

emancipation and the wider political context, and how Chinese women's demands were often subordinated to considerations of party interest.

Several times in the book the author seems to get carried away by concentrating on the background political context, to a point of de Quincy type digression, an illustration of this is her lengthy comparison of the Societ CP and CCP. Secondly, given the size of China geographically and in population terms, there is not enough indication of disparities between regions, rural-urban and even strata within the society. Thirdly, it is difficult at times to disentangle the very strongly expressed opinions of the author and the real situation. For example, with regard to abortion and sexuality, Curtin says "of utmost importance to the Chinese women is the question of distribution and knowledge of birth control". Whose sentiment is being expressed here, Curtin's western feminist sentiment or that of Chinese women?

Notwithstanding these weaknesses, the book provides factual information about women in China from a historical perspective. The reader needs to always keep in mind the date of publication, and the reliance on secondary data. Curtin's book also provides a stimulus for comparing women in China and women in the aspiring socialist state of Zimbabwe.

Reviewed by Mrs O N Muchena, Lecturer, Dept of Adult Education, University of Zimbabwe.

Food, Poverty and Consumption Patterns in Kenya, Joel Greer and Erik Thorbecke, International Labour Office, World Employment Programme Geneva, (1986 pp 170, 20 Swiss Francs).

North-Western European Democracy as a positive academic social movement is presently entering very deep and unsafe waters over the whole issue of describing and measuring African poverty and suffering. At least that is the impression that can be gleaned from the latest culturally plurastic offering from the International Labour Organisation's World Employment Programme. Joel Greer and Erik Thorbecke are informing us in this monograph that it is possible to measure food poverty. It is indeed a great puzzle why they think that this should indeed be translated into the fancy equations that constitute their statistical *smorgasbord*, if, to begin with, they themselves are not quite sure what this *food poverty* means in terms of its basic causative factors. Greer and Thorbecke are just a drop in the ocean of European social scientists who have fished in the *terra incognita* that constitutes the African continent. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that in the year that Band-Aid hit celluloid screens, and many band-aid solutions were thought up in Washington DC, that the clearest definition of *food poverty* the reader can glean from this beautifully packaged book is:

"Food poverty is a normative, arbitrary and inexact concept. It is an attempt to measure whether individuals consume enough food or have the means to consume enough food to enjoy a minimum desirable level of physical health. The casual links from food consumption and mental well being are only imperfectly understood by nutritionists and the medical profession and, in any case, are subject to inter-personal variability - even within a relatively homogenous population. Further compounding the problem is the difficulty of measuring actual food consumption". (p 1-2).

Despite the humble confession of ignorance, the conclusion in this very elegant statistical *smorgasbord* is:

"Maize is grown more efficiently by small farmers than large farmers, and if the government does not actively promote land reform, it should recognise and facilitate the effective parcelisation of large farms which occurred. Increasing the price of maize combined with appropriate complementary measures could be an important first step in revitalising Kenya's agricultural sector". (p 139-140).

We have heard of how the technical efficiency of North American mid-Western agriculture came through careful manipulation of the corn/hog ratio. It would be very interesting for a social researcher one day to discover what is really behind the corn/human, or maize/people ratio, that is supposed to cure Kenya of *food poverty*. Should we be at this stage phrase mongering about *food poverty*, or should we be talking about the poverty of ideas emanating from world-class labour economists advising social workers in Africa on how best to socially organise labour power. This poverty of strategic thought is constantly displayed in the social democratic naivety that capitalism is not essentially bad, and that if the price is right, then everything else will work out just fine.

The basic social ignorance of the forces that have historically decomposed African labour power, even in Kenya, to force households to grow maize in the first place totally escapes the very otherwise ordered framework of the joint essay. Let it not be misunderstood that we are quibbling about the use of the English concepts, food and the more abstract term *poverty* or even *decomposition*, for as David Knight (1981) has written concerning the use of words in science:

"Vocabularies are only a part of a language, as we all know if we have ever tried to write French or German, or even to translate them; with nothing but a dictionary, or if we have ever received a letter written this way. And yet French and German are very close to English in structure and vocabulary; the problems are much greater when one is faced by the complication of the verb 'to go' in Athabascan languages, or the inclusive and exclusive 'we' of Malay language. It is these characteristics and not the coincidences of vocabulary, that establish relationships between languages, just as it is homologies in structure and not external similarities that establish *classes* in biology. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the grammar and syntax of the language, and not enough to collect words - only if as with Cornish, one knows the affinities of the language one can get anywhere with a vocabulary alone."

