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The politics of placing princes in historical and contemporary Swaziland.

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Declaration

The work contained in this thesis was completed by the author at the University of The Witwatersrand in 2013. It is original work except where due reference is made and has not been submitted for the award in any other university.

Signed----------

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Abstract

This dissertation examines centre- regional disputes which are now more than two centuries old between the Swazi royal house and the subordinate chiefdoms of the Magagula, Tfwala, and Mabuza, all located in central Swaziland, and the Fakudze of Macetjeni, located in the Lubombo region. The research report contends that these disputes have become so critical in the relationship between princes and chiefs in Swaziland that it has culminated in open defiance by chiefs deposed in favour of princes. This has led to the Swazi royal house resorting to the use of naked force in a bid to stamp its authority over the subordinate recalcitrant chiefs.

The tradition of placing princes as chiefs in distant areas helped to serve two aims. One was to send princes throughout the country for purposes of surveillance of the recalcitrant chiefdoms, and the other to remove princes from the royal kraal as these could not disturb the incumbent ruler by contesting the throne. The non-Dlamini chiefdoms have struggled to regain their lost autonomy at any given opportunity. Such opportunities have been availed to the non-Dlamini chiefdoms by forces that have acted upon the Swazi society since the early 19th century. These included the Mfecane wars, colonialism, missionary activities, education and the mineral revolution in South Africa with its concomitant labour migration. These forces saw the Dlamini royal house struggling to retain its hold on the non-Dlamini chiefdoms through the invention and manipulation of tradition. Each of the Swazi kings has adhered to this old tradition of placing his brothers as chiefs, beginning with Sobhuza I up to the time of Sobhuza II and the current king Mswati III. The net effect of placing princes in the periphery has caused a lot of confusion and opposition in the country, as subordinate chiefs have openly revolted against traditional authorities who impose princes as new rulers of their principalities. The Swazi royal house has responded by evicting some of these chiefs and that the latter have been forced to seek political asylum in neighbouring South Africa.

In a nutshell this thesis shows that the Swazi traditional system has failed to offer alternatives or accommodate change. Worsening matters is that the current king is encircled by people who lack vision and wisdom, as a result the traditional system has faltered and failed to embrace change and has distanced itself from the people.

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