

Reflecting on the Negative Impact of the First Ladies in Governance: Case Study of Lesotho and Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The role of the First Ladies in governance particularly in Southern Africa became an area of research following the roles of former first Ladies of both Lesotho and Zimbabwe, 'Maesaiah Thabane and Grace Mugabe respectively. The paper traces the concept of the First Lady. It also provides a brief background of both 'Maesaiah and Grace and how they rose to the positions of First Ladies. Their shenanigans in negatively influencing their husbands on governance and party administrative matters resulted in unending party conflicts, creating enemies among old-time comrades and undermining their husbands through their unbecoming actions. Their actions and incidents that ended the political careers of their husbands is explored. The paper ends with conclusion and recommendations.

Key Words: Lesotho, governance, First Ladies, Grace Mugabe, 'Maesaiah Thabane, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

There are many schools of thought on the origin of the concept of the 'First Lady'. The first school thought argues that during the feudal age, the wife of the president was called a Lady, which was a title of nobility, especially if the husband's title was 'Lord'. In 1838, the author L.H. Sigourney used the concept describing Martha Washington. In 1849, the concept was purported to have been used by President Zachary Taylor in eulogy for Dolly Madison, the wife of President Jameson Madison. The second school of thought argues that the concept 'First Lady' was initially used outside politics to refer to a woman of outstanding in her field or in a high rank. Eventually, the term became the norm for referring to the wives of former presidents, and then later, to those in sitting presidents. In modern times, the term is used to describe a woman seen to be at the top of her profession or art. The term is often used to a non-monarchical heads of state or chief executives who do not have that kind of style in their own country. Some countries have a title, official or unofficial that is or can be translated as 'First Lady' (Merriam-Webster, 2022). The paper adopts the second school of thought because some women occupy this position by marriage, not because they had excelled in their professions or art. The paper however, however recognizes the potential of some 'First Ladies' who have contributed in enhancing their husband's political profiles and their countries. The focus, is therefore on First Ladies of Lesotho and Zimbabwe.

History and folklore have documented the villainous role played by First Ladies in the downfall of their husband's positions in society and even governments. This includes the Biblical Jezebel, whose meddling negatively affected her husband, King Ahab's reign; the 18th century France's Queen Marie Antoinette who contributed to the fall of her husband King Louis XVI reign; 1980's Philippines Imelda Marcos whose corruption and lavish spending (she boasted of her 3 000 pairs of designer shoes) led to the fall of her husband Ferdinand Marcos reign. Though she was convicted of stealing from state coffers after her husband's death, she never spend a day behind bars (De Vries: 2022). Despite these references, Van Myk and Nyere (2019) of the African First Lady Database observed that the role played by wives of Heads of State and Government in Africa has been widely overlooked. This paper therefore, focus on the roles played by the former First Ladies of Lesotho and Zimbabwe, 'MaesaiahLiabiloe (nee Ramoholi) Thabane and Grace Ntombizodwa (nee Mafuru) Mugabe respectively. They aptly amplify the role some women could play in either building or destroying their husbands' political careers. The two are also liken to historical villainous wives. Zimbabwean former First Lady Grace Mugabe, masterminded her husband former President Robert Gabriel Mugabe's¹ estrangement from his erstwhile party and military allies. Robert subsequently resigned and made way for his protégé, Emmerson Mnangagwa in November 2017 while the role of 'Maesaiah has been likened to a virus that weakened Lesotho's All Basotho convention (ABC) party resulting in the party going into a war with itself (Zihlangu, 2022), and further splitting into several parties. This is also interpreted inter-textually as an allusion to the old biblical story of Samson and Delila, where the former gave in to the latter's' seduction and revealed the source of his power.

¹ He was the Wing Commander in the Air Force of Zimbabwe. He became the defence attaché at the Zimbabwe Embassy in China and later intelligence attaché in India. Usually people spend four years in their deployment area aboard but he spend more than twenty years in Beijing.

Grace was born on 23 July 1965 in Benoni, South Africa to migrant parents and she is the fourth of five children in the family. In 1970, she moved to then Rhodesia, to live with her mother, IdahMarufu in Chivhu while her father remained and worked in South Africa to support his family. She attended primary school in Chivhu and proceeded to Kriste Mambo secondary school in Manicaland. She married Stanley Goreraza² and they had a son, Russell Goreraza, born in 1984 when Grace was 19-years-old.

Robert Mugabe was initially married to Sara Francesca ‘Sally’³ Mugabe (nee Hayfron) from Ghana. They met at a teacher’s training colleague in Ghana and married in 1961. They were blessed with a son, Michael Mhamondezenyika Mugabe born in 1963. He however, died of cerebral malaria when he was three years. Robert and Sally’s faltered when they found out that they could not have any more children (Tambani: 2017), and that paved a new relationship between Mugabe and Grace. After completing school, Grace worked as secretary to Mugabe, and became his mistress while still married to Goreraza. She gave birth two children, Bona born in 1988, named after Mugabe's mother, and Robert Peter Jr (Rogers, 2019; Meredith, 2002). When Mugabe and Grace relationship became exposed, Goreraza and Grace divorced in 1995 and she then got married to Mugabe. When Mugabe married Grace he was still married Sally who suffered a kidney failure and subsequently died in 1992. Before she died, Mugabe was already romantically involved with his secretary, Grace subsequently married her in 1996 (Nyarota, 2018). Mugabe claimed that Sally was aware of his relationship with Grace and she might not have liked it as she suffered from kidney failure and she was on her death bed (Meredith, 2002). Mugabe and Grace married on 17 August 1996 in the tiny church at Katuna Mission where Mugabe lived and attended school as a boy. Archbishop Patrick Chapaipa, head of the Catholic Church, officiated at the ceremony albeit reluctantly as Sally was still alive and they had not divorced. Unlike Sally, Grace showed no interest in charitable course. She preferred a life of luxury. Mugabe and Grace had a lavish wedding in which Mugabe allegedly looted the nation’s treasure to pay for food and entertainment for the couple’s twelve thousand guests (Norman & Wiener, 2008). Grace became Mugabe’s young wife (Hill, 2005). Mugabe still wanted to have children and Grace was there to fulfil the task.

