Some Aspects of
AIDS-related Discourse in
Post-apartheid South African Culture

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Introduction

The language of AIDS does not merely represent the condition: it constructs it in different ways. Words and images create different conceptual realities of the phenomenon. These both reflect and determine the way we understand and feel about the condition. Language can neither be separated from our thoughts and feelings, nor from the social context in which it is used.

Looking specifically at the situation in our own country, there are numerous examples of how language has been and is being used in very different ways to express and shape attitudes towards AIDS. The condition is either described in starkly explicit terms, avoided altogether, exaggerated or downplayed, depending on the situation, the mindset of the speaker or writer, and the intended effect on the audience. Commonly used metaphorical representations of HIV and AIDS provide different conceptions of the phenomenon, and create different meanings.

Taboos and AIDS

The onset of HIV/AIDS in South Africa has caused old linguistic taboos regarding sexually explicit terms to break down in certain contexts. AIDS-education programmes used currently in South African schools, and media campaigns aimed at young people, use graphic terms – for example, describing different ways of having sex – in order to explain how the disease is transmitted and can be prevented. The coyness and mystique that used to

surround sex have been stripped away. Pieter-Dirk Uys, a satirist who goes round to South African schools giving AIDS-education talks, believes in blunt speech. In his talks he deliberately uses words that would formerly have been taboo in such situations: 'fuck' and the Afrikaans '*naai* ', for example. He feels it is necessary to use this discourse to communicate with his audience in terms they can relate to. He caused a furore when he placed an advertisement in a Grahamstown newspaper at the 2003 Grahamstown Festival with the headline: 'Think before you fuck'. A few years ago this word would have been regarded as unprintable in a generally circulated newspaper. His reaction to the outcry was: 'Great. The message is finally hitting home'[1].

At the same time that old taboos are breaking down, new taboos have come into being. Amongst certain sectors of the black population, the very words 'HIV' or 'AIDS' arouse superstition and have become taboo[2] [2.] There is a fear that people could be bewitched or infected just by saying the name. Adding to this reason for fearing to talk about it is the shame and stigma attached to those affected. Secrecy and silence prevail. Accordingly, AIDS is referred to vaguely as 'this thing', as in 'a person died of this thing' or 'this thing outside', as in 'she got this thing outside'[3] to ensure that other people do not think that the infection was contracted within the home. The phrases 'the disease of nowadays' (Posel 2004:13), 'the new sickness', 'Helen Ivy Vilakazi' and 'the three words' (Leclerc-Mdlala 2000:28) have also come into being.

In the Drakensberg district of KwaZulu-Natal, specifically, there is use of circumlocutions such as 'someone has died of the feet' (*izinyawo*), referring to the swelling of the legs and feet; 'of the head' (*ikhanda*), denoting the headaches associated with meningitis; 'of the chest' (*isifuba*), indicating TB or pneumonia; or 'of the stomach' (*isisu*), suggesting uncontrollable vomiting and diarrhoea (Henderson 2004:5). The indirectness of these expressions which describe AIDS in terms of the symptoms of the particular opportunistic infection that finally caused death reveals the extent

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[1] *Pretoria News*, 4 July 2003.
[2] 'Aids solution is foiled by an evil spell of silence' in *The Sunday Independent*, 3 October 2004.
[3] *Pretoria News*, 22 November 2001.

of the fear attached to it. Not saying its name is a way of trying to deny its reality and its power. However, the effect of refusing to 'call a spade a spade' is the creation of mystery, which, ironically, increases the sense that AIDS does indeed have power. According to Posel, the 'mysteriousness [of AIDS] as a disease which has eluded both western medicine and indigenous healers' has been 'explicitly linked to [its] extraordinary power and menace' (2004:14).

