(Dis-)Graceful Leadership: On Familial Logics and Politics in Zimbabwe

La (dis)grâce du leadership : En ce qui concerne les logiques familiales et la politique au Zimbabwe

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(Dis-)Graceful Leadership: On Familial Logics and Politics in Zimbabwe*

The “non-coup” *coup*¹ in Zimbabwe in November 2017 brought intense international and national attention on the imbrication of familial practices with electoral politics in this southern African country. That month, the Zimbabwean military forcibly removed President Robert Mugabe who had been Zimbabwe’s elected leader (at times the contests were highly disputed) since independence from Rhodesia in 1980. Mugabe’s ruling Zimbabwe African National Unity (Patriotic Front) [ZANU (PF)] party replaced him with his erstwhile comrade, Emmerson Mnangagwa. To explain the *coup*, many commentators and Zimbabweans, including those leading and benefiting from the military’s actions, focused on the actions of Grace Mugabe, wife of then President Robert Mugabe, as precipitating it.

In the 2010s, Robert Mugabe’s much younger second wife moved more from being solely focused on charity works (akin, for example, to Chantal Biya in Cameroon; see Eboko [2004]) to being more active and an emergent force within the ruling party. She became leader of ZANU (pf)’s Women’s League and she led the public attacks that ultimately prompted her husband to fire two vice presidents (including Mnangagwa). Most Zimbabwean media and scholarly commentators had seen these dismissed vice presidents as the main

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1. A Zimbabwean high court judge found the military removal of President Mugabe to be legal, a finding which likely served the interests of not only the *coup*-makers but also many other African leaders said to be interested in the removal of Mugabe but who would have been compelled by the African Union charter to not recognize Mnangagwa as a leader if his ascension was officially designated to be due to a *coup* (MOORE 2018: 16).

contenders to succeed Robert Mugabe within the ruling party (Tendi 2016), and thus Grace Mugabe's rivals, clearing a path for her to become vice president, if not, some allege, ultimately president; albeit this step was ultimately pre-empted by the military action against her husband.

Such focus on Grace Mugabe was clearly seen in the words written on some of the signs carried by those hundreds of thousands who took to the streets across the country on (the military sanctioned) march on November 18th to call on Mugabe to step down, four days after military vehicles rumbled into Harare to confine Mugabe and his family to their home, while soldiers arrested some of his allies and seized control of the national broadcaster. The sentiment was typified by one of the signs carried that declared: "leadership is not sexually transmitted" (which also became a meme on social media)² implying that Grace Mugabe had been on the verge of taking a senior political leadership position solely because of being married to Robert Mugabe. Three days later, as the Zimbabwean parliament prepared to formally impeach Mugabe as president, after his party had removed him as leader of ZANU (pf), six of the eight articles of impeachment related to Grace Mugabe:

Mugabe is accused of allowing his wife to assume his constitutional mandate, access classified and privileged documents, abuse state resources, insulting the new leader Vice President Mnangagwa and threatening to kill him. He is also said to have let Grace Mugabe cause disaffection within the country's defence forces by spreading reckless and false allegations against the army (Simons, Pleasance & Davies 2017).

The impeachment process was formally stopped the same day, on November 21st, when President Mugabe submitted his resignation. The following week, a Zimbabwean high court judge rendered legal Mugabe's removal, declaring that the military moved in to ensure non-elected individuals do not exercise executive functions, which most observers took to be a reference to Grace Mugabe (Associated Press 2017). This legal reasoning was colourfully expanded upon, a week or so later, by Christopher Mutsvangwa, the then head of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (a nominal ally of the ruling party which had been opposed to the rising influence of Grace over the last few years) and newly-minted Information Minister in Mnangagwa's first cabinet, who declared: "Grace, a mad woman with no brains, was in charge of the country on behalf of her cohorts and we

2. This phrase was purportedly uttered by a former leader of the war veterans, Jabulani Sibanda, who was charged in December 2014 for insulting the President by, among other things, uttering these words. It was a term also used by other war veterans who were allied to former Vice President Joice Mujuru, the first vice president Grace Mugabe targeted, as discussed below (PHIRI 2014).

are revolutionaries; we don't carry out any *coups*. We protect what the people want and that's what we did" (cited in Dlamini 2017). The international media commentary often shared this view, as can be clearly gleaned by some of the headlines from this period such as "Zimbabwe: Mugabe's 'Fall from Grace'" (Huet 2017), "Grace Mugabe: How the Tables Finally Turned on Zimbabwe's Spendthrift First Lady" (Thornycroft 2017a), and "Behind Mugabe's Rapid Fall: A Firing, a Feud and a First Lady" (Onishi 2017), to give but a sample from *Euronews*, *The Telegraph*, and the *New York Times*.

These dramatic events that unfolded in Zimbabwe in November 2017 thus showed how familial logics in Zimbabwean politics had become a flashpoint in leadership succession manoeuvrings in the ruling ZANU (PF) party. The instigators of the *coup* and all those Zimbabweans (and others) who supported it, focused largely on Grace Mugabe as a usurper seeking to (further) ensconce herself in the seat of power as a significant cause of the removal of President Mugabe. Such exposition sheds much light on some of the divisions within the ruling party and widely felt dissatisfaction with, if not anger at, Grace Mugabe; an anger due, in part, to misogyny and, in part, to the longevity of Robert Mugabe's rule with its extremely adverse economic consequences for most Zimbabweans and against what seemed to be a ploy to prolong his family's rule through Grace's attempts to potentially succeed him.

However, I am going to argue that such a perspective provides a skewed, albeit often salacious, sense of the roles played by familial logics in Zimbabwean politics: it gives the impression that leadership within the ruling party was driven by familial succession dynamics and could suggest that the removal of President Mugabe indicates the restoration of a politics that is not biased towards family members. Instead, I am going to suggest that familial logics have mattered and have had consequences in terms of political and economic careers in the Zimbabwean political economy, but they are insufficient to explain Zimbabwean politics.

In particular, I focus on three elements of what I call a heteronormative, patriarchal familial logic—the forging of networks of access and patronage, metaphorically being grafted onto the imagination of the nation, and the performances of marital propriety—at work within both the rise of Grace Mugabe within ZANU (PF), and thus Zimbabwean politics, as well as in some of the negative assessments of her. Her (ultimately stalled) ascension (to at least the position of vice president) and the *coup* itself show how the performance of politics in Zimbabwe has indexed particular familial idioms and has enabled familial relationships to benefit from its power. In so doing, such political performances have implicated the propriety of certain types of marital masculinities and femininities and their codes of etiquette. These gendered

performances of respectability are double-edged as they can help mobilize support as well as criticism. Moreover, they need to be understood within wider cultural politics of affinal relationships as particular patriarchal and patrilineal evaluations are commonly made in regards to the comportment of spouses in Zimbabwe (as elsewhere). In addition, they need to be situated within the cultural politics of electoral politics in Zimbabwe, a common constellation of meanings and practices mobilized in the conduct of political party actors when competing for elections, including for posts within their own party.

