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Fighting the Lion: Nationalist Masculinity in Sam Nujoma's Autobiography

Abstract

Dr. Samuel Nujoma's autobiography, *Where Others Wavered: My Life in SWAPO and My Participation in the Liberation Struggle*, documents his life as a pivotal figure in the Namibian war for independence leading to his tenure as the first president of Namibia (1990-2005). Nujoma, known as the "Founding Father" of Namibia, occupies a larger-than-life sphere within the public imagination through monuments, public photographs, placards and street names. Nujoma's autobiography prescribes a certain type of national citizenship that details a specific construction of masculinity for Namibian men. This paper analyzes his autobiography, arguing that Nujoma constructs a hegemonic masculinity based on four key features: 1. leadership; 2. initiation to manhood; 3. the use of physical strength; 4. strictly defined gender roles. This literary analysis will enter a broader discussion as to how in the face of global economic shifts and the introduction of neoliberal structural adjustment policies, Nujoma's masculinity remains unattainable to many male youths today who struggle with a lack of employment opportunities and rapid urbanization. The shifting of hegemonies from a white masculinity to a nationalistic black masculinity points to the changing nature of expectations for masculinity and further highlights intergenerational discontent that arises in light of changing global economic planes.

Former Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba declared February 21, 2014 as a National Day of Prayer dedicated to the extensive range of "passion-killings", or domestic murders, that seemed to multiply in the start of that year. The *Windhoek Observer* notes that "on this Prayer Day, the Sam Nujoma Stadium hosted thousands of people...in response to the Head of State...worried about the brutal killing of women across the country" (Monchlo). Newspapers, social media, politicians and religious leaders denounced the young generation of Namibians who were largely involved in these killings. The Prime Minister at that time declared that "Namibian men are sick in their minds" (Heita). Sam Nujoma, the founding president of Namibia, made the following statement:

We have fought those who colonised our country, and we will continue to fight those who are killing our girls. From today onwards, anyone who will be found guilty of committing such evil deeds will have to be buried alive. I have my soldiers and I will work closely with them. (qtd. in Heita)

Media outlets across the nation picked up on Nujoma's militaristic statement and individuals shared his words widely on social media sources. Ironically, the vigilantism and aggression in his sentiment is exactly that which is so repudiated within the passion killings. While Nujoma is not personally responsible for the surge of domestic killings, one has to wonder if the militaristic language used by the founding father reflects a specific construction of masculinity that simultaneously repudiates violence against women, but promotes aggression and violence as a masculine trait.

Scholars explain that violence against women arises from a specific construction of masculinity, or a hegemonic masculinity, that often remains unattainable by a specific portion of men (Uchendo, p. 10, Morrell, p. 3). According to Hearn and Morrell, hegemonic masculinity has been conceptualized as a dominant male prototype, exclusively available to men in power, functioning through "a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy" (4). This study of Nujoma's autobiography, *Where Others Wavered: My Life in SWAPO and My Participation in the Liberation Struggle*, explores how Nujoma constructs a hegemonic masculinity in his autobiography based on four key features: 1. leadership; 2. initiation to manhood; 3. the use of physical strength; 4. strictly defined gender roles. This article argues that in the face of global economic shifts and the introduction of neoliberal structural adjustment policies, Nujoma's masculinity remains unattainable to many male youths today who struggle with a lack of employment opportunities and rapid urbanization. The shifting of hegemonies from a white masculinity to a nationalistic Black masculinity points to the changing nature of expectations for masculinity and further highlights intergenerational discontent that arises in light of changing global economic planes.