Other euphemisms for AIDS used in African communities are the words *iAce* or *iLotto*[4]. The Nguni prefix *i* is attached to the English word 'lotto' or 'ace' to form a mixed compound. The metaphor seen in 'ace' and 'lotto' draws on the discourse of gambling – 'lotto' referring to the national lottery – and suggests the risky nature of sexual activity. Just as winning or losing in gambling is a matter of chance, it implies that people have no control over whether they contract HIV or not.

Amidst the silence surrounding AIDS in certain communities, we see that terms to denote it are proliferating. This paradox illustrates how 'speech and silence actually interrelate'; the 'conflict between vocal affirmation and the peculiar silence effected through denial' being 'apparent' rather than real (Harper 1993:119).

As the *iAce* or *iLotto* examples demonstrate, the use of metaphor is highly revealing of the way people conceptualise the material world. Lakoff and Johnson (1980;1981) have demonstrated convincingly how deeply embedded metaphors are in our thought processes, albeit unconsciously. The striking use of various metaphors to describe AIDS – including AIDS as a plague, AIDS as death, AIDS as punishment, AIDS as an external invader and so on – has been well researched (Ross 1988; Sontag 1989; Watney 1989). It is not the intention of this paper to examine these metaphorical representations since they are not new and are based on language use in other parts of the world, but they certainly bear out the truth of Posel's assertion that 'AIDS carries a heavy metaphoric burden' (2004:23).

The United Nations Language Policy on AIDS

The United Nations Development Programme has developed a detailed

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[4] *Pretoria News*, 22 November 2001.

HIV-related language policy[5], the aim of which is to normalise the condition and resist discrimination against people living with HIV. When it comes to naming HIV-positive individuals, for example, it recommends that we should avoid terms like 'victim' or 'sufferer' because these carry connotations of helplessness and defeat. If, on the other hand, we talk about people 'living' rather than 'dying' and use the phrase 'someone living with HIV', we are recognising that an infected person may continue to live for many years. It suggests that phrases such as 'AIDS patient' should be avoided because we are then identifying someone by a medical condition alone. The policy states that being sensational and using metaphors such as 'plague' or 'scourge' gives the impression that the epidemic cannot be controlled. This kind of language creates hopelessness and panic. Such recommendations go beyond mere political correctness: they recognise that language can have a profound effect on attitudes and behaviour.

War Metaphors and AIDS

A key recommendation of the United Nations Development Programme HIV-related language policy is that the discourse of war should be avoided. Language should be drawn from the language of peace, instead. In practice, however, it seems difficult for people to avoid the discourse of war when discussing disease. This practice predates the AIDS pandemic. As Sherry comments: 'there was a long tradition before AIDS of militarizing disease' (1993:45). It has become almost habitual to discuss overcoming disease in terms of waging war, and the extension of the analogy to include AIDS is a natural development. It is nonetheless ironic that Kofi Annan described HIV and AIDS as 'the real weapon of mass destruction'[6] in a news conference given at the end of 2003. In his speech he lamented the fact that the Iraqi war had taken attention away from other major problems, including AIDS, that 'caused more daily insecurity than terrorism or unconventional weapons'. Such comparisons go directly against the policy of the organisation he heads. Bearing in mind that 2003 was the year that the United States invaded Iraq and that this event dominated world affairs that year, however, it is not

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[5] 'Defusing words of mass destruction' in *Guardian Weekly,* November 13-19 2003. See also: http://www.undp.org/hiv/policies/langpole.htm.

[6] *Pretoria News*, 20 December 2003.

surprising that he drew on the highly charged 'war against terror' discourse when attempting to give impact to his speech.

Sontag has thoroughly explored the ubiquity of the military metaphor in the discourse of disease. She holds that military metaphors 'contribute to the stigmatizing of certain illnesses and, by extension, of those who are ill' (1989:11). Of all metaphors applied to illness, the military metaphor is the one she 'is most eager to see retired' because it 'over-mobilizes, it overdescribes, and it powerfully contributes to the excommunicating and stigmatizing of the ill' (1989:94).

