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The seeds of ethnic or tribalistic manifestations in Limpopo: The case of Makhado, Vuwani and Malamulele

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This research article argued that the current conflicts between Vhavenda and Vatsonga, two decades and four years later after the first democratic elections for a new South Africa in 1994, are manifestations of the seeds that were sown by the Voortrekkers since their arrival around the Soutpansberg in the northern parts of South Africa in 1836. Makhado (Louis Trichardt), Vuwani and Malamulele have been embroiled in continuous arguments and counterarguments, advocacies and counter advocacies, including protests, and in some instances, destruction of the essential property. Before then, Vhavenda and Vatsonga used to live alongside each other and even together. In their traditional village settings, there was no discrimination based on language or ethnicity. Through review of early scholarly writings, oral resources garnered from elders and the author's personal experience, a few episodes were highlighted, and the ramifications thereof were discussed.

Contribution: This study also postulated that although the promotion of the tribes' uniqueness was culturally significant, social cohesion and multiculturalism could have been sustained without institutionalising the segregation laws and demarcations, for these decisions have come back to haunt the present democratic South Africa's ideals of nation building and social cohesion.

Keywords: 'divide-and-rule'; apartheid; separate development; *Group Areas Act*; forced removals; tribalism; Vhavenda; Vatsonga.

Introduction

This research article attempts to discuss an important issue of memory of distrust and ethnic rivalry sown by apartheid policies amongst communities that had lived together harmoniously for ages. According to Vail (ed. 1989) in 'The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa', ethnic consciousness is a product of historical experience. It is well known, but perhaps not aptly documented, that ethnic consciousness or tribalism in the then Northern Transvaal was fermented or orchestrated by the white settlers. This article traces and chronicles some aspects of the unfortunate past histories of unresolved ethnic or tribalistic tensions and conflicts that were deliberately created by the white settlers (Voortrekkers) in the northern parts of South Africa. It begins with the history of the coexistence between Vhavenda and Vatsonga in the then so-called Northern Transvaal prior to the Voortrekker invasions in the area. The arrival of the Voortrekkers and the impact of their sojourn on the two language groups are highlighted, particularly the policies and the resultant episodes, such as *The Natives Land Act*, *The Group Areas Act*, Apartheid and Separate Development, *The Bantu Self Government Act* that culminated in the creation and establishment of two separate territories, one for Vhavenda and another for Vatsonga (Muller 1963:53–65) and forced removals. This was an attempt by the white settlers and the resultant white apartheid government to divide these nationalities so that they would weaken them to rule them easier ('divide-and-rule'). They did not care about the seeds of tribalism that they were sowing between these two language groups. Inevitably, that was a recipe for anger, hatred, contestations, tensions and irresolvable conflicts, which are still manifesting themselves at present through the recent media-covered Malamulele and Vuwani uprisings, and the resultant creation of a new municipality, which necessitated another forced removal under the democratic government.

A qualitative research design and approach were employed in this study to collect data. This was carried out through a review of early scholarly writings and face-to-face interviews

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(semi-structured and convergent) to garner oral resources from elders, with the author's personal experience of some few episodes being included. A non-probability, purposive sampling method was adopted to complete the whole picture of the study. In this study, the author has informed all the participants about the nature of the project before their participation. All study participants participated willingly and voluntarily.

It is significant for this article to contextualise the 'divide-and-rule' strategy (Christopher 1988:233–240). It is a phenomenon that had reigned supreme around the globe for several decades, and the white Afrikaner Voortrekkers employed the same strategy to dismantle the sound relationship between Vatsonga and Vhavenda. It is, therefore, prudent for this study to highlight some of these global trends.

The India–Pakistan history of unresolved conflicts: Kashmir and Jammu

Britain, like many other European imperialists such as Portugal, Holland and France, once ruled the Indian subcontinent that consisted of both Hindus and Muslim communities. It was once known as British India. The two major communities in the Indian sub-continent had lived peacefully for centuries prior to the arrival of the British imperialists. The British Empire was uncomfortable with the unity of these communities and started poisoning them through 'divide-and-rule' tactics. The British actively supported the Muslims and presided over the Muslim League's demand for the creation of a separate state of Pakistan (Baloch 2002:166–168). Hence, they eventually presided over the catastrophic partition of the land into India and Pakistan in 1947. The partition deliberately left the provinces of Jammu and Kashmir up for grabs. Since then, continued disputes and contestations between the two countries (India and Pakistan) over Jammu and Kashmir have not stopped. The unending wars of 1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999 have damaged potentially rich Kashmir, which would have benefitted both communities of a united Indian subcontinent. Since the partition of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947, the Kashmir dispute between them has become an intractable one, and the wars they have been engaging in have not resolved the dispute (Mir 2014:110).

