

The ascendancy of Esther Utjiua Muinjangu to the NUDO presidency in Namibia: A challenge to patriarchy?

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Abstract

There will be a female presidential candidate running for office in 2019 Namibian Presidential Elections. This has never happened in the 29 years of independence and was made possible by a small political party, the National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO) which elected Ester Esther Utjiua Muinjangu as its President – making her the first woman leader of a political party in Namibia. This text records and introduces this historic phenomenon in the literature on Namibian politics. It deals with the nature of NUDO and the circumstances that led to Muinjangu ascending to the party presidency. While accepting that history has been made, it cautions against 'over-celebration', for patriarchy has not disappeared merely because a woman has ascended to a position of power. The text concludes that Muinjangu occupies a moral and strategic position to mount a meaningful challenge to patriarchy and bring about meaningful political participation for women.

Patriarchy, women political participation and the Ovaherero society

Patriarchy has always been seen as a challenge to equitable participation of men and women in public life in the world in general and in Africa in particular. It has been defined as “a social and ideological construct which considers men as superior to women”.¹ The understanding of men as superior to women leads to the domination of the former over the latter. This domination takes place in the household, paid employment, the state, male-on-female violence, sexuality and cultural institutions.²

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¹ Preeti S. Rawat, “Patriarchal Beliefs, Women's Empowerment, and General Well-being”, *Vikalpa*, 39 (2), 2014: 43-56 (44).

² Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990; Rawat, “Patriarchal Beliefs”.

Although Africa records the first monarch in the world, in the form of Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt, leadership by women in Africa has remained rare.³ The history of African culture hitherto remains one that defines the place and role of women as inferior beings who are subordinate and must submit to men in society.⁴ As earlier stated, it has been submitted that the state is one of the zones/sites of patriarchal domination.⁵ It is through politics that a majority of state leadership is constituted. The level of participation of women in politics in Africa and Namibia has not been encouraging. Post-independence Namibia, characterised by constitutional values of equality and democracy, was seen as an opportunity to alter old patriarchal norms that enjoyed the protection of traditional African society and were maintained by the colonial state.⁶ Although there has been a number of policy and institutional changes in post-independence Namibia, this has not translated into effective political participation. As argued, women in Namibian politics never occupied significant positions of power before or directly after independence.⁷ A significant change occurred in 2013, 23 years after independence, when the ruling party, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), amended its constitution and adopted a 50/50 equal representation of men and women in all its structures including in parliamentary seat allocation. This policy created an opportunity for Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah to be elected to the position of Vice President of SWAPO in 2017, the first female to occupy such a position in the history of SWAPO, both before and after independence.⁸ At the government level, Hage Geingob, SWAPO President who is also President of Namibia, appointed Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila Prime Minister in 2015. In 2016, SWAPO also appointed Margaret Mensah-Williams Chairperson of the National Council. All these positions had never been held by

³ Guy Martin, *African Political Thought*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

⁴ Abeda Sultana, "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis", *The Arts Faculty Journal*, 4, 2011: 1-18.

⁵ Rawat, "Patriarchal Beliefs"; Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*.

⁶ Heike Becker, "A Concise History of Gender, "Tradition" and the State in Namibia", in: Christiaan Keulder, (ed.), *State, Society and Democracy: A Reader in Namibian Politics*, Windhoek: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2010: 171-199; Erika K. Thomas, *Political Empowerment of Women in Namibia since Independence*, Windhoek, University of Namibia, 2005; Nangula Shejvali, *Though a leader in gender representation, Namibia still has work to ensure full equality*, Windhoek, Afrobarometer, 2018.

⁷ Dianne Hubbard and Collete Solomon, "The Women's Movement in Namibia: History, Constraints and Potential", Legal Assistance Center, Windhoek, 1994, <<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiWzbTF5Y3hAhUTtXEKHeCKDU4QFjABegQIBRAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lac.org.na%2Fprojects%2Fgrap%2FPdf%2Farticle95facesfeminism.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3I92zKDO6087KDNf-jc898>> [accessed 19 March 2019].

⁸ Theresia Tjihenuna, "Women Score Big in Central Committee", *The Namibian*, November 28, 2017, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/172134/archive-read/Women-score-big-in-central-committee>> [accessed 19 March 2019].

women before and were made possible by the 50/50 policy as stated earlier.⁹ There was, however, criticism of the 50/50 policy from both inside and outside SWAPO based on issues of meritocracy, fairness and equal competition amongst others.¹⁰

Apart from the All People's Party (APP) that emulated SWAPO's 50/50 policy in 2014, opposition political parties have lagged behind in empowering women.¹¹ This is observed by the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) which laments that, by virtue of the often limited seats opposition parties obtain in parliament, the trend suggests that men have continuously been favoured (at party levels) when seats were allocated.¹² The dominance of patriarchy in the Namibian political arena was evident from independence up until the 2014 adoption of 50/50 representation in parliament by the dominant ruling party. This is evidenced in the table below on the representation of women in the National Assembly.¹³

Table 1: Women representation in the National Assembly from 1989 to 2015

National Assembly – Namibia			
Year	Total Seats	Women's Seats	% Women
2015	104	48	46.15
2009	72	16	22.22
2004	72	18	25
1999	72	18	25
1994	72	13	18.1
1989	72	5	6.94

⁹ Keith Vries, "Swapo targets 50/50 representation", *Windhoek Observer*, June 20, 2013, <<https://www.observer.com.na/index.php/sports/item/1689-swapo-targets-50-50-representation>> [accessed 19 March 2019].

