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Title: Do Swazis have households? Why the Unit of Analysis Matters.

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Do Swazis have households? Why the unit of analysis matters.

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CHOOSING THE UNIT OF ANALYSIS

This paper starts from a very practical, empirical research issue, a very elementary issue: if one is wanting to collect basic data about the distribution of incomes, family sizes, unemployment, cattle, infant mortalities, malnutrition, wealth, illness, poverty, crop surpluses, self-sufficiency, educational attainment (or anything else) in contemporary Swaziland, what is the appropriate unit to sample?

In order to answer this question sensibly we need to know something about the way a society distributes its goods and its ills. We know, for instance, that in Europe consumption is organized in nuclear family households. We assume that a woman and her husband and minor children share equitably if not equally in their pooled income. So household is the appropriate unit of analysis. The validity of this assumption has only recently been questioned by people working within a feminist perspective who have pointed to the possibility of inequities of distribution within households, linked to the earning power of family members, and how the increasing proportion of women in paid work is transforming household structure.

The choice of an appropriate unit of analysis rests on some prior knowledge of the way a society distributes its goods (and ills); but once a particular unit has been chosen, the information collected is used to demonstrate the distribution. A certain circularity immediately becomes apparent. Once the unit has been chosen, it is impossible to disaggregate the distributions to smaller constituent units. Inequities between, say, men and women within households remain masked as long as data is collected by household. The best that can be done with such data, by people interested in the possibility that women come off second best, is to isolate households without men. The immense popularity in social studies of female-headed households is doubtless in part the consequence of the ease of access to this category from the many surveys in which household is the unit of analysis (distracting attention from the majority of women).The choice of unit of analysis is thus an important choice. It will shape the resultant distributions and in turn shape our "knowledge", thereby confirming our choice.

HOMESTEADS, HOUSEHOLDS AND HOUSES

In Swaziland three units have been used in survey research of this kind: the homestead (umuti), the house (indlu), and the household. The first two are part of the local taxonomy, the way Swazis themselves conceptualise their domestic organization. The third, the household, is a bureaucratic import, the internationally standard form for comparative statistics. The situation in Swaziland is compounded by a distictly casual approach to terminology. Thus Holleman et al (Holleman(ed) 1964) work with rural homestead (umuti); but then go on to call urban domestic groups "homesteads", which they are not, since they lack the essential holding of arable land which distinguishes homesteads as institutions. Regrettably official practice has followed this precedent: urban "homesteads" are now a misleading feature of all Swazi government statistics. The economist Low (1986) works with rural homesteads but calls them "households" because he is working within the paradigm of the New Household Economics.

In 1980 Black-Michaud and Simelane suggested that official statistics be recorded according to the constituent houses(tindlu) into which a homestead is traditionally divided. Each married woman establishes of her own "house" of descendants within the homestead of her husband, an arrangement of particular importance under polygamy (Black-Michaud 1981, Black-Michaud and Simelane 1981). They argued persuasively that this would yield a truer picture of any inequalities between houses. This idea seemed attractive to the Swazi officials, who too readily saw that a house, indlu, is indeed a distinct unit, each married woman having access to her own separate purse and fields. It also seemed attractive to the academic advisers: given the prevailing marxist paradigm, any technique which unmasked inequalities was to be encouraged. Calling these units "households" had the added advantage of seeming to bring Swazi data into line with international practice.

Thus in both the 1983/4 agricultural census and the 1986 population census, homestead data was collected using separate forms for each constituent "household" of a homestead.
The outcome was most surprising: most homesteads apparently consisted of only one "household" rather than the several "houses" that the anthropological literature had described, that Black-Michaud and Simelane had observed in their careful field study, that the Swazi officials had taken for granted. In 1986 there were on average only 1.18 "households" in each homestead.

Discussion with census officials and enumerators showed that "households" were identified on the basis of commensality. Only those who never ate together were separately enumerated. Now although a Swazi man expects only his own wife to cook for him, and although all married women expect to become the owners of their own kitchens, it is also true that nearly all members of a Swazi homestead will sometimes eat together. The more the men are away, the more likely it is that the women and children will eat together. When the men are at home - at weekends, at month's end - this commensal group breaks up into its constituent parts, with the men gathering near the cattle kraal if there is one,

each there to receive food from his own wife, while the women and children eat apart. As to who cooks, who provides, who prepares, it is difficult to generalise in a society where the resident domestic group undergoes dramatic changes in size and membership from one day to the next with the coming and going of people who, although members of the homestead, also keep house elsewhere, near work, in town. The arrangements are ad hoc, practical. In short, commensality cannot be used to identify houses. The so-called "households" which now appear in official statistics alongside "homesteads are non-commensal groupings of houses within homesteads. The interpretation of Swazi data is thus fraught with unusual difficulties arising from this array of overlapping terms and meanings.

