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# Danger and Opportunity in Katima Mulilo: A Namibian Border Boomtown at Transnational Crossroads\*

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Rapid construction of new 'transport corridors' across the SADC region is supposed to facilitate the free flow of commodities, tourism and investment between 'valuable places' in Southern Africa and global markets. Since the opening of a road bridge across the Zambezi in 2004, Katima Mulilo has become a busy stopover point along the Trans Caprivi Corridor (TCC), which links the Copperbelt of Zambia with Namibia's sea port of Walvis Bay. The new transport route has at last fulfilled the colonial dream that motivated the Anglo-German exchange of territory, which originally established the 'access corridor to the Zambezi' in 1890. Katima's current investment boom seems to give substance to the SWAPO government's official agenda of 'bringing development' to Caprivi, nearly a decade after an armed insurgency attempted its secession. But beyond the apparent success story, Katima Mulilo's boom is illustrative of a broader reconfiguration of the nature of state sovereignty, engendered by two distinct but interrelated processes. One of these processes changes the nature of state sovereignty from 'above'. The TCC is a space for global business and transnational governance over which the Namibian state authorities have de facto limited sovereignty. The other process changes state sovereignty from 'below'. It is manifest in the flourishing of illegal business activities in the Namibia-Zambia borderland, sprawling shanty towns and other societal phenomena that challenge SWAPO's idealised development agenda. The combined dynamics of opportunity for more-or-less legal private gain, on the one hand, and looming societal instability that accompany Katima Mulilo's current boom, on the other, continue the historical pattern of Caprivi as a site that threatens to colonise the centre of the state from its territorial and social margins.

In May 2004, a new bridge across the Zambezi River was opened at the Wenela border post, the main point of transit between Namibia's Caprivi Region and Zambia's Western Province. It closed the last gap in a 2,524 km-long asphalt route called the 'Trans Caprivi Corridor' (TCC). The TCC connects the Copperbelt of Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with Namibia's sea-port of Walvis Bay, which advertises itself as a gateway for trade

\*This article is based on 10 months of field work conducted in 2002 and 2004 in Namibia and Zambia. Earlier drafts were presented at the annual meeting of the American Association of African Studies in San Francisco, 16–19 November 2006 and the founding meeting of the African Borderlands Research Network in Edinburgh 13–14 June 2007. For comments and critical feedback on earlier drafts I thank Paul Nugent, Jeremy Gould, James Ferguson, Henning Melber, Jan-Bart Gewald, Gregor Dobler, Mattia Fumanti, Bennett Kangumu Kangumu, Morris Szeftel and three anonymous JSAS reviewers. For help with the photographs I thank Taika Iloa. All errors and mistakes are entirely my own. Financial assistance from the following institutions is gratefully acknowledged: the Academy of Finland, the Nordic Africa Institute, the Finnish Graduate School for Development Studies, the Graduate School of International Development Studies of Roskilde University and the Office of the Chancellor of Helsinki University.



Figure 1. The Trans Caprivi Corridor route showing major cities. Map edited by the author.

between Southern Africa, Europe and the Americas<sup>1</sup> (see Figure 1). The new Zambezi Bridge is located just outside the Namibian town of Katima Mulilo and its Zambian neighbour, Seseke. Both towns are regional centres and both towns are booming. Over the past few years, they have changed from provincial backwaters to busy stopover points along a transport route for international business. In the no-man's land between the border checkpoints and in the margins of the new truck stops, new warehouses and tourist lodges are visible. Small-scale traders, taxi drivers, porters and sex workers have discovered new opportunities to earn a living and now routinely traverse the spatial and legal boundaries of Namibia and Zambia. Not far from the new South African- and Chinese-owned shopping centres, informal markets and enterprises flourish. New and older shanty towns are sprawling into the savannah surrounding Katima. The town's bustling dynamism is accompanied by a special kind of tension characteristic of boom- and frontier towns throughout history, including other rapidly growing urban centres across Africa.<sup>2</sup> It is a tension between the

1 Namibian Port Authority, 'About Namport', available at <http://www.namport.com/content/show.php?m¼ 2>, retrieved on 10 June 2007.

2 Compare Gregor Dobler's article in this issue.

wide-open opportunities for commerce and social mobility and the precarious nature of a situation where state and non-state regulations are very much in-the-making, sometimes in conflict, and seldom applied predictably.

The current boom in Katima Mulilo is clearly a new phenomenon, but one key element underlying this development is not new at all: Caprivi and its regional capital have been, and still are, located on the geographical, political and social periphery of a succession of pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial states. For over a century, Caprivi has been a classical frontier land, a place on the edge of state power. This is illustrated by the most common solution to the cartographic inconvenience which Caprivi represents; it has routinely been cut off and re-inserted separately (often in a smaller scale) on many official and commercial maps of Namibia and its colonial predecessor, South West Africa. Over the decades, the perception of Caprivi as a place that is about to 'fall off the map' has persistently defined the nature of the efforts made by those at the centres of government striving to bring the region under their control.

Caprivi's precarious nature is only one side of the coin. Opportunity is the other, for with the heightened risk comes heightened potential for reward. Caprivi's perceived remoteness has also always been its key asset. Its geographical position has alternately, sometimes simultaneously, served two purposes: as a bridgehead to gain access to the hinterlands and their resources, or a bulwark to block the intrusion of external enemies. Efforts by those at the centre of state power to minimise the disadvantages and maximise the opportunities run through Caprivi's history like a red thread and remain central concerns today. In its current incarnation, Caprivi has become a thoroughfare for international business. Its key stopover point, Katima Mulilo is attracting exactly those activities that the Namibian government, donors and investors and business-minded residents of the area recognise and promote as 'development'. Caprivi and its regional capital are now firmly 'on the map' of Namibia and of global commerce; it has become a 'valuable place' for investors. This is no insignificant achievement for the SWAPO government. A decade ago an armed movement emerged in Caprivi that accused the Namibian government of deliberately marginalising Caprivi economically and fought – unsuccessfully – for secession and an independent state. Now it would seem as if this politically volatile frontier has been harnessed to the rest of the country. The periphery has been brought closer to the centre whose administrative muscle, in turn, is strengthened by its co-operation with market forces. I argue that the current boom is more than merely a sign that the Namibian government's authority in Caprivi is growing. Instead, I see it as illustrative of a broader reconfiguration in the nature of state sovereignty. This reconfiguration is engendered by two distinct, but interrelated processes. One changes the nature of state sovereignty from 'above'. It is directly visible in the way the new corridor route leading through Caprivi has been established: the TCC is a space for global business and governance over which Namibian state authorities have limited *de facto* sovereignty. The other changes state sovereignty from 'below'. It is visible in the flourishing of illegal business activities in the shadows of the new corridor. Both processes are eroding the regulatory authority of the Namibian state, but they enhance state power by providing new opportunities for its representatives on various levels of the administrative hierarchy.<sup>3</sup> In the final section, I describe both processes through a closer examination of the current boom in Katima Mulilo.

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<sup>3</sup> Roitman makes a distinction between state regulatory authority and state power to account for what she regards as a 'paradox between the increasing intensity of unregulated activities and the persistent efficacy of state infrastructures' in rural Chad. See J. Roitman, 'Productivity in the Margins: The Reconstitution of State Power in the Chad Basin', in V. Das and D. Poole (eds), *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe, School of American Research Press and Oxford, James Currey, 2004), p. 104.

## Two Transnational Spaces

These two processes arise from the fact that Katima Mulilo is located at the crossroads of what I conceptualise as two transnational spaces. Each of these spaces has a long legacy and, to understand Katima's current boom, recent changes in both need to be considered. The first of these spaces is the recently completed Trans Caprivi Corridor. As I will show, it follows the logic of a late nineteenth century German colonial dream. It is also part of a much larger development, which can presently be observed throughout the member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and beyond. Well over a decade after the demise of the Apartheid regime, powerful alliances of SADC governments, foreign donors and private enterprises are joining forces to bring southern Africa into the mainstream of global transport and investment flows. Whilst African leaders speak of regional integration, it is being effected through South African investors competing with western multinationals and Chinese companies who drive a 21st century scramble for the most lucrative markets, scenic tourist destinations, agricultural land and mineral resources on the continent.<sup>4</sup> This shift does not affect all people and places across the region equally, however. It plays itself out with particular intensity around the nodal points of mineral resource extraction and tourism, production and consumption, and along the transport routes connecting them. All across Southern Africa, and with remarkable speed, so-called 'transport corridors' are being built from scratch or extended, upgraded and rehabilitated from existing rail, road, sea port and electric power infrastructure.<sup>5</sup> Western and Chinese donors and contractors provide the bulk of the grants, soft and hard loans and technical know-how for these projects. The results are not simply physical improvements to old and new long-distance transport arteries. The 'corridors' are part of sophisticated marketing and management schemes such as the Walvis Bay Corridor Group, a 'public-private partnership' designed to enhance the free flow of goods and investments. Its aim is to minimise inefficient or corrupt government regulation and other 'friction' or 'leakage' along the TCC and several other transport routes converging on Walvis Bay.<sup>6</sup> New transnational spaces that are both physical infrastructure and integrated channels of privatised governance extending across the boundaries of formally sovereign states are being created. These spaces are part of emerging worldwide networks of 'transnational governmentality'. According to Ferguson, they increasingly link 'economically valued spaces' – resource-rich and secured enclaves that are 'dispersed around the world – in a point-to-point fashion' whilst their 'less useful' hinterlands are largely neglected.<sup>7</sup> Since the completion of the TCC, Katima Mulilo has become a major node in one such transnational space and Caprivi's urban centre has become 'useful'.

The other transnational space is the Namibia-Zambia borderland (Figure 2). As with the TCC, the borderland not only exists as a physical space but also as a site of practices of governance. To describe its fundamental characteristics I find the concept of margins of the

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4 H. Melber, 'The New Scramble for Africa's Resources', available at <http://www.alternatives.ca/article2793.html>, retrieved on 12 June 2007.

