

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

Wolfgang Zeller, University of Edinburgh

wolfgang.zeller@ed.ac.uk

**(Chapter 3.) Who welcomes whom? Staging the politics of celebration on the
Namibia-Zambia border**

Abstract:

This chapter relies on a detailed account of the 2004 opening of the Zambezi Bridge at Katima Mulilo to examine the actions and alliances the leadership of the Namibian and Zambian states were engaging to broadcast their power into the borderland at the time. The analysis draws on previous works in political anthropology on the public performance of state power in Africa and challenges the official narrative that sovereign state authority has created a new conduit for development and progress in the borderland. Instead, the new transport corridor is described as a politically contested space of transnational governance “from above”, which is the outcome of an alliance of powerful interests involving high-level Namibian and Zambian government representatives, international donors and investors, and so-called “traditional leaders” based in the borderland. The individual and collective interests and agency of these players are situated in the context of regional history established in chapter 2.

**3.1. Introduction: Bridges, Togetherness and Separation - the Public Performance of
State Authority in the African Postcolony**

‘The struggle for Namibia’s independence was a national endeavour. (...) The residents of the Caprivi Region were no exception in this national duty. (...) Comrade Simbwaye is one of the greatest heroes of the Namibian struggle for national independence since he never wavered. He died for the total liberation of Namibia rather than compromise the territorial integrity of his motherland. History will judge harshly any person or group of persons who make any attempt to dismember any part of our republic’ (Namibian President Hifikepunje Pohamba at Heroes Day commemoration, Katima Mulilo, 26th August 2006).

‘The MMD administration wants Western Province to move from the poorest in the country to possibly the richest. This can only be done through upgrading the infrastructure. Government will encourage investment in Western Province in order to create employment and enhance income to the local

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

community’ (Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa to party cadres of his Movement for Multiparty Democracy in Western Province, quoted in *The Post*, 7th December 2004).

When we were making kushowelela there, I’m sure the people who are not Barotse, the presidents and the ministers, they were ashamed because they don’t know it. They were indeed looking at us like it was a new thing to them’ (Munukayumbwa Mulumemui, Barotse Royal Establishment, Mwandia, 21st May 2004).

This chapter presents a detailed account of the 2004 opening of the Zambezi Bridge at the Wenela border post to examine the actions and alliances the leadership of the Namibian and Zambian states were engaging to broadcast their power into the borderland at the time. My situated analysis of the event challenges the official narrative of sovereign state authority creating a new conduit for development and progress in the borderland. I argue that the bridge and the new cross-border transport corridor it opened up are a politically contested space of transnational governance, created by an alliance of powerful interests involving high-level Namibian and Zambian government representatives, international donors and investors, as well as so-called “traditional leaders” based in the borderland. Through the examination of this alliance, the chapter contributes to my dissertation’s overall analysis how the Namibian and Zambian states’ assertions of territorial sovereignty are being negotiated with residents and powerful players in the two countries’ shared borderland.

In my reading, the above statements by the Namibian and Zambian heads of state are attempts to bring peripheral regions rhetorically into their governments’ respective narratives of nation building. President Pohamba emphasized individual and collective acts of heroism in the liberation struggle which preceded Namibian independence from South Africa’s apartheid regime in 1990. He cautioned those who dare to question the official truth and sent a clear warning to the Caprivi secessionists. President Mwanawasa promised to turn the tide of Zambia’s three decades of gradual socioeconomic decline by aligning his administrations’ efforts with the forces of liberal market economy. Both presidents were addressing audiences in provinces which, until then, had been geographical and political peripheries within both countries. They were poorly connected to the capital centers of Windhoek and Lusaka and separatist movements had emerged on both sides of the

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

borderland. The third quote, by a senior member of the Barotse Royal Establishment, could be interpreted as a vignette illustrating that grassroots voices from the borderland were aiming and able to put an alternative and vernacular spin on the May 2004 opening ceremony of the Zambezi bridge, and the official narrative of development and (trans-)national integration it was designed to convey. My analysis will show, however, that BRE and other representatives of traditional authority, while publicly asserting their autonomy on the highly visible stage provided by the opening ceremony, were at the time not clearly outside the alliance of powerful interests, which had made the new infrastructure possible. While asserting their autonomous stance publicly they were, in fact, becoming part and parcel of the emerging field of transnational governance, which built it.

My use of a public performance of state authority as a case to analyse political and socio-economic relations draws on a well-established strand of work in social anthropology and African studies. In 1938 Max Gluckman witnessed the opening ceremony of a new bridge in northern Zululand. His 1940 ‘Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand’ (Gluckman 1952) has since become a classic of social anthropology. The essay first developed the *extended case method* and represented a major contribution to the scholarly critique of racial segregation in South African society. Gluckman provided a detailed account of the events on the day of the 1938 bridge opening and the actions of those attending the ceremony. He demonstrated that the attempt to construct a coherent representation of relations between white and black Zulu participants as clearly segregated along the racial divide was fraught with tensions that emerged in the context of the ceremony. Blacks and whites, he showed, were actually in a relationship of simultaneous togetherness and separation. While the white colonial regime held the monopoly of physical violence, blacks and whites were both part of a single social system dominated by the integration of Zululand into the South African industrial and agricultural economy. This necessitated both groups to adapt their behavior to each other in socially determined ways when they associated with one another. Gluckman showed this through several examples of blacks and whites adopting elements of each other’s ritual practices during the bridge opening ceremony (Cocks 2001: 753). Gluckman’s later colleague, Manchester anthropologist Victor Turner, further pursued the concept of

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

ritual practices as dynamic openings (Turner 1969)¹. Turner emphasized the importance of rituals as a process generating and not just reflecting new social phenomena and paid close ethnographic and analytical attention to the relevance of hidden processes within rituals for political practice.²

In his 'Provisional notes on the Postcolony', republished as a chapter of his 2001 book, Achille Mbembe examines state-society relations in contemporary Africa through the aesthetics of public rituals of postcolonial state power. Five decades after Gluckman, Mbembe saw a new paradox of simultaneous togetherness and separation which led him to develop his concept of *commandement*. Mbembe argues that, in the absence of tangible material results that would be relevant for the everyday life of its citizens, the postcolonial state delivers overblown and glorifying representations of itself and its top representatives. Under these circumstances, state power seeks to institutionalize itself as an untouchable 'fetish'. Public spectacles become a key aspect of this project and serve to further consolidate the status quo of mutually disempowering relations between the dominant and those apparently dominated. The state commandeers the dancing bodies of its subjects. It colonizes and appropriates the 'debris' of ancestral ritual genres, which are emptied of their meaning and reduced to mere ornamentation. Arguing with Bakhtin (1981), Mbembe claims that the postcolonial state engages in an official 'monologue' where people are spoken to but cannot speak. Despite the incoherence of state power's *commandement*, both rulers and ruled partake in it, and their relationship is characterized by conviviality rather than resistance. According to Mbembe, the postcolonial subjects willingly engage in 'baroque practices' of worship for the state-as-fetish (Mbembe 2001:129). They have 'internalized the authoritarian epistemology to the point where they reproduce it themselves in all minor circumstances of daily life'. An 'intimate tyranny' therefore links the rulers with the ruled (Mbembe 2001:128).

Karlström believes that Mbembe's bleak and dark vision overemphasizes the ideological power and centrality of the postcolonial state and that his pessimistic portrayal of state-society relations is too radical (Karlström 2003:57). He notes that Mbembe's

¹ The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (1969), Aldine Transaction 1995.

² Bell (1997: 129f.) notes that political rituals are not simply the form aspect of an already existing power configuration, but actually an intrinsic element in its construction.

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

perspective on African ceremonialism focuses almost exclusively on “spectacles staged by rulers for their subjects” (Ibid:64). Following Bakhtin, Karlström emphasizes the relevance of studying occasions where the stage for public political rituals is set by the subject population. To argue his case, Karlström juxtaposes two different kinds of public rituals in postcolonial Uganda. The first case is the official celebration of Uganda's 1991 Independence Day in Kampala. It aligns well with Mbembe's argument, since popular expectations are “satisfied with regard to the public enactment of power”, whereas they are “frustrated with regard to substantive reciprocities” (ibid.:71). The state's Independence Day monologue is inflated to the extent that the general population is hardly able to directly witness the state ritual, and instead confined to a distant space behind a police cordon. Rudimentary elements of reciprocity still exist in representational forms, but have been emptied of all meaningful substance. Karlström then contrasts this with the visits of prominent state officials to rural areas of the Buganda kingdom. Here, he argues, a social matrix of substantive reciprocities still exists or can be re-claimed. In return for a hospitable reception involving various forms of scripted interaction, such as musical entertainment, sports and feeding of the guest, the visitor becomes bound by an obligation to respond to the needs of his hosts. Karlström stresses that the community has options to follow up on these expectations and thereby hold state representatives accountable. Far from zombifying, he argues, these occasions of public rituals are empowering opportunities for those who stage them (ibid:67).

While I agree with Karlström's argument that Mbembe overemphasizes the centrality of the state in postcolonial spectacles, the case he cites to support his argument is not entirely convincing. Karlström does not make explicit the state-like quality of the Buganda kingdom, which itself has managed to establish a government, parliament, bureaucracy and physical center of power in the form of government buildings. Similar to the Asante kingdom in Ghana, Buganda has sent envoys to foreign countries and engaged in bilateral negotiations with World Bank officials (Englebert 2002:350). The kingdom is led by a closely-knit oligarchy that is well-connected to Uganda's political and business elites (ibid: 349, 354, 359, 362). While Englebert also sees scope for 'Born-again Buganda' to make a plausible claim to share the role of state governance, he is cautious regarding the possibility for this to 'trickle down' to the Buganda subjects. He instead finds that “as yet, the economic

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

actions of the kingdom have contributed little to local development, privileging instead its own institutional reconstruction while exacting a quasi-fiscal burden on its subjects” (ibid 360).

