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Peter G. Forster, Bongani J. Nsibande, eds. *Swaziland: Contemporary Social and Economic Issues.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000. xlix + 369 pp. No price available (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84014-331-7.

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It is difficult to ascertain this book's provenance. All the main chapter contributors, including one of the joint editors, are current or former teaching staff of the University of Swaziland in the field of Social Science. However, the other editor, Peter Forster, is affiliated to the Department of Sociology, School of Comparative and Applied Sciences, University of Hull in the UK. All the reader is told is that the book has been published, courtesy of the British Council, "through a Link relationship ... between the University of Hull and the University of Swaziland". If the papers themselves sound suspiciously like ones that were originally written for a conference or workshop, this is not indicated anywhere in the book. The 17 authors come from the disciplines of Sociology/Anthropology, Politics and Administrative Studies, Agricultural Education and Extension, Law, Religious Studies, Home Economics, Distance Learning, Educational Foundations, Economics, Statistics and Demography, and Geography.

While one must welcome the multi-disciplinary cooperation that this represents, the immediate problem that such a wide variety of approaches poses is the question of identifying a central unifying theme for the book that has resulted from such collaboration. It is claimed on the blurb that the book aims to make "up-to-date information on socio-economic issues in contemporary Swaziland [more] readily accessible". These issues fall into four categories, around which the sixteen chapters of the work are grouped. Part I, covering "National Security and Stability", has two chapters dealing with Swaziland's security concerns in the context of a changing South(ern) Africa as well as Swazi civil religion. Part II, entitled "Family, Gender and Household", consists of five chapters that discuss the related issues of women, law and development, the needs of the youth, women's empowerment, and gender disparities in agriculture. Part III is concerned with Swaziland's urban and rural development. It also comprises five chapters. Finally, Part IV, which has four chapters, examines "Development in Health and Education", covering the plight of school leavers, "education for development in the twenty-first century", childhood mortality, and issues of women's health in Swaziland.

There is a useful introduction (pp.xvi–xlix) which provides a brief account of the historical background to the country, its struggle for independence, political and economic developments since independence in 1968 as well as a short discussion of what the editors see as "key components of indigenous culture". For the reader's convenience, the editors also summarize the "principal themes in the contributions" of the various authors (pp.xxxix–xlix). Here they present the essays largely as individual pieces, with rather little in the way of any running interlinking argument or point. Overall, the Introduction makes one wonder if this is, in fact, a book or merely a collection of essays that might have been better suited for a journal.

Bongani Nsibande's opening chapter is a lucid account of the changing political scenario in the Republic of South Africa during the 1990s and their implications for Swaziland's stability. Nsibande's discussion is prefaced by a quick look at the run-up to independence in 1968. He argues that while the apartheid regime had been a strong supporter of the "Swazi monarchy and its aspirations, its successor [since 1994] has been much more cautious and critical" (p.14). At first sight, it is difficult to see why this chapter has been grouped together with Peter Kasenene's piece on Swazi civil religion, defined as "a set of ideas, beliefs, values, rituals and symbols of a religious orientation which members of a society share, giving them a sense of communal purpose and identity" (p.21). Kasenene's is one of the most clearly written and absorbing chapters in the book. Evidently, this is a slightly revised version of the same author's earlier article that appeared in the UNISWA Research Journal (October 1988).

Philip Iya's contribution on the discrimination of women under Swaziland's law is another very readable chapter. He shows that more needs to be done beyond affirmative action and the repeal of discriminatory laws

for the effective eradication of all forms of discrimination against women in the Southern African region and beyond. He argues that we need more information on the nature of gender discrimination in the country. In his other chapter, Iya discusses the needs of youth in Swaziland's national development policy. He makes a plea for a multi-disciplinary debate on the key problems facing the Swazi youth. This point surely underlines the importance of including all the major areas, including History, which is sadly lacking in the entire book. Issues are not discussed in their historical context. Iya also likes to announce the issues he intends looking at–for instance on p. 58–and then takes them one by one, almost as if he is giving a lecture. This may be a useful stylistic ploy, but it could also tempt the reader to skip those issues/subtopics that may not appear particularly enticing or exciting. A case in point is the author's rather extended discussion of the term "youth" which some readers may find somewhat sterile. Overall, however, the piece would appear to be a very useful document that could provide the basis for policy decisions.

The essay by R.S. Bhalla attempts to indicate the shortcomings of the Swaziland Marriage Act of 1964 and offers some suggestions for its amendment to improve its workability. This Chapter stresses the need for simplicity in the laws governing the institution of marriage, but the essay itself is not really an example of lucidity. For it is couched in rather technical language which is both too theoretical and legalistic for the general reader and does not seem to provide the flesh–in the form of specific or concrete Swazi cases–to illustrate the problems identified.

The joint chapter by the Keregeros on women's empowerment and income generation is an informative and well researched piece which is also quite readable. Unlike one or two others in the collection, it does have the meat to support its argument. Equally clear, and well illustrated, is Chapter 7 on "Gender Disparities in Agriculture" by K.J.B. Keregero, B.M. Dlamini, and M.M. Keregero.

The second half of the book looks generally at "development": in the "urban and rural" sectors as well as in health and education. The chapters therein are all policy-oriented but quite informative for the most part. Thandi Khumalo provides a careful examination of the problems of community participation in urban planning, identifying some of the major obstacles to this. Michael Matsebula's account of the evolution of the urban informal sector is perhaps the only essay in the book that takes a look at its topic by using a historical perspective, pushing the discussion as far back as the period before World War II, and carrying the story up to the post-independence era. It is quite clear, though, that interesting as this discussion is, it does borrow a fair amount of data and ideas from the author's previous writings, as his bibliography (pp.182-85) would surely confirm. S.N.A. Mensah's contribution is yet another important piece, which is somewhat technical at the theoretical level. However, the author makes his main argument very clear in his conclusion. He advocates greater support for the small farm sector, arguing that "the promotion of the small farm agrarian structure could increase agricultural productivity, reduce environmental pollution and increase employment" (p.200). K.J.B. Keregero discusses the problems faced by agricultural extension work in Swaziland and suggests that "the Swazi way" of doing things, admired so much by outsiders, must "find practical reflection in the manner in which agricultural extension is carried out ...". Exactly how this is to be done, however, is not clear.

Of the remaining chapters, perhaps the most striking is Mamane Nxumalo's examination of "how traditional cultural practices impact on the status of women's health in Swaziland" (p.353). Much of what she writes is based upon government and other official publications as well as secondary sources. A portion of it, however, comes from her own informal general observation of the situation in the country. Overall, this makes for a very fascinating, commonsensical and readable discussion of women's health, their education, their social problems such as teenage pregnancies, maternal mortality, family planning, unsafe abortion practices, etc.

In conclusion, then, the usefulness of this publication lies in the relevance of many of its chapters to the practical problems faced by contemporary Swaziland rather than its intrinsic academic value. It should be compulsory reading for administrators, development workers, NGOs, as well as national leaders concerned with not only modern Swaziland but the Southern African region as a whole.

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