

# Elite Conflict and the Negation of Economic Development in Lesotho

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## ABSTRACT

Several factors have been offered to explain depressing economic development levels in Africa. The factors include colonial legacy, social pluralism, and its centrifugal tendencies, corrupt leaders, and limited inflow of foreign capital. While Lesotho shares some of the above challenges, it is more homogenous in terms of ethnicity, a remarkable departure from most African countries, south of the Sahara. Notwithstanding the insulation from inter-ethnic squabbles, Lesotho is not faring better in economic development due to internal conflicts within elite ranks for political power reminiscent of what is in other parts of Africa, albeit not on ethno-linguistic or cultural lines. This intra elite conflict has largely not been interrogated as a bane to development in Lesotho. This work makes use of prebendalism theory. Methodologically, the work used secondary data. The temporal scope is from 1993 to 2018. It is deduced that elite conflict has impacted negatively economic development in Lesotho.

## 1. Introduction

Conflict has become one of the most prevalent hazards, the world over, undermining progress. The post-colonial era in Sub-Saharan Africa is plagued with rampant instances of conflict and eventual apparent failure of development initiatives in Africa. Some Scholars have written to this effect, cementing through coverage of several instances of political instability that show the extent to which the continent is replete with internal conflicts, from North to South, East to West and Central. For example, Olaosebikan (2010) provides that from around 1960's, a sequence of civil wars had taken place in African continent and include but not limited to countries like Sudan (1995-1990), Chad (1965-85), Angola since 1974, Liberia (1980-2003), Nigeria (1967-70), Somalia (1999-93) and Burundi, Rwanda and Sierra Leone (1991-2001).

The Commission for Africa identified political elites as causes of underdevelopment. The Commission noted that Africa has been bedevilled by governments that have often looted state resources; that did not only dismally fail in provision of service delivery but were predatory; that maintain control through violence and bribery and, that have squandered and stolen aid. These actions have been deleterious to economic development in Africa (Commission for Africa, 2005).

The Kingdom of Lesotho has not been immune to some of these challenges. Lesotho is a Constitutional Monarchy surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. Since independence, which it gained on 04 October 1966, it has been bedevilled by recurring political violence

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linked to elections (Kabemba, 2003). Since this time, interparty and intra-party conflicts have characterised the political realm as the two main political parties, Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) and Basotho National Party (BNP) were often vehemently opposed to each other (Matlosa, 2020). This was peradventure evident in the country's first elections, held a year before (April 1965) granting of independence. The elections were won by the BNP, while the BCP rejected the election outcome (Lodge, Kadima, & Pottie, 2002). The antagonistic relations that began prior to independence seemed to have set a pattern that was to typify the electoral politics and the post-independence period.

The period from 1966 to 1986 was characterised by one party rule, although, relatively in a multiparty setting. From 1986 to 1993 marked a period of military junta in the country. In 1993 the country returned to constitutional democracy as the army relinquished power and facilitated elections. It is this period beginning in 1993 that is of interest to this study. Since 1993, elections in Lesotho were marred by political violence, hence, Matlosa (2008) writes that post-colonial history of Lesotho has revolved around contestations for power during and after elections and periodic military intervention in the country's politics, and a damaged international image.

Economically, Lesotho mostly depends on South Africa. It has been estimated that of its imports that constitute 99% come from South Africa and that exports estimated at 65% go to its only neighbour South Africa (Hassan & Ojo, 2002). Lesotho is also a member of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) in which it benefits from the collection of receipts by all the members, and the proceeds are distributed in terms of the revenue sharing formula. According to the World Bank (2017), Lesotho is subject to domestic pressures and heavily exposed to the economic and political uncertainty experienced by its only immediate neighbour, South Africa.

In recapitulation, Lesotho's political history is one littered with instability and coup d'état. Sejanamane (2017) advances that those not living in Lesotho have often wondered and questioned why a small and impoverished country as Lesotho is bedevilled by political conflict, unlike in the rest of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). According to Sejanamane (2017), governments which are not focused on responding to the needs of the people but answer to the needs of a clique of politicians allied to the military are at the heart of the problems in Lesotho. Sejanamane further provides that this has been reflected in the actions of politicians who have often plot, murder and steal public resources without fear of consequences due to their alliance with some elements of the military.

This paper therefore proceeds in the following fashion. It first considers the conceptual issues. Covered in this section are the two main variables in the form of political conflict and economic development. The theoretical framework follows the conceptual issues, which is also followed by the final observations on the interaction between elite conflict and economic development in Lesotho.

## **2. Conceptual Issues**

### *2.1. Political Conflict*

The word conflict has its roots in the Latin word *confligere* which means to clash, to strike together, thus implying that it first designated an actual encounter with arms (Singer, 1949). However, due to the nebulous and elusive nature of the concept, various proposals to how conflict can be defined have been advanced. Kazanský (2015, p. 20) proposes that conflict be understood to mean a social phenomenon which involves a clash of interests and goals among individuals, groups, or countries.

In politics, Jeong (2000) suggests that conflict is more explicitly defined as existing when two or more groups embark and or engage in a struggle for issues and or things such as values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are often to neutralize, injure, eliminate or destroy the rivals. For Lesotho politics therefore, the actors or players, in particular the political elite engage in the mentioned struggle, hence this paper uses political or elite conflict interchangeably. It is worth noting that there are different types of conflict which can be recapitulated and categorized, although not exclusively, under inter-state and intra-state conflict, with the latter of interest.

