

Tradition and Control in Swaziland

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State formation in Southern Africa has been a contentious issue because it is usually linked to the role of the Republic of South Africa in such processes. The Kingdom of Swaziland has long been overshadowed by its powerful neighbours and the Swazi response to this situation has allowed the idea to emerge that Swaziland is a client state of South Africa. This idea has influenced many of the analyses carried out into the nature of the Swazi state. In this paper, I will discuss the process of state formation in Swaziland and provide a theoretical context for my analysis.

In 1972, David Parkin described the emergence of minor family dynasties based on capitalist enterprise among the Giriama of Kenya. At the core of this process was the ability of entrepreneurs to make long-term capital investments in land rather than in people by the reconciliation of 'paradoxes of custom' (1972:5). In 1985 and 1986, while conducting ethnographic research in the Chiefdom of Velezizweni in western Swaziland, I observed a similar phenomenon among successful farmers, known as Balimi Mbamba (Real Farmers), who reconcile paradoxes of custom by supporting traditional rights of usufruct, while seeking to gain proprietorial rights over land (Bowen, 1987; 1989). The activities of these farmers can be conceptualised as the negotiation of short-term and long-term strategies related to gaining proprietorial rights over land. In the short term, by reinforcing and increasingly dominating local social institutions, the Real Farmers safeguard themselves, and their interests, against the consequences of alienating their kin and neighbours. In the long term, they gain control over, and restrict access to, the resources of their Chiefdom.

I concluded that the strategies of the Real Farmers as a group, in upholding custom in the short-term to achieve particular goals in the long-term, are coordinated and cohesive because the common short-term goal is readily identifiable. The Real Farmers want proprietorial control over their homestead land to serve the interests of their conjugal families. As individuals, the Real Farmers confront

the State, which controls land and is represented by their Chief and others, and, by using the symbols of custom, negotiate a new division of resources.

The activities of the Real Farmers provide a model for understanding political processes at the state level. This process of negotiation of long-term and short-term strategies by reconciling paradoxes of custom, mirrors the activities of King Sobhuza II (now deceased) and the Swazi royal family who have regained complete control over the Swazi state in the years since independence.

The analogy between the actions of Real Farmers and the King is made cognisant of a particular and complex relationship that exists between the community and the state, a relationship best described in terms of 'corporatism' (Higgott 1983). This corporatist model, in enhancing our understanding of the nature of the community in relation to the state, also allows us to understand why groups of people such as the Swazi royal family, and the Real Farmers have been seen to gain a social, economic and political advantage over others throughout the years since independence.

In describing the corporatist model, others have suggested that analysts must first move away from the perception that the activities of such states can be perceived in the '...pluralist sense of "neutral arbiter"' (Higgott, 1983:78), or as having '...only a shadowy existence ...at best merely an instrument which is used by this or that class or alliance of classes' (Randall & Theobald, 1985:135). This view, if applied to the Swazi state would envisage that state only as the government of the country of Swaziland, and thus fails to account for the either the evidence of the Swazi state as part of a larger Swazi nation¹, or for the intricacy of power

1. Within Swaziland there are substantial concerns over re-unification with the large number of ethnic Swazi who live in the Republic of South Africa (Government of Swaziland, 1982a, 1982b, 1983). These concerns seem to be articulated in terms of the division as truncation of a total ethnic identity. Therefore, the issue of re-unification has a pronounced spiritual and symbolic dimension.

relations between the community and the state. The complexity of the latter can be seen by analysing the process of development policy formation and implementation, and the responses of farmers to those policies. This complexity is further enhanced when considered in the light of clear differences between the exercise of power over people in the rural sector, on Swazi Nation Land,² and those in the industrial and agri-business sectors.

The contemporary Swazi state takes power from the public's acceptance of the legitimacy of the Swazi government. In this sense that state conforms to a recognised model.³ That the public accept the legitimacy of the government is particularly important to this argument, especially to the ruling aristocracy, for reasons I will shortly illustrate. Also important is a further aspect of this definition of the state. This is the public acceptance of the right of the state to use force, and to uphold its claim to binding rule-making over a defined territory, by virtue of commanding a monopoly over the legitimate use of force (Gould & Kolb, 1964:690; Mann, 1983:373).

