



No God is responsible for our miseries

Religion and the architecture of backwardness in Swaziland



Bafanabakhe Sacolo

As we continue the journey to our liberation, it is also of great importance that we deal with all the issues that continue to keep the people of Swaziland in exploitation and oppression. One of these issues is religion, which the monarchy has come to use as one of its mobilising strengths to keep the people of Swaziland in backwardness.

“Umculu” and “indilinga” propaganda

With the majority of the population being Christian, and with a history of the first Christian institutions being established around the 1840s, the monarchy, from these early moments, made itself a champion of this development. Myths were created that this was through a dream by one of the dynasty's predecessors, Somhlolo, who supposedly dreamt of taking the so-called *umculu* book instead of the *indilinga* coin. This is clearly a lie, because when we

follow the traces of Christianity into the southern part of Africa, we find that by the late 1400s Christianity was already in existence and was rejected by different African tribal groups that were fighting against colonisation and European supremacy.

Christianity as a suppression tool in the hands of the royal family

Today, we see the link between the Dlamini dynasty and the use of religion, especially Christianity, to keep the people of Swaziland under absolute rule. Mswati himself is the "supreme" leader of Christianity, where on multiple occasions he calls Christian and religious leaders to his palace, becomes a man of the cloth, and preaches about what the Bible says. In fact, these links show that the regime has made itself the custodian of Christianity in Swaziland.

Not only the king, but the whole royal family and the elites dominate different sectors of religion because it serves their interests.

One of Mswati's wives, LaMbikiza, is a gospel singer. Mswati's interpreter, Sihle Dlamini, who is a multimillionaire and a pastor. The tinkhundla army commander, a murderer, is also a pastor. A wife of his son, Nothando Hlophe, is a gospel singer and recently won the Best of Africa Award at the 18th SABC Crown Gospel Music Awards in Durban, South Africa. These are only a few examples of many active cadres of the regime. They also show that religion itself, which should be a matter of freedom of choice, is not independent, as the regime is directly involved in it.

Royal luxury in the midst of deepening poverty

On different occasions, we see religious leaders mobilising the people of Swaziland to attend the religious events of the monarchy. We see religious leaders pledging money to the royal slavery events of the regime, blessing an illegitimate system with the last penny of the poor people of Swaziland because they are promised a better life in heaven, while only the elites and the regime, supposedly chosen by the "Lord", enjoy the wealth of this world.

Deepening "divine right" to rule

This is how the regime has weaponised religion,

making people believe that they are the legitimate leaders "divinely ordained by the Lord". They have made the people of Swaziland think that the existing class hierarchy is not a human construction that can be dismantled but rather the expression of divine will – permanent, natural, and sacred.

In other words, the autocratic regime has used religion to justify the conditions that oppress the people of Swaziland by creating false consciousness – the condition in which the oppressed misunderstand their own situation. It is a distorted representation of reality that serves a specific class interest.

The worker who accepts poverty as God's will is not going to organise against the factory owner. The peasant who believes earthly hierarchy reflects divine order is not going to challenge it. This misrepresentation is precisely what makes it so powerful and so dangerous to revolutionary consciousness. It makes exploitation bearable rather than intolerable and, in doing so, removes the very pressure that might force the system to change.

The need for class consciousness

As the people of Swaziland, we must also realise that our country is not isolated from the rest of the world. When we look at global development, we are falling behind and seem to be moving in a backward direction while the world moves forward. The history of the world and the historic mission of the working class teach us that monarchies are not divine. They have been overthrown before, and it is possible to overthrow them again. They are simply a particular stage of society in which leaders were chosen through family lineage – feudalism – which seemingly has no place in the present day. They represent a backward social order.

The presence of the monarchy is one of the most important causes of our miseries. As long as palaces exist, we can never truly develop because the parasitic nature of monarchy and capitalism relies on exploiting us. The monarchy has also used religion and embraced it as its own identity and ideology in order to keep us in chains.

The working class of Swaziland has a historic mission that determines its path to freedom: to violently overthrow the monarchy and capitalism and bury them together with their backward ideas.

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Monarchical authority vs. Democratic aspirations

Culture as a contested terrain



In 2023, Mswati splashed over R66 million to buy a fleet of top of the range ultra-luxurious 2023 Mercedes-Maybachs GLS 600 for the exclusive use of his wives. The extravagant purchase came a few years after the he had splurged over R100 million on a fleet of Rolls-Royce cars for his numerous wives. Courtesy: [Swazi Royal Leeches Lifestyle](#).



Lobamba: [Mana Mamba](#) – raising four children on her own in a one-room hut with a leaky roof (WFP). Throughout his four-decade rule, Mswati enjoyed royal luxuries while poor mothers like Mana live in stick-and-mud houses unable to take care of their families.