The 2004 opening of the road and bridge across the Zambezi was a case where reciprocity has been to some extent re-established between the representatives of two postcolonial states and their respective citizens. The new bridge served as a very concrete and tangible reminder for the inhabitants of the Namibia-Zambia borderland that their elected officials were indeed delivering on earlier promises of “bringing development” to them. However, in order to assess who is actually delivering what and to whom, it is necessary to examine the alliances into which the two governments’ leaders had entered in order to achieve this development. Representatives of all major players in this alliance were attending the opening ceremony, which therefore lends itself for such closer analysis. Besides the heads of state and bureaucrats from Namibia and Zambia, these were firstly the delegates of international donors and private business enterprises which had financed, engineered, or were otherwise involved with or benefiting from the project, and secondly high-level representatives of various “traditional” authorities from the surrounding areas on both sides of the borderland.

From the way these representatives physically congregated at the opening ceremony emerges another important observation. The bridge opening took place in a similar spatial setup as the Ugandan Independence Day monologue observed by Karlström: a VIP zone cordoned off by state security forces. Inside were the leaders with their distinguished guests and selected “cultural” or “folklore” groups providing scripted entertainment designed to represent “the people”. Outside was a large crowd of spectators stretching their necks to get a glimpse of the action. In an inversion of Gluckman’s 1938 bridge opening in Zululand, the Zambezi bridge opening can be read as a scripted ritual enactment of togetherness that reveals the actual facts of separation, which are at the heart of this postcolonial social situation and society. Separation in the latter case no longer has the element of racial segregation problematized by Gluckman. Instead, it is defined by a clear and visibly policed dividing line between a transnationally networked political-economic elite on the inside, and the non-elite on the outside of the ceremonial space. Yet in this particular case, the spatial separation into VIPs and outsiders, which inevitably travels with all state leaders’ security

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

apparati, also provided a highly visible stage for a competing enactment of vernacular quasi-state power and its interpretation. As I will show, a high-level delegation from the Barotse Royal Establishment took this stage in what I interpret as a deliberate attempt to hijack the bridge opening ceremony. This episode opens the possibility for an interpretation of the event, which conforms neither to Mbembe’s nor Karlstöm’s arguments on the public performance of state authority in the African postcolony. The BRE delegation had not staged the Zambezi bridge opening, but when they did literally take this stage their actions did not conform to the template of depoliticised cultural folklore in praise of the leaders, which are at the heart of *commandement*. They instead attempted to put their own template on the event, playing on their supposed ability to bridge the divide between those in- and outside the VIP zone. The location between that Namibian and Zambian border posts added further symbolic meaning to this event: The no man’s land was more than just a mere backdrop but a highly visible and symbolic stage for the enactment of different ideas of statehood.

In the following sections I seek to establish a clearer understanding of these relations of power through a description and analysis of the background and various stages of the social situation of the bridge opening ceremony. My analysis will treat the temporally and spatially limited social situation of the Zambezi Bridge opening as a microcosm where relations of power and their contestation were enacted by the participants.

3.2. A New Deal for the Namibia-Zambia Borderland – Secessionism is “out”, Investment is “in”

In March 2000, the 205 kilometer journey from Livingstone at the Victoria Falls to Sesheke took eight hours on what locals referred to as “the road of death,” a hazardous track with deep sand and giant potholes that had finished off many vehicles and caused numerous fatal accidents. Regular bus connections had ceased years earlier. The road has not always been this bad. In the mid-1960s the existing gravel road was upgraded as a major regional asphalt artery connecting this peripheral hinterland to the major national road and rail routes. But a lukewarm attitude toward inclusion in the Zambian state by the Lozi leadership in the Western Province of Zambia, the armed struggle for Namibian independence, and the long drawn out civil war in nearby Angola soon put the brakes on whatever momentum the

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

national government could muster to introduce its idea of development into this and other parts of Zambia’s Western Province. From the late 1970s, Zambia’s copper production and the commodity’s world market price began to decline. Together with the actions of a kleptocratic political and economic elite and the impact of structural adjustment programs, this constituted the fiscal realities under which not only transport and other infrastructure, but essentially every public service in this and other peripheral parts of Zambia fell into disrepair.

What was left of me by the time I reached Sesheke considered to hitch a ride on a ragged pontoon car ferry crossing the Zambezi - and to potentially wait several days for this rare event. My travel companion, a Malawian trader with a suitcase full of Lingala music tapes, and I instead decided to hire one of the local youths and his dugout canoe to take us to the Wenela border post on the other side. My Malawian companion and I said goodbye at the river banks – I made my way via the Wenela border post to Katima Mulilo while his priority was to get re-united with his merchandise. It had traveled across the river and border line on a ‘tax free’ alternative route.

Katima was clearly reeling from the aftermath of the secessionist attacks eight months earlier and the partial closure of the West Caprivi section of the highway to Windhoek caused by suspected UNITA fighters’ attacks just three months earlier. Many businesses, tourist lodges and development agencies were closed or operating on skeleton staff. Old acquaintances I met downtown told of long days & nights in police interrogation cells and friends that were in jail or simply unaccounted for since the secession.

When I returned to the Caprivi Region and Sesheke District in 2002 the journey along and across the Zambezi were still no easier, but change was in the air at the two urban centers Katima Mulilo and Sesheke. New shops, warehouses, internet cafes, petrol stations and tourist lodges had appeared in the townscape. By early 2004, these developments had accelerated to an outright construction boom. During the same period a remarkable shift took place in the words and actions of Namibian and Zambian government officials with regard to Caprivi and Western Province. Official high-profile rhetoric, visible acts of drought and flood emergency relief, and infrastructure development by both governments seemed to signal a new commitment and ability by the leaders on both sides of the Zambezi to bring these remote hinterlands into the national fold. SWAPO leaders were referring to Caprivi as

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

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, among them Brendan Simbwaye³. Before and after his election in 2001, Levy Mwanawasa and his MMD party courted the Lozi leadership and their subjects’ votes in Western Province. Mwanawasa and other high-level government members became frequent visitors at the palaces of the *Litunga* and Senior Chiefs like Inyambo Yeta of Mwandia, and vice versa. Significant development projects were being channelled into Western Province. In December 2004 the president told party cadres: “In the 2001 elections, the party did not do well in Western Province. But now I have an impression that the MMD is becoming stronger than ever. Come next elections, we will scoop all the seats in Western Province” (President Mwanawasa, quoted in *The Post*, December 7, 2004). Apart from the political potential, Western Province’s new-found attraction for the Zambian government was also based in concrete economic interests in the Zambezi floodplains. The region is relatively wealthy in natural resources: water and fertile soil for large-scale irrigated commercial agriculture; forests rich in tropical hardwood for timber production; and scenic landscapes, wildlife and a colourful cultural heritage marketable for tourism. The end of the civil war in Angola in 2002 raised hopes for greater political stability than the wider region had not seen in decades, and in 2004 President Mwanawasa promised nothing short of an economic boom to his new Lozi allies (see opening quote chapter 3.1).

The construction of the Zambezi bridge and the Namibia-Zambia borderland’s connection to the two countries’ national tar road grids were clearly the most tangible elements of these developments. Under the Apartheid regime’s security paradigm the German dream of an access corridor to the interior of southern Africa had mutated into a military bridgehead and first line of defence, but the original idea already resurfaced well before Namibian independence. Klaus Diercks was among those in Southwest Africa who saw the need for the territory - by the early 1980s clearly, if slowly moving towards its eventual independence - to open up alternative trade routes and overcome the almost

³ 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.

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

complete dependence of SWA’s economy on that of South Africa. Diercks, a Southwest African with German family roots, was working as the Chief Bridge Engineer in the SWA Department of Transport and made suggestions for a bridge across the Zambezi at Katima Mulilo. They were rejected, as building bridges into enemy territory did not seem like a viable suggestion to Diercks’ superiors at the time. After Namibia’s independence Diercks became Deputy Minister of Works, Transport and Communication in the SWAPO government and the Zambezi bridge project plan was back on his agenda. The road from there to the opening ceremony on 13 May 2004 still had a few turns and potholes, the first of which was fixed when in 1994 Nelson Mandela's ANC government handed over the Walvis Bay enclave. Namibia now had an Atlantic coast deep sea port and cargo ship access to the rest of the world. Outstanding debt repayments on loans received by the Zambian state from German banks in the 1980s were another obstacle . Zambia's failure to fulfill its side of the contracts delayed the German go-ahead for the bridge and the Livingstone-Sesheke road several times. After a fair amount of creative accounting by Zambia and skilful shuttle diplomacy by Diercks, construction commenced in early 2002. Two years later the project was completed, on budget and on time.⁴

On its northern side the 877m long Zambezi Bridge connects with the 205 kilometre long highway to Livingstone, which was rebuilt and tarred in 2004. On its southern side the bridge connects with a 400 kilometre section of the Trans Caprivi Highway, which was upgraded from gravel to asphalt between the mid-1990s and 2004. German and German-South African engineering and construction companies designed and built the bridge and both roads.⁵ The German KfW Bankengruppe⁶ provided the bulk of the funding as part of their development cooperation with the Zambian and Namibian governments.⁷ The new

⁴ http://www.klausdiercks.com/Namibian_Roads/Zambezi_bridge.htm

⁵ Examples are the German engineering company JBG Gauff Ingenieure, which designed the Zambezi bridge and CONCOR (until February 2005 held to 44.99% by German-based construction multinational Hochtief), which built the bridge, Livingstone-Sesheke road and several other sections of the corridor road.

⁶ KfW stands for Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau. The *Reconstruction Credit Institute* was formed after World War II as part of the Marshall Plan and is under shared ownership by the German federal (Bund) and state (Länder) governments.