Among Real Farmers, who express much dissatisfaction with the government, state legitimacy is not in question because people perceive the 'Government', that of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, to be different from, and inferior to, the rule of the King. The King's absolute right to rule has never been an issue in the Velezizweni community, and his right to use force to maintain his power is not questioned.⁴

2. Swazi Nation Land is that area of Swazi used by Swazi under traditional rights of usufruct. Individual Tenure Land is land which can be bought and sold.

3. 'A political form of human association by which a society is organised under the agency of a government which claims legitimate sovereignty over a territorial area, authority over all of the members of the society, and the right to use physical force when necessary to insure the effective exercise of its legitimate control' (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1979:412).

4. Ironically, the power of the ruling aristocracy, in anticipation of any questioning of that legitimacy, depends increasingly on its direct economic control over the Swazi Defence Forces who are supported by the Tibiyo Taka Ngwane

A contradiction emerges with the realisation that, despite his unquestioned right to grant coercive power to his rural development officials, King Sobhuza II did not do so. In fact, he obstructed the acquisition of power by these officials by giving the chiefs powers of veto and direct access to regional officials. However, in the industrialised sector of the Swazi economy, in contradiction to his stance on power for rural development officials, the King allowed his officials real coercive power, particularly in the area of industrial disputation. Unrest among labour had always been dealt with relatively harshly with evidence of much intolerance of unionism, particularly throughout the 1970s.⁵ If he had wished, Sobhuza had the ability to dispense coercive powers to all his officials, but instead he chose to do so quite selectively.

The corporatist model can be used to assist analysis of this selective use of coercive power by King Sobhuza and royal family members. The Swazi state exemplifies the corporatist model as described by Higgott and Robison (1986b), who argue that the attraction of this model is its ability to accommodate *laissez faire* growth theory on the one hand, and demands for political order, elite security, and regime maintenance on the other (1986b:43).

The broad model of corporatism is best perceived as a continuum, one extreme being spontaneous organisation, in which the state's role is arbitration, and the other extreme being state corporatism, in which power and initiative are concentrated in the state itself (Randall and Theobald, 1985:173). This latter form incorporates 'inclusionary', and

corporation, which is a large company owned by the King (Booth, 1983:107).

5. For example, a march of railroad workers in 1975 was met with tear-gas and mass arrests, as was a strike by sugar workers at Big Bend in 1978. Teacher and student protests over wage levels in 1975 and 1976 escalated to the point where the police were authorised to fire on demonstrators (Booth, 1983:75-76).

'exclusionary' tactics.⁶ Further distinctions across the continuum involve bureaucratic styles, including 'indicative' styles, characteristic of mixed economies, and 'imperative' styles, usually associated with totalitarian regimes (Robertson, 1984:62-64).⁷

In many respects the Swazi state exhibits the entire range of corporatist characteristics. Inclusionary and exclusionary tactics have been used. For example, funding and access to resources have always been oriented towards government initiated rural development schemes in a manner suggestive of inclusionary tactics.⁸ Exclusionary tactics were also evident. For example, unions and political parties can be banned under the threat of sixty-day detention orders. These activities can be seen to differ depending on certain contexts; the more extreme forms of inclusionary and exclusionary tactics were restricted largely to the industrial sector or the agri-business complexes.

Differences also occur in the style adopted by government officials. Officials in country areas, because of their lack of power, use indicative tactics in their efforts to motivate and lead farmers. For example, any attempt to use imperative tactics incurred only anger and opposition from the farmers. However, in the towns and on the agri-business estates, government officials and management (because of government support for business) are able to adopt imperative techniques with impunity. It is a common complaint among workers that, through the Ndabazabantu system (a situation in which the

6. 'Inclusionary' tactics are those in which the state uses controlled mobilisation and cooption to forestall the independent development of worker and peasant organisations. 'Exclusionary' tactics are those in which already formed organisations are deliberately demobilised (Randall & Theobald, 1985:173).

7. The indicative style is one in which emphasis is placed on transmitting ideas by suggestion, as opposed to the imperative style, whereby ideas are transmitted by command.

8. Non-government schemes were not exempted from this rule. To receive funds, such schemes had to be part of a rural development area and the funds had to go into a Government approved project.

workforce are represented by an appointee of the King), they are not allowed to participate in negotiations, but are simply informed as to what their working conditions will be.

The imperative style is also adopted by government leaders, Cabinet Ministers and the Prime Minister, who pronounce on any particular social issue. These pronouncements are accepted, but many people express dismay over what they perceive to be arrogance on the part of such people. There is an acute awareness among urban workers that the imperative style can be backed by police action.