Political conflict, therefore, is not a fixed term as it denotes different things to different people. For some scholars, political conflict is that which occurs when there are difficulties in reconciling different interests or when there are disagreements over objectives (Pondy, 1967; Schmidt & Kochan, 1972). In as much as this definition sounds straight forward, it seems to treat this concept as a rather uniform issue and therefore falls short of addressing this paper.

Other scholars have also advanced a position that is rather accommodating to the subject under investigation. For Mack and Snyder (1957), political conflict can occur as a behaviour where actors behave in a confrontational manner that promotes their interests while at the same time attempt to prevent other actors from obtaining their objectives. For Kazanský (2015, p. 44), a political conflict is one that is characteristic of the clash of political subjects, who struggle to enforce their goals and interest with the objective to gain, control and distribute power, and change their political status within the society. This explanation by Kazanský is important in that it denotes a situation where political elites compete for the control of state (which include state resources) which in turn, is likely to better, not only their political status but also their economic status.

It follows that considering the definition of political conflict, the object of it is political power which is without doubt the most important display of state power. For Kazanský (2015, p. 44), it represents 'an actual ability of a certain social group or its representative – a political party or movement, elected bodies (parliament, government, etc.) to implement its will by means of politics and legal standards.' This outlined *modus operandi* of the political elite has certain effects on economic development.

## *2.2. Economic Development*

The concept of development was prominently conceived as an exclusive economic term denoting growth and increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) etc. But there was later a shift in this one-dimensional thinking that restricted it to economic implications. Scholars like Navaneeta (2015) wrote of the need to realise that it affects other dimensions of the society. Hence, Navaneeta (2015) notes that development came to be understood as a process that is for the benefit of the society. By this, Navaneeta (2015) departed from the early perspective that only economic growth minus societal progress be termed as development. This explanation echoes the elucidations of two of the most profound scholars of development, who posit that development be conceived as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty (Todaro & Smith, 2012).

The same multidimensional approach to economic development is necessary. Economic development was also initially associated with economic growth in terms of the GDP of the country. According to Todaro and Smith (2012, p. 14), it was the experience of the 1950s and 1960s that signalled something was wrong with the narrow explanation of development. For these scholars, this history is such that at the 1950s and 1960s, several nations, especially developing ones, realised economic growth targets but the levels of living of the masses of

people remained for the most part unchanged. They point that an increasing number of policymakers and economists clamoured for more direct attacks on widespread social ills such as poverty, increasingly inequitable income distributions, and rising unemployment. Todaro and Smith (2012) submit that this resulted in a redefinition of economic development in the 1970s, when economic development came to be redefined in terms of the reduction or elimination of these social ills within the context of a growing economy.

For the above reason, economic development becomes one of the broad terms which its measures other than the GDP, include measure of health (life expectancy, infant mortality, incidence of disease, HIV/AIDS cases, immunization, etc.) or education (enrolment rates, average years of education, youth and/or adult literacy rate) or other economic conditions (poverty rate, inequality of income distribution, child labour, unemployment rate) to represent for development (Self & Shields, 2007, p. 8). All these are development imperatives that countries seek to address (in principle) in a positive manner that is beneficial to the people. But reducing all these to realize economic development is daunting a task due to the endless political tensions, wars and conflicts in Africa which have had a lasting negative impact on economic development. This is because economic development cannot be sustained in an environment characterised by violence, instability, and insecurity (Conteh, 2010), as is the case in Lesotho.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The theory of prebendalism has its roots in Max Weber's thoughts and writings, but it was made more salient by Richard Joseph in 1987 in the book 'Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria'. Joseph (1987) inspected the relationship between the pattern of party formation in Nigeria and a mode of social, political, and economic behaviour collectively termed prebendalism. According to Joseph (1987), prebendalism implies a political system where elected officials feel they have a right to a share of government revenues and use them to benefit their supporters.

Although writing in the context of Nigeria, Joseph (1987) demonstrated the centrality in the Nigerian polity of the struggle to not only control but also exploit public office and contends that state power is often pondered by Nigerians as an array of prebends, the appropriation of which provides access to the state treasury and to control over remunerative licences and contracts. This theoretical explanation tally well with the situation in Lesotho. Joseph (1987) posits that, an attempt to comprehend both the tragedy of development and challenges to democracy in many developing countries should take into account the problem of clientelism, conflict, corruption and stupendous wastage of scarce resources.

Joseph (1987) contends that the politics of competition over allocation of resources, has its most calamitous consequences in the transformation of the state offices into prebends. A 'prebend' according to Joseph (1987, p. 55), is an office of state, typical of feudal Europe and China, which an individual procures either through examinations or as a reward for loyal service to a lord or ruler.

For Joseph (1987) therefore, the peculiar political and economic conditions of the post-colonial world have contributed to the entrenchment of a form of state organization, and of attitudes regarding the use of state office, which are pre-modern. Joseph (1987) continues that in lieu of the constitutional and legal systems, stated impersonal norms determining the form of this state organization, such legal-rational features largely serve to camouflage extensive prebendal practices.

In essence, the theory of prebendalism provides that state offices are considered prebends that can be appropriated by office holders, who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their constituents and kin groups. According to this theoretical approach, this leads to intense competition for the occupation of the state offices, irrespective of whether the

competition is through elections or not. It follows that the political elite that has been able to procure the office, is able to use such office as prebends to satisfy a variety of purposes, such as, rewarding comrades (especially through political post such as in the case of Lesotho, the positions of Principal Secretaries of different ministries, Directors of Parastatal, Heads of Democracy Protecting Institutions and Heads of Security Agencies) as well as for the purposes of self-enrichment.