Background: African Masculinity(ies) and Dr. Samuel Nujoma

The term “African masculinity” itself is not a homogeneous entity, tempered by nationality, sexual orientation, racial formation, tribal and ethnic identity, religious conviction as well as temporal and locality concerns, to name a few influential factors. Egodi Uchendo, for instance, argues that African men are persons “indigenous to and inhabit[ing] the African continent” and islands on the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, but that masculinity remains “society-specific” (3). Uchendo, a preeminent scholar on African masculinity, offers a definition of African masculinity that contains a shared history of physical violence and verbal denigration alongside shifting hierarchies and power structures both within and outside of various African societies. For the purpose of this article, African masculinity will be used to speak specifically to the broad spectrum of Black and bi/multi-racial (colored) sub-Saharan African men. Namibian masculinity refers to the varieties of masculinity available to Black and Colored Namibian men, and white masculinity, in this context, refers to the masculinity largely harnessed by Afrikaners in the Namibian context.

Using “African masculinity” as an umbrella term to refer to all Black and multi-racial African men may appear essentializing on a surface glance. African masculinity, however, resides in a unique position of singularity: colonial forces and thinkers from the Global North have long taken it upon themselves to infantilize or dehumanize African men. Thus within these violent and restrictive confines, African masculinity demands a singular discursive field, organized by race and the individuated anti-blackness espoused by historic and modern writings about men of African descent. This collective history tarnished by racism and subordination does not suggest that African men on the whole did not yield power in certain instantiations or that the entire identity of African masculinity is shaped by anti-black racism. Rather, in my imagining,

this category recognizes the plurality of masculinities as they exist and have existed across time and place while also recognizing the familiarity of racism within this categorization.

This interplay between the collective and the singular reflects the means by which masculinity, as a broad concept, contains some sense of universality while simultaneously eschewing the totalizing confines of a singular “masculinity.” Hegemonic masculinity recognizes this plurality, arguing that this tension between the collective and the singular creates hierarchies and tensions. During the apartheid era in South Africa and Namibia, for example, a white hegemonic masculinity emerged through a process of exclusion in which “white men alone had the vote [and]...were predominantly employers, law-makers, decision-makers, heads-of-household, possessors of bank-accounts, possessed of jobs or in income-generating positions and provided with free and compulsory schooling” (Morrell 618). Thus, black men were uniformly excluded from accessing these entry points to masculinity, but were still held to these standards of masculinity. Morrell explains that the systematic exclusion of black men from this masculinity can be linked to sexual attacks on white women in early twentieth century Johannesburg as men “may have been giving Fanonesque expression to the emasculation they felt” (613). These examples point not only to the problematic social nature of shifting ideals of masculinity, but also the pluriform nature of masculinities present in apartheid South Africa and Namibia.

According to Philip Holden’s work on founding father autobiographies, in post-colonial settings the ideals of a national masculinity are usually embedded within the production of citizenship as defined by a founding father figure. (p. 5) Dr. Samuel Nujoma served as the first Namibian president from 1990-2005. His tenure as president began on the day of Namibia’s independence from South African rule on March 21, 1990. Prior to his time as president, Nujoma is hailed as one of the founding members of the South-West People’s Organization (SWAPO)

that lead the struggle against South African occupation and drove anti-colonial sentiments in Namibia and abroad. Within Namibia and across the African continent, Nujoma is known as the “Founding Father” of Namibia and occupies a larger-than-life sphere within the public imagination through monuments, public photographs, placards and street names. He has become the figurehead both for Namibian nationalism as well as its independence. His face appears on every note of Namibian currency and a six-meter tall statue of him resides outside of the Namibian Independence Museum. His presence has become a national symbol of development, commerce and independence.

Panaf Books published Nujoma’s 476-page autobiography in 2001 as a part of its Great Lives Series that featured the works of Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, Sekou Toure and Patrice Lumumba. Nujoma’s autobiography interweaves his own life within the broader framework of the formation of the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO) and the Namibian liberation struggle. Nujoma references Lumumba, Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere, among other African leaders, as his counterparts in the anti-colonial struggle, aligning himself with the icons of liberation. Critical reception of Nujoma’s work, however, has not been as generous in its reading of his autobiographical account. Christopher Saunders’s reading of *Where Others Wavered* argues that Nujoma’s work glorifies SWAPO, distorts the truth and serves as evidence of the ways that the “President remembers the past and wishes to try to stamp out a certain version of the past” (98). This past, Saunders asserts, is reflected the title itself “indicates the strong political and polemical purpose” of the work, which is to “substantiate the heroic role of SWAPO in bringing independence...to praise those who stood firm and to condemn those who did not” (89).