Ross points out how entrenched the metaphor of medicine as war is in general language usage to the extent that 'we can scarcely imagine any other way of talking about how health care providers deal with diseases and patients' (1988:85). She states that since the occurrence of AIDS, 'the phrase 'the war against AIDS' is perhaps the most common metaphor used in the popular press' (1988:86). Commenting on the implications of seeing the virus as 'the enemy', Ross believes that it makes the carriers of the virus (the infected person) into spies and traitors, since they harbour the unseen enemy within themselves. It is easy to see how such an equivalence could promote discrimination against HIV-positive people.

Sherry points out that 'that most pervasive metaphor of a 'war on AIDS' [has] a vagueness and capacity for casual slippage into a variety of meanings' (1993:41), and observes 'that those who used the language of war by no means had a common political purpose' (1993:46). His comments are highly pertinent to discursive representations of AIDS in the South African context, as this paper hopes to demonstrate.

Newspaper discourse used in relation to AIDS in South Africa is permeated with tired war metaphors. Some examples are: 'SANDF declares war on HIV: opening salvo fired in battle against deadly disease'[7]; 'Aids battle hots up'[8]; 'Climate of fear cripples Aids fight'[9]. 'President must lead the war on AIDS'[10]; and 'Barbara is a trooper in her field', about a woman called Barbara Michel who heads an HIV/Aids education programme. The

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[7] *Pretoria News*, 21 January 2004.

[8] *Sowetan*, 2 April 2004.

[9] *Pretoria News*, 26 November 2003.

[10] *Sunday Times*, 30 November 2003.

opening sentence of the latter report reads: 'The war's not lost while there are passionate troops willing to give their all for the fight'[11]. The lexical chains relating to war in these examples are obvious but semantically unsatisfactory because, in Sherry's words, it is unclear 'who, or what, is fighting whom, or what, where and how' (1993:41). The military metaphor could operate on the biological micro-level, referring to 'the war within the bodies of the disease's victims' or on the macro-level, 'in the arena of social and political action'. It could refer equally to 'action against the disease, war by the disease on its victims, or by those who tolerated it on those victims, or by those who transmitted to others' (Sherry 1993:41).

Judge Edwin Cameron, an important spokesman and role model for people living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa has written: 'We risk a failure of words, of concepts ... in the face of AIDS.... We need to respond with imagination and compassion to what is happening around us ' (1993:29).

Struggle Metaphors and AIDS in South Africa

Much AIDS discourse in South Africa is informed by the apartheid struggle. While this struggle did not constitute an actual war, it was nevertheless a protracted conflict against a systematised ideology, and involved bloodshed. Apartheid discourse, therefore, could be regarded as a particular, local variety of the overused, more generic war discourse already considered. Just as Kofi Annan invoked the Iraqi war because of its dominance and currency at the time, South Africans have readily appropriated apartheid discourse when discussing the issue of AIDS. A war in their own time and country and of which they had direct experience has prompted what Sherry describes (in relation to the United States) as 'a far more pointed and conscious deployment of the war metaphor, whose earlier use had been ... diffuse'[12]

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[11] *Pretoria News*, 21 February 2004.

[12] The use of apartheid discourse when discussing AIDS is not confined to political figures or activists only. The compilers of *Nobody ever said AIDS: stories and poems from Southern Africa* observe in the Introduction that creative writers 'have returned to the language of struggle to confront both the pandemic and the inadequate response of local governments' (Thomas & Samuelson 2004:13).

(1993:50). Moreover, the struggle experience was passionately felt by those affected, and so has naturally come to define the way realities are imagined and articulated by many people. The discourse of the apartheid political system and its dramatic demise in 1994 are frequently used to explain and justify a whole range of AIDS initiatives, many of them conflicting. A few examples from the discourse used will illustrate how highly politicised this health matter has become.