5 Other examples are the Trans Kalahari Corridor, Trans Cunene Corridor, Trans Oranje Corridor, rehabilitation of the Benguela Railway, Maputo Corridor, Lubito Corridor, Beira Corridor, Mtwara Development Corridor, numerous individual road and bridge projects under construction in Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique and a 'Copper Corridor' through Angola, supposed to connect Zambia's copper mines directly to the Angolan port of

"Lubito by 2010 (Bundesagentur für Außenwirtschaft, 12 May 2006, 'Sambia plant "Kupfer Korridor" durch

"Angola", retrieved on 4 August 2006 from

<http://www.bfai.de>). See also F. Soderbaum and I. Taylor (eds), *Regionalism and Uneven Development in Southern Africa: The Case of the Maputo Development Corridor* (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2003).

6 WBCG, 'About Us', available at <http://www.wbcg.com.na/wbcg/about/aboutus.htm>, retrieved on 17 July 2007.

7 J. Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC and London, Duke University Press, 2006), p. 40.

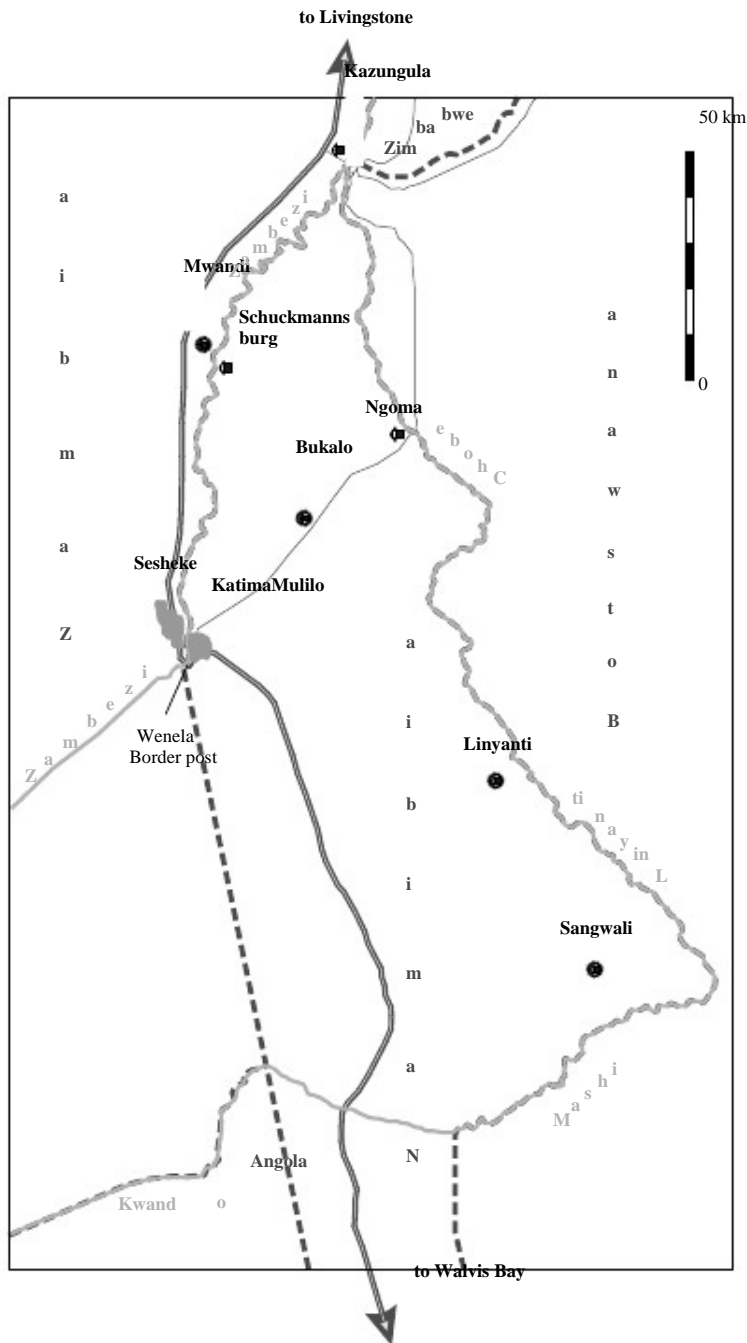


Figure 2. The Namibia-Zambia borderland. Map by the author.

state, developed by Das and Poole, useful.<sup>8</sup> In the way that rules are defined by their exceptions, sovereign state authority defines itself through that which it excludes by demarcating and enforcing the margins of legality, its territory and its citizenry. Yet the fundamental nature of these margins is that here these definitions are continuously contested. Margins are often territorial peripheries as seen from the centre of state power. More generally, Das and Poole emphasise, they are sites and situations where 'law and other state practices are colonised by other forms of regulation'.<sup>9</sup> This definition of margins aptly characterises the realities of daily life in the Namibia-Zambia borderland. The physical condition of the border landscape and the social networks of its inhabitants make it largely impenetrable to the state's regulatory authority. Westward from Wenela the boundary is a straight line running over solid ground through dense bush for 75 km until it intersects with the Zambia-Angola border. It is demarcated and accompanied by a forest cutline, but not fenced and only lightly patrolled. East of Wenela the border follows the central channel of the Zambezi for about 100 km until it terminates at the junction of the borders of Namibia, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe, (see Figure 3) where the river meanders through a maze of islands. By day, but especially in the shelter of darkness, the population engages in a lively cross-border trade in both legally acquired and stolen commodities. They operate through closely-knit and long-standing personal networks that have straddled the international boundary since before its colonial invention in 1890, when Britain and Germany partitioned the Lozi kingdom. As in other African borderlands, the presence of the boundary itself over time has become a central economic and political factor motivating the movement of goods and people across it.<sup>10</sup> Trade is conducted in ways that are often officially illegal, but widely considered as licit by those engaged in them.<sup>11</sup> Police, customs and other frontline agents of the state on both sides of the border make only sporadic attempts at controlling the movement of people and commodities across the international boundary. Where they do, moreover, it is not necessarily to enforce official concepts of law and order, but often to top up their salaries. Life realities in the borderland thus encroach upon the practices of frontline agents of the state. The margins are colonising the centre.

The integrated cross-border economy is, however, itself undergoing a process of change. As in other parts of Africa, parallel commodity chains connecting producers and consumers thousands of kilometres apart are strengthened, expanded or newly emerging in the wake of the new long-distance corridor route.<sup>12</sup> Katima Mulilo is becoming an increasingly important link in such chains.

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8 V. Das and D. Poole, 'State and Its Margins: Comparative Ethnographies', in V. Das and D. Poole (eds), *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe, School of American Research Press and Oxford, James Currey, 2004), pp. 3–33.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

10 A.I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland Under European Rule: A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism* (New York, Humanities Press, 1976); W.F.S. Miles, *Hausaland Divided: Colonialism and Independence in Nigeria and Niger* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1994); D.K. Flynn, 'We are the Border: Identity, Exchange, and the State along the Benin-Nigeria Border', *American Ethnologist*, 24, 2 (May 1997), pp. 311–31; P. Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists and Loyal Citizens on the Ghana-Togo Frontier: The Lie of the Borderlands Since 1914* (Oxford, James Currey, 2002); H. Englund, *From War to Peace on the Mozambique-Malawi Borderland* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2002); B. Chalfin, 'Border Zone Trade and the Economic Boundaries of the State in North-East Ghana', *Africa*, 71, 2 (2001), pp. 202–24; E. Kreike, *Re-creating Eden: Land-Use, Environment and Society in Southern Angola and Northern Namibia* (Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, 2004).

11 Compare W. van Schendel and I. Abraham, 'Introduction: the Making of Illicitness', in W. van Schendel and I. Abraham (eds), *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders and the Other Side of Globalization* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 1–37; Roitman, 'Productivity in the Margins', p. 218.

12 See K. Meagher, 'Manufacturing Disorder: Informal Enterprise and Economic Ungovernance in African Small-firm Clusters', *Development and Change*, 38, 3 (May 2007), pp. 473–503. See also Dobler in this volume.