Finally, as a result, this paper deduces that prebendalism holds that political conflict exist because the pursuit of politics is intended to appropriate the political space and resources among elements of the political elite.

#### **4. Ways in which Elite Conflict is Distinctly Manifest in Lesotho**

The political elite in Lesotho since independence has viewed politics in zero-sum terms, and not as a positive-sum game, that is, in the former, some political elites, especially the ruling elite, seek to maximise its gains at the expense of other elites, while the latter speaks to the sharing of the spoils for everyone. This has resulted in the contestation for state power amounting to some form of warfare whereby only the fittest survive (Matlosa, 1997).

Elite is a concept that is based on the notion that every society holds a ruling minority, a group that controls and disputes the most important power sources (Yamokoski & Dubrow, 2008). Therefore, according to these authors, these group's antagonistic relations are rooted in powers struggles. The contestation for power in Lesotho has revolved around the power elite or politicians in other terms. It is at this point that explained hereafter are the ways in which conflict in Lesotho has been distinctly manifest, and how it has been an impediment to economic development.

##### *4.1. Electoral Violence*

In terms of the struggle for independence, the political history of Lesotho has been relatively smooth and peaceful compared to what was experienced by other African countries. Despite the relatively peaceful transition to independence, the country has not been able to lead a stable and consensual post-colonial society. Evidence has been episodes of post-electoral violence that characterise the country.

The electoral disputes can briefly be looked at from the point of institutional perspective. This is important in that the political conflict in the country is pondered to bear the hallmarks of institutional crisis and constitutional disorder since independence by the scholars hereafter mentioned. According to Mhlanga and Cheuka (2019), the issue of institutional crisis and constitutional disorder is compounded by the structure of the economy given that the Lesotho government plays a dominant role as the main employer in the context of a limited private economic opportunities. So there exist a situation in Lesotho where there is much competition for the control of the state, which has been violent.

The post-independent political history of the country has been branded by frequent political instability mainly over electoral results. This section pays attention to the political conflict of 1998. The electoral violence in Lesotho in the year 1998 has been of a violent nature as it has resulted in burning down of businesses and killings of people. But what has even made it more violent is the involvement of the military in what is seemingly a 'political' conflict that requires a political solution, and or what Matlosa in 'Pondering the culture of violence in Lesotho' calls militarisation of politics (Matlosa, 2020).

According to Sekatle (1999, p. 35), twelve (12) political parties contested the 1998 general elections. These were BCP, BNP, and Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), Marematlou

Freedom Party (MFP), Christian Democratic Party (CDP), Kopanang Basotho Party (KBP), National Progressive Party (NPP), National Independent Party (NIP), Lesotho Education Party (LEP), and Popular Front for Democracy (PFD), Sefate Democratic Union and a coalition of two political parties, Lesotho Labour Party and United Democratic Party (LLP/UDP). Having contested this elections are also a total of 30 independent candidates. Although many political parties contested the 1998 elections, the contest was mainly among three political parties, BCP, BNP and LCD (winner).

It is important to note further that, the political context a little before the 1998 elections, as described by Matlosa (1999), elucidates the crisis that occurred a few days after promulgation of the election outcome. Matlosa (1999) writes that:

*As the (May 1998) election date drew closer, the political bitterness among the contestants became more and more pronounced. The animosity and the rivalry were real as the opposition parties aimed to either dislodge or destabilize the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) government through both parliamentary and extra parliamentary means. Extra parliamentary pressure was relaxed as the election approached with the assumption that the newly formed LCD would be defeated.*

The pre-election environment provided a fertile ground to dislodge the LCD. Ntšu Mokhehle, then leader of the BCP, had defected and or crossed the floor with a majority of BCP MPs to form the LCD, then declared the Prime Minister. This had already led to the antagonistic relations between the two parties. This episode generated acrimony and hostility which was worsened by the outcome of the 1998 election wherein the LCD dislodged the BCP by snatching 79 out of 80 parliamentary seats, under the FPTP (Matlosa, 2020).

As a result, the election outcome saw the main opposition parties, namely the BCP, BNP and the MFP, intensifying a political contest to the results through protests. These parties mobilised their supporters to submit a petition to His Majesty King Letsie III entreating, among other things, that the King dissolves the LCD government and subsequently camped for weeks just outside the Palace Gate with tacit complicity of the military (Mothibe, 1999).

Meanwhile, Matlosa (2020, p. 8) points on the same that working in cahoots with some rogue elements within the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF), the protesters unleashed mayhem, looting and torching business enterprises across the country, most notably in the districts of Maseru, Mafeteng and Mohale's Hoek. Matlosa (2020) explains further that the LDF soldiers infiltrated the protesters heavily armed, wearing grey blankets with their faces painted black, or covered in balaclavas, to disguise their real identity. Matlosa (2020) further writes that they led sinister missions attacking police stations in Maseru, Roma, Morija, Mafeteng and Mohale's Hoek with the purpose of capturing more arms and ammunition. These events eventually saw the LCD government seeking SADC intervention, an external assistance that resulted in a military intervention by South Africa and Botswana.

#### *4.2. Proliferation of Political Parties*

The proliferation of political parties in Lesotho has been a trend that has characterised the country's politics. The emergence of political parties has largely been motivated by competition for the control of the political party. The control of political party is thought to enable the achievement of certain interests, among others, wealth accumulation as the position of the state is key in the country. As a result, intra-party conflict characterised most of Lesotho's party politics. There have been splits prior independence. But post-independence, especially within the period under review, several splits had taken place, notably, in 1997, Ntsu Mokhehle left his ruling BCP to form LCD and then became a Prime Minister under the newly formed LCD.