While Saunders offers a dismal reading of Nujoma's authorial (and political) integrity, Namibian Andre du Pisani proffers a slightly more sympathetic reading of Nujoma's account. On one hand, du Pisani recognizes that Nujoma's account "air-brushes" history with omissions of information and distortions about the detention and torture of individuals accused of spying for the South African Defense Force. Du Pisani calls these problems of "ends justifying means" politics that remain as a marked problem in present-day Namibia (105). Du Pisani, however, closes his article with the statement that Nujoma's autobiography is one of "courage, honour and pride" (106). Perhaps du Pisani offered this praise because he presented this article at a conference at the University of Namibia. It is more likely, however, given the harsh nature of some of his criticism of Nujoma, that du Pisani found himself at odds with how to read a figure who did not, as the 476 pages evinces, waver in his commitment to the liberation of Namibia. Nujoma's character, not unlike his violent statement about burying murderers alive, reads with confusion. This article locates itself within this disparity, offering a close reading of Nujoma's autobiography, to unearth what I term a "nationalist masculinity" that fits within the paradigms of hegemonic masculinity. While du Pisani and Saunders have argued that Nujoma's portrayal of himself contributes to the present-day Namibian political scene, my conclusion, rather, places this nationalist masculinity within the context of Namibian youth and gender-based violence.

Roots, Resistance, Racism and Roles of Gender

Following World War One and the implementation of apartheid in Namibia and South Africa, masculinity began changing form in the face of accelerated urbanization and legalized racial oppression. Robert Morrell writes, "this masculinity was no longer tied to the countryside, to chiefs, to the homestead. It was a masculinity in which men lost jobs, lost their dignity" (630). As nationalist and anti-apartheid movements grew amongst African men, "a black masculinity

emerged” that was “homogenous in the sense of its opposition to white masculinity” but divided along generational lines (Morrell 619) Nationalist struggles thus allowed for a re-configuring of black masculinities and a new-found footing for power within political activism. Nujoma’s construction of masculinity is rooted within this nationalist breed of masculinity that manifests in his discussions of four topics: his roots and claims to leadership; his initiation to manhood; his violent aggression against white power and his views of defined gender roles.

2.1 Royal Roots: Becoming immortal

Nujoma aligns his own history with the history of Namibia to show his claim to ancient bloodlines and construct a ‘larger-than-life’ sense of immortality in his work. He uses this historic alignment and immortality gives him claim to leadership and to be seen as the sole guardian and liberator of Namibia. His autobiography opens with the sentence “the story of what is known today as Namibia begins with the people and with the land” (3). He then proceeds to give a brief history of how various tribes moved into the territory known today as Namibia and settled into “Ovamboland” (4).

The name “Ovamboland” was given to a small area in northern Namibia by Finnish missionaries in the late 1800s, but has largely fallen out of use in recent parlance due to its exclusive nature and colonial legacy. More often referred to as the Central North or the “O-regions”¹, this area is geographically small, but remains the most densely populated area of Namibia. The majority of people living in this region are from the Ovambo tribe, the dominant political tribe in Namibia. Nujoma writes that in pre-recorded history “the region [Ovamboland] was home to nine ethnic groupings, all originally ruled by powerful chiefs” (5). Here, Nujoma refers to the nine subsets of the Ovambo tribe, who share a mutually intelligible language and

¹ To represent the Oshana, Omusati, Ohangwena and Oshikoto regions

culture, but who are ethnically the same. In his discussion of the history of Namibia, he does not mention the eight other distinct ethnic tribes² that are also now called Namibian.

