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Liberation Autochthony

Namibian Veteran Politics and African Citizenship Claims

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ABSTRACT: This article examines Namibian ex-combatant and veteran politics in the context of African claims and struggles over citizenship. Namibian veteran politics has unfolded as long-term negotiation between claimants and political authorities over recognition, realization of citizenship, and legitimacy. This process has operated through repeated claims and responses, material techniques such as employment and compensation, and changing delimitations of the categories of ex-combatant and veteran. Compared with citizenship struggles elsewhere in Africa, particularly the much-discussed surge of autochthony and ethnonationalism, this article discusses how the institutional environment and the particular histories of those involved have influenced modes of claim-making and logics of inclusion and exclusion. It finds that the citizenship politics of Namibian veterans are not based on explicit "cultural" markers of difference but still do construct significant differentiation through a scale of patriotism based on precedence in "liberation."

KEYWORDS: autochthony, citizenship, claim-making, ex-combatants, Namibia, nationalism, recognition, veterans

Reintegration versus Veteran Politics

After its prolonged independence war against South African occupation, Namibia inherited an ex-combatant population that both international and domestic policy makers soon identified as a key challenge. Subsequently, this group, particularly those with a history in the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), the former liberation movement and current ruling party, has been targeted with numerous policies and become a special, officially recognized group of citizens—the veterans. I argue Namibia's history with its former combatants can be seen as a long-term negotiation between claimants and political authorities over recognition, citizenship, and legitimacy. I further contend that situating such processes of domestic veteran politics within the broader spectrum of African citizenship struggles will enable better understanding of both.

The end of the Cold War marked a break in policy readings of Southern political violence. Previously, such violence was understood in political terms, as resulting from legitimate grievances or as part of the competition between world political blocs. This was overtaken by the view of "new wars" (Kaldor 2007), which has tended to stress ostensibly nonpolitical explanations

Conflict and Society: Advances in Research 5 (2019): 186–201 © Berghahn Books
doi:10.3167/arcs.2019.050112

such as primordial hatreds, resource scarcity, or economic opportunism (Collier et al. 2003; Kaplan 2000) at the expense of local political rationales, making it easier to propose externally designed templates of post-conflict reconstruction. Programs of demobilizing, disarming, and reintegrating (DDR) former combatants became a key component of post-conflict transitions, most occurring in Africa (McMullin 2013: 1; Muggah 2009). In contrast with the connotations of sacrifice and desert[1] commonly associated with the older concept of "veteran," policy literature has tended to portray ex-combatants as a security problem with supposed violent and criminal tendencies. For example, the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards of the United Nations says, "Unsupported former combatants can be a major threat to the security of communities because of their lack of skills or assets and their tendency to rely on violence to get what they want" (UN 2014: 1).

A growing body of scholarship has critically unpacked many problematic notions of this policy discourse. These studies have deconstructed ex-combatant stereotypes, zooming in on the reasons of participants for their conflict involvement, as well as their social networks, political activities, and livelihoods in post-conflict settings, and acknowledging the ties of combatants to the broader society before, during, and after conflicts. This literature has revealed the heterogeneity of the politics of former combatants in their societies.[2] However, the predominant focus of this literature on ex-combatants in weak or fragile African states with strong international involvement in "post-conflict transitions" has obfuscated possibilities for fully grasping long-term domestic politics that involve former conflict participants in different settings. As several studies have indicated, relatively strong domestic processes of political centralization have facilitated the branding of previous conflicts as instances of liberation in many African countries, including Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique, Rwanda, Eritrea, Uganda, and Namibia. This has given rise to veteran politics in the sense of valuing and recognizing some participants of these conflicts over others (Dorman 2006; Kriger 2003, 2006; McGregor 2002; McMullin 2013: 1; Schafer 2007; Wiegink, this section).

Historically, politics of veteranhood have been an integral part of the evolution of the political and welfare regimes in many states of the Global North (McMullin 2013: 55–61; Neary and Granatstein 1998; Schafer 2007: 11–13). For example, Theda Skocpol (1992), Alec Campbell (2003), and Stephen Ortiz (2010) have documented how Civil War veteran pensions and twentieth-century veteran policies in the United States contributed to debates on social policy, citizenship, and the role of federal government. The veterans and their organizations exerted considerable influence in this process. This raises the question of whether something along similar lines might be happening in those African countries with demonstrable tendencies toward political centralization and veteran politics. It seems that in these countries, veterans have become an important segment in postwar structures of power, with significant state forming and citizenship effects.