We will not attempt to decompose the coincidences of vocabulary from the natural (hard) sciences and that from the social (soft) sciences, but one certainly comes across many quirks and oddities in this *piece de resistance* from Messrs Greer and Thorbecke:

"A simple conclusion which can be drawn from the decomposition of total poverty is that even though the bulk of the food, poor households and individuals are found in Eastern, Nyanza and Western Provinces, Central and Eastern Provinces are relatively much better off in terms of food deprivation than are the other four provinces. This is because the amount of poverty in a province depends not only on its severity of poverty, but also on its share of total population." (p 41)

But surely, what has to be *decomposed*? Is it the biological, physical regional 'manifestations of poverty'? Or is it more crucial that effort be directed at decomposing the basic casual factors, embodied in the *market* relationship.

The six point matrix that underpins the inquiry into food patterns, and 'food poverty' seems to rest on the suspended cognition that in Kenya the following social phenomena were observed:

1. The average Kenyan family is large and numbers seven. Large families in Kenya have lower farm operating surpluses, total consumption and food consumption per adult equivalent. Poor households have more children than 'non-poor households';
2. Most Kenyan small-holders don't have much money as they spend more on food and "there is little difference between poor and non-poor households.";
3. 'Non-poor households' have on average more land;
4. Small-holders of all categories planted roughly equal acreages of maize and marketed the same. (Our two professors unanimously agree that the "shares of total crop production and of maize sold and the rate of adoption of hybrid maize is in a partial way a measure of 'modernisation' or 'transition' to farming for the market.")

5. Small holders who are educated do better than those who have not had formal education, but the Kenyan educational system, because of high drop-out rates, is socially producing enough 'small farmers',
6. Only twenty per cent of household heads could find employment off the farm, so that there exists a 'large unsatisfied demand for employment,' etc. (p 11-14).

There is, therefore, nothing that exceptional about such happenings under the African sun as far as socio-economic descriptive trajectories go, so that the recommendations concerning the increased production of maize are hardly surprising. It is also never clear how high employment in Kenya affects nutrition, and other facets of social reproduction.

What would have been of more value in a study of this nature would have been a careful examination of the structural changes in the domestic economies of Kenya, without imposing *a priori* categories. If 'taste' is such an important variable, clear theoretical statements on the origins of such 'individual preferences' is required, not only with respect to food, but also with respect to collective economic action, and the non-market allocation mechanisms that operate through the territorial social economy.

What is the best unit of analysis for studying changes in African social economy? Can the analyst use the *household* as a unit of analysis and at the same time articulate the complex inter-relationship between non-capitalist modes of production and the more hegemonic capitalist mode of production and consumption that permeates African social realities. What does the scientist have to do to contribute to territorial efforts to recompose labour power? These are only some of the questions that are raised by the mensuration techniques used in social science in Africa, but which are taken for granted in this ILO publication.

Reviewed by Thomas D Shopo, Senior Research Fellow, Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies, Harare.

References

David Knight, (1981) *Ordering the World: A History of Classifying Man*, Burnett Books in association with Andre Deutsch, London, p 149.

Communities in Crisis, Albert Cherns and Moshe Shelhav (eds), Gower Publishing Company, Aldershot, 1985 (pp 291 US\$37)

The various contributors to this book have presented some of the problems and concerns that plague communities in the late '80s. With their focus on 'communities in crisis', the authors examine both the problems faced by recently established 'designed' communities (such as the kibbutzim of Israel), as well as the malaise of post-industrial urban communities elsewhere. Part 1 of the book is devoted to an analysis of community changes that have taken place in Israel; Part 2 concerns itself with contrasting cases of communities struggling to survive: two examples feature urban situations, one an industrial city in New York State and the other an industrial suburb in Edinburgh in Scotland, and there is a rural example from Norway. Part 3 presents a methodological study of workplace participatory research, the quality of working life in kibbutzim, the relationship of the mentally handicapped to the wider community and finally the problems faced by Bedouin nomads in Israel. Interspaced throughout the book are chapters of discussion and interviews which provide some further insight into the articles.