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TITLE:

“INDEPENDENT CAPRIVI: FOLLY OF THE FEW, PART COLLECTIVE WISH OR REASONABLE POSSIBILITY? REFLECTIONS ON NAMIBIA'S FORGOTTEN STRIP”

1. By Way of Introduction: D-DAY, 2 August 1999

Location: Katima Mulilo (regional capital)

Region: Caprivi

State: Namibia, Southern Africa

“Yes... in 1999, on the second of August, on Sunday morning, everything began around two in the morning... I could only hear a few shots [...] We'd heard rumours that they would come and open fire in the end, but... what we didn't know exactly when” (anonymous informant,¹ Caprivian Masubia, Katima Mulilo, 19 September 2006).

In the early hours of 2 August 1999, the inhabitants of Katima Mulilo, the regional capital of Caprivi, awoke to the sound of gunfire. During the night, a hundred or so individuals had stormed government buildings and the nearby military base at Mpacha airport. Although the attackers struck while Namibian security forces were still sleeping, the insurgents were so poorly armed and trained that in little more than twenty four hours, they were overpowered by the police and the army. A state of emergency was declared, a curfew was imposed and citizens were confined to their homes. Using these powers, Namibian security forces surrounded suspected collaborators and it was soon discovered that the Caprivi Liberation Front, an organisation aiming at the secession of Caprivi from the Namibian state, was responsible for the attacks.²

In the following months, Namibian security forces arrested around one hundred people accused of collaboration, including ex-opposition parliamentarian Geoffrey Mwilima. The fortunes of the self-proclaimed secessionists were irremissibly damaged. Many government prisoners complained of beatings and torture, as well as the fact that their ethnicity (Mafwe) was constantly referred to during interrogations.³

¹ The ethical norm in our area of work is not to reveal the identity of informants, in accordance with the basic principles of anthropological fieldwork.

² Suzman 2002: 26.

³ *Ibid.*

Although from the Namibian government's perspective, an armed insurrection in the form of secessionist guerrillas was unexpected in August 1999, the existence of this kind of movement did not come as a complete surprise. The intelligence services had warned of a potential revolution, given the events of previous years, such as the exile of Mafwe chief Boniface Mamili, ex-leader of the DTA opposition party Mishake Muyongo, as well as the governor of Caprivi, John Mabuko, and the 108 armed followers who fled into Botswana in October 1998, after a long process of government pressure and confrontations.⁴

The uprising was not, it must be stressed, a spontaneous or momentary expression of discontent; rather it represented a definitive and dramatic shift in an ongoing political dispute whose origins are rooted in the 19th century (see bibliography).

In the elections held less than two months later, in November 1999, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) achieved its first ever majority in Caprivi, while the DTA only managed to win 5% of the vote (those wishing to express discontent with the government supported the recently-founded CoD⁵). Do these results point to the alienation of citizens by the government at the time - intimidation if the reader prefers - or a lack of real sympathy for the secessionists among the majority? In any case, it should be noted that less support for the idea of secession does not invalidate the reality that many Caprivians feel marginalised by the government. Indeed, the fact that their lack of support for secession is not at odds with not feeling 'wholly Namibian' is crucial to understanding the existing nuances and gradations of 'Caprivian-ness' and 'Namibian-ness'.

There can be no doubt that since the country's independence the "Caprivi Question" has been, and continues to be, the most serious challenge to Namibia's young democracy, undermining the legitimacy of Namibian sovereignty and activating issues that touch the nerves of many other nation states.

The basic aim of my doctoral thesis (2009) was to understand the current state of the affairs and apprehend the most significant local perceptions and sensibilities surrounding the issue, as well as to offer a reasonable exploration of the possibility of Caprivian independence. The fieldwork was carried out between 2006 and 2007, which probably makes my conclusions obsolete today, given the inexorable variety of the reality on the ground. In the interests of brevity, this article will be limited to looking at the fundamental findings on

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The CoD (Congress of Democrats, with Benjamin Ulenga as president) is a party founded in 1999 by dissatisfied (as some informants mentioned) ex-SWAPO voters, and was intended as a fresh alternative to the de facto one-party system (interview in Katima Mulilo with the party's delegate for Caprivi, and Minister of Agriculture and Fishing, 26 September 2006).

the different positions held by Caprivians (what I have termed narratives) on the secessionist issue; limitations of space unfortunately make it impossible to go into the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history of the region that is so vital to understanding the background of the issue at hand. For this purpose, relevant works are quoted in the bibliography.

