

Carl A. Dutto, Nyeri Townsmen in Kenya. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975. 265 pp.

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Urbanization in many third world countries consists of the extraordinary growth of one or two urban centers. As these primate cities develop more migrants are attracted which in turn creates greater pressure on the city's social and economic resources. To alleviate some of this pressure many planners for years have sought to encourage the growth of smaller urban centers, rather than the largest cities, for a number of reasons. In part, on normative grounds, they wished to see development spread more evenly throughout the country. They also share many common negative images of large cities and sense that life in smaller cities would be more satisfying and less stressful. Finally, many hope that by encouraging the development of regional urban centers, social dislocation can be limited. Migrants would live closer to their rural families; the relative cultural homogeneity of such regional capitals would be less threatening; and the cost of living in such cities would be lower to both individuals and the society as a whole.

For a number of reasons, efforts at decentralizing development have not been particularly effective (at both the international and national levels). Most of the explanation seems to be in terms of economic motives--investors seem to want to put their funds where they think they can earn the highest

return. Part of the explanation is also the feeling that the population of regional urban centers is less skilled and less productive than those in the largest cities. At present this entire question is coming in for considerable rethinking, as critics like Joan Nelson suggest that the case against the largest cities may be both unsubstantiated and wrong.

Nyeri, Kenya, a city of 10,000 located 100 miles north of Nairobi, the nation's capital, is just the sort of city that stands to benefit from an active policy of urban decentralization. While it has in fact increased in size a good deal in recent years, it seems that this growth is due more to population pressure in the countryside and some increased affluence of the population as a result of economic change in general, rather than to a vigorous policy of economic development in the town itself. For the moment, Nyeri seems to be growing in the shadows of the larger city, absorbing short term migrants, those who cannot find work in Nairobi, or those who are not yet ready to make the plunge.

Dutto's book does not, unfortunately, allow us to be very precise about these questions, however, since he focuses his attention on life in this small town and pays no attention to the larger setting in which Nyeri is located. Dutto is right, of course, that there have been few studies of small cities in Africa, but there have been some, as he points out. One might expect, then, that he would offer some observations about ways in which small and large cities differ, or ways in which small cities are alike, since city size seems to be a crucial variable for him. But he does not.

The book is divided into two major sections. Part I provides an overview of the setting and context, complete with data on the monthly rainfall for the town during the 1960s, a description of the major formal institutions and groups, and a demographic and socioeconomic profile of Nyeri's population. Part II is concerned with the nature of social ties in Nyeri. It considers questions such as residence patterns, household composition, social participation, and values. The data come from both participant observation and interviews with 306 residents of the city.

The author, an anthropologist, says it was his original intention to examine the role of organized groups and associations in Nyeri and to assess that role in relation to the structure of the town as a whole and as a mechanism of personal adjustment for individuals in the city (p. xiv). However, after several months of research he discovered, as have others who took Kenneth Little's ideas to the field, that "groups and associations *per se* were rather marginal to the life of people in town" (p. xiv). Instead he tells us his major concern became the concept of social participation and that he was particularly interested in distinguishing individuals who were highly participatory from those who were not. At first it sounds as if Dutto has been both honest with the reader concerning his field work experience and astute enough to shift the focus of his concerns in the middle of his research. A careful reading of the book unfortunately shows this not to be the case: social participation is measured by a scale based on an individual's formal group membership, the degree of financial support he provides to such organizations, his participation in meetings, whether he is a committee member, and whether he holds an office in a group (p. 138). This variable is then cross-tabulated with a wide number of social characteristics to provide a profile of formal group participants. Not unsurprisingly, it turns out that they are older, have higher incomes, live in higher status

residential areas, and hold higher status occupations. High participants are also more likely to use such town services as the bank or post office, more likely to attend meetings such as public gatherings, and have a greater amount of media participation.

By this point the reader ought not be blamed if he is uncertain what the difference is between social participation and voluntary association activity which he had been earlier told was too unimportant in Nyeri to merit study. Instead, after 66 of some 80 tables, and 164 pages, all we get is re-confirmation of every standard sociological hypothesis about voluntary group membership. Where is the anthropological sensitivity to the dynamics of social life at the micro level? The description of ways in which high participants share a style of life qualitatively different from that of others? The data from the survey apparently get in the way of analysis rather than contributing to it. Apparently there is too much data, and rather than condense the findings into fewer tables, or through multivariate analysis, the data seem to dictate the organization of the text.

One area of great interest where insights from Nyeri might have been particularly useful is in the social interrelationship between the town and the countryside. These data certainly show what others working in East Africa have also argued, that ties between the rural areas and town dwellers are strong. We even learn that many of the associations to which residents belong are rural-based. Most interestingly, however, the participants are not forced to choose between town and rural based groups and the majority of high participants belong to both. Clearly, urban and rural goals are not pursued in isolation. Many urban residents confess that the best way to obtain land in the countryside is through a cash income in town. It is unfortunate that Dutto did not use his extensive data as a starting point to pursue some of these interconnections, to learn more about movement between the two areas of the country, to learn how residents conceptualize these different social settings in terms of their life goals, and to show how urban and rural success are intertwined. Here is a case where broad based data collected in a survey and more in-depth data collected through participant observation could have complemented each other very nicely.

Finally, I found the book disappointing because we learn so little about politics in this town which was the center of Kikuyu resistance during the Emergency and is now the capital of Central Province. There is a brief reference to factional elements in local politics (p. 196), but it is too oblique to make any sense. One does not have to be a marxist to see the increasingly class based nature of political divisions in Kenya politics. As the Europeans and Asians have given up or lost control over local resources, particularly in small cities, such as Nyeri, the manner in which local Africans have taken them over has not led to much greater redistribution of wealth than in the past. Control over voluntary associations and both direct and indirect limitations on their activity is certainly a part of this process. The growth of Nyeri and similar towns is taking place in an economic environment where the national economy is not expanding rapidly enough to provide jobs for those who need and want them, and where population growth has made rural alternatives difficult, if not impossible, for many. Dutto, however, fails to raise any of these issues and as a result his study is unable to place his highly descriptive profile of Nyeri in the larger context in which it is located.