

Endangered Tshivenda Names around Ṭhohoyandou in Limpopo South Africa

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Abstract

Since the establishment of Ṭhohoyandou (a town in Venda in the Vhembe district) in 1979 by the Venda Homeland government, new sections were identified through labels such as P-East and P-West, F and G. The process continued with the establishment of the Thulamela Municipality under the new democratic government, with more sections carrying more labels such as H, J, K, M, C, D and many more. With the municipality expanding, village names in and around the town have either been wiped out completely or replaced by new names. This is a result of the fast growth of the town in all aspects, which has resulted in the encroachment into village life, villages being engulfed with and the elimination and substitution of names. Using the Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Eco-Linguistics theories, this article intends to highlight how dominance, control and abuse of power by the municipality have led to cases of linguistic, social and cultural impoverishment and disempowerment. Furthermore, the article demonstrates that the elimination of Tshivenda village names in the fast-developing town of Ṭhohoyandou is destroying valuable information, which could be used for the creation of knowledge for current and future generations.

Keywords: control; disempowerment; dominance; power; resistance

Introduction

There are bodies such as the National Place Names Committee (NPNC) under the Department of Arts and Culture at both national and provincial level—however, one wonders whether there are any at local government level—and if they are functional. It has been noted that for some years now, these committees have been very active in ensuring that names, especially offensive and inappropriate ones, are replaced and



misspelt ones are correctly written.

Noted also is that in many cities and towns streets have been renamed to honour non-South Africans—although in such cases courts had to intervene as local people were resisting. However, many suburbs and sections of townships continue to carry names that have been decided upon without consultations between the local government and the community. Many settlements are developing in areas, which used to have African names. However, these have been replaced by labels such as Blocks and Units. The names of sections of the town of Ṭhohoyan̄dou are such examples. The town was named by the Venda Homeland government in 1979, when they gained what came to be known as ‘‘Homeland independence’’ in an area or village known as Tshiluvhi. The name was accepted as it revived and honoured the legendary leader, Ṭhohoyan̄dou. Nonetheless, the only institution that reminds people of the village is Tshiluvhi Primary school. Two sections in Ṭhohoyan̄dou were named P-West and P-East and these were followed by Block F that spread towards the east. Subsequently, sections have developed towards the east with names replacing Tshiven̄da ones. Currently, many sections of Ṭhohoyan̄dou, which previously had Tshiven̄da names are now called Blocks and Units.

The article employs a Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Eco-Linguistics theories to analyse the naming of sections of Ṭhohoyan̄dou. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on how language is used to produce dominance, control, power abuse and its legitimisation. Van Dijk (2001) points out that this approach is biased towards people with power and against the oppressed (Fairclough 2015). CDA will, therefore, be used to challenge the local government plans and activities, which have wiped away Tshiven̄da names in villages so that the new sections are now merely called Blocks or Units. The analyses demonstrate that the colonial, Apartheid and the local governments, like the homeland governments, did not consult people or the local royal councils, which had information about the Tshiven̄da names in the area. Indeed, Ṭhohoyan̄dou and the Blocks and Units were established where there were no communities, but these were not ‘‘no man’s land’’ as people were forcefully removed to places such as Sokoutenda. Critical Eco-Linguistics will be used to show that the renaming of the areas to Blocks and Units did a serious disservice as it destroyed significant Tshiven̄da names, which provided information such as soil types and vegetation, all of which are invaluable for agriculture and health. The theory will show that it is not only the names that have been endangered but the language too as the Tshiven̄da names carry information about the history, culture and the environment of the Tshiven̄da people.

Background

Sales (1991) records that the numerous names on the continent of Africa were decided upon by foreign powers—for instance, he indicates that Libya is a Greek word for

(“moisture”) or (“rain-bearing”), and named after the south-westerly winds which bore rain. He found out that Ethiopia-Aethiopia can be traced to an Egyptian source, which was later Anglicised to Ethiopia. Africa itself was known originally as Afir meaning (“city”) or (“metropolis”) later as “Ophir”, which appears to be of Semitic origin—then it became “Afriqah”, a colony of Carthage (now Tunisia), which then spread to embrace the whole continent (Sales 1991, 12; 1991; 17).