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict: West bank, Gaza strip and Jerusalem

Since the division of the land between Israelites and Palestinians, Israeli forces have been occupying the West bank and the Gaza strip, with the Palestine contesting this occupation. Moreover, Jerusalem has been divided, with east Jerusalem ceded to Palestine and west to Israel. This decision has continued to polarise public opinion down the years. All interested parties (the global world powers and the warring countries) have constructively performed nothing to

alleviate this challenge, ostensibly because the imperialists have continued to enjoy from the gains of this 'divide-and-rule' strategy. The Israeli–Palestinian struggle or rivalry has become a historical legacy (Mir 2014:160).

The 'divide-and-rule' strategy in South Africa

Similarly, since the arrival of the Voortrekkers during the 1860s in the Northern Transvaal, black population groups of South Africa have not been immune to these 'divide-and-rule' tactics down the centuries, and these may continue to have indelible consequences for generations thereafter. Historically, the divide-and-rule strategy manifests itself according to the themes below.

The Northern Transvaal

According to oral history and literature, Vhavenda as a nation had established a country on its own, independent with its own kings such as Thohoyandou and Makhado, and others (Beach 1980; Nemudzivhadi 1977, 1985, 2017; Ralushai 1977; Ralushai & Gray 1977; Van Warmelo 1940). It was known as Vendaland. However, Vatsonga had their territories scattered around Vendaland; albeit with no recognised king, but mostly chiefs and headmen most of whom were allegiant to the Venda royal leadership, except for a few such as Chief Mhinga who were semi-independent (Dima [Thohoyandou Arts and Culture Centre] pers. comm., 20 May 2004). There was, nonetheless, peaceful coexistence of Vhavenda and Vatsonga in the Northern Transvaal (Nkhwashu 2011:22–23). This status quo was destabilised by what became known as 'The Great Trek' (1835–1846). This was a major exodus by the Dutch descendants now calling themselves Afrikaners from their colony in the Cape. Their rule in the Cape had ended after the British had taken over, with the former moving into the interior of South Africa to search for their own territories to regain and establish their independence (Ndhlovu & Siziba 2018:66). For historical chronicle, they were interchangeably known as Voortrekkers or Boers.

The first 'forced removals': 1867–1913

A particular group of these white Afrikaner Voortrekkers arrived in the territories around the Northern Transvaal area populated by both Vhavenda and Vatsonga. This group was under white Afrikaner Voortrekkers leaders, such as Louis Trichardt, Hans van Rensburg and Piet Joubert. The 'divide-and-rule' strategy was escalated by this group, which started their invasions into Vhavenda and Vatsonga territories with the aim of establishing their sociopolitical hegemony. For this, they enlisted the services of some groups of Portuguese and Vatsonga people under the leadership of a Portuguese by the name of Joao Albasini to disrupt peaceful coexistence between Vhavenda and Vatsonga. This fuelled the beginning of tensions between the two language groupings (Vhavenda and Vatsonga) in the Northern Transvaal. Consequently, Joao Albasini was rewarded by naming a

dam after him (Albasini Dam) and some pieces of land (Vho-M.F. Mugovhani, Vho-Geda Rambau and Vho-R.A. Mugovhani [Ha-Mashau at home of Rev M.J. Mugovhani] pers. comm., 30 July 1985). This information is corroborated by the names that still exist (Albasini Dam and Louis Trichardt town). The town Louis Trichardt is said to have been founded in 1899 (Thotse 2010:78).

Vendaland's wars of resistance under the leadership of Makhado Ramabulana is well documented by various scholars, such as Warmelo (1940:31–74), Ralushai and Gray (1977:13–103) and Nemudzivhadi (2015, 2017). Vhavenda under King Makhado fought gallantly to resist the forced occupation of their territory called Venda. The highlight of Makhado's bravery was when his army (divided into regiments named Mavhoyi, Maunavhathu, etc.) defeated the Voortrekker army in 1867 and removed them from their occupied area they had named Schoemansdal (Nemudzivhadi 2017:1–89). Unfortunately, Makhado died in 1895, and the Boers (Voortrekkers) under Louis Trichardt saw his death as an opportunity to resume their fight to conquer Vhavenda, which they eventually succeeded in 1898.

Vhavenda were driven from their fertile mountainous areas. Large communities of Vhavenda were forcefully removed from areas, such as Tshiruruluni, Songozwi (Luatame), La Ndou, Phawe, Ha Mabasha, Tshifhefhe Tshidzivhani, Tshitungulu, Luonde, Ha Ratombo and many other areas (Nemudzivhadi 2017; Warmelo 1940:31–74). These people were forced to settle in dry areas, such as Nzhelele, Ha-Kutama, Ha-Sinthumule and Vuwani areas, which were densely populated by Vatsonga. Consequently, a town was established in Tshiruruluni and named Louis Trichardt (Nemudzivhadi 2017:1–89; Ralushai 1977:15–17) and Thotse (2010:47).