It is helpful to draw a sharp distinction between urban and rural residential domestic groups in Swaziland. The distinction, at its crudest, is between those who have migrated to work, and those left behind. To call both of these kinds of groupings by the same term (a common practice) and to compare them as though they were examples of the same species who happened to be situated in different environments, is to misunderstand entirely the social structure of Swaziland. Basic to understanding the distinction is the land tenure system.

RURAL DOMESTIC GROUPS

Although, like all colonies with settlers, the Swazi experienced severe expropriation in the first half of the twentieth century, the system of communal tenure under chiefs has persisted and expanded (Russell 1990b). In 1988 over sixty percent of the country was registered as communal tenure land i.e. in the name of the King on behalf of the people.[1] With the exception of several tracts devoted to "improved agriculture" of various kinds (including that devoted to investment of Royal capital and grazing Royal cattle), this land is divided between some 200 chiefdoms, the usufruct of which is allocated by chiefs to the common people. Arable fields and space on which to establish a homestead and cattle byre are distributed only to married men, who are presumed to head domestic groups big enough to work the land effectively. Since Swazi men marry late, usually only after fathering several children (Russell 1990a), they usually do indeed have the potential to muster adequate family labour for this purpose. Typically the fields belonging to a homestead are allocated by the homestead head to the married women of the homestead (his own and his sons' wives, his mother), who become

[1] Of the remaining land, 20 percent belongs to registered companies, in several of which the Royal family through their investment coporation, Tibiyo, have significant shares. 14 percent is privately-owned freehold, of which Swazis (as distinct from white and coloured Swazilanders) own a minority but increasing share. See Russell 199b.

responsible for susbsistence provisioning. Any surplus accrues to the head on a field reserved by him in the name of his mother, upon which all must labour, the produce from which is not eaten unless and until other granaries are exhausted.

In 1986 over 70 percent of all Swazis were living thus on communal land in an umuti, homestead[2]. It is rare to find a Swazi without an umuti despite a very high rate of births without marriage, (which render the patrilineal principle more tricky in practice), and despite 22 percent urban population. Sons belong to the umuti of their fathers, and when married are expected to place their wives there. A son's children also belong in his father's umuti, whether or not the children's mother lives there. Unmarried women belong to the umuti of their fathers, married women to that of their husbands. The slow consolidation of marriage amongst the Swazis, with considerable ambiguities about when and whether one is married, leaves women with dual loyalty and rights in two homesteads for a long period. The children of unmarried daughters belong by patrilineal principle to the homestead of their genitors, who have prior legal claim on them. In practice such children, while young, usually remain with their mothers, as members of their mothers'fathers' homesteads. Eventually they will gravitate to the place of their biological fathers; as sons, motivated by their claim on patrilineal inheritance, as daughters, claimed by fathers for the bridewealth they may bring in at marriage.Those who are bought by their fathers from their mothers will make this move earlier (Russell 1990)

RESIDENTS AND ABSENTEES

While it is quite simple to enquire of any Swazi where his/her umuti is, and to receive a prompt and plausible answer, it is altogether much more difficult when at any particular umuti to determine its membership, for besides the people who are actually resident at the homestead at any one time, there are other absent members. Some of these may be peripheral, others central to its functioning, as for example, a male head who is living away at his place of employment. Sons who work in towns or plantations where they have their own accommodation, perhaps supplied by employers, may stay away from their parents' umuti for years without lessening their right to full membership of it. Absence need not mean that sons neglect their obligation to support parents, though it may give them greater scope for occasional evasion of this responsibility. They are likely to send children to live with their parents, whether or not they are married to children's mothers. In due course they themselves also may return to live there.

One's right to claim membership in the umuti must therefore be distinguished from the exercise of that right at any particular time. A married woman who has joined her husband's father's umuti does not sever her ties with her parents, and when returning to

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[2]An elegant informed account of the rural homestead is found in H.Sibisi's essay in de Vletter (ed) 1983

them is treated as a privileged member of their homestead. Even somebody without living parents will, by principles of classificatory kinship, be able to trace their rightful umuti - perhaps that of father's brother, or perhaps that of father's father's brother's son.

We see that the umuti is not strictly a residential group, though there is a legitimate expectation that there is space at the umuti for all members to live there should they want to. Upon maturity, dutiful sons will each build themselves a house at their father's umuti, a tangible physical symbol of the permanency of their claim to membership. These houses may remain locked up and underused for large parts of each year while the sons live away in some town where they have, or hope to have, work, and where they are likely to be members of some household. Those resident at the umuti at any time are those of its members who happen to be exercising their right to live there. Membership is thus always bigger than the residential group.