⁷ JBG Gauff Ingenieure, *Bridging the Gap*, (Frankfurt, H.P. Gauff Ingenieure, 2004), p. 5; K. Diercks, ‘The History of the Zambezi Bridge from Namibia to Zambia: 1982 – 2004’, available at

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

infrastructure closed the final gaps in a 2690 km-long uninterrupted all-weather tar road called the ‘Trans Caprivi Corridor’ (TCC), connecting Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Copperbelt of Zambia with Namibia’s sea-port of Walvis Bay. Walvis Bay is five to seven shipping days closer to Europe and the Americas than Dar es Salaam and Durban, previously the main exit ports for the minerals extracted from the Copperbelt.⁸ Since the late 1990s Namibian and foreign investments have greatly expanded the Walvis Bay harbour’s capacity with new state-of-the-art container handling and dock facilities. Since the opening of the Zambezi Bridge trucks carrying pre-refined copper ore concentrate from mines in the DRC and Zambia have been transported via the TCC through Zambia into Namibia.⁹ Other enterprises operating along and through the TCC are situated around the Zambian capital Lusaka (a major consumer market and site for manufacturing), the tourism industry at Livingstone, the salt refineries, fish factories, and shipping industry of Walvis Bay, importers of European and American fertilizer, agricultural- and mining equipment, and exporters of Zambian agricultural and timber products.¹⁰

3.3. More Than a Road – Transnational Governance From Above

In two important ways, the TCC is not merely an all-weather transport route connecting the interior of southern Africa with overseas sites of production and consumption. Firstly, the TCC is only one of a network of 18 transport corridors in the SADC region that have been deliberately developed since the early 1990s to integrate Southern Africa into the global economy. Four of these corridors end (or begin) in Namibia. Apart from the TCC, these are the Trans Cunene Corridor connecting Lubango in Angola to Walvis Bay, the Trans Kalahari Corridor linking Johannesburg in South Africa to Walvis Bay, and finally the Trans Oranje Corridor linking Johannesburg to the Namibian port of Lüderitz.

Secondly, the TCC and all other SADC corridors are not simply physical

<http://www.klausdierks.com>, retrieved on 20 September 2006.

⁸ Namibia Economist 2 May 2003, available at <http://www.economist.com.na/>, retrieved on 15 June 2006.

⁹ On their journey through DRC they are accompanied by armed convoys. Personal communication, Jan-Bart Gewalt, 13 October 2007.

¹⁰ Walvis Bay Corridor Group (WBCG), ‘Trade: Export, Import Commodities’, available at <http://www.wbcg.com.na/wbcg/tcc/tcc.htm>, retrieved on July 17 2007.

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

improvements to old and new longdistance transport arteries. They are highly integrated spaces of transnational governance, designed to facilitate 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, among 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.¹¹ WBCG aims to facilitate imports and exports of Namibia and its landlocked neighbours by developing a regional network of transport corridors converging on the port of Walvis Bay and by marketing and managing these services. Among the administrative tools WBCG has developed and lobbied for are free trade agreements within SADC,¹² ‘one-stop border posts’,¹³ ‘dry ports’¹⁴ and ‘export processing zones’.¹⁵ 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 -cooperating to realise our vision - FREE FLOW OF TRADE to and from the SADC region!”¹⁶ Private enterprises and donor governments providing know-how and financing are de facto the driving forces behind these up-to-date ways of doing business in and with Africa. WBCG has received funding from the Swedish and German governments, the EU and SADC.¹⁷ 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

¹¹ WBCG, ‘Members of WBCG’, available at <http://www.wbcg.com.na/wbcg/group/thegroup.htm>, retrieved on 17 July 2007.

¹² The Namibian, 18 June 2007.

¹³ The Namibian, 12 September 2006.

¹⁴ Times of Zambia, 24 February 2006, ‘Namibia paves way for Zambia’s dry port’, available at <http://www.tralac.org/scripts/content.php?id=4564>, retrieved on 6 August 2007.

¹⁵ See e.g. Walvis Bay Export Processing Zone, available at <http://www.wbepzmc.iway.na>, retrieved on 27 July 2007.

¹⁶ WBCG, ‘About us’, available at <http://www.wbcg.com.na/wbcg/about/aboutus.htm>, retrieved on July 17 2007; capital letters in original spelling

¹⁷ New Era, 16 December 2003.

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

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”.¹⁸

With the TCC, 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 supposed to ensure that the ‘market forces’ can reign freely. The governments of Namibia and Zambia, however, have consistently emphasized their view that projects like the TCC are major achievements in the nation-building processes of these two countries and in particular stressed the TCCs relevance in bringing development to impoverished regions in these countries. The background I have laid out in chapter 2 has detailed the historic difficulties of pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial state authorities to project their administrative power into what is now the Namibia-Zambia borderland. I have argued that the TCC is a key element of current attempts by the two governments to overcome this problem, but that in order to achieve this they have to enter into a broad alliance with other powerful players. It is the composition and relations within this alliance that I will now present and examine more closely in the context of the bridge opening ceremony.

3.4. The Day of the Bridge Opening

3.4.1. Journey to the Site of the Opening Ceremony

On May 13th 2004 I awoke at sunrise in my room at the Mwandu Mission Hospital. After a quick breakfast I started up my offroad motorcycle and through deep sand ground my way out of the village to the T-junction with the freshly tarred Livingstone-Sesheke highway. At the junction, the steel monsters of South African road building contractor CONCOR were just waking up, snorting out clouds of black diesel fumes. A few days earlier, they had begun upgrading the three kilometer feeder road into Mwandu on which I had just travelled, and to which I will return again in chapter 4.1. Before that, CONCOR had completed construction work on the highway connecting Livingstone 135 km east from here to Sesheke 70 km towards west.

¹⁸ Times of Zambia, 28 June 2007.

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

My journey from Mwandu to Sesheke took under an hour on the fresh smooth asphalt. As I arrived, Sesheke was bustling. Numerous private and Zambian government vehicles, busloads of people, scores of policemen and school children were moving about. I joined the flow of people towards the brand new road bridge across the Zambezi. For many of us this was not anymore a new experience, though. Already two months earlier Bernhard Streit, the project chief of JBG Gauff, the German engineering bureau which had designed the Zambezi Bridge project, had taken a pragmatic decision and opened the bridge to a limited amount of traffic¹⁹. At the time, the Zambezi had been rising towards record levels. Like many times before, the high water had forced the notoriously unreliable pontoon ferry out of service. A similar vessel operating 140 kilometers downstream at Kazungula had capsized only a few months earlier. Fifteen passengers had drowned and regional road traffic had been disrupted for weeks²⁰.

On the southern end of the new bridge, the no-man’s land between the Namibian and Zambian border posts was alive with spectators and invited guests streaming in through channels maintained by security personnel from both countries. Everyone was heading towards a spacious open square where the stage was set for the official opening ceremony of the new Zambezi Bridge.

3.4.2. The Setting

The offices of protocol of the Namibian and Zambian foreign ministries had cooperated in making the practical arrangements for the event on May 13.²¹ According to chief engineer Streit, the date for the opening ceremony had been set by the organizers and was not directly tied to the end of construction work. Structural work on the bridge had been completed since mid-March while painting, electric installation work and the dismantling of the construction site and equipment were only completed in late June. Mr Streit could not say if the organizers’ choice had been influenced by the date for local authority elections in Namibia on 14 May 2004. The space of the ceremony was organized by a logic which displayed, from the general layout to the smallest details, the formal representation of

¹⁹ Bernd Streit interview

²⁰ Newspaper ref.

²¹ Muchimba, Office of protocol, Zambian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

statehood. Uniformed state security personnel from both countries were restricting access to the core area of the ceremonial site for those without a written invitation. Pretending to be a journalist I was able to negotiate my way through the security lines into the VIP zone, just before the controls were tightened in response to the swelling crowds. Inside the security cordon prevailed an air of officialdom, orderliness and tranquility that stood out against the bustling commotion among the spectators outside. Before I describe this space and the course of events in more detail, I will briefly situate the ceremonial site in its larger geographical context. This context was itself an important element in the official representation of sovereign statehood during the opening ceremony.

[insert Map 1 (borderland) here]

The Namibia-Zambia border starts roughly 110 km east-south-east from the site of the opening ceremony, at the juncture of the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers near Kazungula in Zambia and Impalila Island in Namibia (see map 1). From there it follows the central channel of the Zambezi to a point between the towns Sesheke in Zambia and Katima Mulilo in Namibia. This point is marked by river rapids that are caused by a strip of hard volcanic bedrock, which breaks through the river bed’s surface here and gave Katima Mulilo its name²². From that point, the Zambezi and the border line are parting ways. The river turns towards northwest while the border heads off westwards as a straight mathematical line that runs over flat and densely vegetated, but sparsely populated land. Ninety km further it meets with the Namibia-Angola and Angola-Zambia borderline. The Zambezi bridge passes the Namibia-Zambia border’s turning point in the river just a few meters west of it. With this trick, the engineers were able to build the entire bridge from the Zambezi’s northern to its southern shore on Zambian territory, but also as closely as possible to the Namibian-Zambian borderline. The rationale of this design was not exclusively based on engineering concerns²³. It was partially dictated by donor aid conditionality. The price tag for the 205 km

²² Katima Mulilo (Silozi): Putting out the fire. According to local folklore this refers to the tendency of dugout canoes to capsize or take water in the rapids, thereby extinguishing the home fires which households used to transport by canoe when shifting from the dry to the flood season homesteads.

²³ Although the relatively stable volcanic bedrock which occurs in the river bed at the site of the bridge was an

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

reconstructed road was €23.1 million, and for the new bridge €8.2 million. Of the total sum of €31.3 million 95.9 per cent was paid through KfW as a grant by the German government while the Republic of Zambia was supposed to cover the remaining 4.1 per cent (JBG Gauff Ingenieure 2004: 5).²⁴ Namibia is not on the United Nations’ list of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and would therefore only have been eligible for a repayable soft loan from the donor bank which financed the infrastructure project, the German KfW Bankengruppe.²⁵ Zambia is in the LDC category and therefore qualifies for KfW’s grants. Accordingly, it was necessary to keep the bridge and road a bilateral German-Zambian project entirely built on Zambian soil.²⁶ The project nevertheless required the participation of Namibian government institutions in various ways. The integration of the TCC to which the new bridge and road were the last missing link had involved Namibia-based players from the start. The initiative and successful lobbying of the German donors by Klaus Diercks of the Namibian ministry of roads and transport and by the WBCG were instrumental in the decisions to fund the various upgrades of the corridor route. Construction work of the bridge itself also required the cooperation of both countries’ state authorities on various levels. The engineers of JBG Gauff and CONCOR were largely accommodated at Katima Mulilo. They, as well as large quantities of machinery, fuel and building materials had to enter the construction site through the Namibian border check point at Wenela on a daily basis. Permission by the Namibian authorities to allow this without time-consuming checks was only granted after the constructors had agreed to equally hire Namibian and Zambian citizens for their local unskilled work force.²⁷

[insert sketch (map 2) and foto of ceremonial site]

important consideration for the construction site (Chief engineer Streit interview).

