

The Impact of Perceptions of Tribalism and Ethnicity on Public Administration in South Africa: A Case Study of the Vuwani in the Vhembe District

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of perceptions of ethnicity and tribalism on public administration in South Africa with reference to the protests of Vuwani communities in 2016 against their area being re-demarcated to fall under the LIM 345 municipality (later named the Collins Chabane Local Municipality) dominated by Xitsonga speakers. The study adopted qualitative and exploration designs and used a literature review and key informant interviews in order to obtain secondary and primary data respectively. This study revealed that Vuwani communities feared domination by the Xitsonga-speaking majority in the proposed new municipality. The council of the proposed new municipality consisted of 72 councillors, 74 per cent of which were Xitsonga-speaking councillors and a mere 26 per cent were Tshivenda-speaking councillors. It also found that perceptions of ethnicity and tribalism in Vuwani had rendered public administration ineffective, thus bringing service delivery to a halt for several months. The study recommended that policy-makers should abolish majority representation based solely on regionalism and should seek to forge national unity. It concluded that the establishment of public institutions based on ethnic homogeneity had the potential of bringing about peace and stability in areas characterised by ethnic disparities.

Keywords: Municipal Demarcation Board; tribalism; nation-building; Vuwani; new municipality

Introduction

Resilient tribalism and ethnicity in Africa have continued to rear their ugly heads from the time that colonialism ended. Most African countries face problems emanating from these identical twins, and some have endured the types of violence that have threatened the foundation of new independent states, for example, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Kenya, Mozambique and Angola (Lesasuiyan 2017). In post-apartheid South Africa, tribalism and ethnicity are still evident. The reason for this is that ethnic connections still challenge other types of relationship, thereby fomenting friction emanating from attempts at internal secession. Despite this, people in general want to be part of a broader geographic polity (Karodia 2008, 32). Tribal and ethnic identities and loyalties were encouraged by successive apartheid governments through the creation of pseudo-republics recognised only by the South African government and not by the international community (Geldenhuys 1981, 2). These pseudo-republics were comprised of the so-called Republic of Transkei for one section of the IsiXhosa-speaking people, whereas the so-called Republic of Ciskei was created for another section of the IsiXhosa-speaking people (Khunou 2009, 86). The so-called Republic of Bophuthatswana was established for the Setswana-speaking people and the so-called Republic of Venda for the Tshivenda-speaking people (Geldenhuys 1981, 1). When apartheid fell in 1994 all these “homelands” and supposed “national states” were collapsed into a new South Africa in order to form a new nation based on a common national identity instead of on disparate criteria such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, culture or other such considerations (African National Congress [ANC] 1998a, 12).

Karodia and Soni (2014, 7) describe tribalism as a “monster that compromises democracy and the constitution of South Africa.” The implication is that it threatens public administration which is responsible for policy formulation and for service delivery to every citizen of South Africa. According to Marume (2016, 15), “public administration” is one aspect of a more generic concept of administration: for example, it can be seen as a product of politics and therefore as tasked with implementing the policies formulated by politicians. By implication, there is a dichotomous relationship between politics and public administration: hence it is the administrators’ responsibility to ensure that there is efficient service delivery to the electorate (Gildenhuys 2004, 294). Therefore public administrators are expected to direct the implementation of policies via the kinds of technical and managerial skills needed for public administration to be effective (Gildenhuys 2004, 295).

According to Kuye (2014), public administration is the tool that guides the delivery process of public sector management. Kuye’s definition is consistent with that of Pfiffner (cited in Marume 2016, 17) who posits that it is concerned with getting the

work of government done through coordination of local officials' efforts to ensure implementation of effective service delivery. However, White (cited in Marume 2016, 16) argues that public administration comprises all those operations that have the purpose of fulfilling or enforcing public policy. Therefore, it can be deduced from the above that public administration comprises one single purpose, which is to deliver services to the electorate through two instruments, namely politicians and bureaucrats. Most importantly, as pointed out by Kuye (2014), society at large suffers when and where public administration is ineffectual and weak.

The term ethnicity refers to a category of people who regard themselves as sharing similar backgrounds, customs and ways of life. Ethnicity thus describes the social identity of individuals (Thomas 2001, 2). It is one of the factors of demography, together with gender, age, occupation, and marital and family status (Edgar and Geare 2004). Smith (cited in Thomas 2001, 2) enumerates six attributes of ethnicity, namely, collective names, common myths of descent, shared history, a distinctive shared culture, association with a specific territory, and, finally, a shared sense of solidarity. This study investigated whether this notion of ethnicity played a role in the opposition of the Vuwani communities to their re-demarcation into the new Collins Chabane Local Municipality (formerly LIM 345) in 2016. The study further evaluated the role of church leaders in terms of their attempts at creating a harmonious relationship among the role-players from the two communities implicated in the demarcation process.

Research Problem

The Malamulele area in the Limpopo province of South Africa, where the communities speak mainly Xitsonga, was demarcated before the 2000 local government elections to fall under the Thulamela Local Municipality, an area where most people speak Tshivenda. Vuwani, a town in the Vhembe District Municipality in the Limpopo province, was demarcated before the 2000 local government elections to fall under the Makhado Local Municipality, which served largely Tshivenda-speaking communities. It too had a minority of Xitsonga-speaking communities. The Xitsonga-speaking communities in the Malamulele area demanded their own municipality independent of the Thulamela Local Municipality; that is, they wanted to be part of a municipal area and municipality comprising mostly Xitsonga speakers instead of Tshivenda speakers. However, the reason they gave for demanding their own municipality was that they were not receiving acceptable services from the Thulamela Local Municipality. A study conducted by Musitha (2016, 57) found that, contrary to claims about the municipality's lack of services, the problem lay with weak ward committees in the area that failed to ensure proper oversight of service delivery. However, perceptions of ethnicity as a root cause of dissatisfaction cannot be ruled out. As Toharudin (2010, 30) points out, ethnicity can be a factor in such disputes. Toharudin gives the example of a case of alleged ethnic discrimination in Belgium that

led to Walloon workers protesting against perceived discrimination based on ethnic groupings in the workplace. As a result of fears of such supposedly unfair discrimination, two separate Belgian universities were founded for French and German speakers; in other words, they were established based on ethnicity.