A major split also for the LCD occurred in October 2001, which saw the formation of the Lesotho People's Congress (LPC). In October 2006, another split rocked the LCD, and the result was the formation of the All Basotho Convention (ABC), and also the formation of the Democratic Congress (DC) from the LCD just before the 2012 snap general elections. A lot of other party splits have occurred since return to constitutional rule, but the above parties have been major players.

The review of the proliferation of political parties as a distinct means by which conflict is manifest in the country is important in two ways. First, control of the party (usually being in the party National Executive Committee (NEC)) in Lesotho, usually means a guarantee to appointment to a ministerial position when the party enters government. Second, the ministerial position in Lesotho offers attractive benefits, both legally entitled and beyond legal entitlements. The main benefit outside legal entitlements include among others tenderpreneurship.

In line with the control of the party, the trendy nature of political party splits in Lesotho renders such conflict as elite conflict. The party splits and proliferation of political parties in Lesotho is not a matter of ideology but the pressing need to capture the control of the party and eventually of the state, as motivated by the accompanying benefits. For example, according to Pule (2013), the BCP emerged from exile a deeply divided party, although for a time, the character, depth, and reasons for these divisions remained unclear as party pronouncements gave little of what the real issues were. Despite wanting pronouncements, it would seem that at least the following issues were central to the divisions that resulted in the formation of the LCD:

*First, there was no agreement within the party on the dominant personality cult of the party leader, Ntsu Mokhehle, with some members challenging his leadership and others regarding such challenges as anathema. Second, Mokhehle's advanced age and failing health gave the different contenders added impetus to articulate their positions more forcefully than before. Third, one veteran party member argued that the key issue was the changing class composition of the party with a South African-based proletariat gaining in importance over a Lesotho based peasantry. This according to the veteran tended to favour one faction at the expense of the others...Fourth, Lesotho's economy and the resources available to the ruling party were never really sufficient to allow an elaborate patronage system to develop thus helping to placate disaffection (Pule, 2013, p. 204).*

The result of the above intra-party conflict in the ruling BCP was an eventual split that formally took place in June 1997. The above submission by Pule (2013) is a clear demonstration of how the political elite within the ruling party is unconcerned about issues of good governance for the people but, are constantly entangled in the struggle for control of the party for own self-serving benefits. As mentioned earlier, the review of the proliferation of political parties is best examined in two ways. With one already examined, the second as above indicated is the issue of ministerial positions.

The issue of ministerial positions can be examined outside the context of one being in the NEC. This can be traced to First Past-the-Post (FPTP) model the country inherited from the British as its former colony. The country currently uses Mixed Member Proportional (MMP), which is a combination of the FPTP and Proportional Representation (PR). In 2002 when the country adopted MMP, the FPTP was still retained. Within this arrangement, the retention of FPTP that put emphasis on constituencies has had potential to produce elite conflict within the party, especially the ruling parties.

This has been the case because of the criteria political parties use in selecting and appointing ministers. The practice that has often been followed by parties about to form a government is

that ministers are appointed based on the votes they garnered from the general elections. What this means is that an MP with the highest number of votes will be appointed for a ministerial position, followed by the second largest votes in that order. The problem emanates when an MP with the least votes, or from PR is made a minister while MPs elected at the constituencies and with many votes are not made ministers. Such MPs feel disgruntled and at times, mobilise their own support from the party NEC and even at the grassroots of the party. This issue usually leads to inevitable party split if not arrested.

#### *4.3. Militarisation of Politics*

Lesotho's history is replete with instances of military involvement in politics, which eventually lead to ouster of governments and attempts to remove constitutionally elected governments. A term usually employed to elucidate this is coup d'états. A coup, in its general sense refers to political conflict between the military and a government resulting in a military takeover (Pathmanand, 2008). The most worrying in Lesotho is that of attempt of military takeover and or at worse the complete takeover. But of the main threats of the Lesotho's fragile democracy is the militarisation of politics, or as Matlosa (2020, p. 5) posits, 'securitisation of the political realm and politicisation of the security sector'.

While the security sector has had its own portion of unwarranted involvement in the political arena, the biggest culprit has been the military. According to Matlosa (2020, p. 5), militarisation in Lesotho entails three interwoven trends namely:

*(a) the conduct of politics by violent means (including the abuse of the military by political actors to gain political advantage over their rivals) (b) establishment of armed militias and vigilante groups, involving mainly the youth, by political parties and (c) intervention by the security forces (especially the military) in politics along partisan lines advancing corporate interests of the army and/or individual interests of some influential soldiers. The cumulative effect of all these trends is the entrenchment of a culture of violence which is profoundly engrained in Lesotho's body politic.*

For Matlosa (2020), the military and politics in Lesotho are two sides of the same coin and this is evident from various accounts of the history of the military in the country. For Lesotho, a political conflict that can seemingly be solved through political process often invokes the involvement of the army. According to Letsie (2018), established out of the Police Mobile Unit, a riot squad of the Lesotho Mounted Police was a modernized army and has since been liable for most of the pervasive culture of violence in the country. This view is further cemented by Matlosa (2020) who writes at length that, the politics of Lesotho is characteristic of a pervasive culture of violence that has historically wreaked havoc on society.