Former Prime Minister Thomas MotsoahaeThabane⁴ and the leader of ABC was married twice before marrying ‘Maesaiah. His first wife was Matoka Judith Thabane (nee MamotapanyaneYayiFobo) and they were blessed with four children: Nkoea, Potlako, Toka and Selimo. Matokadivorced with Thabane and died in 2017 at the age of 79. In 1987, Thabane married LipoleloThabane and they had one child Amelia. Like Mugabe, Thabane married ‘Maesiaha before divorcing Lipolelo. ‘Maesiaha was born on 16 April 1977 in Lesotho and married Thabane on 27 August 2017 and became the Lesotho’s First Lady. Although not much is known about her but she gained notoriety after Thabane's ascendancy to power, media reports suggested she called the shots apparently on the appointment and dismissal of ministers. In the past two-and-half years of Thabane's administration, ‘Maesiaha has been accused of causing chaos in the government by allegedly meddling in the affairs of the state to a point of influencing government decisions.

Like Mugabe, Thabane was still married to LipoleloThabane when he became romantically involved with ‘Maesaiah in 2011. Being the third wife, ‘Maesaiah was not well received by Lipolelo, Thabane’s children and members of the family. Despite hostile reception, on 17 August 2017 Thabane and ‘Maesaiah wedded at Setsoto Stadium in Maseru. Thousands of Thabane’s ABC supporters and SADC dignitaries were in attendance (Rakotsoane, 2017). The marriage celebration was sponsored by controversial Chinese businessperson Yan Xie⁵ who had been rewarded by Thabane by being appointed in 2017 as Head of Special Projects and Special Envoy and Trade Advisor on the China-Asia Trade Network (Ntsukunyane, 2018) to the dismay and outcry of the Basotho.

² He was born on 21 February 1924 at Katuna Jesuit Mission. He was the sixth child born to Gabriel Mugabe-the Mission’s carpenter and his wife Bona Mugabe. He studied at Fort Hare and University of South Africa attaining BA in History and English literature and BA in Education in 1951 and 1954 respectively (Norman: 2004, 35-38).

³ Sally was referred to as Amai (Mother) in Zimbabwe. Following the dearth of Nhamo and imprisonment of Mugabe, Sally sought exile in UK where she worked for Africa Centre until she returned to Zimbabwe after release and independence of Zimbabwe. She became First Lady in 1987 and was elected Secretary General of ZANU-PF Women’s League in 1989.

⁴ He was born on 28 May 1939 in Maseru, Lesotho. He is a Mosotho politicians and the fifth Prime Minister of Lesotho. He attained BA at National University of Lesotho (NUL).

⁵ He boasted of bankrolling almost every politician in Lesotho, including the weeding of Thabane and ‘Maesaiah, and that of ThatoNkahlle (nee Mosisili)-the daughter of former Prime Minister PakalithaMosisili. He also funded former Deputy Prime Minister MothejoaMetsing birthday in Ladybrand-South Africa. None of the politicians had disputed Xie’s public pronouncements. In June 2020, he fled Lesotho to Australia after Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) started investigating him for corruption.

Since Thabane's and Mugabe's resignations in the backdrop of internal pressure within ABC and a military intervention in Zimbabwe respectively, the role of First Ladies has been in the spotlight. Their contribution in the disgraceful fall of their husbands from power is explored.

According to Van Myk and Nyere (2019) the First Ladies are usually the wives of the Presidents or Heads of State and Government. They are often perceived as mothers, care-givers that nurture the sick, young and elderly through humanitarian projects and deal with women and children issues. These responsibilities evolved with time because the First Ladies are strong pillars and key role players in the careers of their husbands through:

- actively supporting their husbands' rule;
- becoming influential political actors domestically, regionally, and internationally. This enables them to influence relationships and extracted political support, as well as financial gain through tenders and government funding;
- acting as power brokers and members of the inner circle. They actively mobilised support for their spouses. They use strategies such as personal narratives, their country's liberation history, religion and culture. They supported their husbands' political campaigns (Van Myk and Nyere, 2019).

These responsibilities give First Ladies the platform to influence the political developments in their respective countries. This situation, wittingly or unwittingly planted seeds of political ambition, political control including desire for power by both Grace and 'Maesaiah. Though Grace wanted the power for herself, 'Maesaiah wanted to use Thabane to govern.

A number of similarities are noted between the two First Ladies and their marriages to Heads of States and Governments. Apart from being First Ladies, both their husbands were over 70 years of age when they married them. Mugabe was 72 years while Grace was 31 years and Thabane was 78 while 'Maesaiah was 40. Both were not the first wives to their husbands, Grace was the second while 'Maesaiah was the third.

Both former First Ladies were awarded Doctoral Degrees, 'Maesaiah received honorary Doctoral Degree from Divinity College Consortium (Interdenominational University) in the United States of America on March 2019 for social community developments in the country (Lesotho Government Website, 2019). While Grace registered PhD philosophy in early 2014 and graduated after three months with a Doctorate in Sociology titled "*The Changing Social Structure and Functions of The Family*" from the Faculty of Social Studies in September 2014 at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ). She was among 3 274 grandaunts who were capped by her husband, the then Chancellor of the UZ and insisted on being referred to as Dr 'Amai' (Mother) Grace Mugabe. The degree was later revoked (Rogers, 2019), following the arrest of Levi Nyagura, the vice chancellor of the UZ in 2018 by the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission and charged with abuse of office following an investigation into the fraudulent awarding of the PhD. Grace was bulldozing her way, not only politically but also academically. In both instances she was embarrassed.

2. Efforts of the First Ladies at bringing good governance in disrepute

Both 'Maesaiah and Grace had similarities of meddling with the internal affairs of the ruling parties and governance issues. They became fast emerging as some of Southern Africa's most influential, impossible-to-ignore and divisive former First Ladies.

