Voice interplay in the Makhado-Louis Trichardt renaming saga

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Abstract

The tendency of foreigners to replace names in areas they have conquered or those that allegedly appear unoccupied is well known and has featured highly in the history of South Africa. The Makhado-Louis Trichardt renaming saga has followed a similar trend as it has now become a battleground for two opposing forces, the government on the one hand, and the so-called Hlanganani Chairperson's group on the other hand, with each name getting toppled by the other before the ink for its endorsement has even dried. This paper intends to demonstrate that this renaming saga has created an interplay of negating voices perpetuated by power relations between equally powerful forces. In each case, the endorsement of each name seems to be turned into a weapon that performs some sort of 'jabs', characteristic of hidden polemic where 'the other's words are treated antagonistically, and this antagonism, no less that the very topic being discussed, is what determines the author's discourse' (Bakhtin (1984:195).

1. Introduction

Over the years Africans have had to endure the indignity of being removed from areas they had occupied for years by foreign forces. Usually this had to do with some fertile land with good vegetation or rains, a flatland where they had been able to do farming and raise their stork, or some picturesque valley with good vegetation. The forced removal of Africans from their land by foreigners and/or colonisers is a well known and recorded practice by both colonial and later apartheid rulers. Most indigenous African names have, as a result, been erased through this practice only to be replaced with European names which usually commemorate such a 'conquest' by renaming the village after some village or town back in Europe or after one of the colonisers' leaders. Many elders today narrate and explain that many areas which today teem with English and Afrikaans names are villages in which they grew up living as close communities where they hunted and looked after cattle, played games such as *musangwe* 'bare knuckles' and *khororo* 'hockey' among others.

These elders tell stories of names which have been effaced from history and thus sound like folktales to many of the new generation There has always been references to some names where elders would say, '*ha kale*' (of old) meaning before they were removed, because in certain cases they moved with some of the names as a sign of resistance.

The dawn of a democratic era saw more people adding their voices to calls for the re-examination of names, even as part of a bigger reclamatory process. Complaints that South Africa resembled another European country as it was characterised by European names everywhere gained ascendency. Indeed a glance of any South African map buttresses this notion. The ANC government then established, among others, structures to deal with some of these imbalances. One such structure is the Geographical Names Council with branches in the various provinces. In line with its mandate, the Northern Geographical Province

Names Council decided to rename some of the towns by reverting to the original names of the areas where they are situated. For this reason, the names of some towns reverted to the popular ones among Africans - names which were used before the colonial era.

There were voices of dissent especially from whites who wanted the names to remain unchanged ostensibly because changing the names was seen as detrimental and tantamount to re-writing the history of the said towns (Daily Sun, Wednesday, 11 April, 2007:3).

However, a counter argument by the Northern Province Names Council advanced similar reasons since the introduction of the European names in place of the Tshivenḍa ones had obliterated the history of Vhavenḍa. Some predominantly Afrikaner conservative groups staged sporadic protest marches in Polokwane but with the passage of time, faded into oblivion. But the Louis Trichardt to Makhado renaming that remained a hot potato still rages on between the Makhado Municipality and the Provincial Names Council on the one hand and the so-called Hlanganani Chairperson's Group comprising of whites, some African groups reported to be Vatsonga, Bapedi, coloureds and Indians, placed in the old South Africa racial and tribal categories (The Citizen, Friday March, 2007: 2). The names have been constantly changing as each time one is endorsed then there is a case against it and it is made to shift and make room for its counterpart and vice versa.

It is quite clear that during the reign of Vhavenḍa rulers, there was no problem with the name Tshirulu-luni because to them the name was informative as it means 'a place of good rainfall'. However, after the defeat of Mphephu by an alliance of forces among them the Voortrekkers under General Joubert, African mercenaries recruited by them such as Vatsonga and Swazi/Ngoni groups, the whites saw an opportunity to change the name to Louis Trichardt in honour of their own hero who had run away from justice in the Cape. When the new democratic government took over, they used their power to change Louis Trichardt to Makhado in order to honour a hero who resisted white domination. Having realised that the renaming is interfering with their identity, the whites decided to exploit minor cultural differences among Africans to restore the name Louis Trichardt.

