

Royalty, Religion and Residency: The Swati Experience of Governance with Special Reference to the Period 1968 - 2018

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Abstract

The role of religion in the governance of society is ambiguous and complicated. Therefore, it should never be ignored but instead be studied and analysed carefully so that what is good from it can be gleaned for the benefit of good governance and what is bad can be discarded. In Eswatini for instance, on the one hand African Traditional Religion and African Instituted Christianity are seen largely as responsible for the theological justification and support for the absolute monarchy. On the other hand, progressive mainline denominations and evangelicals have been seen as largely responsible for call for change of the system to participatory democracy. In some cases, religion has been cited as a key pillar that instituted and supports the absolute monarchy. While in other cases religion has been a catalyst for change, resistance and inspiration for people seeking to contribute to the development of democracy and good governance. This paper seeks to establish the role that is played by religion in the governance of Eswatini. It also seeks to establish the relationship between religion and the monarchy, as well as the relationship between religion and ordinary citizens of the country. It critically examines the political role that is played by religion. It seeks to critically analyse the political significance of religion for both the royal family, which forms the ruling class, and residents, which comprises of all ordinary citizens of the country. The paper's main argument is that while on the one hand religion gives theological justification for the dominance of the royal family in the governing of the country by affirming it whilst relegating citizens to the margins as subjects, on the other hand, religion can still be used as a catalyst to encourage the residents to stand up and transform the political system to one that is democratic and participatory for the benefit of all citizens.

Keywords: Royalty, Monarch, Religion, Tinkhundla, Governance, Eswatini, Church

Introduction

Eswatini (formally Swaziland) remains the only country in Africa that is ruled by an absolute and benevolent monarchy (Dlamini 2016:4). This traditional system of governance has integrated royalty into the political and institutional pluralism in the democratic dispensation. Its persistence and continued survival as well as its role in a postcolonial era have been entrenched through religion and culture. This affects the residents (citizens) in particular who, whilst aspiring to reside in a free and democratic society, continue to be trapped in a country run through a traditional and undemocratic system. Eswatini is located between the borders of South Africa and Mozambique. It is a small nation with a population of just over one million people. It has experienced divergent political developments starting with a diarchy, then colonialism, King's Decree and 'Tinkhundlacracy', which is a system of political control of the people through and for the benefit of the monarchy. This essay will illustrate the religious and cultural frameworks in Eswatini since colonialism.

Eswatini has been ruled by an absolute monarchy from the Dlamini dynasty for over 150 years. The Dlamini dynasty is referred to as *Emalangeni*, 'those of the sun'. King Sobhuza II marshalled his tiny nation to independence in 1968, after a long struggle since his ascent to the throne in 1921. During colonization, the monarchy was seen as the rightful leader by the people and when the country gained independence, the King regained more power from being a mere paramount chief to a king of his people free from the supervision of the British. Surprising enough, instead of losing power during independence as was the case with other monarchies on the continent, he gained more power. Chistian Potholm (2008:219) observes that, 'unlike most of his traditional counterparts in Africa Sobhuza II gained, not lost power during the decolonization period: and in fact he expanded his control far beyond the Swazi nation ...'. The question that has to be asked is, how did the monarchy manage not only to hold onto power but to increase its grip? How is it that the Kingdom of Eswatini has survived the political changes that took place in other parts of the continent and changed monarchs into democratic systems of government? How has the monarchy only survived the calls for democratic change but in fact seems to have become even stronger? Does this mean that Emaswati (the

Swati people) do not want participatory democracy, one they can shape and influence? Political analysts and academics have attempted to reflect on these questions from different perspectives. Factors such as economy, class structure, cultural structuralism and others have been blamed for the perpetuation of the monarchy (Sihlongonyane 2003:155).

There are a number of answers to this question, but one of them, which is the subject of this paper, is the role played by religion and culture in the entrenchment of the power and dominance of the monarchy over the citizens of Eswatini. Very little has been done to look at the role of religion in the foundational motivation and sustenance of the dominance of the monarchy in Eswatini. Therefore, the hypothesis of this paper is that royalty and religion are complicit in keeping residents of a country, commonly referred to as citizens, on the margins of political leadership, as they are deemed to be inferior to members of the royal family and those they have adopted to be part of the aristocracy. Such religio-cultural and anachronistic practices that emanate from both African Traditional Religions and Christianity make it extremely difficult for residents of Eswatini or ordinary citizens to participate fully in the political leadership of the country. The same sentiments are echoed by Bongi Radipati (1992:243), who argues that ‘the monarchy under the direction of King Sobhuza II, succeeded in reinforcing its power considerably and in constituting an original political system essentially based on systematization of tradition’. Emile Durkheim (1965:47) defines religion as,

a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – *beliefs* and practices which unite into a single moral community called church or those who adhere to them.