The Natives Land Act of 1913

The primary objective of Voortrekkers' *Natives Land Act* was to effect territorial segregation of black and white people. The act also determined which areas were to be allocated to white people and Black people. Through it, despite Africans being more in numbers than white people, they were disposed of their land and confined to ownership of only 7% of South African land (Davenport 1991). In the Northern Transvaal area, the Afrikaners declared large tracts of land of Vhavenda and Vatsonga to be white areas, and some were turned into white-owned farms. (Davenport 1991). The act laid down the foundation for separate development through the development of Bantustans or Homelands and to retribalise the African population (Muller 1981). This would later fuel ethnic consciousness or tribalism between Vatsonga and Vhavenda in the Northern Transvaal.

The role of missionary enterprise: 1820–1913

Missionary enterprise also played some divisive role in the social relations between Vatsonga and Vhavenda during the

19th century. The work of missionary societies fermented or orchestrated ethnic consciousness or tribalism between these communities. Whereas the Dutch-reformed Church had served both Vhavenda and Vatsonga around 1820 and 1863, the Berlin Missionary Society practised its religious services amongst Vhavenda only, and the Swiss Missionary Society has operated solely amongst Vatsonga since 1875. In this way, the seeds of religious apartheid were sown between Vhavenda and Vatsonga (Nemudzivhadi 2017). It was undoubtedly an attempt by these missionaries, together with the apartheid government, to divide these nationalities so that they would weaken them to rule them easier (divide-and-rule strategy). Although it was not a formalised and documented strategy to dismantle the sound relationship between Vatsonga and Vhavenda, the missionary societies preached the gospel with some political undertones to divide the two communities. Despite all these, Vatsonga and Vhavenda still cherished their peaceful coexistence and continued to respect each other (Khosa 2018a; Nkhwashu 2011:54). Through the assistance of Missionary enterprises, particularly the Berlin and Swiss Missionary Societies, these communities established hospitals and schools. The territories witnessed the birth of Lemana College at Shehe, Valdezia (Lwalani) mission station and schools, such as Valdezia, Mambedi and Mashau, including Elim Hospital at Shehe through the Swiss Missionary Society (Evangelical Presbyterian Church) (Nkhwashu 2011:54–61), whilst the Berlin Missionary Society (Evangelical Lutheran Church) established Vendaland Training Institute and a few schools, namely, Tshakhuma, Beuster (Maungani) and Georgholtz (Haluvhimb) mission schools around Vendaland (Mugovhani 2011:38–41). Both Vhavenda and Vatsonga, respectively, attended these mission schools and colleges indiscriminately, choosing any school or college solely based on which was nearer to their place of abode. The Afrikaner government was not comfortable with this peaceful coexistence, for it undermined their mission of divide and rule, and this, unsurprisingly, precipitated the episodes to follow hereafter.

The Group Areas Act of 1950

The Apartheid government's group areas was promulgated by the white National Party in South Africa to eliminate mixed neighbourhoods in favour of racially segregated ones, which would allow South Africans to develop separately. Once an area was declared a group area, only people of a particular race were to reside in that designated area, and the other racial groups would be displaced. It was through this policy that Vatsonga were forcefully removed away from their low-lying territories previously shared with Vhavenda (Mashau, Lwamondo, Tshimbupfe, Davhana, Masia, Mulenzhe, Tshivhase, Dumasi, Lambani, Vhurivhuri, and many others), and Vhavenda were forcefully relocated to lands previously occupied mostly by Vatsonga (Khosa [University of Venda] pers. comm., 30 July 2018b; Nkhwashu 2011:54). The goal of the Afrikaner National Party was not only to separate South Africa's white minority from its non-white majority but also to separate non-white people from each other and to divide black South Africans along tribal

lines to reduce their political power. The African (Bantu) groups were separated into homelands or Bantustans. This spelt the beginning of the conscious dismantlement of Vhavenda–Vatsonga settlements. Both Vhavenda and Vatsonga became aggrieved. Vatsonga–Machangana people were deliberately pitted against Vhavenda.

The *Group Areas Act* (1950), as in many other black territories in South Africa, firmly sealed the dislocation of former Vhavenda and Vatsonga and the take-over of their territories by the white masters. This was formalised by the *Bantu Authorities Act* of 1951, which led to the creation of tribal, regional and territorial authorities. Subconsciously, this recognised Vhavenda as distinct from Vatsonga and other non-Vendas (Nemudzivhadi 2015).