Fingers are being pointed at both the whites and the new democratic government for apparent abuse of power for limited consultation, racism on the part of whites and pure tribal prejudice on the side of the Africans who are siding with the whites. All these elements combined seem to elicit the voice interplay that has characterised the endless renaming of the town.

2. On the notion of voice and the interplay

Somehow the two groups have been speaking to each other through these names which eventually create some kind of discourse between the parties concerned. This phenomenon is explained better through what Bakhtin (1973) calls voice. He associates it with ideologies that are used when people use language. Bakhtin's observation is expanded more openly by Bruner (1986:121) who explains that when people use language, they

impose their own points of view 'not only about the world to which it refers but towards the use of the mind with respect of his world.' Kamberelis and Scott (2004:206) go on to illustrate that in his understanding of these ideologies that he regards as 'voice', 'the content and style of any utterance constitutes a voice or an ideological stance towards both the discourse used and the real-world referents of the discourse.' From this Bakhtin maintains that all utterances be they written or spoken, are borrowed and get transformed in new contexts but that they tend to find in the new contexts. For this reason, Bakhtin argues that interactions between voices become dialogic (Blackledge 2005:14). This means that wherever a discourse occurs according to Bakhtin, it is shaped or influenced by other discourses. This implies that every utterance links up with a series of many other 'chains of discourses' as Fairclough (2001) calls them.

Since in discourses, speakers are different and contribute utterances for different purposes, there are possibilities of struggles between them because in such cases speakers attack each other openly. In this ideological struggle, '...the voice may be hostile to the other voices, or may suppress them, leaving them only a suggestion that they are in a way present' (Blackledge 2005:6). In this case Bakhtin (1984:196) speaks of what he calls the 'internally polemical' word, a word with a sideward glance at another person's hostile word, which possesses enormous style-determining significance. Blackledge (2005:15) goes on to add that in such speeches utterances tend to contradict each other because when one speaker takes a stand, he attacks his/her interlocutor's speech as it 'responds to it with cutting remarks ('jabs and needles')'.

This process seems to play itself out in the Makhado-Louis Trichardt renaming saga because no sooner is one name endorsed than it is replaced by the another with concomitant quarrels and counter arguments. The interaction creates an interplay of voices as in the case of participants on a discourse contributing towards a topic. In this case, when a name occupies the centre stage, it becomes primary discourse, but as soon as it is shifted aside, it becomes secondary discourse and the floor beholder the primary discourse (Blackledge 2005:16). This process in the end makes naming a site a struggle for survival between equally powerful and contesting forces. As power shifts from one group to the other, the names as discourse create voices which communicate negative messages to the opposing group. Everything that transpires in the foregoing has to do with power relations between two formidable forces. Issues involving power relations are best handled through critical discourse analysis.

3. Critical discourse analysis

This study is being conducted within the critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach where language is seen as a social practice. This means that language is used to talk about societal issues that are economic, political educational, and cultural among others. In the words of Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter (2000:146)

CDA is concerned with social problems. It is not concerned with language per se, but with the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures.

Van Dijk (1993:294) stresses this function and adds that critical discourse analysis or CDA focuses on 'the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance' (Van Dijk 1993:294). Issues of dominance tend to be more in the political sphere, hence the open emphasis from CDA scholars that in actual fact CDA has a political agenda and that they as scholars are proud of this (Van Dijk 1993, Wooffitt, 2005). This may be the reason why they all argue that it tends to intervene on the side of the dominated and oppressed against the dominating groups which normally has power to control (Fairclough & Wodak 1997:259).

However, where the two opposing groups are formidable with none prepared to shift, then discourse becomes a battlefield (Grillo 2005:8). This further indicates that when language is used, say in the form of names, it becomes discourse through which dominance, control and inequalities are produced (Fairclough 1995, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak 1997; Van Dijk 1993, 2001, 2008).

