

# Colonial administrators, indigenous leaders, and missionaries: Contesting the education of the Swazi child, 1921-1939

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## *Abstract*

The study of Swazi historical affairs in the colonial period has remained patchy. The historian is confronted by numerous gaps that make it difficult to get a comprehensive view of the development of the history of the country during this period. One of the neglected subjects is the nature of the relations between indigenous rulers who were allowed to exercise some authority by the British policy of Indirect Rule, colonial administrators, and missionaries who promoted western education for Swazi children. This article interrogates such relations in the 1920s and 30s arguing that between 1928 and 1937 the education of Swazi children was intensely contested by groups whose main aim was power and control over the indigenous population. The article shows that indigenous leaders challenged western education as advanced by missionaries because it was viewed to be undermining the power and authority of the Swazi monarchy. Colonial administrators were part of the contest as they wanted an education system that would further the ends of British colonialism. For their part, the missionaries became part of the contest as they believed that western education was a good instrument for evangelization.

**Keywords:** Colonialism; Missionaries; Colonial administrators; Indigenous leaders; Regiments; Education; Contesting.

## **Introduction**

It is now general knowledge that colonialism bequeathed Africa with numerous institutional changes that cut across most aspects of African life.<sup>1</sup> This is not withstanding the fact that some scholars have argued that such change was negative and did very little to benefit African societies.<sup>2</sup> The analysis of the influence of colonialism on African countries has, on many instances, been based

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1 Some of the sources that touch on the subject of colonialism and change are LH Gann and P Duignan, *Burden of empire: An appraisal of western colonialism in Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967); DK Fieldhouse, *Colonialism, 1870-1945: An introduction* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981) and RE Robinson and J Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The official mind of imperialism* (New York, Macmillan, 1962).

2 TB Kabwegyere, *The politics of state formation* (Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1972); W Rodney, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, 1972.

on debatable assumptions. For instance, it is sometimes assumed that most things went according to the plans of the colonizers, when in fact, at times, there was a huge gap between policy statements and what actually happened on the ground. Also, it is sometimes assumed that once colonialism was established, it became a smooth process except in those instances where there was visible military resistance to colonialism. The reality is that colonialism contained numerous contradictions and conflicts, especially in terms of the interests of indigenous leaders, colonial administrators and other interest groups. Research into these contradictions and interests enables us to gain a better understanding of the operations of colonialism in different African countries.

Research into the contradictions and conflicts within the colonial system in Swaziland has received limited attention from scholars.<sup>3</sup> This is especially the case if we consider the existence of several interest groups whose aim was to achieve control and authority in one form or the other.<sup>4</sup> For instance, colonial administrators continued to struggle for control over the indigenous population, indigenous leaders were also struggling to maintain their control in the face of an intrusive colonial system, while missionaries pursued their agenda of 'spiritual conquest' of the indigenous population. Presently, there is not much known of the struggles between these conflicting interest groups in Swaziland. This is in spite of the fact that in other African countries or regions research has revealed the dynamics involved in conflicts between these groups.<sup>5</sup> This is especially the case in the spread of Western education. Most of the sources that deal with the subject of 'formal education' or the mixture of formal and informal education in Swaziland hardly deal with the conflicts or debates that punctuated the colonial period.<sup>6</sup> Yet, it is these conflicts or critical junctures that shaped the direction of the process of change.<sup>7</sup> Historical studies only marginally hint on these conflicts as they mention them in passing and often provide unbalanced accounts.<sup>8</sup>

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3 B Berman and J Lonsdale, "Crises of accumulation, coercion and the colonial state: The development of the labour control system in Kenya, 1919-1929", *Canadian Journal of African Historical Studies*, 14, 1(1980), pp. 37-54.

4 For a similar experience in East Africa see, J Lonsdale and B Berman, "Coping with contradictions: The development of the colonial state in Kenya, 1895-1914", *Journal of African History*, 20(1979), pp. 487-505.

5 R Gray, "Christianity", A Roberts (ed.), *The colonial moments in Africa: Essays on the movement of minds and materials, 1900-1940* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986).

6 For some of the studies in which such neglect is evident see, LT Mthethwa, "Education in Swaziland" (Ezulwini, Emlalalini, undated); M Marope, *The education system in Swaziland: Training and skills development for shared growth and competitiveness* (Washington DC, World Bank, 2010).

7 For a very insightful discussion of how conflicts changed the histories of some nations see, D Acemoglu and JA Robinson, *Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity and poverty* (London, Profile Books, 2013).

8 For more information on this issue see, H Kuper, *Sobhuza II: Ngwenyama and King of Swaziland* (London, Duckworth, 1978); JSM Matsebula, *A history of Swaziland* (London, Macmillan, 1972).

This article makes a contribution to an understanding of these conflicting interests in the colonial period and focuses on conflict surrounding the education of indigenous Swazi children.<sup>9</sup> The article shows that between 1926 and 1937, colonial administrators, indigenous leaders, and missionaries contested the education of the Swazi child. It shows that colonial administrators supported missionary education because they believed that it was essential to westernize the young Swazi who would eventually shift Swaziland away from traditional institutions that they believed to be a hindrance to progress. On the other hand, indigenous leaders under the guidance of King Sobhuza II (referred to as Paramount Chief at the time),<sup>10</sup> felt that western education was alienating the young Swazi from traditional institutions and in the process undermining the power of the institution of monarchy. Contrary to conventional wisdom that views this conflict as an indication of a concern over the quality of education received by the Swazi child, the article argues that the main issue of contestation was power to control the indigenous population.