Apartheid and separate development: 1948–1959

Translated from the Afrikaans meaning of Apartness, apartheid was an ideology conceived by the National government and was introduced in South Africa in 1948. It consolidated the idea of separate development of the different racial groups in South Africa. It forced different racial groups and people to live separately. This culminated into the *Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act* of 1959, which provided for the creation of tribal authorities in South Africa. That is how, through this ideology and policy, the territories of Vhavenda and Vatsonga were clearly and formally demarcated in the Northern Transvaal.

The Bantu Self-Government Act: 1959

The goal of the Afrikaner National Party was not only to separate South Africa's white minority from its non-white majority but also to separate non-white people from each other, and to divide black South Africans along tribal lines to reduce their imagined political power. Through this *Bantu Self-Government Act*, The Africa (Bantu) groups were separated into homelands or Bantustans. About 13% of the South African land was set aside for all the identified and demarcated homeland. This enabled the apartheid (National Party) government to claim that there was no black majority in the country and reduced the possibility that black people would unify into a single nationalist organisation. Every black South African was designated as a citizen of one of the Bantustans.

Forced removals: 1960s–1980s

Forced removals refer to the moving of people from their established places of abode against their will (Baldwin 1975). During the 1960s and 1980s, the apartheid (National Party) government implemented a policy of resettlement, which forced millions of people to move to their designated 'group areas' (Platzky 1985). Force was used to ensure that this act was successfully realised. Heavily armed police forces were used to drive people out of their established villages and load their belongings onto government trucks, who were taken to large empty tracts of land to begin life

from scratch (Desmond 1972). Many lost their families and precious possessions because of these 'forced removals' (Muller 1963:53–65). It is significant to mention that Vatsonga did not leave their low-lying areas without a fight. There were several skirmishes of passive resistance, resulting in clashes between Vhavenda and Vatsonga, particularly in areas such as Mashau, Bungeni, and many other villages (Vho-M.F. Mugovhani, Vho-Geda Rambau and Vho-R.A. Mugovhani [Ha-Mashau at home of Rev M.J. Mugovhani] pers. comm., 30 July 1985). This firmly bore the seeds of Tsonga–Venda antagonism. The white Afrikaner settlers (Voortrekkers) thereafter occupied most areas previously occupied by black people of the Northern Transvaal.

In 1959, the Apartheid Government formally promulgated the *Bantu Self-Government Act* (ed. Vail 1989:33). Through this conscious 'divide-and-rule' tactic, the two language groups were forced to settle in separate territories under the auspices of the separate development (Apartheid) policies. Ten self-governing territories for different black ethnic groups were established as part of the policy of apartheid (<http://www.worldstatesmen.org/org/South African homelands.html>). Black people were thereby packed in small pockets of homelands, whilst the white people took the largest portion of the country.

The *Bantu Self-Government Act* formally declared a pseudo-independent territory of Vhavenda. It was formally known as the Thohoyandou Bantu Authority in 1962. In 1969, the Venda territory became the Venda Territorial Authority, whilst the Tsonga territories became known as the Shangaan-Tsonga National unit. In 1973, the two homelands were granted the self-government status, with Vendaland under Patrick Ramaano Mphephu (great-grandson of Makhado) as Chief Executive Councillor and Vatsonga homeland became Gazankulu under Hudson William Edison Ntsanwisi as Chief Councillor (N.G. Mugovhani personal recollection). Although Vendaland was eventually declared as an independent country from South Africa in 1979 under 'President' PR Mphephu, the Tsonga-Shangana Gazankulu was only given self-rule but not independent from South Africa under H.W.E. Ntsanwisi as Chief Minister (E.T. Mugovhani [Pro-Makhado Task Group] pers. comm., September 2018). With the advent of the new democratic South Africa in 1994, the two homelands were re-integrated into the new Republic of South Africa.

As mentioned earlier, the demarcation of the two territories was a recipe for hatred, contestations, tensions and irresolvable conflicts, particularly with regard to Louis Trichardt. This Afrikaner-controlled town (Louis Trichardt) has been the main industrial and commercial town for both Vhavenda and Vatsonga down the years. The homeland towns of Thohoyandou and Vuwani for Vhavenda, and Giyani and Malamulele for Vatsonga-Machangana were not fully developed industrially and commercially. Because of

the confluence or convergence of both Vhavenda and Vatsonga (who were no longer good brothers and sisters like before) to this one main town (Louis Trichardt), there was bound to be conflict over territorial ownership around the area surrounding it, and potential contest for socio-economic hegemony over Louis Trichardt ensued later in the years that followed (E.T Mugovhani [Pro-Makhado Task Group] pers. comm., September 2018).