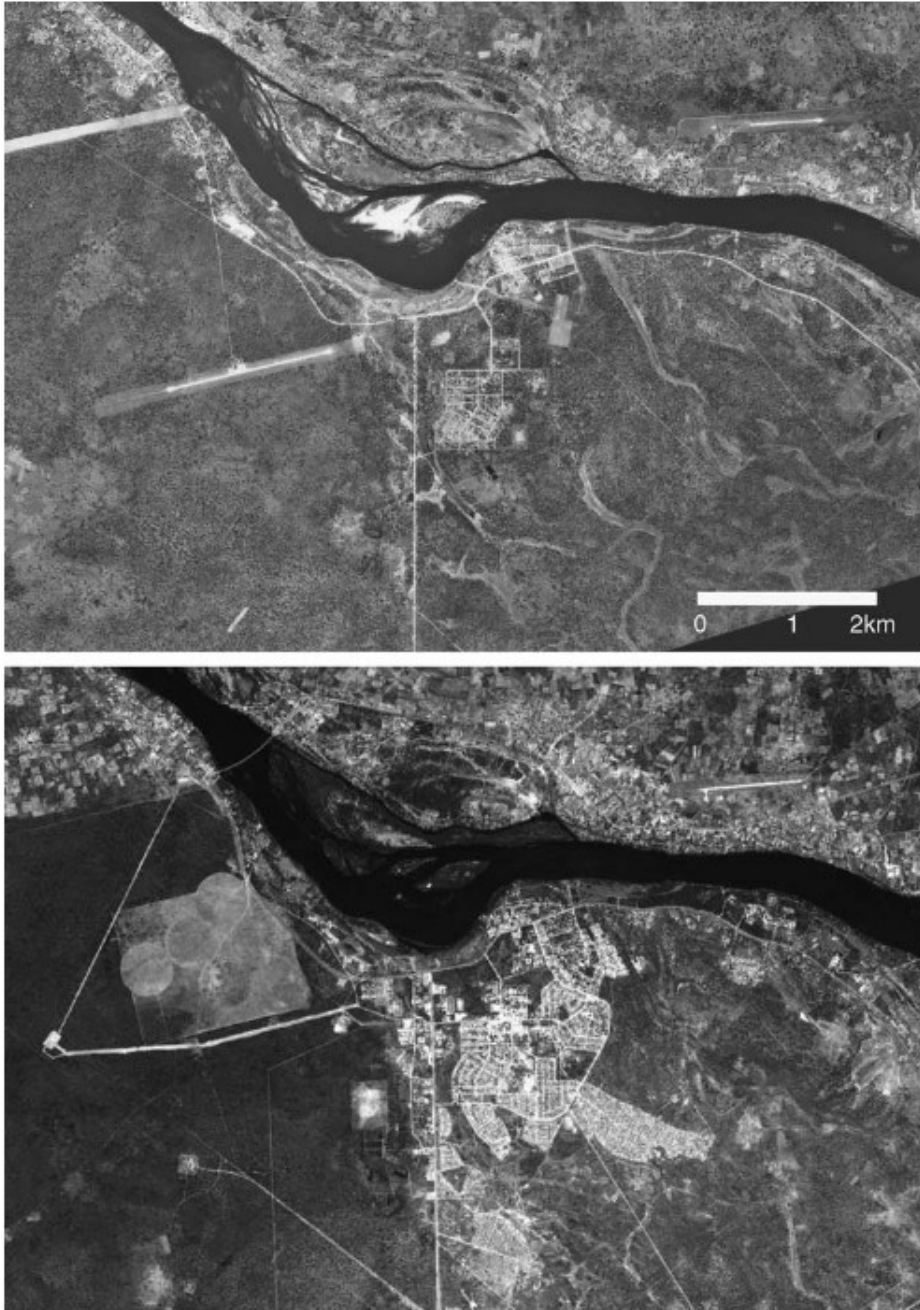


Figure 3. Katima Mulilo in 1972 and 2008. The rectangular-shaped residential area in the centre of the older image is Ngweze. North of Ngweze, and along the main road the recent construction boom is visible. South and Southeast of Ngweze are new formal residential areas and adjacent squatter camps. West of the main road crop production with irrigation is visible in place of the former Wenela air strip. The new bridge, Wenela border post with adjacent squatter camps and boundary outline (now mostly overgrown) are visible in the upper left corner. The river islands between Katima Mulilo and Sesheke are partly submerged during high water and used by smugglers as informal 'export processing zones'. Source: author.



The transnational spaces of the transport corridor and the borderland share some important features. Largely uninhibited by local and national-level state representatives (and sometimes with their active endorsement), commodities move through both spaces across the Namibia-Zambia border. Both spaces are neither entirely removed from attempts at government regulation, nor under the full control of sovereign state authority. Both spaces provide opportunities, but are also potentially problematic for the Namibian (and Zambian) state authorities at various levels of the administrative hierarchy. However, as I show, there are important differences in how state authorities relate to them.

## Danger and Opportunity

The corridor is an opportunity for high-level representatives of the Namibian and Zambian governments to ally themselves with private investors and donor governments. Both serves their own private business interests, but also brings highly visible, politically rewarding 'development' to peripheral and previously neglected parts of their countries. This has helped to counter the claims of separatist movements in both Caprivi and Western Province that posed internal challenges to the formation of the two postcolonial states.

Nevertheless, the alliance with powerful global players and market forces has potential drawbacks for the two governments. Achille Mbembe observes the emergence of extractive structures and mechanisms in Africa whose overall internal logic, profitability, 'requires the exit of the state [ . . . ] and its replacement by fragmented forms of sovereignty'.<sup>13</sup> He argues that one aspect of this trend is the establishment of 'extra-territories' that are welcoming to investors, including transport corridors and tax-free zones through which goods can move largely uninhibited by government regulation.<sup>14</sup> Ferguson and Reno argue that state sovereignty in this situation is no longer grounded in the actual ability of central governments to exercise effective control and maintain a monopoly of legitimate violence over the entire state territory; instead, the simple provision of contractual legal authority to legitimise the extractive work of transnational firms becomes sufficient.<sup>15</sup> According to Ferguson, the new forms of transnational governmentality, which emerge as part of these new ways of doing business in and with Africa, do not replace state authority, but overlay and coexist with it.<sup>16</sup> African leaders are tuning in to the dominant discourse of the 'development industry', urging them to participate in an 'inevitable process of globalisation' and surrender themselves to 'ceding some elements of sovereignty'.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, the new corridor is an opportunity, but it entails the danger of a hollowed-out sovereignty with limited scope for decision-making by the representatives of the state in Windhoek and Lusaka.

Likewise, the transnational space of the borderland is 'dangerous', but it also entails opportunities for representatives of the state. If sovereignty is constituted through defining the margins of the state then failure to control these margins is dangerous to the centre. Between

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13 A. Mbembe, 'Ways of Seeing: Beyond the New Nativism. Introduction', *African Studies Review*, 44, 2 (September 2001), p. 4; see also A. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001); A. Mbembe, 'At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa', *Public Culture*, 12, 1 (January 2000), p. 284.

14 Mbembe, 'Ways of Seeing', p. 5.

15 Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, p. 207; W. Reno, 'How Sovereignty Matters: International Markets and the Political Economy of Local Politics in Weak States', in T.M. Callaghy, R. Kassimir and R. Latham (eds), *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-Local Networks of Power* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 197–215.

16 Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, p. 103.

17 K.Y. Amoako, Executive Secretary UN Economic Commission for Africa (9 December 1999), available at [http://www.uneca.org/eca\\_resources/speeches/amoako/99/120999speech\\_kyamoako\\_ecowas.htm](http://www.uneca.org/eca_resources/speeches/amoako/99/120999speech_kyamoako_ecowas.htm), retrieved on 28 June 2007; B. Love, 'OECD Jobs Report Shows Darker Side of Globalisation', *Reuters Africa* (19 June 2007), available at <http://africa.reuters.com/business/news/usnBAN945342.html>, retrieved on 28 June 2007.

the 'extra-territories', Mbembe and others argue, exist 'zones of flux' and informality, often found in urban areas and the proximity of international boundaries.<sup>18</sup> From the point of view of central government the activities and 'twilight institutions'<sup>19</sup> which thrive in the transnational space of the borderland are, at best, ambiguous. They smell of subversion and threaten the order that postcolonial state authority represents. In the Namibia-Zambia borderland they seem all the more volatile due to the area's history of separatist tendencies, high HIV infection rates,<sup>20</sup> natural disaster, and geographical and cultural distance from the centres of power in Windhoek and Lusaka. Against this background illegal activities such as smuggling and unsanctioned cross-border movement pose a threat to the ability of central state authority to rein-in the periphery. On the other hand, the activity of criminalising the traders and trespassers and enforcing border controls is also an opportunity for state authority. They are publicly seen as doing what Agamben considers fundamental to sovereignty: performing the act of exclusion and inscribing sovereign power onto the bodies of the excluded.<sup>21</sup> And, less visibly, alongside the new parallel commodity chains, new opportunities emerge for frontline representatives of the state to augment their own salaries in the shadows of official state regulation.

In what follows, I examine the way in which the twin themes of opportunity and 'danger' have consistently been faced by external centres of power when trying to impose their domination on the area: first for the colonial German state when it sought to incorporate Caprivi in German Southwest Africa;<sup>22</sup> then through the early decades of Katima Mulilo's development as a peripheral administrative headquarters; through its rapid growth into a Bantustan capital and strategic forward position for the apartheid military; and in its current transformation into a border boom town at the crossroads of two transnational spaces.

## An Access Corridor to the Zambezi: The Caprivi Zipfel under German Rule

Germany acquired what is now Namibia's Caprivi Region in 1890 as part of the territorial swap with Britain known as the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty.<sup>23</sup> In the spirit of contemporary Cape-to-Cairo dreams the 'access corridor to the Zambezi'<sup>24</sup> inspired German hopes for a "direct land connection

stretching from the existing protectorate of Deutsch Sudwest Afrika (DSWA) to the interior of Southern Africa and the German territories in East Africa. DSWA

18 Mbembe, 'Ways of Seeing', p. 5; T.B. Hansen and F. Stepputat, 'Introduction', in T.B. Hansen and F. Stepputat (eds), *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 1–38; W. van Schendel and I. Abraham, 'Spaces of Engagement: How Borderlands, Illicit Flows, and Territorial States Interlock', in W. van Schendel and I. Abraham (eds), *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders and the Other Side of Globalization* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 38–68; M. Niger-Thomas, 'Women and the Arts of Smuggling', *African Studies Review*, 44, 2 (September 2001), pp. 43–71; Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists & Loyal Citizens*.

19 C. Lund, 'Twilight Institutions: An Introduction', *Development and Change*, 37, 4 (July 2006), pp. 673–84.

20 IRIN Plusnews, May 30 2006, 'Namibia: Curbing HIV/AIDS along a transport corridor, retrieved 10 July 2006 from <http://www.plusnews.org>

21 G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998).

22 The dynamics of danger and opportunity were already an integral part of the Lozi kingdom's rulers' attitudes and strategies with respect to their Southeastern frontier, the present-day Namibia-Zambia borderland. For further details, see W. Zeller and B. Kangumu, 'Caprivi Under Old and New Indirect Rule: Falling off the Map or a 19th Century Dream Come True?', in H. Melber (ed.), *Transitions in Namibia – Which Changes for Whom?* (Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 2007), pp. 190–208; L. Flint, 'Historical Constructions of Postcolonial Citizenship and Subjectivity: The Case of the Lozi Peoples of Southern Central Africa' (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2004), pp. 114, 256; M. Mainga, *Bulozi Under the Luyana Kings: Political Evolution and State Formation in Pre-colonial Zambia* (London, Longman, 1973), pp. 133, 154.

