

Eight

I have been concerned recently to analyze the institution of the beer party in the society of the Fur, a village-dwelling population in Darfur province of Sudan that subsists mainly by the hoe cultivation of millet (Barth 1967).

One may describe the norms or customs governing this institution and show how it organizes a group of persons around a joint task. Beer is supplied by a host, and guests arrive to drink, sing, and work for the host. Some of the guests are there by invitation; many arrive unasked and unannounced, to share in the work and the beer and the company. In all these respects, one beer party is like another beer party, and this brief description summarizes the gross customary features of the institution. **As** far as changes in the institution go, all that the informants, or an anthropologist with longer field work in the area than myself, might be able to say is that beer parties are becoming fewer or more rowdy.

If one wishes to describe an institution as a pattern of the allocation of time and resources, one needs to specify the set of alternatives. In a beer party you can be *guest* or *host*, or you may choose to allocate your own labor directly to your own millet field. Different frequencies of these allocations entail different kinds of community life: although they may be looked at as behavioral outputs, their frequencies have structural implications for the society.