### **Swazi indigenous leaders and Western education, 1902-1928**

By the second half of the nineteenth century the Swazi leadership, just like its counterparts in the rest of the region, were forced to contend with the growing power and influence of European nations and the South African Republic. During the last five years of the century the Swazi Queen Regent, Labotsibeni (Gwamile Mdluli), and the Swazi nation at large were forced to contend with the power of the British and the Afrikaners who were competing to either control or take over her kingdom.<sup>11</sup> Evidence indicates that she was resigned to the view that the whites would ultimately take over the country (so was her husband, King Mbandzeni who ruled the country in the period 1875-1889), and was intrigued by the source of the power of white man. It was in the context of power and control that she viewed education as one of the most important instruments of control.

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9 Much as there are different contending definitions of a child for purposes of this article a child means a boy or girl who has not reached puberty. In terms of chronological age the term child is limited to persons of 16 years and younger. For a much more elaborated definition see HS Simelane, "Landlords, the state, and child labour in colonial Swaziland, 1914-1947", K Lieten, E van Nederveen Meerkerk (eds.), *Child labour's global past, 1650-200* (New York, Peter Land, 2011), pp. 569-594.

10 While recognizing the potential confusion of the use of the name Sobhuza, the subsequent pages of this article will use this name in reference to King Sobhuza II. This is simply a matter of convenience.

11 For more detail on the relationship between the British, the Afrikaners, and the Swazi under Labotsibeni, see HS Simelane, "Female Leadership, Europeans, and the struggle for Swazi Independence, 1890-1902", *Uniswa Research Journal*, 19, December 2005; K Ackson, "Queen Regent Labotsibeni", MJ Diamond et. al. (eds.), *Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region* (New York, The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004).

The purpose of this section is not to retell the story of the different forms of education in Swaziland but to contextualize the views of the indigenous leadership on Western education and how such views were revised in the late 1920s as the Swazi monarchy and traditional institutions were struggling for their survival. Western education or what some call formal education was introduced in Swaziland by missionaries during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Once introduced, it expanded such that by independence about 90% of schools in the country were mission owned and controlled.<sup>13</sup> Before the imposition of British colonial rule there is no evidence showing the views of indigenous leaders on the introduction of Western education. It was during the regency of Labotsibeni (1899-1921), that the perceptions of the indigenous leadership on Western education became very clear.<sup>14</sup> In an attempt to identify the source of the power of European nations Labotsibeni frequently asked her Council, "In what does the power of the whites lie"?<sup>15</sup> Many of the Councillors argued that the power of the white man lies in guns and military strength. Some of them even argued that it lies in magic, hence in the Swazi language whites were called *Belumbi* (magicians). However, Labotsibeni was not convinced with these responses and instead she argued that, "It lies in money and books".<sup>16</sup>

Throughout her reign Labotsibeni worked hard to encourage the Swazi to gain Western education. However, in her view the power of Western education was to be given to members of the aristocracy as a priority.<sup>17</sup> She viewed the education of members of the royal family as a means of regaining power that was systematically being eroded by British colonialism. She was also open to the education of the children of prominent councillors as she saw them as important cogs in entrenching the power and control of the monarchy over the indigenous population. In pursuit of her vision she mobilised the support of colonial administrators to establish a Swazi National School at Zombodze in 1906, and the Swazi National High School in Matsapha in 1931.<sup>18</sup> Labotsibeni believed that the Crown Prince, Nkhotfotjeni, later given the name Sobhuza

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12 LT Mthethwa, "Education in Swaziland" (Ezulwini, Emlalalini, undated).

13 K Geary, "Indicators of educational progress – a Markov chain approach applied to Swaziland", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 16, 1(1978), pp. 141-151.

14 JSM Matsebula, *A history of Swaziland...*

15 H Kuper, *Sobhuza II ...*, p. 43.

16 H Kuper, *Sobhuza II ...*, p. 43. The point is also raised in A Booth, *Swaziland: Tradition and change...*

17 For more information see, A Booth, "Western schooling and traditional society in Swaziland," *Comparative Education*, 39(2), 1997, pp. 433-451.

18 A White, "Swazi national schools", *Overseas Education*, 30(2), 1958, pp. 62-63.

II,<sup>19</sup> should be one of the beneficiaries of western education because he had to be taught to read and write in order to be in a position to handle the complex documents of control generated by the British colonial administration. She also felt that Sobhuza should receive Western education to enable him to deal with the contradictory expectations of British colonialism and the indigenous political system.<sup>20</sup> She believed that he would be able to restore the power of the Swazi monarchy if he was able to negotiate and debate in the language of the conqueror.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, Sobhuza was educated first at Zombodze National School, and later at the Scottish Presbyterian educational complex at Lovedale in South Africa. He was amongst several Southern African traditional leaders who were schooled at Lovedale.

An important aspect of this period is that there were cordial relations between colonial administrators and the indigenous leadership in as far as introducing and spreading Western education in the country.<sup>22</sup> There was a convergence of interests in that for the colonial administrators spreading Western education would enhance the aims of colonial administration,<sup>23</sup> while for the indigenous leadership the perception was that it would help restore the power and control of the monarchy over the indigenous population.<sup>24</sup> From the first Resident Commissioner, F Enraught Francis Moony (Resident Commissioner 1902-1907) to De Symons Honey (Resident Commissioner 1917-1928), there was unity of purpose with the indigenous leadership on spreading western education in the country. Missionaries enjoyed the freedom of establishing schools in different parts of the country and in the process continued in their mission of evangelization.

## **The foundation for conflict over the education of the Swazi child**

In general terms, the whole colonial agenda in Swaziland and all over Africa, was riddled with contradictions and characterized by conflictual relations.<sup>25</sup>

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19 For purposes of easy reference the name Sobhuza will hereafter be used in the article in reference to King Sobhuza II.