Peter Kasenene (1993:24) defines culture as ‘the man-made [sic] symbols, language and material things which are neither instinctively acquired nor genetically transmitted’. Charles Valentine (1968:3) takes the definition further by noting that culture consists of ‘all socially standardized ways of seeing and thinking about the world, of understanding relationships among people, things, and events; of establishing preferences and purposes of carrying out actions and pursuing goals’.

The political rights of citizens have been a subject of discussion, with scholars and political analysts raising many contentious issues with a majority

of them being in general agreement that they have been marginalized as far as full participation in the political life and governance of the country is concerned. Amongst the key written works on religion, monarchy and the role of citizens in Eswatini, Joshua Bhekinkosi Mzizi's stands out. His primary work on this subject is titled: *The Dominance of the Swazi Monarchy and the Moral Dynamics of Democratization of the Swazi State* (in Kumalo 2013:83). In this article Mzizi analyses the monarchy's efforts to entrench its dominance whilst limiting the rights of citizens in Eswatini. He argues that religion and culture have been used in the legitimization of the dominance of the monarchy whilst marginalizing ordinary citizens. He asserted that,

Judeo-Christian beliefs underscored the centrality of royal authority and the notion of the divine appointment of kings. Royal absolutism, therefore, implied that kings were God's representatives amongst nations. They commanded unsurpassed authority and respect for them was demanded, not earned (Mzizi 1995, in Kumalo 2013:83).

Hilda Kuper (1978) gives a full, detailed history of the rise of the Swazi nation, noting that there is inherent loyalty between the monarchy and the citizens which withstood the interference of the British colonizers. James Shadrack Matsebula (2000) writes about the developments of the history of the country, including the place of the monarchy and the loyalty of citizens. Mzizi (2005) also analyses the dream of Somhlolo, which is the bedrock of Christianity's relationship and sense of subjections to the royal family in Swaziland. He then calls for Christianity to offer a prophetic critique to the monarchy and empower citizens to resist the undemocratic system of leadership in the country. Whilst this work is aware of the essays that have been written on royalty, religion and the role of citizens in the governance of the country it seeks to respond to the question: how does religion contribute to the monarch's dominance of the political leadership in Eswatini?

Therefore, this essay focuses on the role played by religion to undergird and support the dominance of the monarchy. It focuses on the role of religion in the relegation of residents to the margins of political leadership. It seeks to do this by critically examining the complicity between royalty and religion in the marginalization of residents in political leadership. Royalty represents the royal family and the monarchy who form the ruling aristocracy in Eswatini. These include the Their Majesties (King and Queen mother),

princes and princesses and citizens they adopted by appointing to positions of power. Religion represents religio-cultural beliefs, tradition and practices mainly from African Traditional Religions and Christianity. In Swati tradition there is no separation between religion and culture; the two go together. Kasenene (1993:93) notes that '[r]eligion manifests a holistic approach to the world and to existence'. Residency represents those who stay in the country, in other words the citizens either by birth or naturalization. The methodology used to achieve the goals of this study include the examination of the role of the royal family and the residents of Eswatini in the political system and how these are undergirded by religio-cultural assumptions and beliefs. This is done through critically analysing archival material, papers and reports on the state of politics in the country. The essay has four sections. In the first section, it examines the historical background to the study of citizenry and politics in Eswatini by discussing the relationship between the monarchy and the residents. Then it explores the use of religion and culture in the marginalization of citizens in the public sphere and their participation in earlier epochs. This is followed by a section that discusses the involvement of citizens in politics and religion and analyses the areas of contestation. Next, it proposes the way in which religion can be used to empower citizens to participate meaningfully in the development of democratic governance in Eswatini.