23 The official name of the document is 'Anglo-German Agreement of 1890'.

24 Anglo-German agreement of 1890, Article III. 2.

also needed water and labour resources and, via the corridor, both seemed available in great abundance. Such hopes were soon disappointed. The swampy territory was too distant from established German outposts and remained without a colonial administration for nearly two decades. Its value was openly questioned in the colony and the Reich resulting in the sardonic name Caprivi Zipfel.<sup>25</sup> Initially a form of popular mockery surrounding the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty and the person of Chancellor Leo von Caprivi, it gradually came into everyday use in Germany in the early years of the twentieth century, eventually finding its way into publications and official documents.<sup>26</sup>

From 1905, the aggressive political expansionism of Kaiser Wilhelm II led to a more vigorous exploration of the Reich's overseas territories for raw material production and trade.<sup>27</sup> After the genocidal war against the Herero and Nama (1904–1908), German

settlement surged in

DSWA and diamond deposits were discovered near Luderitzbucht, creating an urgent need for increased indigenous labour supplies. The colonial lobby's publications and newspapers in DSWA also speculated about possible deposits of coal, diamonds and copper in the Caprivizipfel.<sup>28</sup> During the same period, the British High Commissioner in South Africa repeatedly urged that the German authorities establish police control in the area to 'clean up' what both sides had come to regard as a lawless zone.<sup>29</sup> Caprivi's commercial opportunities had attracted a colourful population of traders, prospectors and other white frontiersmen, among them individuals who had been uprooted and displaced by the Second South African War. They were allegedly decimating the abundant wildlife, trading firearms and alcohol with the natives, or claiming to represent the German government.<sup>30</sup> These were not issues of peripheral importance: the European colonial powers were at the time debating the best methods of managing the overseas territories and their settler and native populations. German massacres in DSWA and the Anglo-Boer conflicts had exposed the difficulties facing colonial states in trying to impose their rule over the territorial and social margins of their colonies. The state of affairs in Caprivi thus directly undermined the credibility and viability of the colonial endeavour as a civilising mission of Europeans in Africa. In the German colonies the preservation and cultivation of *Deutschtum* (Germanness) among settler colonists was regarded as an essential goal.<sup>31</sup> Whites corrupting natives or 'going native' themselves embodied the antithesis to the civilising mission. They were considered to be dangerous and needing to be either excluded from society or reined in. The margins had to be policed.

After an arduous three-month journey by Hauptmann Kurt Streitwolf and 17 troops, the German flag was finally hoisted at Schuckmannsburg on the banks of the Zambezi in February 1909. Besides policing, Streitwolf had the task of setting up a functioning administration and

<sup>25</sup> Allgemeine Zeitung 1907–08.

<sup>26</sup> For further details see Zeller and Kangumu, 'Caprivi under Indirect Rule', p. 194.

<sup>27</sup> G. Sandner and M. Rossler, *Geography and Empire* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), p. 118.

<sup>28</sup> This was the rationale for Seiner's expedition to the Okavango and Zambezi in 1905–06 (see F. Seiner 1909, 'Ergebnisse einer Bereisung des Gebietes zwischen Okavango und Sambesi (Caprivi-Zipfel) in den Jahren 1905 und 1906', *Mitteilungen aus den Schutzgebieten*, 22, 1 (January 1909), pp. 2–106; F. Seiner, 'Die

''wirtschaftsgeographischen und politischen Verhältnisse des Captivizipfels', *Zeitschrift für Kolonialpolitik*,

''Kolonialrecht und Kolonialwirtschaft, 11 (1909),

pp. 419–21; see also Erklärungen des Professors Dr. Hahn in der Sitzung der Kommission vom 12. Dezember 1906, *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, 18, 2 (January 1907), pp. 25, 73;

''M. Fisch, *Der Caprivizipfel während der deutschen Zeit 1890–1914* (Koln, Rudiger Koppe Verlag, 1996), p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> No Author, 'Der Caprivi-Zipfel', *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, 19 (1908), p. 1,153.

<sup>30</sup> Contemporary sources ostracised them as 'lichtscheue Weisse Elemente': 'white elements avoiding the light of ''day' (N.A., 'Der Caprivi-Zipfel', p. 1,152);

and 'weisses Gesindel – Aasjager und direkt dem Gefangnis entsprungene Verbrecher': 'white good-for-nothings – poachers and prison escapees'. See K. Streitwolf, *Der Caprivizipfel* (Berlin, Susseroth, 1911), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> D.J. Walther, *Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia* (Athens, OH, Ohio University Press, 2002).

exploring the territory's geography and economic potential.<sup>32</sup> Streitwolf installed two paramount chiefs over the Fwe and the Subiya as his direct administrative counterparts. He reported some progress in expelling illegal white settlers, no traces of valuable minerals, an unhealthy climate for European settlement and the Zipfel's only moderate potential as a labour reserve.<sup>33</sup> Difficult transport access remained the decisive constraint to realising this potential before the outbreak of the First World War abruptly ended the brief German presence in Caprivi. The dual chieftaincy introduced by Streitwolf, however, was to survive beyond Namibian independence as the basis of regional and local administration.

### Katima Mulilo: From Contract Labour Hub to Apartheid Garrison Town

The Versailles Conference brought Caprivi, along with the rest of South West Africa (SWA), under the League of Nations Mandate handed to South Africa. Between 1919 and 1939 responsibility for the administration of all or parts of the Caprivi Strip was passed back and forth several times between various administrators in South Africa, SWA and the surrounding British colonies. Their geographical location made Caprivi and the adjacent Barotseland Province of Northern Rhodesia peripheral to developments along the line of rail, native labour being their key asset. By the end of the 1920s, contract labour bureaus were hiring tens of thousands of Lozis who worked and lived in ethnically segregated communities in all the major mining centres of South Africa and the Rhodesias.<sup>34</sup>

In 1935, flood-prone Schuckmannsburg was abandoned in favour of a new administrative centre 70 km upstream at Katima Mulilo. Four years later the outbreak of the Second World War highlighted the strategic location of the Caprivi Strip in the heart of Southern Africa and Pretoria took over its direct administration.<sup>35</sup> A Special Company of the Native Military Corps was based at Katima in 1940 to reinforce protection of the Victoria Falls Bridge near Livingstone 200 km downstream. In the same year, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA or Wenela) built the first air strip near the town. By then hundreds of Caprivi men were joining the stream of Lozi labourers setting off from across the Zambezi every year. The airstrip instantly became Caprivi's most important military and civilian link to South Africa and SWA. In the years following, Katima Mulilo grew gradually and modestly. New offices and housing for a Native Commissioner and other basic administrative facilities were constructed. A Catholic mission from Northern Rhodesia expanded existing health and education facilities. But for postal and banking services Katima's residents had to cross the Zambezi to Sesheke. The South African administrators perceived the Caprivi Strip to be unsuitable for white settlement and low in commercial potential and consequently continued Streitwolf's cost-efficient administrative model of a dual chieftainship under the supervision of one white government officer.

The end of Caprivi's existence as a remote, sleepy backwater came in 1963. Following the Odendaal Commission's recommendation of a roadmap towards a self-governing homeland, the South African administration began to implement large-scale, financially costly plans for direct government-driven development in the Strip. Katima Mulilo, the designated seat of the future 'bantustan government', saw an unprecedented inflow of white officials and inhabitants from the region tasked with steering developmental efforts. Zambia had just

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<sup>32</sup> Streitwolf, *Der Caprivizipfel*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 229–34.

<sup>34</sup> G. Caplan, *The Elites of Barotseland 1878–1969* (London, C. Hurst & Co., 1970), p. 145.

<sup>35</sup> B. Kangumu, *A Forgotten Corner of Namibia: Aspects of the History of the Caprivi Strip, c. 1939–1980* (MA Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2000).

attained independence when work began in November 1964 on a new layout of Katima Mulilo as an apartheid town. The authorities demolished several villages and relocated their inhabitants inside the new town boundaries where developments included administrative and service headquarters and adjacent areas set aside for white settlement, commerce, and the segregated black township Ngweze.

Over the ensuing years, Caprivi men and women were sent for training in government services to South Africa. In the rural parts of Caprivi, government built up health services, road infrastructure, fire and wildlife management, animal husbandry, boreholes and irrigation. At considerable cost, the first unpaved road connections to Katima from the Botswana border at Ngoma and from Rundu through Western Caprivi were bulldozed through the dense bush. In 1969, postal and telegraph services were directly connected to South Africa. Eastern Caprivi was finally inaugurated as a South African Bantu homeland with a Legislative Council in 1972. Four years later, a Caprivi 'government' was formed, complete with a constitution, regulations for 'Caprivian' citizenship, a state flag and national anthem. The Legislative Council consisted of the Fwe and Subiya chiefs and their councillors, who received salaries.

By then Ngweze had grown from a residential area with one primary school in 1965 to an apartheid township (see Figure 2). It had secondary-level schools, teacher training colleges and vocational schools with boarding facilities and several denominational churches. The Bantu Investment Corporation (BIC) had started various business enterprises and an open market. New Look was established as an additional township in 1978, and by 1979 Katima Mulilo officially counted 4,600 inhabitants (including 575 whites), compared to about 500 in 1963, of which 148 were whites.<sup>36</sup>

The actual number of Katima Mulilo's black residents was, however, much higher than these figures suggest, as numerous shanty towns mushroomed in the vicinity of government installations.<sup>37</sup> The townships and shanty towns also became fertile ground for ideas of black emancipation, often introduced by Caprivi residents returning from work or government training in Zambia and South Africa. The white authorities observed these developments with great suspicion. The benign side of strong, government-driven development in Caprivi was thus, from the outset, accompanied by political and security concerns, which gradually moved centre-stage over the following years. The Caprivi African National Union (CANU) was formed in 1963 with the aim of achieving self-government for the Caprivi Strip. Its first President, Brendan Simbwaye, was arrested in 1964 and subsequently disappeared at the hands of the South Africans.<sup>38</sup> Mishake Muyongo, another leading member of CANU and a prominent member of the Fwe royal family<sup>39</sup> escaped arrest and fled to newly-independent Zambia with a group of CANU activists, meeting leading members of SWAPO in Lusaka in November 1964 where Muyongo agreed to a SWAPO-CANU merger. Nowadays he maintains that SWAPO president Sam Nujoma promised that Caprivi would be granted either special political status or complete autonomy after Namibia's independence.<sup>40</sup> SWAPO disputes this claim today, but the issue played a vital role in the emergence of the Caprivi secessionist movement of the late 1990s, which Muyongo masterminded.

