

9 *Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye: A Journey of 'Internal' Exile*¹

Bennett Kangumu Kangumu

Introduction

The Caprivi African National Union (CANU) was secretly founded on 7 September 1962² even though it had existed as an underground movement from late 1958. CANU did not survive within Caprivi beyond its very first public meeting, which took place in July 1964.³ Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye, founding President of CANU, and two others, Alfred Tongo Nalishuwa, and Vernet Maswahu, were arrested at that meeting and this marked the start of a life of perpetual detention, isolation, banishment and 'internal' exile or displacement for Maswahu and Simbwaye. After his arrest, CANU re-grouped in Zambia under Albert Mishake Muyongo and joined the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in an alliance in 1964. Simbwaye was made SWAPO's Vice-President.

This chapter attempts to provide a historical timeline⁴ of the life of Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye between the period 1964, when he was arrested, and 1972

- 1 This chapter is part of a larger study, the research for which started in 2005 and was aimed at producing a short biography of Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye. I wish to thank Ellen Namhila for her ongoing encouragement and belief that this was a story worth writing, and Werner Hillebrecht and his staff at the National Archives of Namibia for being very helpful in locating relevant files that contained information on Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye. I wish to thank Mr Alfred Ilukena, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, who assisted me with conducting oral interviews with former CANU activists and family members of Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye. Lastly, I wish to thank all former CANU activists and the family of Simbwaye who shared their stories and memories of Simbwaye, and the 1960s period in Caprivi history.
- 2 Albert Zacharia Ndopu, Katima Mulilo, 17 April 2006. Albert Zacharia Ndopu was a founding Executive Committee member of CANU and served as the Secretary for Information and Publicity.
- 3 There is confusion regarding the actual date of this meeting. CANU activists interviewed separately maintain that it was in mid-July 1964 (Albert Zacharia Ndopu and Ignatius Matengu), with the latter even stating that Simbwaye was arrested on the morning of 15 July 1964, which would also be the date of the meeting. Ignatius Matengu, apart from being a CANU youth activist at the time, was staying in Brendan Simbwaye's house because he was Simbwaye's nephew. C. E. Kruger, the Native Commissioner for Eastern Caprivi Strip at the time, believes the meeting took place in the second half of August 1964. This is supported by Albert Mishake Muyongo, CANU's Vice President, in a short autobiography submitted to SWAPO and published in *Namibia News*, Vol. 3, No. 1-3, January/March 1970, pp. 9-12.
- 4 Following archival research and oral interviews I conducted on the life history of Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye, I constructed a timeline of his life story that appeared in *New Era* in August 2006 to coincide with the celebration of Heroes Day, which was being celebrated for the first time at Katima Mulilo. The newspaper article was entitled: 'Heroism: A Glance at Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye.'

when he is presumed to have 'disappeared' at the hands of the South African authorities in the east of the Caprivi Strip. The chapter will look at the available evidence about his arrest, his trial, the banishment order, his house arrest at Warmbad and Khorixas, his visit to Katima Mulilo in 1972, and his eventual disappearance.

Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye was born in 1934 at Ndangamwa (Lukozi village) near Malindi in the eastern floodplain of the Caprivi Region. He started his schooling at Schuckmansburg Primary School and proceeded to the Holy Family Mission at Katima Mulilo where he completed his Standard Six Upper in May 1955.⁵ He went for further education at Lukulu Teacher Training College in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) where he completed a two-year primary education course in May 1957. He started at the Holy Family Mission in August 1957 teaching the Standard Four class, working as a boarding master at the school and also taking responsibility for football and athletics. Simbwaye was a Catholic and deeply religious; he was married to a trained nurse. He resigned from his teaching position in 1963 to devote his entire energy to CANU, with the purpose of terminating South Africa's occupation of the Eastern Caprivi Strip.

The authorities started to closely monitor Simbwaye's activities at the end of 1963 when he left for Lusaka (Zambia), to seek support from the United Nations which was then involved in Zambia's transition to independence;⁶ and to cement ties with the United Independence Party (UNIP), among other things. It is reported that UNIP assisted with printing the first CANU membership cards, and drafting its first constitution.⁷ It was on this trip that Simbwaye met members of the SWAPO leadership in Lusaka to pave the way for a 'merger' between CANU and SWAPO. He returned from Lusaka in March 1964 but was advised not to cross into the Eastern Caprivi Strip because the authorities were looking for him as he had left the territory illegally and was accused of fermenting political unrest in the Caprivi. He stayed on at Sesheke (Zambia) until May 1964, when CANU members in Caprivi had finished selling membership cards and recruited many to its cause, in order to prepare for CANU's first public meeting.