¹⁰ Lahja Nashuuta, "Are Female Lawmakers Failing Women?", *The Southern Times*, February 18, 2019, <<https://southerntimesafrica.com/site/news/are-female-lawmakers-failing-women>> [accessed 19 March 2019]; Dee-Ann Schwanke, "Barriers for Women to Positions of Power: How Societal and Corporate Structures, Perceptions of Leadership and Discrimination Restrict Women's Advancement to Authority," *Earth Common Journal*, 3 (2), 2013: 1-2.; John Walenga, "Swapo's 50/50: A populace decision against competitiveness", *The Villager*, September 23, 2013, <<https://www.thevillager.com.na/articles/5040/Swapo-s-50-50--A-populace-decision-against-competitiveness/>> [accessed 19 March 2019].

¹¹ Ndanki Kahiurika, "APP Presents Zebra-style List", *The Namibian*, September 24, 2014, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/print.php?id=128287&type=2>> [accessed 19 March 2019].

¹² Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, "African Democracy Encyclopaedia Project", <<https://www.eisa.org.za/wep/namwomenrepresent.htm>> [accessed 5 March 2019].

¹³ Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, "African Democracy"; Freeman Ngulu, "Namibia in Top Rankings for Number of Women in Parliament", *Economist*, March 29, 2017, <<https://economist.com.na/23520/extra/namibia-in-top-rankings-for-number-women-in-parliament/>> [accessed 5 March 2019].

In March 2019, there was a paradigm shift when a small political party, the National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO) elected its first female president. This had never happened in the history of Namibia. What was most interesting about this development is not only that a woman was elected as president of a political party but the nature of the political party concerned and the cultural dynamics within which these elections were taking place. As will be explored in the following section, NUDO is one of the political parties with a strong cultural patriarchal inclination. It is regarded an ethnic party with almost its entire leadership and membership being from the Ovaherero ethnic group.

Traditionally, a vast array of Ovaherero patriarchal cultural practices resembles those of other Bantu tribes in Namibia.¹⁴ Prior to Namibian independence, patriarchy has been deeply rooted in its society. This patriarchal system was based on paterfamilias (man being the head of a household). This system subjected women to being paraded as 'property' of the husband by in part, the dowry paid by the man's family to marry the wife. Thus, women often found themselves subordinated to men. Historically, young girls (from early teenage years) in the Ovaherero society have found themselves in a systematic process that grooms them to be good wives. At this stage, girls are informed of who they will be married to when they come of age.¹⁵ In terms of the power dynamics within a household, Ovaherero women/girls are classically conditioned to accept that men head the house and are afforded a lot of respect within the household and the community. Women could individually own and control property, including cattle, but male (husband) consent was necessary.¹⁶ In a traditional setting, women/girls are taught to be submissive to their male counterparts/husbands. Ovaherero women are traditionally not allowed to take decisions without the consent of their husband and are cultured to believe their primary roles centre around domestic tasks of cooking, cleaning and bearing children.¹⁷ At public gatherings women are expected to behave in particular ways that recognise the authority of men.¹⁸ They are generally excluded from hunting and stock raising, thus limiting their role in production and confining them mainly to child-rearing and household tasks. From a Traditional Authority perspective, succession to Chieftaincy was exclusively reserved for those with patrilineal linkages, and not those from the matrilineal side. As observed among the various Royal Houses under the Ovaherero Traditional Authority, contemporary literature suggests that women in the

¹⁴ Rukee Kaakunga, "An Introduction to Namibia's Herero People", <<https://theculturetrip.com/africa/namibia/articles/an-introduction-to-namibias-herero-people/>> [accessed 5 March 2019].

¹⁵ Kaakunga, "Namibia's Herero People".

¹⁶ Manfred O. Hinz and Alexander Gairiseb, (eds.), *Customary Laws Ascertained: The Customary Law of the Nama, Oveherero, Ovambanderu, and San Communities of Namibia*, Vol. 3, Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2016.

¹⁷ Kaakunga, "Namibia's Herero People".

¹⁸ Hinz and Gariseb, *Customary Laws*.