Against this background, this article aims to examine the politics of Namibian ex-combatants and veterans in the context of struggles over citizenship in Africa. In so doing, it seeks to extend the established boundaries of both mainstream accounts of African ex-combatants and general debates of African citizenship struggles that have tended to focus on the increasing importance of autochthonous and ethnonationalist politics that resort to "cultural" markers of political identity. These comparative angles will enrich and deepen the growing body of scholarship that examines African post-conflict transformations and former conflict participants through the lens of veteranhood and citizenship. I will argue Namibian ex-combatant and veteran politics exemplify a particular kind of exclusionary nationalism that is comparable with autochthonous and ethnonationalist politics of citizenship that tend to operate through "cultural" designators, yet different in important ways. I shall suggest the concept of "liberation autochthony"

to describe this particular form of exclusionary nationalism. However, despite its importance, the Namibian ex-combatant and veteran politics might paradoxically also have opposite, unintended consequences toward more inclusive citizenship.

In what follows, I will first briefly lay out the field of citizenship struggles and autochthony in Africa. I will then outline the main characteristics of Namibian ex-combatant and veteran politics and associated inclusions and exclusions (for more detail, see Metsola 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2015). The final sections will focus on how the categories of Namibian ex-combatant and veteran politics result from and further contribute to Namibian postcolonial nationalism and statehood, and on how the Namibian case is situated within African politics of citizenship and autochthony. The article is based on a total of 15 months of fieldwork between the 1990s and 2016, with the main body of materials collected in 2002, 2003, and 2009 in Windhoek and north-central Namibia. Main sources include ethnographic observation, life historical interviews with more than one hundred ex-combatants, thematic interviews with politicians and civil servants, gray literature, and Namibian newspapers and online sources. Ex-combatant research participants included men and women, young and old, and were from different sides of the war and various ethnic backgrounds.

African Citizenships and the Surge of Autochthony

Differentiated citizenship has a long history in Africa. Colonial regimes institutionalized racial hierarchies and ethnic categories and created separate juridical statuses for metropolitan citizens and natives (Mamdani 1996; Mbembe 2001: 28–29). After transitions to independence, the new African states embarked on nation-building projects in an attempt to unify their heterogeneous and dispersed populations. These efforts imagined the nation in historical narratives, figures, and ceremonies while retaining the collectivist focus of colonial population management. Instead of building robust links between the central authority and citizens through political participation, service provision or other concrete relations, citizenship often remained minimalist, "involv[ing] a birth certificate or a national identity card that does not have the power to invoke rights and obligations" (Roitman 2007: 188).

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the combination of economic crises, liberalization packages, retreat of the state, and political democratization put heavy pressures on the chains of centralized accumulation and redistribution through which many postcolonial states had operated (Young 2004). This led to increased competition over political authority, rents, and productive assets (Berry 2009: 23–26; Dorman et al. 2007: 4–5; Englund 2004; Geschiere 2011: 333–334). At the same time, there was a renewed policy focus on citizenship and building liberal institutions. As Barry Hindess (2005: 242) argues, whereas "liberal government of non-Western populations was once predicated on a denial of citizenship, contemporary liberal attempts to govern the people of the non-Western world are increasingly channeled through the institution of citizenship itself." Along these lines, citizenship can be seen as the liberal matrix of relating to authority. If colonial regimes governed through exclusion from citizenship and postcolonial regimes focused on building the collective identity of the nation and biopolitics of selective inclusion, then neoliberal forms of rule seek to govern through the entitlements, expectations, and responsibilities attached to citizenship. In this context, citizenship has also increasingly become a medium through which political subjects may understand and articulate their positions, a claim instead of mere status (Das 2011).