Public gatherings were prohibited in 'native areas' unless specially permitted by a tribal chief or the Native Commissioner, under Proclamation No. 198 of 1953. This was reinforced by a Minute issued by the Secretary for Native Affairs on 4 July 1958, with the agreement of the Secretary for Justice. The Minute, entitled 'Control of Meetings or Gatherings in Native Areas' was directed to all officials in the Department of Native Affairs:

Because attempts are being made nowadays to undermine the authority of the chiefs and the government, often through the medium of unlawful gatherings and meetings,

5 Bennett Kangumu Kangumu (2006). 'Heroism: A Glance at Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye', *New Era*, 25 August.

6 The United Nations' Special Committee of Twenty-Four that was dealing with issues of decolonisation heard petitioners (including Kenneth Kaunda) from Northern Rhodesia (as Zambia was known at the time) in 1962 and 1963 arguing the case for independence and the end of the Federation for the Rhodesias and Nyasaland. See United Nations (1965), *The United Nations and Decolonisation: Summary of the Work of the Special Committee of Twenty-Four*; Vol. 3(4), pp. 43-44.

7 Bennett Kangumu Kangumu (2008), 'Contestations Over Caprivi Identities: From pre-colonial times to the present' (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town), p. 246.

it is imperative that the provisions of Proclamation No. 198 of 1953 should again be brought to the attention of all chiefs and headmen. The Department has reason to doubt whether the chiefs really understand the implications of, and the firm support given them by, this legal enactment.

CANU activists reportedly approached the authorities three times requesting permission to hold a public meeting but this was refused.⁸ It was then that they decided to proceed to hold a public meeting to launch CANU at Mafulo near Katima Mulilo. It was at this public meeting that the police, headed by Sergeant Hartmann and his son-in-law, Sakkie Bosman, and accompanied by a score of black askaris (black policemen), arrested Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye and Alfred Tongo Nalishuwa. Vernet Sibanda Maswahu would join them later in prison when he was arrested on his way to take a petition to the UN in Lusaka (the petition was also confiscated by the police).⁹

The Trial

The three accused were brought to court for trial at Katima Mulilo, which attracted a sizable crowd. They were accused of holding an illegal meeting under the provision of Proclamation 198 of 1953 (cited above) which prohibited meetings or public gatherings without permission from the authorities. Simbwaye was also charged with leaving the Eastern Caprivi Strip without permission. The charges were read and the accused called to plead but no answer was forthcoming and a 'not guilty' plea was entered. The accused were asked if they wished to put any questions or make statements. Simbwaye ignored the presiding officer and declared in a loud voice that he did not recognise the court, that they wanted to be tried internationally on an international level and he and his co-accused declared that they would only submit to the United Nations.¹⁰ For this, they were immediately sentenced to one month's imprisonment for contempt of court without the option of a fine. On the main charge they were fined £2.00 for holding an illegal meeting and Simbwaye was fined a further £2.00 for leaving the country without a permit.

Before the accused were sentenced, the Native Commissioner made an impromptu visit to Pretoria to report on what had taken place; to ask for banishment or removal orders to be served on Simbwaye and Maswahu; and to ask that the three (Simbwaye, Maswahu and Nalishuwa) serve their sentences elsewhere in South West Africa as the prison facilities at Katima Mulilo were inadequate. The three were then transferred in the dead of night and handed over to police from Rundu at the Manyeha crossing (now Kongola), to be taken to Grootfontein. Simbwaye reported to Israel Goldblatt that, at Grootfontein, the three prisoners were told that their sentences had been increased from one to three months. They served their prison sentence in the Windhoek Central

8 Interview by author with Adrian Waluka Simubali, Bukalo, 16 April 2006. The same is reported by advocate Israel Goldblatt in his notes of a conversation with Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye on 2 October 1964.

9 Interview by author with Adrian Waluka Simubali, Bukalo, 16 April 2006.

10 NAN BAD, V5, vol. II: C. E. Kruger, in a Submission for Removal in terms of South West Africa Proclamation 15 of 1928 of Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye and Vernet Sibanda Maswahu, 15 August 1964.