<sup>36</sup> K.-G. Schneider and W. Richter,

Kavango und Ostcaprivi. Periphere Wirtschaftsraume im Entwicklungsland

\*\*\* Namibia. Geostudien 13/91 (Köln, Universität Köln, 1991), pp. 130, 133.

<sup>37</sup> According to Bennett Kangumu Kangumu they were known by their inhabitants as by such names as Piggery, Coloureds, Dairy, Mission, Forestry, Lewis, Mahohoma, and Mafulo.

<sup>38</sup> Kangumu, *A Forgotten Corner of Namibia*.

<sup>39</sup> Mishake Muyongo is a direct descendant of Fwe chief Simataa Mamili, who had been appointed by Lozi king Lewanika and was recognised by Streitwolf as the first Fwe chief in Caprivi in 1909. See M. Fisch, *The Secessionist Movement in the Caprivi: A Historical Perspective* (Windhoek, Namibia Scientific Society, 1999), p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> United Democratic Party, 'Caprivi Zipfel: The Controversial Strip' (2005), available at <http://www.caprivi.freedom.com/history.i?cmd¼view&hid¼23>, retrieved on 17 July 2007; Flint, 'Historical Constructions', p. 188.

SWAPO's military wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) employed hit-and-run tactics such as ambushes, laying landmines and sabotage of infrastructure in Caprivi from the late 1960s onwards. South Africa responded with a heavy military build-up, and constructed major army bases, including Omega III in Western Caprivi. In 1965, the Mpacha military airfield was built 25 km outside Katima Mulilo. The Caprivi Strip thereafter began to play an important role in South Africa's regional destabilisation policy aimed at blocking the perceived encroachment of hostile governments and guerrilla movements. At the hands of the military planners, the former access corridor was transformed into a strategic forward position where SADF trained specialised secret military units, like Koevoet, and launched cross-border raids into Zambia and Angola.

The military build-up fuelled further service and infrastructure development and generated additional business and employment locally. It also transformed Katima Mulilo into a garrison town of the SADF: a base located near the centre was hit in a rocket attack on 23 August 1978, killing ten SADF soldiers and wounding ten more.<sup>41</sup> The townscape of Katima Mulilo changed as SADF built bunkers and other structures to shield residents and government installations. In pursuit of suspected SWAPO activists the South African authorities turned to terrorising the black population – SADF increasingly had disciplinary problems with soldiers going on shooting rampages.<sup>42</sup> Despite efforts to impose tight controls along the border with Zambia, many 'Caprivians' migrated to the neighbouring country to work or join the liberation struggle in exile; others flocked to Katima's growing shanty towns and associated with soldiers and government employees.

In the late 1970s, the rear bases and theatre of SWAPO's guerrilla war shifted to Southern Angola. Caprivi remained of strategic relevance, but the apartheid regime's ability to sustain the costly development efforts introduced during the 1960s declined. A phase of stagnation and contraction of governmental services set in and continued until Namibian independence in 1990.

Following the German era, the Caprivi Strip's key asset for its South African administrators remained its forward location in the centre of southern Africa, despite the gradual redefinition of its value from economic to mainly military-strategic considerations. From its intended role as a thoroughfare, the Strip mutated into a bridgehead and first line of defence. Technology and the administrative muscle of the apartheid regime overcame the problems posed by geographic distance. Yet the social transformations induced by the Odendaal Plan also saw another pattern re-emerge: the former lawless frontier zone that the Germans had felt compelled to 'clean up' in 1908 now produced new enemies from within – an organised political opposition among the black population, disciplinary problems within the army and informal urban sprawl with its associated social 'disorder'. Caprivi and Katima Mulilo thus not only came geographically closer to the centre of South Africa's administrative power; the Bantustan and its capital also gave rise to social phenomena that its white administrators sought to stamp out because they were seen to threaten the very nature of the apartheid system. The margins once again 'colonised' the centre.

## Putting Katima Mulilo on the Map since Independence

When the SADF withdrew their troops from the area in the run-up to Namibian independence in 1990, a significant part of the income opportunities in Katima Mulilo and

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<sup>41</sup> P. Stiff, *The Silent War* (Johannesburg, Galago, 1999), p. 205.

<sup>42</sup> According to several Caprivi inhabitants the region's rich wildlife was jointly decimated by local poachers and SADF soldiers and some valuable specimens were allegedly captured and airlifted to South Africa for re-sale.

the region were lost.<sup>43</sup> This was compounded by the return of hundreds of exiles from Zambia and other countries in the early 1990s. Expectations of rapid economic change were high among the 'previously disadvantaged', fuelled by SWAPO's promises in the run-up to independence. In a climate of frustration and competition for scarce opportunities, long-standing rifts between 'traditional' and political party leaders and their supporters became more pronounced during the 1990s and eventually broke out in open violence. Following a security crackdown after the first evidence of an organised secessionist movement emerged, some 2,500 Caprivi residents fled to Botswana in 1998. On 2 August 1999, armed militants calling themselves the 'Caprivi Liberation Army' launched attacks on Namibian government installations in Caprivi, resulting in 15 casualties. President Nujoma declared a state of emergency in the region, which lasted three weeks. Namibian security forces pursued suspected secessionist sympathisers throughout Caprivi, making hundreds of arrests inside and outside Namibian territory and using torture and unauthorised extradition. In (probably unrelated) incidents in late 1999 and 2000, cross-border raids into the Caprivi and Kavango regions by UNITA fighters from Angola led to several casualties among motorists driving along the TCC. For months, military convoys were the only safe option for road travel between Katima Mulilo and the rest of Namibia. Construction work on sections of the TCC, and business and development projects in Caprivi came to a virtual standstill until mid-2000, when the situation normalised.

The secessionist call for a separate 'Caprivan State' continues to make occasional headlines in the Namibian press.<sup>44</sup> The radical core of the movement appears to be a spent force, however. Its leadership is either dead, in exile or on trial in court cases bogged down by endless technicalities. Whether or not their cause will regain momentum remains to be seen. What is undoubted, though, is the SWAPO government's experience of Caprivi politics as a potential threat to Namibia's territorial integrity, its official version of liberation history, and its rhetoric of national reconciliation. In general, Namibia's ruling party has shown little tolerance towards dissenting opinion within and outside SWAPO.<sup>45</sup> Heavy-handed coercive measures dominated the Namibian state security forces' dealings with the Caprivi uprising and its aftermath. However, in recent years the SWAPO government has made progress in bringing Caprivi back into the national fold through rhetorical appeals to its regional leaders and population,<sup>46</sup> visible acts of 'emergency relief'<sup>47</sup> and 'sustainable

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43 The deployment of United Nations and later Namibian Defence Force troops could only buffer out a fraction of these changes. For Western Caprivi, compare J. Taylor, 'The Politics of Identity, Authority and the Environment: San, NGOs and the State in Namibia's West Caprivi' (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, forthcoming 2008).

44 Examples are a pro-secessionist opinion piece published in *Caprivi Vision*, 1 September 2005, the controversy over the revival of the United Democratic Party (UDP) (*The Namibian*, 28 July and 8 September 2006, available at <http://www.namibian.com.na/archives/index.html>; *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 September 2006, available at <http://www.az.com.na/interaktiv/archiv/suche.20154.php?q¼ 1>; *New Era*, 4 and 5 September 2006, available at <http://www.newera.com.na/>). The surfacing of a document which Caprivi separatists claim proves that the 1964 CANU-SWAPO merger was agreed on the condition that Caprivi would become an independent state separate from Namibia (*The Namibian*, 24 January 2007), and the repeated public claims by accused and acquitted high treason suspects that Caprivi is historically 'not part of Namibia' (*The Namibian*, 2 February 2005; 17 January 2007, 17 April 2007 and 14 June 2007).

45 For example, regarding the SWAPO detainee issue, the emergence of opposition parties Congress of Democrats and Rally for Democracy and Progress, and the National Society for Human Rights.

46 SWAPO leaders frequently refer to Caprivi as a potential 'bread basket of the Nation' (*New Era*, 4 July 2006). At the 2006 Heroes' Day celebrations in Katima Mulilo president Pohamba declared 'the Caprivi Region played a significant role in the national liberation of our motherland' and singled out a number of local 'heroes and heroines' of the armed struggle (H. Pohamba, 'Statement on the Occasion of Heroes Day Commemoration', 26 August 2006, available at <http://www.grnnet.gov.na/grnnews.html>, retrieved on 17 July 2007).

47 In 2003, 2004 and 2007 flood relief operations brought high-profile government delegations and extensive media coverage to Caprivi. While some homes, livestock and crops were lost, the dominant rhetoric of 'catastrophe' exaggerated government's role in saving a population that has lived with the Zambezi's natural annual flood cycle for centuries.

development'.<sup>48</sup> The Zambezi bridge and Caprivi's connection to the national tar road grid are testament to the material and symbolic shifts the SWAPO government is aiming for. These examples also highlight the strategic alliances SWAPO has made to achieve these shifts. I have argued elsewhere that this 'development' is a tool used by the Namibian and Zambian governments to appeal to important political power brokers among the 'traditional leaders' on both sides of the borderland.<sup>49</sup> Here, I will focus on those who built and financed the new infrastructure and the creation of the transnational space of the transport corridor, namely international investors and development aid donors.