Matlosa (2020) imputes the military for this culture of violence that:

*At the heart of Lesotho's culture of violence lies the historical trend of militarisation of politics and politicization of the military. The political elites often enlist support of the security establishment with a view to tilt the balance of forces in their favour against their opponents. The security establishment, on its part, enters the political fray in pursuit of the individual interests of those in command and/or its corporate interest. This militarisation explains, in part, recurrent political instability and crisis in Lesotho that has invited external intervention by the Southern African Development Community (SADC).*

Benyera (2017) captures a series of incidents that saw military involvement in politics, although Banyera arguably refers to them as 'coups' in Lesotho. Banyera shows both those directly by the army and those that the army's contribution is not so overt, although it can still



be argued. But what is important is how the phenomenon of militarisation of politics has bedevilled the country, highlighting the distinctiveness of the manifestation of political conflict in the country. According to Benyera (2017), the first coup occurred in 1970 when then-Prime Minister Chief Leabua Jonathan annulled the election result and seized power after the military's preferred candidate lost to Ntsu Mokhehle of the BCP.

The second coup, with visible spearheading of the army occurred in January 1986 when a faction of the military took power. According to Benyera (2017), the king was installed by the military as the country's leader and was to rule with the help of a six-member military council headed by Major General Justin Metsing Lekhanya. But when there emerged antagonistic relations between the then power players in the form of the King and military, leading to the breakdown in the monarch-military alliances, eventually forcing the King into exile, a third coup had taken place in 1990 (Benyera, 2017) as a result.

A fourth coup occurred in August 1994 when King Letsie III dissolved the democratically elected BCP with the backing of the military (Benyera, 2017). Another instance that falls short of being classified as a coup took place in 1998. This is because, the government, although paralyzed by the happenings of then, still existed and there is relatively less to posit it was a coup. But what is commonly agreed as Benyera (2017) captures is that there was a mutiny in the army, where in September 1998 junior officers arrested their superiors. This led to the SADC military intervention. The latest to take place was the much-contested attempted coup of 2014. All these coups and instances referred to bring to the fore the role of the military in politics, while also putting into question, that of the monarchy or its influence then.

This controversial role of the army has led to scholars like Letsie (2018) calling for the demilitarization in Lesotho. According to Letsie (2018, p. 3), Lesotho maintains an army of around 3500 personnel across all the ranks, despite it being an enclave of South Africa. According to Kincaid (2001) in Letsie (2018, p. 3), the key reason for countries to keep armies is to ensure national security through safeguarding of the sovereignty of the state over the territory and population within its borders. This reference speaks more to dealing with external threats and assisting the police with maintenance of order only when the latter is overwhelmed.

But for Letsie (2020, p. 3), Lesotho's geographical position, however, implies that practically, the country has no possible external threat that it can successfully deal with militarily. Letsie (2018) writes that the country's only potential external threat is its only neighbour, South Africa, which Lesotho can hardly engage militarily because of the former's vastly greater superiority. Despite that the military is supposed to be highly disciplined body, characterised by a hierarchy of ranks and a culture of strict obedience, and subordinated to civilian rule (Heywood, 2007), the same can hardly be argued about Lesotho.

For Letsie (2018, pp. 3-4), Lesotho's army has a history of mutinies, resistance of civilian control, and involvement in what amounts to political coups. Letsie (2018) continues that in some cases these conflicts have claimed numerous lives and have negated the image of a peaceful pastoral community that Lesotho has enjoyed. The author advances that the army has been involved in many human rights violations, including murders, assassinations, and violent coups, adding that this is in direct contrast to what is expected of the army.

The military's contribution to the culture of violence, is remarkably visible during and more after elections. This has led to scholars like Matlosa (2020) arguing that the contribution of the military to the culture of violence in Lesotho is that it is inextricably linked to inter-party contestations over state power. For Matlosa (2020), this describes, in part, why atrocities perpetrated by the military intensify around elections especially in post-election periods. Matlosa (2020, p. 7) notes that:

*Evidently political violence involving the military intensified in the immediate aftermath of the 1993, 1998 and 2015 elections. From these case studies of post-election violence with heavy involvement of the military, one would be excused for mistaking the LDF for a political party.*

The role of the LDF in politics has been a subject of intense debate and has often led to the conflict being a violent one. Simply put, the LDF has been more of a willing political tool to cement the interest of the political elite, than it has been an army serving the protection of the nation at large. According to Mothibe (1999), there are two competing schools of thought to explain why the army has tended to be involved in a political conflict. The first school of thought is presented by Molomo (1999) and argues that the BNP in its years of rule since independence had entrenched itself especially in the military such that successive governments had a legitimacy crisis. Pule (2013, p. 179) concurs that the army has been intimately related to the BNP rule for a long time. This school of thought argues as a result that, in the crisis of 1998 the LDF was on the side of the opposition parties as it did nothing when the LCD government was virtually paralyzed.

The second school of thought is labelled ‘anonymous’ in Mothibe (1999, p. 59), implying a hidden identity of the proponent. This school of thought contends that the indifference/reluctancy/hesitancy of the army was proof of a patriotic military which refused to be used ‘to butcher one of their own’ on behalf of a party which had fraudulently won the election and had formed an illegal government. Both these schools of thought point to the notion of a polarized military in the country. It is this polarization along party lines that has made the political conflict violent in the country. The result of the 1998, post-election violence ended in the military intervention of South Africa and Botswana under the auspices of SADC.