20 Throughout the history of colonialism in Africa there was always a contradiction between the interests of colonial governments and indigenous leaders. There was need for indigenous leaders to clearly understand the attitudes of colonial governments for them to maintain themselves in power.

21 B Nyeko, "The rule of the Dlamini in the nineteenth-century Swaziland", *Tarikh*, 4(2), 1973, pp. 42-48.

22 GS Kunene, "British colonial policy in Swaziland, 1920-1960" (Ph.D, University of York, 1992).

23 For parallels from other areas in Africa see, AE Afigbo, "West Africa to 1800", AE Afigbo, RJ Gavin, JD Omer-Cooper and R Palmer (eds.), *The making of modern Africa*, 1 (London, Longman, 1992).

24 JF Scutt, *The story of Swaziland*, 3 (Mbabane, Swaziland Printing and Publishing Co., 1986).

25 For information on such contradictions and conflicts in Swaziland, see AG Marwick, "The attitude of the Swazi toward government" (Microform, University of Swaziland, 1955).

For instance, while Western education was well received by the indigenous leadership, it was juxtaposed over an indigenous education system that played a very important role in entrenching and maintaining the control of indigenous leaders. The Swazi indigenous education system was informal and constructed on a rigid rank system.<sup>26</sup> The whole structure of the education system was not built on formal institutions, but it revolved around age regiments. The purpose of these age regiments was to make the young Swazi loyal to the monarchy. The emphasis was on traditional values and these were values that emphasized respect for seniority and leadership. According to Sishayi Nxumalo, the main purpose of the education system was, "... the absorption of children into the society of their fathers".<sup>27</sup> The values of loyalty and morality were transmitted from the old to the young based on the accumulated knowledge of the past. It was an inward looking education system that did not accommodate the complexity of the world introduced by Western imperialism, particularly Western education.

It would be a mistake to assume that the value of the traditional education system was simply centred on morality and innocent loyalty to elders. It was in fact an instrument of monarchical control.<sup>28</sup> The structure of age regiments as made popular in the nineteenth century was premised on building a sense of nationalism that cut across clan and geographical lines.<sup>29</sup> Although it was predominantly based on male age groups, reflecting its original function as an instrument of primitive accumulation,<sup>30</sup> women groupings also existed. All the age regiments under this system were under the control of the indigenous king.<sup>31</sup> If he did not exercise this control directly, as was the case with women regiments, it was indirectly exerted through princes or princesses. The king determined when a regiment was formed, what name it was to carry, and when older regiments were given permission to marry.<sup>32</sup> Through the control of regiments, the king had power to control homestead formation and reproduction.<sup>33</sup> As such the king had enormous control over the whole

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26 For a more detailed discussion of the importance of rank in Swaziland society see, H Kuper, *An African aristocracy: Rank among the Swazi* (London, Oxford University Press, 1947).

27 S Nxumalo, *Our way of life* (Mbabane, Swaziland Printing and Publishing, undated).

28 This was not peculiar to Swaziland but applicable to several regions in Africa. For more information see R Grey, "Christianity", A Roberts, *The colonial moment in Africa...*

29 RT Coryndon, "Swaziland", *Journal of the African Society*, 14, 1915, pp. 250-265.

30 For a full discussion of the regiment system in Swaziland see, H Beemer, "The development of the military organization of Swaziland", *Africa*, 10, January 1937, pp. 55-74.

31 RT Coryndon, "Swaziland", *Journal of the African Society*, 14, 1915, pp. 250-265.

32 LD Lister, "The role of tradition in the recent political and economic development of Swaziland", *Manchester Papers on Development*, 1(3), 1985, pp. 30-44.

33 S Schoeman, "Swaziland: The monarchy at work", *African Institute Bulletin*, 17(3), 1987, pp. 37-40.

process of social reproduction amongst the indigenous population.

The most important weakness of the period of the regency of Labotsibeni, and a matter that was later at the centre of conflict regarding the education of the Swazi child was that this traditional education system was allowed to collapse and this premised the collapse of the control of the monarchy over homesteads and general indigenous population. At the same time, Western education was growing at a fast rate, and for many of the traditional chiefs and Sobhuza, this fast growth was at the expense of the traditional education system upon which the power and control of the monarchy was based.

There was rapid expansion in the establishment of formal schools.<sup>34</sup> Although there was a noticeable increase in the number of schools, enrolment was not so, for instance, while in 1920 there were 2,200 pupils in Swazi schools, in 1925 there were 2, 958.<sup>35</sup> King Sobhuza II, began to point fingers at the colonial establishment and missionary education became an obvious target.

### **Contesting the education of the Swazi child**

While there appeared to be calm when Sobhuza took over the leadership of the Swazi in 1921, evidence indicates that the Swazi monarchy was in crisis. This was because the monarchy's control of the indigenous population was very weak as the supporting institutions had become weak during the regency of Labotsibeni. In the late 1920s Sobhuza and his traditional Council, "embarked on a process of reviving the authority of the monarchy and chiefs".<sup>36</sup> Sobhuza's first action was to attack some of the institutions that came with colonialism. It appears that while Sobhuza and his Council were aware that problems of social disintegration, poor economic production premised on land shortage were crucial problems faced by the indigenous population, mission education was considered to be a serious challenge to the power of the monarchy and regional chiefs. Consequently, the education of the Swazi child through mission education became the prime target of criticism by Sobhuza and the Swazi National Council. The situation became worse from 1928 when the Resident Commissioner, Thomas Ainsworth Dickson came out strongly in support of mission education. Therefore, the

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34 SR Ndwandwe, "Christian missionary activities and the transformation of the status of Swazi women, 1920-1947" (M.A., University of Swaziland, 2000), p. 23.