Royalty and Residency in Eswatini

In the monarchic system of Eswatini, the King, who is also referred to as the 'lion', *Ingwenyama*, rules with the help of *Indlovukati*, the she-elephant, his mother or, if she is deceased, one of the senior wives. The King is the head and symbol of the nation *sive*. Not everyone can become a king in the Swazi society. For one to be King he/she must first come from the children of the King and then they must be chosen by the King and endorsed by elders of the royal house *bantfwabenhkosi* or *Emalangeni* (Kuper 1965:65). The King and the Queen are by principle accountable to *Indlunkhulu yasebukhosini*, the royal household or family, a council made up of the princes and princesses, *bantfwabenhkosi*, also known as *Emalangeni*. The royalty belongs to the *Nkhosi Dlamini* clan and they produce the King who is the absolute monarch, having power over all aspects of life in the country, controlling, for example, the economy, social rules, culture, religion and even education. Politically, he controls Parliament, Cabinet and chooses the Prime Minister. Under the royal

family or *Emalangen*i there is the Swazi National Council (SNC), *liqoqo*, which includes princes, chiefs and commoners who are appointed by the King. The Council is led by a Traditional Prime Minister, *Indvuna Yase Ludzidzini* (Governor of the main palace, which is the seat of the King and the Queen). This Council advises the King on a number of issues, especially traditional ones, related to the governance of the country. Politically, the country maintains a dual system of government with a modern government led by the Prime Minister, who also comes from the Dlamini dynasty with a cabinet that is hand-picked by his Majesty on one hand. On the other hand, the traditional system of governance is run by chiefs who report to the King. As a result, in Swaziland the monarch is still the absolute ruler; he opens and dissolves Parliament; signs and repeals laws; appoints and dismisses the Prime Minister; and he is the Supreme holder of the land, the culture, customs and traditional religion of the country (Kasenene 1993:90). All the subsidiary structures such as Cabinet, African traditional religious leaders, the leaders of churches are guided and influenced deeply by the monarchy through its complex system of patronage.

This makes Swaziland a unique place in terms of the interface between African traditional systems of leadership, modern politics and religion. This system entrenches the clear divisions between leaders and those that are led and is incapable of inculcating a culture of equality in society. Kasenene (1993:88) further observed that,

The distinction between those who govern and those who are governed in Swaziland is clear because of the monarchical system of government, with the Dlamini royal family as the ruling group and the rest of the Swazis as subjects, except the few who are adopted into the ruling class.

Thus, residents are limited in the role they can play in the governance of the country. They also live in a country where equality is an impossibility according to this system. On the top of the structure is the royal family, which is a class of rulers. Then one has the ruling elite, which is adopted by the ruling class. On the next level are all the ordinary citizens. Sipho Simelane (2006) correctly observes that ‘for anyone to survive or make it to the top in the political structures, one has to conform to the standards laid by the royal family and at times even compromise their principles’.

Residents, Royalty and Religions: The Intersection

Swazi traditional religion permeates all aspects of life including the various institutions. Kasenene (1993:92) notes that 'it is impossible to separate religion from any other aspect of culture. As a result, religious beliefs and practices help to sanction political power ...'. This it does through promoting obedience to power and discouraging resistance to those in power, in this case the Dlamini dynasty. The proposal of this essay is that culture and religion encourage residents or citizens to pay absolute loyalty to the royal family as good followers and subjects. Kasenene (1993:90) observes the significant role played by culture and religion in keeping citizens submissive to authority in the Swazi context,

For example, cultural values facilitate obedience to rulers. The most fundamental value in Swazi culture is respect for one's seniors. All human relationships are controlled by this value. It regulates relationships between parent and child, husband and wife, king and subject, royalty and ordinary people ... subject and any ordinary Swazi is expected to be humble, soft spoken and submissive to the dominant partner. To question one's senior is condemned as unSwazi.

As a result, what is the unwritten but dominant rule is to have a member of the royal family close or distant, or just someone with the surname Dlamini as a leader, while the rest are followers even if they are more qualified educationally and with experience. This denies residents space to define and exercise their political abilities or prowess to the fullest.

As far as religion is concerned there are two important components that have been used; Swazi Traditional Religion and Christianity. Swazi Traditional religion is embedded in the belief in ancestors of the nation, who are consulted through rituals, sacrifices and national ceremonies such as *incwala*, also known as a national prayer. *Incwala* is 'a national religio-political ritual ...' (Kasenene 1993:96). The King is the central player during *incwala* and there is no *incwala* without the King. Through this ceremony religious practices and beliefs are entrenched through the performing of rituals, sharing of common identity propaganda and doctoring through the use of traditional herbs and animal sacrifices with the purposes of building unity and enhancing the rule of the King and the royal family.

