In this way, the tsetse is kept away from human settlements. When the fields in Bunyoro-Kitara were left uncultivated for several months due to the wars and depopulation, the bush spread rapidly, until the former fields and gardens were under dense vegetation. Tsetse spread to these new bush areas with the wild animals, and when people were returning to their villages from refuge the tsetse was waiting, and eventually infected their cattle (see Ford 1971: 160-161). It is likely that some people died of sleeping sickness at this point, but this has not been recorded, for the disease in East Africa was rather unknown to Europeans until the terrible epidemic that struck Buganda in 1900.⁸

We have no information about the diseases that were most common among the people at that time. While in Buganda Speke learned that occasional cholera epidemics ravaged the country, and it is likely that this was also the case in Bunyoro-Kitara. Smallpox was common along the caravan routes between the interior and the coast reaching Buganda in the 1870s. Baker, while on his way to Bunyoro-Kitara in 1863, noted that smallpox was a scourge of Central Africa, decimating populations every now and then. Plague was also common among the agricultural people, carried by rats feeding on the granaries (Speke 1908: 309; Hartwig 1978: 27; Kiwanuka 1971: 150).

It is obvious that people suffered from a multitude of diseases, some of which were caused by inadequate nutrition. Baker speaks about the nutritional situation in the country in the early 1870s:

Provisions are very scarce; the people have been fighting for so many years that cultivation has been much neglected, and the natives live principally upon plantains (Baker 1874: 144).

Plantain, although poor in essential nutrients such as proteins, may actually have saved many lives, since, providing that the groves were not destroyed, it could yield twice a year even if left without care. Had it not been for the plantains there would

⁸ See Ford (1971: 240) and Arden Hoppe (1997: 86-105).

have been a major famine in northern Bunyoro in late 1860s and early 1870s. However, plantain alone could not alone provide adequate nutrition for the people. Physical signs of nutritional diseases appeared among the Nyoro:

The natives of Unyoro are very inferior in physique to the Fatiko. This is the result of vegetable food without either cereals or flesh. None of the general public possess cattle; thus the food of the people from infancy, after their mothers' milk has ceased, is restricted to plantains and the watery sweet potatoes. The want of milk is very detrimental to the children. The men generally exhibit a want of muscle, and many are troubled with cutaneous diseases (Baker 1874: 150-151).

The nutritional deficiencies and hunger undoubtedly exposed the people to several infections, and assumably mortality, especially among children, was high. Grant was told by a Nyoro chief how their children died very young. The chief also noted that if one of his wives had a child with servant, meaning the Iru, the child usually lived, but any of his own would quickly die (Grant 1864: 292, 298). Grant's explanation for this was polygamy and the inadequacy of their diet. It is known that the king and the members of the Bito clan had certain food taboos, which they followed strictly for ritual reasons. They despised such foods as sweet potatoes, cassava, beans, peas, chickens, and eggs, i.e., the usual peasant foods. The king and his Bito officials, and the Bito in general, subsisted mainly on milk, blood and beef obtained from the royal herds (Beattie 1971: 106, 120). The same is most likely true for the Huma, who liked to distinguish themselves from the peasant population and follow the habits of the royal clan. Here one is inclined to think that the loss of cattle due to raiding and disease reduced the herds to a degree that the Bito and the Huma were no longer able to feed their children properly. Their diet, although narrow, was rich in proteins and fats, indicating that if the amounts to be consumed were adequate the individual should have been properly nourished. The sharing of food inside the household in a patrilinear, polygamous society is another important matter; most likely the children were the last one to be fed, and in times of scarcity, they together with women, were the first to suffer from nutritional deprivation (Brabin 1984: 33).⁹ Thus, it may be speculated that the diet of the agricultural population, combining cereals, vegetables, legumes, and some meat, provided a better and more balanced nutrition for the children in normal times, when cultivation was free from disturbances.