In 2016 the South African Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB) granted Malamulele its own separate municipality and Vuwani was expected to be part of it. However, there were protests against the decision of the MDB. To put pressure on the MDB to reverse the decision, the Vuwani-pro-Makhado group burnt down 30 schools, and businesses were forced to shut down for three months (Rasila and Musitha 2017, 1). However, with the court bid failing to review and set aside the decision of the MDB, a stalemate between the pro-Makhado communities and government ensued, thus rendering the staging of the local government elections of 2016 impossible. Moreover, the possibility existed that the forthcoming 2019 national elections in this region might be adversely affected if the current dispute remained unresolved. This study, therefore, investigated the motives behind the violent resistance of Vuwani communities, which included the burning of 30 schools in the area, ostensibly because of opposition to being demarcated to be part of the Collins Chabane Local Municipality. The study further analysed the role of a Vhembe pastors' forum and its attempts to reconcile the warring parties. Finally, recommendations were made about how policy-makers could promote unity in diverse communities such as those in Vhembe of the Limpopo province.

Research Design and Methodology

Study Area

This study was conducted in Vuwani (see Figure 1 for the area encircled on the map of the Vhembe District which has four local municipalities). The two local municipalities that were affected by the MDB's demarcation were Makhado and Thulamela.

The two major languages spoken in Vuwani are Tshivenda and Xitsonga. The areas of Malamulele where the people speak mainly Xitsonga in 2013 resisted being part of the Thulamela Local Municipality. Malamulele won its freedom in 2016 and was incorporated under the newly established Collins Chabane Local Municipality. The Vuwani communities in the Makhado municipal area speak mainly Tshivenda. Although the Vuwani area was demarcated in 2016 to fall under the newly established Collins Chabane Local Municipality, the Vuwani communities demanded to remain part of the Makhado Local Municipality.

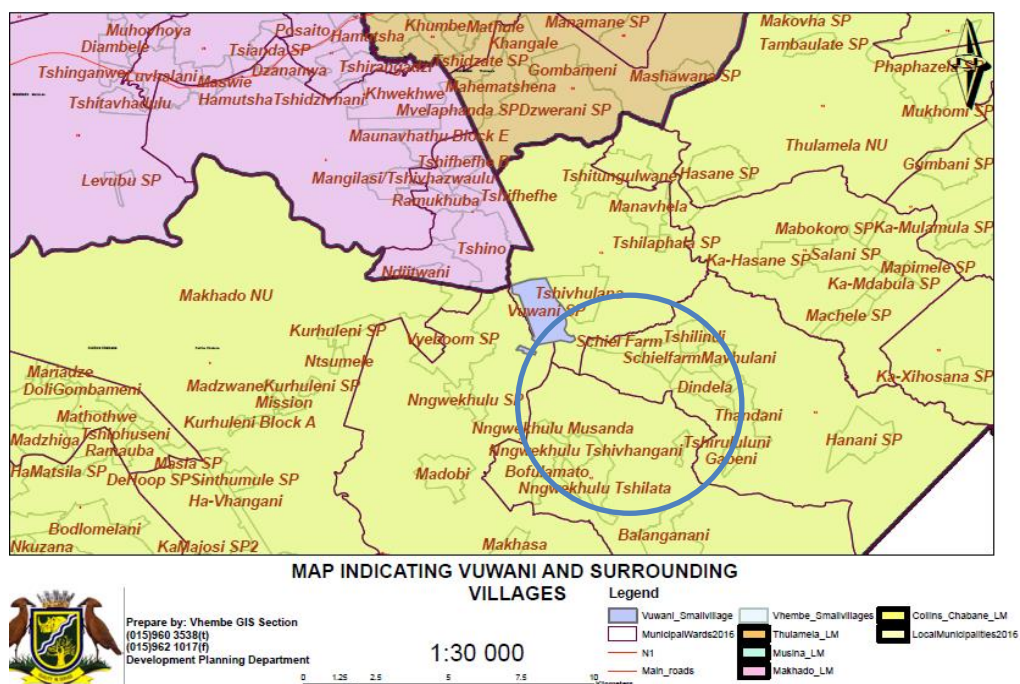


Figure 1: Vhembe District with four local municipalities

Source: <https://municipalities.co.za/map/129/vhembe-district-municipality>

Research Design

This study, which was grounded in a qualitative research paradigm, aimed to understand why the Vuwani communities under the pro-Makhado leadership protested against being demarcated to fall under the proposed new Collins Chabane Local Municipality. According to Musitha (2016, 57), ethnicity and tribalism did not play any role, given the fact that the communities of Vuwani and Malamulele have over the years been historically intertwined, even in marriage. Hence, in order to investigate the underlying causes of the protests, a qualitative research approach was employed. To date, there has unfortunately been a paucity of studies investigating the causes of the violence that followed the decision and announcement by the MDB in 2016 that Vuwani was being demarcated to fall under a new municipality. The Vuwani communities are predominantly Tshivenda-speaking and they share the same identity. However, there are Xitsonga-speaking groups in Vuwani.

Therefore, there is a gap in understanding the causes of the Vuwani communities' rejection of the demarcation decision and the subsequent violence that followed the MDB's announcement that Vuwani was to be re-demarcated to be part of Malamulele with the intention of integrating it into the new municipality.