Ovaherero traditional settings are still inherited by the husband's brother if the husband dies.¹⁹ The matter of wife inheritance is described by Jekura Kavari:

Polygamy is a normal practice among the Ovaherero of Kaokoland. In case of death of a husband of a polygamous household, all his wives are divided among the ovangu 'younger brothers' and ovasya 'sisters' sons', because they have been the deceased legitimate wives. The inherited wife of a senior member stays senior to the inheritor's own wife or wives. Her status remains untouched.²⁰

Although most of the customs and norms that were historically practiced by the Ovaherero are currently no longer widely practised, particularly with the advent of the constitution and several laws that empower women,²¹ subconsciously most of the belief systems on the position and role of women among the Ovaherero people persist. The social organisation of the Ovaherero described above provides for a scenario that would greatly degrade and suppress the role and place of women in leadership positions, and makes them out to be inferior to their male counterparts. Against this background, how was it possible for Muinjangu to ascend to the presidency of a political party whose membership and leadership typify patriarchal norms? This text provides the context in which NUDO ended up with a female president and what this means for the fight against patriarchy not only amongst the Ovaherero but also the implication for the wider political participation of women in Namibian politics. It describes NUDO in the context of patriarchy and the integration of the Ovaherero traditional leadership, practices and customs into political party system before dealing with the electoral events that led to the election of Muinjangu. It concludes by addressing the question as to whether the election of the NUDO female President signals a successful challenge to patriarchy.

NUDO as an epitome of the 'traditionalisation' of politics

NUDO was established as a political formation on 25 September 1964 after the Ovaherero traditional leaders separated from the South West Africa National Union (SWANU) over the former's radical policy agenda on the liberation struggle in Namibia. In 1977, NUDO joined the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) and remained part of the formation until it broke away in 2003 to assume independent status and was registered

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jekura Kavari, "Estates and Systems of Inheritance among Ovahimba and Ovaherero in Kaokoland", in: Legal Assistance Center, (ed.), *The Meanings of Inheritance: Perspectives on Namibian Inheritance Practices*, Windhoek: Legal Assistance Center, 2005: 63-70.

²¹ Tousy Namiseb, "Women and law reform in Namibia – Recent developments", in: Oliver Christian Ruppel, (ed.), *Women and Custom in Namibia: Cultural Practice Versus Gender Equality?*, Windhoek: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2008: 107-112; Faith Haushona-Kavamba, "The five most influential women in Namibia", *Windhoek Observer*, August 8, 2013, <<https://www.observer.com.na/index.php/sports/item/2056-the-five-most-influential-women-in-namibia>> [accessed 5 March 2019]; lina Soiri, *Radical Motherhood: Namibian Women's Independence Struggle*, Uppsala, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996.

as a political party by the Directorate of Elections.²² Until 2014, from 1964, the overall leadership of NUDO, the position of presidency, had always been occupied by the Paramount Chief of the Ovaherero – Hosea Kutako until 1970, Clemens Kapuuu until 1978 and Kuaima Riruako until 2014.

As stated earlier, NUDO broke away from the DTA (now Popular Democratic Movement) to assume independent status. It argued that the DTA did not adequately represent the interests of the Ovaherero people.²³ At its registration as a political party, NUDO was headed by Kuaima Riruako, who was also the Paramount Chief of the Ovaherero under the Ovaherero Traditional Authority.²⁴ NUDO had a strong base within the Ovaherero community for the followers of this organisation were mainly the Ovaherero people. As purported in reports,²⁵ it appears that the NUDO party garnered great support and loyalty by virtue of its former President having been the Paramount Chief of the Ovaherero. The affinity of the Ovaherero was not a matter of mere imagination. When NUDO broke away from the DTA, evidence presented when the matter went to court, made it clear that it was the Ovaherero, led by their chief Kuaima Riruako, who were dissatisfied and leaving DTA.²⁶

The integration of traditional leadership in the political system has been a subject of study by political scientists. In western societies, there is a clear separation between traditional leadership and the political party system. It is after observing the peculiarity of the African situation that Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz caution scholars interested in African politics to understand African politics in the context of the traditionalisation of society, informationalisation of politics and undifferentiated state in their text “Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument”²⁷. The main argument is on guarding against analysing African politics through eurocentric lenses. Following this caution, it has been argued that because of the different context of African politics, particularly the origin and development of the state, concepts such as rationality are understood differently.²⁸ This argument continues that in Africa, there is a tendency for politics to become centrifugal:

²² Graham Hopwood, *Guide to Namibian Politics*, Windhoek: Namibia Institute for Democracy, 2008.

²³ Bogdan Szajkowski, (ed.), *Political Parties of the World*, 6th ed., London: John Harper Publishing, 2005.

²⁴ Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, *Election Update 2004*, Johannesburg, EISDA, 2004.

²⁵ Brigitte Weidlich, “Nudo Sheds Ethnic Label in Manifesto”, *The Namibian*, August 17, 2009, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=56698&page=archive-read>> [accessed 5 March 2019]; Kelvin Chiringa, “We Are Unapologetically Herero – NUDO”, *The Villager*, March 6, 2019, <<https://www.thevillager.com.na/articles/14652/we-are-unapologetically-herero-nudo/>> [accessed 5 March 2019].

²⁶ Tangeni Amupadhi, “Court rules for Nudo”, *The Namibian*, February 11, 2004, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/print.php?id=4567&type=2>> [accessed 20 March 2019]; Hopwood, *Namibian Politics*.

²⁷ Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, Oxford, Currey, 1999.