There has been long-standing and bitter debate in South Africa about what causes AIDS, its prevalence, how it should be treated, whether or not the treatment is effective and who should pay for it. President Thabo Mbeki has been associated with the so-called 'AIDS dissidents' who claim that the virus does not exist, or that if it does it is harmless; and that AIDS is not contagious but is caused by poverty and the very drugs used to treat it. Evidence that he was influenced by their thinking, for a time at least, is that he included some of them on a panel of experts formed to advise him on AIDS. In April 2000 he wrote a letter to foreign leaders – including Bill Clinton and Tony Blair – justifying his inclusion of the minority-view scientists. In this letter he attacked the orthodox view, stating that:

> Not long ago in our country people were killed, tortured and imprisoned because the authorities believed that their views were dangerous. We are now being asked to do the same thing that the racist apartheid tyranny did, because there is a scientific view against which dissent is prohibited (Sparks 2003:264).

Notable here is the violence of the language used – words such as 'killed', 'tortured', 'imprisoned', 'racist', 'apartheid ' and 'tyranny' – all taken from the discourse of apartheid politics. The argument is not entirely clear, the vagueness resulting largely from the use of unspecified personal pronouns and the use of the passive voice. When Mbeki says: ' We are now being asked to do the same thing...', it is not clear to whom the pronoun 'we' refers. He also does not say by whom 'we' are being 'asked', but presumably these unnamed agents are the orthodox scientists, those who are developing medical treatment for AIDS. He uses the vague passive form again in 'dissent is prohibited', making the agent seem shadowy and sinister.

What is strikingly clear, however, is that Mbeki equates the AIDS

dissidents with anti-apartheid activists, and suggests that they are being persecuted and oppressed just as political activists were by the apartheid regime. By putting the AIDS dissidents in the same camp as those individuals who struggled against apartheid, Mbeki evokes sympathy and admiration for them, at the same time arousing hatred for those they are struggling against – the body of established medical opinion, who are equated with apartheid tyrants. The mainstream scientists are constructed as 'bad'; the dissidents as 'good': divided into mutually exclusive categories, or Levi-Strauss's 'binary oppositions' in terms of which myths are structured. The purpose of such simplification is 'to make the world explicable, to magically resolve its problems and contradictions' (Storey 2001:61). This example shows how language works as 'an instrument of control as well as of communication' and how 'hearers can be both manipulated and informed, preferably manipulated while they suppose they are being informed' (Hodge and Kress 1993:6).

The meanings implicit in Mbeki's metaphor were developed when a statement from his office by spokesman Smuts Ngonyama soon afterwards accused the AIDS activists who were demanding that the government provide anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs in the public hospitals of trying to poison black people. The actual words were: 'Our people are being used as guinea pigs and conned into using dangerous and toxic drugs reminiscent of the biological warfare of the apartheid era' (Sparks 2003:265). It is certainly true that ARV drugs are toxic and can have bad side-effects. It is also true that these drugs were and are still being developed, so there is a sense in which human recipients could be called 'guinea pigs'. However, it is an over-simplification to see this in terms of a white-driven policy against blacks for a hidden political agenda[13]. In comparing this process to ' the biological warfare of the apartheid era' military discourse was used again.

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[13] Perceptions such as these have deep historical roots in the longstanding distrust between black and white groups. They echo conspiracy theories that whites wish to reduce the black population because they fear being outnumbered and losing political power. These beliefs are understandable and have some justification. During the last regime agents such as Wouter Basson perpetrated the 'dirty tricks' of apartheid by means of chemical warfare.

Such perceptions were articulated more fully when, in March 2002, Peter Mokaba, former ANC youth leader, wrote:

> The story that HIV causes AIDS is being promoted through lies, pseudo-science, violence, terrorism and deception. We are urged to abandon science and adopt the religion and superstition that HIV exists and that it causes AIDS. We refuse to be agents for using our people as guinea pigs and have a responsibility to defeat the intended genocide and dehumanisation of the African child, mother, family and society (Sparks 2003:266).