The foregoing seems to prove that there is a dialectical relationship between language use and the social structures in which language is used (Fairclough 2001). This explains that the social structures influence language and language, on the other hand, influences social structures, suggesting in this context that the names Makhado and Louis Trichardt are discourses or ideological voices through which the citizens of the areas or the pro-Makhado and pro-Louis Trichardt groups are communicating. The interplay of voice is therefore caused by conflicting power relations between the opposing groups, namely the Makhado Municipality and the Geographical Names Council on the one hand and the so-called Hlanganani Chairperson/s group on the other. Each time one of these names is endorsed, it produces or reproduces power abuse, racism, tribalism and prejudice.

The analysis of the ideological voices between Makhado and Louis Trichardt will focus on the interplay between primary versus secondary discourse as the two fight for the primary discourse status. From a historical point of view, the whole saga started when the area was called Tshirululuni, a name which was replaced by European Voortrekkers after the defeat of Mphephu in the Mphephu-South African Republic War (Motenda 1940; Nemudzivhadi 1977)

3.1. Tshirululuni (ha Makhado) as primary discourse.

The name Tshirululuni is associated with the area where Makhado/Louis Trichardt is today from the era of the Vhavenda of Raphulu. Much is read about the time when Thohoyandou sent Mpofu, Makhado's grandfather to rule over Sunguzwi which is in the same vicinity. This is the area where Ramabulana had his royal residence even though he moved to Mauluma on account of safety. Makhado, his son, had his royal residence in the same area and according to information the area was known as Tshirululuni ha Makhado during his reign. He did move up to Luatame for safety as he had become vulnerable to the whites, who together with some African mercenaries, were making inroads in his country. His son Alilali Tshilamulele Mphephu also ruled from Tshirululuni. Vhavenda lived there and as

such Tshivenda culture and language dominated. During this time Tshirululuni was the primary discourse with no other name challenging it (Motenda 1940; Nemudzivhadi 1977, 1998).

3.2. Louis Trichardt as primary discourse

According to Moller-Malan (1953), it was the nephew of Louis Trichardt who, after the Mphephu and the South African Republic War, requested that they name the area where they were launching attacks upon Mphephu's regiments after his uncle Louis Trichardt. His request was granted by General Joubert. After the establishment or what is apparently a transplantation of the town Louis Trichardt on to the royal village town of Tshirululuni ha Makhado, the name became primary discourse and Tshirululuni ha Makhado was obliterated. The establishment of Louis Trichardt was in line with the rule of the Transvaal Republic of the boers and as such the name became legal. The name was therefore made popular in all spheres of life. The suppression of Tshirululuni through Louis Trichardt reflects a case of what Bakhtin (1984:196) calls 'internally polemic' as whites would not want to be reminded of a Tshivenda name or anything associated with Africans.

It is clear again that the elements of power abuse, racism and prejudice played a major role as the Voortrekkers would not be associated with Tshirululuni, a Tshivenda name, hence its replacement with Louis Trichardt in which honours their own hero.

3.3. Tshitandani as an aside discourse

After the Mphephu war with the South African Republic, Louis Trichardt became a primary discourse and Tshitandani became an aside discourse with almost a primary slot with Africans and ignored as discourse by whites. The name Tshitandani was adopted out of resistance against white domination and pride by Vhavenda who described Mphephu's war with the Boers as having been as tough as *tshitanda tsha mudzwiri* 'a stomp of a mudzwiri tree' (a very strong tree) because though the whites were formidable, Mphephu's soldiers put up tough resistance (Motenda 1940).