35 SR Ndwandwe, "Christian missionary activities..." (M.A., University of Swaziland, 2000), p. 23.

36 A Booth, *Historical dictionary...*, p. 108.

contest for the education of the Swazi child featured the missions, the colonial administration and the Swazi indigenous leadership under Sobhuza. It was general knowledge that the relationship between colonial administrators, missionaries, and indigenous leaders was never an easy one.<sup>37</sup> What is obvious is that the common denominator between these three antagonistic groups was power of control over the indigenous population.

Dickson's support for Western mission education was contextually relevant to colonial policy of the time. The colonial government needed African clerks and interpreters, while businessmen and Christian missions sought literate auxiliaries.<sup>38</sup> Such education was meant to promote rather than frustrate the ends of colonial policy. The work of missionaries should not be viewed in isolation from the activities of government official.<sup>39</sup> In many ways the shared common interests and often what was of benefit to the one group was equally good for others. Since education was still largely in the hands of missionaries their collaboration with the colonial government was crucial and even the Colonial Office in London looked for guidance from missionaries.<sup>40</sup>

When Dickson came to Swaziland, he had a long service in Kenya and he brought with him a curious mixture of a strong belief in the virtues and efficacy of indirect rule,<sup>41</sup> while at the same time exhibiting a belief in the principles of progressivism. It was this progressivism that brought him into direct conflict with Sobhuza and his Council because he strongly favoured the aims of Christianity and those of African westernization. He did not shy away from giving strong support to the work of mission schools, and this brought him into conflict with Sobhuza and his traditionalists. The progressive and administrative institutions he advanced were in direct conflict with the intentions of Sobhuza to emphasize traditional Swazi institutions as a means of reviving the domestic power of the monarchy and traditional chiefs.

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37 For a general discussion of this issue see, R Gray, "Christianity", A Roberts (ed.), *The colonial moment in Africa...*, pp. 140-190.

38 The tendency for colonial governments to advocate for the education of Africans was not unique to Swaziland but a general trend in British colonial Africa. For more information see, A Roberts, "The imperial mind," A Roberts (ed.), *The colonial moment in Africa...*, pp. 24-76.

39 H Kuper, "The Swazi reaction to missions", *African studies*, 5(3), 1946, pp. 177-188.

40 For further information, see R Gray, "Christianity", A Roberts (ed.), *The colonial moment in Africa...*

41 There is a wide literature on the British policy of indirect rule. For more information, LH Gann and P Duignan, *Burden of empire...*; L Hailey, *Native administration in the British African territories, Part V, The High Commission Territories, Basutoland, the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and Swaziland* (London, HMSO, 1953).



A few years after taking over power, Sobhuza began to emphasize Swazi tradition to entrench the presence of the monarchy.<sup>42</sup> For instance, he began to elaborate the *Incwala* ceremony and the institution of *emabutfo* (age regiments). The main aim of this move was to control the acculturation of young Swazi men and women.<sup>43</sup> He argued that Swazi children should not be alienated from their tradition and culture through Western education. When the Resident Commissioner showed strong support for mission schools, Sobhuza began a serious attack on this type of education. He argued that Western education, as taught in mission schools caused Swazi children to despise Swazi traditional institutions and indigenous culture and also made them ill-fitted to the Swazi traditional environment. According to him, Western education was failing to teach Swazi children traditional values, which were previously taught by the indigenous system of education.<sup>44</sup> Such views created a conflict between the indigenous Swazi leadership on one side and the Resident Commissioner and missionaries on the other side. Sobhuza's views were not fundamentally contrary to the policies of the colonial office in London. For instance, the then newly formed Colonial Office Advisory Committee stated that, "Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various people...Its aim should be to render the individual more efficient in his or her condition of life...to promote the advancement of the community as a whole".<sup>45</sup>

From the mid-1920s most regional chiefs were in full support of Sobhuza's views because such views were addressing concerns about the diminishing power and influence of indigenous leaders and institutions. For instance, in the late 1920s some regional chiefs organized contributions for building what were referred to as "tribal schools".<sup>46</sup> It was reported that there were about eleven schools with a total of about 300 children that owed their initiation to and were under the care of traditional chiefs. It also appears that Sobhuza's arguments against Western education, particularly mission education, gained the support of a large number of Swazi households. The colonial administration was concerned with the ability of traditional chiefs to establish schools that were outside the control of missionaries and the

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42 S Schoeman, "The monarchy in Swaziland", *Africa Insight*, 16(3), 1986, pp. 163-175.

43 C Lowe, "Land and chieftainship in Swaziland 1910-1940: Some preliminary reflections" (Paper, Social Science Research Unite Seminar, the University of Swaziland, November 1989).

44 LT Mthethwa, "Education in Swaziland" (Ezulwini, Emlalatini, undated), p. 7.

45 Advisory Committee on native education in British tropical African dependencies: Education in British tropical Africa (Cmd. 2374, 1925), p. 4.

46 LT Mthethwa, "Education in Swaziland" (Ezulwini, Emlalatini, undated), p. 7.

colonial administration. It began to put in place policy that would bring the establishment of what were referred to as “native”<sup>47</sup> schools under control. The policy that was eventually put to place stated that, “... no person or group of persons shall open a native school without reporting to the Superintendent of education who may give his consent thereto and being satisfied that the regulations ... have been observed”.<sup>48</sup> Colonial administrators were fully aware that the establishment of such schools was a form of resistance against Western education, and by extension British colonialism. They represented an attempt by the Swazi monarchy and conservative forces to retain control over the indigenous population.