Rhetorically, Nujoma conflates the history of Namibia into the history of Ovamboland, or of the Ovambo people. He employs this strategy often when speaking of Namibia in order to secure both his place as the leader of the Ovambo people and the dominance of the Ovambo tribe. Within Namibia, the Ovambo people maintain the position as the dominant tribe in Namibia with the highest collective population and largest representation in the government. Leading political party SWAPO is formed largely of Ovambo people and has held the presidency and parliamentary majority for Namibia's twenty-five years of independence. When Nujoma, who founded SWAPO, positions the Ovambo people as the original inhabitants, or ancestral tribe, of Namibia, he secures the place of SWAPO as the defender of national history and the continuing dominant political party.

Nujoma writes, for instance, of the Ovaherero and Nama genocide under German colonial rule that "Hereros [sic] were suppressed with superior German weapons...some of the Hereros retreated north to Ovamboland...and requested assistance from their Ovambo cousins" (11). In this statement, Nujoma refers to the resistance of the Ovaherero and Nama people against the German occupation from 1886-1915. Militant German occupants entered Namibia, then German South-West Africa, in 1884 and their presence caused tension with the Ovaherero and Nama tribes. This tension eventually culminated in the Germans "suppressing Herero revolts" by enacting a gruesome genocide from the years of 1904-1907 that killed nearly 80% of the Ovaherero population (Wallace 177-8). Germany was eventually ousted from Namibia following World War 1 in 1915 and German South-West Africa was designated as a protectorate

² Roughly, these tribes include the Ovambo, Okavango, Lozi/Caprivian, Nama, Damara (or Khoekhoegowab), Ovaherero, San and Baster. Many of these tribal distinctions have at least 2 subsets. In addition to these tribes, there is a large coloured population and white population (comprised mostly of Afrikaaners and Germans).

of South Africa. The resistance of the Ovaherero and the Namas is the first instance of organized resistance against European colonial forces in Namibia. Nujoma's decision to align his ancestors, and by proxy himself, with his Ovaherero "cousins" points to a definitive insertion of his narrative into this broader narrative of resistance. The inclusion of the Ovambo people within this narrative allows SWAPO and the Ovambo people to maintain a claim to their role as the liberators of the nation against European forces.

This liberatory narrative extends beyond the scope of Nujoma's autobiography. In the recently inaugurated Independence Museum, there is one floor dedicated to the colonial resistance of the Ovaherero and the Nama with three floors dedicated to liberation from South Africa. On the floor dedicated to the Ovaherero/Nama struggle is a display of early resistance leaders. In this display, Nujoma is depicted in color in the center of the piece, even though he was not alive during the colonial resistance phase. His image, adorned in army gear, is transposed over the Namibian flag and surrounded by the two Namibian flags. Below him lies a Welwitscha plant, a species indigenous to Namibia that thrives in the harsh climate of the expansive Namib Desert. Due to its ability to survive in the harsh Namib Desert, the Welwitscha plant has become a national symbol for Namibia and features in its Coat of Arms. This museum display containing Nujoma's visage harkens upon the design of the Namibia Coat of Arms.

By drawing upon the Coat of Arms, Nujoma's image becomes a national symbol of victory and liberation. Further, the prominence of his image, both in color and size, over the other leaders promotes him as the ultimate liberator of Namibia whose actions supersede those of other resistance leaders. A militarized Nujoma, then, whose six-meter statue stands outside of the museum, becomes a national symbol of liberation and upholds the dominant narrative that SWAPO, under his guidance, acted as the primary liberators of Namibia. Moreover, the

anachronistic positioning of Nujoma's image within that of the early resistance phase of the early 1900s (1904-1907) allows him a sort of immortality and omnipresence throughout Namibian history.