HOMESTEADS AS ENDURING UNITS

The umuti is an enduring unit. When the head dies his widow lives on, assuming with her inheriting son the headship until he is in a position to take up the headship alone. Although every umuti is a land-holding unit, all land belongs to the King who retains the right, through chiefs to move people to make way for roads, grazing land, irrigation schemes, forests, development schemes, royal residences or community projects. They will be compensated with alternative communal land elsewhere. Whole homesteads, but more usually certain members of homesteads can also be banished for witchcraft or falling foul of the chief.

This physical mobility of homesteads was until recently seen as fairly unproblematic: house-construction skills were universal, the materials (branches, grass, mud, dung) freely available. But the recent adoption of more expensive, more durable building materials, the use of which demands more uncommon skills and considerable investment, is fostering more sedentary expectations, in which entitlement to particular tracts of land is more fiercely asserted, displacement more fiercely resisted. In recent times people have resisted displacement by insisting that they cannot be separated from the graves of their ancestors, thereby incurring policy-makers in the tremendous expense of exhuming remains, and financing the essential ritual slaughter with which ancestors are enticed to follow their descendants to new homestead sites. There is nothing in the anthropological record to suggest that this was the practice in the thirties; to the contrary, it is the mobility of the Swazi which both anthropologists and historians emphasize. The new concern not to be separated from ancestors may have much to do with a new awareness of the power and value of traditional religious beliefs in a world of religious pluralism; it may also have something to do with increasing pressure of population on the land.

DIVERGENT INTERESTS OF HOMESTEAD MEMBERS

The composition of the group resident at the homestead at any one time is the outcome of the interplay of the several interests of its members. Some who want to stay will be edged out by others. If there is a dearth of homestead earners, young men will be expected to go away and find work and share the rewards with those who brought them up. Some who want to go will be constrained by pressures to remain. If there is a shortage of vigourous labour on the homestead, young men will be pressed to postpone their search for paid employment. Mothers-in-law are always anxious to retain the biddable services of their subservient daughters-in-law, who may pay somebody to stand in for them as domestic drudge. The relatively privileged profile of Swazi women in paid employment compared to Swazi men (Russell 1986) suggests that there are systematically different outcomes for the educated and the uneducated, for men and for women, in the resolution of these issues.

Dominant amongst competing interests is the homestead head's interest in the agricultural productivity of the homestead. Any deficit in the annual maize crop must be purchased using somebody's valued and limited cash income. Homestead heads in employment thus give high priority to financing the planting of the annual crop - ploughing and fertilizing the land, purchasing the most reliable seed and pesticides. As earners they will be expected to buy maize when the granary is empty. They may take leave from paid work to personally supervise these tasks. They may spend time contacting their sons to remind them of their obligation to contribute to this expenditure. Buying family maize is an expensive alternative to growing it. Holleman's assumption (1964 p 331)) that the strength of attachment to the rural home amongst men in towns could be measured by whether or not men "actually went back...to cultivate their fields at their rural homes" is limited; the financing of the annual planting is more critical than personally labouring in it; if necessary, specialised labour for particular agricultural tasks can be bought (for example, mechanized ploughing, especially amongst those without oxen).

THE FALLACY OF THE HOMESTEAD DEVELOPMENTAL CYCLE

The homestead head is however concerned to maintain an adequate complement of continuous labour for all the other tasks entailed in the maintenance of the homestead - weeding, harvesting, threshing, storing and preparation of foodstuffs, the care of livestock, buildings, fences and children. To this end a head will try to ensure a certain minimum of people always resident at the rural homestead. This pressure to stabilize the homestead labour pool despite changing homestead membership through births, deaths and migration, is but one of the factors which makes the application of the domestic cycle model to the Swazi homestead so inept, as demonstrated in the attempt by Low (1986).

Low is interested in the availability and distribution of family labour for "peasant household production". Adopting Fortes' notion of the domestic developmental cycle, he boldly proceeds to cram the unwieldy Swazi "farm-households" into five phases

devised by Fortes in 1945 to confer coherence on what otherwise seemed too great a variety of nuclear family types amongst Ghanaians[3]. The result is little short of absurd. The correlations he finds are the direct result of his own classification procedures.

He starts by simply excluding all households headed by women (14 percent of his sample). Into the Establishment phase, which Fortes depicts as the time of courtship and marriage of the couple, Low classifies, NOT the expected young couple, but all households having less than seven people of which at least one is a child under ten, provided the head is not older than 50 years old. (Households with less than four people and a head under 40 are also considered to be in Establishment).The Expansion phase, characterised by Fortes as the time children are born, contains all Swazi households containing between seven and ten members provided at least a quarter of them are under 16 years of age and the head is under 50. (Alternatively the head is under 55 and half of household members are children under 16). The remaining categories are populated by equally unlikely categories.

