

Towards an Explanation of the Recurrence of Military Coups in Lesotho

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Lesotho's history is littered with military coups, with the latest one—with questionable authenticity—complicating the already complicated role of the military in the South African country's politics. This article unpacks what it terms a dangerous mix in Lesotho's politics which pits the military against the monarch.¹ This will be achieved by first exploring the history of monarch–military relations using the coloniality of power as the theoretical framework.² This relationship is here cast as one of legitimisation, delegitimisation, and relegitimisation.³ Some authors characterise the relationship as perpetually antagonistic and maintain that it was never meant to work.⁴ Accordingly, the two institutions tend to have a love–hate relationship, at times opposing each other while also reinforcing one another on another level. In this relationship, tensions occur when the military delegitimises the monarch and the state, leading in turn to the monarchy seeking to relegitimise itself. The extent of these tensions is expressed—among other things—through the various military coup d'états that have rocked the kingdom in the clouds for decades.

In Lesotho, the latest version of military coups occurred on 1 September 2014 and was the sixth successful coup in the country since 1970. Unlike other coups before it, this one was very different because it was disputed by many, including Lesotho's powerful and influential only neighbour, South Africa, and the

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regional body—the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Then, Prime Minister Thomas Thabane alleged that his deputy had instigated the coup, which led to his brief exile in South Africa. On the ground, the coup was led by renegade Lt Gen Kennedy Tlali Kamoli, who had been relieved of command on Friday, 29 August 2014. In an uncharacteristic confrontation between the police and the army, within a short period the army subdued the Lesotho Mounted Police Service. According to Rupiya and Mothoagae, the army collected about 250 weapons from the police armouries, as well as all available uniforms.⁵ This was after they had fatally shot one police officer and seriously wounded three others who were believed to have resisted the coup.

In explaining the recurrence of military coups in Lesotho, this article argues that the conventional theoretical framework of deploying the concept of unconstitutional change of government is flawed as it misses the role played by historical factors which still haunt nation-building and state-building processes in Lesotho. The concept of unconstitutional change of government is very fluid and open to manipulation, especially by the military and outside forces. The SADC's inability to act decisively in circumstances deemed to constitute an unconstitutional change of government is well known. The regional body, in principle, denounces such practices but lacks the practicalities for reversing them. Such events occurred in Mauritius in 2009 when Mark Ravanomana won the elections but was unable to assume office owing to a myriad of complicated state–military relations in that country.

The departure point for the article is its deployment of the concept of coloniality, as opposed to other liberal theories, such as those that view the persistence of military coups in Lesotho as a legal or democratic problem. The article attempts to answer the following four questions: (1) What is the historical context of the current monarch–military relations in Lesotho?, (2) What is the status of the monarch–military relationship?, (3) What accounts for the persistence of military coups in Lesotho?, and (4) Finally, is the Lesotho problem a Lesotho problem?

A Historical Overview of Lesotho's Military Involvement in Politics

Before colonisation, there was no absolute monarch in Lesotho. After the *Lifaqane* wars of 1815 to about 1840, King Moshoeshoe amalgamated the many fragmented Sesotho speaking people to form a nation living on the mountain fortresses of modern-day Lesotho. Moshoeshoe was not born into a big chieftainship, but through his qualities, he built the Basotho nation around his chieftainship later with the help of the British. The Basotho lost much of their arable land to the Boer farmers in the modern-day Free State Province of South Africa, forc-

ing them to live in the mountains where crop production was impossible given the harsh weather. This was the origin of the Lesotho's dependence on South Africa, a situation which persists until today. In coloniality terms, this depicts coloniality of power, as land used for growing cash crops employing cheap Sotho labour was forcibly taken from the Sotho people, and the food sold to Basotho who have no option with no arable land of their own. In a way, the Sotho were captured by the Boers of the Free State.⁶

Later on, Moshoeshe sought and was granted British recognition and protection, together with Botswana and Swaziland. Before then, the Sotho kings were answerable to the people. With British "protection" also came the British model of the monarch in which the people were answerable to the monarch. This was the second turning point in Lesotho's troubled history and most important in the relationship between the monarch and the people. Power shifted from the people to the monarch, and this explains four factors: (1) the constitutional provision which reigns in the monarch and renders it ceremonial, (2) the monarch's desperate moves to seek political influence through aligning and realigning itself with the various military factions and political alliances in Lesotho politics, (3) the Basotho's unhappiness with the present monarch which they rightly view as a colonial creation meant to serve and preserve the monarch and not the people, and (4) it partly accounts for the failure of the constitutional monarch model in Lesotho, which before the importation of the British model was a rotational federal type of monarchy that was not under Moshoeshe but owed him allegiance. The current British model of a constitutional monarch system is simply alien to the Basotho, and it creates fertile grounds for the emergence of political and military factions. According to it, the king is the head of state but does not actively participate in political activities while the prime minister is the head of government with executive authority.