In the early 1930s it was revealed that many Swazi homesteads were not sending their children to mission schools. In 1934 colonial officials reported that, “There are about 30,000 children growing up in Swaziland, who are untouched by any policy that the administration and the missions may have for development”. In practical terms this means that these children were not attending school as a protest by their parents against Western education. Colonial administrators together with other commentators attempted to explain the factors behind such a development. From the point of view of colonial officials this was because homestead duties related to the home and its economy was preventing children, especially boys, from attending the ordinary day school at which the hours of school attendance, “cover the time period from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day”.<sup>49</sup> There was a lot of truth in this explanation but it simply assisted the colonial administrators to avoid dealing with the real issue.

Colonial records indicate that the matter was much deeper than the division of labour at homestead level. There was also an indication that there was some fear for some Swazi parents that the attendance of their children at schools under missionary control will mean a break-down in tribal discipline, control and sanctions.<sup>50</sup> Such evidence appears to have been refuted by some missionaries, but reports from the Superintendent of Education stated that, “In spite of statements to the contrary by some missionaries there is

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47 According to the records of the time it was stated that, “Native means any aboriginal native belonging to any tribe of Africa, and includes any person of mixed race living as a member of any native community, tribe, kraal or location in Swaziland”. See SNA, RCS 418/39, establishment of regulations to control mission, private, and other schools.

48 SNA, RCS 418/39, Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Advice on Native Education (Court House, Mbabane), 4 April 1939.

49 Swaziland National Archives (SNA), RCS140/34 – Meeting of Executive Committee of board of Advice on Native Education, January 1934.

50 Swaziland National Archives (SNA), RCS140/34 – Meeting of Executive Committee of board of Advice on Native Education, January 1934.

undoubtedly a desire on the part of many of the Swazis to have their children taught in schools that are not under the direct control of missions".<sup>51</sup> What became clear was that there was a huge divergence of opinion between the Swazi traditional leadership on one side, and the colonial administration and missionaries on the other. The situation was made more complex by the fact that the Swazi were also divided on the matter. The Resident Commissioner, in the words of Dr D Hynd, demonstrated a "... great devotion to duty, his deep concern for the uplift of the Swazis through Christian education".<sup>52</sup> At the same time evidence indicates that the Resident Commissioner continued with the policy of spending as little money as possible for the education of the Swazi child. In his credit, he was willing to support a few promising Swazi pupils with larger than average amounts of money.

The struggle for the education of the Swazi child intensified in 1933 when Sobhuza once again came out publicly to criticise mission education in the country. Particularly, he directed his criticism to the type of education that was given to Swazi children. He pointed out that, "[Swazi] children no longer obey the law of the land [Swazi law and custom], and when they throw away our customs they say they are following the laws of the whites".<sup>53</sup> He also repeated his view that as a result of western Christian education there was a breakdown in traditional courtesy, respect and obedience and an increase in immorality and illegitimacy. This he associated with a rift between Christian and non-Christian educated, and uneducated. He questioned the type of education that was given to Swazi children in mission schools. It appears that his criticism was born out of the fact that all schools in the country at the time were legally segregated. For white children primary education was free and compulsory, while for Swazi children it was neither free nor compulsory. This was a time when the ratio of government spending for a Swazi child at school to that for a white child was 1:18. However, Sobhuza did not articulate such issues in all the public criticisms he made on western mission education. What dominated his attacks was breakdown in obedience to traditional cultural values and morality. This is understandable because his real concern with Western mission education was how it was undermining the power of the monarchy and traditional chiefs.

While the colonial administration was generally not in agreement with

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51 SNA, RCS 534/32, Correspondence from HJE Dumbrell, Inspector of Education, to the Resident Commissioner, Swaziland, 28 November 1933.

52 SNA, RCS 456/35, Meeting of Executive Committee of Board of Advice on Native Education.

53 H Kuper, *Sobhuza II...*, p. 106.

Sobhuza's views, there were some people within the colonial establishment who supported his views. For instance, Allan G Marwick who was Deputy Resident Commissioner in the early 1930s and became Resident Commissioner in 1935 was one of the strong supporters of Sobhuza.<sup>54</sup> In the early 1930s he attempted to convince the then Resident Commissioner, TA Dickson that British colonial policy should move away from undermining Swazi royalty economically and politically.<sup>55</sup> Instead, he proposed that British colonialism in the country would better be served if the domestic power of the Swazi monarchy was bolstered. This is the type of thinking that influenced his actions when he became Resident Commissioner after the death of Dickson. It was such support that encouraged Sobhuza to experiment with other educational systems in opposition to Western mission education.

Even outside the administrative establishment, Sobhuza gained some supporters. This came out clearly in a meeting of the Board of Advice on Native Education where Mr LA Tweitan of the Full Gospel Mission of Norway made an articulate attack on the education system in the country. His arguments were in support of the view that Swazi children were not receiving appropriate education. He pointed out that:<sup>56</sup>

When it comes to reading in the schools I think it is pitiful to hear the native children reading their own language. They stutter and stammer as if they were reading a foreign language. When a teacher in a primary school is more interested in hearing the children read a few English sentences than hearing them read in their own language, it seems to me there is a mistake there. I am afraid that the vernacular is often regarded as an inferior subject in our schools and therefore does not receive the attention it deserves.

The conflict over the education of the Swazi child was made worse by the decision of the Resident Commissioner to encourage the formation of the Swaziland Progressive Association (SPA). This was an association of educated Swazi and the initiative for its formation came from the Resident Commissioner. It was a reflection of the progressivism he was trying to inject in Swazi society. To Sobhuza and his Council, the formation of the association was evidence of how western mission education was being used to undermine Swazi traditional institutions. He viewed the association as a means for

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<sup>54</sup> For more information on AG Marwick, especially his relationship with Sobhuza, see, A Booth, *Historical dictionary...*, pp. 173-176.

<sup>55</sup> A Booth, *Historical dictionary...*, p. 174.