Bonkhe Nxumalo

Thesis: The primary and secondary contradictions

In Swaziland, the primary contradiction is between absolute monarchical authority and the democratic aspirations of the masses. This contradiction decides the direction of the whole society.

But a key secondary contradiction operates inside it: royal culture vs popular culture. The monarchy does not rule by force alone. It uses “Swazi tradition” to legitimise economic monopoly and political dictatorship. The masses develop their own cultural expressions – in unions, churches, schools, and protests – that assert dignity, solidarity, and the right to self-rule. The struggle over culture is therefore a struggle over who defines what it means to be Swazi.

The structure of monarchical authority

Political monopoly

Mswati III governs under Decree No. 2 of 1973, which banned political parties. The 2005 constitution keeps the king as head of state with executive, legislative, and judicial power:

- Appoints the prime minister, cabinet, two-thirds of the Senate, 10 of 69 House of Assembly members, all judges, and security chiefs.
- Tinkhundla elections every five years run on “individual merit”. Parties are illegal. The 59 Tinkhundla centres and 385 chiefdoms channel all grievances up to the throne, blocking horizontal organising.
- In 2021, MPs Bacede Mabuza and Mthandeni Dube (who was lately released after apologising to Mswati) were jailed for demanding an elected prime minister. Sentenced in 2023 to 25 and 18 years for “terrorism” tied to the June uprising.

king is equated with loyalty to Swazi identity.

State media: Swazi Observer and Swazi TV broadcast royal events daily. Dissenting views are banned as “unSwazi” or “foreign influence”.

Chieftaincy system: Chiefs allocate land, resolve disputes, and police communities. They answer to the king, not to voters. Cultural deference to chiefs becomes political obedience to the palace.

Material effect: Culture becomes a fence around the royal estate. To question Tibiyo is to “disrespect culture”. To form a union is to propagate “foreign” ideas. The king’s 15 wives, fleet of cars, and annual reed dance are defended as our tradition, even when clinics lack paracetamol.

Popular culture: resistance and reinterpretation

The masses produce a counterculture grounded in daily struggle:

Protest songs and slogans: During June 2021, youth sang “*Ayibuye iNgwenyama*” not to praise the king but to demand he return the wealth. “Democracy Now” was chanted at funerals of those killed.

Union and student culture: Tucoswa May Day rallies, Uniswa SRC forums, and underground meetings redefine “Swazi” as collective self-determination, not submission.

Churches and communities: Some pastors reinterpret biblical justice to condemn evictions and killings, breaking the monarchy’s monopoly on moral language.

Social media: Despite shutdowns, activists used social media to spread videos of police shootings and contrast royal luxury with township and rural poverty. The throne loses control of the narrative.

Thus, culture is not static. The monarch needs “tradition” to be frozen and hierarchical. The masses need “culture” to be living, democratic, and tied to material needs.

Synthesis: how the contradictions interlock

a. Political rule protects economic monopoly: As long as the king appoints the prime minister and judges, Tibiyo cannot be taxed or audited.

b. Economic monopoly funds cultural hegemony: Tibiyo profits pay for the Buganu festival, Swazi Observer, and chiefs’ allowances. Royal culture reproduces consent.

c. Cultural hegemony disarms democratic aspirations: If demanding a vote is “unSwazi”, then poverty looks like destiny, not policy.

June 2021 broke this cycle. Youth rejected the decree banning petitions. Their material demands – jobs, bursaries, democracy now – were inseparable from cultural defiance: burning tinkhundla centres, refusing to attend Umhlanga, and exposing royal excess online. The state answered with bullets: about 100 killed. Soldiers guarded royal palaces while shops tied to Tibiyo were targeted.

Motion and resolution

In terms of the dialectical materialism method, contradictions are resolved through struggle. The monarch must suppress democracy because democracy would:

- Tax Tibiyo, audit royal spending, and redistribute Swazi Nation Land.
- Replace chiefs with elected local councils.
- Separate “Swazi culture” from the private wealth of one family.

Each act of repression sharpens the contradiction. Each eviction, each jailing, each dollar spent on a Maybach while nurses strike, exposes that “tradition” is class rule in ritual dress.

Build popular culture

The main contradiction in Swaziland is monarchical authority vs democratic aspirations of the masses. Culture is a key terrain of that struggle. Royal culture defends the estate. Popular culture asserts the people’s power.

Therefore, the fight for democracy is also a fight over culture: Who defines Swazi identity, the palace or the people? Who owns the land and the ceremonies on it? Until the working class wins political power, “culture” will keep being used to guard Tibiyo’s sugar fields. When it wins, culture can become what people make together, not what they inherit from a throne.

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