On their part, the British colonialists wanted a stable monarch in Lesotho, one with a predictable lineage, and hence easy for them to control. This is a typical manifestation of coloniality of power, which divides and rules. At independence in 1965, the poorly lived experience of the Basotho continued; the only difference was that Lesotho was now being ruled by blacks who were mainly controlled by their only neighbour, South Africa. The Moshoeshe dynasty as we know it today was thus firmed at independence and remains a British colonial project while the military remain a South African project. On their part, the political elites in Lesotho did not bother to overturn this political system for various reasons; the major one being that such a system allowed politicians to continue to have a hold on the monarchy. Without any real power, the monarchy usually sides with the military or sections of the political elite to find continued relevance, hence the

argument being made here that the relationship between the monarchy, and the military in Lesotho is that of legitimisation, delegitimisation, and relegitimisation.

This has led to a series of coups which will be briefly discussed below. The first coup occurred in 1970 when then-Prime Minister Chief Leabua Jonathan annulled the election result and seized power after the military's preferred candidate lost to Ntsu Mokhehle of the Basotho Congress Party. In this case, the chief seized power when a candidate he did not support won the election with the backing of the army. The second coup occurred in January 1986 when King Moshoeshoe II and a faction of the military led by Gen Justin Lekhanya took power. The king was installed by the military as the country's leader and he issued *Lesotho Order (No. 2) of 1986*, which vested all executive and legislative power in himself, the king. The king was to rule with the help of a six-member military council headed by Maj Gen Justin Metsing Lekhanya.⁷ The king also passed the *Suspension of Political Activities Order No. 4 of 1986*, which all but banned any political activity.⁸ This military/monarchy antagonism was to end in a bitter separation as they blamed each other for the delays in returning power to a democratically elected civilian government. This constitutes what this paper termed the legitimisation, delegitimation, and relegitimation of the monarch-military relationship.

The third coup occurred in February 1990 when a power struggle emerged within the monarch-military alliances, forcing King Moshoeshoe II into exile in Sweden. Others sarcastically said the king was on a sabbatical in England.⁹ Another coup occurred in August 1994 when King Letsie III staged a coup backed by a military faction to ouster the democratically elected leader, Ntsu Mokhehle. Within a year, in January 1995, Moshoeshoe II was reinstated by the military as the king. Three years of relative peace were ended in September 1998 by an army mutiny by junior officers. The latest, and certainly not the last, coup occurred in September 2014, with the then-Prime Minister Thabane as the target. These coups bring to the fore the question about the role of the monarch in Lesotho politics.

Politically, the debate on the role of the monarch in postcolonial Lesotho started in the early 1960s with two predominant camps. The first camp consisted of the Basotho Congress Party (BCP), which was the predominant nationalist party and wanted the monarch to be a constitutional monarch, with the military falling under the prime minister. They wanted the king to have no executive powers. The second group consisted of the Basotho National Party (BNP)—another nationalist movement—which wanted the king to have executive powers and be in full command of the security forces. The rationale was that if a conflict was to occur between any two political parties, there would be a need for one neutral person, like the king, controlling the army.

To this day, the question of why Basotho nationalists were so preoccupied with the occurrence of conflict in postcolonial Lesotho remains unanswered. However, things changed when the BNP won the elections, and the BCP lost. Suddenly, sentiments were reversed, with the BNP now wanting the military to be under the prime minister and not the king, probably because it had won the elections so it wanted to control the army. The BCP also suddenly started clamouring for the king to assume full control of the army because it saw this as the only way in which it could have official access to the military. The BNP was surprised that it had won the elections, while the BCP for its part was surprised that it had lost the elections. The surprise election results fuelled dishonesty among Basotho politicians, and they increasingly sought to align themselves with the army, with those crowded out reverting to the police as a source of power. This partially explains the army-police clashes in Lesotho. Such political practises relegate ideology and other political considerations to a peripheral status as the control of the military becomes the ultimate political possession.

Is the Lesotho Problem a Lesotho Problem?

By and large, Lesotho's problems can be itemised as persistent hunger, high HIV and AIDS rates, over dependence on South African migrant labour and foreign aid, poor human security, unstable government, chronic political violence, poor economic growth, and a political climate in which political parties failed to mature. A sulking and politically ignored monarch which tries to remain politically relevant by siding with various political coalitions and certain branches of the security forces adds to the complications of the Lesotho problem, as does the national interest and role of Lesotho's only neighbour, South Africa. That South Africa's economic hub—Gauteng province—relies heavily on Lesotho's water explains Pretoria's repeated attempts to shape Lesotho's leadership.¹⁰

Responding directly to the question: is the Lesotho problem a Lesotho problem? The answer is no, the Lesotho problem is a coloniality problem and it is a South African problem. As way back as 1965, Michael Ward rightly observed that Lesotho was an economic hostage of South Africa. To that I will add South Africa's unwillingness to release Lesotho from this hostage situation. Thus in 1965, upon 'independence' Lesotho moved from British colonialism to South African hostage, this is termed coloniality. Ward noted:

But it is clear from even the most cursory examination of the economic situation that Lesotho will become more and more economically dependent upon South Africa—irrespective of the political party in power. As an enclave of South Africa, Lesotho has always been closely integrated economically with the Republic

by virtue of its peculiar geographical position. This, together with the country's extreme climate and inhospitable terrain, enforces an external dependence which makes nonsense of political desires for complete self-sufficiency.¹¹

Lesotho's dependence on South Africa for virtually everything is neither voluntary nor symbiotic, but one that is forced and maintained by South Africa through systemic violence. This interpretation is at variance with that of the then High Commissioner in London who noted that Lesotho was a "prisoner of geography."¹² South Africa benefits from instability in Lesotho in various ways; migrant labour for the mine, cheap water from a desperate neighbour, and bigger markets for South African goods with unfettered access to the Lesotho market.