## **5. How Does Conflict Disrupt Economic Development?**

The impediments to economic development by elite conflict has not been a subject that much work has been devoted to addressing in Lesotho. This work has adopted the view of economic development in accordance with the elucidation proffered by Todaro and Smith, who posit that economic development be redefined in terms of the reduction of the earlier mentioned social ills.

Following is how this elite conflict has affected the various indicators of economic development from 1993-2018. The indices of economic development under review are GDP, unemployment, and poverty. It therefore constitutes the crux of this section to determine how economic development has been disrupted by political conflict in Lesotho.

### *5.1. The Cost of Conflict on Gross Domestic Product*

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total final output of goods and services produced by the country’s economy, within the country’s territory, by residents and non-residents, regardless of its allocation between domestic and foreign claims (Todaro & Smith, 2012, p. 14). In 1998, the country experienced a peak of political instability which had a negative effect on the country’s GDP as below captured.

According to the statistics from the World Bank (Table 1), the country’s peak of political instability impeded growth of GDP. It is observable that the GDP started to decline from 1997, a year ahead of the 1998 elections. This decline from the 1996’s 5.597 to 3.704 in 1997 is due to the delicate political environment ahead of the elections. In particular, the ruling political party BCP was experiencing internal squabbles. There were attempts within the party to get rid of its leader Mokhehle. This elitist faction that developed led to Mokhehle crossing the floor to form a new party, LCD.

Table 1.  
World Bank (GDP Growth (Annual - %) - Lesotho

Year(s)	GDP Growth (Annual - %)
1993	3.51
1994	5.98
1995	3.291
1996	5.597
1997	3.704
1998	1.538
1999	0.476
2000	3.876
2001	3.562
2002	0.724
2003	4.56
2004	1.692
2005	3.466
2006	4.23
2007	4.833
2008	6.74
2009	2.154
2010	0.825
2011	5.355
2012	6.744
2013	4.187
2014	2.884
2015	2.65
2016	5.047
2017	-1.322
2018	-0.453

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=LS>

But particularly in 1998, the rejection of results by the opposition parties had turned violent, as entangled in the matter also was the LDF. The 1998 post-election violence was characterised by looting, burning of some businesses and loss of employment for many people. According to Mhlanga and Cheuka (2019), from the year 1990 to 2000, Lesotho had a continuous negative Balance of Payments (BOP). The authors further posit that at the height of the conflict in 1998, property worth ZAR 160.0 million (approx. USD 29.1 million) was damaged; 246 firms were shut down with 400 workers losing their jobs, and 100 people including soldiers died. Manufacturing which had picked to 60.5% in 1984, deteriorated to an average of 7.5% in 1985-1999. In 1999, the annual growth hit an all-time low at 0.476. The year 1999 is an immediate post conflict year, where no recovery had taken place, except assessment of the damages.

It follows from the above submissions therefore that the period of conflict and political instability in the country affected local production as factories were forced to close, thus forcing the country to import more than it exported (Mhlanga & Cheuka, 2019). The infrastructure was also damaged. The political risk is a key determinant of economic performance in Lesotho (UNICEF Lesotho, 2017). Following the 1998 elections, in so far as the political conflict is concerned, the GDP proceeded although with ups and downs, that some cannot be traced to the influence of the conflict under review, for example, the 2008 global recession, which its effects added to the already impeded economic development in Lesotho.

The era of coalition formation in the country also brought about its own challenges that reflected in the country's GDP. In 2012, there was a sense of relief in the political arena of Lesotho, brought about by the first peaceful transition of power between the outgoing Prime Minister Mosisili and the incoming Prime Minister Thabane. It was during this time that there

was a positive movement in the country's annual percentage growth of the GDP from 2011. The GDP had increased by 1.389 from 5.355 (2011) to 6.744 in 2012 as observed in Table 1. This resonates with the point that political stability accrues well with economic growth.

But this positive reaction was short lived, as political uncertainty began to simmer. According to UNICEF Lesotho (2017), annual GDP growth rates dropped after 2012 owing to continued political uncertainty that began to simmer late in 2013. The annual percentage growth of the GDP dropped from 6.744 in 2012 to 2.65 in 2015 as demonstrated in Table 1 above. In 2014, the political conflict reached a peak when the army staged an attempted coup against the coalition government led by Prime Minister Thabane. The Prime Minister and his other coalition partner skipped the country, while some police stations were attacked by the army. This decline in annual percentage growth of the GDP in the referred period in Lesotho is testimony to the studies conducted by Edwards and Tabellini (1991); Alesina, Ozler, Roubini and Swagel (1996) and Fosu (1999) that political conflict and economic growth have inverse relationship.

The same is true of 2017 as the country experienced intense intra-party conflict in one of the main coalition partners, leading to its split, and a motion of vote of no confidence against the sitting Prime Minister, then Mosisili, the result of which was him advising His Majesty for the dissolution of parliament which eventually led the country to the elections. In a country expected to head for elections in every 5 years, Lesotho since 2012 has headed to elections two (2) times (2015 and 2017), owing to inter and intra-party conflict. Had it not been because of the new amendments to the constitution, March 2020 would have been the third time Lesotho went for snap elections owing to the same. As earlier indicated, GDP alone is not sufficient measure of economic development. There are other indices that needs to be taken in to account and to the others it is now turned.

### *5.2. Unemployment and Poverty*

Unemployment reflects the inability of an economy to generate employment for those persons who want to work but are not doing so, even though they are available for employment and actively seeking work (ILO, 2015). Unemployment and poverty are particularly important indicators of economic development identified here. Lesotho is largely a poor country, with a nominal per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of \$1,299 (World Bank, 2020).