While these dispositions may influence political manoeuvrings of the leaders and the ways in which Zimbabweans assess their propriety or impropriety, I will argue that they need to be situated within the particular affective mobilizations and demobilizations associated with electoral politics in Zimbabwe. Grace Mugabe expertly used rallies to pursue some of her political ambitions (or, potentially, of those behind her, for there are questions about her motives, as briefly discussed in the conclusion herein.) In the ruling party tradition, rallies mobilize support through affection and fear. This cultural politics emphasizes violence as a means and a source of legitimacy of electoral politics, including within internal party competitions, which both enabled but ultimately undermined Grace Mugabe's tactics within ZANU (PF), at least up until the time of the *coup*.

In this paper, I will start by providing a conceptual framing of the nexus between familial logics, propriety of leaders, and affects and political (de) mobilization and then situate it within the wider scholarship concerning electoral politics in Zimbabwe. Next, I examine in detail how the marriage relationship between Robert and Grace Mugabe became deeply entangled in the succession politics of ZANU (PF). In so doing, it became an index of wider assessments of the president and part of the mobilization and demobilization tactics of the ruling party. I conclude by returning to a general assessment of how entrenched familial logics are within the politics of Zimbabwe.

Familial Logics and the Cultural Politics of Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe

Familial logics here refers to the deployment of lineage and affinal relations and categories for organizing various social projects. This concept draws on the work of Florence Weber (2005) and others (Yanagisako & Collier 1990) who examine both the flexibility of kinship and the affective pull of its language in particular social contexts. As Déchaux (2008: 226) explains Weber's key concept of "practical kinship," it "refers to the set of obligations and feelings that give meaning to official kinship ties or create other ties, and

that make all those ties effective.” In other words, familial logics are not mere rhetorical devices but rather they can and do have affective pull when they are deployed, invoked and signalled. For affect is, as Jennifer Cole and Lynn Thomas (2009) insightfully demonstrate, integral to various features of daily life across Africa (like elsewhere), suggesting that the politics of emotion are an important, but under-researched, element in the dynamics of power.

In the present discussion, I am interested in how sentiments of kinship and marriage have intersected with the practice of electoral politics in Zimbabwe. This is not to reduce politics in Zimbabwe to familial logics but rather to examine how categories and practices of kinship and marriage have been effective means of informing political dynamics and consequences such as enabling and ultimately disabling succession moves within ZANU (PF). This refers to how lineage and affinal relations can enable certain individuals not only to access positions of power and wealth (while potentially firming up the authority of others) but also to use familial idioms in seeking, metaphorically, to create legitimacy and rhetorical positions of hierarchy (Schatzberg 2001; Bayart 2009). Furthermore, I examine how familial logics can become entangled in the performance of the propriety of leaders in electoral politics, indexing a gendered code of respectability. I suggest all three aspects of a particular heteronormative, patriarchal familial logic—forging networks of access and patronage, metaphorically being grafted onto the nation, and integrated into performances of marital propriety—are crucial for understanding some of the dynamics around Grace Mugabe, leading up to and during the *coup*. Let me briefly situate each aspect within the wider social science literature before examining familial logics within the Zimbabwean context.

Up until the 1950s, much of the social sciences, particularly anthropology, concentrated on the importance of kinship in African socialities and politics, albeit typically in functionalist and essentialist ways (Faris 1973; Kuper 1988). Although it became less central a focus of social science research from the 1980s onwards, some researchers have analysed how kinship became a way to forge patronage and assistance in states and business endeavours. Examining the influence of pre-colonial political dynamics, histories of European colonialism, and wider political economies of postcolonial African states (rather than, say, assuming an unchanging pre-colonial social organization), a range of scholars began analysing how kinship and family networks have worked to reinforce elite control of state structures and sources of economic accumulation into a particular “politics of the belly” that forge varied clientele communities (Bayart 2009). As Bruce Berman (1998: 325) observed, “The vertical relations of patrons and clients involved mutual obligations of support and assistance and extended the ties of kinship and sentiment into the wider structures of

economies and politics.” It should be noted here that these concepts have generally been applied more to states in East, central and West Africa than in southern Africa.

A complementary literature examines how familial logics become a way of ordering nationalist sentiment and policies. There is an abundance of literature that focuses on how familial logics are grafted onto nationalist claims. This refers in part to a common practice of leaders in postcolonial Africa (and elsewhere) making claims of being a father or mother of the nation or being ascribed as such by their supporters or clients, positioning the latter as the metaphorical children to the former (Schatzberg 2001). Moreover, feminist scholars have long shown how gender and sexuality are intimately bound up with nationalism (along with race and potentially other social categories like ethnicity and religion), with commonly heterosexual masculinities constituting nationalist projects such as protecting the feminized nation itself. As Tamar Mayer (2000: 10) argues, “women are figured as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation and as ‘pure’ and ‘modest,’ and men defend the national image and protect the nation’s territory, women’s ‘purity’ and ‘modesty,’ and the ‘moral code.’” These gendered moral hierarchies often operate through lineage and affinal categories and sentiments, with (at times, highly racialized) policies and programs directed towards biopolitical initiatives around heteronormative marriages, population control, and the like, informing norms and efforts by governments, civil society organizations, and individuals to fashion suitable and respectable lives (Hunt 1999; Klausen 2004). Elleke Boehmer (2005: 31) nicely shows the linkage between unequal gendered familiar tropes of nationalism, state practices, and a widespread template in the social body of postcolonial nations:

The new [postcolonial] nation-state secured a controlling metaphor for its existence in the unitary and hierarchical structure of the patriarchal family. The family became at one and the same time an important vehicle of social organisation and a primary carrier of the gendered ideology of the middle class. [...] The step from embracing these figures of the male-headed national family and the feminine domestic space, to endorsing concepts of passive state-mothers, is a relatively easy one to take.

Given that elites play a large role in constructing the nation, the representation of the nation thus generally “serves the aspirations of the elite” (Mayer 2000: 10). These gendered moral hierarchies concerning “the family” tend also to bleed into assessments of the propriety of political leaders themselves.