Prominent again is the belligerence of the language, seen in exaggerated words such as 'violence', 'terrorism', 'genocide' and 'dehumanisation'. The fact that Mokaba specifies that the victims of this 'conspiracy' are 'African' is significant. He counts on his audience's familiarity with and emotional response to past oppression, recalled by his use of racially-charged struggle discourse. This use of apartheid discourse is highly emotive and has a destructive effect[14].

President Mbeki has been criticised for his silence and inaction on AIDS when opportunities for him to address the issue in words or action presented themselves[15]. Discourse is structured as much by what is absent as

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[14] The high emotional register of Mokaba's speech could be due, in part, to denial of his own personal condition. Three months after making this speech, he died of an AIDS-related illness.

[15] See, for example, *The Citizen* 17 February 2003: ' Mbeki accused of HIV silence'; *Pretoria News* 1 April 2003: 'Medical Journal flays Government on AIDS'; *Pretoria News* 27 September, 2003: 'Outcry at Mbeki's Aids claim: President says he knows no one who has died of HIV';
Financial Times 13 April 2004:6: 'Mr Mbeki and his health minister have underplayed the disease's importance, quibbled over mortality figures and delayed the dispensation of life-prolonging anti-retroviral drugs. A comprehensive HIV/Aids treatment plan is now under way, but the government's leadership and commitment on the issue remains in doubt'; Morgan, Jonathan. 2003. Long life: positive HIV stories. CapeTown: ABC Press. 44-45, 158, 169.

by what is present. Often what is not said is as important as what is (Storey 2001:96). Mbeki's silence on occasions has been interpreted as an eloquent statement of his refusal to give due attention to the epidemic. His government has often been accused of adopting a denialist position, maintaining a 'reign of silence'; his policy on HIV and AIDS ' colluding with and compounding the stigma surrounding HIV-positive bodies' (Thomas 2001:8). His attitude has resulted in what has been widely regarded as a reluctant and belated acquiescence to the provision of ARV treatment[16].

Anglican archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, addressing a news conference in Cape Town in August 2003, used struggle discourse when commenting on the government's perceived inaction on HIV/AIDS. He described this as 'a world disgrace as serious as apartheid'[17]. In similar vein, Pieter-Dirk Uys remarked: 'Once upon a time, not so long ago, we had an apartheid regime in South Africa that killed people. Now we have a democratic government that just lets them die' (2002:1). These comparisons imply that President Mbeki is as morally reprehensible as the old apartheid tyrants in contributing to the suffering of the masses.

The warfare/apartheid metaphor used by Mbeki himself, based on the conflict between groups of people with opposing medical views, identified him – through his sympathies with the dissidents – with former anti-apartheid activists. However, critics of Mbeki, as we have seen, identify him firmly with the former apartheid state. This lack of consistency validates Sherry's views 'that those who use the language of war by no means [have] a common political purpose' (1993:46). It also demonstrates how the same discourse can be 'repeatedly invoked to legitimate' (1993:48) different courses of action.

Government policies, utterances and non-utterances on AIDS have provoked highly emotive counter discourses. Zachie Achmat is a former anti-apartheid activist who discovered he was HIV-positive in 1990 and later formed the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), a lobby group which has

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[16] In November 2003 the government announced they would fund a programme to provide free ARV drugs to those who qualify for treatment. This programme began in April 2004.

[17] *Pretoria News*, 6 August 2003.

placed pressure on the government to provide drugs to HIV-infected people free of charge. In 1999 Achmat (sometimes described as an 'AIDS warrior') started a drug strike, refusing to take his own ARV medication until it was affordable and available to all South Africans[18].