Sales reports that the Portuguese adventurers travelling along the west coast of Africa, are said to have named many countries and cities without consulting the inhabitants of the areas (1991). For instance, Pedro da Sintra in 1462 is said to have named Sierra Leone “Serra da Leoa” or “Serra Leao”, which means (“Lioness mountain”) (Sales 1991, 17). Many other countries, according to Sales, carry colonial qualifiers as in French “Soudan”, which later became “Mali”—Belgian Congo became “Zaire”, and later became the “Democratic Republic of Congo”, when the country gained independence. The English decided upon “Gold Coast”, which became “Ghana.” Northern and Southern Rhodesia were named after Cecil Rhodes (Rhodesia), which later became “Zambia” and “Zimbabwe” respectively (Sales 1991). Many others such as Botswana, Lesotho, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi kept their names but “Nyasaland” later became Malawi’ (Sales 1991).

Along the east coast of Africa, according to Huntingford (1940, 209-210) the Greeks had cities such as Nikonos, Donioros, Sarapionos Homod, Toruke and Pyraloan. However, these were replaced when there was expansion and were given new names such as Mukandisha, Brava, Kismayn, Lamu, Mombasa, when the Arab leader, Sultan Abdul Malik took over power. By implication, these foreign powers found African names and replaced them because they were in control.

The European and Arab conquerors used power to rename countries and cities where people lived without consulting them. McCracken (2010) reports that when the first Irish settlers arrived around 1789-1803, they named places they came across. For instance, the village Cradock and Cradock River were named after Sir John Cradock who settled in South Africa. The town of Upington in the Northern Cape was named after an Irish Prime Minister, Sir Thomas Upington.

Coetser (2003) points at English names that were decided upon by the English when they arrived and settled in South Africa. For example, East London was renamed after the city of London. She bemoans that they found a river named Eersterivier and changed the name to Buffalo River, which was also later given an Afrikaans version, Buffelrivier. She goes on to give examples of Xhosa names, which were changed by the English such as Naguni, to Nahoon, Kwikwini became Quiqney; the original name was traced to the San or Koi, meaning (“break inland”) (Coetser 2003, 50). Coetser goes on to show a host of English names for streets and suburbs, which were based on those in England or names of English heroes; or those who later came to

South Africa. Some street names such as Oxford, Cambridge, and York were named after cities and Jameson, Buxton, Dale, Duncan, Gladstone and Milner, after colonial heroes. Other names were of German origin, which came into being when the two super colonial powers were still allies. These are Berlin and Hanover, which were later changed to Buxton and Gladstone respectively, when the relationship soured. She adds that there were a few Afrikaans names such as Stormberg, Kloof, Buite Kant and Burger in East London, but decries that there were no Xhosa names except for Amalinda, named after the Battle of Amalinda.

Coetser (2003) also complains that after 1994, the new South African government did not value Afrikaans names because the authorities changed the John Vorster Bridge, named after one Afrikaner Prime Minister, to Steve Biko Bridge, after the late Black Consciousness leader. She further records that many municipalities and districts carry names of Xhosa leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Chris Hani and Alfred Nzo, and others have Xhosa names, such as Amathole District Municipality, Cacadu District Municipality and Ukhahlamba District Municipality. She is critical of the new government and asserts that it is following in the footsteps of the British colonial power, as it has established new municipalities and given them Xhosa names and ignored the Afrikaans ones (Coetser 2003, 57). It is interesting that Coetser conveniently turns a blind eye to the many instances where Afrikaans leaders did away with isiXhosa and other African names and replaced them with Afrikaans names. On the whole, Coetser shows how the colonial, Apartheid government, and now the democratic government have used their powers to replace the original names of places without consulting the inhabitants of the place because they could not be challenged.