These developments have given rise to intense struggles over citizenship across Africa, often articulated through claims to cultural authenticity and autochthonous origins. Quite correctly,

this "culturalization of citizenship" (Geschiere 2011: 339) has been noted as a "global predicament" (Englund 2004: 11) or a "global conjuncture of belonging" (Geschiere 2011: 339). Yet, claims and politics of belonging that use such distinctions as territorial origins, ethnicity, religion, language, race, or tradition have been particularly pronounced in contemporary Africa (Berry 2009; Fourchard and Segatti 2015; Geschiere 2009, 2011; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000; Nyamnjoh and Brudvig 2014). In this situation, one could expect Africans not to harbor strong national sentiments. However, the matter is not straightforward. As Peter Geschiere (2011: 323) argues: "Depending on the context, autochthony can become a dangerous rival to national citizenship, drastically undermining earlier ideals of national unity and the equality of all national citizens. On the other hand, it can also be seen as coinciding with national citizenship. In such cases, autochthony slogans demand a purification of citizenship and an exclusion of 'strangers.'" Indeed, despite the persistence and revitalization of subnational identities, the nation-state has remained a highly significant frame of political action in Africa (Englebert 2009: 197–198). Political struggles tend to be more about the conditions of truly belonging to the nation than about establishing separate political communities. In such situations, nationalism reflects a desire to justify one's eligibility for rights and access to resources rather than a sense of a shared community with one's fellow citizens (Dorman et al. 2007; Englebert 2009). As Mahmood Mamdani (2007: 22) puts it, "the key question in the post-colonial African context is not which rights, but whose rights. Who has the right to rights, the right to be a citizen?"

However, I would propose that another key question concerns the idioms and justifications through which these claims are made and that this will depend on context. In what follows, I will use the case of Namibian veteran politics to argue that in addition to the aforementioned "culturalization of citizenship" ostensibly inclusive, unifying notions of the nation can also lead to exclusionary versions of nationalism and citizenship. I will propose the concept of liberation autochthony to explain how SWAPO's narrative of national liberation and histories of different groups of conflict participants during the war account for such politics of inclusion and exclusion by constructing a scale of patriotism. Even though the ideology of liberation suggests an inclusive notion of the nation, the actual history of the struggle and its narrative accounts produce notions of originality and authenticity similar to differently justified versions of autochthony.

The Timeline and Shifts of Namibian Ex-combatant and Veteran Politics

In contrast with the weaker and more dispersed forms of statehood in many African colonies, the economic and security demands of the settler population in Namibia, as in South Africa, gradually produced relatively efficient administrative structures (Lodge 1998). For the "natives," this meant dispossession, expulsions, and disruption of social structures and propelled a system of migrant labor that extended throughout the Southern African region (Moorsom 1989; Wallace 2011; Werner 1993). The ensuing state form differentiated starkly between settlers and natives and produced "tribal" divisions but also sowed the seeds for the emergence of nationalism, campaigns for independence, and, eventually, armed liberation struggle (Emmett 1999). However, instead of the "Namibian nation" rising united against the colonial oppressor, as SWAPO's narrative of national liberation claims,[3] encounters with South African rule and support for the liberation movement varied. This led to multiple divisions within Namibian society—between apartheid-designated black "homelands" and settler areas, between urban and rural areas, between the educated and uneducated, between the young and the old, and along ethnic lines (Brown 1995; Leys and Saul 1995b; Tapscott 1995).

Tens of thousands of young Namibians, mainly from the north-central regions, joined SWAPO in exile. They lived in civilian SWAPO camps called "health and education centers" in Angola and Zambia, participated in the war in the ranks of SWAPO's armed wing People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), or studied at various institutions around the world. Tens of thousands Namibians were also recruited into the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF) and paramilitary police unit Koevoet, the South African surrogate forces in Namibia. During the transition to independence in 1989–1990, fighting forces on both sides were demobilized and Namibian exiles repatriated, resulting in 25,000 former SWATF and Koevoet fighters and approximately 50,000 SWAPO returnees (Colletta et al. 1996: 131; Preston 1997: 454; Saul and Leys 1995: 63–64). A rapid differentiation took place in the fates of the returnees and former combatants (Preston 1997; Tapscott 1994). SWAPO leadership returning from exile filled most of the top positions of the new government. Educated returnees became part of the public service or joined the private sector. In contrast, the rank-and-file from SWAPO camps and military wing, as well as former SWATF and Koevoet fighters, were to become the target group of reintegration, administered mainly by their elite and middle-class counterparts working as politicians and civil servants.