Reconceptualising Military Coups in Lesotho

There are three ways of analysing the recurrence of military coups in Lesotho. Firstly, there is the legal perspective in which these military coups are viewed as a series of unconstitutional changes in government; secondly, there is the liberal perspective, which looks at the matter in simplistic terms and reduces the problem to Lesotho being a fragile democracy; and finally, the decolonial perspective, which is being advocated for in these pages and analyses these military coups as the continued work of the colonial matrices of power, knowledge, and being.

A number of theories and explanations have been used to account for the prevalence of military coups in Lesotho. Most of these theories lead to more questions while the original one remains partially answered. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, explained the behaviour of the postcolonial state as one best known for aberrant behaviour such as repression, brutality, corruption, inefficiency, and failure to promote the collective well-being of its citizens.¹³ But what accounts for the aberrant behaviour of the African state is still illusive at scholarship.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni further noted that a number of scholars responded to this question by articulating what he termed an "African exceptionalism" thesis. This thesis is premised on a "static, cultural relativist reading of the African condition and development."¹⁴ He singled out the explanation by Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz as efficacious in analysing the general problems facing postcolonial African countries. Chabal and Daloz argue that "development in Africa is informed by a different logic to that which shaped the Western world." For them, development or lack of it is a direct result of Africa's obsession with short-term consumption (the politics of the belly). They further contend that Africa suffers from a perennial preference for reliance, if not dependence, on outside resources rather than productive activities or proper savings. For this analysis, while that is true, these are colonially imposed snares which trapped Lesotho into its current

political quagmire. Finally, Chabal and Daloz argue that what appears as disorder to outsiders is actually order to the African beholder.

Chabal and Daloz's arguments lead one to a seemingly simple yet sophisticated question: what is the problem with Lesotho? Is the Lesotho problem a Lesotho problem? The legal perspective, as alluded to earlier on, analyses the Lesotho problem as a legal challenge, as a series of unconstitutional changes in governments. This legalistic perspective is anchored in the African Union's (AU) five categories of unconstitutional changes of government. According to Dirk Kotze, these are: (1) putsch or coups against democratically elected governments (for example, the various coups in Lesotho), (2) intervention by mercenaries to replace democratically elected governments, (3) the replacement of a democratically elected government by armed dissidents or rebels, (4) the refusal to accept the results of a legitimate election or the refusal by an incumbent government to hand over power to the winning candidate or party (for example, Madagascar's Andry Rajoelina refused to hand over power to winning President *Marc Ravalomanana in 2009*), and (5) the elimination of competition by disqualifying candidates (for example, Burkina Faso's Blaise Compaore in 2014).¹⁵

The AU classification of unconstitutional changes of government does not include the removal from office by popular uprising such as the overthrowing of the government of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia on 14 January 2011 and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak on 11 February 2011. The major shortcoming with this legalistic view is that it equates the holding of elections to the existence of democracy and that an elected government is a legitimate government. The unqualified classification of elections as *free and fair* or *free and credible* exacerbates the confusion and creates incentives for elections to be manipulated. As witnessed in the Zimbabwe 2012 elections, the low threshold of free and fair elections effectively renders most elections free and fair, even the most scandalous ones. A case in point is Hosni Mubarak's 97 percent landslide victory in 2005 and a similar 97 percent victory in the 2010 parliamentary elections, which was followed by popular uprisings which led to his ouster in 2011.¹⁶ So porous are the African Union provisions that they fail to recognise the role of internal armed conflicts in unconstitutionally removing governments. Such a framework cannot be relied on if one is to properly diagnose the underlying problems which causes Lesotho's pandemic coups.

The liberal democratic perspective views military coups in Lesotho as a sign of the lack of a consolidated democracy. Proponents of this perspective, such as Afrobarometer, use empirical data to support their view that there is no democracy in Lesotho. Parameters used in gathering such data include the proportion of respondents who reject military rule, prefer democracy, prefer multiparty rule,

prefer to choose their leaders in elections, and prefer to have the parliament make the rules.¹⁷ This is a good descriptive framework of what the Basotho prefer with little or no analysis of the reasons behind the indicated preferences, causalities of the lack of democracy or the recurrence of military coups. Put simply, the problem with democracy in Lesotho is that there is no democracy. It is very rare that a country's democracy is underwritten by other countries. This flies in the face of the seminal concept of state sovereignty. The moment that democracy is imposed on a country, it ceases to be democracy and becomes something else, maybe, kakistocracy, plutocracy, or mobocracy.¹⁸ The underwriting of Lesotho's democracy by South Africa translates to coloniality of power where real power resides with the latter as it did during colonialism where the apartheid regime directly intervened in Lesotho to protect its national interest.