2. Caprivian Narratives on Secession:⁶ Features, Gradations and Grey Areas of a Social Mosaic

[The region of Caprivi] “from the confluence of the Zambezi and the Chobe to the 21° west” (Bruchmann 2002: 77).

As mentioned above, a key part of the fieldwork⁷ consisted of the qualitative analysis of opinions and feelings in relation to secession, based on a desire to understand the *sensibility* of the population toward a specific issue as being symbolic of more deep-seated concerns, such as the lack of identification with the Namibian state, if this was indeed the case, and how, why and when this was expressed. Of course, it is not possible to understand everything: purity does not exist, to say nothing of totality. In addition, the use of qualitative methods of discourse analysis targeting a handful of people, however diverse or interesting these may be, cannot offer any real statistical scope (nor was this the intention: measurements can also be misleading, since no real individual is truly an average example of anything).

However, we will perhaps be able to explore, better still *understand and feel*, something of what is stirring the hearts and minds of certain representative sectors of the Caprivian population on issues as important, and as *radical*, as belonging to a specific nation state and the desire, or aversion, to the idea of secession as an independent entity, as well as unpacking a series of reasons for these positions on both sides of the debate.

Of greatest concern to me were the impressions of the citizens of Caprivi, of the men and women in the street, not just the political manoeuvring behind the scenes, the leading figures and the tides of political power. After all, people’s opinions are the best litmus test of shared values and norms.

⁶ The term ‘narrative’, as a compendium of discourses, has been chosen precisely because of its greater breadth than the term ‘discourse’, since a narrative may contain several discourses, which may even be contradictory (Farre i Ventura 2008), as is the case here.

⁷ Fundamentally, my fieldwork consisted of participant observation over seven months spent on site (three months in 2006 and four in 2007), 27 semi-structured in-depth interviews of an intentional sample of diverse ethnic origin (Mafwe or Masubia, not so much due to any real ethnological differences between the groups, but for shared differential meanings and the symbology popularly associated with being Mafwe and supporting secession), age (two age groups), gender and activity in associations and political parties, as well as analysis of newspaper articles, secondary bibliography and the use of photography and ethnographic video.

To begin with, we might ask why is Namibia opposed to secession. It seems self-evident that no state would readily accept, without some form of protest, the secession of a portion of its territory. After all, almost all constitutions robustly stipulate the indivisibility of their “legitimate territories”.

Namibia is no exception. Radical opposition and brutal suppression of secessionist intentions are backed up by the legally indisputable argument that pro-independence movements pursue unconstitutional aims which must be combatted, whatever their arguments and whatever the cost, to the bitter end. This argument then, makes any dialogue impossible and heads off any proposals, including those of a political nature. In my view, it constructs a scholastic narrative that can never allow for – or resolve – the complex and vital social realities on the ground.

In light of the fieldwork undertaken and the nuances revealed, any approach to the subject of secession must distinguish between two clearly defined issues: the notion of the secession of Caprivi from Namibia (for diverse reasons, fundamentally practical, historical and ethical), and the position on the specific armed secession uprising that occurred in early August 1999, the way in which it was carried out and the methods used. To simplify matters, I shall term these two ‘branches’ of the positions the secessionist *principle* and the secessionist *uprising*. The results of the analysis offered here summarise the findings on the opinions and sensibilities in relation to these two *interlinked* issues in the sense that, while it may be easy to heuristically disaggregate them for the sake of comprehension and textual clarity, in reality they remain closely linked (for example, although an individual might sympathise with the idea but not the methods used and the chance taken in 1999, by 2007 they may well have greater sympathy toward the uprising itself, if their leanings toward the secessionist idea have increased due, for example, to dissatisfaction with the government; or as one informant put it, “*Now I understand them*”).⁸

The positions outlined below summarise the findings of the fieldwork and data analysis, illustrating the complex reality on the ground (as social mosaic, fabric or structure).