Christianity, which happens to be the majority religion in the country,

has also been used to entrench the power of the monarchy. For instance, a literary reading of the Bible gives justification for the King to exercise absolute power over the citizens including dispossessing them of their fields, taking of their daughters as his wives and sons as his guards and soldiers (1 Samuel 8:1–22). Where residents are mentioned next to the king, they are servants, expected to offer undivided loyalty to the king or queen. There is hardly any king who is depicted as offering service to his subjects. The Bible also calls for citizens to obey those in authority, for they have been given authority by God (Romans 13:1–10). In fact, the Bible especially, the Old Testament, is the king or queen's book for, in most parts, residents or subjects are called to offer full submission and servanthood to the rulers and never have ambitions to rise to position of leadership on their own and for their benefit. Even if they rise it must be to the benefit of the King or royal family.

When it comes to the question of citizens rising to the position of kings the Bible has a record of only two ordinary citizens who rose into the position of kings from the margins of society. The first is Saul and the second is David. Saul was picked up by God (1 Samuel 10:1–27). Then David, another ordinary citizen, was picked up and became one of the most respected kings (1 Samuel 16:1–13). In spite of failures and sins, he is said to have been loved by God, who declared him a man after his own heart. However, the stories of these two men remain rare ones, considering that no ordinary resident rose to the position of king after that. Kings were then chosen through hereditary processes from within the royal dynasties. Therefore, the Bible portrays kings as appointed by God within the royal family than through a democratic representative process. John Pobee (1991:23) notes that this is 'the point for political pseudo-religion of the divine ruler-cult'. Therefore, it is not surprising that even in modern-day Christianity there is no mention or place of an ordinary resident who rose to become king or an ordinary family member who became royal. This entrenches the position of those who in the royal families are seen as belonging to an upper, privileged and ruling class, whilst keeping those without royal blood in perpetual servitude.

Residents in Politics: A Religio-cultural Perspective in Eswatini

In the case of Eswatini, the Bible is not the only tool that is used to entrench the marginalization of residents from political ascendancy. Swati cosmology,

a phenomenon created by the synergy between religion and cultural values also relegates residents or ordinary citizens to the margins of political power. In Eswatini, the King summons the nation to the royal kraal for consultative meetings. However, those meetings have no decision-making powers. Only members of the royal family, together with those they have adopted by appointing them to positions of responsibility, make decisions. Residents can only rise to the positions of headmen, army generals, deputy Prime Minister and heads of regional offices. They can also be elected to positions of power such as parliamentarians and councillors, but those positions are not influential, because they are subjected to royal decree that runs the country. Parliamentarians have limited power of decision making and those powers are not above the King's powers. So, residents can participate in the lower structures of the system of governance. However, these roles do not elevate them to political leadership, nor do they give them political influence. In these positions they are just serving the monarchic system and are not leaders in their own right. Therefore, they have no power by themselves to exercise in the governance of the country.

Generally, little is recorded of the residents' participation in political processes in the history of the country, except in the period running up to independence and the late 1990s. During the run-up to the elections there was the emergence of Swati educated elites such as Ambrose Zwane, Dr Samketi, JJ Nquku, Prince Dumisa Dlamini and others who entered the political arena, formed political organizations and provided leadership that contested for seats in Parliament as the new Constitution allowed them. Whilst the citizens were involved in the political campaigns and mass mobilization of people during the run-up to the elections, after 1968, they were again relegated to subjects, whose role is to support the monarchy, more as cronies than leaders following their own ideas and convictions. In the half a century of independence no resident or ordinary citizen from outside the Dlamini clan has been appointed to the position of Prime Minister, which is the highest position any civilian can hold in the country as only that of the King is above it. In most instances in the country, political leadership is expressed in clan terms, the domain of the elders, *labadzala*, *emalangen*i royalty. Even discussing politics in public is forbidden unless one has permission from *labadzala*.