<sup>56</sup> SNA, RCS 456/35, Meeting of Executive Committee of Board of Advice on Native Education, January, 1934. It should be noted that no siSwati was taught in Swazi schools in the 1930s. Swazi children were taught Zulu instead of their mother language. Therefore the reference to "own" language in the statement seems not accurate.

the colonial administration, “to make the educated [Swazi] to support the government against [traditional] Swazi institutions”.<sup>57</sup> Sobhuza questioned the need for the association and saw its formation as a means to destroy the power of the monarchy. He openly told members of the association that they should be reminded that their loyalty should remain with the Swazi king. Sobhuza was an intelligent person and was fully aware that what he was saying was tantamount to pouring new wine in old bottles. He became more convinced that changes should be made in the type of education that was given to Swazi children to protect the power and control of the monarchy over the indigenous population.

Sobhuza heated up the contest for the education of the Swazi child when he put forward a proposal of how the education system in the country could be made more relevant and appropriate. It must be noted that his fears about the SPA were correct because in the movement to independence, the SPA was transformed into a political party called the Swaziland Progressive Party (SPP), in direct opposition to the monarchy.<sup>58</sup> This showed that the views of the educated Swazi on how Swaziland should be organized politically were not at tandem with those of Sobhuza and his block of traditionalists. Sobhuza proposed that the education system in the country should incorporate elements of the Swazi traditional form of education that revolved around the regiment/*libutfo* system. This is a system that was first introduced in Swaziland during the time of King Mswati II.<sup>59</sup> The king reorganized the warriors into age regiments that cut across local and kinship ties. While military considerations were foremost in Mswati’s decision, the age regiment system entrenched loyalty to the monarchy.

In the middle of the 1930s Sobhuza argued that the regiment system should be introduced to all schools in the country as he felt that it could be adapted to fit the western school system. The regiments included all Swazi males on the basis of age and it was the main educational institution of pre-colonial times.<sup>60</sup> It imposed and enforced a national code of discipline, morality, and unity, all under the control of the monarchy.<sup>61</sup> As mentioned above, through this system, the monarchy could even control the reproduction of

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57 H Kuper, *Sobhuza II ...*, p. 102.

58 See JSM Matsebula, *A history of Swaziland...*

59 H Kuper, *Sobhuza II...*, p. 19.

60 For more detail see, H Kuper, *An African aristocracy...*

61 For more information see, AG Nkosi, “Education and culture among the Swazi of the protectorate” (M.Sc, Yale University, 1950).

all homesteads. The system also bestowed on the king punitive powers in case the national code was breached. Clearly, Sobhuza was trying to bring back into effect an educational system that would give the monarchy effective control over the Swazi population. He saw in the *emabutfo* system a means to revive the control of the monarchy over male citizenry as the country was gradually undergoing modernization. He invoked tradition in trying to impose the system in the education system of the country. He felt that his main weakness in the maze of power and control was that he was not in control of the education system. He felt vulnerable to the authority of colonial administrators and the teachings of mission schools.

By this time the majority of schools in Swaziland were under the control of missionaries, who at the same time received strong support from most of the colonial administrators.<sup>62</sup> The missionaries came out with a very negative response to Sobhuza's proposal and their reactions showed the extent of their prejudices.<sup>63</sup> The missionaries argued that the introduction of such a system in the schools will teach paganism which they were trying to uproot from Swazi society. To a large extent their objections were also based on perceptions of morality. The missionaries were afraid that participation in the traditional system would threaten the foundations of their Christian teachings. They were however, not alone in protesting against the introduction of the *emabutfo* system in the country's education system. They were joined by white settlers and also by the "native intelligentsia" even though these two were arguing from different perspectives.

Once again, Sobhuza's proposal was strongly supported by Marwick who argued that the age-group system was in touch with indigenous life and that it should be encouraged.<sup>64</sup> He also argued that the regiment system was more of an integrating influence since, "it is an indigenous institution motivated and controlled within the tribe, capable of being operated efficiently by the natives themselves, without extraneous aids and with little or no training".<sup>65</sup>

Although Dickson's inclinations were clear, this must have been a very difficult time for him as he was looked upon to come up with a final decision on the matter. Understandably, he was not enthusiastic about the views expressed

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62 FJ Perkins, "A history of christian missions in Swaziland to 1910" (Ph.D, University of the Witwatersrand, 1974).

63 H Kuper, *Sobhuza II...*; H MacMillan, "Swaziland Decolonization and the Triumph of Tradition", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, XXIII, 4(1985), pp. 643-666.

64 SNA, RCS 500/35, AG Marwick to Colonel R Rey, 13 November, 1935.

65 H Kuper, *Sobhuza II ...*, p. 106.

by his deputy. He insisted that he was not ready to implement Sobhuza's suggestion and could not give it his full blessing without examining the implications. He took a very academic approach and invited anthropologists to investigate the system and consider the feasibility of its application. Such an approach was in line with the prevalent British thinking at the time that showed a belief that an empirically grounded approach to colonial problems would not only serve as a foundation for better informed government policies, but would also lead to more rapid "progress".<sup>66</sup> He got the services of Professor I Schapera of Cape Town, Winifred Hoernle of Witwatersrand University, and Branislaw Malinowski of the London School of Economics.<sup>67</sup> The report that was produced by these academics was strongly in favour of the introduction of the regiment system into Swazi schools along the lines suggested by Sobhuza. However, the Resident Commissioner took sick and was not in a position to come out with a decision on the matter. He died soon after and the matter was left in the hands of AG Marwick and other colonial administrators.