Over time, Namibian ex-combatant and veteran politics have evolved relationally through a cumulative series of claims and responses, with every major phase starting from demonstrations by SWAPO ex-combatants. This happened in 1990, in 1995, in 1997–1998, and again in 2006. The relative strength of the Namibian state and economy facilitated this dynamic by enabling the domestic formulation of policies without heavy involvement of international agencies. Initially, the ex-combatants, returnees, and demobilized soldiers were assumed to simply resume life in their local communities (Colletta et al. 1996; Preston 1997). However, most of them experienced problems in generating adequate livelihoods and soon started to demonstrate, demanding jobs, money, and official recognition from the government. Early responses included a demobilization gratuity, vocational training, rehabilitation of the war-disabled, and resettlement schemes (Colletta et al. 1996: 155–167, 171, 175–177; Preston 1997: 455, 463–467; RoN 1998).

As these efforts had meager success, demonstrations by SWAPO ex-combatants recurred in 1995 and again in 1997–1998, eventually drawing in thousands of demonstrators (*Namibian* 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1995d). In response, the government chose a course of action that drastically diverged from the typical course of reintegration programs—mass public employment.[4] Through this effort called 'Peace Project' more than 18,000 ex-combatants, principally former exiles, were registered between 1998 and 2002 and employed in the Defence Force, the newly created Special Field Force police unit and other government agencies (RoN 2001 RoN 1998: 3–5, 15–19). The elderly or disabled received veteran pensions. Job provision pacified the ex-combatants for nearly 10 years. However, in June 2006, a newly formed veteran group called the Committee on Welfare of Ex-combatants made several demands, including considerable monetary compensations. Eventually, the government gave in. Since then, recognized veterans have received considerable lump sum payments, as well as monthly grants and other benefits.[5]

At each of these stages, ex-combatant groups have first organized and demonstrated; the authorities have opposed their demands; the ex-combatants have then persisted, becoming increasingly vocal in their criticism of the government; and finally a compromise has been reached (Metsola 2006: 1122–1123; 2010: 119–120). This claim and response dynamic has repeatedly redefined the criteria of recognition. Initially, ex-combatant policies targeted only those who had been involved in military activities. However, the following year the circle of beneficiaries was extended to all unemployed former exiles (RoN 1998: 6), likely in response to the presence of many noncombatant former exiles among the demonstrators. This brought significant numbers of women within the orbit of official recognition and benefits (Metsola 2015:

109–110). Former exile youth who did not meet the age-based eligibility criteria of the Peace Project or the Veterans Act have also organized and persistently campaigned for recognition and benefits as "struggle kids," "struggle children," or "children of the liberation struggle." They have received some degree of recognition and benefits, although nothing as systematic or large-scale as older former exiles.[6] Finally, the War Veterans Act of 2008 further broadened the limits of eligibility to potentially include people with no exile history, as long as they "consistently and persistently participated or engaged in any political, diplomatic or under-ground activity in furtherance of the liberation struggle" (RoN 2008).

Apart from these gradually widening circles of inclusion, the shifts in ex-combatant and veteran politics also increasingly excluded former SWATF and Koevoet fighters. The creation of the new integrated security forces, vocational training provided by the Development Brigade, and the registrations and job placements of the Peace Project were in principle open to them. However, in practice they were registered and recruited in much smaller numbers than their SWAPO counterparts (Bolliger 2017: 201–202; Colletta et al. 1996: 149; LeBeau 2005: 72–73; Preston 1997: 459; RoN [2001]: 3, 9). The War Veterans Act of 2008 formalized their discrimination and made it impossible for former SWATF and Koevoet to access veteran benefits.

In these ways, Namibian veteran politics has produced different outcomes for different groups potentially classifiable as ex-combatants or veterans. In the ensuing discussion, I will suggest the shifting inclusions and exclusions of Namibian veteran politics are intimately tied to liberation history both as a national founding myth and as a basis for a special relationship between current leaders and SWAPO veterans. Stressing one's history in the liberation struggle has tied the current political elite and SWAPO veterans closely together, giving the latter license to make demands and the former a language to articulate ideal citizenship. I will argue such use of the history of the liberation struggle constructs a scale of patriotism, with various material effects in terms of political power, inclusion and exclusion, and access to resources. This version of exclusionary nationalism merits comparisons with "culturally" based variants of ethnonationalism and autochthony.