However, the name Tshitandani continued to be used mainly by Vhavenda and other Africans alongside Louis Trichardt. It is clear that the name Tshitandani did not prove to be a threat to Louis Trichardt because though it was used by African people, it was not regarded as an official name. However, it is this name that continued to carry and shape the indigenous African identity quite innocently in the absence of Tshirululuni. Of course, many Africans who lived in the vicinity of the town associated themselves more with the name Louis Trichardt because of the ideology of the time where anything associated with white people was considered the best. It was like borrowed pride because of the racial divide. Whites made it clear that what belonged to them did not belong to Africans. Indeed the

'innerly polemical' element can be seen where the name Tshitandani sort of became an odd name to whites. However, it was used as a symbol of resistance by Vhavenḓa.

4. Democracy, the Makhado-primary discourse and Louis Trichardt-secondary discourse interplay

In line with changes in the democratic era, the ANC government decided to rename many other places - rivers, dams, streets and so on - which carried European names, some of which were known to be insulting such as Klipgat, Kaffersfontein and Duiwelskloof among others. A number of towns in Limpopo then known as the Northern Province were given names of village towns that were either removed or obliterated. As such Warmbath became Belabela, Nylstroom reverted to Modimolle, Naboomspruit carried the old name Mookopong, Potgieters revived the old Mokopane and Pietersburg was replaced with the original name Polokwane, Alldays assumed Lephalale, Messina was correctly spelt to Musina and Louis Trichardt reverted to Makhado, though it was popularly known as Tshirululuni ha Makhado in the past (Daily Sun, Wednesday, 11April, 2007:3).

The decision to rename Louis Trichardt Makhado made it primary discourse thus relegating Louis Trichardt to no discourse. However, the pro-Louis Trichardt group rejected the name Makhado by persisting to use Louis Trichardt instead, thus making it their primary discourse although on the discourse floor it had become a mere secondary one. This, therefore, meant that all official document including road map directions had to bear the name Makhado as primary discourse shifting Louis Trichardt to the annals of history as no discourse at all again.

5. Legalities, Louis Trichardt-primary discourse and Makhado-secondary and Tshitandani continues as an 'aside discourse'

It can be said that within a few months of Makhado enjoying primary status that there was a challenge from the so-called Hlanganani Chairperson's Group for the retention of the name Louis Trichardt as they claimed that there had been minimal consultation on the name and that the name was divisive as it favoured Vhavenḓa. The challenge tended to waver between racism and tribalism as the so-called Hlanganani Chairperson's Group comprised of whites in the lead and other groups referred as Vatsonga, Bapedi, coloureds and also Indians. It took some legal processes to replace the name Makhado with Louis Trichardt as both the Makhado Municipality and the Provincial Names Council would hear none of it (The Citizen, Friday 30 March, 2007:2). For this reason, Louis Trichardt became primary discourse to this group thus reducing Makhado to secondary discourse. In order to succeed, whites decided to drum support from some Vatsonga, Sotho-speaking people, Indians and coloureds in order to legitimise resistance against the government. In all this, underlying elements of racism and tribal prejudice are very obvious though the debate seems to be about the names.

However, the fact that it had become official and had to be used for all official documentation, even if some did not want it, Louis Trichardt became secondary discourse to most Vhavenḓa who up to now continue to refer to the town as either Makhado or Tshitandani. This voice interplay underlies both racism and tribal prejudice and therefore made discourse a battlefield and continues to do so up to now.

All the time Tshitandani continued as an 'aside discourse' shuttling between primary and secondary discourse so as to jolt Louis Trichardt aside despite court rulings which made Louis Trichardt primary discourse. It can be said that whereas whites and the satellite groups used Louis Trichardt as their primary discourse, most Vhavenḓa and ANC-aligned groups continued to recognise Makhado as their primary discourse, therefore, creating a situation where they appeared to be speaking past each other so as to jab at each other. This straddling of names displays what Bakhtin (1984:196) calls 'internally polemical' discourse or voices.

At the moment there are mainly two opposing groups, the pro-Makhado/anti-Louis Trichardt group and the pro-Louis Trichardt/anti-Makhado group. This makes discourse and obviously ideology of voices a site of political struggle. The struggle is about the floor for speakership.