When TA Dickson fell sick, Marwick, his deputy, was appointed Acting Resident Commissioner, and in March 1935 after the death of Dickson, he was appointed Resident Commissioner. This development completely changed the nature of the struggle for the education of the Swazi child. It contained two very important dynamics. First, it weakened the position of the colonial administration of pushing for the dominance of Western mission education, even though temporarily. This was because its main official advocate was no more. Second, it strengthened Sobhuza's position in the contest because Marwick was a very strong supporter of Sobhuza on the issue of strengthening the power and control of the monarchy in Swaziland. This was bound to work well for Sobhuza because the main thrust of his efforts during these years was the revival of the control of the monarchy over the rest of the indigenous population and education of Swazi children happened to be one of the available weapons. The effects of the development on the position of mission education do not appear to have been very negative. This is probably because by the mid-1930s education in Swaziland was overwhelmingly dominated by mission schools and these schools very much determined policy.

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66 For more information on this belief in the 1930s see, H Tilley, "African environments and environmental sciences: The African research survey, ecological paradigms and British colonial development, 1920-1940," W Beinart and J McGregor (eds.), *Social history and African environments* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2003), pp. 109-130.

67 H Macmillan, Hugh MacMillan, "Swaziland Decolonization...", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, XXIII, 4(1985), p. 110.

When Marwick took over the office of Resident Commissioner he resolved to follow the recommendations of the above anthropologists, and allowed the regiment system to be introduced in Swazi schools. Understandably, the missionaries were not happy with the decision and began to argue that if the new policy was implemented, then it should be voluntary rather than being nationwide and compulsory. Such an argument was directly opposite to what Sobhuza wanted. These opposite views put the Resident Commissioner in a very difficult position because the missionaries had the backing of the white settler population that was not keen to have white pupils forced to be put under the regiment system. It became clear that a compromise was the only solution to the impulse. It was finally agreed that the new policy should be introduced as an experiment and that it should first be implemented at Matsapha National High School. It was hoped that later, the regiment system would spread to other schools in the country, especially public schools.

The decision to introduce the regiment system as an experiment and only in one school (which was a national school), was partial victory for Sobhuza and complete victory for the mission schools and white settlers. The experiment left mission school curricula unchanged and the missions were still controlling the commanding heights of western education in the country. It is also interesting to note that the curriculum based on western education at Matsapha National High School did not change. What changed was simply the grouping of students into age-based regiments and given time within the teaching time-table of the time.

The regiment system as introduced at Matsapha High School was nothing but a process of indoctrinating Swazi children on the sanctity of tradition and loyalty to chiefs and the monarchy. In an attempt to make the regiment system a success, Sobhuza appointed his supporters into the committee governing the school.<sup>68</sup> He also hand-picked some elders to speak to the boys at Swazi National School on Swazi history. To bring the young boys closer to his orbit of power he also arranged camps for the boys at his residence. He crowned his efforts in 1935 by appointing a special board to advise him on all matters concerning Swazi youth.

While the experiment was focused on school going boys, girls were not completely left out. Entrenching control over young girls was put in the hands of Princess Silima. She appears to have concentrated on strengthening

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<sup>68</sup> For more information on this point see, H Kuper, *Sobhuza II...*



patriarchal values amongst the girls. This was done through imposing traditional ceremonies that imposed chastity and emphasizing the need for sexual restraint. The most celebrated of these traditional ceremonies was the *Umchwasho* that was introduced in 1935. The gist of this ceremony was that for a period of two years the young girls would be required to refrain from sexual relationships and concentrate on national duties. Interestingly, the ceremony was conducted in the name of a princess and deviation from it attracted strong punitive measures. Obviously, the aim was control over young girls under the context of invented tradition.

The experiment in the regiment system in schools was a failure. This was evident at Matsapha National School where very few boys participated in the activities of the regiment system. The situation was made worse by the fact that the experiment failed to spread to other public schools in the country. In the final analysis, therefore, the experiment had no impact in the Swazi education system as introduced by the missionaries. Up to now, there has been no academic interrogation of the dynamics behind the failure of the experiment. It is, however, possible to identify possible explanations. The failure seems to indicate that the Swazi population was not fully behind the indigenization of the country's education system. That explains why they did not enrol their children in the regiment system at Matsapha National School. It appears therefore, that the gist of the failure of the system was to be found in un-reconciled interests between the majority of the indigenous population and what the monarchy wanted. As a result, even Sobhuza's great friend Marwick who had become the Resident Commissioner could not redeem the experiment.

The failure of the experiment as a means of contesting the education of the Swazi child indicates that Sobhuza was the eventual and big loser. Such a conclusion should be taken with caution because he did not lose the fundamental battle of reviving the power and control of the monarchy over the indigenous population. From the controversy over the education system Sobhuza came out with a very strong and willing supporter of the dominance of the monarchy over the indigenous population. His trump card in this case was Allan G Marwick who had extensive knowledge of the political affairs of Swaziland, especially the struggle for power between the colonial administration and indigenous leaders.

When it became clear that the experiment of the regiment system as a means of bolstering the power and control of the monarchy was failing, Marwick began to systematically use his position as head of the colonial administration

to take a new direction to bolster the power of the Swazi monarchy. It should be noted that well before 1935 Marwick was critical of British colonial policy that was undermining the power and control of the monarchy over the indigenous population. Once he took over as Resident Commissioner he began to assist Sobhuza to bolster the power of the monarchy domestically. For instance, he gave full support to Sobhuza's attempts to use tradition to revive the power of the monarchy.<sup>69</sup> He was in full support of the introduction of *umcwasho* ceremony in 1935.<sup>70</sup> Marwick also took specific initiatives to intellectually ground Sobhuza's cultural and traditional initiatives to bolster his power and control. Towards this end, Marwick communicated with intellectuals in South Africa, especially anthropologists, to give intellectual support to Sobhuza's traditional initiatives. He also invited these academics to come to Swaziland to discuss Sobhuza's initiatives. As a result, Sobhuza got full support from anthropologists such as Winifred Hoernle and Isaac Schapera. This gave Sobhuza's traditional initiatives a progressive flavour that received the approval and support of the Colonial Office in London. The Swazi monarchy began to be viewed by many within the indigenous population as an institution capable of representing the indigenous population.