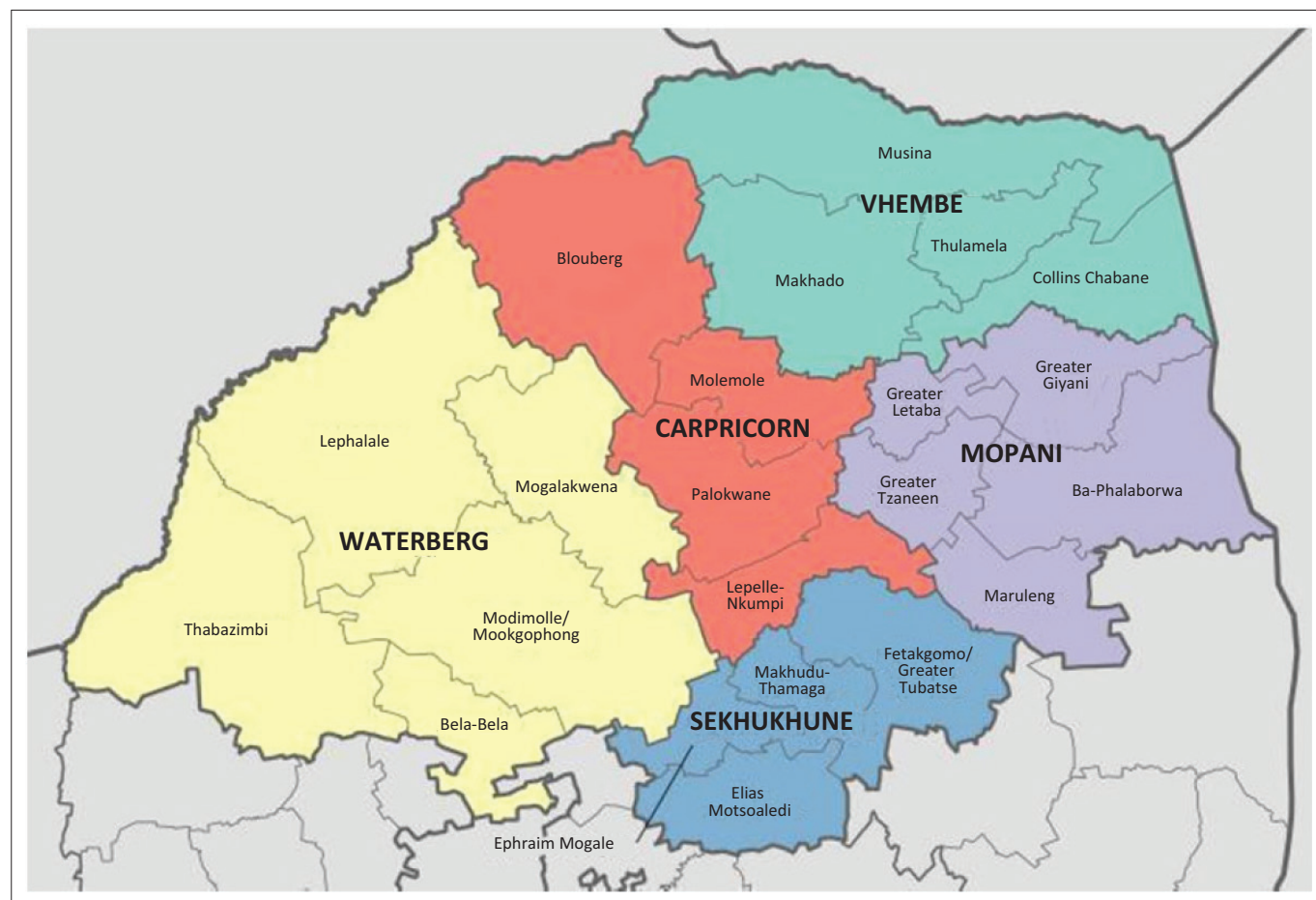
Lately, to legitimise their autonomous citizenship, Vatsonga communities either misappropriated some of the original names of some rivers to suit their language structures, for example, *Rivubye* (meaningless) for *Luvuvhu* (*mulambo wa muvuvhu*, meaning river known to be inhabited by *muvuvhu* = hippopotamus), *Mambedi* for *Muembedi* (Sengani 2018:54–81), and many other examples. According to Sengani (2018), when Africans (in this case the Vatsonga or Vhavenda) named villages, rivers and valleys, they used their linguistic, cultural, and interactional or narrative skills to code information about the environment. However, because of the deep-seated dislike for each other, which had been successfully sown by the Apartheid regime, there are now clumsy conflicts over rivers whose original names were not questioned before. There are now towns, villages, rivers and valleys that convey misleading and/or senseless information.

Post-1994 demarcation of district municipalities: With reference to the Vhembe district municipality

A new South African map designed: Provincial and local government dimensions

When the new democratic South African government decided to redress some of the past dispensations, one of the policies was to demarcate and rename some of the boundaries and reconfigure the provinces of South Africa. The new provinces of South Africa became known as North West, Northern Cape, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and the Limpopo province. One of the old provinces largely affected in this regard was the Northern Transvaal, the large portion of which came to be known as the Limpopo province.