In most cases residents are elevated to positions of assistant or deputy *lisekela*. Mzizi (2004) argues that the Tinkhundla system would ultimately destroy the country because of its failure to include all the citizens of the country in political leadership. He blames the late King Sobhuza II who in

1973, suspended the democratic constitution that was adopted at independence in 1968 and instituted the Tinkhundla system, which Mzizi calls poisonous. He blames Sobhuza II's fear of political parties, which led to him 'doing everything in his power to discredit political parties blaming them for being divisive and foreign elements' (Mzizi 2004 in Kumalo 2013:107). Political parties would have ensured the participation of the residents in the political system, but they were banned through the Constitution by the King, who then declared the Royal Decree as the way of running the country. On the 12th of April 1973, Sobhuza II suspended the Constitution. He blamed the disunity of the people on the 'Westminster Model Constitution' of 1968. He argued that it was 'the cause of growing unrest, insecurity and dissatisfaction' (Mzizi 2004:99). He continues to say that,

The Constitution has permitted the importation into our country of highly undesirable political practices alien to, and incompatible with the way of life in our society and designed to disrupt and destroy our own peaceful and constructive and essentially democratic methods of political activity; increasingly this element engenders hostility, bitterness and unrest in our peaceful society (Maseko 2007:4).

The King replaced the constitution with the famous royal decree known as the '1973 Decree', in which he said,

Now therefore I, Sobhuza II, King of Swaziland, hereby declare that, in collaboration with my cabinet ministers and supported by the whole nation, I have assumed supreme power in the Kingdom of Swaziland and that all legislative, executive and judicial power is now vested in myself and shall, for the meantime, be exercised in collaboration with my cabinet ministers. I further declare that to ensure the continued maintenance of peace, order and good government, my armed forces have been posted to all strategic places and have taken charge of all government places and public services. All *political parties* and similar bodies that cultivate and bring disturbances and ill-feelings within the nation are hereby dissolved and prohibited (Kings Proclamation 1973:2).

Speaking about these changes in 1980, the King said,

There is a need to allow representation of people. People must be able to participate in decision-making processes over and above their representative. That is why we threw out the white men's book (Westminster Constitution), which emphasised representation by others. We chose our own way (*kwakitsi*) of electing leaders through the *Tinkhundla* constituencies, that is what we know it is from the Swazi way of doing things. Over and above that people are still allowed to come to the royal Kraal to listen for themselves and participate in decision-making processes (King's Proclamation, 1973:2).

From that day, the only mechanism that ensured people's participation in political systems, e.g. political parties and subsidiary organizations were banned in Eswatini. They were replaced by Tinkhundla a patrimonial system through which the monarch exercises full control and power of the nation. *Tinkhundla* is a Swati name which means gathering place. Mzizi (1995:195) blames this system for being the tool of manipulation of ordinary people by the royal house. He says that,

I am uncomfortable to call the Swazi system *Tinkhundlacracy* because I do not know what it is. There is unquestionable royal manipulation of the masses ... and the silent declaration that only the King is right in political matters, social, economic, cultural, etc. This, for me, is a violation of the human right of self-determination of the masses.

That means for about 33 years, the country was led by the decree without a proper constitution. During this time there was no clear mechanism of how people could climb the political ladder but depended on being hand-picked by royalty to serve. In 2006, a new constitution was promulgated. It was drawn through a process that refused the participation of organized groups such as political parties and other civil society groups, but rather residents organized through the pro-monarchy Tinkhundla system meant to serve the agenda of the monarchy.

Ultimately, as much as ordinary citizens tried to play a role in politics, their avenue was through the systems sanctioned by the monarchy and even their contributions remained insignificant. Of course, this should not be construed as an attempt to undermine the role that was played by some leaders in the body politic of the country over the decades of independence. Some

residents worked their way up to high-profile political positions using the Swazi way of subtlety – *kulala phansi*. In other cultures, this would be interpreted, for instance, as cunning, sucking to power and bootlicking. However, in Eswatini that is almost the only way one can work one's way up to political power, by showing extra approval and respect of royalty and the system. Once in power a number of these residents demonstrated their unparalleled skills and prowess. Looking at the record of these leaders and many others there is just no basis for thinking that leadership must be reserved for those from the royal family. In the 1960s, a considerable number of residents formed political organizations of their own and demonstrated leadership qualities beyond that of some members of the royal family. These are people like Sishayi Nxumalo, who started the Swaziland Democratic Party, Ambrose Zwane, who started the Ngwane National Liberator Congress, JJ Nqutu's Swaziland Progressive Party who led their political organizations with excellence. Looking at these men's profiles and contributions, the validity of the claim that they are incapable of leading and their loyalty to the country questionable simply because they do not have royal blood remains disingenuous.