²⁴ According to the news magazine Der Spiegel the Zambian government announced in early 2004 that it did not have sufficient funds and that KfW had to step in to make the payments (Der Spiegel 5.7. 2005).

²⁵ KfW stands for Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau. The *Reconstruction Credit Institute* was formed after World War II as part of the Marshall Plan and is under shared ownership by the German federal (Bund) and state (Länder) governments.

²⁶ Streit interview, Diercks website

²⁷ Streit internterview; Portuguese foreman interview

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

The opening ceremony took place in a large open square where both the international border line and the bridge reach the Zambezi’s southern shore. The sandy soil of this site had been levelled and compounded as part of the bridge construction work and presently serves as a parking lot for trucks. The site is located in the no-man’s land between the Namibian and Zambian border infrastructure with their police checkpoints and customs stations. The colonial-era history of this place is preserved in its name: “Wenela Border Post”. What in 2004 contained the fairly run-down offices of the Zambian immigration and customs services was originally built in the 1940s as a recruitment station of the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA). Their choice of location gave the Namibian and Zambian organizers an opportunity to further strengthen the official message which representatives of the two countries’ governments stressed throughout the event. According to this message, the new bridge and road were the result of the efforts by the leaders of two separate and sovereign African states to bring development to the peripheral hinterlands of their respective countries. With great formality and precision down to all details of the ceremony this message was repeated over and over. Let me illustrate this by describing the spatial setup of the ceremonial site (compare map 2 and photo).

A row of catering tents with some 500 chairs reserved for the attending VIPs was facing an elevated speaker’s podium with microphones. Neatly laid out on all the chairs were copies of the official program and a colour brochure titled “Bridging the Gap”. Printed by the German engineering company JBG Gauff, the brochure included technical details and colour photos of the new infrastructure, and statements by the German financiers and the heads of the Zambian government institutions involved in the project. Behind the podium another large tent had been erected, shading 50 upholstered chairs aligned behind two large leather fauteuils. This tent was flanked by the flags of Namibia, Zambia and Germany, laid out with red carpets and decorated with flowers. After their arrival, the two countries’ heads of state were seated here with their delegations. More red carpets lay waiting to be rolled out later between the arrival point of the official limousines, the president’s tent, the speaker’s podium, and the site where a red ribbon was to be cut towards the end of the occasion. Security personnel were fiercely guarding the red carpets to prevent anyone from stepping on them prior to the arrival of the Namibian and Zambian heads of state. Between the VIP tents and the presidents’ tent ran the international boundary, right through the speaker’s

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

podium. This fact was not immediately visible, but Buxton Funjika, the Zambian Master of Ceremony later pointed it out to the audience and journalists.

The ceremonial site was only a stone’s throw away from the southern banks of the Zambezi River, rushing by in full flood. The arch of the new white concrete bridge thus emerged right behind the presidents’ tent. The view presenting itself to those under the VIP tent and the glass eyes of the media was pregnant with symbolism: With precision and a power that seemed well beyond the reach of the raw forces of nature raging underneath, the bridge was projecting outwards from where the heads of state were later seated, into a distance that remained invisible and open for the imagination. The invited guests could also see the swelling crowds of local spectators, a powerful mass of anonymous bodies urging to push forward, yet held at bay by uniformed police. Also in view of the VIPs were the white tents of a catering service and its staff, busy setting up shiny linen and cutlery, plates and glasses and chrome vessels containing the promises of forthcoming tasty abundance.

The entire setting of the opening ceremony conveyed the presence of sovereign state power in action. The coercive potential of this power could be seen in the strict precision of the spatial arrangements. It was visibly embodied by the security forces, both to those outside whose access to the ceremonial site was restricted, and to those inside whom these forces separated from the masses. The benevolent and providing potential of sovereign state power could be experienced in the provision of tranquility, order and physical comfort for the guests inside the VIP zone, and of course in the concrete manifestation of the new infrastructure. These displays of sovereign state power’s coercive as well as benevolent potential were clearly part of a particular language of stateness (Hansen and Stepputat). This language gave expression to the claim made implicitly by the organizers of the event that a hierarchy existed in which the Namibian and Zambian state were “above”, their citizens “below”²⁸.

In the following sections, my aim is to move beyond accepting the logic of verticality and encompassment. I will instead approach it as an ethnographic problem which I examine in the context of the opening ceremony. For this I will take a closer look at various groups and individuals attending, and the events unfolding during the ceremony. While still

²⁸ One sentence and ref. To Ferguson and Gupta, or just Ferguson: encompassing.

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

introducing further evidence of how the claims to verticality and encompassment were expressed, I will expand the scope of my narrative to include other actors and their forms of representation: other vernaculars than the official language of stateness I have so far concentrated on.

3.4.3. Inside the VIP Zone

As the morning progressed, several visibly distinct groups of guest established their presence within the VIP zone. Members of the organizing committee and signs on the chairs referred the newly arrived to their reserved seats. Easily identifiable by their uniforms were around fifty members of the higher and highest ranks of the Namibian and Zambian police and military, as well as a full Zambian military brass band. Seated next to these was another group of some forty men whose dress code visibly united them and distinguished them from the other guests. The heads of these mostly elderly and serene-looking men were adorned by red hats, some in the shape of military berets, others rather like red plastic shower caps. Along with these the men either wore business suits, often including items like ties or socks in bright red colour, or a particular kind of skirts in mostly red and white colour²⁹. Red is the color of the Barotse Royal Establishment and the men wearing it were *indunas* (Silozi: headman, advisor) from the courts of the *litunga* (the Lozi king) and his senior sub-chiefs. Seated separately were the wives of the red-capped gentlemen, all out in their Sunday best.

The front row of the central section of the VIP tent was reserved for another group of twelve individuals whose dress code and dignified demeanor visibly distinguished them from the other guests. They were senior chiefs, accompanied by their most senior advisors, from the areas of Namibia and Zambia adjacent to the new infrastructure. I spotted Chief Liswani III of the Subiya people and Chief Mamili of the Fwe people. From Zambia’s Kazungula area had come Chief Musokotwane of the Toka-Leya and Chief Sekute of the Leya, as well as Chief Mukuni of the Toka-Leya from near Livingstone. They all wore what across Southern Africa are the instantly recognizable insignia of a chief in the 21st century: dark business suits and wide-brimmed hats, occasionally trimmed with leopard-skin, as well as fly-switches of zebra tail with elaborately carved ivory handles. Among the chiefly men

²⁹ This skirt called *liziba* (worn by men) or *misisi* (worn by women) is part of the Lozi folk costume, which is partly an invention from the time of British colonization).

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

Lozi Princess Nakatindi Wina stood out as the only female. She is the sister of Senior Chief Inyambo Yeta from Mwandu. The princess and her husband Sikota Wina appeared as if dressed for a reception at Buckingham Palace: him in black pin stripe with bowler hat and her in leopard-spotted black & white with matching hat. Princess Nakatindi is a regional, as well as national Zambian celebrity. The just-renovated highway from Livingstone to Sesheke on which I had traveled earlier in the morning had been officially named “Nakatindi Road” after the former chieftainness of Sesheke District Nakatindi Nganga Yeta when it was first built in the 1960s. Like her mother before her, the current princess Nakatindi also is holding political office as a Member of Parliament from the Western Province of Zambia. As I already mentioned in chapter XX, her husband is also a seasoned member of Zambia’s political establishment.

Some of the newly arriving invited guests approached the chiefs seated in the front row with bows, kneeling and hand-clapping, the rituals of respectful behavior among the Lozi-speaking people on both sides of the Zambezi River. Around Princess Nakatindi I observed also more elaborate displays of royal Barotse etiquette. The chiefs and the Princess remained seated while receiving these ovations. They took place in the open space between the front row seats and the speaker’s podium and were therefore highly visible to everyone inside, and many outside the VIP zone.

The remaining chairs were occupied by European NGO workers and bridge project engineers, business people and regional-level Namibian and Zambian bureaucrats. I also spotted Sibeso Yeta, the first-born son of Senior Chief Inyambo Yeta who was at the time constructing a tourist lodge just outside his father’s palace in Mwandu. Yeta junior was talking business with Oppie Opperman, owner of the largest construction business in Katima Mulilo and the greater area. Across the open square under the presidents’ tent delegates from the German embassies in Windhoek and Lusaka and from KfW were seated. Boredom was visibly spreading among the distinguished guests as the morning progressed. While some resorted to playing with their cellular phones, others were leafing through the official program and a glossy brochure that had been laid out on their seats. In the brochure, the German engineering company which planned and oversaw the road and bridge project explained the path towards the ready structure we came to celebrate in colorful pictures and hard numbers, supplemented by greeting words from the responsible Namibian and

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

Zambian bureaucrats.

By 9 a.m., an hour before the officially scheduled arrival of the two presidents, most seats inside the VIP zone were occupied and the contingent of forty journalists, among them two camera teams of the Namibian and Zambian state broadcasting corporations were in position. The crowd of local spectators outside the VIP area had swollen to well over a thousand, while more people were streaming in from Sesheke across the bridge and Katima Mulilo 3km from here. Under the watchful eyes of the security forces, another group of some 200 people had established themselves inside the VIP zone, in the unsheltered space without chairs situated beside the area where the red-capped Lozi *indunas* were seated. Some of their members held up four large and neatly crafted placards. Three of the placards praised Presidents Nujoma and Mwanawasa and “Princess Nakatindi MP” for bringing the road and bridge to Sesheke. One petitioned President Mwanawasa to bring state television and other development to Sesheke and wished him luck for the 2006 presidential election. Within the same crowd, several dancing and singing groups were getting ready to perform. Microphone-in-hand, the Zambian MC stepped up, briefly introduced himself and then invited the performers to entertain the assembled guests.

3.4.4. Waiting for the Presidents

According to the official program, the scheduled arrival time of the two presidents was 10 a.m. While the presidents held their bilateral meeting at the nearby luxury hotel Zambezi Lodge Mr. Funjika at the site of the opening ceremony called one after another “cultural group” to perform. By 10.30 the number of spectators had swollen to around 5000 people, some 500 of which were inside the cordoned-off area, the rest stretching their necks from behind the police lines to get a glimpse of the action. Finally, the first limousines carrying Namibian and Zambian government ministers arrived from Zambezi Lodge.