What emerges most strongly from Low's attempt is the sheer unsuitability of the Swazi homestead data to the categories proposed by Fortes. The newly-married couple, with their growing family is simply invisible in Swazi homestead data. Low is not an unintelligent observer. His account is hedged with qualifiers. Yet what he fails to confront is the distinctive nature of the Swazi homestead, not as a household in any taken-for-granted Western sense, but as an immensely flexible patrilineal land-holding group of kin who compose and recompose themselves into a number of shifting domestic groups according to their changing and continuously negotiated interests. It is this construction which must be emphasized. Such a group is not dependent on the head for its resources. His age, fitness and fertility are one amongst several sources of energy and fecudity available to the group. The late age at which men achieve headship of homesteads compared to the early age at which men in nuclear systems achieve headship of households, means that there is a much narrower range of homesteads than households.

THE FALLACY OF A TREND TO NUCLEAR FAMILIES

The idea that the predictable phases in people's life-cycles will be reflected in the structures of the households to which they belong is sensible only when separate households are clearly established by a particular person or couple, and come to an end with the death of the founders. In other words, when they have a nuclear structure. Recognising this, Low feebly suggests that Swazis are indeed in the process of adopting a two-generation nuclear family form. His evidence comes, not from an examination

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[3]The well-known five phases are 1)establishment 2) expansion 3)consolidation 4) fission 5) decline. The model has been widely adopted in the region. See inter alia Murray (1987),de Vletter(1984),Marquardt (1987), Barendregt and Brouwer(1988)

of the kinship structures of his sample (which would seem from his categorization to be anything but nuclear), but from arguments advanced by Hughes (1964) who worked as part of a University of Natal team twenty years earlier (Holleman 1964). Hughes is so committed to the idea of nuclear family structure as the emerging norm in Swaziland that, using the following extraordinary definition, he manages to classify 42 percent of Swazi homesteads as "nuclear families".

> Nuclear family is a term used to cover that type of homestead comprising only a homestead head, his wife, and his children. Since the mother-son family is a traditional feature, the term "nuclear family" has here been extended to cover the situation where a mother of a homestead head (or one of her co-wives) is attached to such a grouping.
>
> We could not instruct our enumerators to inquire whether every child of a homestead head was in fact also the child of the wife inhabiting that homestead.Our "nuclear family" therefore diverges slightly from the normal anthropological meaning of this term by the inclusion of <u>all</u> children of a homestead head reported to have only one wife resident in that homestead. From the sociological point of view this variation is of only minor importance in the present context (Hughes 1964 p 127).

His conclusion that "probably nearly half" of modern rural Swazi homesteads are "essentially nuclear families" (ibid p 129) shows a remarkable lack of understanding of kinship systems in general and the nuclear family system in particular. Yet he is not alone in this belief. Assumptions about the inevitability of the decline of so-called "extended families" and the universal adoption of "conjugal families" as societies are drawn into the international market, are as common as they are misguided (Parsons 1948, Goode 1958), and have been fuelled by the misconception, repeated in numerous sociology textbooks, that Western society itself has only recently shed the extended family system, a misconception exposed by Laslett in 1972[4].

The essence of nuclear families is not their small size. This is an incidental and variable feature. What matters is the structuring of the relationships in which the various members are embedded. In nuclear family households, relationships between parents, and between parents and children are invested with paramount importance. Duty is in the first instance to other members of this nuclear family. Thus parents experience great pressure to care for their own immature children, but not for their parents who of course constitute their own separate family household. Ironically, given this apparent neglect of parents, it is the conception of descent which structures the nuclear

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[4]Young and Wilmott's influential work on family and kinship in London(1954) through its misleading use of the phrase "extended family" to describe the close links between working class women and their mothers, popularised the idea that nuclear families were a historically new feature of English society.

family. Since in the nuclear system descent is from both parents equally, prospective parents upon marriage must live alone. Bonds within the family-household thus established are privileged above all others, including those with other non-nuclear-family kins. Emotional ties with outsiders are as threatening to the nuclear family household as ruptures within it, the spouse with a lover or with an excessive attachment to a parent, or persistent quarrelling between children and parents.