This article offers an alternative perspective to the above, that is, the decolonial perspective. Simply defined, coloniality is the continued existence of the colonial matrices of power long after the official end of colonisation. Nelson Maldonado-Torres puts it thus, "... coloniality is an invisible power structure that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of direct colonialism."¹⁹ The deployment of the decolonial perspective helps in understanding the distinction between colonisation, decolonisation and coloniality. As a continuation of colonisation, coloniality stands on three legs—coloniality of knowledge, power and being.

Of the three legs, coloniality of power is efficacious in explaining monarch-military relations in Lesotho. Postulated by Peruvian sociologist and humanist thinker Anibal Quijano, the term denotes the colonial structures of power, control, and hegemony imposed mainly by Europe and America on the global south which continues to operate through the control of authority, labour, sexuality and subjectivity.²⁰ Coloniality of power makes it extremely difficult if not impossible for development to occur in Lesotho as the country remains trapped by its former colonisers. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that coloniality of power:

... has positioned Africa at the interface between different value systems and different forms of logic: Western and African; urban and rural; patriarchal and matriarchal; religious and secular; nationalist and tribal/ethnic; modern and traditional; progressive and conservative; cultural and technical. . . . Until today, Western values and concepts coexist uneasily with African concepts, partly because colonialism manipulated and deployed both Western and African concepts as tools of control, domination, and subjection, destroying some of the concepts and values originating in pre-colonial Africa and re-inventing others.²¹

Ndlovu-Gatsheni further located the effect of the above as the creation of a clique of African elites "who dream in both western and African languages."²²

These African elites became the leaders of the decolonisation process and subsequently the leaders of the postcolonial states in Africa. The challenges that face these African elites are numerous but can be summarised as trying to use a colonial mind to decolonise itself. The product is recurrent coups and an entrenched culture of looting akin to primitive accumulation. Thus, countries like Lesotho must choose either to be traditional or western and not to try and be both because they end up being neither of the two as is the case right now. Lessons from other countries such as Japan are useful for Lesotho in this regard. An analysis of the Japanese model demonstrates that it is possible to develop a hybrid political system in which certain cultural aspects are mixed with modern democratic practices to generate a political environment in which culture and tradition play complementary and not competing roles.

That is, the monarchy must play a stronger role in the politics of Lesotho and cease to perform mere titular ceremonial functions, but first it needs to revert to the *status quo ante* wherein the monarch was answerable to the people and vice versa. Constitutional provisions which allow the prime minister to bypass the king must be reversed, with the king being allowed to have more powers than the prime minister. These provisions render the king ineffective when it comes to making decisions regarding major political issues.

Towards an Explanation of Lesotho's Recurrent Coups

It is difficult to comprehend the causality of six military coups in less than 40 years of independent rule in a country that is monolingual and monocultural, tenets which tend to foster unity and nation-building, resulting in a more efficient state. It must be admitted from the outset that the 2014 coup was disputed by the Lesotho military and the opposition.²³ By contrast, scholars such as Martin Rupiya argue that what happened suited every definition of a military coup.²⁴ If it was not a genuine military coup, then what exactly happened and why? If it was stage-managed, why did that stage management occur? Contrary to Rupiya's views, this article argues that what happened was a stage-managed coup which was meant to create an environment consistent with the views and fears established by Thabane. This section explains the likely rationale for the stage-managed 2014 coup in Lesotho.

Theoretically, a military coup is an irregular transfer of state power by the regular armed forces or internal security forces through the use or threat of force.²⁵ What cast doubts on the authenticity of the October 2014 Lesotho coup were the events preceding the coup. Thabane had just dissolved Parliament which was about to pass a vote of no confidence against his failure to control the feuding

parties in the two-year-old coalition government. This was the chief reason why it is widely argued that he stage-managed the coup to create the impression that he was being persecuted by his political opponents, hence giving him a legitimate reason to dissolve parliament. In other words, Thabane dissolved Parliament before it passed a vote of no confidence in him.

The popularity of Deputy Prime Minister Mothetjoa Metsing was soaring, and Thabane was worried that his deputy would overthrow him and move on to form a new coalition that would oust him. Hence, the clash can be interpreted as a clash between the army which backed Deputy Prime Minister Metsing and the police force which largely supported Prime Minister Thabane. In a bid to stamp his authority on the military, Thabane had fired the Lesotho Defence Force commander, Lt Gen Kennedy Tlali Kamoli, and replaced him with Brig Gen Maaparankoe Mahao. This move backfired with Lieutenant General Kamoli teaming up with Deputy Prime Minister Metsing to mobilise Parliament to pass a vote of no confidence in Thabane. So how does one make sense of all this? Below are four possible explanations.