Like other provinces, the Limpopo province was demarcated into several district municipalities (Thotse 2010:47). The Vhembe District Municipality is the case study in this article (see Figure 1). For effective governance and better service delivery to the communities, the Vhembe District Municipality was further decentralised into local municipalities.



Source: Municipalities of South Africa, 2018, *Limpopo, Collins Chabane Local Municipality*, viewed 02 August 2018, from <https://municipalities.co.za/overview/1241/collins-chabane-local-municipality>

FIGURE 1: Map of Limpopo province's post-1994 demarcation of district municipalities.

The local municipalities include:

- *Thulamela*: This incorporates Thohoyandou and Vuwani towns and surrounding areas predominantly populated by Vhavenda, and Malamulele Town and surrounding areas of Vatsonga, such as Mavambe, Shingwedzi, Madonsi, Lombard, Merwe and others. It is therefore inhabited by both Vhavenda and Vatsonga.
- *Makhado*: This incorporates areas, such as Louis Trichardt, Sinthumule, Kutama, Nthabalala, Mulima and Mashamba, Hlanganani areas such as Bungeni, Nzhakanzhaka, Mashau, Masia, Davhana, Tshimbupfe, including Elim, Maila, Vleifontein, Watervaal and others. This municipality is populated by both Vhavenda and Vatsonga.
- *Musina*: It is predominantly populated by Vhavenda and Bapedi, but other minorities are also found.
- *Mutale*: Vhavenda have always been the dominant inhabitants.

Louis Trichardt versus Makhado names debacle 2003–2005

The Louis Trichardt versus Makhado names debacle reared its ugly head when the new post-1994 democratic government began its bid to replace Apartheid names in those towns that were known by names of White Afrikaners with those of African heroic leaders. This debacle stemmed from a purposeful plan by the Limpopo provincial government to rewrite the history of the province, thus giving birth to an emerging political agenda to highlight the historical significance and contributions made by African heroic kings from the Limpopo province. It was a national government imperative to prioritise towns and/or cities as suitable places for these commemorations. The task team that was appointed to carry the government mandate (the Names Council of the Limpopo province) subsequently proposed Vhavenda king's name, Makhado, to replace the Afrikaner leader's name of Louis Trichardt. Similarly, Pietersburg has been replaced with Polokwane, the Afrikaner name Warmbad is now Belabela, Musina now Messina, Modimolle replaced Nylstroom, Mookgophong for Naboomspruit, Mokopane for Potgietersrus and many others in the new Limpopo province of the new democratic South Africa. Thus in 2003, Louis Trichardt was changed to Makhado (Thotse 2010:176). Unfortunately, the decision was perceived as to be an imposition of 'ethnic supremacy and tribalism' (Thotse 2010:176).

The fact that Vatsonga joined hands with their former enemies, the Afrikaners, to vehemently oppose the name of a Venda hero, Makhado, to replace the Afrikaner name Louis Trichardt bears enough testimony to the deep-seated animosity that had been created between Vatsonga and Vhavenda by the white Afrikaner Apartheid regime. The predominantly Tsonga Hlanganani Concerned Group (E.T. Mugovhani [Pro-Makhado Task Group] pers. comm., September 2018) was formed, and together with the predominantly white parties, such as the Democratic Alliance and the Freedom Front, managed to ensure that the name change is reversed, and the town again became Louis Trichardt.

This was carried out for Makhado who has historically always remained highly esteemed by Africans alongside kings, such as Shaka, Moshoeshoe, Sekhukhune, Mokopane and Malebogo. The primary objective was merely an attempt by the province to legitimise the historical significance and contributions of African kings in the fight against dispossession of land and oppression. Unfortunately, the other racial and ethnic groups failed to accept that because of the deep-seated racism and tribalism. This happened equally to Makhado's statue, which was erected and unveiled in 2005 in the same town. It was subsequently defaced immediately (Thotse 2010:176). It remains to be seen whether this dispute will ever come to be resolved, given that new disputes have subsequently arisen, again between the previously neighbourly communities who have been manipulated emotionally to hate each other. Makhado presently exists as one of the local municipalities only, with Louis Trichardt town remaining untouched. The present scenario has undoubtedly benefitted the minority Afrikaner community both emotionally and hegemonically, primarily because of the long-term effect the divide-and-rule strategies had on Vatsonga and Vhavenda in the northern part of South Africa (now known as the Vhembe district of Limpopo province).