²⁸ Göran Hydén, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

There is little respect for formal rules associated with a higher authority such as the state. The abstract nature of the system underlying the ideal of a rational-legal type of bureaucracy is ignored in favour of the local-specific pressures and interests associated with individual communities. This doesn't mean that utilitarian rationality is unknown in Africa. It is being pursued by individuals there as anywhere else. The difference, however, is that these pursuits are not autonomous of what others think and do. Self-interest is mediated by considering what a particular choice means for others. In fact, rational action in the context of primary reciprocities involves investing time and effort in nurturing particular social relationships. That is why Africans don't see themselves as acting irrationally when they behave in ways that undermine formal bureaucratic norms or other rules associated with technical definition of rationality. That is also why the informal character of a movement becomes a more congenial forum for action than the formality of public institution.²⁹

While Goran Hyden can be accused of overgeneralisation if not afro-pessimism, the central point he makes relevant to this context is that African politics is unique and studying African politics with eurocentric binoculars delivers a false picture. Other scholars such as Jean-François Bayart and Alex Thomson came to the same conclusion.³⁰ This is the context within which the politics of NUDO must be understood. The context of the overlap between traditional structures and state structures such as the political party. The context of the alternative ways of understanding rationality. Indeed, the context in which the logic of democratic contestation within political parties does not apply in a situation whereby the traditional leader is also the president of a political party. While challenging the presidency of a political party may be seen as a sign of bravery, availing of an alternative vision and the exercise of a member's democratic right, in this context it can be seen as disrespectful if not tantamount to treason – challenging the authority of a Chief in a traditional context. With the Chiefs at the helm of NUDO since 1964 NUDO politics was traditionalised. No one dared, nor attempted, to contest this position. The traditionalisation of NUDO politics as described above therefore meant that traditional customs and practices guided the party more than its constitution.

Following its registration as a political party in 2004, NUDO participated in the 2004 Presidential and National Assembly Elections. In the National Assembly elections of that year, the party won 4.17% of popular votes and 3 out of 78 seats in the National Assembly. Kuaima Riruako, NUDO's presidential candidate at the time, emerged fourth with a 4.23% of the national vote in the Presidential Elections.³¹ On the 2nd of June 2014, Kuaima Riruako died and was succeeded by Asser Mbai, his then Vice President. Mbai took NUDO into the 2014 Presidential and National Assembly elections whereby the party won only 2 seats in the National Assembly, which President Asser Mbai and

²⁹ Ibid.: 58.

³⁰ Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009; Alex Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, New York: Routledge, 2010.

³¹ Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, *Election Update 2004*.

Secretary General Meundju Jahanika took up.³² The table below provides the results of NUDO in the National Assembly elections from 2004 to 2014.³³

Table 2: Election Results from Previous Years.

National Assembly Elections		
Year	Seats in the National Assembly	Percentage (%)
2004	03 / 72	4.17
2009	02 / 72	2.78
2014	02 / 96	2.08

2018 congress – the fight for the soul of NUDO

Occupying the political vacuum

In the month following the death of NUDO President Kuaima Riruako in June 2014, the National Executive Committee of the party elected Vice President Asser Mbai as President until the next congress.³⁴ What is important to note is that unlike in the past when the successor to the NUDO Presidency was at the same time the successor to the Chieftaincy of the Ovaherero, a unique scenario occurred whereby the successor to the Chieftaincy, Vekuui Rukoro, was neither a NUDO member nor interested in the NUDO presidency.³⁵ Mbai did not seek re-election as NUDO president when the congress took place in Windhoek from 25-26 May 2018. Kuaima Riruako's successor to the Ovaherero chieftaincy, Vekuui Rukoro, was in fact a member of the ruling party, SWAPO.³⁶ The 'anomaly' of an Ovaherero Chief who is not a member of NUDO, coupled with the non-availability of Mbai, threw the race for NUDO Presidency wide open for the first time in the history of the party. Thus a power vacuum was created. Politics, like nature, abhors a vacuum. Someone is bound to fill that vacuum regardless of his/her content and character.

³² Tuhafeni Moses, "SWAPO Welcomes 7 Former NUDO Members", *The Villager*, November 25, 2015, <<https://www.thevillager.com.na/articles/9623/SWAPO-Welcomes-7-former-NUDO-members-/>> [accessed 5 March 2019].

³³ Electoral Commission of Namibia, "Election Results from Previous Years", <<http://www.ecn.na/results>> [accessed 29 May 2019].

³⁴ Maggy Thomas, "Asser Mbai is new NUDO president", *The Namibia Press Agency*, July 6, 2014, <<http://www.nampa.org/index.php?model=feature&function=display&id=110376>> [accessed 9 March 2019].

³⁵ The Namibian, "Ovaherero authority denies influence in Nudo", *The Namibian*, June 1, 2018, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/177980/archive-read/Ovaherero-authority-denies-influence-in-Nudo>> [accessed 5 March 2019].

³⁶ The Namibian, "Ovaherero".