The 877 m long Zambezi Bridge has replaced a notoriously unreliable pontoon. Until April 2004, this contraption represented the only option for light vehicles to cross directly between Namibia and Zambia. At Sesheke, the new bridge connects with a 205 km highway to Livingstone, which was rebuilt and tarred in 2004. Until then, the frequent accidents and breakdowns along this deteriorating regional traffic artery had earned it the reputation of a 'road of death' among the population of the area. On its southern side the bridge connects with a 400 km section of the TCC running through the Caprivi Region, which was upgraded between the mid-1990s and 2004. German-based engineering and construction companies designed and built the bridge and both roads.<sup>50</sup> The German KfW Bankengruppe<sup>51</sup> provided the bulk of the funding as part of their development co-operation with the Zambian and Namibian governments.<sup>52</sup> Among the many motives for this development, the most important is the Copperbelt. Growing demand in China, India and other rapidly industrialising economies has caused a more than fourfold increase in the world market price for copper since 2003.<sup>53</sup> Transport access to Africa's largest deposits of the metal is a matter of keen interest among buyers worldwide.<sup>54</sup> Walvis Bay is five to seven shipping days closer to Europe and the Americas than Dar es Salaam and Durban, which are thus far the main exit ports serving the Copperbelt.<sup>55</sup> Namibian and foreign investments have greatly expanded Walvis Bay harbour's capacity with new state-of-the-art container handling and dock facilities in recent years. Since the opening of the Zambezi Bridge, trucks carrying copper ore concentrate from the Australian-Canadian owned Dikulushi mine in the south-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo drive along the TCC through Zambia into Namibia.<sup>56</sup>

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48 In recent election campaigns in Zambia and Namibia, candidates of both countries' ruling parties have emphasised the infrastructural development they claim to have brought to Caprivi and Western Province.

49 W. Zeller, "Now We are a Town": Chiefs, Investors, and the State in Zambia's Western Province', in L. Buur and H.M. Kyed (eds), *State Recognition and Democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa: A New Dawn for Traditional Authorities?* (New York, Palgrave, 2007), pp. 209–31; W. Zeller, 'Chiefs, Policing and Vigilantes: "Cleaning Up" the Caprivi Borderland of Namibia', in L. Buur and H.M. Kyed (eds), *State Recognition and Democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa*, pp. 79–104.

50 Examples are the German engineering company JBG Gauff Ingenieure, which designed the Zambezi bridge and CONCOR (until February 2005 held to 44.99 per cent by German-based construction multinational Hochtief), which built the bridge, Livingstone-Sesheke road and several other sections of the corridor road.

<sup>51</sup> KfW stands for Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau. The Reconstruction Credit Institute was formed after the Second World War as part of the Marshall Plan, and is under shared ownership by the German federal (Bund) and state (Länder) governments.

52 JBG Gauff Ingenieure, *Bridging the Gap*, (Frankfurt, H.P. Gauff Ingenieure, 2004), p. 5; K. Dierks, 'The History of the Zambezi Bridge from Namibia to Zambia: 1982–2004', available at <http://www.klausdierks.com>, retrieved on 20 September 2006.

53 [http://www.econbrowser.com/archives/2006/01/soaring\\_commodi.html](http://www.econbrowser.com/archives/2006/01/soaring_commodi.html), retrieved on 5 April 2008.

54 A. Goldstein et al., *The Rise of China and India – What's in it for Africa?* (OECD, 2006), pp. 25ff; The Financial Times reported in 2006 that the price of copper had hit an unprecedented \$6,000 a tonne, double the average price in 2004 (Financial Times, 7 April 2006, p. 14). The International Herald Tribune attributes this price hike largely to the rapidly growing demand from China, which in 2003 passed the United States as the world's top consumer of copper (D. Lague, 'China to Sell Some Copper to Battle Rising Price', International Herald Tribune (15 November 2005), available from <http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/11/15/business/copper.php>, retrieved on 17 July 2007).

55 Namibia Economist, 2 May 2003, available at <http://www.economist.com.na/>, retrieved on 15 June 2006.

56 On their journey through DRC they are accompanied by armed convoys. Personal communication, Jan-Bart Gewald, 13 October 2007.



A smelter at Tsumeb in north-central Namibia, operated by a UK-based company, processes the ore into refined copper, which is then exported through Walvis Bay. As this one example shows, the TCC is now a means by which interconnected transnational business ventures and their nodal points meet. Other enterprises operating along and through the TCC involve the Zambian capital of Lusaka (a major consumer market and manufacturing site), the tourism industry at Livingstone, the salt refineries, fish factories and shipping industry of Walvis Bay, the import of European and American fertiliser, agricultural and mining equipment, and the export of Zambian agricultural and timber products.<sup>57</sup>

The corridor is not, however, merely an all-weather transport route connecting sites of production, consumption and trade. It is also an integrated space of transnational governance, supposed to ensure the smooth conduct of private business across state boundaries without hindrance from governmental red tape. The Walvis Bay Corridor Group (WBCG) is the organisational expression of this agenda. Launched in 1998, its members are African and Namibian-based private and parastatal transport and logistics enterprises, SADC bodies, the German-African Business Association, Namibian government ministries and the Walvis Bay municipality.<sup>58</sup> WBCG aims to facilitate imports and exports to and from Namibia and its landlocked neighbours by developing a regional network of 'transport corridors' converging on the port of Walvis Bay. Among the administrative tools WBCG has developed and lobbied for are free trade agreements within SADC,<sup>59</sup> 'one-stop border posts',<sup>60</sup> 'dry ports'<sup>61</sup> and 'export processing zones'.<sup>62</sup> These are located at key points of transit along the corridor routes, including Katima Mulilo. In WBCG's idealised imagination the TCC functions like a frictionless Teflon-coated pipeline, as the 'corporate philosophy' on their website illustrates: 'The Corridor Group – public and private sector in one team – co-operating to realise our vision – FREE FLOW OF TRADE to and from the SADC region!'<sup>63</sup> Private enterprises and donor governments providing know-how and financing are de facto the driving forces behind these ways of doing business in and with Africa. WBCG has received funding from the Swedish and German governments, the EU and SADC.<sup>64</sup> But Namibian (and Zambian) government representatives are eager to participate and claim ownership. The Namibian High Commissioner to Zambia in June 2007 called upon 'the private sector' to 'do their share' and 'ensure the speedy conclusion of the Trans Caprivi Corridor and to facilitate the smooth flow of cross-border traffic [ . . . ] by utilising infrastructure that the Namibian and Zambian governments must put in place'.<sup>65</sup>

An alliance of southern African governments, investors and development aid donors has created a transnational space that is at least partly removed from state regulation and instead is supposed to ensure that market forces can reign freely. SWAPO regards projects such as the TCC as a major achievement in the nation-building process of a postcolonial Namibia. The SWAPO government's official vision for Namibia's socio-economic development stresses infrastructure development, direct foreign and domestic investment and rapid industrialisation

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57 Walvis Bay Corridor Group (WBCG), 'Trade: Export, Import Commodities', available at <http://www.wbcg.com.na/wbcg/tcc/tcc.htm>, retrieved on 17 July 2007.

58 WBCG, 'Members of WBCG', available at <http://www.wbcg.com.na/wbcg/group/thegroup.htm>, retrieved on 17 July 2007.

59 *The Namibian*, 18 June 2007.

60 *The Namibian*, 12 September 2006.

61 *Times of Zambia*, 24 February 2006, 'Namibia Paves Way for Zambia's Dry Port', available at <http://www.tralac.org/scripts/content.php?id%4=4564>, retrieved on 6 August 2007.

62 See, for example, Walvis Bay Export Processing Zone, available at <http://www.wbepzmc.iway.na>, retrieved on 27 July 2007.

63 WBCG, 'About Us', available at <http://www.wbcg.com.na/wbcg/about/aboutus.htm>, retrieved on 17 July 2007; (capital letters in original).

64 *New Era*, 16 December 2003.

65 *Times of Zambia*, 28 June 2007.

in the agricultural, mineral extraction, manufacturing and tourism sectors.<sup>66</sup> In terms of realpolitik, this has led to an emphasis on visible large-scale projects that are publicly justified by their supposed creation of large numbers of jobs.<sup>67</sup> The national leadership consistently refers to projects such as the TCC to support claims that they are 'bringing development' to Caprivi and other impoverished regions and people in Namibia. Yet, at the same time, a long list of high-profile scandals in recent years has also revealed that members of Namibia's new ruling elite are extracting additional incomes from the embezzlement of public funds and more or less legal investments in parastatal and other companies closely associated with SWAPO 'comrades'. These include several direct or indirect beneficiaries of the TCC.<sup>68</sup>

### Living through Connections, Doing Business in a Border Boomtown

In Katima Mulilo the winds of change are scented by diesel fumes and the smell of fresh cement. Secessionism is 'out', investment is 'in', and a steady stream of trucks have been rolling across the new bridge since May 2004.<sup>69</sup> In the town centre, Namibians, white and Malaysian South Africans, Chinese and multinational corporate investors have built new supermarkets, banks, hardware stores, warehouses and petrol stations with long-distance truck facilities. Government and private investors (among them several high-profile SWAPO members) are developing a prominent section of Katima's Zambezi river shore into a waterfront tourism park with luxury lodges, shops and restaurants. Hopes of making the sprawling investment (whose concrete foundations are below the Zambezi's high water margin) viable are pinned on the fact that, via the new bridge, the Victoria Falls are just a two-hour drive from Katima Mulilo. On a more modest scale, Sesheke is undergoing similar changes. Along the route to Livingstone, investors are buying up what used to be communally-held agricultural land, in particular along the Zambezi shore.<sup>70</sup> The Danish government in 2006 agreed to provide funding for more road construction along the Zambezi further upstream.<sup>71</sup> This was intended to pave the way for further investment in commercial agriculture, tourism and the timber industry in the region.<sup>72</sup> It would also link Katima to the sites of recently discovered diamond and oil deposits near the Angolan border. Katima Mulilo is thus emerging as a regional hub, a bridgehead for business with good transport access where essential goods and services are available in a reliable manner (Figure 3).