High unemployment, with that of youth unemployment a major concern, continue to bedevil the country. Lesotho's youth unemployment rate remains high at 23.6% by 2018 coupled with high inequality and poverty (UNICEF Lesotho, 2017). It was also estimated that of the 7,500 graduates who enter the labour market each year, half do not get jobs. Even those who are employed are mainly working in subsistence agriculture where they do not earn salaries or if at all small wages (Central Bank of Lesotho, 2012).

The worrying state of unemployment in the country is attributed to political conflict that for the longest time, has bedevilled the country. This is because successive governments in Lesotho have for the longest time, invested most of their energies in dealing with political conflict and how they may sustain themselves in power, rather than focusing on the general development. Even at the time of some positive notable economic performance, the preoccupation with conflict clouds the political elite sense of need to attend to the general development. The effect therefore has been compromised development, which is seen among others, through the depressing levels of unemployment overtime.

Former Minister of Finance in 2012 Timothy Thahane explained during his delivery of the government financial policy for 2012/2013 that:

*Economic performance of Lesotho since independence has neither been high nor sustainable enough to reduce poverty meaningfully, nor to create jobs in sufficient numbers to absorb annual entrants to the labour force... There is need for high investment growth in order to realize economic growth in Lesotho, but investment alone is not sufficient. There are preconditions which are necessary and include political and social stability. Political instability has been a heavy cost on Lesotho's development and has led to slow and difficult recovery.*

Political instability is often a deterrent for at least a long-term investment. This view has also been cemented by Colino (2012) who posit that, political instability originates in high uncertainty which may decrease labour demand and therefore increase unemployment. Political uncertainty defines the situation in Lesotho, more especially during the time of coalition formations. But the issue of investment is not the only one that has been dealt a blow by political conflict. The Lesotho development assistance as demonstrated through the Official Development Assistance (ODA) has also been negatively affected, especially in periods of high political conflict in the country, such as in 1998 and in 2014.

The Official Development Assistance is defined as government aid designed to promote the economic development (in which tackling unemployment is one of the economic development aspects included) and welfare of developing countries. Loans and credits for military purposes are excluded (OECD, 2020). Below is the Lesotho Net ODA:

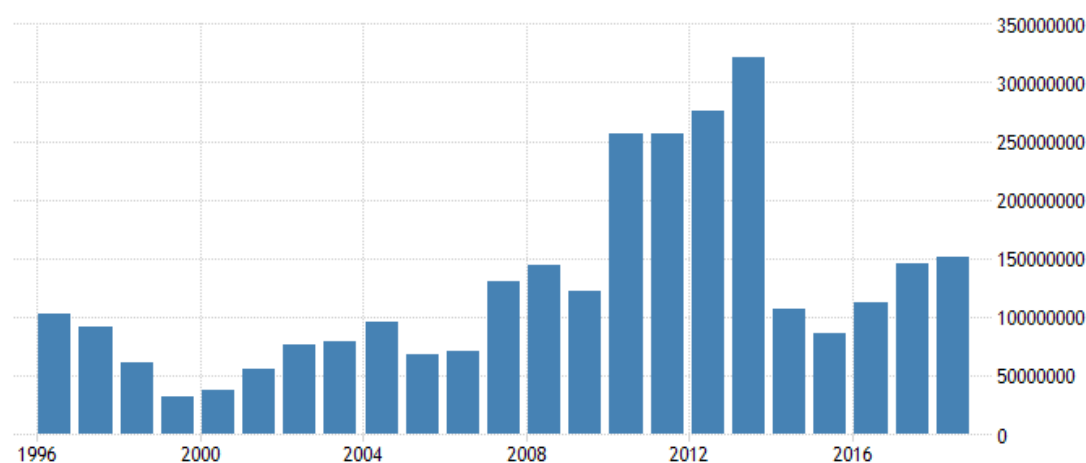


Figure 1. Lesotho - Net Official Development Assistance and Official Aid Received

Extracted from: World Bank in Trading Economics.com (<https://tradingeconomics.com/lesotho/net-official-development-assistance-and-official-aid-received-us-dollar-wb-data.html>)

The standings on the ODA as demonstrated in Figure 1 communicate a message that, it is difficult to attain loans and or aid which can be essential to addressing unemployment if the country is characterised by political uncertainty. As indicated in 1999, the post 1998 political violence has had its share on the ODA as the country registered an all-time low. The same is true of the 2015, during the post 2014 attempted coup. According to the government of Lesotho, the country recognizes that there are global and domestic factors that affects ODA flow to the country. Domestically the government identified factors such as continued political instability and limited financial prudence as major contributing factors (Government of Lesotho, 2019).

On poverty, it follows that unemployment is among others a major cause of poverty and remains high at 23.6%. Hassan and Ojo (2002) note that while economic growth is a vital

requirement for improving welfare, relatively strong economic performance during the years 1994 to 1997 was not accompanied by declining unemployment, poverty, or inequality in Lesotho. Hassan and Ojo (2002) further provides that the country's development continues to be challenged by widespread poverty, which it (poverty) and inequality remained extremely high during 1993 to 1999. The Gini coefficient for Lesotho is one of the highest in the world, implying that in a country with widespread poverty, half the population in 1999, many of the poor suffer extreme deprivation (Hassan & Ojo, 2002). The national average incidence of poverty changed a little in the 1990s, except that urban poverty moved slightly lower and rural poverty moved slightly higher, reflecting the substantial growth in manufacturing and services, the stagnation of crop agriculture, and the deterioration of the range lands (Gelb, Alan, & Tidrick, 2000).