Two factions emerged in the struggle for the leadership of the party. One faction was led by the 43 year old Vetaruhe Kandorozi, a NUDO councillor for Okakarara constituency while 55 years old Ester Utjiua Muinjangu, a NUDO leader in the Khomas region and a lecturer at the University of Namibia led the other.³⁷ The factions became engaged in heated and confrontational campaigns that would turn ugly towards the start of the party congress. On the 24th May 2018, a day before the congress was to begin, one of the factions launched an urgent application in the Windhoek High Court to challenge the rules and procedures, particularly the exclusion of 120 delegates, arguing that the opposing faction, which included the then party Secretary General Meundju Jahanika, was tilting the congress in its favour.³⁸ The case was eventually dismissed on the grounds that the applicants, who supported Muinjangu, had recourse to raise these very objections at the congress.³⁹

From High Court Chambers to physical violence – the emergence of ‘Team NUDO’ and ‘Team 100% VK’

The disagreements moved from the High Court chambers to the congress floor. A journalist who was present at the congress venue reported:

The National Unity Democratic Organisation (Nudo) elective conference that was held at Greiter’s Conference Centre, Brakwater over the weekend was abandoned after violence erupted between ‘comrades’ in a battle for positions. Upon arrival at the conference centre on Saturday at the third congress of Nudo, New Era witnessed first-hand physical confrontations and insults among party members. Battle lines were drawn pitting ‘Team Nudo’ on one side against ‘VK 100%’ on the other. The party is divided into two camps, with members supporting Vetaruhe Kandorozi for the Nudo top position (presidency) calling themselves ‘VK 100%’ and those supporting Utjiua Muinjangu calling themselves ‘Team Nudo’. The dispute was the alleged ‘deliberate’ attempt by the current Nudo secretary general and ‘VK 100%’ preferred candidate for the SG position, Meundju Jahanika, at blocking some 120 delegates belonging to ‘Team Nudo’ and claiming to represent certain branches from Aminus Constituency and Erongo Region, from participating in the congress.⁴⁰

Similarly, the congress was summarised as follows:

³⁷ Michael Uugwanga, “NUDO presidential candidates upbeat ahead of weekend elective congress”, *Windhoek Observer*, May 24, 2018, <<https://www.observer.com.na/index.php/national/item/9842-nudo-presidential-candidates-upbeat-ahead-of-weekend-elective-congress>> [accessed 5 March 2019]; Kuzeeko Tjitemisa, “On the Spot with Utjiua Muinjangu”, *New Era*, May 24, 2018, <<https://neweralive.na/posts/on-the-spot-with-utjiua-muinjangu>> [accessed 5 March 2019].

³⁸ Edward Mumbuu Jnr, “Nudo congress given greenlight”, *Namibia Press Agency*, May 25, 2018, <<https://www.leramobile.com/content/75002/Nudo-congress-given-greenlight/>> [accessed 5 March 2019].

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kuzeeko Tjitemisa, “Political hooliganism derails Nudo congress”, *New Era*, May 28, 2018, <<https://neweralive.na/posts/political-hooliganism-derails-nudo-congress>> [accessed 5 March 2019].

The National Unity Democratic Organisation's third elective congress ended in disorder and confusion as a result of leadership disorganisation, distrust, squabbling, power hunger and factional rifts, coupled with unpreparedness and fights over delegates. The party held its elective congress over the weekend at the Greiter's conference centre outside Windhoek to elect a new leadership for the next five years. However, the event failed to take off, and was cancelled on Saturday when party president Asser Mbai declared the outcome of the proceedings null and void because of the confusion, disagreements and unresolved issues.⁴¹

Although outgoing party President Asser Mbai was quoted and reported to have cancelled the congress and declared it null and void, the Muinjangu faction was reported to have proceeded with the congress and declared her Party President.⁴² The weeks and months that followed were marked by chaos and confusion in NUDO. On the 31st May 2018, Mbai announced the suspension of key figures of the Muinjangu faction including Muinjangu, Joseph Kauandenge, Uahimisa Kaapehi, Munjasa Karuhumba and Stephanus Zakaapi. On the same day, Joseph Kauandenge, who was announced by the Muinjangu faction as Secretary General following the chaotic congress, announced the suspension of Mbai alongside Secretary General Meundju Jahanika. He also announced that the duo had been recalled from the National Assembly.⁴³

The above narration of events relating to the NUDO congress of 2018 demonstrates what has become of African political parties and the fight for political power. This conflict, that degenerated into physical fights, is not only unseemly but speaks volumes of the state of democratic consolidation in which Namibia is to be found. The NUDO shenanigans were a worry to many Namibians concerned with the state of democracy in the country. Kae Matundu-Tijparuro, a local columnist and veteran journalist who has reported on Ovaharero affairs for years, could not contain his misgivings with the outcome of the NUDO congress:

Nudo's elective congress, which took place or would have taken place last weekend, invited headlines that for many years to come would reverberate. Some sections of the media characterised the event that took place as "political hooliganism". In fact one may agree with the 'hooliganism' description if reports of what transpired is anything to go by... What a distasteful, shameful and unsightly spectre on the weekend of Africa Liberation Day... While the late Riruako's legacy is yet to be completely deciphered, understood and written in its full meaning and context, one is made to believe what transpired last

⁴¹ Sakeus likela, "Nudo congress ends in chaos", *The Namibian*, May 28, 2018, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/177803/archive-read/Nudo-congress-ends-in-chaos>> [accessed 29 May 2019].