Golele (1993) indicates that homeland leaders removed African names and replaced them with names of their choice when they attained some sort of independence—for instance, Giyani came with the new Gazankulu homeland government and in protest, the people who were removed from the area left for another part named Hatshama (“we are staying”); and the first school Sukani (“leave”). Similarly, the people who were expatriated from Thohoyandou went to name their new area Sokoutenda (Golele 1993, 88).

A number of scholars, such as Jenkins (1994), Meiring (1994) and Moller (1995) have pointed at the establishment of the National Place Name Committee (NPNC), which was meant to advise the government on the names chosen in consultation with the inhabitants of the various places. There were policies and procedures in place to be followed for any decision on a name. Jenkins (1994, 14) reports that there had been cases where people decided to change names of certain places and institutions in honour of liberation fighters as was the case with the people’s decision to rename the Hendrik Verwoerd Airport in Port Elizabeth to Mathew Goniwe. There were consultations with the local communities such as was with the renaming of the township of Nolukhanyo at Bathurst to KwaTambo. However, the NPNC turned it

down because there had not been any consultation with the Tambo family, and the committee also felt that it would not be wise to honour a national leader with a small “obscure little place” (Jenkins 1994 14). Jenkins goes on to point to many other cases where there were consultations with the people, as was the case with the renaming of Verwoerdsburg to Centurion, which took numerous meetings as some groups were resisting, until they took a vote and the name change took place. Jenkins (1994, 21) however, shows that there have been cases like when the changing of the names of presidential guest houses such as Wesbrook to Genadendal and Libertas to Mahlambandlopfu were done without any consultations.

Machaba (2003, 66) points out that after 1994, when the new democratic government assumed power, many names in South Africa were changed. She cites cases of provinces such as the Transvaal and Orange Free State that were renamed—with the former being divided into a number of provinces, with new names—and the latter becoming the Free State. She goes on to show how major cities such as Durban, Bloemfontein and Pretoria were strategically embraced within the new metros of eThekweni, Mangaung and Tshwane. Where there was resistance, such as in the case of Tshwane, the local government indicated that the name Pretoria would remain—but that Tshwane was more embracing. This became very difficult to challenge (Machaba 2003, 69). Other problematic cases were those of Pietersburg to Polokwane and Louis Trichardt to Makhado. In the case of the former, an Afrikaner group marched through the streets of the town resisting the name change, but eventually lost. In the case of the latter, there were numerous court cases at local government level. Although alleging to have consulted communities, the resisting group was very forceful—hence the new name Makhado was rejected. Mudau (2009, 133) found out when conducting interviews that Makhado Municipality did not consult sufficiently, and this had resulted in repeated and endless changes in the names (Sengani 2011).

Machaba (2003, 66) further notes a number of instances where isiZulu names were altered by South African governments over the years, such as Kyalami instead of Khayalami, Umbogintwini instead of Ezimbokodweni. Sadly these decisions could not be challenged because the South African government then had power and control. Jenkins (1994, 15) indicates that other names that were immediately changed were offensive ones such as Kafferfontein to Tierpoort. These changes came about because the people felt that the government had power and could make changes.

Hough (2015) takes us back in time to show us that many other names in Europe were decided upon by powerful people. He writes that Wales was named by the Anglo-Saxon, meaning (“Britons and foreign nationals”) so as to disassociate them from their neighbours, the Celts. The appropriate name for the areas is “Cymru”, which, according to Hough means (“people from the same region, kinsmen”). What is interesting is that “Cymru talks of inclusion and kinship, Wales talks of exclusion and difference” (Hough 2015, 641). The name indicates that the Welsh people were

oppressed and the name was imposed on them. Hough goes on to also point out that many names of colonised countries were imposed by Europeans, Australians and Americans. He also gives examples of areas or places in South Africa, such as New Hanover, which was named after Hanover by the Germans, who settled in the country in remembrance of a town back in Germany. Pretoria was named after Andries Pretorius by members of the Transvaal Boer Republic and Bloemfontein after Piet Bloem, in what they called Oranje Free State (Hough 2015, 641). These names replaced indigenous ones such as Tshwane and Mangaung, which had to give way to foreign ones—because powerful colonisers had decided against them, and in addition, there was no consultation.