In the late 19th century this was not the case. Away from their fields and villages, being pushed between the Arabs, the Ganda, and their own superiors, the Iru tried to survive the best they could. Stanley, passing through the southern part of the kingdom in January 1876, noted that the inhabitants of the area had dug several pits as underground hiding places, and that these underground dwellings were common along the southern countryside (Stanley 1878: 432). Grant reported

⁹ See also Roscoe (1966: 9-14, 19, 36-40, 41, 44).

in 1862 about the same kind of habit among the Nyoro saying that they hid their grain and all valuable items under-ground from the plundering Ganda. In the early 1870s, Baker wrote that the granaries had disappeared from the countryside, and all the grain that was not destroyed was buried and hidden in deep holes in and around the villages. The Arabs, living by foraging the land, sometimes used terrible tactics of torture to find out the locations of these grain holes (Grant 1864: 256, 270; Baker 1874: 198-199).

The hardships confronted by the Iru were not felt by the elite of society. The members of the royal Bito clan seem to be untouched by the problems facing the common people. Both Speke and Baker described the consumption patterns of the royal house, especially the excessive use of milk. The king's wives and children were fed with milk to the extent that they were, according to Speke, "immovably fat", (Speke 1908: 409; Baker 1867: 168-169). Still, in 1862, Kamurasi complained to Speke about his ill health and that of his family:

I am constantly stricken with fever and pains, for which I know no remedy but cauterly; my children die young; my family is not large enough to uphold my dignity and station in life...(Speke 1908: 410-411).

As the situation became worse by the 1870s, it is also likely that the Bito clan and the royal family experienced a decline in their standard of living. But the king and his chiefs, as well as the members of the royal clan, had their means of extracting tribute for themselves, as well as for their guests. The visitors in Bunyoro-Kitara, like in Buganda, were not permitted to buy food directly from the people, but had to be fed according to the king's orders at the cost of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. According to Baker, it often happened that the visitors were not fed at all, for the people fled from their villages to escape their unpleasant duty. This kind of behaviour usually resulted the royal punishment by king's bodyguard, and the extraction of tribute by force.¹⁰

In addition to the duty of entertainment, the fear of being punished or captured as a slave was real among the Iru. Although Kabarega and the Nyoro complained against the slavery conducted by the Arabs, they themselves were also engaged in slave trade not only as suppliers, but also as buyers. According to Baker, Mutesa of Buganda bought ivory from Bunyoro-Kitara for the traders from Zanzibar, and paid for his goods with slaves, cotton products, and bracelets, and other goods coming from the coast. Women had become an important article of exchange with the rise of the slave and ivory trade. Baker says that needles, being in great demand in Buganda for textile manufacture, were exchanged for young girls; you could buy a girl with thirteen needles in Buganda and then exchange her for a tusk in Bunyoro-

¹⁰ However, Grant mentions that the Nyoro peasants did not always flee from their dwellings, but actually traded with the foreigners. They exchanged their food for cowries, beads, and so on. The prohibition of trading reported by Baker relates to the omukama's attempt to monopolize all trade in his kingdom, and to make sure that firearms, powder, and other valuable goods did not fall into the hands of omukama's enemies. See Grant (1864: 252).

Kitara worth twenty or thirty pounds in England. In Bunyoro-Kitara young women were wanted for the sake of wealth, for they were valuable as a labour force, and also exchangeable for cattle. A father or owner of many daughters was a wealthy man for he could sell his daughters as wives, each worth of twelve to fifteen cows. Cattle being rare in Bunyoro-Kitara in 1870s, wives were bought with cotton products, barkcloth, bracelets, ivory, and so on. (Baker 1874: 208-209, 212, 214).