1. Of Instrumentalised State Institutions

The military has been instrumentalised to the point where it is now a willing tool at the disposal of top army officials and politicians for use against their rivals. Those politicians lacking support of the military quickly seize the police as an alternative instrument and source of power. After being instrumentalised, the military then instrumentalised itself, that is, it moved from being a politicised, partisan institute to governing the country in its own name. Simply put, the military in Lesotho overshot its mandate, accordingly abusing its structures, mechanism and authority. However, this perspective does not fully explain the role of the monarch.

2. A Constitutionally Weakened Monarchy

The constitution of Lesotho incapacitates the monarchy as it outlaws any political involvement by the monarchy.²⁶ His majesty is merely a titular rubber stamp of the prime minister and Parliament. With the king's hands tied by the constitution, His Excellency is always busy trying to be seen as not siding with either side in Lesotho's politics. The weakening of the king via the constitution has placed him in the position of a mere spectator, with the military and the government being the only institutions with real power. Accordingly, *Schedule 1 of*

the Constitution of Lesotho delivers the most immobilising blow to the monarchy, as the Oath of Office reads:

In the presence of Almighty God and in the full realisation of the responsibilities and duties of the high office of King (Regent) and of the binding nature and binding force of this Oath, I do swear that I will obey and observe the provisions of the Constitution and all other laws of Lesotho, that I will discharge my duties in such manner as to preserve the character of the monarchy as a symbol of the unity of the Basotho Nation, and that I will accordingly abstain from involving the monarchy in any way in politics, or with any political party or group. SO HELP ME GOD.²⁷

The eunuchisation of the monarchy gave the king an incentive to form alliances with the military so he could have control over political developments in Lesotho. This monarch–military romance started around 1986 when the military ousted the democratically elected leader of the BCP, Ntsu Mokhehle. Thus, the monarchy is now largely viewed as a political contestant, albeit as a junior partner to the military and politicians. The coups in Lesotho can be explained as emanating from the lack of a solution to previous coups. SADC has consistently failed to fully address the recurrence of military coups in Lesotho. Instead, piecemeal compromises have always been deployed as stop-gap measures, leaving the original problems unsolved. SADC’s obsession with elections as a panacea to governance problems in the region is puzzling. After the February 2015 elections, Lesotho still faced the same problems and the risks of becoming a failed state, as it currently sits in the “high warning” stage on the Fragile States Index.²⁸ It is ranked number 72 out of 172 countries, with Swaziland ranked 51, the Democratic Republic of Congo 4th and South Sudan 1st. Only 6 out of 55 African states are rated worse than Lesotho.

The role of outsiders in the recurrence of military coups in Lesotho cannot be overemphasised. Lesotho, being completely surrounded by South Africa, depends on the revenue it generates from the sale of water from the Lesotho Highlands to South Africa’s water utility company Rand Water. As such, South Africa has a direct permanent interest in Lesotho, which renders it an integral part of what happens or does not happen in Lesotho. On the other hand, Lesotho is an impoverished country of about two million people whose workforce constitutes the bulk of the migrant workers working in South Africa’s mines. The overreliance of the Basotho as migrant labourer in the mines of South Africa is a huge source of cheap labour for South African mines, a situation which must be sustained by continued instability, poverty and general lack of development in Lesotho. The sustenance of these asymmetrical colonial matrices of power lies at the core coloniality of power.

The Lesotho military has a long relationship with the apartheid regime while the Basotho mineworkers form the bulk of South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). NUM is an affiliate of the trade union federation, the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), of which COSATU is a tripartite member in the South African ruling alliance comprising the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party (SACP), and COSATU. This relationship renders Basotho mine workers key protagonists in South African politics, especially when it comes to participating in protracted mine strikes which have a devastating impact on the South African economy. By destabilising the Lesotho economy, South Africa will be trying to make conditions unbearable in Lesotho, such that in cases of protracted strikes, the mine workers will be left with no option but to return to work.

Internal squabbles and bickering with the Royal Lesotho Defence Force (RLDF) is one of the major internal contributing factors to the recurrence of coups in Lesotho. The rank and file of the RLDF are constantly complaining about low wages and poor working conditions (obviously, they compare their conditions with those of their counterparts in the South African National Defence Force. This makes the rank and file of the RLDF willing accomplices in the execution of any coups in which they will be promised better salaries and working conditions. An extreme version of this scenario is one that argues that junior army officers may actually be responsible for instigating the coups, as demonstrated by their willingness to support the various factions in Lesotho's politics including the monarchy.