2. 1. Favourable Discourses: The Secessionist Option

Among the least critical positions within this narrative, there is a broad range of possible nuances:

⁸ Interview on 8 August 2007 in Katima Mulilo, young Masubia woman.

a) Independent Caprivi, *by force if necessary*

This is the openly secessionist position, which views secession in a positive light for historical (here recorded history backs the idea that Caprivi is a separate reality from Namibia) and practical reasons (the Namibian state has not been generous in Caprivi, whose *de facto* deterioration since independence, makes ‘going it alone’ seem to offer a better future, especially due to the region's benign climate and the ‘jewel in the crown’ of Africa: water resources), and therefore judges the 1999 uprising, both in its essence and its methods – violence and use of force – as completely justified.

Those espousing this view unreservedly represent a small minority, for obvious reasons: both those who carried out the secession and those suspected of being complicit in their aims can still expect a dubious trial and a prison sentence. Publicly confessing to this position, via tape recorder for example, is no trivial matter. I was fortunate enough to interview Crispin Matongo, architect of the 2006 attempt to revive the UDP, who off the record agreed to provide certain information. He did openly declare his unconditional support for the secessionist *intention* and, finally, even explained that he understood the justification of violence, given what he considered to be the ‘colonial’ occupation by Namibia of Caprivi. Matongo deemed the situation analogous to that of South Africa in Namibia, underlining the legitimacy of SWAPO’s armed struggle against the ‘Boers’. In this discourse, the use of violence is justified by the ideal of sovereignty, as well as the lack of legitimacy of the Namibian government in Caprivi and its scant recognition of the region. As has frequently occurred elsewhere, the underlying premise is that one is simply *not a true Namibian citizen*, and from there everything else follows on: the creation of a (legitimate though illegal) army, the search for international support against an imposed nationality (from Botswana or Zambia) and, if need be, among other decisions, the choice of armed struggle once feelings of injustice among some individuals have reached a critical mass: when “the mayonnaise sets”, to use a now classic expression (see for example, Cahen 2006 or Iniesta Vernet 2002).

It also seems noteworthy that many of those sympathising with the secessionist idea (and even many opponents), spoke with particular deference of the independence leader par excellence, Albert Mishake Muyongo, who occupies a hybrid status between career politician and member of the Mafwe royal family, the latter status conferring unquestionable moral legitimacy on the former. Muyongo is talked about as a charismatic figure: an educated man (much more so than Nujoma, claimed some respondents, who is “jealous of him”), highly intelligent and persevering, and thus able to mobilise a whole people. Muyongo is like an messiah exiled in cold, faraway Copenhagen with the ex-monarch Benjamin Bebi (the true,

legitimate ruler, said some respondents some, as opposed to the current “sell-out” to SWAPO), with whom he has recreated the true royal household in a Danish suburb, waiting for the right time to return and liberate his homeland.

Opposed to this view of Muyongo, visible in some discourses, is the radically different position of those who flatly reject independence and consider Muyongo as a “power hunger”, an opportunist who wants to be “president of something, of whatever”.⁹ This assertion is based on Muyongo's attempts, through the ballot box, to gain the presidency of Namibia, the signing of a CANU-SWAPO anti-colonial agreement and his backing of the constitution, facts that seem difficult for anyone to reconcile with secessionist intentions or claims that Caprivi has never been part of Namibia. Such inconsistencies therefore give die-hard Namibians ammunition with which to discredit both Muyongo's ideology and political leadership.

However, there is still a third set of opinions on Muyongo: that of his own supporters, those that once followed him but now reproach him for having chosen a cushy life in exile and leaving them in the lurch, whether in the dank prisons of the foreign enemy (Namibia), or in the tough refugee camps of Dukwe (Botswana). Analysing these diverse positions on the leader – often a cathartic compendium of much tension, frustration and longing, both because of his symbolic character and his real importance – remains of great interest.

b) Use of political channels

This secessionist position rejects violence and therefore accepts (for reasons outlined above) the principle but not the methods of the 1999 uprising, opting instead for political and diplomatic strategies. The research found two main currents among those seeking political solutions: firstly those that, from soon after Namibian independence, believed in and supported the secessionist idea (largely since Mishake Muyongo once again began talking of independence for Caprivi, after twice failing to be elected president of Namibia in 1989 and 1994), but always advocating political and diplomatic channels to achieve this; and secondly, those who have oscillated from an initial belief in the convenience of belonging to Namibia and the subsequent recognition that Caprivi had become an region ignored within the national whole, one that started out as the country's ‘first’ region in 1989 only to become the last (in education, income, etc.) and that for these reasons, it would be more desirable for the population of Caprivi to go their own way.