Let us now take a closer look at the kind of entertainment that was provided. All performances were combinations of dancing, drumming and singing in Silozi, the regional lingua franca spoken on both sides of the Namibia/Zambia borderland. The root of all these performances was a rich legacy of dances and songs praising the senior chiefs of the Lozi people. This template had been stretched and adapted during European colonization to honor non-Lozi dignitaries, such as British colonial administrators. In the versions

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

performed on 13 May 2004 some of the praise was audibly directed at "Presidenti Mwanawasa" and "Presidenti Nujoma". The members of one female singing group were dressed up in skirts with the face of the Zambian President and the slogan "vote MMD"³⁰ printed on them. Other singers were dressed in blue, red and green, the colours of Namibia's ruling party SWAPO. The performances were clearly scripted into the space and program of the official ceremony, which was entirely controlled by state authority. The Master of Ceremony announced and regulated the timing and sequence of the appearances. His aides regulated the microphones and sound amplification. The state television crews regulated the selection of images for broadcasting. The overall result was a smooth and orderly progress through the scripted program. But while the audience outside the security cordon was too far away to directly experience the performances, the invited guests inside absorbed them passively in the rising heat of the day. Then, there was a change.

Just after 11 a.m. yet another drumming group stepped up to perform. Unlike some of their predecessors, the distinct sound of their unusual percussion instruments and the precise intensity of their rhythm instantly captured the attention of the audience inside and outside the police cordon. I had seen the same group perform at the 25th anniversary of Senior Chief Iyambo Yeta's taking office, held at Mwandu in September 2002. This group was well-known among the spectators with local origins for their skills and wide repertoire of rhythms, songs and dances from the Lozi cultural heritage. In precisely the same manner that I had witnessed at Mwandu in 2002, several dozen of the red-capped *indunas* and their wives rose from their chairs shortly after the music started and began to dance. Like in 2002, the dance was clearly not simply a spontaneous playful display. The dancers were enacting a well-rehearsed template of public display of Lozi-ness. Their movements were coordinated and took the form of a circular procession in front of the highest-ranking member of Lozi royalty present, in this case Princess Nakatindi. The performers and distinguished dancers were cheered on by the crowds behind the security cordon and drew upon themselves the attention of all those inside it. One hour behind official schedule the presidents still were nowhere to be seen. Yet, the atmosphere at the site of the opening ceremony was crackling with excitement.

³⁰ Movement for Multiparty Democracy, ruling party of Zambia

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

Let me reflect briefly on what I have just described. As the morning progressed it became clear that the organizers of the opening ceremony had invited a number of guests to which they had assigned visibly distinct places and roles within the ceremonial space and course of events. Besides representatives of the Namibian and Zambian state sat development aid workers, investors and businesspeople and representatives of regional “traditional authority”, all neatly separated in a planned sitting order. Also the people holding up placards and the performers were carefully scripted into the setup and program of the event. They were relegated to conveying an air of local authenticity and lively spontaneity, a linkage to the “common people” who were supposedly supportive of their national leaders. The premeditated nature of these appearances was however all-too obvious. The ruling parties of Namibia and Zambia had lined up members to display and voice messages of support for their leaders. These leaders, meanwhile, were keeping the audience of several hundred invited guests waiting. The guests therefore found themselves in a situation where everything in space and time, including their own bodies were subjected to the ordering capacity of sovereign state power. Yet within this seemingly all-encompassing framework a different set of expressions were heard and seen which followed their own scripted logic, a different language of stateness than that of the Namibian and Zambian organizers. I am referring to the various expressions of Loziness I have described: the uniform and highly visible dress code of the members of the Barotse Royal Establishment, the public displays of Lozi etiquette, and the dance of the Lozis. The particular poignancy of the latter was comprised of several elements. The dance captured the attention of the entire audience. As the cheering of the crowds signalled, it succeeded in what the scripted format of the event had largely prevented: The dance established a spontaneous emotional bond between those inside and those outside the security lines. This occurred at a particular moment in time: In the rising heat, the audience’s patience with the late-coming heads of state was beginning to wear thin and anticipation was approaching boiling point. Through relatively simple means of public embodiment of Loziness, the Lozi succeeded to stake their claim to a share of the space and time which the event’s organizers had worked so hard to capture into the realm of sovereign statehood. The Lozis publicly displayed a different logic of submission to sovereign power, symbolism and collective action than that of the Namibian and Zambian state, within a setting that was in the realm of the state. Should this be read as a subtle but

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

open expression of opposition to the dominant order? I will return to this question soon.

3.4.5. Praising the Leaders

Ten minutes after the dance of the Lozis the President of Zambia Levy Mwanawasa and his entourage arrived in a cloud of dust thrown up by a long motorcade of police vehicles, black limousines and SUVs. While promenading down the red carpet the president took his time jovially trading jokes with Princess Nakatindi and her husband. Among the delegation arriving directly with the President were two other important members of the Barotse Royal Establishment. One was *Ngambela* Mukela Manyando³¹ of the *Litunga* from the BRE’s capital at Mongu. The *Ngambela* was dressed in full Lozi regalia with red cap and *liziba*. The other was Senior Chief Iyambo Yeta, the brother of Princess Nakatindi, in black suit complete with hat and chiefly fly-switch. According to the BRE's system of governance Sesheke and the greater area up and down the Zambezi are under the custodianship of this man, who is himself one step down in the power hierarchy under the *Litunga*. The Senior Chief took a seat between the German Ambassador and the *Ngambela* in the front row of the presidents’ tent. Princess Nakatindi and her husband were now also seated among the delegation and guests of President Mwanawasa. Soon thereafter the motorcade of Namibian President Sam Nujoma and his entourage arrived. Once they were settled down, the bridge and road opening ceremony finally began in earnest. The Zambian military brass band played curiously dissonant versions of the national anthems of Namibia and Zambia. Brittle singing from the mouths of the two countries' VIPs accompanied the music. The Zambian Master of Ceremony then held a brief welcoming speech, which he opened with the following remarks:

"Maybe we will make so that we become a joint republic, because there is no boundary now between Namibia and Zambia. Here where the Presidents are we are in Zambia, and the tents where you are sitting are in Namibia. We are now going to remove the border so that it is a joint Republic of Zamnamibia."

The polite laughter from the VIPs gave Mr. Funjika time to check his cue-cards. He welcomed the audience to what he called a “very historic event” and remarked that “only a

³¹ Silozi: most senior *induna*, often translated as “prime minister”

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

few years ago, this would not have been possible, because the Boers would have blown up the bridge.” He then introduced the dignitaries seated in the presidents' tent. This turned out to be a long and elaborate list of names and titles in a meticulously kept order of rank. Mr. Funjika started with the ministers and their deputies and continued with members of the diplomatic corps, singling out the German ambassador to Zambia "(...) without whose country's assistance it would have been difficult to sit here at this time". He then addressed "(...) the Royal Highnesses, the traditional leaders from both Zambia and Namibia. You are most welcome to this - your - occasion". After that Mr. Funjika welcomed the MPs from the two countries, project consultants and bridge contractors, and finally the general public and media representatives³². He then made the following announcement:

“In this land where we are, the land of Bulози, the *Ngambela* and the traditional rulers are here, and the traditional rulers asked to come and greet our two heads of state, together with the Lozi king³³, in the traditional manner. I am therefore, your Excellences, asking the traditional rulers from Barotse to please come and greet the leadership.”

On their cue, the red-capped *indunas* all entered the open square before the presidents' tent, their wives following behind them. One elderly and dignified *induna* stepped to the front of the group where a microphone was placed before him. For the first time since the beginning of the event there was complete silence throughout the site of the ceremony. With impressive synchronicity, the entire group of about 70 Lozi *indunas* and women then went through a sequence of movements that involved hand-clapping, kneeling down and upward swinging of the arms, while they repeatedly uttered the syllable “shooh” in a subdued but clearly audible manner. The *induna* standing in front then held a speech in Luyi, the official language of the *Litunga's* royal court³⁴. His melodious and rousing tone elicited cheers from the crowds outside the police cordon as he audibly addressed Senior Chief Inyambo Yeta,

³² The official speakers which appeared later in the ceremony all opened their addresses with elaborate list of names and official titles. These always explicitly included the ‘chiefs’ or ‘royal highnesses’. In some cases, these introductions took up nearly half of the speakers’ time.

³³ Obviously a reference to Senior Chief Inyambo Yeta, but using an incorrect title: *Litunga* is the Lozi king

³⁴ Gowlett, D.F. (1989) ‘The parentage and development of Lozi’. *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics* 11: 127-49.

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

then President Mwanawasa and finally President Nujoma. The Lozi group then repeated the gestures and syllable “shooh”, after which the leading *Induna* bowed slightly and said “thank you“ in English. The entire performance lasted four minutes. It was followed by loud and sustained ululating and cheering from the crowds outside the police cordon and polite applause from the VIPs inside, all of whom had listened and watched with rapt attention. The three recipients of the address remained seated and motionless. Clearly something remarkable had just taken place, but what?

With the arrival of the Zambian and Namibian presidents the scripted formalism of the ceremony and the public enactment of the claim to vertical encompassment came to a point of culmination. The symbolic representations of the sovereign statehood of Namibia and Zambia found their ultimate expression in the physical presence of the two heads of state, the playing of the national anthems and the official protocol of the welcoming address. Yet soon after the dramatic entries of the two presidents the Lozi *indunas* again moved center-stage with their own well-rehearsed performance. Eight days after the opening ceremony one of the participants gave me his interpretation of the significance of this episode.