The doctrine of royal superiority that undergirds the politics of the country is brutal to a point that even those from the royal family who dare to push for political reforms that would open up the system to other citizens are discarded by the royal family and may even pay an ultimate price. An example of this, as Nomvula Ntjengase (2020) narrates, is the story of Prince Clement Dumisa Dlamini, who was amongst the first Swazis to graduate with a university degree, maybe even the first from the royal family. Dumisa was a progressive who joined Dr Nqutu's Swaziland Progressive Party and later co-founded the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress with Dr Zwane. He became General Secretary and organized people for membership and marches to fight against the exploitation of the citizens. His party contested the elections and contributed immensely to the attaining of independence in 1968. After that, he went to the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US) to further his education. He qualified with a string of degrees, ranging from science, economics and politics. By the time he came back to Eswatini he held two master's and two PhDs, all from reputable institutions such as the University of Sussex in the UK and Princeton University in the US. He came back to Swaziland in 1975, hoping to contribute to the leadership of the country for which he was more than qualified. However, it was not to be as he was shunned by his fellow royalty for having formed the NNLC, which had

contested elections with the King's party known as Imbokodvo. Ultimately, he was imprisoned under the 60 Days decree, a law that had been promulgated by King Sobhuza in 1973 when he abrogated the constitution. He was imprisoned from 1977–1980 by the King and ultimately released and advised to leave the country and refrain from practising politics. He went overseas where he worked for four years and returned to Swaziland. In 1984 he was then expelled from his country and sent to the United Kingdom to live in exile where he ultimately died a lonely and broken man 17 years later.

From Prince Dumisa Dlamini's story we glean how resolute and brutal the system is to those who oppose it, even if they are connected with the royal family and have a string of degrees and incredible record of political leadership. If they dare to open it up for residents to participate in it, they are likely to pay the ultimate price. Other residents organized themselves to form the People's United Democratic Movement under the leadership of Mario Masuku and the strong federation of Trade Unions formed by the late Jan Sithole, but all these have not been able to make progress. Mario Masuku has been in and out of prison most of his life. Most of his organization's (PUDEMO) leadership are exiled in South Africa. Emaswati are both strong in tradition and religion and this is working in favour of the system. Both religion and culture expect residents to be respectful, submissive and stay out of progressive politics, unless they are invited or appointed to serve in a position of influence, also known as *kubulawa*. Kubulawa in Swati literally means 'killed' (Vilakati 2015:15). In this context it means one's own will and aspirations have been killed as one is now to serve the King and royalty with all that one has. In reality, it means the opposite. It means patronage by the King and in return one gives one's undivided loyalty in service to the monarchy.

Residency, Royalty and Religion in Eswatini

I have already demonstrated above that it can safely be concluded that due to traditional religion and culture, political leadership in both the pre-independent and post-independent Eswatini were reserved for the dominance of the royal family and those connected to it. This is because Swati culture is highly structured and each person knows their place in society. The political leadership of the country is understood to be for the selected few who belong to the Dlamini dynasty because of the blood that runs through their veins that

comes with it. This has led to the failure of progressive movements and leaders to bring about change in the country, in spite of the many efforts that have been tried over the decades. To support political groups or even be associated with them can lead to one being ostracized and stigmatized by the leadership, leading to one not being able to access basic services and opportunities. As a result, to get into progressive politics takes bravery and the commitment to sacrifice, for residents are not supposed to harbour political ambitions in Eswatini, but rather to serve at the behest of the elders, *labadzala*.

It is noteworthy that although citizens have remained largely on the margins of society, there has been a number of them who were committed Christians and climbed the political ladder. Most of these leaders held faith and culture together in a creative tension and used it to justify their loyalty to the powers that be. Among these are people like JLF Simelane who served as Minister of Finance and diplomat; MB Nsibandze, Arthur Khoza and Albert Shabangu, Constance Simelane, all who were committed Christians and adherents of Swazi culture, but served at the highest levels any ordinary citizen can reach with excellence and merit. There has been an increase in the number of ordinary citizens and women serving in the cabinet. There are a number of reasons for this development. The first is the pressure that has been coming from progressive groups from within and outside the country who have been campaigning for these changes to take place. There has also been the call for women to be included in leadership positions in the world and that has forced the king to consider women when appointing members of the cabinet, parliament and other positions of influence to appease the world and be seen to be responding to the call for the democratization of the system.