Essentially, the distinction is noted between governmental style in rural areas as opposed to agri-business and industrial settings. The distinction can be understood in terms of governmental attempts to achieve particular goals in each sector. I concluded that the local government style in Velezizweni, and the response of *Real Farmers* to government officials, reflected a real awareness that local government officials are relatively powerless, and that real power was still exercised by the traditional authorities. The achievable goal of government, in these circumstances, is the greater dependence, by incipient commercial producers (such as *Real Farmers*), on the infrastructure of the state which is under centralised control.

The *Real Farmers* support the state, as represented by the King and his chiefs, because they know that ultimately the burning issue of the future of land tenure will be decided at that level. Therefore, they continue to move into a relationship of greater dependency on infrastructures which are centrally controlled, while rejecting the authority of local government officials.

This rejection of the authority of local government officials actually supports the view that governments become authoritarian because they cannot achieve situations in which their farmers become dependent on the economic infrastructure of the state. Such governments also strive to maintain centralised administrative control, rather than allow diffusion of administrative structures and power at a local

level (Higgott, 1983:85-86,98). The lack of an authoritarian response to the maintenance of local power by traditional authorities, with Real Farmers support, suggests that the emergence of such structures of power and authority are compatible with the goals of the centralised state.

To analyse this situation it is necessary to understand the role of King Sobhuza II, who reigned from 1921-1983. At the time of his death, Sobhuza held complete power in Swaziland. He promoted rural development through the Rural Development Areas Programme, but when that programme began experiencing difficulty achieving set goals, he did not resort to authoritarianism to try to improve its performance. Furthermore, throughout the process of rural development in Swaziland, and despite their antipathy to the Rural Development Areas Programme, the King allowed groups such as the Real Farmers to gain significant influence and authority over the councils of the Chiefs.

Why did the King truncate the power of Rural Development Areas Programme officials by leaving all real power with the Chiefs? When the Rural Development Areas Programme began to have difficulty in achieving set goals, why did the King choose not to resort to authoritarianism? Finally, why do the Real Farmers pursue a future of increased dependence on the infrastructures of the state?

The answers to these three questions lie in the King's motives in welcoming formal rural development programming to Swaziland. By the short-term use of the Rural Development Areas Programme, the King achieved the long-term goal of centralised power, restricted to those who give him their unqualified support. Sobhuza II left power with the chiefs because he never intended to let real power move away from the ruling aristocracy, of which the chiefs are members. The lack of authoritarianism occurred because the King needed foreign capital in the post-independence years to provide employment and opportunity for the growing urban population which was becoming restless, not because he wished for a successful rural development programme. I contend that the

King knew that aid monies were only going to be available from foreign governments if they were tied to rural development. This had certainly been the case with aid money from the United Kingdom at the time of Independence in 1968. Others have described this as a situation in which the rhetoric of development and the implementation of the programme in effect form the basis of communication between the indigenous state and the international community (Higgott, 1983:xiii; Morss & Gow, 1985:xiv; Morss & Honadle, 1985:202), and as such involve expressions of generally recognised principles of universal need.⁹

The final question of why the Real Farmers are prepared to move into a relationship of greater dependence on the infrastructure of the state is at the crux of the entire issue of the relationship between the community and state in Swaziland. The Real Farmers trust in their ability to comprehend the political process. Due to the fact that they share power at the local level, and because they can see the linkages with power at the national level, they believe they can anticipate the vagaries of government, as it is exercised through the control of the ruling aristocracy. The Real Farmers recognise their integral role in the sustenance of royal power.

For the moment, royal power rests on public acceptance of the legitimacy of the institution of kingship. King Sobhuza II understood this reality, and he knew that he had to maintain that legitimacy despite the radical changes which were occurring over time throughout his domain. Sobhuza realised that he needed to become the final arbiter of tradition in the minds of his people so that he might reform tradition, as needed, to retain his legitimacy as King. He

9. These principles are known as the Basic Needs Approach and are said to define certain universal needs basic to all people. These needs are to be met through a redistribution of material wealth and government resources, and take the form of hospitals, clean water, schools, roads and other infrastructure (Conyers, 1982:28; Higgins & Higgins, 1982:32; Webster, 1984:35).

started this process in 1934 by sponsoring the work of the anthropologist Hilda Kuper in Swaziland.