Munukayumbwa Mulumemui is a senior *induna* of the Barotse Royal Establishment in Mwandu. Mr. Mulumemui’s title *Induna Omei* indicates that he is designated the role of expert on Lozi tradition in the Mwandu *kbuta*³⁵. He explained that he had participated in a ritualised form of paying respect and praising Lozi leaders called *kushowelela*³⁶. The template for *kushowelela* includes a speech held in Luyi which takes the form of a poem called “*kuloka*”. The speaker addresses the recipient in a succession of elaborate titles referring to his or her pedigree and achievements, as well as petitioning him or her to protect and provide for the future well-being of the performers. *Kushowelela* is however more than just a public performance of praise. It is a long-standing element of Lozi land management. The performance is the public actualization of this institution and seals a contractual relation between those praising and those praised, which involves mutual obligations. According to

³⁵Interview 10/2004: *Induna Omei* at Barotse Royal Establishment Mwandu
Munukayumbwa Mulumemui, Mwandu, 21.5.2004

³⁶ *shoelela* or *showelela*: Silozi, to give the royal salutation as a token of gratitude for a favour granted by the *Litunga*. See <http://www.barotseland.net/sil-eng4.htm>

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

Sumbwa³⁷, the Lozi practice of managing communal land requires people who obtain access to land through request to pay homage and tribute to the “owners of the land” through the *kushowelela* institution. The public performance of this institution constitutes a historical record of the permission to use the land concerned, which can be cited in case land disputes arise later on³⁸. The implicit obligation for the leader thus praised is to continue providing for the material and spiritual well-being of those who were giving praise. In the Lozi kingdom prior to European colonization the performance of *kushowelela* was accordingly reserved for these “owners of the land”, i.e. the *Litunga* and his regional representatives: senior chiefs like Inyambo Yeta. I asked Mr. Mulumemui about the more recent history of this institution:

WZ: In the colonial time, was the honour of praising like this ever given to some high representative of the British Empire, as a way of respect?

MM: You see, when those Europeans came here, the British government and us, we were together. When our *Litunga* was welcoming a European that time, that person was going to be praised also. But when the European was alone it could not be done.

WZ: There had to be a senior Lozi chief present.

MM: Yes.

WZ: To be praising a president in this manner, is this unusual?

MM: Oh yes, it is unusual. We cannot do that to the presidents alone, because they are not Lozi Chiefs. It is a very big honour.

WZ: Has a President of Zambia ever been praised in such a way? Has it historically happened before?

MM: No.

WZ: President Kaunda, president Chiluba...?

MM: No. It is a new thing. You see, that man, it was his initiative. That day of the bridge opening, the *ngambela* used his initiative for all, even the presidents, to be praised together.

WZ: If Senior Chief Inyambo Yeta would not have been there...

³⁷ Sumbwe, Nyambe (2000): Traditionalism, Democracy and Political Participation: The Case of Western Province, Zambia. *African Study Monographs*, 21(3): 105-146, July 2000

³⁸ Compare <http://www.zamlii.ac.zm/include/search-gen.php?id=265>

WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION

MM: Then the *ngambela* could not do that. There must be a senior chief.

According to both the Zambian MC Mr. Funjika and Mr. Mulumemui, the initiative to perform *kushowelela* at the opening ceremony had been taken by the Lozi delegation themselves. From Mr. Mulumemui’s accounts it becomes clear that the significance of this act was well beyond a mere display of local folklore. The performance of *kushowelela* on 13 May 2004 was rather the latest re-invention of a tradition which had already undergone adaptations under British colonial rule. To understand the motivation for this initiative we need to know more about what was communicated, both explicitly and implicitly, and to what kind of audience. Mr. Mulumemui recounted the following:

WZ: This praising, is it like a poem?

MM: Yes please. We call it “*kuloka*”. That is to say “you have powers” and so on and so forth.

WZ: What did the *induna* standing in front say about the presidents?

MM: He said: “You presidents Nujoma and Mwanawasa, you go ahead and continue as presidents of Namibia and Zambia. What we have done here and how we are together here today is because of you and what you have done building that bridge. This is very very good to our two countries, to the people of Namibia and Zambia. This bridge is also now bringing a good friendship between the two countries.” He was also praising like that: “You continue to do that! We want our countries to be uplifted.”

It is important to notice here that very few people living in the Katima Mulilo-Sesheke area, which is at the southern periphery of Buluzi, could have possibly understood the exact verbal content of the *kuloka*. Luyi is nowadays only used as a ceremonial language (Gowlett 1989³⁹). It is not sufficiently similar to the local variety of Silozi, the lingua franca in the Namibia-Zambia borderland, to be easily understood there outside the elite circles of higher *indunas* with considerable knowledge of Lozi royal etiquette. The general poetic template of the *kuloka* and purpose of the institution of *kushowelela* are however sufficiently well-known. Local inhabitants from both sides of the border proudly associate these with what they consider highly authentic “deep” or “real” Lozi-ness, a core part of their heritage and

³⁹ Gowlett, D.F. (1989) ‘The parentage and development of Lozi’. *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics* 11: 127-49.

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

identity⁴⁰. Lozi-speaking spectators from the borderland could thus relate to the performance of *kushowelela* at the bridge opening as a public expression of how they like to be seen by outsiders. Mr. Mulumemui saw a strong contrast in how the local spectators and the heads of state experienced the performance of *kushowelela*:

MM: When we were making *kushowelela* there, I’m sure the people who are not Barotse, the presidents and the ministers, they were ashamed (*laughs*), simply because they don’t know it. They were indeed looking at us like it was a new thing to them.

WZ: You felt that they were a bit uncomfortable?

MM: Oh yes (*chuckles*). And then, you see, it was very very nice for us. Since to ourselves, we are accustomed to do that. We were expressing our culture within the people, among the people. And that day, you see, there were so many people. All those tents, and the ground was full of people, men and women.

Mr. Mulumemui clearly relished in the memory of his participation in the performance of *kushowelela* at the opening ceremony. He both enjoyed its successful popular appeal and the discomfort he perceived among the heads of state whom he and his associates were publicly praising. They got one over the presidents, as it were. The explanation to this apparent contradiction lies in the four decades of post-independence history I described in chapter 2.XX. After decades of lukewarm to strained relations between Zambia’s central governments and the Lozi leadership since Zambian independence in 1964, these improved considerably under President Mwanawasa’s administration. In the light of these developments, the Lozis’ performance of *kushowelela* at the opening ceremony can be read as a carefully considered public demonstration supposed to communicate the following message to the heads of state of Zambia and Namibia: “We welcome you here - as guests in what is actually our land, and on our own terms”. These terms include the implicit understanding by the Lozi leaders and the local audience that *kushowelela* obliges the “owners of the land” to “continue to do that”: to provide for their people and bring tangible

⁴⁰ This sentiment and the difficulty to understand the verbal content of the *kuloka* were expressed by numerous borderland inhabitants, both in general terms and in relation to the performance of *kushowelela* at the opening ceremony. On the creative re-invention of Lozi tradition and the inclusive but open character of the Lozi cultural umbrella, see Milbourne 1997. <http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/ceras/baobab/milbourne.html>

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

development to the Lozi inhabited areas, in exchange for voting them into power.

As I have demonstrated, the opening ceremony was a meticulously designed public enactment of two neatly separated claims of sovereign statehood: The independent republics of Namibia and Zambia. However, a third claim to statehood was represented in the ceremony: The Lozi kingdom. The site of the celebration added poignancy to this claim: While the presence of the international boundary reminded the audience of the fact that Namibia and Zambia are internationally recognized sovereign states, it also illustrated the genesis of these states, and their shared border: a line of partition cutting through the Lozi kingdom imposed in 1890 by the colonial powers Germany and Britain. The ceremony therefore took place in a location where one claim to statehood was overlapping and competing for recognition with the other two. To stage this claim, the Lozis employed their own language of stateness, which relied on a powerful assertion: grassroots authenticity. Within the site and program of the ceremony, which was entirely regulated by the Namibian and Zambian organizers, the Lozis successfully transformed themselves, at least intermittently, from welcome guests to welcoming hosts. Through their collective appearance, dance and performance of *kushowelela* they showed the audience that they were comfortably on their home turf. Their use of a distinctly Lozi vernacular language of stateness rallied support among the local spectators, sparking off audible responses from the masses strictly confined to the outside of the security cordon. The fact that the heads of state were not fluent in this language was a source of additional strength for the Lozis (and amusement for Mr. Mulumemui).

Yet the Lozi assertion of authenticity and demonstration of strength was rather subtle in character and at no point directly offensive or confrontational. To the contrary, I interpret it as a carefully considered public appeasement of Mwanawasa’s administration by the BRE delegation, and in line with Mwanawasa’s engagement of the Lozi leadership. After all, the *indumas* were offering praise and respect to the heads of state, along with one of their own senior chiefs. Various Lozi celebrities included among the guests and delegation of President Mwanawasa were publicly demonstrating their closeness to each other. This points to another side of the show of strength by the Lozis: They demonstrated their ability to communicate directly, on behalf of their people, with the two heads of state. To both the state representatives and the rest of the audience they asserted their role as interlocutors and

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

translators between “their” people and the national governments.

My reference to the “rest” of the audience includes a group of people I have already mentioned, but whose role in the opening ceremony has so far been rather passive: the entrepreneurs and representatives of foreign development aid donors. We have already heard some, and will soon hear more of their language and its role in the opening ceremony. I am referring to the language of “development”.

3.4.6. The Speeches

The four hours following the *kushowelela* were a marathon of public addresses interspersed with entertainment intervals. Altogether seven speeches were delivered by the Deputy Minister of Zambia's Western Province Simasiku Namakando, the Governor of the Caprivi Region Bernard Sibatani, the German Ambassador to Zambia Erich Kristof, the Zambian Minister of Works and Supply Ludwig Sondashi, the Namibian Minister of Works, Transport and Communication Moses Amweelo, and finally the two Presidents.

Governor Sibatani called the changes which he expected from the new infrastructure and increasing long-distance traffic to his region “historical” and listed expected benefits for the local population from investment, local cross-border trade and transport safety. He mentioned the need of borderland inhabitants to cross to the other side of the river and border to attend funerals and bring home the bodies of the deceased. The Governor also appealed for help in dealing with HIV/AIDS and food insecurity in the region. Directly referring to the residents living on both sides of the border he exclaimed “we are one people” and was rewarded with sustained cheering from the mixed Namibian-Zambian crowd.