2.1 The First Ladies efforts at amassing wealth and influencing tender processes

The former First Ladies had nicknames based on their public behaviour. Grace preferred a life of luxury (Arnold & Wiener, 2008). She spent her initial 15 years shopping rather than interfering in state matters. Consequently, she earned herself nickname 'Gucci Grace' because of her penchant for Gucci label. They undertook frequent trips to London where they spend small fortunes at Harrods in London and even toyed with the idea of buying a long-haul private jet (Hill, 2003). They also went on frequent overseas jaunts, visiting places as far afield as Iran, Montego Bay, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Dubai and Paris (Stiff, 2000; Rogers, 2019). Apparently, there was a limit to shopping and she went into property acquisition and farms in Zimbabwe, Hong Kong, Dubai and South Africa amongst others places. In the process, she was ruthless in displacing villagers using the police and other state agencies, especially in the Arnold Farm in Mazowe where 15 families were moved (Caj, 2017). For Grace, it did not matter whether villagers got a court order to stop her escapades as long as she had security agents behind her. She disposed the vulnerable and the weak. Grace often welcomed and hosted foreign Heads of State and Government at her Harare home, and at State House. Her close proximity to the President gave her access to influential political networks that she exploited to buy properties and run businesses (Van Myk & Nyere, 2019). She exploited the connection of her husband to her own selfish interests.

Between 2012 and 2017, Grace had evicted more than 380 families, amassing more than 16 farms in the country from prominent individuals and companies such as High Court Judge Ben Hlatshwayo and Agro producers Interfresh respectively. Some of these farms included the Estate in Gushungo Holdings which incorporated Gushungo Dairy Farm, Gushungo Dairy Parlour and Alpha Omega in 1 200 hectares Foyle farm in Mazowe, 40 km, north of Harare (NewsdeZimbabwe, 2021). In 2016, she reportedly bought a R58 million property in Harare from Jan Teede and the Zimbabwe Central Bank allowed the cash to be exported to a Mauritius bank account (Zimbabwe Today, 2015; The Citizen, 2017). According to Sejanamane (2017), Grace also grabbed the 3rd largest dam in Zimbabwe in Mazowe in June 2017. In spite of the fact that the law prohibits privatisation of water in Zimbabwe, Grace took over the dam and had AK47 wielding policemen chasing away villagers from using it. Over the years, she was able to siphon funds from the state for personal use (Zimbabwe Today, 2022). On the other hand, (Stiff, 2000) opines that Grace had built a Z\$20 million mansion in the lavish suburb of Borrowdale Brook called the 'Graceland mansion' with the funds earmarked for low-income housing for the poor civil servants. The three-story mansion was later sold for an estimated 2.5 million pounds profit to Libyan government under the late Gaddafi Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi (Zimbabwe Today, 2015). This was tantamount to theft of public funds earmarked for the disadvantaged groups and no action was taken against her.

In South Africa, Grace initially rented a mansion in Sandhurst on a year lease for about R25 million and lived in it with her staff during her trips to the country and later media reported that she spent R45 million on 9 249 square meter property in Sandhurst, Johannesburg. Her sons Robert Jr and Chatunga were reportedly paying R500 000.00 a month for an apartment in Dubai before moving to South Africa, where they rented a flat in Rivonia, for which they paid R70 000 a month before they were kicked out after a drunken brawl that left a security guard injured (The Citizen, 2017). She also acquired overseas residence, including Hong Kong villas where Bona stayed during her student days at the university in that country (Zimbabwe Today, 2015). This extravagance was done despite poverty ravaging majority of Zimbabweans and she further deprived the poor and the down trodden of their dignity.

In Lesotho, 'Maesaiah started a 'MaesaiahThabane Trust Fund under the pretext of helping the needy and destitute in Lesotho but this fund was also mired in controversy. The trust fund has been perceived by many as a money-laundering scheme. An intriguing Savingram from the Cabinet Office on 22 August 2017 to all Principal Secretaries (PSs) alerting them of an award to the First Lady by an obscure Women's movement. The (PSs) were allegedly notified to advise their Ministers of the occasion. "The cost of the ticket(s) was M300.00 per person and M3, 000.00 per table of ten, respectively. The event's proceeds, a certain percentage would be given to the First Lady to donate to a charity/support group of her choice." This event send a clear message that funds could be facilitated to move from the public purse into the private one.

In May 2018, the Director of 'Maesaiah Trust Fund, MakaraboMojakhomo and her husband ThabangMojakhomo allegedly defrauded the trust up to M200,000. Thereafter, Makarabo disappeared and her family feared for the worse given the history of such cases involving security forces. After she reappeared in South Africa in May 2019, she reported "fear that the First Lady has powers to control the police and the judiciary so (she) would not get a free and fair trial with her control" (Mohloboli, 2020). Like Grace, she also had some influence over security and judicial entities. One of 'Maesaiah Trust Fund procurement officer, NtoloShoepane-Mpeete, was laid to rest after she was killed under unclear circumstances. She disappeared and her body was found at a mortuary in Boksburg. It is still not clear what could have happened to her but she is said to have leaked the WhatsApp video of 'Maesaiah and Thabane singing heartily in their bedroom clad in their morning gowns. The *Ha re namatla*-translated: we have no strength. That video went viral on social media (Mohloboli, 2020), and 'Maesaiah was suspected to have silenced her though there is no evidence to that effect.

'Maesaiah, was also accused of seeking to control ministers, especially when it came to the awarding of tenders. She allegedly ordered the removal of former health minister Nyapane Kaya after he refused to unlawfully award a multimillion-Maloti catering and laundry tender to her preferred candidates (Mohloboli, 2020). On 22 October 2019, DCEO Chief Investigations Officer, ThabisoThibeli, briefed Public Accounts Committee (PAC) implicating 'Maesaiah bidding for some Chinese nationals who were said to be close to her. This allegation was also confirmed by the former PS for Local Government, KhothatsoTsooana, before PAC that 'Maesaiah directed that a lucrative M340 million Mpilo Boulevard tender be awarded to Xie's UNIK Construction Engineering Company. He also claimed that former two cabinet ministers, MahalaMolapo (Local Government and Chieftaincy) and ChalanePhori (Small Business Development, Cooperatives and Marketing) also supported the directive. He said 'Maesaiah and the two ministers wanted UNIK awarded the tender to reward its owner, for assisting Thabane. Xie allegedly offered financial assistance to Thabane and members of ABC party during their time in exile in South Africa (Pherudi, 2021; Kajane, 2020).