Nujoma's rhetoric fosters this sense of immortality throughout his work by employing various strategies to align himself with an ancestral claim to virility. In addition to claiming that his ancestors were among some of the original royal tribes found within Namibia, Nujoma writes of his parents and grandparents: "As a child, I listened with pride to the stories of my parents' and grandparents' lives, grew in strength from herding my family's cattle and guarding them against natural predators—the lion, leopard and jackal" (1). In this statement, Nujoma positions his family as people who are protectors and he asserts his acquisition of strength through completing a traditionally male task, herding cattle. He compiles images of a masculinity that is rooted in protecting, guarding and responsibility. The trope of hunting, specifically fighting lions, runs throughout his work. In the following passage, for instance, he describes his father's hunting prowess:

My father was known to be one of the best runners...he was also a famous hunter...no animal could get away if it ran in front of him...having grown up in the Chief's palace, he knew all about these weapons and was well-versed in their usage. (p. 21)

This description of his father departs from the role of masculinity as guarding and protecting alone, but adds the element of physical strength, speed and hunting abilities. By including the phrase, "having grown up in the Chief's palace", Nujoma is aligning himself with leadership and power and legitimizing his claim to this leadership.

Resistance: Becoming a Man by Fighting the Lion

Nujoma further legitimates his masculinity by writing about the experience of his traditional initiation ritual from boyhood to manhood and his military prowess. As background to his

initiation ritual, Nujoma explains that he and his other male playmates were in charge of taking the cattle for grazing when they were young boys. He writes, “we boys would have to know how to sharpen our arrows for our bows to be ready to defend the cattle from being attacked by lions” (24). Though there were a number of predators that could have attacked the cattle in this area, including leopards and wild dogs, it is significant that Nujoma specifies the lion. When discussing his initiation ritual into manhood, his transition into manhood centers around facing a lion. He explains that elders and boys were expected to travel to the saltpans and that he must go “on foot as a sign of maturity and strength” (25). During Nujoma’s journey, he walked alongside the donkey cart for five days and five nights. In the course of the journey, Nujoma spots a lion in the brush near the donkey cart and so builds a fire around the cart and watches over the donkeys and passengers until it is safe for them to proceed. Nujoma’s frequent reference to the lion does not only represent his virility in facing one of the most dangerous animals in Namibia, but also undermines South African propaganda that portrayed him as a blood-thirsty lion.

South African Defense Forces (SADF) used the image of the lion to turn Sam Nujoma into a predatory, violent man in anti-SWAPO propaganda during the liberation struggle. In his autobiography, Nujoma features two images with a bearded lion with his own face. In one figure, the lion has blood dripping from his fangs and he is standing over the body of a baby who is crying in fear. Skeletons lay on a barren landscape and a second lion appears with the face of Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, another SWAPO leader. Another figure is attached to a “Safety Guarantee” promising that any SWAPO soldier bearing that paper could surrender him/herself without fear of punitive measures depicts the same bearded-lion version of Nujoma. In this portrayal, he looks more peaceful and is walking through a verdant wilderness. Though the safety guarantee lion appears calm and pensive, the construction of SWAPO as a predatory

animal sends the message that SWAPO poses a threat not only to the enemy forces, but also to its own constituents.

Nujoma embeds these comics within a chapter of his autobiography that details his work within the United Nations to draw attention to apartheid in Namibia. These images are juxtaposed with photographs of him meeting with dignitaries from around the world in his quest to fight for Namibian independence. Further, in the following chapter, he includes photographs of the mass graves of the Cassinga Massacre. The Cassinga Massacre occurred in May of 1978 when South African troops began Operation Reindeer, a strategic land and air attack meant to destabilize SWAPO. The attack on the Cassinga refugee camp, however, did not attack a military base but, after a 12-hour air strike, killed over 1000 adult civilians and children. By juxtaposing these lion-images of himself with photographs of him with dignitaries and pictures of the mass graves, Nujoma delegitimizes the message behind the comics that he is a blood-thirsty killer. He portrays himself as a dignitary and advocate for the people. He sends the message that the real killers who are wreaking havoc on Namibia are the white South Africans who committed the Cassinga Massacre.