A qualitative research design was deemed suitable for this research study because it allowed the researchers to detail a plan for conducting the study (Thyer 1993, 94). At the time of the current study only a few studies had investigated the role of churches in the Vhembe district, which prompted the researchers to explore the contribution of church forums in reconciling the “warring parties” in the Vuwani area (Dane 1990, 6-7). This study also sought to confirm the validity of the assumption that ethnicity and tribalism were not the underlying factors that caused the violent protests. Although the study by Musitha (2016, 57) found that the Malamulele community was not influenced by ethnicity in demanding their own municipality separate from the Thulamela Local Municipality, it cannot automatically be inferred that Vuwani too was not influenced by ethnicity- and tribalism-related factors.

Data Collection Methods

This study made use of primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from the responses of listeners to a South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) radio programme on Phalaphala FM on Monday morning May 6, 2016. The presenter had posed the following question to the public:

What are your views on the proposed new municipality?

Having posed the question, the presenter invited listeners to respond to it by phone or SMS or on Facebook. Friday afternoon at 18:00, the broadcaster played a tape recording of the responses of the 53 listeners who had answered the question posed, expressing different opinions about the establishment of a separate municipality for the Malamulele residents. The researchers listened to this tape recording, recorded all the responses and later went through the recording, classifying the responses in terms of similar groupings or themes and analysing them in terms of variables. Of the 53 listeners, ten expressed the view that Vuwani should remain part of Makhado if a new municipality was to be established. Five responded that Vuwani should accept the court verdict that confirmed that the area should be demarcated and that a new municipality should be established. Seventeen respondents expressed the view that civil society should be consulted about the establishment of a new municipality that would include areas that did not ask to fall under the proposed new municipality. Thirteen responded that Vuwani should protest against incorporation into the newly proposed municipality through the use of the same violent methods used by Malamulele residents. Eight people agreed that Malamulele should be granted its own municipality.

For the study, the researchers obtained secondary data by consulting relevant literature sources, namely published books, newspaper articles, legislation and online articles.

Analysis

The researchers captured the listeners' responses, classified them in terms of themes/groupings, and analysed these. Using an Excel spreadsheet, the researchers collated and analysed the responses (as mentioned in the preceding section), and they presented the findings in tables and graphs.

As mentioned earlier, the researchers obtained secondary data by consulting various literature sources, and the next sections report on the literature review relating to relevant issues.

The Roots of Tribalism and Ethnicity in Africa

The study by Mustapha (2006) reveals that colonialist authorities in Nigeria established administrative regionalism along ethnic lines involving the three main tribes, namely Hausa-Fulani in the north, Igbo in the east and Yoruba in the west. To survive, the ethnic minorities were forced to squeeze themselves into a region targeted for an ethnic majority group. Therefore this article contends that ethnicity politics is based on domination, which inevitably characterises public administration, with the dominated minority groups fighting to survive domination by majority interests. This was evident when the final demise of colonialism led to inter-ethnic violence in a number of African countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Kenya, Mozambique and Angola (Lesasuiyan 2017). The violence that followed the collapse of colonialism was a clear indication that loyalty to ethnic groupings tended to supersede supposed national priorities with concomitant resistance by minority groups to perceptions of domination by bigger ethnic groups. This was, for example, evident in Nigeria, where the institutionalisation of democracy and nation-building were threatened (Salawu and Hassan 2011, 32). The perceived negative characteristics associated with Western political systems were thus influential factors in undermining African political systems.

Tribalism involves loyalty to a social group that has common customs and beliefs. It refers to a way of thinking or behaving in which people are more loyal to their tribal identities than to their friends, countries or other social groupings. Tribalism, as a theory, is based on variables such as combinations of the following factors: kinship-based organisations, reciprocal exchange, manual production, oral communication, and analogical enquiries. However, according to Okogu and Umudjere (2016, 93), tribalism is oriented towards genealogy and mythology.

At this point it is necessary to inquire about ethnicity and tribalism specifically in Africa. Although tribalistic tendencies have grown and become entrenched in Africa (and in South Africa in particular), some believe that ethnicity has its roots in Europe and was exported to Africa (Toharudin 2010, 30). Belgium can be singled out as an example of a country where ethnicity existed but where its existence was threatened.

According to Kuzelewska (2015, 1), conflicts between linguistic groups (i.e. the French and Dutch) threatened the unity of Belgium until the principle of “territoriality” was introduced to resolve these conflicts. This principle laid the foundation for the division of the country into two areas: the Flemish region (the Dutch-speaking region in the north), and the Walloon region (the French-speaking region in the south). It is our view that the principle of “territoriality” suggests that Belgium implemented the policy of separate development for each linguistic group. This principle of “territoriality” allayed fears about the domination of one group by the other since each group was able to control its affairs separately. Billiet, Maddens, and Frogner (2006) further argue that making Dutch, French and German the official languages of Belgium by law in 1963 did not stop discrimination based on ethnic origin and language. For example, according to Toharudin (2010, 30), ethnic discrimination compelled Walloon workers to protest against discrimination based on ethnic groupings in the workplace. Toharudin claims that because of the protests and disturbances that broke out at the universities of Brussels and Leuven, the two universities were turned into ethnic institutions for French- and Dutch-speaking students respectively. A point to consider here is that Belgium colonised the Congo, which today is known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Before the arrival of colonialists, Africans were a group who, until the 1884/5 Berlin Conference, did not have feelings of tribalism and ethnicity. The Berlin Conference brought with it colonialism and imperialism which created tribalism through chieftaincies—this rendered African unity ineffective, and regionalism subsequently became the order of the day (Fanon 1963, 128). The Berlin Conference heightened colonial activity by European powers, thus eliminating or overriding most existing forms of African freedom and self-governance (Adekunle 1983). Colonialism, according to Fanon (1963, 129), creates spiritual rivalries so that some groups of people see themselves as different from other groups.