Liberation History as the Basis of Inclusion and Exclusion

During the course of campaigning for Namibian independence, SWAPO and its allies produced a powerful narrative of national liberation through armed struggle. Since Namibian independence, the significance of this narrative has not faded. On the contrary, it has continued to serve as a state-sponsored founding myth of the nation, as a backbone of SWAPO's legitimacy, and as major political currency for ruling party politicians (Becker 2011; Melber 2005, 2014; Metsola 2010; Saunders 2007). In public debates, struggle merits back claims related to several present issues such as land, jobs, and political standing. Namibia shares these characteristics with other "post-liberationist" states in the region, including Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa. They have emerged from protracted independence wars and seen a former liberation movement transforming into a dominant party in a multiparty framework, with wartime divisions and rhetoric recycled in the political imagination of the independence era (Buur et al. 2007; Dorman 2006; Kriger 2006; Saunders 2007).

The continued political significance of liberation history is visible in how different groups of Namibian former conflict participants have been talked about in policy papers, public statements, and the media and how such designations have justified the inclusions and exclusions of veteran politics. One common view has seen them as needy, volatile, and potentially dangerous, which justified decisions concerning them as a matter of national interest and peace-building.

For example, Home Affairs Minister Jerry Ekandjo justified the absorption of ex-combatants into the Special Field Force as "the price we have to pay for peace," as they could "build a bomb out of nothing" and had the potential "to turn this country upside down" (*Namibian* 2002). Such concerns resonated with international DDR discourse conveyed by international agencies that interpreted the Namibian situation as part of the global post-conflict landscape (Colletta et al. 1996; Dzinesa 2006; Preston 1997).

The other prevalent view of ex-combatants, particularly those associated with SWAPO, has cast them as liberation heroes. The notion of a liberation struggle provides a framework for speaking of former armed forces radically different from the portrayal of ex-combatants as a security threat, calling forth dichotomies of a nation and its oppressor, the good and the bad, heroes and villains. As put by President Hifikepunye Pohamba, for example, "it was natural for government . . . to take care of the welfare of the veterans of the national liberation struggle . . . These sons and daughters of the soil put their lives on the line and shed their precious blood to break the chains of colonialism and apartheid so that our country could be free and independent" (*New Era* 2012). This view is closely connected with the idea of sacrifice: that the veterans were prepared to face hard conditions and danger for greater good, which prevented them from leading normal lives and from gaining civilian education, skills, and careers. Hence, a debt was owed to these "forgotten heroes" (Gleichmann 1994).

There has been a distinct temporal dimension to these discourses. During the initial institutionalization of the ex-combatant issue in the 1990s, perceptions of them as a security threat, as needy victims, and as deserving national heroes all justified policies targeting them. They were commonly referred to as ex-combatants or ex-fighters, and such terminology was applicable to personnel from both sides of the war. The concept of the veteran primarily referred to elderly or disabled former SWAPO combatants. In principle, fighters from both sides of the war could become beneficiaries even though in practice this happened unequally. The post-2006 stage of renewed ex-combatant demands and policies broadened the sphere of recognized veterans, deepened the institutionalization of the concept, and entrenched discrimination between different sides. In October 2006, a Ministry of Veterans Affairs was launched. In 2008, a War Veterans Act was passed, and an official veterans' association was created in 2010, with key personnel of the independent association that had campaigned for compensation recruited to top positions (*Namibian* 2010). Thus, over time, the concept of the veteran, with its heroic connotations, has overtaken that of the ex-combatant or ex-fighter and increasingly distinguished loyal SWAPO ex-combatants from their SWATF and Koevoet counterparts or "dissidents."[7]

SWAPO's version of the "liberation struggle" and its uses in veteran politics have not gone unchallenged. There are multiple local histories of relating to the former and current regime that do not easily fit into SWAPO's dichotomous notion of colonial oppression versus national resistance (Friedman 2011; Kössler 2007; Williams 2015). Many "remainees" who did not leave into exile during the war have highlighted their contributions to "the struggle" and challenged the privileging of former exiles (Metsola 2015: 198–200). More specifically, former SWAPO detainees and their supporters have persistently voiced testimonies of SWAPO's mistreatment of its members in exile, questioning its heroic credentials (Angula 2018; Groth 1995; Nathanael 2002; Ndeikwila 2014; Saul and Leys 1995, 2003a, 2003b). Finally, ex-SWATF and Koevoet members and their supporters have disputed their sidelining and branding as enemies, stressing the complicated reasons that drove people to different sides of the war (Bolliger 2018; Metsola 2007: 136–137; 2015: 226–227). They have repeatedly attempted to gain veteran status, which the government has vehemently rejected (see, e.g., *Die Republikein* 2006; *Namibia Daily News* 2018; *New Era* 2008a, 2008b). Unlike in neighboring South Africa, the Namibian policy of national

reconciliation has stressed silencing, forgiving, and moving on from wartime atrocities, whether committed by those who fought for the former regime or by SWAPO. This has protected former SWATF and Koevoet from any open punishment or revenge but has not prevented SWAPO and its supporters from expressing their persistent disdain against these former enemies, branded as "mercenaries" or "traitors."