Sejanamane (2019) opines that the picture, which emerges out of Xie's dealings, is of a highly devious person whose business *modus operandi* is that of a 'corruptor and ruthless tenderpreneur'. Tšooana however, absolved Thabane of any wrongdoing, saying although he attended the meeting, the premier advised them against any improper conduct and instead told them to "go and do the right thing" by awarding the tender to the deserving bidder (Kajane, 2020). Thabane was keen fighting corruption, in fact he won the 2017 elections on the manifesto based on fighting corruption. But the people around him including his wife, undermined this noble national objective.

It also turned out that Xie had established a series of over twenty front companies which are exclusively given monopoly for waivers and tendering in different government ministries and departments. This enable illicit money obtained from fraudulent tendering activities to be obscured in legal transactions. While these companies are registered under different Basotho men and women some of whom have not been involved in any business, Xie was a signatory to all their bank accounts. In less than two (2) years of its existence, 'Maesaiah Trust Fund is said to have accumulated over a billion Maloti assisted by Xie's front companies and their associates which were mercilessly looting public funds (Liotloana News Agency, 2019). 'Maesaiah is no different from Grace for love of money. They could go an extra mile to accumulate more money.

2.2 Cases of assaults against the former First Ladies

These First Ladies also became law unto themselves as they assaulted civilians at will under the pretext of diplomatic immunity. Grace's reputation for violence and hot temper earned her the nickname of "Dis-Grace". Swalia & Sheridan (2009), reported that, while on a shopping trip in Hong Kong where her daughter Bona was a university student, Grace ordered her bodyguard to assault *Sunday Times* photographer Richard Jones outside her luxury hotel. She then joined in the attack, punching Jones repeatedly in the face while wearing diamond encrusted rings, causing him cuts and abrasions. She was subsequently granted immunity from prosecution 'under Chinese diplomatic rules' because of her status.

In another incident that took place in August 2017, while visiting South Africa to treat an ankle injury, Grace is said to have assaulted a 20-year-old model, Gabriella Engels, and two friends, who were in the company of her two sons, Robert Jr. and Chatunga, at a hotel in Sandton, Johannesburg. It was alleged that Grace hit the women with an extension cord, causing various injuries including a deep gash on Engels' forehead. This was after accusing the women of living with her sons. After charges were laid by Engels for "assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm", Grace was due to appear at a Johannesburg court on 15 August 2017, but failed to do so as she was subsequently granted diplomatic immunity. On 30 July 2018, the South African High Court stripped Grace of her diplomatic immunity and allowed the case involving her assault against Engels to proceed (Rogers, 2019). The move by the High Court to revoke the diplomatic immunity of Grace did not auger well for the position of the First Lady, now that it was not for the first time she assaulted a civilian. It suggest therefore, Grace was used to taking law into her hands. The AfriForum⁶ has since petitioned the South African High Court to prosecute Grace.

'Maesaiah was also not an exception in assaulting other citizens as she was nicknamed '*Chesampana*' – translated: 'fast in slapping' because more often than not she was embroiled in physical fights with civilians or verbal altercation with government officials. In 2017, Thabane and 'Maesaiah were implicated in the killing of Lipolelo Thabane - at the time of the murder, Lipolelo was still legally married to Thabane but in the process of divorce. Lipolelo had won a High Court case in 2012 which entitled her to be the First Lady of Lesotho in the event Thabane became Prime Minister. After 2017 elections, Thabane became the Prime Minister through the establishment of the third coalition government. By virtue of the court outcome, 'Maesaiah could not become the First Lady because Lipolelo was still married to Thabane and became a stumbling block towards her ambition of becoming the First Lady. Two days before the inauguration of Thabane, Lipolelo was assassinated on 14 June 2017 (BBC, 2020; Report Status Regarding Assassination of Mrs Lipolelo Thabane: 2019). The first attempt to kill her failed on 12 June 2017. Both Thabane and 'Maesaiah were implicated in the assassination of Lipolelo and also alleged to have paid M400 000 deposit with outstanding 3 million Maloti to be paid once Lipolelo was killed and providing employment in government for the killers (Pherudi, 2019). Thabane was accused of shielding his wife from prosecution. These allegations mounted pressure from the opposition and Thabane's own party ABC for him to resign.

⁶Is a civil rights organisation that mobilises Afrikaners, Afrikaans speaking people and other minority groups in South Africa and protect their rights.

On 6 February 2020, 'Maesaiah was also charged with the murder of Lipolelo and attempted murder of ThatoSibolla who was in the company of Lipolelo at the time. She was charged of contravening section 40 (1) (2) of Penal Code Act No. 6 of 2010 by unlawfully act with an intent to cause the death of Lipolelo by shooting her in the process and section 22(1) of the Penal Code Act 61 of 2010. (Report Status Regarding Assassination of MrsLipoleloThabane: 2019). She is currently out on bail while Thabane has not been charged on the same. Despite the murder charges, 'Maesaiah is preparing herself to campaign for a constituency during the 2022 elections in the country.

In 2018, 'Maesaiah was caught up in a physical altercation with 'ManthatisiMabuthile at Ha Tšolo, Maseru Private Hospital. Mabuthile's sister was hit by 'Maesaiah's vehicle. The two met at the hospital and upon Mabuthile inquiring on what happened, 'Maesaiah allegedly grabbed her saying '*mosali, mosali, mosali ha kebuisoekemosalijoalo*' (loosely translated to mean 'woman, woman, woman no woman talks to me like that'). Media reports indicated that 'Maesaiah assaulted and injured Mabuthile. *Ba ilebatšoaranakamatsoho* – (translated- they engaged in a fight) and 'Maesaiah beat Mathumile by throwing her on the floor and pulling her hair. Mathumile was later informed that she was fighting with the First Lady (Mohloboli, 2020). The incident came in the aftermath of complaints by senior ABC officials like Maliehe, who have spoken out publicly, and others who haven't, that the First Lady's aggressive behaviour threatened to derail support for the ABC and alienate most of the Prime Minister's supporters.

On the same day, 'Maesaiah allegedly assaulted a foreign doctor on call at Queen Mamohato Memorial Hospital for delaying to attend to a patient who had been brought in by her bodyguards. In one of her latest gaffes in 2019, 'Maesaiah threatened to assault the minister of Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation Dr MahaliPhamotse for having spoken to Thabane without her consent. This after Phamotse had asked Thabane, according to protocol, to greet the players before a soccer match kicked off (Mohloboli, 2020). She was indiscriminate in her assault escapades because she was not held accountable and exploited the position of her husband.