The life of the peasant in Bunyoro-Kitara in the troubled times of 1860s and 1870s was insecure, politically and economically. The common people were, in many areas, mere objects of exchange and plunder, and their lives were not respected by Arab slavers, the Ganda invaders, nor their own rulers. Women, who were captured and sold as slaves in great numbers, had become economically more valuable than before; with women you could obtain ivory, cattle, guns, ammunition, or other luxury items. Women were valuable as wives or domestic servants, doing much of the agricultural work, as well as the manufacturing. Although the commercial value of women rose due to slavery, the economy of the country suffered considerably, since less and less people were engaged in production. Loss of permanent fields, the gardens, and the fig trees used to manufacture barkcloth forced the Nyoro to rely on local and regional markets for subsistence and clothing; salt, ivory and women were exchanged for food, cloth, and even cattle, obtained from the Ganda as well as from the Soga. Despite hostilities, the trade relations endured because of the remarkable system of blood brotherhood among the traders.¹¹

It is likely that the Huma cattle keepers also suffered a decline in their well-being. Cattle were lost due to the extensive raiding, and trypanosomiasis may have reduced the size of the herds. However, cattle could be driven to the remote, more secure areas. The nomad lifestyle of the Huma herders allowed them to escape the fate of the cultivators; the Huma moved to different locations with their source of wealth and subsistence, something which the peasant was unable to do. A high protein diet, consisting mainly of milk, protected the Huma against nutritional deficiencies, but the loss of cattle may have reduced the quantity of cattle produce available for food, exposing the Huma, and especially their children, to nutritional stress. The ruling Bito clan, being able to extract tribute from subordinates, experienced losses mainly due to the internal strife. Rebellious chiefs and their people were usually targets of punitive expeditions ordered by the *omukama*, and as result of these kinds of expeditions the chief and his followers, if captured, were either killed or captured and sold as slaves, and their property was confiscated by

¹¹ Traders coming from the different ethnic groups used to form relationships based on blood brotherhood. This was primarily for security reasons, for trading in foreign lands was a hazardous business. The traders engaged in this system acted as a host to each other, whenever they visited their partner's country. The host took care of the security of his trading fellow. Great importance was attached to these blood pacts, and a betrayal of trust was seen as an extreme insult, something incomprehensible. The Nyoro had a saying, that "whoever cheats his friend, is bound to have a swollen stomach"; a clear reference to a starvation. See Uzoigwe (1979: 52-53).

the king. In much the same way, in Buganda the king and his chiefs were well off at the expense of their subordinates, although under a constant threat of internal mutiny and invasions from the outside.

3. CONCLUSION

The economic power of the Ganda state in the late 19th century depended on a strong, centralized system of government. Military force was used to extract tribute from the neighbouring kingdoms, the satellite states, and the inhabitants of the Buganda proper. There was no need to establish state controlled specialized production, for the raiding brought more wealth, which could be perfectly controlled by the king. This kind of centralized system was by no means unique in Africa. The nineteenth century Zululand provides an example of another centralized state where the king practised violent tribute extraction both inside and outside the kingdom's borders. The strength and military might of the Zulu kingdom depended on its ability to utilize the labour of the homesteads, i.e., the common people, who served the king as soldiers and labourers, and the age-sets system and the marriage restrictions and permissions ordered by the king put him in the control of both production and reproduction (Guy 1979: 10-11; Isichei 1997: 413-415).

In Buganda, the spoils of war were unevenly distributed among the Ganda elites. Those in favour of the king were wealthy and powerful, but they also felt the sword of Damocles constantly hanging over their heads. To the peasant the king and his chiefs appeared as a constant threat. In addition to the normal tribute collected by the king and the chiefs, the contacts with the coast and the coming of the caravans to Buganda meant that they were obliged to serve them, whatever the cost. Despite the traditional differences in the Ganda and Nyoro kings' relations with their subjects, there seems to be little difference in their policy toward them in the late 19th century. The Ganda peasant did not have to worry about being overrun by invading forces, but the military service for the king put him in danger of losing his life. Without the effective subordination of the female population, the strength of the Ganda empire would have been difficult to maintain. The women and children were the most vulnerable part of the population who bore the heaviest burden in the political, military, and economic upsurge of the kingdom. Though the European explorers did not report such things as high child mortality or cutaneous diseases among the Ganda, it does not mean that they did not exist. However, the Ganda vegetable diet, supplemented by beans and occasionally fish, seems adequate and nutritious, so that severe deficiency diseases seem to have been rare in normal times. The relative peace in the kingdom before 1885 made life more secure compared to the situation prevailing in Bunyoro-Kitara. Although the peasants were occasionally subject to the exploitation of their superiors, they did not experience such hardships which would have shattered the basis of food production and

eventually led to a general weakening of the health and nutritional status of the people.

The kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara, being in a state of war throughout the 1860s and 1870s, until *omukama* Kabarega managed to pacify the country for a short while, was the scene of a large human tragedy. The northern parts of the kingdom experienced the greatest losses, as well as the eastern areas adjacent to Buganda. In Bunyoro-Kitara, the people were exposed to nutritional stress judging from the description of their physical and health status. For the ordinary people raiding caused serious troubles. The minor disturbances included the loss of personal property and food supplies. This could hamper production in situations where agricultural tools, such as iron hoes, were stolen. In the worst case, the people's huts and banana gardens were destroyed, sheep and goats stolen, women and children captured and men killed. After the crop and the dwellings had been destroyed the remaining population were forced to seek shelter and food from other locations. They had to abandon the fig trees that produced the bark for their clothes, and soon they were wandering around the countryside in rags, looking for the patronage of some powerful chief, and living in temporary, unsanitary grass dwellings. The poor condition of clothing and housing exposed them to disease, which spread among the wandering people to other parts of the kingdom. The abandonment of permanent fields, gardens, and grain storage caused nutritional deprivation, which was further deepened by the loss of young women and children as slaves, meaning that there was less labour engaged in subsistence production. In the areas where the people experienced only minor disturbances the nutritional situation was naturally better. The Iru diet combined vegetables and meat, as well as fish, and it can be argued that their diet, in normal times, was better and richer than that of the Ganda peasant.

The Bito clan, although wealthier compared to the Iru, were also subject to changes in their material and biological well-being. The cattle raiding and the cattle disease diminished the herds decreasing the cattle produce used for food. This might have caused the nutritional deprivation of children among the Bito, for the children were usually the last to be fed in a household. The same applies to the Huma also. Moreover, both the Bito and the Huma despised vegetable foods, which meant that they were subjected to vitamin and calorie deficiencies.

The people captured as slaves, who were mainly women and children, were distributed to the Bito aristocracy as domestic servants and wives. It is likely that their standard of living and physical well-being were not so inferior as one might expect for slaves. They were valuable as a labour force, and therefore well looked after. Moreover, since the bulk of these people were agriculturalists, they were not restricted by the same taboos as the members of the ruling clan and the Huma. They could consume both the cattle produce occasionally available to them, and the vegetable foods they were used to. Their diet was more diverse, which contributed to their better physical health. The same applies to the women and children brought as slaves to Buganda. They were given as wives and servants to the chiefs of

various ranks, which meant that their patrons were relatively well-off. Therefore, the slaves assimilated into the society in this way most likely enjoyed better material and biological well-being than the average Nyoro and Ganda peasant.

It seems that the number of the absolute poor increased in Bunyoro-Kitara during the 1860s and 1870s, and that the Ganda did not suffer from the conjunctural poverty as much as the Nyoro. The Iru, already the poorest group of people, succumbed in great numbers to absolute poverty. Remembering the exceptionally hard conditions in the 1860s and in 1870s it may be argued that in normal times, when the external threats were not as frequent, the material well-being was sufficient to satisfy the nutritional needs of the people, and that they did not experience chronic nutritional stress.¹² However, conjunctural poverty existed in African societies well before contacts with the Arabs and the Europeans were established. Apart from ecological factors, absolute poverty and nutritional stress were caused by the warfare between African societies and the sometimes ruthless policies of African rulers towards their own subjects.

¹² See Koponen (1988: 382) for the situation in Tanganyika in the late 19th century.

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