Kruipers (1984) has shown that in Australasia, among the Weyewa, names were used as resources to construct discourses (Kruipers 1984, 455). He notes from the interviews conducted that in names, the people coded social, cultural and historical secrets about their environment. Anderson (2015, 641) maintains that some names explain more about the features of the area and link this to the belief of the people in the areas as they are “topographically and socially salient.” When original names are replaced or altered, very valuable coded information on the economy, environment, the history of the people, heritage, science and technology, health and culture is lost forever.

This article therefore, has employed Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Eco-Linguistics to show how and why powerful governments replace names and often altered them and what the consequences of these acts are.

Critical Discourse Analysis

One of the approaches used in the analysis is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This approach was chosen because it deals with power relations between the powerful oppressors and the oppressed. Scholars such as Blommaert (2005), Fairclough (1989; 1992; 2015) Fairclough and Wodak (1997), and Wooffitt (2005) point out that CDA focuses on social problems. Van Dijk (2001, 249) explains that CDA investigates “relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality and position of discourse analyst in such relationships.” Van Dijk sees this as a “sociopolitical discourse analysis”, because the theory originated when scholars became alarmed at how political figures and the elite were using their protected platform to abuse power, thereby suppressing the dominated (Van Dijk 2001, 251).

For this reason, CDA tends to focus more on top-down relations of dominance in order to understand the abuse of power, while the bottom-up approach explains how the oppressed uses language to resist. Scholars in the former approach maintain that often powerful groups succeed because, in as much as they impose their will, there are times when dominance is produced “jointly” and appears so natural as political elites study and win people’s minds. It is these tendencies that make dominance acceptable

by the dominated (Van Dijk 2001, 352). According to Fairclough (2015, 229–30), CDA has an emancipatory agenda to empower the dominated and analysts. It challenges analysts to be committed social activists and critics so that they can do more in order to develop the domain (Blommaert 2005; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Wooffitt (2005). This has led many scholars in the field to bring many others into conference, thus becoming multidisciplinary.

Critical Discourse Analysis scholars have been very practical in that they have pragmatic tools available to work with. They suggest a number of propositions:

- Language influences society and in turn society influences language use. By implication, there is a dialectical relationship between language use or discourse and society (Fairclough 1989; 1992; 2015; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Van Dijk 2001). This implies that when names are used, they influence people.
- Language use constitutes change: Here they bring forth three elements such as knowledge generation, social relations and identity. In this case, the use of names anywhere generates knowledge because names are a discourse that people live by. If names are derived from local languages and cultures, they will influence knowledge generation in that direction, and if they are foreign, foreign knowledge will be articulated at the expense of the indigenous knowledge. In terms of social relations, local relations will develop through strategies such as praises, totems and link up through relating with the vegetation, geographical features, and animals (Stibbe 2013). Where identity is involved, people tend to be called by the names of the villages and their names become surnames. However, if names are foreign, everything local gets forgotten.
- Language carries ideology. Often in societies, where there are more than two cultures with one being more powerful, local people give up because the ideology of the powerful is to win them. There are times when local people resist but gave up for the sake of peace. As stated earlier, this assertion is supported by Fairclough and Wodak (1997, 250), who argue that: “What is distinctive about CDA is both that it intervenes on the side of dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups and that it openly declares the emancipatory interests that motivates it.”

Critical Eco-Linguistics

It has been indicated above that this article deals with names of the environment that have been endangered because they have been replaced unfairly by powerful individuals. People have always lived with and by the environment. The first recognised study of language and the environment is that of Sapir (2001), who noticed that there was a relationship between language and both the physical and social surroundings (Fill and Muhlhausler 2001, 2). There is a possibility that Sapir could have been influenced by his teacher Boas, with whom he had worked with on

American-Indian languages. Their research was based on the role of context (Chapman and Routledge 2005).