More fundamentally, Marwick helped Sobhuza to cement his control domestically, particularly over some regions in the country. His target in this regard was the regional chiefs who had grown disloyal to the monarchy over the years. Marwick revised the law of 1898 passed by the South African Republic to undermine the monarch's power over regional chiefs. For instance, according to this law the monarchy could not punish regional chiefs if they did not comply with his instructions. Also, the Swazi monarchy was deprived the power to appoint traditional chiefs.<sup>71</sup> Marwick made it a criminal offence for traditional chiefs to be disloyal to the monarchy. Sobhuza was given power to turn over to the colonial courts any chief who failed or refused to comply with his instructions. For the first time since 1898 the Swazi monarchy had an instrument in its hand to force regional chiefs to comply with instructions from the central monarchy. This became a very useful tool for Sobhuza to bring under his effective control all chiefs in the Southern part of the country who had refused to be loyal to the monarchy since 1898. For the first time since the advent of colonial rule Sobhuza could effectively coerce traditional

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69 For more detail on the use of tradition for purposes of power in Swaziland see, V Johnson, "Ideology and ideological control in Swaziland," J Daniel and M Stephen (eds.), *Historical perspectives on the political economy of Swaziland: Selected articles* (Kwaluseni, Social Science Research Unit, 1986), pp. 126-141.

70 A Booth, *Historical dictionary...*, p. 176.

71 H Kuper, *Sobhuza II...*, p. 112.

chiefs to control the indigenous population.

Beginning with the residency of Marwick in 1935, Sobhuza did not wage another serious campaign against western mission education in the country. This was in spite of the fact that in the movement towards independence in the 1960s, many of the Western educated citizens formed political parties in opposition to the traditional block. This was due to the fact that his control over the indigenous population was better established than ever before. In fact, his relations with missionary educators remained cordial well into the post-colonial period although he continued to demonstrate a distrust of the western educated Swazi.<sup>72</sup> This was understandable because in the 1920s and 1930s the contest for the education of the Swazi child was largely about control over the indigenous population. Once this control was achieved through other means, there was no further need to contest the education of the Swazi child.

## **Conclusion**

Present historiography on Swazi history indicates that the colonial period has not benefitted from in-depth historical interrogation by historians. Some aspects of this history have not attracted the attention of scholars and are presently characterized by neglect. This has deprived us knowledge of the dynamics of change and continuity that can lead to a better understanding of the economic, social, historical, and political developments in the country at the time. This is especially the case with issues concerning conflict and power struggles within the context of colonialism in Swaziland.

In this article the focus was on the contestation of the education of the Swazi child between 1928 and 1937. It was at this time, more than at any other, that opposing views were expressed by those who had vested interest in controlling the indigenous population. It has been pointed out that there was wrangling between the colonial administration, missionaries, and the indigenous leadership on what the Swazi child should be taught at school. Colonial administrators, represented by the then Resident Commissioner, Thomas Ainsworth Dickson, and the missionaries believed that Western mission education was what the Swazi child needed in order to positively contribute to the development of Swazi society. On the other hand, King Sobhuza II, together with some traditional

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<sup>72</sup> For more information on Sobhuza's views on the western educated see, HS Simelane and H Macmillan, *The speeches of King Sobhuza II*.

chiefs and princes believed that western mission education was a destructive force in Swazi society and it had to be mixed with indigenous education reminiscent with what was happening in the pre-colonial period. While the dimensions of this debate are easy to understand, a challenge to the historian might be the real purpose of the debate.

The substance of the conflict, as argued, was power and control over the indigenous population. In this respect, the colonial administration and the missionaries were on the same side even though history has shown that their interests were not always in agreement. Missionaries were always happy to support the aims of colonialism as long as such aims were not viewed to be an encroachment on the spiritual and moral domain of the missions. What was at stake for Sobhuza and his traditionalists, was the power and control of the monarchy. From 1895 when the South African Republic (Transvaal) took over the administration of Swaziland, the power and control of the monarchy over the indigenous population were on the decline. The situation was made worse in 1898 when a law was passed taking away the power to punish traditional chiefs from the monarchy. When Sobhuza took over power in 1921, the control of the monarchy domestically was very weak. According to him this was because Western mission education had polluted the mind of the Swazi child, and that had to be corrected.

From 1921 to 1935 Sobhuza waged a campaign to transform the education system that was dominant in the country, to align it more with his interests of reproducing the monarchy. His argument was that all schools in the country should introduce the regiment system that contained most of the elements of loyalty to the monarchy. It was discussed in the article that in this endeavour Sobhuza was supported by many indigenous chiefs, some colonial administrators, and some academics. Consequently, Sobhuza won the battle of introducing indigenous education in some schools. However, his success was short lived because the experiment that was implement proved to be a complete failure. Western mission education went ahead unchanged, and the experiment on indigenous education was eventually abandoned.

While Sobhuza failed to make indigenous education to be an integral part of the education system in the country, he achieved success in reviving the power and control of the monarchy over the indigenous population. This happened because the colonial administration under Allan G Marwick in the mid-1930s was decolonially-like prepared to undertake policy changes that boosted the domestic position of the monarchy. By the time Marwick

retired from colonial administration in 1937 the power and control of the monarchy further strengthened colonial control was still very effective. From 1937 onwards, little was heard on Sobhuza's opposition to Western mission education.