There is always a range of types of cultural capital deployed by established or aspiring political leaders in different African countries, including education, religion, wealth, ethnic background, class, fashion, and relation to

what is deemed “tradition” or “modernity,” among other forms of symbolic capital. These features often matter in the negotiations and strategies of ambition among the elite. They also can feed into sentiments of the grotesque, the obscene and in ludic situations that can play in the dialectic between rulers and ruled as Achille Mbembe (1991) has identified as part of the postcolonial condition in some parts of Africa. But the embodiment and performance of different forms of cultural capital by political leaders can also mark their own comportment as moral persons, leading to assessments by wider audiences, namely by their compatriots, as to their propriety, if not suitability or ill suitability for their position of authority. And given the weight placed on familial logics in the “politics of the belly” and the imagination of the nation, marital and gendered comportment often figure into these calculations of propriety.

In reverse order, let me briefly situate each aspect of these familial logics within the Zimbabwean context, moving from performances of marital propriety, the family as nation, and forging networks of access and patronage.

In Zimbabwe, there is significant scholarship on attempts by the colonial government, employers and missionaries to inculcate particular forms of marriage, forms of personhood, and gendered, and racialized moral orders among the varied colonized groups, with a particular focus on seeking to reshape the bodies and comportment of African women (Schmidt 1992; Jeater 1993; Summers 1994; Burke 1996; Kaler 1998). Such efforts were engaged with by African men and women in differentiated and changing ways, including a growing emphasis on etiquette and respectability as markers of class distinctions among Africans (Shutt 2015). By the 1950s in the main urban areas a more hegemonic view emerged that privileged heteronormative marriage with children for African women. In the words of Teresa Barnes (1999: 117-118), these structures of feeling led to a hegemonic form of gendered classed propriety (which she calls “righteousness”) that shunned women like sex workers who were not in such respectable marriages and “who chose to remove themselves from the social reproductive cycle. This was, ideally speaking, unacceptable behavior, but in practice it flourished nonetheless under the pressures of colonial urban life.” Such gendered notions and assessments of the particular form of cultural capital of classed propriety and their tensions have continued in postcolonial Zimbabwe, both in terms of privileging certain femininities and masculinities in patriarchal heteronormative marriages and negatively assessing other forms of gendered behaviour.

Like all gendered performances, they can be contingent and contested, but marriage sanctioned through the payment of bridewealth, if not with a church ceremony, are the standard through which other conjugal relations tend to be

assessed, typically through a patriarchal lens (Kaler 1998; Mate 2002; Adams 2009). Indeed, this particular criterion is most visible in disputes over property upon dissolution of the relationship through divorce or death of the husband or male partner. Despite various legal initiatives, the dominant norm is that the ex-husband/male partner or his patrilineal relatives claim the property, at times leaving the ex-wife/female partner or widow completely property-less. Feminists and others have long critiqued these practices in Zimbabwe, be it in analysis (Stewart 1987), legal challenges and protests (IWRRAW 1999), or cinematic fictional accounts like *Neria* (Mawuru 1993). While others, like some born-again churches, have in turn responded by “teaching propriety and domesticity” that emphasize marriages that privilege the authority of husbands “as working for God” (Mate 2002: 553, 556). Patriarchal marriages and patrilineal claims over marital property are still widespread, as substantially documented in, and signalled by the title of, a 2017 Human Rights Watch report: *‘You Will Get Nothing,’ Violations of Property and Inheritance Rights of Widows in Zimbabwe* (HRW 2017). Whereas scholars have shown how educational credentials have long been important for asserting leadership qualifications in the realm of politics, going back to the African nationalist mobilizations in the 1950s,³ there has been limited attention to how gendered familial logics have also been key forms of cultural capital in shaping the propriety of leaders in Zimbabwe. Yet, given the pervasive cultural importance placed on male-dominated marriage as an index of respectability of men and women, it is not a surprise that it has also been a form of cultural capital in electoral politics. Let me give four brief examples.

First, Marc Epprecht (2004) has shown how Zimbabwean politicians and state media increasingly denounced and “othered” gays and lesbians from the 1990s onwards, holding up patriarchal heterosexual marriages as indicative of “Zimbabwean culture.” Second, Morgan Tsvangirai, who was leader of the main opposition group, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party,⁴ lost great credibility when he was prime minister in the Government

3. This scholarship has also examined the tensions between “the educated” and the “commoners” in the nationalist movement from the 1950s onwards, including the liberation struggle in the 1970s (MOORE 1991; SCARNECCHIA 2008), a tension that evolved into suspicion by the less educated towards the privileged and educated elite as being more interested in their own self-promotion and not for the good of the greater nation (CHUNG 2006: 290).

4. Since 2005, the MDC has split several times, often with each faction retaining “MDC” but modifying it with the name of its leader. The largest party has been the one led by Tsvangirai (and now Nelson Chamisa, who succeeded Tsvangirai after his death in 2018), which often was called MDC-T (“T” for Tsvangirai).

of National Unity (GNU, 2009-2013)⁵ and was involved in marital and sex scandals after his wife died in a car accident in 2009.⁶ As an editorial of an independent Zimbabwean weekly declared at the time, “Tsvangirai is loved in this country and respected the world over for the change he has brought to this country, but it will be these little indiscretions that will begin to eat away his armour” (Madanhire 2011).⁷

Third, war veteran, former ZANU (PF) and then independent MP, Margaret Dongo, caused a scuffle in Parliament in 1999 when she criticized some male members of the ruling party as “*vakadzi vaMugabe*” (“Mugabe’s wives”), which was taken to be such an insult that it led to some jostling afterwards, showing, as a linguist suggested, that “*chikadzi*” (“wife-hood”) “means being weak, subservient and dominated (sexually, too)” (Chitauro-Mawema 2006: 112). Finally, many women who run in elections often face abuse by others, typically focused on their presumed sexual improprieties or immoralities. As the chairwoman of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission declared before the July 2018 election, “Women [running in elections] have been accused of being prostitutes and accused of indulging in extra-marital affairs. Men have not been treated in the same manner. Moral righteousness only applies to women leaders” (Associated Press 2018).

The metaphorical grafting of a patriarchal familial logic onto the nation has been common in Zimbabwe. During the nationalist struggle, nationalists talked about fighting for “the motherland” and praising women nationalists as “mothers of the revolution;” however, this was often translated into women carrying out familial roles such as cooking, helping to transport items such as arms, and as (sometimes unwilling) sexual partners (Chadya 2003; Lyons 2004). In the postcolonial period, a singular “Mother of the Nation” and “Father