Ambassador Kristof diplomatically registered his indignation with the fact that his country’s financial contribution to the bridge and road was represented in a “misleading” manner on a nearby tableau displaying the technical details of the project. Setting the record straight, he detailed the funds which the German government had provided for the Livingstone-Seskeke road, the Zambezi bridge, the Trans Caprivi highway and the modernization of the Walvis Bay harbour. Reading straight from his employer’s development policy guidelines the ambassador portrayed “infrastructure development”,

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

“private sector growth” and “regional integration” as the basis for bringing “poverty alleviation”, “progress” and “sustainable development” to the rural poor. He then stressed the significance of the new road and bridge as the missing link in the TCC and its importance for trade in the SADC countries as a new “access route to the Atlantic only five shipping days away from Europe”. Mr. Kristof expressed hope that plans to simplify and integrate customs procedures would be swiftly implemented by the Namibian and Zambian governments. He then praised the technical precision, financial discipline and project’s on-schedule completion achieved by the bridge and road engineers. The ambassador finally concluded: "German taxpayers’ money, as a contribution in the fight against poverty, has been well-spent."

The ensuing entertainment break featured a schoolgirl from Sesheke with a well-rehearsed performance of a poem titled “we never knew a road”. With the force of a small whirlwind, the girl praised the wisdom of the presidents and raved about the joy the new infrastructure had brought to her hometown. The audience both in- and outside the police security cordon were cheering in delight.

Ministers Sondashi and Amweelo then celebrated the good cooperation between their governments and the German counterparts in planning and facilitating the construction process, stressing their gratefulness for the financial assistance given by KfW. The Namibian minister paid tribute to the role of former Deputy Minister of Transport Klaus Diercks and reminded the audience that, although his country was technically not a direct partner in the bilateral German-Zambian project, Namibia had nevertheless played a major role in the project’s preparation and implementation.

After one last dancing group from Zambia, President Nujoma stepped up to the podium. His speech was delivered both in English, and - through a translator - in Silozi. The Namibian president called the event a “historic moment in the bilateral and diplomatic relations between the Republic of Zambia and the Republic of Namibia” and honoured Zambia’s “unwavering support to the cause of Namibia’s struggle for freedom and independence”. The rest of his speech was organized around the phrases “regional economic integration”, “trade and tourism”, “strategic infrastructure development”, and “SADC export to Europe and the Americas”.

President Mwanawasa also began by recalling the “shared history, good

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

neighborliness and harmony between the people of our two countries”, after which he stressed the significance of the new road and bridge for “SADC integration” and “regional economic growth”. When the president declared “we are the same people”, and some moments later “we are one people” he drew cheers from the audience, both out- and inside the security cordon.

From the official speeches held at the opening ceremony two main themes emerged that were expressed through a particular terminology: the language of “development” and the language of “unity”. Let us take a closer look at these expressions separately, as well as in relation to each other. In their efforts to imbue the new infrastructure with meaning, the official speakers all sought to build verbal bridges between its supposed abstract and material significance. The new transport link was supposed to capture and channel larger-than-life forces that were both inherently good and previously out of reach to flow through and into the borderland. These were the forces of commerce and private investment. Wherever they were guided by sound and rational planning, growth, progress and development for the benefit of all were to become inevitable realities. While the speakers varied regarding the geographic scale they emphasized (local/borderland, regional/southern Africa, global), they all converged on the central message: road access brings development which will benefit everyone. Already before the official speeches, the Lozi delegation’s *kushowelega* had subscribed to this same logic. The language of development was thus the *lingua franca* spoken at the opening ceremony. Everybody who was allowed to speak, from the presidents to the schoolgirl had something to say about development, suggesting that all participants had something in common. Expressions of the solidarity and unity of “one people” seemed to support this claim in a neutral and self-evident way. In my understanding, however, the references to “one people” carried with them a variety of quite specific meanings that were neither self-evident nor made explicit by the speakers, and therefore remained open for a variety of interpretation by the audience. These different meanings have deep and entangled roots grounded in the historical process of the making of the borderland, and they are not politically neutral. I have already described these in chapter 2 and will explore them in more detail after the following section.

3.4.7. Cutting the Ribbon, Shooting the Fisherman: The End and Epilogue of the

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

Bridge Opening

Gusts of hot wind swept through the site of the opening ceremony as President Mwanawasa concluded his speech. The atmosphere among the exhausted audience erupted with expectation. Mr. Funjika could hardly make himself heard as the Lozi *Ngambela* Manyando presented the two presidents and the German ambassador with canes carved by Lozi artisans. The ambassador and the presidents then proceeded to unveil a brass plaque commemorating the opening event and to cut a red ribbon at the head of the bridge. Ambassador Kristof held the ribbon as both Presidents cut it from opposite sides. The master of ceremony then declared the end of the event.

The fairly orderly state of affairs promptly disintegrated into a flurry of movement. The presidents took a test drive across the bridge in their limousines, while their entourages and other invited guests moved towards the nearby VIP buffet. The regular crowds began to slowly make their way out of the no-man’s land, back to Katima Mulilo and Sesheke. I joined those who proceeded to the Zambian border post in the old WNLA buildings to get their papers stamped. Immigration and customs officers still wearing their parade uniforms were slowly getting back to work. Hopeful border-crossers were spilling into the building and forming long cues outside. Once the Zambian officials had cleared the papers the same procedure started all over again at the Namibian border post. A good two hours after the ribbon cutting, I was finally breathing fresh air as I steered my vehicle towards Katima Mulilo, past lamp posts and trees with posters in blue-green-red urging to ‘Vote SWAPO!’ in Namibia’s local authority elections, to be held the following day.

Two months later, on 15 July 2004 Zambian national Francis Sikwai Musanza died instantly when he was 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 ca. 70km eastward from the new Zambezi bridge. He was part of a group of eight Zambian and five Namibian nationals who were jointly operating as seasonal fishing camp along a side arm of the Zambezi river. The surviving seven Zambians were later charged with illegal entry into Namibia, while two of the Namibians were charged with harbouring illegal immigrants. The police officer faced disciplinary measures. In a separate incident on 14 January 2004 another Zambian national had been shot and wounded by a Namibian border guard. Leon Kakoma had tried to

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

smuggle two sacks of mangos across the Zambezi from Sesheke for a Zambian female operating a stall at the Katima Mulilo market. The incident prompted diplomatic consultations between the Namibian and Zambian governments and, on the initiative of Princess Nakatindi Wina, was debated in the Zambian parliament on 11 March 2004. During the debate, parliamentarians acknowledged that similar incidents had happened before along the Namibia/Zambia border, but President Mwanawasa stated: “We cannot stop co-operating with our neighbours just because of this incident, and we should continue our good neighbourliness as a measure of our foreign policy”⁴¹ (Times of Zambia 12 March 2004).

3.5. Togetherness and Separation: Reading the Opening Ceremony

The representation of the sovereign statehood of Namibia and Zambia was a dominant theme of the opening of the Zambezi Bridge, from the general layout to the smallest details. The Namibian and Zambian offices of protocol responsible for the practicalities had arranged the ceremonial space to include the two sovereign states’ shared boundary line. Spectators saw the flags, uniforms and red carpets. They heard the anthems and official titles of the state representatives. From the sovereign solidity of the limousines emerged the large bodies and celebrity faces of the immaculately dressed men of power. Flocks of plain-clothed and uniformed security personnel and journalists surrounded the leaders and their foreign and local distinguished guests. In great detail, the ceremony in all its aspects was geared to “reproduce the imagination of the state as the great enframer” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001, p. 37). And the central message conveyed to the audience was that the governments of Namibia and Zambia were bringing development to their citizens in a peripheral corner of the state territory.

This double success story of sovereign statehood relied on a very powerful source: something concrete had actually been constructed in the physical landscape. It was visible and tangible in the background of the ceremonial site, throughout the event. The thousands of spectators who came across from Zambia had already felt the bridge and road’s new tarmac under their feet or wheels that morning. Katima Mulilo and Sesheke were

⁴¹file:///D:/PhD/Newspaper%20reports/Border%20Policing/Times%20of%20Zambia%20March%202011%202004%20Zambian%20shot%20by%20Nampol.htm

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

experiencing an economic boom, and all investors and residents I spoke to in 2004 gave one explanation for it: the new road and bridge. Other aspects of the materiality of the opening ceremony were not as long-lasting, but were very concrete for the duration of the event. All technical aspects of the event were functioning with flawless precision, from the sound system and comfortable seating to the catering provided for the VIP guests after the end of the ceremony.

Also more subtle aspects of the opening ceremony’s materiality deserve our attention. Mbembe points out that African subjects, like any other human beings, engage in “meaningful human expressions”, and do “not exist apart from the acts that produce social reality, or apart from the process by which those practices are [...] imbued with meaning.” In this sense, the ceremony had the potential to give meaning to the relationship of citizens with ‘their state’. By connecting in a formal event that which is delivered with the representation of the institution that has delivered it, a link was being made for the spectators through which their relationship with the state could be remembered as a positive and meaningful experience. Reciprocity was established.

To accept this apparent success story of postcolonial state formation at face value is problematic, however. I argue that the new infrastructure celebrated on that day is actually part of a narrow transnational corridor space of worldwide commerce connecting enclaves of resources, production and consumption. As I have shown in chapter 2.7., the construction of this corridor was not the result of a sovereign act by the governments of the countries which it runs through and connects. It was rather the result of an alliance of transnational governance. The members of this alliance were all represented in the opening ceremony. They were congregating inside the cordoned-off security zone, interacting and expressing themselves in various vernacular “languages of stateness” during the event. They can be slotted into three distinct groups. Firstly, there were the international development aid donors, -workers and investors; another group comprised of the state bureaucrats and elected members of the Namibian and Zambian governments; finally, there were the representatives of “traditional” authority from both sides of the Namibia-Zambia borderland. This separation into distinct groups follows the official roles which their members played during the ceremony. However, to accept their existence and recycle them unquestioned into separate analytical categories is problematic. For rather than the

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

distinctions between them it was the close association and interaction between the members of these groups, during the ceremony as well as in everyday life, which I regard as crucial for my interpretation of the events of 13 May 2004. This blurring of distinctions among those inside the security cordon was most evident in their shared rhetoric of “development”, which I have already examined more closely, and in the rhetoric of “one people” to which I now return.