What separates all the above from the mainstream of SWAPO ex-combatants is the latter's position as heroes of the nation and as a group with an intimate history with the country's current leaders. These characteristics make them both symbolically and practically important as a major part of the narrative of national liberation and as a key constituency of the ruling party. The long, shared struggle history generated enduring expectations among former exiles of a continuing relationship of mutual closeness and support between them and SWAPO, often expressed as a relationship between a parent and their children (Metsola 2015: 100–101, 132–133, 152–153, 195–196; *Namibian* 1995a; *New Era* 2006). Official recognition, employment, and compensation have responded to this expectation. The Peace Project gave former SWAPO combatants privileged access to secure permanent employment on a scale exceptional in the Namibian context where employment opportunities are scarce. This worked as a combination of reward and discipline, both responding to their expectations and reaffirming their links with the party and the state, particularly when their jobs placed them in regimented living environments together with many of their wartime peers (for a more detailed description, see Metsola 2015: 149–187). Monetary compensation and other benefits have further enhanced these effects.

The intimate shared history of exile also means former exiles are potential witnesses of SWAPO's internal problems and questionable practices, including disappearances, maltreatment, abductions of youngsters into exile, and unfulfilled material promises. Such problematic aspects of "the struggle" are relatively well known and came up repeatedly if fragmentarily in my field materials (Metsola 2007: 144–148; 2010: 596–599; 2015: 196–198, 208–210, 230–236). However, they have mostly been publicized by SWAPO detainees and dissidents whom the ruling party and its supporters tend to discredit and brush aside for opening old wounds and threatening the spirit of reconciliation (for a recent example, see *Windhoek Observer* 2018). Open reporting of similar issues by large numbers of previously loyal ex-combatants would be harder to ignore.[8] Apart from raising issues of concrete responsibility, this would amount to the veterans stepping out of their place in the national narrative of liberation, thus eroding SWAPO's struggle history and the party's legitimacy.

While the imageries of security threat and victimhood have applied to all ex-combatants, former SWATF and Koevoet are cast as villains instead of heroes in the narrative of national liberation and do not share an intimate history with current rulers. Only former SWAPO combatants have been able to resort to the full array of the registers of threat and desert to back their claims. In demonstrations and public statements, they have referred to their sacrifices in the liberation struggle, pledged their loyalty to SWAPO, and pleaded with it to take care of them as a father takes care of his children. However, they have also been prepared to add weight to their demands by contrasting their predicament with the affluence of the political elite, threatening the latter with withdrawing their political support and occasionally even with violence, and referring to contentious aspects of the liberation struggle. (Metsola 2010; 2015: 111–116, 122, 125, 132, 195–198.) In these ways, Namibian veteran politics has resulted from particular versions of liberation history and further contributed to them. The role offered for SWAPO veterans by the narrative of liberation and the particular history of exile involves a Faustian bargain, enabling their claim-making but simultaneously restraining their public remembrance and political agency.[9]

The Scale of Patriotism and Liberation Autochthony

How does the case of Namibian veterans stand in comparison with "cultural" variants of autochthony and ethnonationalism? To provide a contrasting point of reference, let me briefly refer to the well-known case of Ivory Coast's "national identification campaign" of the early 2000s, in which Ivorian citizenship became conditional to proving a village of origin within the country. This happened against the backdrop of a previously permissive citizenship regime under President Félix Houphouët-Boigny that had granted citizenship to a large number of migrants in the booming Ivorian economy. Economic decline in the 1980s and 1990s together with the introduction of multiparty politics fed social tensions along ethnic and regional lines. This culminated in the desire to purify the nation of immigrants—a notion that often included northern Ivorians—and eventually, a civil war (Bøås and Dunn 2013; Cutolo 2010; Geschiere 2009: 98–117; Marshall-Fratani 2006).