The long break between that very period and the 80s when Haugen (1972) revived environmental linguistics is blamed on Autonomous Linguistics, where scholars focused more on grammar, with emphasis on its tools without applying them in contextual issues (Burling 1970; Herbert 1980; Sapir 1929). Haugen (2001, 57) defines environmental linguistics as “the study of interactions between any given language and its environment.” Both Fill and Muhlhausler (2001) show that an understanding of this interaction within context shows that people and other organisms end up benefitting because language codes very valuable information, not only about the environment, but also the people’s heritage, culture, economy, science and technology, health and the language that is used to convey all this knowledge.

Concerns have been expressed from various quarters that many environmental activists are merely theorising about the field, as most people do not interact with the environment, because what the people see are destructions, deforestation, removals and unplanned settlements; and all these are detrimental to the environment. Some scholars, among them Fill (2001, 57), suggest that there is a need to recall history to the classical period in various cultures, when it was believed that “Languages were born, and died like living organisms.” In order to get the message through, there was a move to popularise the “power of the metaphor”, through which all objects communicate (Goatley 2001, 203). Myerson and Rydin (1996) had already argued too about the need to be proactive; and suggested interactions across disciplines and spheres of life, where people should get involved in campaigns, negotiations, persuasions and debates so as to conscientise others on the protection of the environment. They further suggest that much could be accomplished if every discipline could deal with environmental issues from their own perspective. Scholars then wrote books on issues about the environment (Harre, Brockmeier’s and Muhlhausler 1999; Muir and Veenendall 1996; Killingsworth 2005)

Parker (2005, 1) went on to cite a statement from a document on *Warning to humanity*, which read “Human being and natural world are on collision course.” This then led to the emergence of Critical Eco-linguistics.

Stibbe (2013, 407) maintains that if people ever lived in an area for years or were the originals, their folklore tends to carry information about everything in that area. The mountains, rivers, valleys, people and many other elements are heard or coded in their storytelling, songs, praises, proverbs and metaphors. In other words, “with settled oral cultures, languages remain intensely localised, and their vocabulary and grammar respond to, and reflect, the local environment and the human needs for survival within that environment.”

However, when the same people move or are removed physically to another area, much in terms of “lexical discursive and narrative resources” easily gets lost as there is no continuation with the narratives, and more so if these elements are not found in the new area (Stibbe 2013, 409). These moves are seen as cases that degrade and destroy the environment. This in a way implies that whenever people leave a place, they do not only leave ruins of buildings, but also of the environment. This is because the new settlers decide to impose their culture and language so as to authenticate ownership. In this manner, they rename whatever they find and the past gets lost. Stibbe (2013, 409) points out that when this happens, the ecological knowledge of the subjugated people and languages gets lost. When it comes to naming, the frame of reference tends to be different as occupying power usually rarely considers cultural and linguistic diversities. Usually, it would appear that the environment tends to be attuned to the first cultures.

Nettle and Romaine (2000, 166) assert that:

Delicate tropical environments in particular must be managed with care and skill. It is indigenous people who have the relevant practical knowledge, since they have been successfully making a living in them for hundreds of generations. Much of this detailed knowledge about local ecosystem is encoded in indigenous language and is being lost.

Stibbe (2013, 410) allays some of our fears where we might think that whenever people move or are moved, their languages do not adapt. He maintains that the situation can be salvaged if speakers have the ability to “create new stories, metaphors, identities and cultural norms in adaptations to new locations.” Some of the dominating cultures such as English and Afrikaans have tried this, although with very little success; since it was done at the expense of African languages and cultures.