66 As laid out in the Namibian Government's Vision 2030. [http://www.npc.gov.na/vision/vision\\_2030bgd.htm](http://www.npc.gov.na/vision/vision_2030bgd.htm), retrieved on 25 March 2008.

67 Examples are the now-defunct Ramatex textile factory, the failed Northland City investment scheme (see Dobler, this volume), table grape plantations on the Orange River and several new uranium mining ventures. A failed plan from the early 1990s for massive sugar cane production in Caprivi was recently reincarnated in a proposed N\$870 million plantation and production plant for bio-diesel fuel by an Israeli investor. SWAPO member Chief Kisco Liswani III of the Masubia Tribal Establishment lobbied strongly for government to fast-track the project which was supposed to put 50,000 hectares of currently communal land under irrigation and result in 300,000 [sic] permanent, plus 300,000 temporary jobs. *New Era*, 28 February 2008.

68 See H. Melber, 'Poverty, Politics, Power and Privilege: Namibia's Black Economic Elite Formation', in H. Melber (ed.), *Transitions in Namibia – Which Changes for Whom?* (Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 2007), pp. 110–30 for details on self-enrichment schemes involving high-level Namibian civil servants and parastatal managers misappropriating public funds for the Walvis Bay export processing zone.

69 Namibia's Investment Newsletter reported in June 2004, 'The mere 20 to 30 vehicles per day which braved the pontoon [ . . . ] have now been replaced by a traffic flow of over 60 heavy vehicles each day. And these are but early days', Ministry of Trade and Industry, Republic of Namibia, 'Frontiers of Commerce Expanded', Namibia's Investment Newsletter, 5 (May 2004), p. 4.

70 Personal communication, Fredrick Mutesa, 25 April 2008; During an interview in June 2004 the Sesheke District Chief of Police offered me his assistance in case I was interested to 'invest' and 'buy land' in the area.

71 *The Post*, 18 December 2006, available from [http://www.postzambia.com/post-read\\_article.php?articleId%19629](http://www.postzambia.com/post-read_article.php?articleId%19629), retrieved on 17 July 2007.

72 *New Era*, 27 July 2006; Barotse Development Trust 2006. Barotse Development Trust, 'Projects', available from <http://www.barotsedevelopmenttrust.com/projects.html>, retrieved 29 November 2005.

A look beyond Katima's booming central business district however suggests that any impression of rapid 'development' must be set against Caprivi's broader socio-economic realities. A 2006 government study states that Caprivi remains the poorest region in the country with a Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) of 36 compared to an overall average of 24.7 for Namibia. Caprivi has the country's highest HIV prevalence rate: 43 per cent – nearly double the national average of 22.5 per cent.<sup>73</sup> In the areas across Caprivi's borders with Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Angola, rates are either known or estimated to be above 40 per cent. Some scholars and policy makers therefore regard Caprivi as a conduit for AIDS to enter the country.<sup>74</sup> Infrastructure for electricity and water, as well as access to education, health and other services remain very limited in the rural areas of Caprivi and some parts of the regional capital. The Katima town council is weighed down by scandals, internal feuds and limited management skills. It seems incapable of collecting sufficient revenues to pay its employees and various parastatal service providers. This has resulted in frequent shut-downs of water and electricity supplies affecting all local users, including the state hospital.<sup>75</sup> On 5 March 2008, two stories illustrating the contrasts appeared in the same edition of the daily *New Era*. The first reported that construction work on the N\$128 million Zambezi Waterfront Tourism Park was about to begin; the other that Katima's hospital, schools and thousands of residents had been without tap water for five days (an underground pipeline had burst because the town's ageing water infrastructure had not been maintained due to 'a lack of finances').<sup>76</sup> Shanty town residents have repeatedly protested against poor municipal services.<sup>77</sup> On several occasions central government has had to intervene directly to force administrators and their finances back on track.<sup>78</sup> Since 2003, the key player in urban development in Katima Mulilo has been Luxembourg's state donor agency, Lux Development. Its programmes, worth, e3.6 million, fund the renewal of the Katima Mulilo open market and support urban development through the formalisation of informal settlements in the town.<sup>79</sup> While this has brought visible improvements for some areas and residents, the growth of new squatter camps on the outskirts of Katima outpaces the formalisation of the old ones that emerged during the apartheid era.<sup>80</sup> Rural-urban migration has expanded from within Caprivi to other rural areas in northern Namibia and western Zambia.

The degree of intermarriage and kinship ties among the descendants of Lozi migrants remains very high. In search of a better life in relatively-wealthier Namibia, Zambian citizens have come to Caprivi for many years. Probably around several thousand are working as herdsmen or household maids in the rural areas, or as day labourers, sex workers and traders in urban businesses, bars and markets. Many residents on both sides of the borderland lead a cross-border lifestyle that defies clear categories of formal citizenship on a daily basis, as the following example illustrates. Godfrey Simasiku<sup>81</sup> runs a shop in the market of Mwandji, a Zambian town located 70 km from Sesheke towards Livingstone along the newly tarred

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73 Namibia National Planning Commission (Windhoek, Government Printer, 2006).

74 For recent studies describing Caprivi as an access corridor for HIV to enter Namibia, see IRIN Plusnews, 30 May 2006, 'Namibia: Curbing HIV/AIDS Along a Transport Corridor', retrieved 10 July 2006 from <http://www.plusnews.org>; C. Keulder and D. Lebeau, *Ships, Trucks and Clubs: The Dynamics of HIV Risk Behaviour in Walvis Bay*, IPPR Briefing Paper No. 36 (Windhoek, Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006); D. Lebeau, *Turning Corridors of Mobility into Corridors of Hope: Mapping the Link Between Mobility and HIV Vulnerability in Namibia* (Geneva, International Organisation for Migration, 2006).

75 *The Namibian*, 16 October 2000; 23 July 2003.

76 *New Era*, 5 March 2008, retrieved 5 March 2008 from <http://www.newera.com.na/page.php?id%5983> and <http://www.newera.com.na/page.php?id%5984>.

77 *New Era*, 16 August 2007, retrieved 16 August 2007 from <http://www.newera.com.na/page.php?id%3330>.

78 *The Namibian*, 31 May 2002; 12 December 2003, 4 June 2004, 4 August 2004.

79 Lux Development, *Namibia-Luxembourg Co-operation* (Luxembourg, 2007), pp. 5, 12.

80 Interview Michael Mudabeti, Mayor of Katima Mulilo, Katima Mulilo, 5 September 2002.

81 I have used a pseudonym here.

section of the TCC (compare Figure 2). The market represents an easily accessible and cheap source of consumer goods for customers from Mwandí and nearby villages. People living in and around Schuckmannsburg, located just across the river in Namibia, also frequently visit Mwandí. Their Namibian dollars are a relatively stable currency that can be re-sold for an extra profit to traders from Sesheke who need them to buy supplies across the border in Katima Mulilo. Mr Simasiku is in his early 30s, a priest in the Apostolic Church and a respected young family man. He sells a variety of food and small household items and his business is expanding. In 2004, Mr Simasiku built a second shop near the junction of Mwandí's main street with the just-completed corridor highway. He closely follows changes in the prices and profit margins of his merchandise. If price advantages of the Katima Mulilo-based wholesalers over those in Livingstone are significant enough he becomes a part-time smuggler. On a typical cross-border business trip, Mr Simasiku takes Namibian dollars accumulated from his Namibian customers and travels to Sesheke. At the Wenela border post he pays the official fee of 500 Zambian Kwacha<sup>82</sup> for a border pass and crosses legally into Namibia. In Katima he meets with his local associates and investigates the day's transport options to Schuckmannsburg. Mr Simasiku then buys merchandise such as salt, soft drinks, cough medicine or blankets from one of the Katima wholesale dealers, loads them and accompanies the consignment to a place on the river banks near Schuckmannsburg. This is illegal, as the pass from Wenela is only valid within the Katima Mulilo municipality. Near Schuckmannsburg, Mr Simasiku hires a local acquaintance with a canoe. At nightfall, they smuggle the shipment across the border to Mwandí. The only 'border guards' they fear and are likely to encounter are hungry crocodiles and enraged hippopotami. The Schuckmannsburg border guards hardly ever patrol at night, the police at Mwandí never. Godfrey Simasiku then sleeps in his own home. To 'legalise' his journey he crosses back illegally to Schuckmannsburg the following day, travels to Katima, re-enters Zambia through Wenela and gets the 'in' stamp for his border pass. If he still has leftover Namibian currency he sells it in Sesheke before returning to Mwandí. As an epilogue, some of the goods transported in this operation later cross the Zambezi once more, in the shopping bags of Godfrey Simasiku's Namibian customers.<sup>83</sup>

Mr Simasiku's intriguing business model is similar to that of hundreds of Zambian citizens who earn a living from the sale of vegetables, fish and textiles at the Katima Mulilo open market and from the export of petrol, alcohol and soft drinks to Sesheke.<sup>84</sup> Their merchandise is transported across the border by 'human taxis', middlemen who skilfully negotiate and circumvent border controls, the river's currents and fauna. Meanwhile, the traders themselves enter and exit Namibia along paths demarcated by more or less official regulations. While the former know the routes in the landscape, the latter know how to use legal and 'half-legal' documents, market levies, small fees, favours and bribes to keep immigration, customs and town council officials from interfering with their business.<sup>85</sup> Traders like Mr Simasiku have no intention of staying permanently in Namibia.<sup>86</sup> They are perpetually in transit between the multiple nodes of their cross-border networks, cultivating private and business contacts and skilfully exploiting differences in prices, currency exchange rates and regulatory regimes demarcated by the border. Their daily practices constitute the Namibia-Zambia borderland as a transnational space in its own right. This space was well-established long before the arrival of the TCC, but in the few years since then

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82 ca. e1 in 2007

83 Interview Godfrey Simasiku, Mwandí, 25 May 2004.

84 N.M. Nickanor, M. Conteh and G. Eiseb, 'Unpacking Huge Quantities into Smaller Units: Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Between Namibia and Her Northern Neighbours' (unpublished manuscript, Windhoek, 2007), p. 23.