The TAC have used extreme terms such as 'murder', 'genocide', and 'holocaust' to describe the deaths caused by AIDS. The choice of these words suggest that the deaths have been the result of human agency and deliberate intent and evoke the discourse, drawn from World War 11, of mass murder based on ethnic discrimination. This discourse would resonate with South Africans who have bitter memories of the institutionalised racism embodied in the apartheid system. But the 'genocide' that Peter Mokaba believed was being perpetrated by the dispensers of ARV medicines, the TAC attributed to the government for failing to provide ARV treatment. This is something of a paradox. The same word – 'genocide' – is used to describe two completely opposite activities: providing the drugs and withholding them. This example again illustrates how different parties may use the 'same kind of language, albeit to divergent ends' (Sherry 1993:44).

The 46664 Concert

A particular popular cultural event – the 46664 rock concert held in Cape Town on 30 November 2003 – provides a striking example of the discursive conflation of the apartheid struggle and AIDS. The 46664 concert was timed to coincide with World AIDS Day, AIDS was the prevailing concern, and the whole point of the occasion was to raise money for the treatment of AIDS. However, the dominant discourse of the event was based on Nelson Mandela. He was present both in person and in the massive image of his face which towered above the stage. The number of the concert's title, '46664', was his personal prison number when he was a convict on Robben Island.

This single event actually conflated three different discourses: first, the discourse of AIDS; second, the discourse of popular music; and third; the discourse of Nelson Mandela. These different 'worlds' or discourses were deliberately combined to construct certain meanings and effects. The popular

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[18] Zachie Achmat was voted one of the heroes of 2003 by *Time* magazine and was nominated for the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize.

music added colour, vitality and a mood of celebration to the occasion, counteracting the negative associations of AIDS and disease. It would also have attracted a mainly youthful audience, people in the age bracket most at risk of becoming infected. The discourse associated with Mandela brought popularity, moral authority and a sense of drama to the issue of AIDS in which many people have lost interest[19] because it is discussed *ad nauseam*.

Semiotics is the academic discipline that deals with the way 'signs take on meanings' and are linked 'to larger systems of meaning' (Myers 1999:18). de Saussure's model – reduced to the most elementary terms here for the purpose of brevity – posits that the signifier is the form which a sign takes, while the signified is the mental concept represented by the signifier (Chandler 2002:18-32). The signs can be in various modes: 'spoken words, or written words, or pictures, sounds or music' (Myers 1999:25). All these kinds of signs operated to produce meaning at the 46664 concert. The organisers maximised to the full the semiotic power of Nelson Mandela's image, particularly. The titanic sign of his face conveyed a range of complex mental concepts. He is an icon of black liberation and, as a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, has come to represent humanitarianism. More than any other individual, he is associated with the end of the apartheid state and the transformation of South Africa into a democracy. All these connotations, or what Barthes terms 'meanings at the level of secondary signification' (Storey 2001: 65), were fully exploited for the cause of AIDS.

Embedded in the 46664 concert were the binary opposites of past and present, effectively juxtaposed. The old man Mandela and his political history were brought directly into the present, the 'now' world of youthful artists and their modern musical discourse, as well as the 'now' world of the AIDS epidemic. The past and present also collide in Mandela's own narrative, where revolutionised social conditions have changed his position and thus his personal discourse. Under the old regime, Nelson Mandela was the epitome of the revolutionary, the left-wing subversive and represented the ultimate threat to stability. He was marginalised, hunted, forced underground and imprisoned – the persecuted outsider. His present discourse is diametrically opposed to all this. It places him at centre stage, figuratively,

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[19] 'AIDS Information Overload Syndrome' (AIOS) has been identified as a widespread reaction to the plethora of material about AIDS in the media.

and literally, at this concert. He is now emblematic of stability, the ruling class and moral authority. Semiotically, his meaning has shifted totally, in keeping with the shift in power relations that has taken place in South Africa. The fact that Mandela has been transformed into a superhero through the inversion of the social hierarchy in the final decade of the twentieth century demonstrates the dynamism of meaning and how contingent it is on social context. In the words of Lecercle: 'time alters the signs, corrupts the signifier, the signified, or their relation' (1990:28). Meaning is an essentially unstable construction.