There is also a problem when new languages and cultures arrive with new names and narratives because they usually create mismatches between them and the environment. Stibbe (2013) explains that when new cultures and languages arrive, there is a spread of translinguistic discourses. Usually, when dominant discourses arrive, they tend to be so powerful that they easily influence local people, who immediately adopt them. In the process, there is a development of competing discourses, where lesser powerful discourse is either suppressed or resisted. The power of the new discourses always overwhelms and displaces the local ones, which eventually lead to “ecologically destructive behaviour” (Stibbe 2013, 412). Powerful cultures often prevail because they come with what Stibbe refers to as “new liberalism, trade liberation and commercialization and modernization”, where names are fashioned to those of the first world or cities. When discourses are meant to compete, “oppressed groups [are] the first ones to suffer the consequences”—because as Fairclough (2006, 6) observes, the new dominant and foreign discourses tend to lack the “practical adequacy.” This can be ascribed to the fact that powerful cultures tend to monopolise the language of

the economy, health, science and technology or any industrial movement that advances business.

Stibbe (2013, 414) complains of the “overconsumption of natural resources”, where dominant languages win and local languages loose. This continues to be countered by scholars who have come up with the new titles such as *Earthspeak*, *Greenspeak* and *Ecospeak*—as indeed, the ecosystem does speak—and yet people and powerful foreign nationals fail to respond accordingly, because they are alien to the environment.

Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

Political Names/Names after Rulers/Mahosi

Tshiluvhi became P-East and P-West respectively. This is a village that was under khosi/mukoma Netshiluvhi, who later became a junior under Mphaphuli. People who were removed from the area so that Thohoyandou can be established went to settle at Tshisikule, which then gained a protest name, Sokoutenda.

Haralushai, named after a junior ruler under Mphaphuli became Block Q, thereby clouding the history of this leader and the village. Hamagidi, named after a junior ruler under Mphaphuli, became Block M, thus destroying the history of the ruler and the village. Tshisikule and Mbara—*Unit C*. The name Tshisikule is that of a junior ruler under Mphaphuli—the area was named after him, but use of the name faded with time, with the emergence of Sokoutenda, which emerged as a protest name for people who were removed from Haralushai, Tshiluvhi and Tshivhumbe.

The name Mbara is said to have been given to another Mphaphuli, who was sent to meet a delegation at a section of Miluwani. However, on arrival, he saw police and grew cold feet and ran back to his seniors, who later mocked him, calling him *mbara* meaning (“stupid”)— thus, the name became famous when he became a junior ruler of the area.

Sokoutenda (“just accept”), was originally part of Miluwani. The name emerged from people protesting after they were removed from Haralushai, which was later called “White Area”, Tshiluvhi, then Tshivhumbe. It has now become Unit C.

The names above refer to areas or villages named after local *mahosi* (“rulers”). The replacement of Tshivenda village names with “Blocks” and “Units” disempowered *mahosi* (“rulers”) as the local government took over. Their political involvement that has been there for ages was not only threatened, but removed without consultation.

Soil Type

There is an area which was known as Unit C, which the community knew as Maṭhaphu. The name is derived from the verb *u ṭhaphuwa* meaning (“to reach an end or particular end”). The soil type of this area is red to brown and very rich. A closer observation and interaction with elderly people from the area, gave us an idea of the meaning of the name. The soil is soft and dusty when one is ploughing and if a vehicle moves at a high speed, it gets very slippery. When it rains, one can hardly move on it, so that it feels like walking on a tread-mill. In other areas, the soil becomes so caked that with each step one feels like they are carrying a heavy load on a slippery surface. The name *maṭhaphu* correlates with this activity. The name shows that the soil is rich and therefore fertile. There was thus, agreement with the interviewees on the origin of the name. The soil in this area is suitable for planting maize—and this can be seen during summer as the harvest is always plentiful. The vegetation, be it in people’s yards or along the road, is always green. This, therefore, reminds the people who have settled in the area to plant fruit and vegetables and any other plants for shade or beautifying their yards. The name also reminds people who intend settling in the area that buildings in this area requires reinforcement of the foundations as there could be cracks later, as the soil is soft. The area has been named *Unit C* and this very name has destroyed all the valuable information about the rich and fertile soil.