3. Incompetent, Weak Political Parties and Ever Changing Alliances

When in power, Lesotho's political parties fail to reign in the military and actually become subservient to it. Political parties in Lesotho have consistently failed to institutionalise themselves. They have not managed to crystallise themselves in a manner that will result in them stabilising political behaviour in Lesotho. Consequently, political parties in Lesotho have lost their connection with the population and, with fragmented party structures in place, party politics in Lesotho is all about leadership jostling.²⁹ This is in stark contrast to the organisation of the RLDF, which emerges as the most dominant institution in Lesotho politics. It is not surprising that Lesotho has 21 political parties in a country of just over 2 million people and 850,000 voters. For some, politics is the only way to earn a living in Lesotho, hence the endless proliferation of political parties with no following or structures. In the end, the military feels duty bound to control this "industry." The incompetence of these political parties is manifest in their differ-

ence, which is only in terms of official colours; everything else is more of the same. Additionally, these political parties lack internal democracy, and expecting them to run the country democratically is expecting too much from them. Such lack of democratic tendencies at the political party level is a fertile breeding ground for military coups. While plausible, this perspective exonerates colonialism from its role in the Lesotho crises.

4. Towards a Decolonial Explanation of Lesotho's Coups

From a decolonial perspective, the causes of the various Lesotho coups are rooted in coloniality. The British colonialists created the Moshoeshoe dynasty which replaced the federal chieftainship that existed before conquest. This angered other kingdoms which were alienated in the process. This discontent at being dethroned remains a contentious issue in Lesotho politics today. Secondly, the lack of genuine development in pursuit of the Truman type of developmentalism has left Lesotho and the Basotho reeling in poverty and “undevelopment.” Truman developmentalism is the process of westernising nonwesterners through various methodologies, “missionarism,” forced democratisation and various forms of development aid.³⁰ This is in contrast to the 1955 Bandung Conference definition which sees development as the attainment of freedom from the political, economic, ideological, epistemological and social domination that was installed by colonialism and coloniality.³¹ In other words, Lesotho's problems are rooted in pursuing the wrong type of development, a development which “undevelops” it. Real development is the elimination of coloniality. Of course, there is a paucity of ideas in Lesotho on how to take the country forward. This results from the obnoxious task of using a decolonised mind to decolonise itself.

The colonial project was effective in creating what Mamdani terms “bifurcated states” inhabited by two distinctive sets of populations, citizens and subjects.³² Mamdani argues that the crisis with postcolonial Africa emanates not from how it was exploited but how it was governed. That is, it was governed by colonialists so that it became ungovernable. For him, the colonial government created and decentralised despotism, a phenomenon synonymous with Lesotho's problems today. Chiefs were tamed and turned against their people, becoming native informers and gatekeepers for the colonial state. Elsewhere in Africa, tribal differences were turned into a colonial resource called ethnicity. At “independence,” Lesotho was faced with hard choices. Mamdani characterised these choices as either to co-op the decentralise despots or to smash them.³³ The despots had mastered the art of oppressing the people from their creators and they coalesced and formed today's political, military and monarch elites in Lesotho.

Citizens had rights and subjects suffered extreme deprivation of their rights to everything including the right to rights. Tribes were refused the “space to coalesce into a majority identity, by fracturing them into different and competing minitribes and minorities.”³⁴ In Lesotho, this took the form of fracturing the many chieftainships which had beforehand coexisted for many decades operating on a rotational federal basis. This imposition of a single king actually constituted the centralisation of traditional power into one family. Closely linked to the fragmentation of these chieftainships was the militarisation of most aspects of the Basotho people. This was meant to discipline the colonial subjects. To that effect, Mbembe is correct in noting that, “. . . the colonial state model was, in theory as in practice, the exact opposite of the liberal model of discussion or deliberation.”³⁵ He further notes the forms of violence that were used against the natives. These were the “foundational violence” which authorised the right of conquest and had an “instituting function” of creating Africans as its targets; the “legitimising violence,” which was used after conquest to construct the colonial order and routinise colonial reality; and the “maintenance violence,” which was infused into colonial institutions and cultures and used to ensure their perpetuation.³⁶ The recurrence of coups in Lesotho today is a continuation of Mbembe’s “maintenance violence,” which in essence maintains Lesotho and Basotho as coloniality subjects.³⁷ Violence in Lesotho is efficacious in allocating and reallocating power and disciplining antisystemic natives such as those agitating for the Bandung type of development.

The corruptness of Lesotho’s elites is undeniable. However, one has to trace its roots in order to fully comprehend its magnitude. Colonisation was a grand corrupt system, one which laid the foundation for today’s primitive accumulation tendencies among Lesotho’s elites. Having been exposed only to corrupt systems, it is not surprising that Lesotho’s elites are corrupt, power hungry and overtly scandalous because such that is all they know. The state was never structured to serve the people except the elites; it was equally structured to be ungovernable, unsustainable and unproductive. It is extroverted towards serving South Africa and the only source of power is the barracks underwritten by South Africa.