Background History of Ethnic and Tribalism Classifications in South Africa since Colonial Times

The colonial period can be directly associated with giving birth to ethnicity on the continent of Africa. The Berlin Conference (1884–1885) was undoubtedly the single most important event that laid the firm foundation of this monster that tears apart societies in Africa today. When colonial powers divided the continent among themselves, people with different backgrounds were separated and placed in groups according to written boundaries. This was something that was alien to Africa. According to Mcebisi (2007, 138), nationalist movements inherited this phenomenon when Africa decolonised. Mamdani (1996) argues that colonial powers reinforced ethnicity in order to perpetuate their divide-and-rule strategies. The Peace Treaty of Vereeniging in 1903 ended colonial domination of South Africa by a foreign British power, but a foundation was already being laid for the Union Government of 1910 to

perpetuate it. A special type of colonialism was thus initiated in South Africa with ethnicity being used as a means of ruling South Africa. Traditional leaders became the instruments to implement and perpetuate ethnicity on behalf of colonial masters. Mcebisi (2007, 139) bluntly argues that “Chiefs became ethnic entrepreneurs, while traditional institutions became markers of ethnicity.” When the Nationalist Party government came to power in 1948, it began to implement its “separate development” policy. In order to disenfranchise blacks in their country of birth, it used traditional authorities to rule blacks outside the so-called white South Africa. Homelands and supposed “national states” were created in South Africa, and traditional leaders were appointed to enforce the new order of divide and rule.

Nationalist Party Government Consolidates Tribalism and Ethnicity in South Africa

Tribalism in South Africa was formalised and entrenched by the Nationalist Party which governed the country from 1948 to 1994. It implemented a divide-and-rule strategy of false ethnic nationalism among those who were beneficiaries of this strategy. The apartheid government established its own pseudo-republics which were recognised only by itself and not by the world (Geldenhuys 1981, 2). The pseudo-republics created were Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei—together commonly referred to as the TBVC states (Geldenhuys 1981, 1; Khunou 2009, 86). Apart from these “republics” there were also the supposed self-governing homelands of Gazankulu, Lebowa, Qwaqwa, KwaZulu, KaNgwane, and KwaNdebele (Egero 1991, 10–11). These homelands were created to serve Xitsonga, Sepedi, Southern Setswana, and IsiZulu speakers. Their establishment was preceded by the process of forced removals where groups of people were separated from others. This created a sense of togetherness among the new groupings: people felt that they were different from other people who did not speak the same language or dialect or share the same cultural activities. Homelands were created on the basis of the language and culture of a particular ethnic group (Khunou 2009, 82). However, with the arrival of the new democratic dispensation in 1994 came a new vision—to create a united country under one Constitution with all its people sharing equal citizenship and human rights.

This arrangement required the creation of civil service entities, each serving its own people (Egero 1991, 51). According to Mathebula (2013, 8), this created a sense of group cohesion among those belonging to the same cultural groupings and of resistance to being assimilated by other powerful cultural groups. Being part of an organised group enhances your chances of acquiring a more favourable position in society at large whilst maintaining your own identity, despite the proximity of other tribal or cultural groups (Mathebula 2013, 9). In line with Mathebula’s argument, Cobbett and Nakedi (cited in Cobbett and Cohen 1988, 78) suggest that the perception of being dominated by other ethnic groups has the tendency of encouraging secessionist moves, as was evident with Sotho speakers in the Transkei when Chief

Malefane led them out of Herschelites and ended up in Ciskei. The same happened in the Maluti district when a group of Sotho speakers resisted Xhosa domination and tried to secede, but the move was brutally crushed (Cobbett and Nakedi, cited in Cobbett and Cohen 1988, 78).

The Fall of Apartheid, and the Nation-Building Project

In addressing Parliament, the Minister of State Security from 2014 to 2017, Honourable David Mahlobo (2016), said the following on nation-building:

The ANC-led government as mandated by the majority of our people since 1994, reaffirms its commitment to the attainment of a national democratic society as envisioned in the Constitution of our land, the Freedom Charter and other founding documents. Building a truly united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society is a long and arduous journey which our former President Nelson Mandela spoke of when he said “Yinde lendllela esiyihambayo.”

The fall of apartheid rule led to the drafting of South Africa’s new Constitution of 1996, the aim of which is to create a unitary state with various groups organised into single municipalities in order to build a truly united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society (ANC 1999, 5). The current study contends that municipalities, as established in accordance with the new Constitution, have been a source of ethnicity and tribalism because more and more communities seem to demand their own municipalities. The study further contends that a rainbow scenario is needed to build a new society, forge a united nation and ensure genuine nation-building. The ANC aims to apply national democratic revolution principles to build a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society (ANC 1998a, 11). The achievement of nation-building requires that all sectors in society be committed to such a cause (ANC 1998b, 13). Nation-building happens when the people themselves take responsibility for a bottom-up approach and not when an approach is imposed from the top by government (ANC 1998b, 14). Nation-building should lead to a position where citizens are geared towards building a sustainable society (ANC 1998c, 10). The Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996) provides a framework for the building of a truly united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society by dividing the country into national, provincial and local spheres of government where different people are placed within bigger areas with identities different to their original identity (Republic of South Africa 1996). It is this division of the country that perpetuates the sense of belonging to an own group rather than to the country as a whole. According to Toharudin (2010, 30), this is because of the fear of discrimination based on ethnicity as was witnessed at the universities of Brussels and Leuven in Belgium. The solution to this Belgian problem was to establish ethnic universities.

The Municipal Demarcation Board, Vuwani, and Public Administration

The majority of the people objected to the demarcation of Vuwani to fall under Malamulele with the aim of integrating both areas into the proposed new municipality. The police, in their quest to crush the resistance, arrested many people and held them at Malamulele and Thohoyandou police stations. Those arrested included people from both the Xitsonga- and Tshivenda-speaking groups. This suggests that tribalism and ethnicity were not the reasons for the resistance (Van Zyl 2016, 2). The Chairperson of the Vyeboom Civic Association, Mr Sambo, who is a Xitsonga speaker and who refused to attend organised ministerial meetings, said the following in an SABC radio interview on Phalaphala FM on May 6, 2016:¹

We don't care who comes from where. We are not prepared to talk to anyone. Our plan is to shut everything down. We never plan to damage schools; this was just because the government does not listen.