2.3 First Ladies scolding civil servants

Grace on one occasion threatened lawmaker and former Deputy Justice Minister, Fortune Chasi, accusing him of frustrating her efforts to obtain more land near farms she owned. The area had gold reserves, and some villagers there pan for gold. In a rally in July 2017, she also scolded and humiliated Presidential Spokesperson, George Charamba, accusing him of taking sides in the factional battles in ZANU-PF. Images of Charamba being roasted on the podium by Grace were embarrassing. She reprimanded him not to separate the president from his wife. (Nehanda Radio, 2017). Scolding at some civil servants in public is uncalled for.

'Maesaiah's behavior of publicly rebuking government officials was a norm and unacceptable. However, Thabane staunchly defended her and warned ministers against criticising her (Mugari, 2020). Anyone who criticised 'Maesaiah was sure to lose their jobs in government, only the brave and tested such as Maliehe expressed their views on this unbecoming behaviour. But more alarming was 'Maesaiah's escapades in New York where like 'Gucci' did to Charamba, she is reported to have publicly harassed Ambassador KeleboneMaope, Lesotho's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Not only did she say unspeakable things to him in a reception meant for her husband, but she was reported to have asked the assembled Basotho in the reception to line up to inform her how the Ambassador has treated them. 'Maesaiah had absolutely no business getting involved in state matters. But what was even more worrying was that she said whatever she said in the presence of Thabane. The attempt to humiliate a senior Lesotho diplomat by someone who had no status to do so was deplorable.

2.4 The First Ladies blatant interference with government and political party matters

Grace took almost twenty years to attempt to stage a coup and her political career spanned a mere three years (2014-2017) when she was elected the President of the Zanu-PF Women's League. This role meant she automatically became a member of the party's Politburo. She was successful in gaining support from religious leaders, youth, traditional leaders, and minority apostolic churches. She made some noteworthy claims in pursuit of her political ambition. For example, she publicly stated that even if Mugabe were to be incapacitated, Zimbabweans would vote for him because he was God-ordained. Besides addressing religious rallies, she used nationwide "Meet the People" tours to brand herself the President (Van Myk & Nyere, 2019).

Grace did not hide her ambition to become President as she challenged her husband to name a successor, a taboo topic in a country where critics of the president had sometimes been sidelined, jailed or according to human rights activities, abducted, beaten and killed. She positioned herself as a possible successor, saying one of the two vice presidents should be a woman (Mutsaka, 2017). As Mugabe aged, Grace moved into the spotlight publicly influencing state appointments and dismissals. Perhaps the most sensational of her actions within the government was her call for the dismissal of TeuraiRopa Joyce Majuru, the then Vice President on allegations that she wanted to poison, topple and assassinate Mugabe.

Two days later, Mujuru along with eight cabinet ministers all of whom were linked to her were dismissed. When she succeeded, she began to have illusions of grandeur hoping to be a cabinet minister and later Mugabe's successor. This drove her to work through her husband to be "elected" as head of the ZANU-PF women's wing. Through her political manipulation, Mujuru became an outcast within ZANU-PF and by the time the party held a congress in December 2014, Mujuru could not be considered for presidential succession.

Grace sent mixed signals, saying she had no problem becoming president but on other occasions saying she had no such ambitions. After dismissing Mujuru, instead of appointing another woman, Mugabe appointed Mnangagwa, one of the senior members of the ZANU-PF as second vice-president, to the dissatisfaction of Grace. It meant ZANU-PF had two Vice-Presidents, Mnangagwa and Phelekezela Mphoko - who joined forces with Grace under the umbrella of Group of 40 or G-40. Squabbles over the presidential succession intensified, with Cabinet ministers and military generals trading insults in the press and social media. Grace consolidated her power through the G40 and began her political battle against Mnangagwa. Unfortunately that proved costly for the presidency and the Mugabe family.

Grace's growing political prominence became a cause for concern to people such as Nkosana Moyo, opposition leader of Alliance for the People's Agenda averred that Grace wielded a shadow power in her husband's presidency. Although she was not elected, she behaved as though she was elected herself (Nyarota, 2018). Chigumadzi (2017), opined that Grace used threats at various rallies and warned those who opposed her that:

"I might have small fist, but when it comes to fighting I will put stones inside to enlarge it, or even put on gloves to make it bigger. Do not doubt my capacities"

After becoming ZANU-PF Women's League Secretary in 2014, Grace became power hungry. She started addressing rallies where she trashed everyone including her husband's allies of many years and Mugabe did nothing to restrain her. Among the many that were trashed was Mnangagwa, who later became President after the resignation of Mugabe. When Grace influenced Mugabe to fire Mnangagwa, it marked the beginning of the disgraceful end of Mugabe's career.

The agitation to have Mnangagwa dismissed in both government and the party began with Grace. She accelerated her campaign on the realisation that the Mugabe did not have long to live. Somehow the bedroom had overthrown the public sphere of the state. The spousal relationship which was not a constitutional matter had staged a coup through other means other than weapons of war. The "bedroom coup" was now a reality which would only be confronted by weapons of war as the generals rolled down the tanks. This emboldened ZANU-PF and the broader public to reject the notion that the President's wife was a public face rather than a private role with the husband. In her antics, Grace was oblivious of the 2008 press briefing after the country's harmonized elections,⁷ where there was no outright winner, and Morgan Tsvangirai was said to have won and should have been declared the winner (Salomao, 2019). In fact Tsvangirai wanted to remove Mugabe and ZANU-PF from government, but security chiefs were not in the mood to compromise (Chikane, 2013). In response to possible Tsvangirai's victory and ambition, the security chiefs who included Defence Forces Chief Vitalis Zvinvashe, former Army Commander Constantine Chiwenga, Air Force Chief Perrence Shiri and former Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri, addressed a press conference declaring that:

"The highest office in the land was a straightjacket whose occupant was expected to observe the objectives of the liberation struggle. We will therefore not accept, let alone support or salute, anyone with a different agenda that threatens the very existence of our sovereignty, our country and our people" (Gagare, 2008).