5. The GNU was forced upon ZANU (PF) by wider international pressure, including from South Africa whose ANC government had been rather supportive of it, after a highly disputed national election in March 2008 in which the two MDC parties elected more MPs than ZANU (PF) and Tsvangirai had won a higher percentage of votes than Mugabe but not reaching the necessary 50% of the votes. During the run-up to the presidential run-off election in June, party and state security forces unleashed incredible violence across the country, forcing Tsvangirai to withdraw from the election. Mugabe’s victory was not internationally recognized but with the GNU he remained president and Tsvangirai became prime minister. Until the start of the GNU in February 2009, hundreds of Zimbabweans were killed, and thousands displaced, many of whom fled the country itself (MASUNUNGURE 2009).
6. There were disputed claims that he briefly married a woman he impregnated and had other women demanding maintenance rights for children they claimed he fathered.
7. See also MOYO (2011) and the unsigned opinion piece in the *Zimbabwe Independent*, “Tsvangirai Sex Scandals Risky,” *Zimbabwe Independent*, 14 September 2017, <<https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2012/09/14/tsvangirai-sex-scandals-risky/>>, accessed on 20 November 2017.

of the Nation” became the terms of reference, but disputes existed over to which individual it applied. While Robert Mugabe’s first wife, Sally,⁸ was called “Mother of the Nation,” Grace Mugabe adopted this mantle and put it to more overt political uses, as discussed below. “Father Zimbabwe,” however, was first adopted by Joshua Nkomo, the main opposition leader to Mugabe until he and his party folded into ZANU (PF).⁹ Nkomo was older than Mugabe and was a nationalist leader before him as well. Although this title was occasionally contested—like when ZANU (PF) called him “Father of Dissidents” when they were persecuting him and violently attacking his (alleged) supporters—he was still often called that, even since his death in 1999 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems 2010). This notwithstanding, Robert Mugabe was also given this title. As shown in the study by Selina Mudavanhu (2014), during the time of the GNU state media and ZANU (PF), leaders would not only call Mugabe “God’s Messenger” but also “Father of the Nation,” including portraying him as a “gracious father” who “allowed” the MDC to share power, reinforcing “the idea that Mugabe was the overall authority in the country and the senior partner in the GNU” (*ibid.*: 333).¹⁰

The political aim of such metaphorical attributions and antonomasia is to mobilize normative kinship sentiments for practices of rule, if not hegemony. As Lene Bull Christiansen (2007: 90) argued:

On the Zimbabwean national political stage a discourse of kinship, of “Fathers” and “Mothers” of the nation has played a key role. The President represents himself as the “Father of the Nation” in a classical paternalistic style, but also, as “the head of the family” in an Africanist traditionalist sense, and as “the husband” of the nation; who is entitled to clamp down on any one who attempts to “steal/rape” his wife; that is, the people.

This metaphor of kinship can be seen as feeding on “traditionalist” versions of pre-colonial social structures (Christiansen 2005).

Following the unequal patriarchal logics, the “father of the nation” assumes a central, active role in the affairs of the state; in contrast, the “mother” should

8. Although outside the scope of this paper, it would be fruitful to examine how familial logics were used to assess Sally Mugabe, both when she was alive and then after she passed away.

9. Nkomo and his party collapsed into ZANU (PF) due to state-led massacres between 1983–1987 called *gukurahundi* (often translated as “the early rain that washes away the chaff before the spring rains”) which left up to 20,000 SiNdebele speakers and Nkomo’s alleged supporters dead (ALEXANDER, MCGREGOR & RANGER 2000).

10. In a recent interview, President Mnangagwa drew on this “father of nation” trope in explaining why his government will not persecute Robert Mugabe: “He’s our father figure... our founding father. We’ll do everything in our power to keep him happy” (RUSSELL 2018).

be outside “the ‘serious’ affairs of the national community” and “assumes an emblematic status as a symbol of maternal self-sacrifice or of the nation’s fierce, ‘virginal’ pride—if, that is, she is not excluded from the action entirely as an unknown subversive quantity and a threat” (Boehmer 2005: 28-29).

In terms of the more classic use of familial logics, my last dimension of forging networks of access and patronage, kinship and family ties have definitely been deployed in Zimbabwe through in the political realm. There has been a common practice of spouses of powerful ZANU (PF) men getting into electoral politics such as Joice Mujuru and Auxillia Mnangagwa,¹¹ wife of the new president of Zimbabwe. But the most extensive examples are relatives of Robert Mugabe. Mugabe’s sister, Sabina, and a number of his nephews, uncles, and cousins have held ministerial positions, senior positions in ZANU (PF), in the civil service, as well as in state-favoured business enterprises. As documented in a two-part series in a Zimbabwean newspaper in 2007, “President Robert Mugabe has over the past 27-years diverted plum political jobs and State-funded contracts not only to his favourite nephews and nieces, but also to a network of extended families belonging to his Gushungo clan.”¹² But the role of Grace Mugabe in this nexus of patronage and accumulation is the most glaring and became even more obvious shortly after this series was published.

I will suggest that a combination of using familial logics for accessing positions of leadership and economic opportunities, the melding of affinal relations onto the scale of the nation, and using demonstrations of respectable married behaviour as a sign of propriety or impropriety, all dramatically came into play in regards to Grace Mugabe and that examining these features of familial logics helps explain some of the affective responses of Zimbabweans to the overthrow of Robert Mugabe. However, at the same time, I will suggest that such sentiments, discourses, and predispositions are intermingled with a particular cultural politics of electoral politics.

What I have called the “cultural politics of electoral politics” in Zimbabwe refers to a particular configuration of discourse, practices, and affects that are associated with the state and its constituted subjects. Its resonance depends on the particular receptions and interpellations of the discursively constituted semantic domain of “politics,” with its possible visceral social memories, and

11. She was elected as MP in 2015, taking over the seat her husband vacated when he was elevated to vice president.

12. Chief Reporter (Harare), *The Zimbabwean*, 19 July 2007, <<http://www.thezimbabwean.co/2007/07/nepotism-at-the-top/>>, accessed on 8 January 2018. The chief reporter (Harare) of *The Zimbabwean* wrote a two-part exposé on this matter, see also the second part: “Gushungo clan unravelled,” *The Zimbabwean*, 26 July 2007, <<http://www.thezimbabwean.co/2007/07/gushungo-clan-unravelled/>>.

their articulations with localized or wider-scale social projects, meaningful practices, and struggles at that historical moment (Rutherford 2017: 78).

A crucial aspect of the feature of electoral politics in Zimbabwe is fear, used in intra-party as well as inter-party competitions. Scholars have shown that violence and intimidation has been part and parcel of African nationalist politics in (colonial) Zimbabwe since at least the 1950s. In large part, this feature became concomitant to politics as African nationalists engaged with the oppression and repression of the colonial state (Scarnecchia 2008), including the formation of guerrilla armies which carried out an armed anti-colonial liberation struggle, and with every election, starting with the first election in 1980 after Zimbabwe became a sovereign independent country (Moyo 1992; Kriger 2005, 2012) up to what Phillan Zamchiya (2013: 960) called the “harvest of fear” in the 2013 election, where in lieu of physical violence ZANU (PF) sought “to intimidate and threaten citizens with violence if they were to support MDC-T [see footnote 5] by drawing on memories of the liberation war and of the violence of the 27 June 2008 election.”