This remark is a clear indication that there was still a feeling of togetherness between the Tshivenda- and Xitsonga-speaking groups. Most of the leaders who were for the integration into the Makhado Local Municipality had Xitsonga-speaking wives. The same applied to those who demanded a municipality separate from the Thulamela Local Municipality. A similar finding is reported by Musitha (2016, 57) in a study that investigated the issues of tribalism and service delivery claims by the people of Malamulele to establish whether these were the reasons for demanding an own municipality. Musitha concluded that neither tribalism nor dissatisfaction about service delivery had played a part.

As referred to earlier in this article, the presenter of a radio programme on Phalaphala FM asked the people of Vhembe on May 6, 2016 for their perceptions with regard to the proposed new municipality. The listeners responded via SMS and on Facebook and they were also invited a few days later to phone in and give their views. The researchers recorded and later analysed the divergent views of the listeners.

However, when a Kurhuleni school, whose students were predominantly Xitsonga-speaking, was burnt down (see Figure 2), residents were quick to point fingers at their Venda-speaking neighbours who were opposed to the MDB's decision to incorporate them into the Collins Chabane Local Municipality. On December 12, 2016 the researchers listened to Phalaphala FM's interview with Khosikhulu of Vhavenda in which he provided his views about tribalism issues relating to Vhavenda- and Vhatsonga-speaking people in the Vhembe District. This leader, in opposing the views that the refusal to be part of the new municipality was motivated by tribalism and

¹ https://issuu.com/zoutnet/docs/10_june_2016_limpopo_mirror_digital

ethnicity issues, said that “the first three mayors for Makhado were Xitsonga speaking, one after the other, from 2000 to 2008.”



Figure 2: Burnt school

Source: Africa News Network, May 3, 2016.



Figure 3: Barricaded access road

Source: News24, March 28, 2017

Figure 3 above shows the burning tyres on the road blocking access to various government offices, businesses and schools. The rocks were placed on the road in order to ensure no one used the road. Unfortunately, service delivery was also affected as the shutdown spread to the whole of Vuwani.

The Vhembe Pastoral Forum intervened so as to assist the opposing parties and government agencies to reach amicable solutions to the demarcation problems.

Contemporary Ethnic Issues on the Border of Mpumalanga and Limpopo

The policies of the ANC, the current ruling party in South Africa, are aimed at uniting South African citizens. On coming to power in 1994, it incorporated all the homelands, national states and the provinces previously regarded as the white areas such as the Cape Province, Natal, Free State and Transvaal. It aimed to create one citizenship status for all citizens in one unitary state. However, the apartheid government's separate development programme, which enforced traditional leadership, institutionalised ethnicity and tribalism. The ethnic tendencies did not die despite efforts by the new ruling party to create one nation. Mcebisi (2007, 135) argues that "the perception of ethnicity reflects the saliency of (politicised) ethnic consciousness among the populace owing to past apartheid machinations in service of political hegemony."

In 1994, Mpumalanga and Limpopo witnessed violent protests in the Bushbuckridge and Moutse areas with the former succeeding and the latter failing to be incorporated from Limpopo into Mpumalanga. Narsiah and Maharaj (1999, 36), in investigating why the people of Bushbuckridge demanded to be incorporated into Mpumalanga, determined that they accused Limpopo of not being able to provide services and felt that if boundaries were moved they would be able to benefit. Ramutsindela and Simon (1999) argue that the dispute was mainly about opportunities and constraints that often follow transformation. The Bushbuckridge boundary dispute became more pronounced shortly after the new government came into power in 1994.

Some residents of Moutse challenged their incorporation into Limpopo from Mpumalanga in court. The Moutse area had been part of Kwandebele in Mpumalanga before the 1994 elections. The residents felt that since Mpumalanga was related to them linguistically and culturally, they should remain there instead of being incorporated into Limpopo. However, their bid to remain in Mpumalanga was dealt a blow when on August 23, 2011 the Constitutional Court dismissed the application and delivered a judgment which moved Moutse 1 and Moutse 3 from Mpumalanga to Limpopo.

According to Baloyi (2018, 6–7), these apparently ethnic-based problems indicate that democratic transformational agendas like reconciliation and equality for all were not taking root easily in the minds of people. Fanon (1963, 128) suggests that ethnicity can take a country back to homeland ethnic politics, in that way constituting a reversal of the liberation victory that has been gained.

The Role of the Vhembe Pastoral Forum in Promoting Social Cohesion among the Malamulele and Vuwani Communities

The role of the churches in the promotion of social cohesion among the communities of Malamulele and Vuwani is important in the context of this study. This is because the churches were successful in helping to bridge the schism that existed between government and community representatives. However, there is no consensus as to the unifying role that the churches played: for example, Putnam (2000, 301) postulates that the dark side of social capital formation by religious involvement in terms of “sectarian social capital” leads to intolerance, especially in the case of fundamentalist churches or groups. James (2012) argues that churches are generally accepted as institutions that contribute to the solving of social and economic problems. According to Akanbi and Beyers (2017, 11), some churches, such as the Pentecostal churches, emphasise the gospel of health and wealth whereas others contribute enormously to nation-building, particularly in terms of bridging the gaps that the government of the day fails to address. Preduca (2011, 129) postulates that churches have the capacity to promote and enhance community-building and social cohesion. Churches are regarded as capable of providing the moral, social and spiritual bedrock of communities and individuals and being able to assist with public issues and social capital formation (Bramadat 2005, 209). According to Villa-Vicencio (2009, 7), political leaders turn to faith communities to keep them in touch with the needs of grassroots communities and to provide the kind of spiritual, moral and prophetic leadership that is required to move the nation along the transformation track. It is in the light of the above that the role of churches should be viewed as one of cooling down the violence and protests that were sparked off by the MDB’s demarcation of Vuwani communities to exclude them from the Makhado Local Municipality. It was in trying to resolve the problems surrounding the formation of the new municipality (which later became the Collins Chabane Local Municipality) that the churches in Vhembe stepped in. These churches were concerned about the polarisation of the two communities and the disruption of service delivery.