Grace like Tsvangirai did not have the liberation credentials the military believed were required to be a Zimbabwean ruler. While the military could tolerate, as they had done for years, Grace's rule through Mugabe, the prospect of Grace ruling on her own sent shivers down the spine of the Zimbabweans. She had already demonstrated her greed, intolerance and erratic character over the years. The final straw was the purge of Mnangagwa, who was seen as the successor of Mugabe and that irked the military, who had no intention of allowing Grace and her G40 faction to take over the political reins.

Meanwhile in Lesotho, two months after assuming power in 2017, Thabane complained about people meddling in his family affairs because of a barrage of accusations leveled against his wife for interfering in government operations (Molupe, 2017).

⁷The outcome of the presidential elections were as follows: Morgan Tsvangirai – 46% and Robert Mugabe got 42%. Parliamentary outcomes MDC-T (Tsvangirai) 46%; MDC-M-(Mutambara) 10% and ZANU-PF-45%.

The accusations were founded as ‘Maesaiah’s political influence started from 2017 to 2019 (almost three years) after inauguration of the third coalition government comprising four political parties: ABC, Congress of Democrats (DC), Basotho National Party (BNP) and Reformed Congress Party (RCL). ‘Maesaiah took less than six months to get involved in government affairs. Media reports highlighted that she influenced the appointments of the ministers and the diplomatic staff. Some audio clip circulated confirming her hand in some of the appointments, arguing that some of those were not educated but deserved the positions in view of their contribution to the struggle against the previous regime (Sejanamane, 2017). ‘Maesaiah was oblivious of the fact that diplomatic deployment needed minimum qualifications for representing the country well.

At the time, some ABC members accused the First Lady of capturing the government. Subsequently, in May 2018 the former chairperson of the ABC and Minister of Tourism, Environment and Culture, MotlohiMaliehe, launched a blistering and unprecedented attack on the First Lady, accusing her of exerting undue interference in the party and government through constant meddling in the work of ministers and officials. Some members of the party also complained that Thabane had allowed ‘Maesaiahto run the government through what they termed a ‘bedroom coup’ (Mohloboli, 2018). It became a common cause that many in the ABC and government had been complaining about what they perceived as the negative role of the former ‘Maesaiahin the party and the government. The common threat was that there were many other ABC MPs, ministers and government officials who were unhappy with ‘Maesaiah over the way she treated them or the manner in which she conducted herself. They would not dare say anything to her because they were afraid of losing their jobs.

In September 2018, Maliehe accused ‘Maesaiah of corrupt action. Consequently, he was fired from his ministerial position after claiming she had ‘torpedoing government by seeking to control ministers and how they performed their duties’ and ‘instigating the removal of ministers who refused to comply with her demands’ (Kabi, 2018a). Any one opposing the behaviour of ‘Maesaiah was dismissed without notice. It was therefore suspected that she negatively influenced Thabane, thus creating enemies among the comrades.

The involvement of ‘Maesaiah in the affairs of the ABC and government was also confirmed by KopanoKopane, former bodyguard of Thabane and driver to former Minister of Law, Constitutional Affairs and Human Rights - LebohlangHlaele. He submitted during an audio programme of *LeseliSechabeng*- Enlighten the Nation of Mafeteng Community Radio that prior to ABC *Quthing* Conference, the security cluster of ABC were called to a meeting at Lake Side where the First Lady reminded them to protect Thabane, and ‘*bahloko fatse Makobotata a tlarohakamoetapele* – translated words: they should inflict pain on ABC members who disrespected the party leader’. Some of them objected to the instruction and she threatened to disband their security unit and dismiss them. Before the ABC elective conference held from 1-2 February 2019, Kopane and other drivers were also summoned to the State House in the presence of Thabane. In that meeting, ‘Maesaiah announced that: ‘*matona a na a lonaketlo a tebela le tsebe ho bolaoaketlala*- translated words: I will dismiss your ministers so that you starve’ (Kabi, 2018b). Therefore, Kopane had prior knowledge that his boss, Hlaele would be dismissed even before the Minister was informed. Subsequently, Hlaele who is the son-in-law of Thabane was dismissed from the ministerial position on 18 February 2019.

In February 2019, the ABC held an elective conference and the party was divided into factions prior to the conference, namely the State House/*Malumara* because Thabane had allowed his wife ‘Maesaiah to take charge governance matters) and *Likatana* (rags) factions respectively. The former was led by Thabane and the First Lady while the latter was headed by Professor NqosaMahao. The conference outcome resulted in the election of a new National Executive Committee (NEC) led by Mahao. The old NEC refused to hand over power to the new one arguing that Mahao was relatively a new comer and could not be parachuted to the leadership of the party in the presence of veterans who formed the party in 2006. The two factions held different rallies and lodged accusations and counter accusations in the courts of law. Reports indicated that the First Lady did not like Mahao, as a result, she influenced Thabane through some members of the ABC including former Secretary General SamonyaneNtsekele to oppose the outcome of the February 2019 elective conference.

Adding voice on political and state interference by ‘Maesaiah, Mahao accused Thabane of falling into Mugabe’s trap of surrendering power to his wife through ‘bedroom coup’. He also warned that ‘Maesaiahrisked collapsing government. In part, Mahao in (Kabi, 2019a) opined that:

‘She is singularly the most powerful person in the country. She appoints ministers and fire them. Appoint top civil servants and interfere in virtually everything. The antipathy towards our committee is not necessary that of the leader but of his wife. And so we have an unusual constitutional challenge because this person (First Lady) is not part of the institutional authority within the party and within government. But for goodness sake she is in charge’

Mahao's sentiments were shared by some leadership within ABC, the opposition parties and Principal Chief of MatsiengKhoabaneTheko. He concluded that the efforts to mend the bridge with Thabane failed dismally because 'Maesaiah not Thabane exercised power in both ABC and government (Kabi, 2019b). The Chairperson of ABC, Samuel Rapapa advised the party supporters to read a book titled: *The Graceless Fall of Robert Mugabe* which speaks about the role played by Grace in the fall of her husband from power. He was also aware of the negative role 'Maesaiah exerted on the ABC and government in general.

