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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

PHYSICAL CHEMISTRY

LABORATORY

CHICAGO, ILL.

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RESEARCH REPORT

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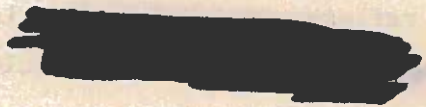
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PREFACE

Mila is the Swahili word for customs or traditions. Today the term is not so much in currency as utamaduni which has a more dynamic ring because it refers to culture. For us at the Institute of African Studies the concern is more with utamaduni than with mila. The rapid transformation taking place today in Kenya and other parts of Africa poses such a big threat to all the cherished traditions in our societies that the Institute has to be the basis of evaluating change and explaining it not only to the diehard traditionalists who look at every innovation with suspicion, but also to the lovers of modernity who do not see any grain of good in the traditions of the past.

The publication of this issue of Mila heralds a revival after a lengthy period of dormancy. There are several other issues in preparation which will follow it closely and which will concern themselves with archaeology, literature and drama, demography, music and dance, oral history and material culture. This volume focusses mainly on medicine and health, an area of research which has been stimulated at the Institute by the return of Dr. C.D.O. Nyamwaya who was studying in England until 1982. The study of traditional medicine from the anthropological and sociological viewpoint is a relatively new and burgeoning field and the World Health Organisation is today spending millions of dollars for research on this and other aspects of medicine and health.

These papers reflect our own interest in traditional health care and our desire that its ~~importance~~ should be debated as widely as possible.

C.L. Wanjala

EDITORIAL

Though the four articles in this issue of Mila do not have any clearly identifiable common theme running through them, they have one feature in common. They all relate in one way or another to the way specific communities cope with the promotion of health and the prevention or treatment of illness.

The first article is a sort of general introduction to the others as it examines how some African societies perceive the causes of illness and how it should be treated. The article by Olenja shows the close interaction between culture and nutritional practices and consequently health. It also touches on some important methodological issues. Oucho's article examines the major theories regarding population growth to bring out the thrust of his argument, namely that sociocultural factors are critical in fertility regulation and therefore population growth. He affirms that fertility regulation has been a feature of traditional African Societies from time immemorial and describes some of the methods used. He concludes by saying that there is need for broadly based fertility regulation policies which should take into consideration the political, economic and socio-cultural environment of a society. Kimani's article introduces the important subject of infertility and how some Kenyan communities cope with it both as a medical and psychosocial phenomenon. Nyamwaya's second article constitutes an expansion of some of the ideas introduced in the first article, though here the focus is on a single community.

The significance of all the articles in this issue lies in the rich ethnographic examples which are given to support some of the authors' arguments. It is hoped that the articles will impress upon the reader the importance of psychological, spiritual, social and economic concomitants of health and illness.

C.D. Nyamwaya