In both these cases, the claiming and granting of status and benefits entails exclusion facilitated by narratives of national history and bureaucratic classifications. However, they relate differently to the supposedly unifying nationalist project. In reaction to economic contraction and increased competition over resources, ivoirité sought to redefine national belonging in more exclusive, ethnonationalist terms. In contrast, the basic argument of Namibian liberation nationalism is that it is inclusive across multiple lines including those of race, ethnicity, and regional origin. Somewhat paradoxically, it mainly does its exclusivist work of separating true patriots from traitors by accusing other political actors of imperialist, tribalist, or sectional politics—in other words, of sowing division.

The liberation narrative's fundamental antagonism between an outside enemy and the supposedly unitary Namibian nation that rises in liberation has overlooked the country's sociopolitical differences and divisions, leaving, for example, the former SWATF and Koevoet members, as well as SWAPO detainees, in an anomalous position. Simultaneously, while the ideal identity of those participating in the liberation struggle was "Namibian," the very process of living in an exile community during a prolonged liberation struggle engendered its own particular identity, specific to SWAPO in exile. Hence, while the language of Namibian nationalism is universalistic, in practice its close association with SWAPO's exile history is particularistic, as only people with a certain background can adopt it convincingly. All Namibians can be citizens, but only some can be "comrades." Thus, similarly to forms of autochthony or ethnonationalism that stress cultural authenticity in terms of ethnicity, religion, tales of historical origins, or language, SWAPO's narrative of national liberation also constructs a scale of patriotism. It depends on one's proximity to "the struggle" along both temporal and spatial axes, with those with a long struggle history in exile at its apex, followed by multiple levels of duration and intensity of participation in exile and within Namibia.

I suggest we can refer to this phenomenon as "liberation autochthony." It is not an explicit attempt to revise the criteria of citizenship along more exclusive lines but rather demonstrates how a particularistic form of belonging can appropriate a supposedly unifying narrative of the nation. Furthermore, it is not restricted to informal utterances, as there are also explicit, official statements, such as the Veterans Act, that lay out the criteria for inclusion through references to recent political history. Thus, instead of representing the erosion of inclusive citizenship under increasing practical competition of particular identities within the national space, the Namibian case rather demonstrates the coexistence—and tension—of the legal concept of universal national citizenship with a pervasive ideology of national belonging that is able to fill this empty signifier (Laclau 2005) with particular meaning. Liberation autochthonies of this kind exist across Southern Africa in countries whose ruling parties have emerged from former liberation

movements. Political uses of histories of liberation are of major importance in all of them—intersecting with multiple other grounds for inclusion and exclusion, including, for example, ethnic and regional differences, as well as xenophobia.

This kind of a tension between universal citizenship and particularistic nationalism is far from a new or isolated phenomenon. As Sara Dorman et al. (2007: 8) argue, African "nation-building comprised a vocabulary, and sometimes a practice, of inclusion, but both implicitly and explicitly shaped assumptions about how members of the nation should live, behave and identify themselves." Despite the expressed intent of unification, exclusion has tended to be an integral part of the postcolonial nation right from the outset. This suggests that perhaps the currently prevalent autochthonous calls for the purity of the nation are not an aberration of nationalism but rather its extreme form that reveals the inherent tension between the idea of "the people" as a supposedly natural entity and the constant practical work required to breathe life into it amid the multiplicity of the inhabitants of the national territory.

However, there are various possible ways to try to resolve this dilemma and they differ in their exclusivity. In Namibia, one can observe not only exclusivist nationalism but also a continuous drive to imagine and build the nation through utterances of national reconciliation and "unity in diversity" (Akuupa and Kornes 2013; Becker 2015), balanced representation, and provision of public goods and services. In this context, the politics of ex-combatants and veterans may offer a template for more broad-based demands that question entrenched patterns of economic and political privilege, in turn engendering responses that may lead toward more inclusive citizenship. While the claims and resulting recognition of SWAPO veterans have been fueled by a sense of entitlement that arose out of their specific, regimented wartime experiences in exile, conditions are in place for many other Namibians—former SWATF and Koevoet, the youth, the unemployed, the landless, or ethnic minorities—to feel similarly entitled and make demands. These conditions include the perceived economic and administrative capacity of the Namibian government to pool and distribute resources, combined with existing efforts to universalize state-citizen relations and benefits that used to be a racial privilege of the white population. This has happened through improving welfare provision, for example, universal old-age pension and other social grants (Ferguson 2015), as well as infrastructure development and service delivery in previously neglected areas. Such material flows between the state and the citizens contribute to public understandings of the state as a provider. Indeed, such claim-making is occurring on many fronts, for example, demands for land, jobs, housing, and services (Metsola 2018). In this sense, the exclusive practices of Namibian veteran politics may unintentionally contribute to a broader dynamic of claims and responses, with more equitable or universal outcomes.