3 Impact of First Ladies involvement in governance

3.1 Resignations of both Mugabe and Thabane

Not being satisfied with the appointment of Mnangagwa, Grace perceived him as an obstacle to her rise to power. The feud between the two reached a tipping point in late September 2017, with both parties pointing fingers at each other at ZANU-PF public gatherings. While addressing an audience at Mahofa's memorial service, Mnangagwa claimed he was poisoned at a ZANU-PF Youth Interface rally in Gwanda. Soon after Mnangagwa's remarks, Mugabe reshuffled his cabinet in what many believed to be power-shifting exercise. Mnangagwa, was dismissed and lost the justice ministry portfolio and Grace was instrumental after reprimanding him for causing divisions in ZANU-PF. Shortly thereafter, Grace expressed her intentions of taking up the Vice-Presidency post. Rogers, (2019), revealed that Mnangagwa, fled because he was warned of not only his arrest, but also it was said that he would be poisoned, hanged and the scene would look like a suicide at Rhodesville Police Station. That early warning saved his life. Subsequently, Grace reigned supreme by wanting to hijack ZANU-PF by even changing the command of the Zimbabwe Defence Force (ZDF). On 14 November 2017, the military tanks rumbled into the capital Harare and soldiers insisted that their takeover was not a coup but 'Operation Restore Legacy' aimed at riding the president of the criminals in his government who had inflicted economic damage on the country. Mugabe was placed under house arrest and some ministers were arrested while others fled the country. Tendai Biti in (Onishi: 2017) observed that:

'Mrs Mugabe's entry into politics caused elite rupture in Zimbabwe. This coup was the result of a disagreement between people eating at the same table, whereas most coups in Africa are done by people eating under the table and receiving crumbs'.

Grace's ambition was curtailed by ZDF led by Chiwenga, war veterans, some members of ZANU-PF and Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). After the unceremonious dismissal of Mnangagwa by Mugabe, Chiwenga warned against the purge of people associated with the liberation struggle. He reminded those behind the treacherous shenanigans including Grace that when it came to matters of protecting the revolution, the military would not hesitate to step in and indeed it stepped in, paving way for Mugabe's impeachment. The delegated powers to Mugabe were withdrawn by the military and it became easy to remove him from power. For fear of being embarrassed through an impeachment process Mugabe resigned and his resignation letter read as follows:

In terms of the provision of Section 96, Sub-Section 1, of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Amendment Number 20, 2013. Following my verbal communication with the Speaker of the National Assembly, Advocate Jacob Mudenda at 13:53 hours, 21 November, 2017 intimating my intention to resign as the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, I, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, in terms of Section 96, Sub-Section 1 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, hereby formally tendered my resignation as the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe with immediate effect.

My decision to resign is voluntary on my part and arises from my concern for the welfare of the people of Zimbabwe and my desire to ensure smooth, peaceful and non-violent transfer of power that underpins national security, peace and stability.

Kindly give public notice of my resignation as soon as possible as required by Section 96, Sub-Section 1 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

Yours faithfully,
Robert Gabriel Mugabe
President of the Republic of Zimbabwe (Nyarota, 2018, p. 177).

After Mugabe's resignation, Mnangagwa returned to Zimbabwe on 22 November 2018 from exile and subsequently sworn in president on 24 November 2017. Consequently, that marked the end of Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe. Not long thereafter, Mugabe died on 6 September 2019 in Singapore.

Following the pressure for Thabane's resignation, he announced that he would resign on 31 July 2020. Fearing that Thabane could lead the country to snap elections, his own party and the opposition in parliament prevented the possible abuse of prorogation,⁸ which Thabane was likely to follow, the Lesotho parliament adopted the Ninth Constitutional Amendment (Lesotho Government Gazette: 2020), that was implemented immediately after adoption by National Assembly (Nyane, 2020). It curtails the Prime Minister's power to advise the King to dissolve parliament and call for elections. Through this amendment, the country was spared having to hold another snap election. In forcing Thabane to resign, on 8 May 2020, 33 ABC MPs announced their resignation from the third coalition government led by Thabane with a view to joining the grand coalition comprising ABC and DC. Other small parties supported both parties. Likoti orates that the grand coalition was not based on any ideology but their desire to oust Thabane without holding another snap election (Likoti, 2021). Subsequently, Thabane's third coalition collapsed on 11 May 2020 and on 19 May 2020, he announced his resignation from the Prime Minister position but remained the leader of the party. This was in consonance with what General Valio Sibanda, senior military commander in ZDF who stated: "power is not sexually transmitted" (Nyarota, 2018, 131). This was true for both countries. Dr Mokeketsi Majoro, an economist and former executive at the International Monetary Fund and Lesotho's Finance Minister, became Prime Minister. Majoro had been Thabane's long-preferred candidate associated to the State House faction. Mugabe and Thabane avoided impeachment and the vote of no confidence. The ambitions of both First Ladies, contributed to the downfall of 81 year old Thabane and 93 years old Mugabe. Maybe the ages of both Mugabe and Thabane created a leeway for their First Ladies to take political advantage.

3.2 Collapse of some business empires and repossession of some estates by the state

In Zimbabwe, the financial problems for Grace to maintain what she had acquired started in May 2019 after Gushungo Dairy estate auctioned five combined harvesters, five Toyota Hi-Lux pick-up trucks and other farm equipment. The business empire of Grace collapsed. The dairy estate was rented out, once thriving chicken and pig enterprises at Zvimba also collapsed (Zimbabwe Today, 2022). Government also repossessed the Mazowe dam, the country's 16th largest reservoir, which has the capacity of 39, 35 million cubic meters of water. The seizure and effective privatization of the dam was unlawful as it violated the Water Act that stipulated that water should not be privatized, although section 3 says, "all water is vested in the President", suggesting Mugabe could have granted permission to his wife to take over the dam. Section 4 of the Act states that there should be no private ownership of the water (NewsdeZimbabwe, 2018). It was payback time, and the national laws were fully implemented after the fall of Mugabe and that was a painful pill for Grace to swallow.

3.3 People's voices in demanding resignations of Mugabe and Thabane respectively

In Zimbabwe, the civilians called for the resignation of Mugabe. This was evident in their public placard messages, written as follows: 'Enough is enough'; 'Mugabe must go'; and SADC and AU stay out of our business, this is what we want' (Rogers: 2019, 210). The instability in Zimbabwe was partly the contribution of Grace political ambition. Similarly in Lesotho, various sectors of the society including the Principal Chief of Thaba-Bosiu, Theko wanted Thabane out. Theko expressed concerns about the developments in the ABC and the government in general. He called on the ruling party to convene a special conference to urgently recall Thabane because he was in breach of the constitution by allowing an un-elected individual in his wife to exercise the powers given only to the prime minister and that 'Maesaiah was interfering in the ABC and Cabinet matters (Kabi, 2019b). In Zimbabwe, the army intervened to nip the political ambition of Grace in the bud, while in Lesotho the opposition parties and Thabane's own party intervened to stop further damage by 'Maesaiah as Thabane had also become a liability.