In my understanding, the repeated references to “one people”, along with the terms “unity” and “development” constitute the lowest common denominator of the languages of stateness used at the opening ceremony. The phrase “one people” without a more specific context means nothing in particular. It is an empty signifier which rhetorically blurs and thereby de-politicizes distinctions that are not politically neutral. A closer examination informed by a detailed understanding of the history of state formation in the Namibia-Zambia borderland however reveals that at least three rather distinct and well-established sets of meanings can be attached to the term.

The first meaning derives from the legacy of the Lozi kingdom. A century has passed since the first attempts were made by the administrators of German South West Africa to enforce the colonial boundary which severed the Caprivi Strip from the heartland of the Lozi kingdom. Yet, throughout the following decades to the present the inhabitants on both sides of the Zambezi have remained very closely connected in all spheres of life. The phrase “we are one people” was consistently used by borderland inhabitants during my field work to describe their relations with those living on the other side of the river and border. Interviewees explained this sentiment through their personal life histories. Without a single exception, these included a strong element of everyday cross-border interactions, frequently accompanied by direct references to close family members living on the other side.⁴² None of the interviewees did however consider the surviving legacy of the Lozi kingdom as a factor which could rally support for the colonial boundary to be abolished in favour of the resurrection of a greater Lozi kingdom. This is consistent with the argument I made in chapter 2 that, from the time of colonial separation through to the present, the boundary has created vested interests and opportunities for the borderland population. An organized

⁴² some refs to interviews & / or later chapters, point on bias thru Subiya interviews

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

movement explicitly aiming to re-unite the divided parts of the pre-colonial Lozi kingdom does not exist on either side of the border in the present day. However the orientation of some political actors in the Caprivi Region and Western Province away from the political centres of Namibia and Zambia is a sensitive issue in both countries. Among other arguments, separatists on both sides of the border stress their perceived “cultural” and “historical” distinctness, which they translate into political claims vis á vis the two countries’ central governments. The phrase “one people” therefore is not a rallying call separatists use to strengthen their claims, but like any references to “Loziness” it has possible political connotations. Caprivi governor Sibalatani himself was born in Caprivi and has close personal ties to Zambia. He used the phrase “we are one people” in a context which made clear he was familiar and concerned with the day-to-day facts of borderland life. Presenting himself as a man of the people earned Sibalatani a positive reaction from the mass of local spectators. But not surprisingly, the governor did not make any direct references to Loziness or the distinctness of the people of Caprivi from the rest of Namibia. Sibalatani is a member of Namibia’s ruling SWAPO party, which the Caprivi separatists were opposing. This introduces another possible reading of the phrase “one people”.

Governor Sibalatani’s personal ties across the boundary are not only an outcome of his personal kinship network. Like most members of Namibia’s current political elite, the governor was actively involved in SWAPO’s armed struggle for independence.⁴³ For men like Sibalatani, Namibian President Nujoma and other former SWAPO exiles who were part of the Namibian government delegation the sentiment that they and their Zambian counterparts are “one people” is firmly grounded in the facts of their personal biographies. It evokes fond memories of their formative years as political activists who were hosted and given “unwavering” support by their Zambian brothers-in-arms in the fight against their common “imperialist” enemies and for pan-Africanist ideals.⁴⁴ Master of Ceremony Funjika’s announcement of the removal of the border from the “Joint Republic of Zamnamibia” was therefore more than a merely humorous remark. It was a statement which celebrated the bridging of the division line that had been imposed by the European colonizers and upheld by the Apartheid regime. Mr. Funjika and several other speakers

⁴³ Hopwood (2004): Guide to Namibian Politics, p. 246

⁴⁴ Nujoma (2001): Where Others Wavered

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

labeled the bridge opening a “historic event”. What they considered historic about it became most clear through Mr. Funjika’s remark that “only a few years ago, the Boers would have blown up the bridge”. The opening of the Zambezi bridge was both symbolically and in material terms a reminder that the former freedom fighters and African nationalists had defeated the forces of colonial rule. There is however more to these statements than the simple confirmation of the fact of national independence. The national leaderships of both Zambia and Namibia are acutely aware that the Namibia-Zambia borderland is at the political and socioeconomic periphery of their countries, and therefore a source of potential threats to national unity. By re-emphasizing the past and present “unity” between neighbours fighting as “one people” for a common cause, those who are allegedly working to undermine these achievements are declared not just enemies of the ruling party. They betray the nation, its loyal neighbours, and the very ideas of progress and development. These are precisely the allegations which especially Namibia’s ruling elite has been making in recent years against separatists in Caprivi, and indeed against any voices of dissent or opposition against SWAPO (footnote on Angolan comment January 2008 regarding RDP?). “Bringing development” to Caprivi and Western Province is one way the SWAPO and MMD governments employ to try and both appease and silence their political rivals in the area.

My third reading of the term “one people” emerges from the financial and organizational reality of the infrastructure project and the facts of togetherness and separation at the ceremony, which I have already highlighted. “Bridging the Gap” was the title of the glossy brochure printed by the engineering company JBG Gauff which the VIP guests found lying on their chairs. The text included details of the project and official statements by the German financiers and their *Zambian* government counterparts. Like the speeches at the opening, these assigned a double meaning to the term “bridging”. On the one hand, they emphasized the technological and economic relevance of closing the missing link in a long-distance transport route of global commerce. On the other, they promised that the new infrastructure would serve the people living in the borderland and help “developing a region” in dire need.⁴⁵ The bottom line message was that everyone will benefit. In the

⁴⁵ JBG Gauff Ingenieure (2004): *Bridging the Gap*, p. 6

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

ceremony this inclusive agenda was publicly endorsed and voiced by various groups and individuals whom the organizers allowed to publicly represent “the people” through colourful displays of “tradition” and “culture”: the Lozi *indunas* performing *kushowelela*, the praise singers dressed up as ruling party supporters and the schoolgirl who “never knew a road”. The public spectacle of the opening ceremony was designed to portray the national leaders, their invited guests and the borderland population united as “one people” by a cause they could all own and benefit from. And this cause was appropriately, both in symbolic and real-life terms, a bridge across a gap.

Already a closer look at the opening ceremony itself suggests a different interpretation, which is deepened if we examine the realities of togetherness and separation in the Namibia/Zambia borderland beyond the spatially and temporarily narrow confines of the event itself. Attached to the now-completed transport corridor were large-scale political interests converging with the economic rationale that made the project feasible: The TCC is a solution to the task of moving mineral, agricultural and manufactured products in bulk between the land-locked hinterlands and the coast of the African continent as quickly, safely and cheaply as possible. At the ceremony itself, participants were visibly divided into VIPs inside a tight security cordon and passive spectators outside it. This gap was not absolute while the ceremony was underway. The organizers had left enough room for selected and politically safe displays of common people to be represented inside the VIP zone. Yet as soon as the event was over two realities of separation became evident again.

Firstly, the audience was separated into VIPs and non-VIPs. After the ribbon was cut, the representatives of donors and business, state and ‘traditional’ authority were whisked away in their air-conditioned limousines for the test drive across the bridge or moved into the catering tents. They remained inside the transnational space of the transport corridor where goods and people routinely cross state borders with little or no restrictions by official regulations. For the rest of the audience the spectacle was over. Those intending to cross the Namibia-Zambia border had to enter the lengthy bureaucratic process of immigration. Minutes earlier they had been addressed as “one people”. Now they were being subjected to biopolitical procedures aimed at slotting them into their places as citizens of either Namibia or Zambia, the second reality of separation. The cases of the men shot by border police illustrate the violent rigour with which at least the Namibian state security forces are

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

prepared to enforce this separation.

3.6. Conclusion

Brief conclusion in relation to the task set out at the beginning:

How the borderland is currently integrated into two states, politically and economically. Examine alliance of powerful interests in the context of the bridge opening: governments, donors/investors, chiefs; transnational governance through corridor. Centre controlling the margins, but what centre?

Leading over to the next chapter on:

How the borderland integrates / colonizes the state. Chiefs and state in Zambia and Namibia through Mwandji road building and floods/biofuel case. Negotiation, chiefs as administrative intermediaries and political brokers.

Relates to the overall analytical question of dissertation:

How are the Namibian and Zambian states' assertions of territorial sovereignty negotiated with residents and powerful players in the two countries' shared borderland?

On the 13th of May 2004, I was among those witnessing the fulfillment of the rationale of an access corridor to the interior of southern Africa, 114 years after its inception. The last gap in the Trans Caprivi Corridor was closed and the tar road was opened from Walvis Bay to Lubumbashi. As the trucks started rolling plans to introduce simplified procedures for the border-crossing of long distance transport through a one-stop border checkpoint were under way.

The rationale of the corridor as a lifeline of development and progress featured prominently in the speeches at the opening ceremony but the specific constellation of interests and opportunities that are attached to this infrastructure and their history remained entirely unexplained throughout the celebration and reporting of the "very historic" event. I have showed how this specific constellation of interests and opportunities, and their successful convergence at the beginning of the 21st century are underlying the materiality of the new infrastructure, and how this alliance became visible in the opening ceremony. The

**WORK IN PROGRESS –
DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

expanded historical and geographic context I have given of the processes that have resulted in the new infrastructure enable us to look beyond the rhetoric of “development and progress”. What has provided the momentum for the implementation of this project was very much the economic rationale of opening the African hinterlands to the free global flow of capital and commodities.

To make way for this flow, the force of this rationale has brought about not only the considerable effort of reshaping the physical landscape, it also managed to transcend the relevance of separate state territories. This simplified movement of goods across a common, regionally integrated market without borders is, however, only the latest in a diverse range of historic currents that have flown through this borderland. The border that runs through the celebration site, once a tool in the spatial politics of colonial expansion, then key element of a military strategy aimed at blocking an enemy insurgency, since then an established structure in the landscape separating two postcolonial states at peace with each other, now can finally be freely transcended by the global market forces.

We now have a better understanding of the present and past projects of state-making in the Namibia-Zambia borderland and the relations between the powerful actors engaged in these projects. But this exercise has only given us limited insights into the relations of those outside the police cordon with those inside. To see whether state formation in the Namibia-Zambia borderland is not just an elite project of transnational governance from above, we have to examine more closely the everyday interactions of frontline agents of the state with the people living in the study area. The everyday nature of sovereignty, both through benign and coercive measures by the state, and through acts of engagement and circumvention by the borderland population is therefore central to chapters 4 and 5.