The global responses to Lesotho’s problems are equally problematic. The notorious World Bank’s Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) was harmful as it made the poor poorer and left the country worse off in a balance of payment crisis.³⁸ The country experienced overall negative growth of about 1.5 percent during the ESAP years and, to date, the economy has never recovered. With a sabotaged, “dysfunctional, malfunctioning and unfunctional” economy, the only way to distribute the little available resources is by force and those who feel marginalised will respond by deploying the military.³⁹

Possible Solutions to the Lesotho Problem

From a liberal perspective, a number of possible solutions to the recurrence of military coups in Lesotho can be postulated. The first is the need for constitutional reforms that remove the harnesses placed on the monarch, that is, the removal of *Schedule 1 of the Constitution of Lesotho*. This would have the effect of giving the monarchy political power and thus curtailing the monarch's proclivity to turn to the barracks to find a political voice. Other reform suggestions worth noting come from politicians, notably Ntsu Mokhele, who suggested the abolition of the independent kingdom in favour of integration into South Africa. Termed the "Eire option" by James Cobbe, the idea is modelled on the United Kingdom/Eire arrangement.⁴⁰ In terms of this arrangement, the Basotho would have similar rights to South Africans while the two countries would retain their independence. However, this is an idea that will be contested by South Africa, which harbours resentment for the high immigrant rates from their economically poor neighbours, especially as immigrants from Zimbabwe and Mozambique have already faced various episodes of Afrophobia.⁴¹

Another suggestion is the development of economic programmes that reduce Lesotho's heavy dependency on foreign aid, migrant labour and revenue from the Lesotho Highlands water project. One such project would be the development of the tourism sector of Lesotho, whose potential to prop up the country's economy is undoubted. Military institutional reforms led by SADC and the AU aimed at, among other things, redefining the mandate of the RLDF away from "throning and dethroning" kings to maintaining the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the kingdom. These efforts must be led by the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security and the Inter-State Defence and Security Committee. With Lesotho facing no immediate military threat, the time to reform the military is now. These reforms must scale down the military, thereby reducing the pressure on the fiscus, which for years has been mounting from the defence sector while simultaneously improving the efficiency of the army. The danger of this option is that, being used to being the kingmakers, the military will certainly resist any moves meant to disempower them by simply staging a coup and installing either one of their own or a compliant politician who poses no threat to the military.

Broader democratisation is desirable as a long-term solution to Lesotho's fragile democracy, which manifests in many forms including recurrent military coups. An empowered monarch would play an oversight role, as in the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Thailand. This is a movement away from the current post-1994 arrangement, which South Africa acts as the guarantors/sponsor

of Lesotho's democracy. Stable democracy need not be imported but grown locally and organically. This will, in turn, lead to civil supremacy over military power.

Conclusion

This article qualified the recurrence of military coups in Lesotho using three perspectives: the legal, liberal democratic, and decolonial perspectives. It noted that the decolonial perspective is the most efficacious in explaining the perennial problems of political instability in Lesotho, a phenomenon which emanates from the instrumentalisation of the army by the elites. In turn, this problem was traced back to the colonial era when Britain altered the nature of the monarch as part of the colonisation process of Lesotho by “manufacturing” the Moshoeshe dynasty. The tug of war involving the monarch and the politicians over the control of the armed forces is merely a manifestation of the problem caused by coloniality of power. Such problems bedevil not only Lesotho, but all the formerly colonised countries, and must be explored using decolonial epistemologies so that the full extent of the problem can be comprehended. This needs to happen before any hasty prescriptions are offered; such prescriptions have failed since they were alternatives *within* as opposed to alternative *to* the political system. Decoloniality is recommended as an epistemology necessary in the disentanglement of those people who continue to live as colonial subjects from the colonial matrices of power—millennia.

Notes

1. James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). See also Fako Johnson Likoti, “The 1998 Military Intervention in Lesotho: SADC Peace Mission or Resource War?,” *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 2 (2007) 251–63, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13533310601150875>.

2. *Coloniality of power* is a concept coined by Anibal Quijano to denote the resilient and interrelating practices of colonialism in power relations, social orders, and forms of knowledge that persist long after the official end of colonialism.

3. Michael Amoah, *Nationalism, Globalisation and Africa* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2011), 73.

4. Pat McGowan and Thomas H. Johnson, “Sixty Coups in Thirty Years—Further Evidence Regarding African Military Coups d’Etat,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 24, no. 3 (September 1986): 539–46, doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00007175. See also Thomas H. Johnson, Robert O. Slater, and Pat McGowan, “Explaining African Military Coups d’Etat, 1960–1982,” *The American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (September 1984), 622–40, doi.org/10.2307/1961833.

5. Martin Rupiya and Mpho Mothoagae, “Tracking Lesotho’s Sixth Military Coup, 30 August 2014: What Has Changed?,” in *The New African Civil–Military Relations*, eds. Martin Rupiya, Gordon Moyo, and Henrick Laugesen (Pretoria, South Africa: The African Public Policy and Research Institute, 2015), 186–260.

6. GlobalSecurity.org, “Basotho Wars (1858–68),” accessed 25 July 2017, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/basotho.htm>.

7. Khabele Matlosa and Neville W. Pule, "The Military in Lesotho," *African Security Review* 10, no. 2 (2001): 62–74, doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2001.9627937.

8. *Ibid.*, 65.