6. Power, power abuse, dominance and control

Perhaps another issue here that needs to be brought to the fore is that of power and how powerful groups abuse power as those who are powerless decide to resist and talk back through similar or different strategies (Wooffitt 2005; Blommaert, 2005). Critical discourse analysis notes that power is not necessarily in language, but it rests with the language user. People with power have access to many resources and as such they can manipulate language to bring about desired results - be it maintaining the status quo or changing the cause of events (Wodak 2001). Blackledge (2005:5) argues that:

CDA is centrally interested in language and power because it is usually in language that discriminatory practices are enacted, in language that unequal relations of power are constituted and reproduced, and in language that social asymmetries may be challenged and transformed.

During the period of Tshirululuni before the colonial era, Vhavenḓa had power as the sole ethnic group and as such were in charge hence the name enjoyed primary discourse status. The introduction of Louis Trichardt by Voortrekkers who then had power through coercion, suppressed Tshirululuni as it was transplanted on to it. Most people who grew up in the 20th century with the exception of those who learnt from their elders have no or very little knowledge about Tshirululuni because it had been wiped off in such a manner that it never appears in any of the maps of South Africa. This was done to deny the people access to historical and heritage knowledge through a carefully designed process of domination and control by the South African Republic and later the successive apartheid regimes.

There was, therefore, no interplay between the voices as that of Tshiruluni was shut off in favour of Louis Trichardt which became primary discourse by force because the occupying group had power. For this reason, it became visible and prominent in maps, was used in all government documentation, educational material, buildings and all roadmap directions at the expense of Tshirululuni.

This renaming reproduces power abuse, dominance and control on the part of the Voortrekkers as there was no consultation with either the ruler of the people and the people themselves. Racism and prejudice against Africans are very obvious as whites would not like to be associated with a Tshivenda name.

The re-introduction of Louis Trichardt created what Fairclough (1995:58) calls 'boundary maintenance' as it took over from Tshirululuni. This process occurred only for a short period in the case of Makhado because no sooner had it become primary discourse than there was a serious challenge from opposing groups for the retention of Louis Trichardt. Whites who had been in power for years and were the leading voices against the name Makhado, together with their supporters, resorted to legal powers for the retention of the name whereas the Makhado Municipality relied on the Limpopo Geographical Names Council and used political and constitutional means to try and retain the name Makhado. The struggle for the primacy of discourse between Makhado and Louis Trichardt creates the real dynamic of power, dominance and control of the voice interplay. Of interest here is the role played by the name Tshitandani as, up to now, it keeps on sneaking in or running parallel to Louis Trichardt to a point of jostling for a 'speaker's floor' in order to be primary discourse in support of Makhado.

The voice interplay between the names, reflects elements of racism and abuse of power between the whites and the new democratic government. The Africans who are supporting the whites seem to be mere supporters. Vhavenda, on the other hand, seem to use both Makhado and Tshitandani to resist white domination that has persisted for almost a century.

Whereas the name Makhado has now been shelved aside legally, many, amongst the Vhavenda, continue to use it ignoring the Louis Trichardt nomenclature. The whole interplay creates what Bakhtin (1973:163) has called 'jabs and needles' as the use of each name continues to remind each group that it is still on the 'speaker's floor' as primary discourse and will be there for a long time. This further creates a serious conflict as each group is not prepared to back down. Whilst there is this jostling for power, even now between the two, the name Tshitandani seems like someone whispering in the background, almost secondary albeit on the side of Makhado pushing for its primary discourse status so that it can wield political power. The two names seem to be parallel voices on both sides of Louis Trichardt in order to squeeze the primary discourse status out of it. As things currently stand, the interplay of ideological voices is creating an ideological and political battlefield because they are used at random as if all are legal.

The foregoing voice interplay is proving to be like a wrestling match because the opposing whites have summoned help from satellite groups such as some Vatsonga, a group reported to be Bapedi, and the coloured and Indian communities against the Makhado Municipality and the Naming Council. Each group has pronounced its preferred name at the expense of the other because both have power. The European group with its satellites continues to use the power they had from the then apartheid regime which changed names by force whereas the new government of the ANC, is now using political power as the ruling party. The collision between voices, therefore, continues to cause a clash of forces.