Racism: Reconceiving the “white man and black boy”

Nujoma both emphasizes specific encounters with white Namibians and recounts his own violence towards them in the course of his autobiography to solidify their place as the national enemy as well as to demonstrate his own masculinity and domination over that enemy. Nujoma writes about the deeply racist policies of the apartheid era, including forced housing relocation (38), inadequate education and the pass system that required all black Namibians to carry a variety of passes to travel about within the country (67). As Nujoma writes, black Namibians

were not allowed to go into the street, or to the location or townships, unless they had a pass from their masters. How can a human being be confined, like a dog, to

his master's yard? It was the worst insult and humiliation to blacks as human beings. (55)

Nujoma explains that inhumane treatment by white Namibians to Ovambos had been engrained in his mind from a young age when he and his friends would sing a song they learned from men in their village with the lyrics "I'm going to make a problem with the whites" (23). He explains that he didn't know what the word "problem" meant at the time, but that people told them "horror stories...that some white employers fed their pigs with the flesh of black workers" (23). Nujoma explains apartheid policies and uses anecdotes surrounding lived racism to explain the racial tensions prior to the liberation struggle.

Nujoma, for instance, details interaction with white Namibians in which he asserts his own masculinity by detailing several violent encounters he had with white Namibians. He writes of a time in which Mr. Blaauw, a government official, accused him of lying: "Mr. Blaauw was short and thin...I caught him firmly and threw him back in the car" (43). Similarly, he explains that he and his childhood friend, Salatiel "were always looking at soldiers with great admiration." He describes an incident in which they had bought military-style boots and "kicked some white boys who referred" to them as "Kaffirs" (33). This particular anecdote not only describes a violent masculinity and retaliation against oppression, but also links this physicality to an admiration for soldiers. Nujoma also describes an incident in which he attacked a police captain in a defensive move, symbolizing him overthrowing the justice system:

The Boers [sic] planned to attack me physically. When we entered...I saw three policemen lined up...[the captain] ordered me to be quiet because I was in the police station. I told him he had no right to shout at me. Then he stood up and tried to push me towards the three policemen. Since he was short and looked like he suffered from malnutrition, I pulled him over the counter and he appeared to be hurt on his shoulders. I told him that I wanted to teach him a lesson...they did not make any attempt to attack me as clearly planned. (61)

In this account, Nujoma single-handedly describes facing four police officers and defeating them without any ramifications for his actions. By recounting an encounter with law enforcement

officials, Nujoma not only fights against white men, but also symbolically against the racist legal system in Namibia. By portraying the police captain as weak, suffering from malnutrition, he is commenting on the paucity of the physical size of the Afrikaners and their inability to intimidate him physically. By saying that he wants to “teach him a lesson”, Nujoma further reverses the rhetoric of the Bantu Education Act that severely restricted educational opportunities for black Namibians and positions himself as the one who is in control of the situation and with the right to serve justice to the Afrikaners.

The violence enacted by Nujoma in these situations is one that acts to reverse what Morrell calls the “rhetoric of the white man and the black boy.” (630). Morrell explains that the apartheid system kept black men in a state of constant dependence upon the white-run state in terms of when and where they could work, live and travel. Nujoma’s violent uprising against white men reverses the trope of the white “*baas*” [boss] who could beat farm workers. The figure of the black man who can beat a white man also poses a threat to white masculine hegemony. Jenkin and Hine, writing about black American boxers, state that “black fighters symbolized black men as conquerors” (10). Although these scholars use the examples of black American boxers, the same principle is applicable. In the apartheid setting, Black men are regulated in terms of movement and treated punitively by white men. Nujoma’s demonstrations of physicality positioned him as a symbolic conqueror of systemic racism. Through violence, he was able to defeat the system by asserting his own personhood. As Black men were in the position of constantly defending their positions as “men” and not “boys”, men faced diminishing spheres of “masculine control” which “triggered gender clashes [in the family] in an attempt to re-establish it [control]” (Uchendu 10). Martha Akawa explains that the emasculation of men by the apartheid regime lead to an enforcing of “patriarchal social structures” and strictly defined

gender roles. (28) Nujoma's autobiography defines these gender roles in set terms that uphold a patriarchal family and social structure.