One of the leaders of the church forum, Dr Alunamutwe Rannditsheni, Dean of the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, who played a pivotal role in the resolution of the demarcation crisis, expressed his happiness when the then State President, Mr Jacob Zuma and Khosi-khulu Vho-Toni Mphephu Ramabulana reached an interim agreement in a meeting with community stakeholders in May 2017. This interim agreement was to place Vuwani under the Vhembe District Municipality and not designate it as part of the Malamulele area.

Dean Rannditsheni declared as follows (as cited in Netshikweta and Nkuna 2017):

The Vuwani situation was a great pain to us as people who work to heal faith. We cannot be happy while seeing other communities denied the right to learn and work. As pastors, we supported the community.

However, Rasila and Musitha (2017, 70) imply that Rannditsheni “fueled the anger of the community members.” Contrary to their views, Rannditsheni is on record as condemning violence and preaching restoration, protection and promotion of learning and teaching in Vuwani. For example, on delivering the combined press release on behalf of all the stakeholders, Rannditsheni declared:

We denounce the destruction and looting of school property and the disruption of schooling. If we do not act, history will judge us harshly. (Van Zyl 2016)

Results and Discussion

The outcomes of the researchers’ analysis of Phalaphala FM radio’s listeners’ perceptions of the proposed new municipality are presented in Figure 4. The SABC presenter invited listeners to give their perceptions by SMS and on Facebook on Monday, May 6, 2016. On Friday afternoon at 18:00, the broadcaster played a tape recording of the responses of the listeners. The researchers listened to the recording and recorded each and every response, which they later analysed via graphs and tables (see Figure 4).

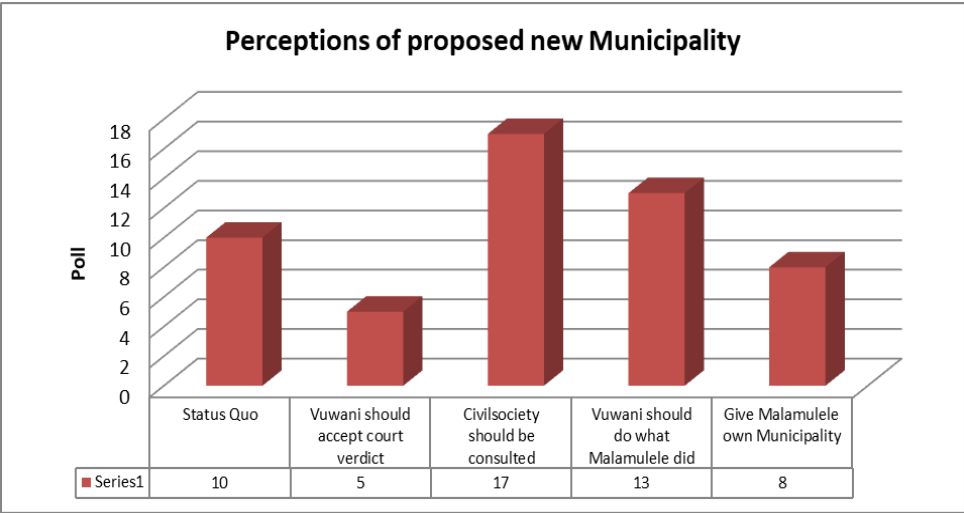


Figure 4: Perceptions of a proposed new municipality

As indicated in Figure 4, 10 respondents were of the view that the status quo should remain; in other words that Malamulele should not be given its own municipality, thus keeping all the areas under the Makhado Local Municipality. Five of the respondents were of the opinion that the residents of Vuwani should accept the court order that the area should fall under the proposed new municipality in Malamulele. However, there were 17 others who were of the view that it would be better if civil society could be consulted and allowed to express their support of or opposition to the formation of the

new municipality before plans were put into place. Interestingly, 13 of the respondents indicated that since the Malamulele community’s violent protests to put pressure on the government to succumb to their demands were successful, that was what should happen in the case of Vuwani as well. Finally, eight of the respondents expressed the view that Malamulele should be granted its municipality.

In 2016 the MDB re-demarcated 14 existing wards in the Makhado Local Municipality to fall under the proposed new municipality. At the time of this study, of these wards, 10 were Tshivenda-speaking whereas only four were Xitsonga-speaking. The residents of the latter four wards shared both a common culture and a common language with the majority of the people residing in the area of the proposed new entity, whereas this was not the case with the other 10 wards. In other words, ethnic differences were discernible. According to Smith (cited in Thomas 2001, 2), ethnicity possesses six attributes, namely, collective names, common myths of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, and association with a specific territory, as well as an overall sense of solidarity. Moreover, the study by Mustapha (2006) indicates that colonialism in Nigeria established administrative regionalism along ethnic lines involving the three main tribes, namely Hausa-Fulani in the north, Igbo in the east and Yoruba in the west. To survive, the ethnic minorities were forced to squeeze themselves into a region that was dominated by an ethnic majority (Mustapha 2006). This evidence suggests that ethnic and tribal tendencies on the continent should be attributed to colonial powers that impoverished the smaller minority groups.