On the other hand, from the 2000s, the government of Lesotho launched on 11 December 2019, the 'Lesotho Poverty Assessment Report'. It documents the country's progress and challenges in reducing poverty with a focus on the period between 2002 and 2017. It revealed that poverty in Lesotho declined by about 7 percent from 56.6 percent in 2002/03 to 49.7% in 2017/18 which translates to about 47,000 Basotho escaping poverty during this period. In the year 2017, 27.3 percent of Basotho were poor at the international poverty line of US\$1.90/day (in 2011 Purchasing Power Parity terms). The modest decline in the national poverty rate indicates a notable decline in extreme poverty declined from 34.1 percent to 24.1 percent (Aumane, 2019). Despite that the Gini index was 51.9 in 2002/2003 and fell by 6.3 Gini points to 44.6 in 2017/2018, about 65.4 percent of all children (aged 0-17) are multi-dimensionally poor (Government of Lesotho, 2019).

The government cites that the failure to significantly reduce both the levels of unemployment and of poverty remains largely due to chronic political uncertainty that resulted in the politicisation of the civil service among others (Majoro, 2017). This political uncertainty also results from recurrent reshufflings of ministers and Principal Secretaries (PS) (all of whom are political appointees). The reshuffling has often been motivated by intra-party conflict than the pressing desire to improve on efficiency in service delivery.

This has impeded the country's ability to tackle unemployment and poverty through the implementation of the National Strategic Development Plan I (NSDP I), a strategy spearheaded by the Ministry of Development Planning alongside Lesotho's development partners, which seeks to table a plan of action to enable the radical transformation of the country's economy to deal with the ills affecting the country's economic development.

In order to realise the National Vision 2020 aspirations, Lesotho developed a National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2012/13-2016/17 as a medium-term implementation strategy. Through the implementation of the NSDP, it was thought that Lesotho will also address the priorities as laid out in the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA). The NSDP key objectives were to achieve:

- High shared and employment creating economic growth.
- Promotion of peace, democracy, good governance and effective institutions.
- Development of infrastructure (minimum infrastructure platform).
- Transformation of skills development institutions and improvement of skills and innovation base.
- Reversal of environmental degradation and adaptation to climate change; and
- Improve health, combat HIV and AIDS and reduce social vulnerability (Makoa, 2014, p. 2).

But as it turns out, the political elites in Lesotho have made a mockery out of the NDSP due to their every time preoccupation with political conflict. In a closer argument, the fixation with political conflict in Lesotho has seen the diversion of resources that could have been used for development initiatives such as addressing poverty in the country to financing elections. It is to be noted that the elections in Lesotho are expected to be held once in five years. Nonetheless, Lesotho in the past five years has used M721 million (47 million USD) to finance three elections within five years (Work for Justice, 2018).

The elite conflict resulted in the unnecessary elections of 2015 and 2017 as earlier indicated. These two elections alone cost the country M32, 229,285.00 million (2 million USD) and M43, 547,948.00 million (2.8 million USD) respectively in MP loans (Office of the Auditor General, 2018). The government incurred this loss because, amongst other benefits to the MPs were the M500, 000.00 (32,000.00 USD) interest free loans (personal) for each MP, payable within the constitutional life of the parliament. The government of Lesotho acts as a guarantor for all MPs who are granted loan by the NEDBANK and if a member defaults in paying the balance, the government settles the outstanding balance.

Hence, the 2015 and 2017 elections meant that the constitutional life of parliament ended prematurely, and for this reason, it was left to the government to repay the outstanding amounts of the MPs personal loans. According to the Office of the Auditor General,

*...the repayment of the outstanding loans for MPs following dissolution of Parliament before expiration of constitutionally specified term constitutes a substantial loss of funds to the government. This calls for a need for government to consider an enactment of the law that will alleviate unjust enrichment such as prohibiting MPs whose loans were previously written off to have access to new loans.*

The argument is therefore that, millions used to service MPs loans could have been used to attend to the problem of unemployment and poverty, rather than servicing the personal loans of political elites. This is a direct misappropriation of funds, which on several occasions, led to the insinuation on the current affairs programs on different local radios that, when MPs are not able to pay their loans, they start trouble that will eventually see the holding of elections, and eventual repayment of their loans by the government. Generally, the preoccupation with political conflict in Lesotho has impeded economic development in ways that have been elucidated. The violent nature of conflict in Lesotho is the most economically costing an issue.

## 6. Conclusion

The political turbulence that the country has experienced over the years has robbed it off the social fabric. The human development aspect of the people has for the longest time not been at stake for the political elite to fight over it. What is observable is the type of political confrontation invoked by need to serve parochial interests. However, there is room for the people of Lesotho to play to correct the nonsense that is elite conflict. The ongoing national reforms presents such an opportunity for citizen engagement and interrogation of issues raised. In this reform, the country should, among others, carefully attend to the security sector reforms, with the aim of depoliticizing the security agencies in the country. This for one, can be realized through stripping off the Prime Minister power to appoint Commander of the Lesotho Defence Force and other heads of the security agencies in the country, and vesting such responsibility into the Defence Commission. This means the resuscitation of the Defence Commission.

Furthermore, the Government of Lesotho should declare the State of Emergency (SOE) over escalating unemployment and poverty in the country. The SOE will enable diversion of government policy and resources towards attending to unemployment, under less bureaucratic

procedures. This move should be preceded by capacitating the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) in the country.

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