⁴² Sakeus likela, "Nudo confusion plods on", *The Namibian*, June 1, 2018, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/177953/archive-read/Nudo-confusion-plods-on>> [accessed 29 May 2019].

⁴³ Michael Uugwanga, "NUDO turns into a circus ...As party factions suspend each other", *Windhoek Observer*, June 1, 2018, <<https://www.observer.com.na/index.php/national/item/9883-nudo-turns-into-a-circus-as-party-factions-suspend-each-other>> [accessed 5 May 2019]; Jemima Beukes, "Fight over Nudo presidency gets physical", *Namibian Sun*, May 28, 2018, <<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/fight-over-nudo-presidency-gets-physical2018-05-27>> [accessed 29 May 2019]; likela, "Nudo".

weekend at the Nudo congress is his legacy. But from what transpired last weekend surely the foundations of his legacy must have been shaken extremely, if not uprooted altogether.⁴⁴

In its editorial following the NUDO events, *Namibian Sun* decreed what it called the ‘death of opposition parties’ and making reference to NUDO:

some local opposition parties have been their worst enemy. Just recently, the National Unity Democratic Organisation (Nudo) failed to hold a successful congress to elect a new leadership, after violence broke out between party members as the leadership battle intensified.⁴⁵

It would seem that NUDO opposing factions heeded the calls and realised that the squabbles were not good for the party. In January 2019, NUDO President Asser Mbai announced several party decisions including that the party congress would be held in March 2019. He also announced that the ‘suspension’ of key figures of the Muinjangu faction has been lifted. The court case brought by the Kandorozi faction was also to be withdrawn. It was evident that the factions had solved their material differences and agreed to go to another congress to elect the leadership of the party.⁴⁶

2019 extraordinary congress and the widespread celebration of ‘women victory’

As intimated above, the 2019 extraordinary congress of NUDO came as a result of the consensus between the warring factions. As such, both the Muinjangu and Kandorozi factions publicly committed to cooperate and accept the outcomes of the congress – even if that meant supporting their opponents.⁴⁷ The congress subsequently took place on the 3rd of March 2019. Muinjangu won the election for the presidency with 240 votes against Kandorozi’s 227 votes. Her faction also took most leadership positions.⁴⁸

Muinjangu’s victory was celebrated widely beyond NUDO’s circle. Monica Geingos, the wife of President Hage Geingob, took to the social media network, Twitter, to celebrate Muinjangu’s victory stating “this is a milestone. Ms Utjua Muinjangu is the first female

⁴⁴ Kae Matundu-Tjiparuro, “Nudo: Beginning or disgrace of a legacy?”, *New Era*, June 1, 2018, <<https://neweralive.na/posts/nudo-beginning-or-disgrace-of-a-legacy>> [accessed 29 May 2019].

⁴⁵ Namibian Sun, “Editorial: The death of opposition”, *Namibian Sun*, June 1, 2018, <<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/the-death-of-opposition2018-05-31>> [accessed 29 May 2019].

⁴⁶ Kelvin Chiringa, “Muinjangu Suffers Set Back in NUDO Factional Dispute”, *The Villager*, November 15, 2018, <<https://www.thevillager.com.na/articles/14240/muinjangu-suffers-set-back-in-nudo-factional-dispute/>> [accessed 29 May 2019].

⁴⁷ Klevin Chiringa, “Nudo to hold critical congress this Saturday”, *The Villager*, January 27, 2019, <<https://www.thevillager.com.na/articles/14619/nudo-to-hold-critical-congress-this-saturday/>> [accessed 29 May 2019].

⁴⁸ Sakeus likela, “Nudo elects female president”, *The Namibian*, March 4, 2019, <<https://www.namibian.com.na/186100/archive-read/Nudo-elects-female-president>> [accessed 29 May 2019].

President of a political party in Namibia".⁴⁹ The following female members of the National Assembly from various political parties also made statements:

Elma Dienda , MP of the Official Opposition, the Popular Movement for Democracy

I am happy for her, I congratulated her and pray for her to God to give her strength to lead the party, this is a sign that women are ready to lead. She is a good example to other women who want to get into politics, I think it is a male thing; I hope she will use her voice to address issues affecting women, especially in the political arena.⁵⁰

Pendukeni Ivula-Ithana, MP of the ruling party SWAPO and former Cabinet Minister in various portfolios

I am proud of her; she stood among men and came out victorious. I hope her victory will inspire and strengthen other women to believe that it can be done. Honestly speaking, I never thought a party like NUDO would ever have a female president.⁵¹

Doreen Sioka, MP of the ruling party SWAPO and Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare

She is welcome, she made history and her achievement is our achievement too. If there is a member from the party to come to Parliament, then she should be one of them as you know that we are pushing for 50/50 gender representation in Parliament and I think she will be a great addition, so we will welcome her with open arms.⁵²

Muinjangué was well aware of her position within a patriarchal society and entity. Interviewed on her victory, she not only acknowledged that she has been part of a patriarchal organisation, she discloses that she had accepted the patriarchal norms:

I think people have matured mentally, and they have realised that it is time for women as well. I have been living in this community and conforming to the norms of the community, but I have realised that certain things have to change as well because culture is not static.⁵³

Despite her chaotic, confrontational and somewhat controversial journey to the NUDO presidency, it is clear that all these scandalous events that characterised her journey will surely be forgotten on account of the history she has written as the first female president of a political party in post-independence Namibia.