The same applies to Nzhelavhalimi meaning (“a place where maize producers have experience”). This is due to the fact that maize harvest has always been bountiful there—implying that the people have considerable experience. The name reminds people who settled there or who will in the future, to use the soil productively because it is fertile. People who settled in this area had vegetable gardens and fruit trees in their yards, and some still plant maize inside and outside their yards.

Tshivhumbe means an area where pottery takes place. The name is derived from the verb *vhumba* (“to form”). It should be borne in mind that the name also has a close association with the meaning of *vumba*, which is clay—which is used for making utensils such as pots and guards. This area has become Blocks D, F and G. Tshivhumbe covers an area from what is now called Blocks F and G east of the two, and D up to the exclusive area. This area has small rivulets, such as Mbobvane and Lukunde, with swamps and reeds, which all flow into Mvuḍi—that flows towards the south and later east to form a confluence with Luvuvhu and Dzindi—all flowing into the new Nanḍoni dam. The few rivulets create a watery area with clay soil. This again reminds people who settle in the area that besides *vumba* (“soil”), which they can use to make utensils or artistic ornaments, the soil needs to be reinforced before they can build, otherwise their houses will develop cracks later. However, an environment with rivulets characterised by reeds and swamps beautifies any area. This means that it should be protected and should not be polluted. Usually, in these areas, there are birds and grasshoppers of all types and colours. The reeds can also be used for making baskets in the hands of skilful artists—and the activity can provide jobs and alleviate

poverty. The new names Block F, G and D, are mere labels, which do not provide any lexical meaning.

Muleđane, meaning an area with pliable or watery soil type became Block J and N. The village of Muleđane stretches from the river Mvuđi to Tshivhuyuni, and the strip along the river is characterised by the clay soil that is very soft. The name is derived from the verb *u leđa*, meaning (“soft and porridge-like”). People who build here need to reinforce the foundations of their houses, as the name explains. If people ignore this warning their houses would develop cracks over a period. The new name Block J does not express any similar meaning or warn or alert people of the kind of soil they are about to build on.

Tshitangwe area has a valley that forms a semi-circle. It is derived from the verb *tanga*, meaning (“to surround”)—hence the semi-circle feature. The valley of Tshitangwe has luxurious bushes with various types of vegetation with flowers of *mivhale*, as well as other trees of various colours. The feature of the area is a spectacle to witness as if it were planned. The vegetation attracts colourful birds and grasshoppers and bees. The new name Unit C has no meaning and has nothing that relates to the beautiful valley.

Vegetation

Miluwani—meaning an area with *miluwa* vegetation became Unit C. After they left Tshitomboni in the south and beyond the Luvuvhu River, the Mphaphuli who are the senior rulers of the area came to live there. The area was named after the *miluwa* vegetation, which is very plentiful in the area named Sibasa or Gammbani by colonial powers who carried the vegetation from Tshaṅowa around Phiphiđi, where the camp was originally established. *Miluwa* is used for making baskets (*mifaro*), plates (*tsele*) and other similar utensils. In terms of knowledge generation, it is mainly the elderly who still have this skill and with the more careful protection of the vegetation, either in sections or some in people’s yards, much can be done in terms of job creation as the baskets mentioned above are very rare and very much sought after. In fact many interviewees were able to indicate that the Vhaventṅa are among the very few people who have the skills and knowledge about making baskets. Wherever these baskets are seen, people buy them and even place orders for more.

Mbaleni is an area full of *mivhale* trees that later became Block E. Mivhale are used for fencing and beautifying yards with their blooming red flowers. The flowers attract different colourful birds and bees. In the past, many yards were always decorated by this vegetation and birds and grasshoppers were easy to catch for the delicious relish with the *mutuku* porridge. In many areas, yards around the houses have all kinds of flowers, but *mivhale* are rarely recognised because the present generation has no idea what their uses are. Business-minded people could produce more of the vegetation and establish nurseries, thereby creating jobs, which are very scarce. Many people can

therefore, earn a living from the vegetation. Nonetheless as things are, it is not only the vegetation that is extinct, but the names that encode very valuable information.