⁹ Interview with an anonymous informant, young Masubia woman, 5 September 2006 in Windhoek.

These positions are clearly more moderate, lacking furious gesticulations, and as such support secession through political means, perhaps even in the long term, with the mediation of the international community. Those holding this position feel they have the legitimacy of history on their side, as well as an awareness that most people would feel comfortable with secession, while bearing in mind the practical and material challenges this would have for Caprivi (though with the conviction that these could be overcome), and completely rejecting any kind of armed struggle to achieve these aims. This rejection of violence is due, on one hand, to faith in the language of politics and respect for the legality and legitimacy of Namibia as a constitutional state (“We have to work within the system”); and on the other hand, to primordial issues of ethics (“People should not die”).

2.2 Discourses rejecting secession: we are still part of Namibia, *we are* Namibia

Like pro-secessionist discourses, positions rejecting the secessionist principle do not indicate clear black or white ideas, but rather include a spectrum of ‘grey’ positions.

a) Radical rejection: *one Namibia, one nation*

Here we find a total rejection of any hint of secessionist ideas, from those convinced of their status as Namibian citizens with full rights, as well of their own Namibian identities. It is true that even those who are most at home with calling themselves Namibian see their nationality as a kind of ‘umbrella’, an overarching and ethnically neutral identity able to recognise and include differences, whether ethnic, regional or others. Namibia is understood to be *defined* by this constituent pluralism, and the nation, the State, the democratic system and the constitution are considered to be the keys to this diversity, as well as guarantors of rights, an orderly society and the security of citizens. The reality of Namibia is therefore always placed above any sense of ethnicity. It may be affirmed then, that for these individuals, feelings of Namibianness are more significant than regional and ethnic ties (the research enquired about which identities were experienced with greater intensity or were seen as more important, as well as the position of different identity markers on a scale. Questions were asked about the how people related to and identified with national authorities on one hand, and traditional ethnic sources of authority on the other, and about how and why people celebrated national, cultural or ethnic festivals).

Namibian identity buttressed by pre-independence history, notably the anti-colonial struggle. Thus, exactly the same historical event and moment used by some to reject Namibian identity (“We were different realities, different liberation groups; we united ‘only’

for the sake of a common aim, without intending to lose our own identities”), is employed by others to explain longstanding feelings of unity (“We fought together, we have had things in common for decades; the blood of our ancestors is mixed in combat”), in which a kind of tragic communion for future generations crystallises Namibians and Caprivians in a single – national – identity. In contrast, when secessionists invoke their crucial role in national liberation, it is to highlight the blood shed by their own *as opposed to* that of others. Indeed, not even past bloodshed has a single aim, a single function. Nothing is neutral, unambiguous, totalitarian.

In addition, implicit in this view is the existence of an equation, according to which one Namibia/one nation = SWAPO, or Namibian nation = SWAPO. Here SWAPO becomes the symbolic denominator, the epitome of the Namibian nation. In my view, this constitutes a perversion of the very idea of nation, since it calls into question the loyalty of any non-SWAPO elements, undermining democratic pluralism and multi-party politics – a serious matter in an ethnically complex context like Namibia.

It is also interesting to note that there was no clear correlation between direct recognition of Namibian nationality (over and above other identities) and total satisfaction with the region's government. Put another way, those disposed to be highly critical of SWAPO and its treatment of Caprivi opted to remain part of Namibia. Especially representative of this position are members of (or those close to) the CoD, since the party was formed precisely as a contemporary alternative, supposedly renewed and refreshed, to the now corrupted SWAPO (in fact, it was founded in 1999 mainly by ex-SWAPO members who, in their own words, had become disappointed or weary with the old party)¹⁰.

b) Emphasis on diversity: Namibians, but Caprivians and ‘ethnic’

This difference between this position and that outlined above is more quantitative, in its shades and nuances, than qualitative. These individuals also feel Namibian, and enjoy the advantages (labour rights, citizenship, etc.) of belonging to a broader national space (for example, “If I go abroad and say I'm from Caprivi, no one will know what I'm talking about; if I say Namibia, everyone will understand.”¹¹) and flatly reject the idea of secession. However, they place qualitatively more emphasis (in this case) on difference, both regional and ethnic. In other words, they claim that being Caprivian and Mafwe or Masubia is more

¹⁰ Personal interview with a founding member of CoD, 2 September 2006 in Windhoek; interview of the CoD regional representative in Katima Mulilo, 21 September 2006.