Within the patrilineage a contrary presssure is at work, inhibiting the separation of sons from their parents, and privileging patrilineal descent over other forms of attachment. (Daughters' relationships with their parents are shaped by the fact that they are fated to leave the patrilineage in which they are born to become the wives,and ultimately mothers,of men in other patrilineages). The organization of domestic life in patrilineal societies is very different. Attachment from birth is to a wide and enduring group to which a man will ultimately bring his wife or wives. The existence of classificatory kin establish each individual in a mesh of relationships which do not rest upon fickle emotions, which his behaviour cannot undo. The existence of several mothers, several fathers, many brothers and sisters diminishes the emotional, but not the juridicial, bond with all of them. This is a much more secure domestic organization than that of the nuclear family household with its explosive potential for disintegration into divorce. Bonds between patrilineal kin span generations, ensuring continuity for its members. Where a person resides is irrelevant to his de jure claims and responsibility to kin (though it may affect him de facto).

When economic circumstances push various members of the patrilineage to reside in several separate small groups as in contemporary Swaziland - a son to the sugar plantations, where he shares a room with some classificatory brothers, father to the capital, where he is given housing which he shares with one of his wives and those children who manage to get enrolled in the school there, father's mother in the rural area with a daughter-in-law and several grandchildren - the resulting pattern is not a series of nuclear family groups. To label them so is to confuse the form with the content, as Hughes does.

Hughes' "nuclear families" include not only absentees who have been continuously away for up to three years (p 63), and all polygamous families in which wives live apart, but also all three-generation families headed by what he calls the traditional "mother-son" feature (including classificatory mothers).Over a quarter of his sample are of this type. They also include families in which the male head's extramarital children are present, and, presumably, also his classificatory "children", namely, the extramarital children of his daughters where these have not been claimed by their natural fathers[5]. But even if

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[5]Hughes apparently did not entertain the possibility that the minor children residing in the homestead might be the premarital children of the woman but not of the husband (see

some of the homesteads he examined consisted of nothing but married couples and their minor children, we would not be justified in calling them nuclear families, for in due course they may be joined by a second wife, or the the extramarital child of a sister or daughter or son: the system in which they are embedded make these real and acceptable probabilities.

The urban population of Swaziland can be conceptualised as the people who are absent from the rural homesteads, though not all are equally strongly bonded to rural kin and rural areas. In 1986 16 per cent of the population was living in towns and another 6 per cent on company-owned land as a consequence of their employment contracts (Census 1986 Vol 1).

ACCESS TO URBAN LAND

Urban land is in principle freehold, though there have developed around urban cores dense peri-urban settlements on communal tenure land, where some of the chiefs whose chiefdoms happened to abut urban areas have accommodated pressures of workseekers by granting very small holdings, enough to build a house rather than to support a family. It is in these communal tenured peri-urban areas, rather than in the urban areas, that we find the permanently urbanised Swazi population, for to obtain land from a chief one must pledge allegiance to him, attend his court and meetings, pay him tribute. In short, the act of obtaining communal land anywhere entails an enduring commitment. There are consequently some Swazis who are committed to peri-urban areas, with inadequate land for family food and thus a somewhat different life style with greater dependence on the market. Statistics on peri-urban areas are rarely available, since their tenurial status renders them invisible within the broader category of communal land under the chief, but both Holleman (1964) and de Vletter (1983) have data confirming that peri-urban areas are more urban than urban areas. The political status of some of these peri-urban areas is presently being contested between traditional authorities, to whom the land belongs, and town councils wanting to make themselves responsible for the services that high urban densities demand.

Most Swazis living in towns are living in rented accommodation. Much housing belongs to the government, a legacy of the colonial regime which housed all its (British) officers. Some belongs to companies as accommodation for employees. The rest belongs to entrepreneurs of all kinds, from civil servants able to get preferential housing loans to build houses to rent to wealthy expatriates (their own accommodation in town being the responsibility of government), to petty rentiers who have

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Hughes 1964, Table 19). Although not common - such children are usually sent to their grandparents - the pattern is not unknown (Russell 1990a).

acquired the right to use of a plot upon which a ramshackle series of rooms is rudely constructed. The impermanence of urban tenure contrasts with the enduring tenure on communal land in rural areas. Only those who have pledged allegiance to a chief live freely on the outskirts of the town, often subletting a part of their house to someone less fortunately placed.

Those living in the most privileged town houses - senior civil servants and successful businessmen - are most unlikely to see the town as their proper and permanent place of residence.They are pulled to the rural areas not only by the fact that land can be acquired freely and of right there, but because political rights arise as a consequence of one's membership of a chieftaincy. To avail oneself of the right, one must belong to a rural umuti. It is at the weekly or fortnightly chiefs' meetings that one has a chance to exercise valuable local political influence. Membership of a chieftaincy also gives one valued rights to keep cattle on the communal grazing lands. Despite overstocking and pasture degradation, cattle remain the most profitable form of investment in Swaziland, where communal grazing and subsidized veterinary and dipping services render costs to the cattle owner exceptionally low[6].