⁴⁹ Monica Geingos, "Monica Geingos Twitter Page", <<https://twitter.com/KalondoMonica>> [accessed 29 May 2019].

⁵⁰ NAMPA, "Female MPs congratulate new NUDO president", *Windhoek Observer*, March 8, 2019, <<https://www.observer.com.na/index.php/national/item/11001-female-mps-congratulate-new-nudo-president>> [accessed 29 May 2019].

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Iikela, "Nudo elects female president".

Esther Utjua Muinjangué – a short profile

Esther Utjua Muinjangué, 55 years old, has been involved in politics since before Namibia gained independence when she formed part of the youth league of SWANU, Namibia's oldest political party. She is a qualified social worker, having worked in the field for more than 10 years, and holds a Master's degree in Social Work Management from the University of Pretoria. A lecturer in the social work department at the University of Namibia, her main scholarly interest is family and child care. She joined NUDO in 2003 when it broke away from the DTA and has been active in the party ever since.⁵⁴

Muinjangué's involvement in the fight for reparations for the Nama and Ovaherero for the 1904-1908 Genocide gained her a national and international reputation as a social justice activist. She has served as a Chairperson of the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation in Namibia.⁵⁵ Under her leadership and combined with the effort of others, the genocide issue has remained in mainstream national discourse. As a result the National Assembly adopted a motion on the matter and the current President, Hage Geingob, appointed Zed Ngavirue as Namibia's special envoy in the negotiations between Namibia and Germany following the German government's admission of genocide.⁵⁶ With her family history and professional skills she was well suited to the advocacy of restorative justice for the Nama and Ovaherero communities as summarised:

Her background as a social worker, a profession that believes in social justice and the protection of human rights. This has great influence on her involvement in socio-political issues. The atrocities committed against Ovaherero and Nama people by Germany do not only constitute genocide but this was also a crime against humanity; the fact that she is a Herero and her paternal grandfather was a product of rape; his mother was raped by German soldiers. She was deprived as a child, of knowing her paternal grandfather. The importance of family trees is highly appreciated in her culture and a portion of that is missing.⁵⁷

The Ovaherero Genocide Foundation under Muinjangué's leadership recorded a number of milestones. It succeeded in creating awareness on the Ovaherero genocide in Namibia and internationally. This was not only awareness for its own sake but in the context of restorative justice. It also managed, as part of the wider efforts, to exert pressure on the German government to accept the genocide as fact and managed to strengthen the relationship between the Ovaherero in the diaspora, who responded by

⁵⁴ Siúan Póirtéir, "Esther Utjua Muinjangué", <<http://www.genderjusticememory.com/esther-utjua-muinjangué/>> [accessed March 20, 2019]; Szajkowski, *Political Parties*.

⁵⁵ Isabelle Le Page and Michelle Fitzpatrick, "Germany to Return Human Remains from Namibian Genocide", <<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-08-29-germany-to-return-human-remains-from-namibian-genocide/>> [accessed 20 March 2019]; Joshua Kwesi Aikins, *Historical Guilt*, Development and Cooperation, 2017, October 24, <<https://www.dandc.eu/en/article/representatives-herero-people-demand-reparations-germany-genocide-committed-colonial-times>> [accessed March 20, 2019].

⁵⁶ Aikins, "Historical Guilt"; Henning Melber, "Genocide Matters – Negotiating a Namibian-German Past in the Present", *Stichproben – Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, 17 (33), 2017, 1-24; Reinhart Kössler, *Namibia and Germany Negotiating the Past*, Windhoek, University of Namibia Press, 2015.

⁵⁷ Póirtéir, "Esther Utjua Muinjangué".

rendering moral and material support, and those at home.⁵⁸ The matter of genocide has emerged as a most important and sentimental issue to the majority of the Ovaherero people.⁵⁹ The Ovaherero do not take kindly to any patronising approach to the matter. Speaking in Berlin, Germany, at a meeting on the Ovaherero and Nama genocide in 2016, Festus Muundjua, the patron of the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation had some harsh words for both German and Namibian government:

Both the German and Namibian governments must have a moral approach, a political will, honesty and un-hypocritical sympathy to deal with the issue of the Herero/Nama Genocide. The obvious condescending and racist attitude of the German Government spokespersons must come to an end! And equally, the obvious disdainful and tribalistic attitude against the Hereros and Namas by the Namibian government must also stop! And finally, all previous agreements that were designed to undermine the interests of the Hereros and Namas on their demand for Reparation must be declared null and void. Namibia, Germany and the bona fide Representatives of the Hereros and Namas (inclusive of those in the Diaspora) should face each other in trilateral negotiating discussions, for they are the sole and authentic ones.⁶⁰

It, therefore, follows that anyone making what is regarded as negative remarks on the matter of genocide is seen as hurting the interest of the Ovaherero. The opposite reading is that anyone actively involved in the genocide awareness and actively supporting the call for restorative justice can be seen to be advancing the interests of the Ovaherero. By the time the NUDO congresses took place in 2018 and 2019, Muinjangué already had a blossoming profile amongst the Ovaherero for the work she has done as chair of the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation. As mentioned earlier, NUDO and the Ovaherero have been intertwined since the 1960s.