¹¹ Interview with an anonymous informant, older Mafwe male, 2 September 2006, Windhoek.

important to them than being Namibian; indicating in diverse ways that nationality is less relevant and comes after regional and ethnic identity components. They also claim to enjoy ethnic festivals more than national holidays and display profound respect for traditional authority, which is visible even in those living in Windhoek or other places far from Caprivi, for example through attendance of annual festivals honouring the king, the celebration of weddings, land management or conflict resolution, all of which show signs of observance of and importance given to traditional forms of authority.

These individuals would never consider renouncing ethnic or regional identity elements in favour of Namibianness and highlight the often quoted differences between Caprivians in general and the other populations of Namibia (language, history, customs, dress, ways of relating to others, traditions). It is almost as if, for them, the reality of Namibia is reduced and flattened in contrast to the relief and density involved in being Caprivian, Mafwe or Masubia. For these ‘contented Namibians’, Namibianness becomes a low intensity identity marker, as opposed to the high intensity of regional and ethnic senses of belonging, so much so that if the situation turned to conflict, they may feel increased sympathy toward secessionist ideas, though this is purely speculative.

Another illustrative concept is that of permeability: for some, being Namibian and Caprivian (Mafwe or Masubia) are permeable realities; while for others, they are totally impermeable. One respondent’s viewpoint clearly shows the nuanced moderation of this position: “No, we’re really totally different, but we can be together, we’re fine like this. We’re really almost Zambians, but Kavango also borders Angola and you don’t hear anything from them about secession”.¹²

2.3 Nuances, sides and angles of the issue

A common complaint among those interviewed in Caprivi is that their ethnicity was continually referred to during interrogations. Being Mafwe, both in popular imagination and in the obvious fact that the majority of those tried after the uprising were Mafwe (the fathers of two of my young Mafwe respondents, first cousins of opposite genders, were still in prison awaiting trial for treason in 2006), leads us to question the real correlation between ascribed ethnicity and the defence of secessionist ideas. *Are we in fact dealing with an ethnic issue, rather than an exclusively regional one?* Where are the boundary lines in Caprivi between ethnicity, culture and regionalism? Do people want secession because they are Mafwe,

¹² Interview with an anonymous informant, young Masubia male, 19 September 2006, Katima Mulilo.

because they feel under-represented as Mafwes, rather than as Caprivians? Does this mean that Masubia Caprivians identify more as Namibians? Official secessionist discourse¹³ explicitly makes absolutely no mention of ethnicity, despite fears of Masubia respondents that, in an independent Caprivi, Masubias would be 'enslaved' by Mafwes.

While it is true that the research carried out found more Mafwes than Masubias lending varying degrees of support to the secessionist idea, I also came across many Mafwes that were convinced of their Namibianness, visible in their membership of political parties, and who were ready to proclaim this national identity totally openly. However, beyond ethnic explanations of the secessionist issue, which in my view are hazardous at worst and inconclusive at best, is the fact that some of the most ardent supporters of secession in the sample *were Masubia* (or as Masubia as possible in such a mixed context). Two examples serve to illustrate the point: a Mafwe girl claiming to have become convinced of the need for secession since 1999, after studying the reaction of the Namibian state and the continued lack of recognition and concern for the region that followed (the girl's testimony is especially interesting, due to her age, gender and ethnicity, and for the clues it provides on the continuity or viability of the secessionist idea, and the will and support for it, amongst Masubias, supposedly the 'allies' of the government against secession in the popular imagination); and an older Mafwe male seriously committed to the secessionist principle, though solely through political and diplomatic means and the role of the international community as mediator (thereby using the paradigm of nationality versus regionalism aspiring to nationality and backed up by legitimising claims), and in this case, through activity in associations¹⁴ instead of political party membership. Another interesting case is that of a Masubia man involved in politics who, while not defending purely secessionist principles, presents a project for Caprivi that highlights the region's 'difference', and originally proposes a national status for Caprivi within Namibia. Such a proposal may be thought of as a kind of specific regionalism.

As for other transversal factors analysed as possible variables likely to increase our understanding of the different positions on the issue of secession, the research showed no significant incidence on sympathy or lack of sympathy toward secession. These factors included, for example, having greater knowledge or contact with the rest of Namibia, having family in other regions, having lived and worked in other parts of the country, being married or related to people from other areas in Namibia or, conversely, being related only to Caprivians or nationals of neighbouring states (especially Zambia, which was the case for the

¹³ See www.caprivifreedom.com.