Since 1980, through its rule ZANU (PF) became more entangled into state bureaucracies (Herbst 1990). Not only the ruling party became a way to influence the government, but also, in some instances, it became the means through which to get civil service jobs; such a politically partisan pathway to such jobs directly challenged a longstanding emphasis on professionalism in the civil service (Verheul 2016; Karekwaivanane 2017). However, this politicization of the government rose to new heights after 2000 with ZANU (PF) activists threatening, and successfully chasing away, civil servants and judges whom ZANU (PF) saw as trying to stop the land take-overs or other actions (McGregor 2002; Hammar 2008). In so doing, they were drawing on the longstanding feature of threats and violence being part of electoral politics for ZANU (PF), directed by elements of state institutions and security services as well as ruling party structures. This is most dramatically and violently apparent in the *gukurahundi* violence (noted above) and the violence caught up in both the large-scale land redistribution and against the MDC, the party that emerged in 1999 which quickly became and has remained the main political opponent of ZANU (PF) ever since (Raftopoulos 2009; Alexander, McGregor & Tendi 2014). As Norma Kriger (2012: 15) documents, for example, during the GNU, ZANU (PF) relied on state institutions and informal networks (of war veterans, youth groups, etc.) whose foundations “continue to be the use of violence, intimidation, and repressive laws against the ‘opposition’ parties [that were formally part of the GNU] and opposition civil society organisations and patronage for loyalists.”

Given the imbrication of ZANU (PF) within state institutions and social practices and arrangements throughout Zimbabwe, the question of succession of its

top leadership has significant importance. However, Robert Mugabe ensured that there was no identified successor. This did not stop many commentators observing various ZANU (PF) leaders jockeying for position (by, for example, placing their allies in key positions in the party's national and provincial structures) ultimately in order to replace Robert Mugabe at some point. Much commentary on these succession politics focused on how different factions worked hard to gain support of President Mugabe while denouncing the other faction (Tendi 2016). Therefore, public actions by senior members of ZANU (PF) were consistently read in light of these succession politics, generating a steady "reading of the auguries" commentariat within the media, academia, and *radio trottoir* of the country.

Familial logics become entangled in these discursive practices of electoral politics in Zimbabwe. They help explain some of the successes and criticisms of Grace Mugabe, but they cannot be examined without understanding the specificity of the cultural politics of electoral politics in Zimbabwe.

The Propriety and Property of Grace Mugabe

A nice illustration of the nexus between familial logics and the cultural politics of electoral politics in Zimbabwe is the complete reversal of emotional outpourings concerning Grace Mugabe among members and leaders of ZANU (PF) over a two week period in November 2017. On Monday November 6th, President Mugabe sacked his senior vice president and long-time ally, Emmerson Mnangagwa, on charges of "disloyalty." The ruling party also quickly removed many others who were considered to belong to the dismissed vice president's faction as he jockeyed in internecine ZANU (PF) manoeuvrings to succeed the aging Robert Mugabe (who turned 93 in 2017). Two days later, Robert and Grace Mugabe were celebrated by a large crowd in a rally in front of ZANU (PF)'s headquarters in Harare as they denounced the "Lacoste" faction aligned with Mnangagwa (so called as Mnangagwa's nickname since the liberation struggle is "crocodile," which is also the logo of the French clothing brand). Already by then, the ZANU (PF) Youth League had endorsed "Dr. Amai [mother] Grace Mugabe" as candidate for vice president in the extraordinary party congress scheduled for the following month, as had all the provincial committees and the party's Women's League, which Grace headed.¹³ It seemed that familial logics achieved culmination at the top of the

13. See the article by the staff reporter of *The Zimbabwe Mail* on all endorsements for Grace Mugabe being "elevated to vice president": "Zanu PF crisis: Mnangagwa's followers purged and faces mass expulsion," *The Zimbabwe Mail*, 7 November 2017, <<http://www.>

ruling party, with the wife of long-serving President Mugabe being positioned to being at least a vice president.

Such ambitions were effectively stopped within a week, as the Zimbabwean military began to take temporary control of Harare starting on November 14th. Aside from the interesting questions about the role of the military, the mechanics of the *coup*, and the wider political economy that shaped it (Moore 2018; Rutherford 2018), what was striking was the ecstatic euphoria that erupted during key events over the following days, including when it was announced that President Mugabe resigned on November 21st. On Saturday, November 18th, there was a massive street march sanctioned by the *coup* leaders across the country, as hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans took to the streets to call for President Mugabe to step down. The joy shown by those on the streets was palpable, as Zimbabwean men and women of all ages and colours walked, danced, sang and celebrated what they anticipated as the end of a long era, the potential for improvement, and their ability to take to the streets without worrying about state violence (from the police, ruling party cadres, etc.).

Among the many signs and posters marchers carried, a number singled out Grace. Not only was there “Leadership is not sexually transmitted,” but there were also pictures of her with a barred oblique line, declaring “Gucci Grace Stop It” and “Sekuru [grandfather, or a respectful term for an older man] must go!!! And his wife Grace.” Meanwhile, others chanted: “We won’t be ruled by a whore!” (cited in Mudiwa 2017). Video clips¹⁴ from the next day showed members of the central committee of ZANU (PF) dancing and celebrating during an extraordinary meeting called to replace Mugabe with Mnangagwa as leader of the party and to expel Grace Mugabe and those who were aligned with her from the party. As one of the approved resolutions declared: “That Grace Mugabe be and is hereby recalled from the position of secretary for Women’s League of ZANU (PF) for promoting hate speech, divisiveness and assuming roles and powers not delegated to her office” (Mugabe 2017).

Although much of the delight was due to the unexpected removal of President Mugabe, some of the celebrations were directed also at the removal of Grace Mugabe. As many commentators noted, her actions and ambitions became a key factor to explain the *coup*. Nonetheless, few have examined how familial logics enabled her rise as well as enhanced the hostility towards her. All three aspects of patriarchal familial logics that I highlighted above played a role in terms of enhancing her position while also making her a much-maligned figure.

thezimbabwemail.com/main/zanu-pf-crisis-mnangagwas-followers-purged-faces-mass-expulsion/>, accessed on 5 January 2018.