Laws, however, do not tamper with the King's rights to choose people from the royal family for any position, nor do they temper with his right to appoint only a person from the Dlamini Dynasty for the position of Prime Minister. There have been developments in the accessibility of political power by citizens during the years 2006–2018 and the number of those who are literate politically continue to climb, meaning more pressure is exerted to the system to open up for them. For instance, during the last elections for parliamentarians, women comprised 14% of the contestants (Maziya 2018:1). Still low, but considering the history of their participation in the country, this is a significant increase. Running for parliamentary elections has also become a big project for most citizens, for this is the only way that those with political ambitions can have their dreams realized. People go to the extent of bribing the

electorate with food parcels, T-shirts and other resources just for them to get votes. In a country where job opportunities and economic prospects remain minimal, joining the race for parliament remains a viable and important option. However, the inclusion of residents in the Tinkhundla and parliamentary system does not necessarily guarantee transformation of the political system and ultimately the country. This is because parliamentarians do not actually have any power; they may discuss laws, but these have to be signed by the King, who holds executive power and can veto parliamentary decisions. A case in hand that showed the lack of power by parliament was the Marwick Khumalo saga. Marwick Khumalo was elected as speaker of the house of Parliament. The King did not want him in that position. He simply refused to endorse him by signing the papers; Marwick was withdrawn by Parliament, in spite of the fact that he had been elected by the majority members of Parliament.

From the above observation then it means one needs to be critical when residents are appointed in positions of power in the Eswatini government. Then one needs to ask the question: whether this is done genuinely or is it so that the government of their Majesties can be seen to be democratic by its global critics? There is a need for the laws – both written and unwritten – that entrench the dominance of leadership by the monarchy to be changed, so that all citizens can contest for leadership positions equally.

Challenges Faced by Residents in Political Office: Religion and Culture as Obstacles

Religion and culture also present a few obstacles for residents to play active roles in the politics of the country. Firstly, culture and religion both have negative effects on people's attitudes towards politics and governance; this is because they have been manipulated into believing that political leadership belongs to royalty not ordinary citizens. This made many residents to have apathy towards participating in politics. Kasenene (1993:89) asserts that,

There are two main methods which dominant groups use to gain or maintain power, namely physical force or mind control It is mind control which was used by the Dlamini clan to consolidate its power and have itself accepted by the people. The main tool which was used in mind control was culture which is rooted in Religion.

Kasenene's observation leads to an awareness of the effects that citizens have from cultural commitment, which promotes loyalty to the status quo. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that Swazi Traditional Religion, Christianity and culture have not been helpful in encouraging citizens of the country to be engaged in political activities and processes in order to transform the situation in the country. Second, is the attitude of some Christians towards religio-cultural practices associated with political leadership. The influence of Christianity on ordinary citizens and their attitudes towards African religio-cultural practices were felt soon after it had produced a sizable number of mission school-educated elites. Most of these came from ordinary citizens without royal connections. Christianity also tended to disrupt traditional cultural practices that socialized residents to Swati forms and structures of leadership. It entrenched the rejection of Swazi culture and ultimately politics for most residents who concerned themselves with the kingdom of heaven, rather than of this earth (Mzizi 2013:284).

A number of able and educated Emaswati turned their backs from the monarchy, culture and political system after they had accepted Christ, believing the system to be sinful because it was connected with ancestor veneration and unchristian rituals such as annual national prayer *Incwala*, and reed dance *umhlanga*. Thus, a number of educated and Christian Emaswati shun political leadership roles in the country because of the lack of free spaces for exercising political leadership. The other reason is that there are not enough opportunities or structures that people can join, that encourage political education and activism. The paucity of these structures is due to the fact that political parties are banned and political activities are monitored by the security agencies and can easily lead one into prison. Linked to that is the bad economic system in the country, which means that there are no resources to fund political activism. It is difficult for political bodies to raise funds. Even non-governmental organizations are struggling to get funding for their humanitarian work of feeding the poor and providing access to health and food. Royalty is embedded in most of the cultural and religious traditions. This means that as long as Emaswati are influenced and shaped by culture and religion in all spheres of their lives, then royalty is going to continue dominating leadership and residents being regarded as mere followers. It will take a new attitude towards Swazi culture especially towards the monarchy to change the attitudes toward the poor participation of citizens to the leadership of the country.