THE REDISTRIBUTION OF INCOMES BETWEEN DOMESTIC GROUPS

Although only 22% of the population live in urban areas and company towns, there are very few rural homesteads without some or other member away at work, usually within Swaziland[7]. A study in the eighties suggested over eighty percent of rural homesteads have at least one member in paid employment, with an average of two per homestead (de Vletter 1983)

These estimates are indicative only, for, as we have already seen, membership of the homestead is subject to a variety of interpretations. It is certain that there are at least as many people in work as de Vletter estimates, but many more if homestead membership is defined more widely. The material contribution of these absent workers to the homestead income has also been estimated. Once again the estimates are subject to very wide margins of error, for the question has always been put very badly, with little understanding of the pattern of redistribution of cash earnings amongst kin. de Vletter, for example, made the assumption that only the homestead head, as keeper of some imagined homestead purse, would receive remittances from absent workers, whereas in fact there is a dense network of intra- and inter-homestead transactions as people discharge special inter-

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[6]Some senior civil servants abuse their position to gain unfair access to the government cattle-fattening ranches with their prime pasture.See Report of the commission of enquiry into the operations of government fattening, sisa ranches and quarantine stations, June 1991

[7]Exact figures are not available, except for men working on the mines in South Africa, about 18000 in 1989, some 15% of the formally employed workforce.

personal responsibilities and obligations (Russell 1984).

The overall effect of this poor data collection has been to underestimate the contribution of absent employed workers to the homestead. Yet even under these circumstances de Vletter finds 17.7 percent of all homestead income to come from absent workers. Russell and Ntshingila(1984), working with a much smaller sample in 1984 suggest a much higher proportion of 39 percent.

When homestead members leave their rural home to join or create other households in other places, they lose neither their homestead membership nor their kin-based responsibility to contribute to the support of various homestead members in several particular ways. As members of other households they will be pressed by new obligations, for example, to contribute to the kitchen of whoever prepares their food or looks after their children or sleeps with them (Russell 1984).

The obligations to the rural homestead weigh more heavily on some members than others. Barendregt and Brouwer (1988 p 115) have shown the greater commitment of eldest sons, who anticipate inheriting headship, over other sons. Similarly more is expected of sons as male and therefore permanent members of the patrilineage than of daughters whose ultimate obligation is to the homestead of the men they marry. But since women marry late (only 30.8 percent of women between the ages of 20 and 30 in 1986 were married (1986 Census p 216)) daughters may in practice become major contributors to their fathers' homesteads, especially if their parents are looking after their premarital children(49.8 percent of Swazi women between 20 and 30 in 1986 were unmarried mothers, the prevalence being higher in rural than urban areas(ibid)). Indeed the links between a rural homestead and the various urban households in which its money-earning members are located are forged and sustained in large measure by the arrangements for child care. Children typically spend their early childhood in rural homesteads, but may join urban households for further education and employment. Parents' indebtedness to those who are caring for their children - usually the children's grandparents - is typically discharged in money payments.

THE REDISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN BETWEEN DOMESTIC GROUPS

The rules of patriliny express the obligation of homesteads to welcome all patrilineally descended children (sons' children) to membership, whether or not sons contribute to their upbringing. By the same rule daughters' children belong in homesteads of the men who fathered them, but they are made welcome in their mothers' homesteads where their presence obliges their mothers to continue contributing to the homestead, either their valued vigorous labour as rural residents, or cash as employed workers living away. Once a woman marries it becomes difficult for her to contribute anything to her original homesteads; her husband and the several members of his homestead all lay claim to a share of her economic output. Husband's mother will assert her "traditional" right to command the labour of a daughter-in-law, against which the husband will assert his "traditional" right to

everything that belongs to his wife. Husband's father can also attempt to lay a rather weaker "traditional" claim to everything that belongs to his son.

HOMESTEAD FISSION AND URBAN AREAS

In the reconstruction of the Swazi past we are presented with a picture of social life regulated by an effective hierarchy of rules and roles, with crisis associated mainly with the death of a homestead head, when his sons, unable to accept the authority of his heir, their brother, would leave the homestead to establish their own homestead elsewhere.

New opportunities for paid employment have altered the options. A man's sons very rarely live in his homestead, despite the symbolic house they build there. They are able to escape the daily submission to their fathers and to set up independent households without the trauma and effort of "fission" from their fathers' homesteads. One should of course not underestimate the difficulties of setting up one's own homestead. The rule which gives all married men the right to land for a homestead has to be set against a population which expands at 3.8 per annum on finite territory; chiefs who control desirable areas (within easy commuting distance of job opportunities, with good water and fertile soil) may be loathe to confer new land on the son of a landholder, especially if he stands eventually to inherit. Population pressures thus increase chiefs' power.