¹⁴ For example, in the Katima Alliance Development Association (KADA).

majority, and frequently Botswana). None of these factors influenced people's feelings of being more or less Namibian (greater or lesser identification with Namibian nationality) or their willingness to declare such feelings, or more or less Caprivian (more or less emphasis on a regional identity that could become national in content with possible independence). The study found individuals related to Zambians, and only Zambians, that had even visited Lusaka but never Windhoek, who declared themselves happy and satisfied Namibians. In contrast, there were also those married to members of other Namibian ethnicities¹⁵ who had lived in other parts of the country (and therefore may have developed a superior feeling of national identification, born of *knowing*) but unreservedly supported Caprivian independence.

In any case, adepts of pure methodology should note that, as mentioned previously, the study never intended to be quantitative, and that neither in its approach nor its use of this kind of variables did it rely on the (empty) accuracy offered by statistics.

3. Conclusion: perspectives

“Science makes no sense because it has no answer to the only questions that are important for us; those about what we should do and how we should live.”¹⁶

“One cannot know everything. Everything one knows is a part of the whole.”¹⁷

It must be understood that if movements of the kind analysed here are more than frequent in contemporary southern Africa (with its states so often written off as immature, failed, and a host of other adjectives), successfully dealing with secessionist proposals such as that of Caprivi is a challenge also faced by mature (‘well-ordered’) nation states. As a very young state, since independence Namibia has become a kind of envied regional example, due to the transparency of its elections and its sustained growth and despite undeniably complex issues such as extremely high rates of HIV-AIDS or ethnic diversity. A lack of economic and even human resources has meant that recognition of the country's multiple languages and identities has not been reflected in the implementation of the so-called Reconciliation Policy (English is the only official language, while in neighbouring South Africa, Namibia's eternal and frustrating mirror, has eleven official languages present in everything from the school curriculum to television series).

The secessionist uprising in Caprivi produced not only victims of different kinds, but also a highly dubious state-sponsored solution lacking in legitimacy (affecting the security

¹⁵ Including Ovambo, an ethnicity much maligned for its inevitable dominance, according to many respondents, even among SWAPO supporters – some spoke of the ‘oppressive Ovambo police’.

¹⁶ Lev Tolstoi, in Weber [1959] 1975:107.

¹⁷ Sow, Baloguin, Aguessy and Diagne 1979: 83.

forces, and later the justice system). These issues remain unresolved and are embodied by those still languishing in prison, excessively prolonged or postponed trials, and a clear feeling of marginalisation in Caprivi over issues such as access to water supplies and regional development and promotion. All of this makes the secessionist question the single most serious challenge to the legitimacy of the Namibian state since independence, despite the existence of secessionist tendencies in other parts of the country, such as those of the Rehoboth Basters to the south east of Windhoek (which have not opted to take up arms and coalesce around ethnic rather than regional considerations, making their case different from that of Caprivi).

As for the more specific issues of urban and infrastructure development (access to water, healthcare, promotion of construction, etc.), the perception of the vast majority of respondents, including those declaring themselves satisfied Namibians, was unanimous: the government is not doing enough, despite its efforts (the least critical respondents at least recognised these efforts but deemed them insufficient, whereas only a few professional politicians from SWAPO earnestly defended the government's attitude).

The latest cases of corruption in Namibia¹⁸ or the controversy in July 2007 emanating from the International Criminal Court in The Hague over Phil Ya Nangoloh's implication of Sam Nujoma in human rights violations after independence, provoking a slew of government declarations against the freedom of the press, in a tone bordering on censorship, point to a possible rise in constraints on democratic freedoms in the country. In July and August 2007, the Ya Nangoloh Case caused a democratic outcry among Namibian citizens, who expressed their most profound and controversial opinions more through text messages than in the opinion pages of the newspaper *The Namibian*¹⁹.

Also noteworthy in these messages is the changing style of president Pohamba. Since 2004, Pohamba has gradually been more open to dialogue, more democratic and has placed more emphasis on 'team politics' than his predecessor Nujoma, the 'father of the nation', in contrast to expectations that Pohamba would turn out to be Nujoma's puppet, given the largely authoritarian and autocratic tone of his last mandate.