Roles: Gendered Positions

Nujoma identifies specific behaviors that he associates with men and women. In the opening of his work, for instance, he describes the gendered role he had to take on as the oldest son in the household. He explains that in the Ovambo tradition, the son's job is to milk the cows and goats. He writes:

as I was the first-born, even though I was a boy, I had to...[carry] a baby on my back—sometimes also holding another by the hand. Other boys used to laugh at me, calling out: “Look at this one! Why is he carrying a baby on his back like a girl?...I would drive our cattle in a different direction so that my fellow cattle herders would not see me and laugh at me. (22-3)

In this anecdote, Nujoma points to the deep embarrassment he felt at having to take on the traditionally “female” role of carrying a baby on his back. In constructing his autobiography, one would imagine that he could omit this anecdote from his life's story to avoid any sense of emasculation. Nujoma may have included this scene in the modern-day re-telling of his life to fit within the international development paradigm of gender equality. With a deeper reading, however, one can also see a stoic nature to his assessment of the situation. He took up the role of the leader and did what needed to be done. This stoicism and leadership fit into his paradigm of masculinity and supports several of his later chapters that deal with him going into exile for the benefit of the Namibian people and risking his life as a figurehead of independence, carrying the proverbial baby on his back.

Nujoma attributes his readiness for leadership to training he received from his father:

my father made sure that I was properly trained and prepared both mentally and physically. I had to go through all the ethnic and tribal rituals, with the clear purpose that as a man I would be able to undertake initiatives and succeed in the most difficult missions. My father often told me that I must be responsible and be able to look after myself. (24)

Nujoma's rendering of his father's advice positions manhood as self-sufficiency and the responsibility to look after oneself. For Nujoma, masculinity is transmitted generationally and through specific rituals. The ritualization of masculinity renders it unattainable not only to women, but also to men who are precluded from the ritualization process. Nujoma's insistence upon the "ethnic and tribal" nature of these rituals, for instance, excludes non-Ovambo rituals as being viable means for masculinity. Further, children born of mixed-tribal backgrounds may not have access to these rituals as they do not necessarily have a clear tribal base. By professing his "proper" training and preparation, Nujoma argues that his ability to lead the Namibian people to freedom is based on the purity of his tribal lineage alongside the training he had "as a man" to "undertake initiatives" and care for himself and others. Nujoma positions ritualized men as the guardians and deliverers of the Namibian people.

This type of masculinity is in direct opposition to the protection he requests for his wife and children when he leaves the country to go into exile. Throughout his autobiography, Nujoma emphasizes the duty of men to occupy this space of self-sufficiency, while women are rendered dependent upon men. He explains, for instance, that when he went into exile, he "said goodbye to my wife and kids whom the Ovambo People's Organization had undertaken to support" (81). Also, he highlights his mother's and sisters' roles as revolving around domestic responsibilities (24), while he had the responsibility to take cattle up to 20 or 30 km away. Within his work, women are often found in the private sphere and also in the position of civilian, rather than soldier. "Soldier" is usually conflated with the word man, such as in the following statement: "This made our soldiers courageous, enduring and resourceful. They would fight to the last bullet or to the last man" (323). As du Pisani explains, Nujoma's work renders war as the "near-

exclusive domain” of men (104). The masculinizing of war conflates masculinity with organized violence and excludes women from this realm of recourse.

Nujoma’s insistence upon the male-centeredness of war derives from a lineage of violence. As Martha Akawa explains, initially missionaries and colonials in Namibia promoted a degree of female emancipation, but found that this emancipation “emasculated the indigenous authority structures, which at the time were vital to European mining and agricultural capitals...the colonial state realized that to maintain...stability...they had to keep African men happy.” (19). Legislation was passed defining the roles of men and women in terms of marriage, employment and land ownership. The birth of these legally gendered roles resonated with men already emasculated by colonial and apartheid practices. Morrell explains that in a history in which black men were “absorbed into a wage economy at the lowest level, denied political rights and granted little esteem by white people. The use of the diminutive, 'boy', captured the inferiority projected onto the adult man and invoked the metaphor of generational struggle as the 'boy' tried to achieve manhood” (630). Upon entering independence with the unbridling of the apartheid era, men were in the position to re-negotiate masculinity. Nujoma’s larger than life rhetoric, insisting upon divided gender roles, his claim to leadership and an emphasis on violence and virility are part and parcel of the masculinity constructed out of a time of nationalism and war.