THE PERSISTENT MISUNDERSTANDING OF RURAL URBAN LINKAGES

It is against this background that we turn to Swaziland's National Income and Expenditure Survey of 1985 (1988), which, with a generous sample of 3% of the population, was designed to settle all kinds of vexed questions, such as the extent and correlates of material inequality in Swaziland, and the role of earned wage income in the broader economic strategy of different kinds of households.

Without ado, the household was assumed to be the income-earning-spending unit. The 3 802 households, sampled from both urban and rural areas, were each carefully monitored for a month, the whole survey spread over a year in order to control seasonal bias. The household was defined as

> " a single person or group of people sharing the same homestead(sic) and eating from the same pot" (NIES (1988) p 11). Homestead was defined as the adjacent housing units that share a common kraal(sibaya) or common yard (libala)" (ibid).

There then follows a refinement which was to undermine the whole exercise:

> "Household members were excluded if they lived away from the homestead most of the time even if they returned for weekends or at the end of the month" (ibid).

It is difficult to exaggerate the distortion introduced into the data on income distribution by this apparently innocuous ruling, designed to eliminate double counting. At a stroke, rural households are deprived of almost all the income of those members who have migrated precisely in order to be able to meet the need for cash at the rural homestead; "almost", because the survey did allow for remittances from absentees to be counted in income. The tiny amounts recorded speak for themselves: on average rural households received only E25.59 a month from this source compared to an average of E348.38 a month earned in towns (NIES (1988)pp 156, 161).

By this rule two-thirds (de Vletter 1983) of all Swazi earners were separated from their dependant homesteads and enumerated as independent households. Had migrant workers been considered members of their rural households, all of their earned wage income would have been counted as rural household income, more than doubling the reported cash income and transforming the reported national pattern of income distribution.

From this definitional rule flow most the "findings" of an analysis of the National Income and Expenditure Survey data by Eele of the Food Studies Group at Oxford who was commissioned by UNICEF Swaziland in 1989 to identify the Swazi poor (Eele 1989). Thus urban households were found to be much richer than rural households, small households were found to be much richer than big households, male-headed households were found to be much richer than female-headed households.

In no time at all experts were busy devising strategies to reduce the appalling poverty of rural female headed households in a country in which over 81% of all rural households (and 17% of all urban households) were allegedly below the poverty line ((Eele, 1989 Table 5, p 13). Swaziland's high GDP per capita (at US$ 759 in 1989 high enough to rank as one of the World Bank's "middle income" countries) was declared to mask a situation in which

> "income is very unequally distributed in the country. A small proportion of the population have access to most of the income" (Eele 1989 p 33). "The level of inequality is high compared to other developing countries" (op.cit. p 11)

The reported maldistribution of incomes in Swaziland was joyfully seized, resonated and elaborated by the international bureaucracy whose careers have come to hinge on such demonstration (No problems, no poverty, no victims = no projects).UNICEF Swaziland found in the findings evidence of the need to expand their local operations. Academics who too had staked their careers on evidence of the inequities of regimes of which they disapprove, took fresh heart.

And all this from a bureaucratic decision to exclude from the definition of household any people not sleeping at home during the week! It would be nice to think that this was an isolated incident, but it is not. In 1977 the International Labour Office mission (JASPA) working once again with flawed official statistics reported a ten-fold discrepancy between urban and

rural incomes in Swaziland. Although their findings were promtly and convincingly exposed as fallacious by de Vletter(1979) - money was earned in urban areas but the goods for which it was exchanged were consumed mainly in the rural areas where most people lived - they became became an important justification for a U.S.$43 million ten-year rural development project aimed at ""closing the gap between urban and rural areas" and "uplifting" the rural poor through increasing agricultural productivity (the impact of which was to accelerate rural-urban migration as people adopted more efficient labour-saving agricultural methods to produce the same amount on less land (Huntings 1985. Low 1986). Such misunderstandings characterise much policy-oriented research by short-term experts who , as members of the international aid bureaucracy have vested interests in the continuing poverty of the Third World, and who, in any case, are simply too expensive to be expected to acquaint themselves with the social peculiarities of all the societies they are called upon to tinker with.

IV.