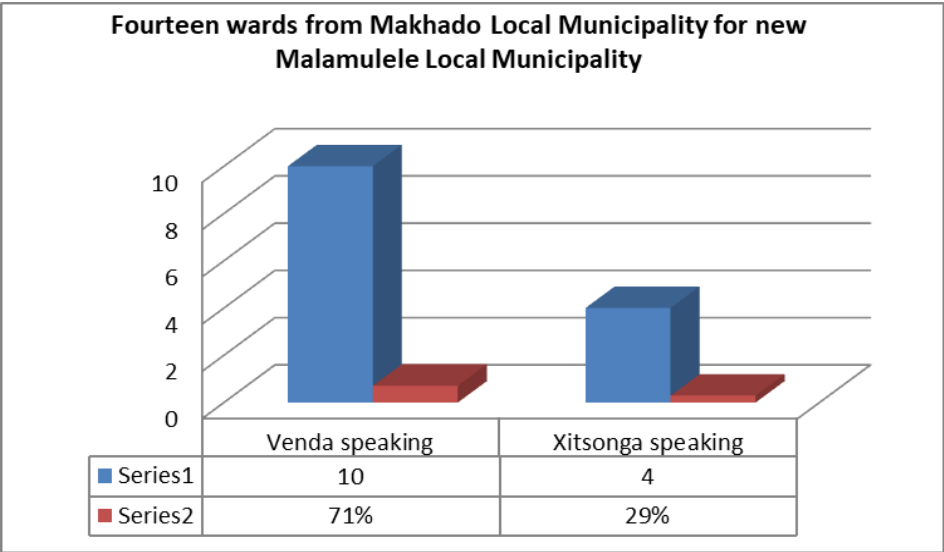


Figure 5: Number of wards re-demarcated to be moved from Makhado to Collins Chabane Local Municipality

Figure 6 below shows the composition of the new entity. At the time of the study it consisted of a total number of 36 wards, with 26 allocated to Xitsonga-speaking councillors and nine to Tshivenda-speaking councillors. Interestingly, only one ward had both Tshivenda-speaking and Xitsonga-speaking councillors. In terms of percentages the councillors were 25 per cent Tshivenda speakers, 72 per cent Xitsonga speakers and three per cent was a mix of these two languages. Thus it was clear that the Xitsonga-speaking councillors would be in the majority and, given the nature of the violence that had preceded the residents’ demand for their own municipality, it could suggest that the areas where Tshivenda was spoken probably feared being dominated by the Xitsonga-speaking councillors in the new municipal council. This possibility is consistent with the findings of Mustapha (2006) that bigger ethnic groups tend to dominate minority ethnic groups.

The number of Tshivenda-speaking councillors compared to the number of Xitsonga-speaking councillors suggested that Vuwani councillors would be dominated by the Xitsonga councillors who were in the majority by far. Moreover, according to Mustapha (2006), being in the minority implies having to find and employ survivalist strategies.

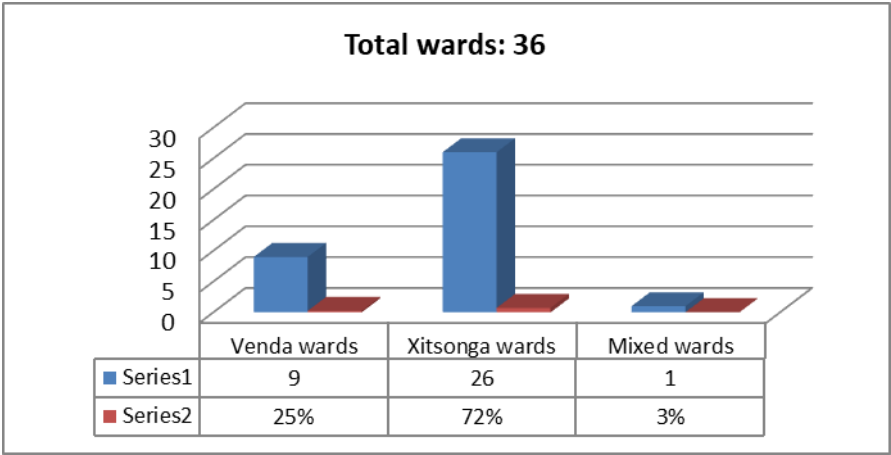


Figure 6: Total number of wards in the new Collins Chabane Local Municipality

Figure 7 below shows that, at the time of this study, there were 36 proportional representation councillors in the new entity. Of these, 10 (28%) were Tshivenda speakers and 26 (72%) were Xitsonga speakers. Based on the distribution, it appeared that resistance to being incorporated into the new entity was because of fears of domination of the Tshivenda councillors by the Xitsonga councillors. The suggested reason for Vuwani communities’ resistance to being incorporated into the Collins Chabane Local Municipality corroborates the findings by Salawu and Hassan (2011, 32) that citizens become loyal to ethnic groupings instead of to the nation as they try

to challenge domination by bigger ethnic groups, thus threatening to undermine institutionalisation of democracy and nation-building. By implication, the Vuwani areas were challenging what they perceived to be impending domination by a rival ethnic group that was bound together by collective names, common myths of descent, shared history, a distinctive shared culture, and association with a specific territory, as well as a sense of solidarity (Thomas 2001, 2). Moreover, this would imply that the Vuwani communities' desire to remain in the Makhado Local Municipality was not necessarily based on ethnic tendencies. Similar to the residents in Malamulele who demanded their own municipality separate from the Tshivenda-dominated municipality, Vuwani residents saw better opportunities for growth under a Makhado municipality consisting of their fellow men rather than under a municipality where their minority representation signalled an inferior status (John-Mary 2001, 5).