14. See, for example, this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KEzOHRNU_k> (viewed on 5 February 2019).

Robert and Grace's relationship began with some scandal, as they both were married to someone else when their affair began. They met at the president's office where she was employed in an administrative role. Their first child was born four years before Robert's first wife, Sally Mugabe, died of kidney disease in 1992 and their second child was born a month after her death. They sought to legitimate their relationship through him first paying bridewealth to her natal family later that year (Smith 2015) and then putting on an extravagant Catholic wedding in 1996. Despite carrying out the normative ways to define a respectable marriage, nonetheless Grace Mugabe largely became a target of opprobrium for what many Zimbabweans saw as opportunism, leaving her marriage (and first child) and thus tarnishing feminine respectability, which is so closely tied to a patriarchal heteronormative family image. As Carolyn Martin Shaw (2015: 165) put it, for many of the Harare women with whom she spoke assumed Grace "yielded to temptation: she was no better than a man;" very few of these women took issue with Robert Mugabe for developing a relationship with a subordinate, forty years younger than he, while he was still married.

Until 2008, Grace Mugabe largely played the role of a supportive wife, accompanying her husband to his events, sponsoring charitable activities towards children, while the private media largely focused on her extravagant spending (made the more galling given the worsening economic crisis Zimbabwe had been facing since the late 1990s and earning her the nickname, "Gucci Grace"). In short, she was seen largely as a "decorative wife" (Mudiwa 2017): "At first, she was introduced as the obligatory wife of a male head of state, standing silently by the president at political rallies wearing dresses and *doeks* [head wraps] with her man's face on them" (Anonymous 2015). She was, to follow Mayer (2000), the epitome of the "pure" and "modest" (albeit an extravagant spender), "biological and cultural reproducer of the nation" of which her husband stridently defended (against, in particular, "Western imperialism" as the governments of the United States and United Kingdom, among others, incessantly criticized his government's actions from 2000 onwards and placed sanctions on certain leading individuals in the government and ruling party).

Over time, however, she became increasingly a public actor in her own right. As Chipso Dendere (2017) observed, in the build-up to the controversial presidential run-off election in 2008 (as noted above), Grace "began headlining the party's campaign events, beginning her transformation from first lady Grace to comrade Grace. She traded in her designer dresses for military clothing, complete with a beret and ZANU (PF)'s trademark clenched fist." However, during the GNU itself her public political roles became relatively dormant. By then she was seen to be leading her family's accumulation activities.

Like other leaders of ZANU (PF), the security services, and civil service, Grace Mugabe took advantage of the transformative changes to governance and politics after 2000 and associated with the controversial and politicized wide-scale land redistribution exercises (Raftopoulos 2009; Alexander, McGregor & Tendi 2014). This transformative exercise took over some 6,000 farms owned by about 4,500 (predominantly white) farmers and companies, resulting in some 145,000 households occupying 4.1 million hectares under smallholder resettlement schemes and about 23,000 medium-scaled farmers using 3.5 million hectares (Scoones *et al.* 2010; Scoones 2018). Grace ensured that the Mugabes received a prime commercial farm just north of Harare in 2002 and then, over the following years, she took over adjacent properties, evicting both white and black farmers who had been resettled (while defying occasional court orders against her actions). Among other activities, she ran a dairy farm, established a school, and built a mansion on some 5,000 hectares of land (Thornycroft 2009). Current reports have listed the Mugabe family as owning about 14 farms and 16,000 hectares on which Grace has proposed to build the Robert Mugabe University, among other such developments (Mushava 2018; Tromp 2017). Based on a document released by WikiLeaks (2008), she also allegedly profited from the elite plundering of the massive diamond fields in Chiadzwa (Saunders & Nyamunda 2016) and rumours had her involved in a range of money-making schemes.¹⁵ In short, she is said to have used her position as wife of the president to make her the wealthiest woman in Zimbabwe (Thornycroft 2017b).

After the 2013 elections which ZANU (PF) won, she then turned her attention to using her familial logics as “mother of the nation” not only for economic opportunities but more explicitly for electoral politics. Receiving her doctorate (PhD) in Sociology from the University of Zimbabwe in 2014 after three months (without going through the normal procedures, see Gagare [2014]) signified her interest in politics, given the privileging of higher education degrees, even if controversial ones, for leadership positions in Zimbabwe. By the end of the year, she became the head of ZANU (PF)’s Women’s League. More spectacularly, that year she led a successful campaign against then Vice President Joice Mujuru, claiming in a number of rallies around the country that the war veteran and long-time cabinet minister and leader of a widely

15. One such rumoured scheme many Zimbabweans mentioned to me in informal conversations during a brief visit to Harare and Johannesburg in 2018 was that she was involved in taking some of the money collected by what had become ubiquitous police roadblocks set up all over the highways and major urban streets where police demanded fines for alleged violations (MATYSZAK 2017). These roadblocks mostly disappeared after the *coup*.

recognized faction in ZANU (PF)¹⁶ was conspiring against President Mugabe. Grace Mugabe engineered the replacement in December 2014 of Mujuru as vice president with Mujuru's rival Emmerson Mnangagwa, who was widely viewed as heading the only other opposing faction within the ruling party at that time. In April 2015, ZANU (PF) ultimately expelled Joice Mujuru (along with her allies) from the party.

As Grace Mugabe was becoming more active in politics, more and more criticisms were levelled at her, both for her ambition and her comportment. Her political technology of choice was political rallies around Zimbabwe, which she deployed for mobilizing support while criticizing those she saw as internal enemies. In these very public events (which state media sympathetically covered and disseminated over the internet), her language, including body language, was thus key in this task. These political performances were critically assessed through gendered sentiments concerning the propriety of married women. For many, her language was viewed as breaking the rules of respectability. As a 2015 profile of her noted, "In a series of tirades stripped of political diplomacy, she detailed [Joice] Mujuru's failures—her greed and her power-hungry, out-of-control shenanigans—to such an extent that the nation sat in stunned silence in the face of the withering attack" (Anonymous 2015). For example, at one rally Grace Mugabe declared "that if Mujuru were killed, 'dogs and fleas would not disturb her carcass'" (cited in Smith 2015).¹⁷ Grace said "things that the average politician would not dare to say, blending snark and sarcasm with biblical references" (Dendere 2017). The contrast with Mujuru was stark, as the latter's public posture was more reserved in the dispute. As Mujuru declared, in a way to try to explain away the actions of Grace Mugabe, "We are not of the same background so our understanding is totally different. You can't blame someone when you have no understanding who she is" (cited in Smith 2015). In fact, as Christiansen (2007: 100) perceptively noted, Mujuru was careful not to disrupt patriarchal hierarchies by emphasizing "her feminine 'virtues' such as subordination and passivity, which serve[d] to 'naturalize' her seemingly unnatural elevated

16. She inherited this position of head of a faction after her powerful husband, retired General Solomon Mujuru, died in a suspicious fire in 2011. General Mujuru had been seen as head of key faction within ZANU (PF) until his death. Many saw her elevation in 2004 to the position of vice president as a strategic move by Robert Mugabe to punish Mnangagwa (and his then supporter Professor Jonathan Moyo, who later became a key supporter of Grace Mugabe against Mnangagwa) whose ambitions to replace Mugabe seemed to be gaining momentum at that time (CHRISTIENSEN 2007; TENDI 2016).