7. Conclusion

In a discourse, there is always a speaker and an addressee. When the area was called Tshirululuni, Vhavenda were the sole ethnic group and, therefore, the speakers and addressees in harmonious discourse communicated among themselves through the name. It defined their identity and cultural heritage. However, the forceful introduction of Louis Trichardt made the occupying forces, the speakers and Vhavenda, the addressees thus lowering their status and wiping away their identity and its concomitant culture.

In political power relations, discourse is rarely a two-way process. It is, in fact, usually a one-way process. The speakers call the shots or play the music whilst the addressees carry the orders or simply dance to the music, all done without questioning. The history of colonialism and conquest is littered with ample evidence that whites, on the whole, are used to being speakers and Africans addressees and not the other way round unless such a person is pleading for his mercy.

What has happened again here is that when the name Louis Trichardt was introduced, the element of 'innerly or internally polemic' was at play, because its presence meant the erasure of Tshirululuni ha Makhado after the Mphephu-South African Republic War (Motenda 1940; Moller-Mallan 1953). In the same vein, the re-introduction of the name Makhado now in the democratic era, erases that of Louis Trichardt, to a point of dismissing it.

Both Louis Trichardt and Makhado reflect conflicting discourses. Whereas the former reflects power abuse, the latter expresses the re-invention of political power to the citizens though it is seen as tribal by some satellites of the whites who are Africans. The real problem whites are struggling with is but loss of political power and identity. The Africans seem to be used to legitimise the case.

However, now there is a problem, Africans are freed and emancipated enough to decide their fate and future as well as shape their own destiny. They can now even decide when they can be speakers or addressees. And this time around they have chosen to be speakers instead of being docile addressees as they want to create their own image and identity. They want to express who they are, but do not want anyone to introduce them. Whites who, for years have wielded political power over all Africans, on the other hand, are not

used to being addressees and this will repeat the Mphephu-South African Republic War which Vhaveṇḑa maintain was as tough as 'tshitanda tsha mudzwiri'(a stump of a mudzwiri tree')(This is a very strong tree which is not easy to cut) (Motenda 1940).

Often in South Africa and the world over, where there are such problems, there is a tendency to arrive at some form of compromise where the citizens go for acronyms. Another option has been to go for double-barrel names where we could see the town being called Louis Trichardt-Makhado or Makhado-Louis Trichardt as it has been the case with KwaZulu-Natal - something closer to the national anthem but which some believe has been bastardised as a result. However, there is a spanner in the works since there are other groups, especially Africans groups supporting the white group, who are rallying for a neutral name because, according to newspaper reports, the name Makhado is divisive and leaves other Africans out of the equation. These elements enact underlying racism on the part of the whites who seem to have been using Africans to fight their battles. Over the years, whites have exploited some elements of differences, especially cultural ones, among Africans in order to divide them. It is unfortunate that some of these Africans have always been won over, thereby working against African unity. In African politics such people have been labelled as sell-outs because their actions have always delayed liberation.

However, many see this, especially coming from Africans, as pure tribalism since in the past the names remained as they were whenever any group settled in an area belonging to others. Reports that the Geographical Names Council and the Makhado Municipality did not consult enough put the two institutions in a bad light because they are there to represent all the people and not take them for granted. Place names should be agreed upon and not imposed (Wodak 2002:143; Blackledge 2005:36).

Possibly some people may come up with an acronym, but this would be indicative of failure to recognise African heritage because the area was known as Tshirululuni and also Tshirululuni ha Makhado during his reign. The name is informative because it means a place with good rains, hence the good climatic conditions- no wonder the Voortrekkers chose to forcefully remove the inhabitants of the place and take them to semi-arid areas. Removing any name is similar to removing information or a road sign placed somewhere by authorities (whoever they are) for the people. Not only is it illegal but it is also unpatriotic and tantamount to vandalism. All name removers of historical names will be judged harshly by history.

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