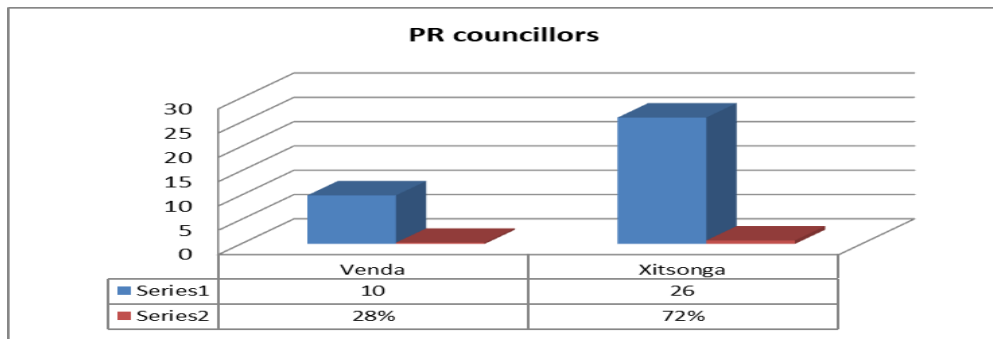


Figure 7: Proportional representative councillors

As shown in Figure 8 below, the total number of seats in the new entity was 72 at the time of this study. Out of this number, 19 (26%) were Tshivenda-speaking councillors whereas 53 (74%) seats were reserved for Xitsonga-speaking councillors. Based on the distribution of seats, the assumption could be that decisions by council would always favour the Xitsonga-speaking councillors, and a further assumption could be that service delivery projects would be dominated by and in the favour of the majority group. Moreover, the percentage distribution suggested that proposals from minority councillors would not enjoy support from the majority. In a situation like that, consensus in council meetings would become difficult, and the situation was also a potential source of conflict in the new entity. In addition, council decisions would favour the interests of the majority group. This notion supports the finding of Vanhanen's (1999) study that members of an ethnic group tend to favour those who belong to their own group over those outside their ethnic parameters, especially where there are limited resources. It further corroborates the finding of Toharudin (2010, 30) that fears of ethnic discrimination in Belgium universities led to the establishment of separate universities for French and Dutch speakers. In the case of the current study it can thus be inferred that the fear of discrimination and domination led to Vuwani communities' resistance when they were forced to be part of the Xitsonga-dominated municipality.

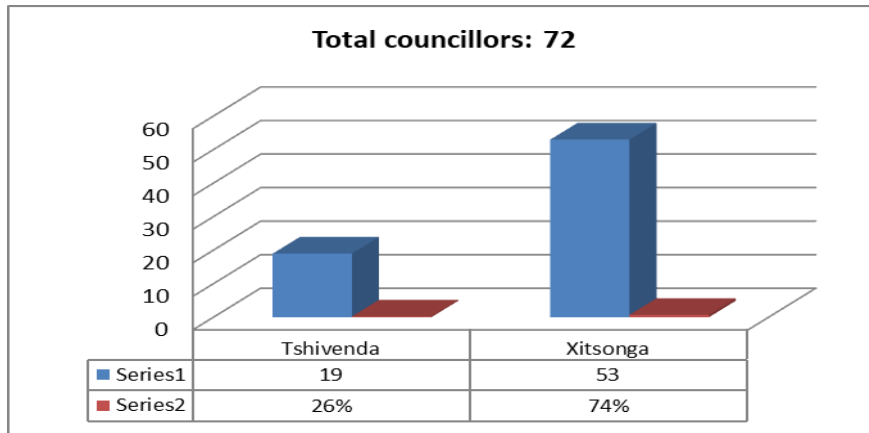


Figure 8: Total number of councillors in Collins Chabane Local Municipality

Conclusion

Vuwani and Malamulele were located in the homelands of Venda and Gazankulu respectively during the apartheid period. Attempts to bring them together followed the advent of the new Constitution, which, in order to meet the aim of creating one South Africa and forging one identity for all South Africans, de-established homelands, national states and the four provinces of Natal, Cape, Free State and Transvaal. The literature and empirical evidence show that the task of creating one identity is not an easy one and that it takes time to achieve. Perceptions of ethnicity and tribalism still linger large, not only in Vuwani and Malamulele but also in Bushbuckridge and Moutse in Mpumalanga and Sekhukhune in Limpopo respectively. These perceptions of ethnicity and tribalism hinder policy implementation, which is the core business of public administration. Hence it can be argued that it is a matter of perception and not necessarily of tribalism and ethnicity per se that caused the fears of the Vuwani people, which led them to resist attempts to demarcate their area. This study found that they feared domination within the new municipality consisting of a majority of Xitsonga-speaking officials. Analyses of the data yielded evidence pointing to the likelihood of such domination in the new municipality. Figure 6 shows that, at the time of this study, the proposed municipality comprised 36 wards. Of these wards, nine consisted of Tshivenda speakers whereas 26 consisted of Xitsonga speakers. Figure 7 shows the number of proportional representative councillors to be 36. Of these, 10 (28%) were Tshivenda speakers and 26 (72%) were Xitsonga speakers.

Figure 8 indicates that the total number of councillors in the new municipality was 72 at the time of this study. Of this number, the Tshivenda-speaking councillors (probably from Vuwani) comprised only 19 compared to the Xitsonga-speaking contingent that comprised 53. There was thus the danger of a skewed representation in

the council along the lines postulated by Verwoerd (2019) in terms of the role that demographics can play in politics, assuming that people vote largely along racial lines. Malamulele councillors would be more likely to vote along ethnic lines in council: moreover, the appointment of key personnel and the allocation of the budget would not be likely to favour Vuwani councillors and their constituencies. This could therefore impact on service delivery to the detriment of the Vuwani people. But the matter does not end there. The whole issue of the perception of ethnicity and tribalism has created a situation where the delivery of services in Vuwani by the Malamulele-based Collins Chabane Local Municipality is refused. The situation has not changed to this day. As indicated by Kuye (2014), public administration is the tool that guides the delivery processes of public sector management.

In order to address perceptions of discrimination based on ethnicity and tribalism, this study recommends that projects to promote unity in diverse communities should not be imposed arbitrarily on the people but should be negotiated with them through meaningful consultation so as to afford them the opportunity to make their own decisions. It further recommends that South Africa should draw lessons from the situation in Belgium where the principle of territoriality for two ethnic groups was implemented.

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