17. This is a reference to the allegation that Joice Mujuru was a witch, one of the charges Grace Mugabe levelled against her, drawing on putative evidence coming from military intelligence agents (TENDI 2016).

status vis-à-vis her husband.” By 2014, Grace Mugabe was not commonly performing patriarchal assessments of femininity. As Alex Magaisa (2017) put it a few weeks before the *coup*, “At times, her [Grace Mugabe’s] language has been aggressive and uncouth. She has humiliated both men and women. Some of her public performances have been all but hysterical. It’s hard to watch entire videos of her speeches without feeling embarrassed on her behalf.” Rudo Mudiwa (2017) astutely captures how Grace’s public, overtly politicized actions challenged Zimbabwean notions of propriety:

Her speeches revealed a trait that Shona speakers derisively call “kupapauka” or “kuzhandukira,” the crass presumptuousness of the unsophisticated. This quality worked to her advantage on the stage, allowing her to commandeer the bully pulpit. What she lacked in political legitimacy she made up for with her brash presence. She would pace across the stage, leveling attacks against members of the [ruling] party who displeased her. When she was on a roll, she would stop to laugh—and, there is no other way to say this—*wickedly*, at her own jokes. Grace’s performances of displeasure often went viral on social media, bits of which Zimbabweans took to mimicking. A finger jab, a scowl, and a now iconic command, “stop it!” directed at alleged saboteurs within ZANU (Mudiwa 2017, emphasis in original).

As several observers noted, public and private commentaries by Zimbabweans on Grace Mugabe were often informed by pervasive sexism in Zimbabwe, which in this case were deployed to discriminate against women involved in politics. For instance, both Mudiwa (2017) and Magaisa (2017) show how Zimbabweans used sexual assumptions and tropes to discuss her, from rumoured affairs to claims that her lack of “sexual satisfaction” at home with the aged Robert explains her reckless public performances. Thus, Magaisa (2017) looks at how the disparaging quip against her that “power is not sexually transmitted” dismisses her agency, as it assumes that Grace “is a political actor only on account of her husband.” Yet it is this familial relationship that became the justification for the armed overthrow of President Mugabe, albeit with the attribution of agency reversed.

As a group within ZANU (PF) consolidated around her after the removal of Joice Mujuru, Grace Mugabe became more publicly critical of the ambitions of Vice President Mnangagwa in 2016 and 2017. During this period, she effectively mobilized support within the ruling party, using rallies to channel her critique against Mnangagwa as she had done against Mujuru. Thus, when President Mugabe removed Mnangagwa as vice president on November 13, 2017, the party structures, until the military took action, were clearly preparing to have him replaced as vice president by Grace the following month. As outlined above, in statements and ultimately with legal justification, the main reason for military intervention was because Grace was unconstitutionally

influencing her aged husband's decisions as head of state. By implication, Robert Mugabe was either not mentally fit enough to make his own decisions or Grace Mugabe was so powerful she was able to influence him subversively. In short, the *coup* leaders claimed she illegally assumed "his constitutional mandate" (Simons, Pleasance & Davies 2017).

Three features of familial logics differentially played out in the "non-*coup*" *coup* in Zimbabwe. Whereas Grace and Robert Mugabe's accumulation of wealth and ability to place relatives within positions of power in the political economy helped them consolidate power as the "mother" and "father" of Zimbabwe, ultimately the perception of the impropriety of a wife seemingly being the more powerful one and influencing the (elderly) husband, became the justification for his removal. Her political mobilization rested on being "mother of the nation," but her public performances not only transgressed the gendered roles that normatively assign this kin role to being supportive of the "father" and merely "symbolic of the nation" (Boehmer 2005), but it also belied the patriarchal familial conventions of wifely propriety as her vulgarity and blatant attacks against putative allies within the ruling party generated widespread criticism. As senior Human Rights Watch researcher for the region (who himself is Zimbabwean) remarked to a reporter during the time when Grace Mugabe was mounting her public criticisms of Joice Mujuru, including threatening to "baby-dump" her at the December 2014 ZANU (PF) congress, "Amai [mother] Mugabe's recent insults and language generally is not very motherly. Society does not expect a mother who runs an orphanage to be threatening 'baby-dumping'. Such language is unmotherly" (quoted in Phiri 2014). Being a "mother of nation" both enabled and constrained Grace Mugabe as a public figure.

And this is the crux of my argument. Grace Mugabe's rise and her near attainment of the position of vice president, if not ultimately of president, was dependent on familial logics, just as the adverse patriarchal assessments of her actions, particularly her propriety, which became much more public as the *coup* took place and afterwards. Indeed, her ascent and fall were both predicated on the actions of the cultural dynamics of electoral politics. Her ability to pull in crowds rested on the fact she was operating from senior levels within ZANU (PF), a party with a history of intertwined and close ties to the military (Tendi 2013) and which strongly values the anti-colonial liberation struggle in its rhetoric and in its justification for violence. Thus, the crowds who came to ZANU (PF) events do so for reasons ranging from deep commitment to the party to fear due to overt threats or the potential of violence or losing out from politicized state-distributed resources, which has included since 2000 land, food relief, and agricultural inputs (Rutherford 2017, 2018).

Thus, one never knows the intentions of the crowd or one's allies. Grace Mugabe discovered this feature as the party structures that had so quickly and enthusiastically nominated her for the post of vice president within two weeks celebrated her removal from ZANU (PF) itself, after the military stepped in to reinstate Mnangagwa, an ally of some of the military leaders, some of whom themselves felt their position of power and accumulation were threatened by Grace's ascent.¹⁸

In their introduction to a special issue examining politics, patronage and the state in Zimbabwe, Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor reflect on how the political and economic crises that have beset Zimbabwe since 2000 led scholars of the country to rethink larger debates in African studies concerning “state failure” and social and “political disorder” that seemed more appropriate to many states in, say, West or central Africa. They argued that previously the common thinking among those studying Zimbabwe was there “seemed little point in engaging with debates that assumed African states were ‘weak’, or with ideas about neo-patrimonial rule that hinged on the legitimacy of tradition or family, leaving no space for the narrative and ideological weight of liberation struggle legacies or the inheritance of centralised bureaucratic states” (Alexander & McGregor 2013: 749). But hyperinflation, deindustrialization and other signs of massive economic distress, including political violence and the growing politicization of state and social institutions “have prompted scholars to engage in new ways with wider debates in African studies over the transformation of state institutions, the consequences of patronage, informality and elite accumulation” (*ibid.*).