Conclusion – has patriarchy been challenged successfully?

This text provided a narrative relating to the writing of history by a small political party, NUDO, when it elected its first female president. This happened against the backdrop of minimal political participation by women in the country. More importantly, this occurs in a society that is largely considered patriarchal. The historical interconnectedness between NUDO and the Ovaherero traditional leadership makes patriarchy more pronounced in the analysis of the politics of the party. We argued that NUDO is a classic illustration of differentiated African politics as posited by Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, Goran Hyden, Jean-François Bayart and others who assert that the complexity of African politics and the inability of the state to emancipate itself from societal forces requires

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Silvio Correa, "History, memory, and commemorations: on genocide and colonial past in South West Africa", *Revista Brasileira de História*, 31 (61), 2011: 85-103.

⁶⁰ Festus Muundjua, "Speech by Mr. Festus Muundjua at the Transnational Non-governmental Congress on the Ovaherero and Nama Genocide", <<http://genocide-namibia.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Speech-Muundjua.pdf>> [accessed 14 March 2019].

different lenses, outside eurocentric methods of analysis, in studying the politics of the continent.

Having recorded and introduced this historic development for Namibia, the central question that remains unanswered is whether the election of Muinjangué represents a successful challenge to patriarchy. We make four arguments in responding to this question. Firstly, given that it is a matter of fact there was no political party in Namibia that ever had a female president; this is indeed a great achievement in the fight against patriarchy. It is for this reason that Muinjangué's election united women across political party lines. In the words of Doreen Sioka, Namibia's Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, quoted earlier, "she made history and her achievement is our achievement too".⁶¹ Muinjangué's own words as discussed earlier, admitting patriarchy existed and that she had accepted it in the past, best explains this success in the fight against patriarchy; "I have been living in this community and conforming to the norms of the community, but I have realised that certain things have to change as well because culture is not static".⁶²

Our remaining three responses to the question are a critical reflection beyond this historic development. We have demonstrated that, historically, the presidency of NUDO was always occupied by the Chief of the Ovaherero. Because of this 'norm', no one ever challenged the NUDO presidency – the position that is de facto reserved for the Chief. The events of 2018 and 2019 are attributed to the fact that Vekuii Rukoro, the successor of Chief Kuaima Riruako, was not interested in the NUDO presidency. Had Rukoro followed the path of other chiefs – Clemens Kapuuo and Kuaima Riruako – it is doubtful whether Muinjangué would have challenged. This challenge to patriarchy can be argued to be a challenge 'by chance' for had there been no vacuum there may not have been a Muinjangué to fill it.

Third, in feminist discourse, there has been a move away from body count – advocating for substance over form – in the fight for the political participation of women and gender equality. In this context, patriarchy does not disappear just because a political party is now headed by a woman. Muinjangué, an educated woman, confirmed that she had been conforming in a patriarchal society which implies that patriarchy does not prevail because women are dominated by men but also because women consciously accept such domination. As stated earlier, in 2014, the percentage of women in the National Assembly in Namibia increased from 22% in 2009 to 46%. A study looking at the performance of women in the 6th National Assembly found that the inclusion of more women in the National Assembly did not lead to increased political participation and advocacy for women's issues.⁶³ It points out that between 2015 and 2018, of the 60 motions tabled in the National Assembly, only 15 motions were tabled by women and of

⁶¹ NAMPA, "NUDO president".

⁶² Iikela, "Nudo elects female president".

⁶³ Job Amupanda and Erika Thomas, *SWAPO's 50/50 Policy in Namibia's National Assembly (2015-2018): Full of sound and fury signifying nothing?*, Windhoek, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, forthcoming.

those only five concerned women and women's political participation issues. As such, while history is made through body count, it does not necessarily mean patriarchy has been overcome.

Fourth, and related to the above, we note with interest that Muinjangué chose running mates, who eventually won, that were all men. These were Vice President Peter Kazongominja, Secretary General Joseph Kauandenge, Deputy Secretary General Uaraa Uapingene and National Chairperson Elia Kandjii. At a glance the 'over-celebration' of Muinjangué's success may create the impression that NUDO has successfully dealt with patriarchy but the leadership remains male dominated. The ascendancy of Muinjangué is thus primarily useful to those interested in history and symbolism. This does not mean, however, that Muinjangué has no latitude in driving the party towards gender equality and greater participation among women. She is actually in a better moral and institutional position to lead the political discourse that will bring about meaningful political participation by women and challenge patriarchy.

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