Religion as a Catalyst for Participating in Governance of Eswatini

In as much as we have seen that religion can be an obstacle for political activism and progress as Karl Marx once asserted, especially when it is used to control the thinking of the oppressed, it can also be a catalyst for their resistance. Hans Kung (1992) observed that 'To the disappointment of many Marxists in Africa, who believed that religion is a sleeping pill for the oppressed masses, religion has proven that it is more complex than that'. Asserting this point even firmer, Kung (1992:13) continued, '[r]eligion has proven that it can be not only a means of social appeasement and consolation but also ... a catalyst of social liberation: and this without that revolutionary use of force which results in a vicious circle of ever-new violence'. Of significance in Kung's assertions is the fact that religion in Africa is also playing a positive role of encouraging positive political activism, which encourages citizens to take their political destinies into their own hands which is yielding positive results already in some countries, this without resorting to violence.

In 2004 during the writing of the constitution, there was an unprecedented move when church leaders, both pastors and lay grumbled against the exclusion of the Christian clause which declared Swaziland, a Christian country from the new Constitution. They organized themselves through the Swaziland Christian Churches United in Christ (SCCUC) and marched to present a petition to the Constitution Review Commission that 'Christianity should be enshrined in the Kingdoms' Constitution as Swaziland's official religion' (Mzizi 2013:242). The move by the Christian leaders under the united banner of the SCCUC reached the King and he then invited them to the palace where he explained to them the reason behind the removal of the Christian Clause in the new constitution, the main reason being that Swaziland was in a modern society which is more inclusive than exclusive.

The role played by the church leaders in protesting against a political matter of concern to them because it touches on their faith is a typical example of the power of religion in mobilizing citizens for political action. It had been unprecedented in Eswatini that members of the clergy would organize a march across denominational lines and stand to contribute towards the drawing up of the constitution. During this protest most, church leaders were clad in their clerical regalia, e.g. dog collars, preaching gowns, albs and cassocks. For a

moment the church had left the comfort of the sanctuary and entered the public space in order to participate in the drafting of a new constitution for the country. The image of the church leaders marching to confront a political structure gave legitimacy to other residents of Eswatini who are adherents of the Christian faith that they can take part in political protests, which they were not sure they could do as Christians. So, it gave legitimacy to the political endeavour and ambitions of a number of committed Christians.

As already noted above, a number of committed Christians had been participating in the political leadership of the country. The idea of a committed Christian becoming a political leader brings with it a sense that the leader possesses qualities depicting loyalty, love, honesty, work ethic, service and integrity. This gives politics a good image from the predominant one where politicians are depicted as liars and thieves. Due to the fact that people tend to trust the church more than any other institution in the country, then they are likely to trust politicians who come through the church.

Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to make a case by arguing that the dominance of the monarchy in Eswatini is accounted for by the influence of religio-cultural factors manipulated by the monarchy and cherished by the residents. In conclusion we can assert that from the discussion above we have observed that in Eswatini issues of governance such as leadership, holding of political and cultural office, occupancy of positions in strategic institutions are generally associated with the royal family, because they have royal blood and those they choose to work with (Kasenene 1993:93). This essay has demonstrated that the role of religion and culture in the shaping of politics in Eswatini is ambiguous. On the one hand it has been used to entrench the dominance of politics by the royal family by spreading a pro-monarchy system of governance at the expense of the residents. On the other hand, religion especially Christianity can be used to rally citizens to participate in transformative political developments of the country at all levels of society. For it to do this, it has to be changed from being a tool of domination of ordinary citizens into a catalyst that inspires them to see politics as another avenue of appreciating the inalienable rights of every human person. It has to create a conducive environment for all members of society to participate in politics including challenging those holding the levers of power to open the doors for others to participate. As they stand, the three

points: royalty, religion and residents, seem incompatible in Eswatini. However, religion can be used to bring the other two (royalty and residency) together, because all of them adhere to it. Instead of being used as a reason to justify the superiority of those who belong to royalty it can also campaign for equality of all people in the political realm of the country.

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