Abstract

Despite abundant evidence that race has been a significant factor in informing historical processes in Swaziland there is presently no major study that focuses on the theme. The main aim of the current thesis is to examine the impact of discriminatory policies and practices in the country by analyzing the reaction of different sections of the society to formal and informal discrimination. While focusing on the period between 1945 and 1973 the thesis traces the evolution of Swaziland’s racial history dating back to the 1840s. The thesis also shows how the conditions created by the intervention of the colonial state as well as competing white interests between 1903 and 1944 deepened political and economic inequality in the country. In parallel, the thesis explores Swazi agency as was manifested through the reactions and initiatives of the monarchy when it stood up to challenge discriminatory policies and practices which were being applied to blacks. This was strongly indicated from the 1930s when a revived cultural nationalism was embraced by the Swazi monarchy to articulate Swazi grievances. To highlight contradictions in Swaziland’s racial patterns Coloured identity is discussed extensively. The thesis also explores the manner in which the Swazi educated elite confronted racial discrimination and argues that their approach was inadequate in alleviating racial injustices as they were experienced by most Swazis in different places. The central argument of the thesis, therefore, is that the formal abolition of discrimination in Swaziland in 1961 is to be understood against the anti-colonial politics in the post-World War II era. The thesis contends that the abolition of racial discrimination by the Swaziland colonial administration was largely a diplomatic gesture necessitated by the local and contemporary political climate as well as changing international relations of the 1960s including developments in the Union / Republic of South Africa. Finally, the thesis observes that since the outlawing of discrimination was not necessarily an indication of government’s political commitment to confronting racism the post-abolition period was not a fundamental departure from the pre-abolition era. Discriminatory attitudes and practices persisted in covert as well as overt, but, subtle forms in most spheres of Swazi society and particularly at the work place. This thesis also observes that the lack of holistic strategies to curb racially inspired practices led to unabated manifestations of discrimination in the country.