85 Nickanor et al., 'Unpacking Huge Quantities', p. 20.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

it has undergone changes that are literally as far-reaching as those brought on by the corridor. The new bridge and recent boom have not changed long-established life patterns completely, but significantly expanded the geographic extent of Katima's attraction.<sup>87</sup> Taking advantage of the newly improved infrastructure, new commodity chains are emerging between producers and consumers thousands of kilometres apart. These chains are running parallel to sections of the TCC.

The Namibia-Zambia borderland is an important link, a space of transition from one trade regime, law enforcement regime, currency zone, and a host of other more or less official practices to another. Borderland residents who have long been engaged in cross-border trade find themselves in the company of newcomers. Angolan and Zimbabwean nationals from up and down the Zambezi are mingling with long-distance traders from as far away as Malawi, Tanzania and DRC. They deal in raw diamonds from Angola, Asian textiles imported via east Africa, Chinese pirate DVDs, Scotch whisky, Congolese carvings, consumer electronics, car parts – the list is long and constantly evolving. In Katima Mulilo, Sesheke and the no man's land of the Wenela border post these commodities are rarely consumed. They are re-packaged, re-priced, re-sold and re-loaded onwards to the next middle-man or woman. Katima Mulilo thus emerges as a regional hub, not only of the 'visible' traffic of goods, investments and people moving through the TCC, but also the trafficking emerging in its shadows. And it is the combination of both trends that constitutes the ongoing transformation of Katima Mulilo into a boom town at the crossroads of two transnational spaces.

The chief of the Namibian police in Caprivi in 2004 conceded that his forces are unable to prevent the daily illegal border crossings and described them as an integral part of life in the borderland.<sup>88</sup> Occasionally, members of the police have started a trading business of their own. A former chief of police in Caprivi was investigated for dealing in raw diamonds from western Angola. The former commander of Schuckmannsburg border post was sacked in 2003 after his superiors learned he had been smuggling fish, television sets, radios, blankets, ammunition and alcohol on a large scale across the border.<sup>89</sup> Regarding the illegal cross-border trade of petrol at Wenela, Nickanor et al. write: 'The level to which Namibian and Zambian border authorities are ignoring the [ . . . ] situation sowed the seeds of doubt of possible complicity of these authorities in this illegal trade'.<sup>90</sup> On other occasions the Namibian police in Caprivi have acted closer to the letter of the law and reasserted territorial sovereignty more vigorously. In sporadic sting operations, non-Namibian nationals have been rounded up and deported and unlicensed traders have been expelled from the Katima market, but usually not for long. Re-entering Namibia illegally is too easy, and business and work opportunities are too promising for many to be deterred.

The Caprivi police chief's frank assessment and relaxed attitude seems pragmatic and appropriate considering the everyday realities of borderland life. But they also mask the fact that state security forces are not only passively observing the developments in the shadows of Katima's boom; some cash in on new opportunities while others occasionally go beyond the mere threat of force. Two months after the opening of the Zambezi bridge, on 15 July 2004, Zambian national Francis Sikwai Musanza died instantly when struck in the abdomen by a bullet fired by Mofat Muyandulwa, a member of the Namibian border police. Mr Musanza was allegedly fishing illegally in Namibian waters in the Nsundwa area, not far from

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<sup>87</sup> Compare also Zeller, 'Chiefs, Policing and Vigilantes'.

<sup>88</sup> Interview, Hieronymus Goraseb, Chief Inspector of Namibian Police for Caprivi Region, Katima Mulilo, 15 April 2004.

<sup>89</sup> Zeller, 'Chiefs, Policing and Vigilantes', p. 96.

<sup>90</sup> Nickanor et al., 'Unpacking Huge Quantities', p. 30.

Schuckmannsburg. He was part of a group of eight Zambian and five Namibian nationals who were jointly operating a seasonal fishing camp in a tributary of the Zambezi. The surviving Zambian nationals were arrested and charged with illegal entry into Namibia while two of the Namibians were charged with harbouring illegal immigrants. The police officer faced disciplinary measures.<sup>91</sup> In a separate incident on 14 January 2004 another Zambian national was shot and wounded by a Namibian border guard. Leon Kakoma had tried to smuggle two sacks of mangos across the Zambezi from Sesheke for a Zambian female operating a stall at the Katima Mulilo open market.<sup>92</sup> Life in the borderland thus remains unpredictable, arbitrary and precarious.

## Conclusion

The completion of the Zambezi Bridge in May 2004 at Katima Mulilo is not without irony. One hundred and fourteen years after its inception, the colonial utopia which motivated Chancellor von Caprivi's administration to negotiate an access corridor to the interior of southern Africa finally came to fruition. The strategic location of the Caprivi Zipfel was recognised but not realised under German rule. It later became part of the costly and ultimately unsustainable paradigms of the apartheid state's social engineering and security. Now the colonial 'access corridor' has become a conduit for global 21st century commerce. The new corridor route has put Caprivi and its regional capital 'on the map'. A closer examination of how this has been achieved, and the outcomes it creates on the ground in Katima Mulilo suggests, however, that the recent infrastructure development and business boom have not strengthened the territorial sovereignty of the Namibian state over Caprivi in a straightforward manner. Sovereignty has instead been reconfigured in two ways.

First, the corridor route itself is physically located within the territory of Namibia and other states it runs through, but it is essentially 'extra-territorial', to a large extent governed by private business and development aid donor's interests. Their priorities may coincide to some extent with the interests of individual Namibian state representatives of the ruling SWAPO party, who have business or political 'investments' associated with the corridor. The official version of 'development' is highly visible along the corridor route and the facts of the boom serve to support government's political claim over the former renegade province. Beyond a narrowly confined realm of rapidly expanding formal business activity involving a well-networked national and transnational elite, the effects of the TCC are already spilling over or trickling down to other people and places. But this 'shadow' side of the boom, which constitutes the second reconfiguration of sovereignty, does not evolve according to the official government vision of development. The corridor has caused a boom of illegal business activities in the Namibia-Zambia borderland. The borderland serves as a parallel export processing zone for local, but increasingly also for long-distance traders. In this other transnational space we encounter winners who can and losers who can't adapt to the rapid changes – or simply happen to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Through both processes of reconfiguration the power of individual representatives of the state is enhanced but state regulatory authority is successfully by-passed. As long as the current boom of Katima Mulilo continues, the bustling activity may distract from the fact that in the margins of this 'development', social phenomena are in-the-making that are already prompting the Namibian state authorities on all levels to assert sovereignty more vigorously.

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91 During field work in the Schuckmannsburg-Mwandi area I heard of several undocumented cases of Namibian border guards physically abusing Zambian nationals they had found crossing the border. These allegations were made by both Namibian and Zambian citizens. Compare Zeller, 'Chiefs, Policing and Vigilantes'.

92 Times of Zambia, 12 March 2004.

Corruptible state security members, rampant HIV infection, the influx of illegal aliens, impoverished rural areas that continuously depend on government food aid and other handouts – these are the facts that already colonise the centre of the state from its margins and define the new ‘dangerousness’ of Caprivi. As long as these can be contained within the region through benevolent government intervention, and as long as the smooth flow of commodities and investments along the TCC is not disturbed, there is no immediate impetus for government agents to take drastic action. But global commerce and tourism undergo business cycles that are entirely out of the hands of Namibian state representatives and can easily upset this brittle balance. Since the secessionist movement was crushed in 1999, state security forces have only sporadically acted to reign in or expel some of those whose livelihoods are dependent on the opportunities found in the margins of the boom. This may change, particularly once Caprivi’s social problems are no longer perceived as peripheral but as a threat to the foundations of the postcolonial state. When central government focuses on Caprivi and Katima Mulilo as a conduit and breeding ground of HIV, illegal aliens and contraband flooding into the country, the opportunities associated with the territory will quickly come to be seen as a threat to national sovereignty.

Katima Mulilo is more than a node or stopover point in an emerging transnational extra-territory. People like Godfrey Simasiku are populating and thriving in the spaces and shadows emerging around the new transport corridor of global commerce. They transcend, but also creatively use, the geography of state sovereignty to find their own solutions to pressing problems of day-to-day survival. The moves and manoeuvres by Godfrey Simasiku, however seemingly chaotic, are part of a precisely calculated transnational business venture. Mr Simasiku and the other smugglers, sex workers, herdsman, and long-distance traders we encounter today in Katima Mulilo are investing their effort and taking risks to make use of the opportunities arising in a grey zone of illegal activities, which they themselves consider as licit.<sup>93</sup> Their actions are not politically motivated, but state authorities have reasons to perceive them as a latent challenge to Namibian state sovereignty. When the current boom slows down or comes to an end, social strife in a hot spot like Katima Mulilo is likely to become an issue the state authorities will be ill-prepared for, but forced to handle more proactively than at the present time. At such a moment, the ‘dangerousness’ of Caprivi is likely to present an opportunity for officials to assert authority through the use of state violence, and the exclusion from citizenship and state territory of those who make a living in the margins of the current boom. Given the power of the transnational interests that have caused the reconfiguration of state sovereignty associated with the TCC, performing the act of exclusion and inscribing sovereign power onto the bodies of the excluded may be the only option left for Namibian officials to re-assert their power when the boom goes bust.

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93 Schendel and Abraham, ‘The Making of Illicitness’.