9. Tefetso Mothibe, "Lesotho: The Rise and Fall of Military-Monarchy Sharing: 1986–1990," *Africa Insight* 20, no. 4 (1990), 242–46, <http://repository.hsrc.ac.za/handle/20.500.11910/155>.

10. For example, Leabua Jonathan, Lesotho's prime minister during independence in 1965, was helped by South Africa's prime minister B. J. Vorster to hold onto power after he faced electoral defeat in the 1970 elections. Vorster's apartheid regime funded Jonathan's military until 1982 when Jonathan criticised Vorster who responded ruthlessly by withdrawing all the military support and killing many refugees and innocent Basotho civilians.

11. Michael Ward, "Economic Independence for Lesotho?," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 5, no. 3 (1967): 355–368, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-modern-african-studies/issue/386290CE1E22E5E702C0A839D03AE48D>.

12. *Ibid.*, 355.

13. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Coloniality of Power in Development Studies and the Impact of Global Imperial Designs on Africa," *The Australasian Review of African Studies* 33 (October 2012): 155–67.

14. Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz in Ndlovu-Gatsheni's "Coloniality of Power," 161.

15. Dirk Kotze, "Africa's Concept of 'Unconstitutional Change of Government': How Appropriate?," *Conflict Trends* 4, no. 3 (2013): 3–10, <http://journals.co.za/content/accordc/2013/4/EJC146700>.

16. *Ibid.*, 4.

17. Michael Bratton and Wonbin Cho, "Where Is Africa Going? Views from Below: A Compendium of Trends in Public Opinion in 12 African Countries, 1999–2006" (Afrobarometer working paper no. 60, Cape Town 8001 South Africa, May 2006), <http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Working%20paper/Afro-paperNo60.pdf>.

18. There are, however, some instances in which imposed democracy became sustained, genuine democracy. These rare cases include Germany and Japan after World War II.

19. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being," *Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (2007), 240–70, doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548.

20. Anibal Quijano, "The Coloniality of Power and Social Classification," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 6, no. 2 (2000): 342–86, <https://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/wan/wanquijano.pdf>.

21. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power*, 14.

22. *Ibid.*

23. The 2014 "coup" was generally interpreted by various governments such as the United States and South Africa as a clash between the police and the army.

24. Martin Rupiya and Mpho Mothoagae, "Tracking Lesotho's Sixth Military Coup, 30 August 2014: What Has Changed" in *The New African Civil Military Relations*, Rupiya, Gordon Moyo, and Henrik Laugesen, eds. (Pretoria, South Africa: African Public Policy and Research Institute, 2015), 189.

25. Francis Deng et al., *Identity, Diversity, and Constitutionalism in Africa* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2008), 119.

26. Chapter 5 of the Lesotho Constitution section 99(4) specifically mentions that "no act of the King shall be valid to the extent that it is inconsistent with an act deemed to be his act by virtue of subsection 2 or 3."

27. Lesotho Constitution, Schedule 1, Section 51, Oath of Office of the King or Regent, <http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/5f117d45be0d3d8ed8e573ee1db7db551ad68565.pdf>.

28. The Fragile States Index measures the fragility of states and has the following 11 categories (in descending order): very high alert, high alert, alert, very high warning, high warning, warning, less stable, stable, very stable, sustainable, and very sustainable.

29. Wole Olayele, *Democratic Consolidation and Political Parties in Lesotho: Realising Effective and Sustainable Democratic Governance in Southern Africa and Beyond* (Pretoria, South Africa: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, 2003), 7.

30. Jack Healey, "Lesotho Development Aid Needs New Direction," *Lesotho Times*, 6 February 2016, <http://www.lestimes.com/lesotho-development-aid-needs-new-direction/>.

31. Thandika Mkandawire, quoted in Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Coloniality of Power in Development Studies and the Impact of Global Imperial Designs on Africa," *The Australasian Review of African Studies* 33 (October 2012), 63.
32. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).
33. Ibid.
34. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 87.
35. Achille Mbembe, *On Private Indirect Government: State of the Literature* (Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research, 2000), 6.
36. Michael Syrotinski, *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: At the Limits of Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 108.
37. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Coloniality of Power in Development Studies," 51.
38. Tabo Foula and Quentin Grafton, "Structural Adjustment in Lesotho: An Evaluation," *Journal of Policy Modeling* 20, no. 6 (1998): 791–814, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/4856280_Structural_Adjustment_in_Lesotho_An_Evaluation.
39. Ibid.
40. James Cobbe, "The Changing Nature of Dependence: Economic Problems in Lesotho," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 21, no. 2 (June 1983): 293–310, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-modern-african-studies/article/the-changing-nature-of-dependence-economic-problems-in-lesotho/5F05D00A22F2043F6944B6B9FB6CC3FD>.
41. Although not watertight, the term *Afrophobia* is preferred over *xenophobia* because hatred was expressed towards certain sections of immigrants and not the totality of them. Thus, past so-called xenophobia attacks in South Africa only targeted black immigrants predominantly from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Somali, Eritrea, Kenya, and Mozambique. Immigrants from the United States, United Kingdom, or any other European country were never attacked.