Despite its innocuous neutral connotations, "household" ,like "family", the biases of which have long been noted, is a culturally loaded Western notion. Indeed until quite recently "family" in England meant, not close kin, but "household", particularly as constituted by slaves and servants (Williams 19XX) The apparently commonsense proposition, that everybody everywhere lives in households of some kind or another, either contains other unstated assumptions which lend it interest (for example that those who live together spend together or eat together) and which should therefore be teased out and elaborated, or it is so bereft of particular meaning as to be trivial. Once we begin to examine the unstated assumptions about "households",we see that we are looking into particular cultures and sub-cultures at particular times.

Household must be conceptualised as an essentially rather arbitrary grooуping of people who come together to share, minimally, accommodation and cooking. What else they share - income, beds, bodies, secrets, bank accounts, lineage, wealth, kinship, recreation, rental, descendants - and for how long, will vary from culture to culture, from class to class, from place to place, from time to time. Any apparent permanence and predictability of household structure is a reflection of stability and homogeneity of that place and time. People subject to the same pressures are likely to institutionalise common solutions to the problem of who lives with whom, and what such sharing will entail. The smaller the scale of the society, the greater the neeed for common solutions. Social anthropologists working in small scale societies were rightly struck by the power of descent to pattern social participation.

Household became institutionalised as a unit of analysis in Britain and other similarly organized Western countries because,

early in this century when the systematic collection of statistics was being institutionalised, household was the significant unit for the pooling and distribution of resources. Industrial capitalism with its particular division of labour had fashioned a particular dependance between husbands and wives, and a particular independence between parents and their grown children. But changing circumstances are beginning to undermine the assumption that households are a satisfactory unit of analysis, even in Britain, where changing technology has undermined the sexual division of labour upon which they were premised. A more unpredictable, volatile pattern of domestic group is emerging.

The link between kinship and household now appears to be contingent. In Britain there are many non-kin households, especially amongst young people at the height of their reproductive power. Fertility is inhibited to prolong valued non-kin households. Despite high levels of sexual activity, the transformation of sexually active couples into families is delayed, releasing women, like men, into the market for sustained periods. Increasing proportions of the population elect to live alone. These new patterns have heightened our perception of the essential arbitrariness of the "family household".

Contemporary research in Britain has begun to explore the limitations of household as a unit of analysis, both as making unwarranted assumptions about the way resources are distributed within households, and obscuring important resource allocations between households (Laurie and Sullivan 1992).

Evans' trenchant criticism of the way the term has been misused in Africa (1989) concludes by allowing that the idea of household is nevertheless too valuable to be entirely discarded. Yet her own arguments against the use of the individual as a unit of analysis - that it obscures important structured relationships between individuals - can also be made against the use of household in those societies, like Swaziland, where households themselves are contained within encompassing domestic networks of a highly visible kind.

The assumption that households are to be found everywhere in the world, with minor cultural variations, has "worked" only because planners and academics have been content to accept at face value the "data" thus collected; the former because it has suited their own agendas, the latter because they are so seldom in a position to know any better, sitting in front of their computers analysing data collected by underpaid and usually alienated enumerators whose main qualifications are that they speak the language, can write, and are willing to do casual work, administering questionnaires they have neither designed nor understood . As to the indigenous academics, they are in too short supply to need to bolster their curricula with research papers, or too busy establishing themselves as part-time consultants within the international aid business to want to rock the boat. With the shifting demand for "hard" i.e. quantifiable data, social researchers have become the victims of their own unimaginative social survey techniques. In Swaziland these entail the synchronic study of a random sample of units (sometimes

households, sometimes rural homesteads) selected topographically on the basis of some kind of map. "Households" (typically defined as whoever happens to be sharing premises at the time of the survey) and "homesteads" (typically defined as the rural residents either with or without their absent migrant worker) are then "interviewed" through some captured spokesman. This technique has inhibited the investigation of interrelationships between units, and of changes within units over time; links between units over time have rarely been considered.

Economic changes in Africa have forced people into new domestic patterns. These patterns are not part of any gradual historical transition to conjugal nuclear family households of the kind found in the industrial West. Laslett's work on the long historic roots of the nuclear family system in England and France cautions us against the facile assumption that industrial capitalism is a lodestone for a nuclear family system. The untidy domestic communities of Swaziland are the adaptive response of patrilineally organized pastoralists to a situation which is likely to persist. People in Swaziland are likely to continue to find themselves living on the fringes of the world market, in which they are likely to continue to participate as part-life-time wage-workers (Wallerstein 1989). But their adaptations take place within a cultural repertoire of lineage with its dense networks of obligation and responsibility, too valuable to be relinquished, especially in adversity. To the extent that "household" obscures the continuing vitality and importance of this distinctively African domestic structure, and imposes on Africa a crippling and distorted image of the maldistribution of resources, its use as a unit of analysis in social research must be discouraged.

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