Samvuni, a place with plenty of *miṭamvu* trees/plants/vegetation became Unit F and G. The vegetation is used for repelling creatures such as reptiles. An innovative mind would develop repellent medicine for all kinds of insects and reptiles, thereby starting a new business venture. We were told by the elderly that this vegetation was found in homes and fields, and that its presence was an indication that there was a very slim chance of coming across reptiles in people's fields.

Zazamela (*miswoswo*) is an area with vegetation that spurts liquid that causes an itch became Block G. The plants, though harmful, repel certain creatures and reptiles. This place is rich in vegetation—and because it can be harmful to the eyes, the name always reminds people to be careful. Its repellent medicinal properties is crucial for people in the area. This is a plant that can produce deterrents for crickets, flies and cockroaches and other related insects.

Maṅiini, meaning an area with *miṅii* trees, became Blocks M, L and S. Although this vegetation is found in other areas of Venda, it is plentiful in the village of Maṅiini and from them, people can produce jam and juice.

Conclusion

The local government took the decision to replace Tshivenda names with labels such as “Blocks” and “Units” came about because institutions such as the NPNC were established only at national and provincial levels. This means that when new areas were proclaimed for settlement, they interact with local government to decide on the names. For years since the dawn of the new era, altered, wrongly spelt and offensive names have either been destroyed or replaced and in some cases, new ones were chosen by the people in the area. There are cases where communities have reverted to the original names because most of these are known. This has been done to preserve the heritage, history, culture and the languages.

There has been condemnation by scholars of the various groups of European travellers, adventurers, colonial powers and the apartheid governments who, at will, without consulting Africans, decided to pen European names for areas they reached, even when there were people living in those areas. These people have been criticised for abusing power and further legitimising the names so as to entrench their rule—thereby endangering not only the names but the languages as well. For sometime, at the dawn of the new democratic era, “consultation” became the buzzword for any name change. However, it is clear that the agreement regarding the name Ṭhohoyanḁou had some form of consensus—because the then Vhavenḁa homeland rulers felt that they had reached another milestone in their history of independence. The name revived the identity of Ṭhohoyanḁou and the history of Vhavenḁa.

However, it would have been more sensible if the name Tshiluvhi (where people pay homage) had been retained for the Central Business District (CBD) of the town of Tshohoyanḑou. The other names, which have thus far been replaced by either Units or Blocks could have been retained—thereby enriching, not only the culture of Vhavenda speakers, but also helping them to retain the knowledge of their history, heritage, economy, politics, environment, education and health.

As such, the renaming has been done without due process and continues as the municipality eludes consulting the residents and communities. The replacement of names endangers not only the names but the language as well. Units and Blocks do not provide any meaning as they obscure vital information. The names encode useful information, which refers to the environment, agriculture, economy, politics, history and heritage. The original names were decided upon, based on the knowledge and skills of the forerunners. The replacement of the Tshivenḑa names with Units and Blocks therefore, hinders the passing on of knowledge from the present generation to the next.

Recommendations

There is a need, however, to capture this demise of not just names, but language and knowledge. Authorities should make concerted efforts to consult with communities, whenever new areas are to be proclaimed. The naming of existing areas ought to remain, and any names for the new areas should be agreed upon after consultation. Discussions in the media such as radio and TV talk shows would balance issues and stimulate research among scholars to investigate more the relationship between names and the ecosystem. Experts ought to engage the NPNC committees through workshops, seminars and conferences—whether on a national or provincial level, to see to it that local government names' committees are involved. Finally, discussions should also be held on the revival of the original names that would involve senior citizens so as to protect the environment as they are the custodians of the history, culture and heritage.

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