In this paper, I have sought to draw on some of the conceptual arguments concerning familial logics within state regimes elsewhere in Africa to examine their heuristic utility to analyse the actions of Grace Mugabe, wife of former President Robert Mugabe. I have suggested that for her rise and fall one needs to understand the particular familial idioms that she and her critics deployed as part of the wider politics. In particular, I showed how Grace Mugabe drew on and then transgressed particular patriarchal codes of

18. A few days after Mugabe fired Mnangagwa (who later said he then fled Zimbabwe), when the chief of armed forces General Constantino Chiwenga was returning from China, the police were waiting to arrest him on the tarmac. However, his allies were tipped off and military security instead greeted him, forcing the police to abandon their plans. A few days later he led the *coup* that removed Mugabe (DZIRUTWE, BROCK & CROPLEY 2017).

propriety linked to married women in her rallies, her predominant means of her political mobilizations against those she saw as her rivals. In so doing, her actions ultimately provided a justification for the relatively friendly overthrow of her husband. Yet these familial logics were, in the end, not isolated from the particular liberation war legacies (including the privileging of the military and the willingness to use violence and fear), which strongly shape the cultural politics of electoral politics, including internal political party competitions, in Zimbabwe.¹⁹

These familial logics provided a more contextualized understanding of the gender discrimination and sexism that others have written about when discussing Grace Mugabe as a public figure (Magaisa 2017; Mudiwa 2017). For her ability to have such influence within ZANU (PF) and the country at large rested predominantly on her affinal ties to then President Mugabe. She showed “agency,” but it rested in part on gendered familial logics. She skillfully engineered herself into a relatively strong position within ZANU (PF) and was on the cusp of doing so in the government itself. But in so doing, unlike Joice Mujuru, she did it by challenging gendered expectations of a submissive wife. As someone who began her relationship as a mistress amidst a hegemonic emphasis on the dutiful and faithful wife, Grace Mugabe was never in a strong position *vis-à-vis* familial logics in Zimbabwe, let alone within ZANU (PF) and their factional jockeying.²⁰ Indeed, there have always been questions as to whether or not she was the sole author of inter-party manoeuvrings or rather being used by her husband or others for their ambitions. Such a discussion reflects in part dismissals of her skills to translate her position as wife into potentially vice president, or higher, and in part, the tendency for many Zimbabwean (and non-Zimbabwean) commentators frequently to deploy “conspiracy theorizing” when examining politics to plumb deeper agents and actors at play. Such a communicative practice has long been current in Zimbabwe, as George Karekwaivanane (2018: 12) aptly shows, “due to the secrecy, censorship, and general lack of transparency that prevails.”

Shortly after the *coup*, there were news reports of various initiatives to investigate Grace Mugabe, seeking to undermine some of the cultural and economic capital that she had built up to support her more active role in politics

19. This association of violence and politics is apparent as I write on August 1, 2018, when in Harare the military opened up fire on people protesting against perceived electoral rigging by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission which declared that official results gave ZANU (PF) a two-thirds parliamentary majority.

20. Many argue that she was never in line to be president as Robert Mugabe himself favoured another candidate, Sydney Sekeremayi, and if the *coup* had not occurred and she had not become vice president afterwards, she would have been quite vulnerable to others within ZANU (PF), particularly once Robert Mugabe passed away (MOORE 2018: 11).

(and putatively contrary to the agreement made with Robert Mugabe upon his deposal that reportedly gave him and his family immunity and preserved, if not augmented, their wealth; see Burke [2017]). The new Minister of Agriculture ordered an investigation into his family's multiple farms, which are in contravention of the government policy of one person-one farm in terms of the land redistribution exercise (Mushava 2018). There were also attempts at the University of Zimbabwe to revoke Grace's PhD on the grounds that university procedures were not followed.²¹ Although she has remained publicly quiet, criticism and condemnation of her continues, including from her in-laws who allege that she has been "disrespectful to family elders, showing off and sowing seeds of disharmony within the family" (Chigoriwo 2017). Many have argued that Grace Mugabe became more active in politics to try to ensure security for her and her children before her husband died. Ironically, given the criticism unleashed against her and the typical difficulty women have in maintaining their family's wealth in Zimbabwe after their husband or male partner passes, she is now even weaker. Her initial success and ultimate failure at ensconcing herself in the top echelons of ZANU (PF) and then the government, *via* a combination of patriarchal familial logics and the cultural politics of electoral politics, may leave her more vulnerable to the more mundane, but potentially as calamitous, attacks from her in-laws on her property in part because of her impropriety.

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21. Among the reports on this revocation of her doctorate earned in sociology while her husband was chancellor of universities, see the staff reporter's article in *The Citizen*: "University of Zim Fights to Revoke Grace Mugabe's PhD — Report," *The Citizen*, 6 January, <<https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/1774544/university-of-zim-fights-to-revoke-grace-mugabes-phd/>>, accessed on 10 January 2018.

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ABSTRACT

The “non-coup” coup in Zimbabwe in November 2017 brought focused international and national attention on the imbrication of familial practices with electoral politics in the country. Much commentary has focused on the actions of Grace Mugabe, wife of then President Robert Mugabe, as precipitating the military replacement of Mugabe with his erstwhile comrade Emmerson Mnangagwa. I deepen the analysis through placing these events within three dimensions of patriarchal familial logics that tend to be common in political economies in Africa and elsewhere: the forging of networks of access and patronage; the metaphorical grafting of “the family” onto the imagination of the nation; and the performance of heteronormative, patriarchal, and marital propriety. At the same time, I argue that these familial logics should be contextualized within the particular affective mobilizations and demobilizations associated with electoral politics in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, Mugabe, family dynamics, politics, state.

RÉSUMÉ

La (dis)grâce du leadership : En ce qui concerne les logiques familiales et la politique au Zimbabwe.— Le coup d’État, ou « non coup », au Zimbabwe en novembre 2017 a attiré l’attention nationale et internationale sur l’imbrication des pratiques familiales avec la politique électorale dans le pays. De nombreux commentaires portaient sur les actions de Grace Mugabe, épouse de l’ancien président Robert Mugabe, lesquelles ont précipité le remplacement de Mugabe par son camarade d’antan, Emmerson Mnangagwa. J’approfondis l’analyse en plaçant ces événements dans trois dimensions des logiques familiales et patriarcales qui ont tendance à être courantes dans les économies politiques en Afrique et ailleurs : la création de réseaux d’accès et de mécénat ; la greffe métaphorique de « la famille » sur l’imaginaire de la nation ; et les performances hétéronormatives et patriarcales de la bienséance conjugale. En même temps, je soutiens que ces logiques familiales devraient être contextualisées dans les mobilisations et démobilisations affectives particulières associées à la politique électorale au Zimbabwe.

Mots-clés : Zimbabwe; Mugabe, dynamique familiale, État, politique.