Conflicts over the new demarcation

The Malamulele town and surrounding areas are predominantly Tsonga-speaking, and they fall under the Thulamela municipality. The Vatsonga communities in Malamulele town and surrounding areas contend that Vhavenda are benefitting more in terms of service delivery, particularly as the headquarters of the Thulamela municipality are in Thohoyandou, a town that is dominated by Venda people in terms of habitation. Ironically, this contention began whilst the mayor of the municipality was a Tsonga (Councillor Mdaka), and a large number of the municipality workers are Tsonga-speaking people (E.T. Mugovhani [Pro-Makhado Task Group] pers. comm., September 2018). The cry and demand for a separate and autonomous municipality from the Thulamela municipality by the predominantly Tsonga-speaking people of Malamulele Town and surrounding areas reached fever pitch after the term of office of Councillor Falaza Mdaka ended, and a Muvenda mayor was installed. This prompted an unfortunate interpretation of tribalism at play (E.T. Mugovhani [Pro-Makhado Task Group] pers. comm., September 2018).

It is very significant to state that the initial cause of dissatisfaction with the Thulamela municipality was justifiable. It is on record that the people of Malamulele town and surrounding areas were dissatisfied with the service delivered by the Thulamela municipality to the communities around the areas (Khosa [University of Venda] pers. comm., 30 July 2018b). The only unfortunate issue is that this was interpreted as a deliberate action by the Venda-based Thulamela municipality management to side-line the predominantly Tsonga-speaking people of Malamulele Town and surrounding areas, given the history of the ethnic tensions that were deliberately fermented by the Apartheid

divide-and-rule tactics. For decades after the various separate development and land acts, the sound relationships and trust between Vatsonga and Vhavenda had been lost. Signs of unfairness from any side of the ethnic group were bound to spark tensions and conflicts (Khosa [University of Venda] pers. comm., 30 July 2018b). The 'divide-and-rule' strategy of the Apartheid regime had left a long-lasting effect on the communities.

The first intensified protests continued for a long period, which eventually forced the Limpopo government to intervene and try to mediate. The national government thereafter entered the fray; however both governments failed to achieve stability. Hosi (Chief) Mhinga reiterated the demand during President Zuma's visit to Shikundu near Malamulele during the burial of Minister Collins Chabane on 21 March 2015 (Municipalities of South Africa 2018). The idea of the new municipality being named after Collins Chabane was mooted during this occasion, and the president hinted the possibility of looking positively at the demand or plea. It was hereafter that the people of Malamulele town and surrounding areas heightened their demand through strikes, protests, apathy to the authority of Thulamela municipality and general passive resistance, which ended up with the torching of their own schools. The protests were protracted until the government finally acceded to the demand of the predominantly Tsonga-speaking people of Malamulele town and surrounding areas (Municipalities of South Africa 2018).

Ultimately, the Collins Chabane Local Municipality was established by the amalgamation of portions of Thulamela Local Municipality and Makhado Local Municipality on 03 August 2016. This municipality is a Category B municipality situated within the Vhembe district. The municipality shares borders with Musina in the north, Thulamela in the north-east, the Mopani district in the south, and Makhado in the west. It is now one of the four municipalities in the district, making up 20% of its geographical area. Malamulele Township has been converted into the new town for the new municipality (Municipalities of South Africa 2018).

Reflection on conflicts over demarcations

Whereas the creation of the new municipality, initially inaugurated as Lim 345, then formally named as the Collins Chabane Municipality, appeased Malamulele communities, this created another challenge. The government further realised that the territory was too small to constitute or qualify for a municipality. The population of the new 'Collins Chabane municipality' was not adequate to meet the requisite capacity to constitute a stand-alone municipality in terms of the government statute. It was because of this challenge that the demarcation board of the government decided to force communities around areas, such as Masakona Mashau, Masia, Davhana, Tshimbupfe and Vuwani, to form part of the new Collins Chabane municipality. This gave rise to another concerned group (the Pro-Makhado Task Group),

which spearheaded the resistance to relocation of the villages and communities from Makhado local municipality to the new municipality (E.T. Mugovhani [Pro-Makhado Task Group] pers. comm., September 2018). This, could, undoubtedly, be interpreted as another subtle manifestation of deep-seated tribalism.

This gave rise to resistance, protests, boycotts, strikes, closure and torching of schools by the communities that were affected by this forced removal, which are the communities around Masakona Mashau, Masia, Davhana, Tshimbupfe and Vuwani areas. The government had hereby created a new problem. Once more, another community group felt ill treated by its 'own' government (E.T. Mugovhani [Pro-Makhado Task Group] pers. comm., September 2018).

The new municipality was formed because of protest by the predominantly Tsonga-speaking people of Malamulele town and surrounding areas who no longer wanted to be part of Thulamela Local Municipality, which, they alleged, was dominated by Vhavenda (E.T. Mugovhani [Pro-Makhado Task Group] pers. comm., September 2018). These communities, through their leaders, had been making it clear that they wanted their own municipality.