¹⁸ "Rise in corruption cases in Namibia". *Afrol News*, 3 April 2008.

¹⁹ Due to the frenzied controversy unleashed by the case, the newspaper's SMS page devoted a special section to the issue: analysis of the different tendencies expressed by so many anonymous citizens is certainly worthy of a separate study, something I will return to in the near future. In summary, one segment of opinion viewed Ya Nangoloh's position as having betrayed the nation and violating traditional gerontocracy (a lack of respect for old father of the nation), while another saw his accusations as justified, and a necessary step toward open and healthy democracy, whoever happened to be right (it was the court's responsibility to decide this and, anyway, what was Nujoma afraid of?). The nuances visible in the numerous text messages are however much broader than this simplistic dichotomy of for/against Nujoma or Ya Nangoloh.

In relation to the last elections in Namibia, held in 2009, the most significant news was that SWAPO again obtained a majority and Hifikepunye Pohamba won another term in office. The results in Caprivi are especially interesting: in the 2004 elections, the CoD, which seemed to be an emerging alternative force, lost ground in Katima Mulilo Urban province (from 1105 votes to 79 in 2009); the DTA also experienced considerable losses (down from 275 votes to 113); although SWAPO also saw its number of votes shrink (from the 6135 obtained in 2004 to 5142 in November 2009). All in all, in Caprivi as in other regions, SWAPO reaped considerably more votes than other parties, which seemingly does not bode well for the secessionist option, given SWAPO's peremptory support for the 'unity in diversity' model. On the other hand, perhaps the most crucial issue is that of *who votes* (ultimately, who trusts the political system) since, as the fieldwork illustrated, many of those most dissatisfied with the Namibian government are those who vote the least, meaning that the final results do not reflect the whole *social truth*, so to speak, rather a partial truth that should not satisfy those analysing the situation as an accurate reflection of reality. In fact, electoral turnout has decreased in Katima Mulilo Urban (this example is used since it is by far the province with the highest number of both enrolled voters and turnout), declining from 8184 voters in 2004 to 7194 in 2009.

The overwhelming impression gained from other up to date information is that the secessionist movement seems to be in a state of dormancy, but has by no means been eradicated. It is made up of a group of charismatic figures, with a clear vision and potential force of action that, depending on the paths taken by Namibian democracy and the perception of these developments in Caprivi, has the potential to gain support in the near future or exhaust itself. However, all this is pure speculation, more or less well-founded, and must therefore form the subject of future research.

The situation in Caprivi will depend intensely, in my view, on how Namibia evolves as a democracy, and on whether it can make ideological and political room for, as well as improve the material conditions of, those living in the Strip. This seems more of a key factor for the development of the situation than the clearly secessionist aspirations of what is in reality a small minority (at least in the pure and genuinely separatist nucleus), which may lose its momentum if the Namibian government is able to satisfy the majority of Caprivians that do not have strong views on their national identity. In the final analysis then, it is hunger (in the broadest sense) that will tip the balance one way or the other, and it is the Namibian

government that holds the solution.²⁰ In contrast, if Caprivi continues to lack the special attention it needs (and has needed for many years) it would be easy, inevitable even, for the secessionist movement to gain in strength, as its standing and credibility improves among different segments of the population.

The unconventional title chosen for this study was “Independent Caprivi: Folly of the Few, Part Collective Wish or Reasonable Possibility? Reflections on Namibia's Forgotten Strip” After this partisan overview, it seems possible to state that the idea of an independent Caprivi *is*, and *can be*, all of these things and more: it is the folly of a few (very few); but it is also largely a partial collective wish, as well as a reasonable possibility. However, it must be highlighted that it is also *many other things*. Perhaps the title I drafted so many months ago has come to epitomise the ideas and positions on the secessionist issue outlined here.

To conclude an article that has been aimed more at analysing the breadth of proposals and perspectives on the issue than at reaching firm and closed conclusions, I will echo the words of a Caprivian Masubia friend:

"It's a relief to tell you all of these things that has been building up in my brain, now the relief is to see that I can share all this information with the world".²¹

The point of the exercise is exactly that: to share all of this information with the world.

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²⁰ Interview with the journalist from *The Namibian* Werner Menges on 13 October 2006, Windhoek.

²¹ Interviewed on 22 September 2006, in Katima Mulilo.

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