The actions of Grace drew reactions from various sectors in Zimbabwe. Christopher Mutsvangwa, Chairperson of Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA), described the actions taken by Grace as a 'coup by marriage certificate'. The organization also rejected the manner in which Mugabe wanted to pass power to his wife in a dynastic fashion, which was contrary to the principles that guided the liberation struggle (Rogers, 2019). After 40 years as the party leader, Mugabe was recalled and Grace and her supporters in G40 were expelled. On the other hand in Lesotho, Thabane wanted to contest the 2022 elections and be the face of the party but his party pushed for his resignation. One of the reasons he resigned, was that he was at the advanced age and opinion makers including his daughter 'Mabatšoeneng Hlaele argued that some party leaders abused the advanced age of Thabane for their selfish interests.

⁸Often Prime Ministers resorted to the prorogation of Parliament when their power was threatened. Others even went to an extent of advising His Majesty Letsie III to dissolve parliament and call for new elections. Therefore, the Ninth the Amendment required the two thirds majority for any elections to be called. Therefore, Thabane had to resign as he could not advise the King to dissolve parliament.

3.4 The granting of post-leadership guarantees

Both Mugabe and Thabane were given guarantees. Mugabe demanded three things before resignation, namely: \$10 million, immunity from prosecution together with his family and that non-of his properties would be taken by the state (Burke, 2017). The 93-year-old's \$150,000 salary was paid until his death. The 52-year-old Grace, reviled for her extravagance and greed, would then receive half that amount for the rest of her life. Similarly in Basotho political parties agreed to ensure a dignified, graceful and secure retirement for Thabane (Communique, 2020). Other media reports highlighted that Thabane also wanted immunity from the murder of Lipoleleo, but that could not be guaranteed as that would be perceived as interference with the independence of the courts of law.

3.5 Former First ladies created enemies within the ruling parties

Both former First Ladies contributed to intra-party conflict. Within both ZANU-PF and ABC, long time comrades turned against each other. Allegations of poisoning and undermining each other became rife, hence expulsions and suspensions. Though ZANU-PF did not split, the ABC did in which two new political parties were formed, namely Basotho Action Party (BAP) and Basotho Patriotic Party (BPP) led by Mahao and TefoMapalesa respectively. Such differences impacted negatively on the unity and the political strength of the parties in both countries.

3.6 Both leaders did not prevail in the shenanigans of their First Ladies

In both countries, the First Ladies did their shenanigans in public without their husbands prevailing or calling them to order. People were assaulted, senior government officials embarrassed but no word from Mugabe and Thabane respectively. Mugabe always kowtowed to his bossy and domineering wife, behavior unbecoming of leader and a war veteran (Roger, 2019). After the resignation of Mugabe, Grace went into the oblivion and she has not been seen in public places in Zimbabwe. In fact some scholars even suggested that she is in Singapore or Dubai. While 'Maesaiah, on the contrary, she is campaigning for the 2022 elections and assuring the voters of better life in her constituency. It is commendable that in both countries when Mugabe and Thabane resigned, there were no casualties or the split of blood. Both processes were smooth.

The haphazard and random assault of members of public was not in keeping with the status of the First Ladies. The assault of Engles in South Africa left a lot to be desired from the qualities of a First Lady and also it puts a very bad picture on Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF regime including all other peace loving Zimbabweans. Similarly, the assault of Basotho such as Mahuthile by the former First Lady was contrary to King Moshoeshoe I's aspiration of peace among Basotho at all times. King Moshoeshoe I remains one of the most renowned Pan African Statesman of his times and is mostly remembered for his passion for peace. He believed in peaceful co-existence and that why he used to refer to himself as "*Khaitseleakhotso*" translated "Brother of peace" (Letsie: 2018, 79). Peace build harmony and tolerance among nations including in both Lesotho and Zimbabwe.

4. Recommendations and Conclusion

Generally, the First Ladies are not state officials but only a beneficiary of state patronage because of the husbands. Such titles do not appear in constitutions of both countries. When people go to elections, they only vote for the President or the Prime Minister; they never vote for the spouse. It is in this context that attempts to transfer power to what is known as First Ladies in the medium of the bedroom should never be accepted. However, it is imperative for the role of the First Ladies to be defined in the constitutions. Therefore, First ladies should, inter alia:

- Provide much support as possible to the Presidents or Prime Ministers to ensure they perform their duties diligently and to the best of their ability;
- Show respect to all and sundry, avoid shouting down others and being rude, respect everyone's dignity and humble oneself before the citizens. After all they are often referred to as 'mothers of the nation'; and keep in mind the concept '*umuntungumuntungabantu*' (*mothokemothokabatho* – translated words: you are because of others (Mofokeng:2002, 84). This Nguni expression should be a guiding principle of how one treats others. They should not treat citizens like trash. This is also congruent to the Biblical saying 'Do unto others what you would like them to do unto you' (Holy Bible-Matthew 7 verse 12, 1510). Engage rationally with everyone they disagree with. Haranguing and harassing people is never a virtue but a vice;
- Be held accountable as they are not above the law especially when they perpetuate impunity; and
- Have every right to participate in politics, seek political office and get elected if they so wish. But when their husbands already holds high political offices, it's better to stay away from politics to avoid a conflict of roles. It's advisable to avoid interference in the politics of the ruling parties and the government affairs in general (Lesotho Times, 2018).

Finally, some leaders and their First Ladies should take a heed to Kenya proverb that says ‘no matter how good a dancer you are, you must always know when to leave the stage’. Both Mugabe and Thabane would not have disgracefully lost power if their former First Ladies knew when to leave the stage and had probably acknowledged ‘bedroom coups’ end in tears. This should be a lesson to other leaders and their First Ladies, that staying in thioer lane, it’s good for survival and stability in both the ruling party and government.

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