Conclusion

Because of the relative strength of the Namibian state and economy, Namibian authorities have been free to make ex-combatant policy decisions independently. Although maintaining social order through ostensibly neutral administrative techniques was an important stated motive for ex-combatant policies, they have been driven by the current regime's aspiration to consolidate itself and attempts of various ex-combatant groups to claim recognition and benefits. Therefore, Namibian ex-combatant and veteran policies have mainly unfolded through government responses to claims of official recognition, jobs, and monetary compensation made by ex-combatants. Such policies have reflected the meeting of government and SWAPO ex-combatant interests: the demands of the ex-combatants to be employed and compensated and the desire of the government to pacify them and ensure their loyalty. Over time, this process has simulta-

neously extended to include new groups in the category of the veteran and to exclude certain groups potentially classifiable as such. Proximity to armed struggle has served as the main criterion as the sphere of eligibility has extended from PLAN fighters to all adult exiles, then the youth to an extent, and finally, in principle, all who contributed to the struggle, whether in exile or not. At the same time, the centrality of the liberation struggle for the notion of "veteran" has translated into firmer sidelining of those from South Africa's surrogate forces, the former SWATF and Koevoet fighters.

I have used the case of Namibian ex-combatant and veteran politics to highlight the coexistence and dynamic contradiction between the ideal of a supposedly unitary Namibian nation and the exclusive real politics of nationalism that pivot around participation in the "liberation struggle." This liberation autochthony shares its exclusivism with the more well-known examples of autochthony and ethnonationalism on the continent. The latter often represent reactions to crises of centralized chains of accumulation and redistribution and concomitant erosion of doctrines of inclusive nationalism, whereas Namibian liberation autochthony is an example of particularistic appropriation of a supposedly unifying narrative of the nation. However, the broader consequences of Namibian ex-combatant and veteran politics are uncertain, as the positive discrimination of ex-combatants has set a precedent for further demands by other groups of more intensive and inclusive relations between the state and the citizens.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank all the research participants, my research assistants Likius Ndjuluwa and the late Gideon Matti, and the editors and anonymous reviewers for their comments on the manuscript. I am also grateful to the Department of Sociology of the University of Namibia to which I have been affiliated during fieldwork periods, and the Academy of Finland (grants 79652, 288998 and 316942) and Kone Foundation for funding.

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NOTES

1. The condition of being deserving (Cummiskey 1987; Pojman 2001).
2. For a few examples of a broad literature, see Fithen and Richards (2005); Mitton (2013); Söderström (2015); Utas (2012); Vigh (2006).
3. For two prominent examples, see Nujoma (2001); SWAPO (1981). For a more detailed account of this genre, see Metsola (2015: 191–195).
4. See articles in the following newspapers: *The Namibian*, 10, 21 April, 9, 17 May 1995, 7 May, 26 June, 29 September, 24, 28, 31 October, 4, 6, 10, 13 November 1997, 21, 22, 27 July, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17 August, 3 September, 23 December 1998; *Electronic Mail and Guardian*, 7, 8 June 1997.

5. This account of the compensation case is based on a large number of articles in *The Namibian*, *New Era*, and *Informanté* between June 2006 and October 2012.
6. *The Namibian*, 9, 11 April 2001; 10, 15 October 2001; 28 November 2001; 13, 21 December 2001; 12 April 2002; 12, 16, 19, 20 August 2002; 9, 10, 16 September 2002; 6 November 2002; 29 January 2003; 8 April 2003; 22 October 2008; 13 November 2008; 19, 25 October 2012; 6 March 2015; 2 February 2018; *Namibian Sun*, 12 August 2015; *New Era*, 18 October 2017, 26 April 2018.
7. This analysis is based on systematically checking how these concepts appear in media stories and official documents since the early 1990.
8. To some extent, this was a lever used by SWAPO combatants when pressing their demands (see, e.g., *Namibian* 2000; *New Era* 2007).
9. For a more detailed analysis of the politics of memory associated with Namibian veterans, see Metsola (2010, 2015: 191–200, 228–243).

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