Sobhuza understood the role of interpretations of tradition which were deemed legitimate by his people. Anthropological research, sympathetic to the aspirations of the King, provided an orthodoxy which supported him in his role as ultimate arbiter of tradition, and formed the conceptual basis for all the development oriented research carried out from the 1960s onward.

Sobhuza sustained a model of traditional Swazi society in the minds of his people and propagated a mythology of harmony and equilibrium in traditional practice. He reinforced this mythology by re-instituting public rituals such as the *Umhlanga* (reed dance) and the annual *Incwala* (first fruits ceremony).

His motives for such actions can be explained in terms of his desire to consolidate his own position in the colonial administration and later, in the post-independence state. His main technique during the colonial period was to adopt a deliberate policy of technological and cultural integration, though he always maintained that this policy was to preserve Swazi tradition, not to destroy it.

The King's endorsement of this policy subsequently permeated every level of Swazi society, and facilitated the ready incorporation of foreign technological and cultural elements without any sense that tradition was being lost. By working within the colonial administration, Sobhuza gave the authorities no opportunity to alienate him from his people, Instead he became the prime intermediary for his people and kept himself constantly on the political stage.

Sobhuza was a gifted and astute politician and, by his actions in propagating selective change, he imbued the process with a high moral value. He added credibility to this moral process by constantly referring back to the past, and by idealising the process by which the Swazi had maintained their state through negotiation rather than confrontation. When the King finally gained absolute control of the state

after 1973, his experience was such that he was able to manage a complex and contradictory government structure without his people questioning his role. Furthermore, he was seen by foreign governments as a sophisticated and moderate political leader. He carried over the lessons he learned during the colonial period to the politics of the post-colonial era. The relationship between Swaziland and South Africa can be understood within the context of Sobhuza's desire to position his country pragmatically and advantageously within the Southern African economic structure.

In terms of domestic policy, King Sobhuza's political strength, after the 1960s, lay in his ability to achieve a harmonious relationship with, and between, the settlers on Individual Tenure Land and the bulk of the population on Swazi Nation Land. He did this by providing those in each sector with a clear understanding of their rights. Only the growing urban population required firm control, and this he initially achieved by silencing industrial unrest and political opposition. This kind of action was only ever a short-term solution.

With the advent of Independence, Sobhuza had the requisite political and literary resources to reinforce aspects of his traditional model in a manner attractive to the modernisation theorists representing foreign governments. Subsequently he used the funds which became available through the various development programs to employ the disenfranchised educated Swazi, to reinforce his position among his Swazi Nation Land power-base, to maintain commercial opportunities on Individual Tenure Land, and to develop his own financial power-base in the royal family owned Tibiyo Taka Ngwane Corporation through joint ventures with foreign capital.

The King used the Rural Development Areas Programme to facilitate the growth of indigenous and supportive social formations such as the Real Farmers. By treating aid as a compensation, and therefore part of the national estate, he was able to employ the urban population who were so restless

during the 1970s, and so gave himself the breathing space needed to allow two developments. First, the ruling aristocracy now have their economic base established through the Tibiyo Taka Ngwane Corporation, and their military base through the Swazi Defence Force. Second, because he did not risk disrupting existing patterns of production on Swazi Nation Land, the King solidified his traditional political power-base in rural areas. In this context, the Real Farmers are but one of many groups who represent the best interests of the King. They are rural-based and politically conservative. They distrust that sector of the government represented by the urban elite, who are the most obvious threat to royal power, but have faith in that sector represented by the ruling aristocracy.

In this paper I have argued that people such as the Real Farmers uphold tradition in a system which they ultimately seek to change. The evolution of the Swazi state is one in which King Sobhuza II also upheld tradition so that he might change the system and eventually dominate the post-independence state. He used the funds available through the Rural Development Areas Programme to provide employment opportunities for the growing urban population, which threatened his position in the post-independence years. By these actions the King found the necessary time to develop his political power-base on Swazi Nation Land and to solidify the economic and military base of royal family control. That he was successful in this endeavour can be measured by the emergence of groups of people with compatible ideologies. These are people, such as the Real Farmers, who have a vested interest in the maintenance of the contemporary political system, and who now have in place the requisite long-term strategies to support their social, economic and political aspirations.

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The first part of the report is devoted to a general survey of the situation in the country.

The second part contains a detailed description of the various regions and their characteristics.

The third part deals with the economic and social conditions of the population.

The fourth part discusses the political and administrative organization of the country.

The fifth part concludes with a summary of the findings and a few suggestions for further research.