Conclusion

A popular image that circulated during the Namibian war for liberation was that of a smiling woman from the Ovambo tribe who had a baby strapped to her back and a rifle slung over her shoulder with SWAPO brandished dominantly below her. This image is laden with symbolism, from the birth of a new generation, the gun and, of course, the woman’s smile. Nujoma’s autobiography, however, loses this nuance when it comes to women in combat and as members

of SWAPO. Nujoma made his statement on passion-killing nearly fifteen years after the publication his autobiography. In his vicious call to bury murderers alive, Nujoma repeats this rhetoric of protecting the “girls” of Namibia and working with his “soldiers”, implicitly male, to avenge these women and guard the female population of Namibia. While the gender hierarchy is explicit within Nujoma’s sentiment, implicit within his words is a generational critique. The majority of men committing these violence acts, and the women facing them, are under thirty-five. News sources report that the majority of the killers and the victims were in their twenties with the second-highest age bracket being people in their thirties (Nunuhe).

Most men who participated in the liberation struggles found jobs in the newly reconfigured governments, entrepreneurial efforts or had funded education through programs while in exile or upon return to Namibia. The youthful generation and men who did not participate in the liberation struggle, however, do not uniformly have access to these opportunities and do not have a claim on the militarized masculinity that marks Nujoma’s text. Morell argues that nationalist-born black masculinity in Southern Africa remains divided along generational lines. These generational lines are especially important when discussing the emergence of the much maligned youth generation. African youth, shouldering unemployment and a cut of state benefits due to neoliberal structural adjustment, are often seen with weak political potential (O’Brien 55) and referred to as the “‘lost generation’ and ‘marginalized youth’” (ibid, 57). In Namibia, this generation is often pejoratively termed “born-frees” as they were born after or around the time of Namibian independence in 1990. O’Brien explains that there is a divide between those generations who were coming of age just after most African countries received independence (1960-1970s) and younger generations who did not receive the same educational or workplace opportunities with the introduction of neoliberalism in the 1980s.

Mass urbanization and economic crisis has prevented many African youths from being able to “establish independent households” (O’Brien 57) and they have largely come to rely upon extended family connections within urban areas for sustenance (Simone 71). Compounding the accelerated urbanization of the 1980s-1990s with a continuing “rollback of state-led provisions” and diminishing job market (Bogaert 128), the young generation also faces a high unemployment rate. Even educated youths struggle to secure sustainable employment and often share responsibilities within an extended family setting. Within this unit, however, youths rarely are granted authority because as “pressures to provide for basic needs increase...[with] little prospect for delivery in the future, their [youth] authority may wane.” (Simone 73). Even in a country like Namibia with a “black majority government...most black men remain unemployed and see little change in their circumstances or prospects. Women have suffered the consequence of anger and feelings of impotence” (Uchendu 14) in the form of domestic violence and deep-seated gender roles that blame women for larger social ills.

As Awaka explains, “at the end of the war...[there were] no alternative models of masculinity to militarized masculinity...[men] with no skills and no opportunities became frustrated and angry...expressed by some...[as] violence against women” (28). While Nujoma’s model of masculinity does contribute to this militarized masculinity and create a hegemonic masculinity largely outside of the grasp of Namibia’s born-free population, the model presented by apartheid and colonialism must be interrogated in order to continue erasing the legacy of “white men and black boys”, particularly in the face of the global market and neoliberal reforms. Finally, I am not suggesting that the trend of men turning to domestic violence occurred solely because of the lack of a suitable template for masculinity, but rather that understanding these

constructions of masculinity, and their root causes in Namibian society, will allow for deeper understanding of the core issues surrounding this trend of violence.

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