What stands out, factually, was that the Thulamela Local Municipality was not doing well in terms of service delivery to these predominantly Tsonga-speaking people of Malamulele town and surrounding areas. The communities of Malamulele town and surrounding areas claimed that the Thulamela Local Municipality had skewed attention to the areas that were predominantly occupied by Vhavenda at the expense of the other communities it was supposed to serve equally and impartially. Moreover, it was alleged that the representation of personnel at governance level was not equal; there were more Venda officials when compared with Vatsonga in the governing council. This, therefore, was interpreted as obvious preferential treatment, which evoked the sad memories of the divide and rule forced removals of Vatsonga from their areas in favour of Vhavenda language groups. Again, predominantly Tsonga-speaking people were not being treated on equal par with their Venda counterparts, this time no longer by the previous Apartheid but by their own government.

What the Government and the Demarcation Board did not do was to establish a research study to get the real root of the problem but to simply acceded to the demand of the predominantly Tsonga-speaking people of Malamulele town and surrounding areas, which resulted in the formation of a new municipality initially called Lim 345. This was performed to appease the predominantly Tsonga-speaking people of Malamulele town and surrounding areas not realising that they would be creating another conundrum.

How both the Government and the Demarcation Board could not foresee the challenge of the new demarcated area being too small to qualify for an independent municipality is

unfathomable. All the demarcation board decided to, at the behest of government, was to include areas of people who, after all, had no problem with the initial dispensation that gave rise to the demarcation of the Thulamela Municipality. This expectedly precipitated another protest from communities around Vuwani who were being forced to belong to the new municipality. They contended that they were being forced to be integrated into the new municipality without their input.

The communities of Masakona Mashau, Masia, Davhana, Tshimbupfe and Vuwani people do not understand why they should be placed with people who, in the first place, did not want to be with them. The residents of the latter areas alleged that they were not consulted and, subsequently, government did not pay attention to their dissenting voices, and they interpreted this as partial treatment, considering that there was prior consultation between the government and other communities of Malamulele town and surrounding areas. 'We did not ask for a municipality' (Kanyane et. al. 2017), they contended. It was, therefore, a case of reluctant residents being incorporated into a new municipality. A crisis was sown, triggering anger, violence and widespread protests. The old ethnic tensions that were created between Vatsonga and Vhavenda by the white Afrikaner Apartheid regime were thereby rekindled.

The people of both areas claim that, and I quote:

[T]he ANC [*African National Congress*] Freedom Charter has promised that the people shall govern, which means that local people shall determine their governance. The government is elected to serve and advance the interests of the people and should strive to deliver on its mandate. (Freedom Charter 1955)

Both communities quote the former President Nelson Mandela's postulation that 'if the ANC does to you what the Apartheid government did to you, then you must do to the ANC what you did to the Apartheid government'.

Conclusion

Now that apartheid and separate development is done with since 1994 and replaced by a multinational government with no segregation policies, it is difficult to postulate that the tension between the two language groups is still the result of the heritage of the Voortrekkers, the apartheid policies and/or the work of white missionary societies after all these years. The tension is on the agenda of the current South African democratic government. Limpopo province has been one of the most sought-after provinces in elections for the ANC in national polls, as its communities had been voting for the ANC in very large numbers. With such instability and loss of trust in the ANC leadership, this will have an interesting bearing on future relations of these communities and the ruling ANC party in terms of allegiances and voting during elections. At present, there are contestations of narratives, and it is necessary to diffuse them.

Conspiracy against certain sections of the communities may have a lasting impact on stability in the Limpopo province.

It is unfortunate that government has, intentionally or not, brought back those sad memories to the two nationalities of Vatsonga and Vhavenda. This has, ostensibly, resuscitated or revoked the old tensions between Vatsonga and Vhavenda, which were created by the old Apartheid regime during the eras of the forced removals and separate development. The South African government needs to find some strategies to diffuse this tension. Perhaps, the government should consider some constructive dialogue on this explosive matter to avoid a grim reminder of the deep pain these language groups experienced in the past, and, instead, assist by providing further symbolic reparation for South Africa's previous tumultuous history. The Malamulele-Vuwani issue, as it has become known, may have a lasting adverse impact on stability in the region in the near future, unless judicious thinking and intervention are employed to diffuse the suspicion that it is force that will determine or define the outcome of any conflict in the new South Africa like the government of the Apartheid era.

This study, therefore, postulates that although the promotion of the tribes' uniqueness was culturally significant, social cohesion and multiculturalism could have been sustained without institutionalising the recent demarcations, for these decisions have come back to haunt the present democratic South Africa's ideals of nation building and social cohesion.

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Author's contributions

N.G.M. is the sole author of this article

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