Nelson Mandela's elevation from convict to President has often been described as a 'miracle'. The words 'miracle' and 'miraculous' often crop up in discourse about him or South Africa's transformation[20]. Because of his apparent ability to make the impossible possible, Mandela has acquired almost divine status. At the 46664 concert this discourse or network of meanings surrounding the person of Mandela were transferred to the cause of AIDS. The study of how meanings are associated is known in the marketing world as branding (Myers 1999:7,18). Brand-names are usually the labels given to consumer goods being sold as commodities. In this instance there is nothing being sold, but the marketing strategy of branding still operates through the meanings linked with Mandela[21]. Branding, by means of his name, his prison number, and his physical image is a simplification of his complex mythology. Put in the position of consumers at this concert, the audience is being asked to 'buy' the cause of AIDS because of their faith in the Mandela brandname which 'adds value' to it. This exemplifies the way marketers 'try to project a ready-made heritage... [to] carry the associations of a brand across to a new sector' (Myers 1999:21). Such attempts are based on the assumption that the audience is in sympathy with the values being projected. However, audience responses to signs are complex, diverse and impossible to control. As Barthes argues, signs are

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[20] See, for example, Cameron-Dow, John. 1994. *South Africa 1990-1994: The miracle of a freed nation.* Cape Town: Don Nelson.

[21] A US survey placed Mandela second only to Coca-Cola as a brand name. The use of Mandela's image is carefully controlled by a team of advisors. Requests are considered only if the proposal 'embodies the values Mr Mandela stands for'. (*Pretoria News*, 26 April 2004.)

polysemic: they have multiple meanings since interpretations are dependent on the cultural repertoires or schemata of the audience (Storey 2001:65-6). Right-wing elements, for example, would not respond positively to the associations of the liberation struggle. It is also possible that the visual symbol dominating the stage could recall memories of the huge images of fascist leaders such as Lenin, on occasions of massive rallies, since signifiers carry traces of meaning from other contexts. This reading is certainly unintended (after all, the image of Mandela's face wears a smile), but the fact remains that it is possible. Subjectivity always comes into play, so that reading is 'an interaction between the discourses of the text and the discourses of the reader' (Storey 2001:12).

The spoken words around the 46664 event drew parallels between Mandela's political struggle and the struggle against AIDS. When receiving the artists who had gathered in Cape Town beforehand to perform at the concert, Mandela himself told them that 'it would take greater unity and effort to conquer HIV than it took to tear down apartheid'. He went on to say: 'We are called to join the war against HIV/AIDS with even greater resolve than was shown in the fight against apartheid'[22]. Recognisable here is the extended metaphor of warfare again, but it is not clear how Mandela conceptualises this war, or what precisely he means by 'joining the war against HIV/AIDS' in practical terms. The vagueness of the war paradigm, discussed earlier in this paper, makes his meaning elusive.

As already seen, the UN language-policy makers, as well as Ross and Sontag, reject the use of war imagery in relation to AIDS because it could encourage stigmatisation of those infected. Clearly, this is not what was intended at the 46664 concert. We are able to construct meaning based on our knowledge of Mandela 's deeds and words in respect of HIV/AIDS in other contexts. Mandela has frequently urged people to accept and extend compassion to HIV-positive people. His proactive backing of such initiatives as the prevention of mother-to-child-transmission (MTCT)[23] would suggest that, for him, the phrase 'joining the war' implies prevention of new infections by the provision of drugs, as well as the treatment and care of

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[22] *Pretoria News*, 29 November 2003.

[23] In his closing speech at the international AIDS conference held in Durban in July 2000 Mandela called for widespread interventions to prevent MTCT.

those already infected. If so, the metaphor of war to describe such constructive action is not appropriate. The fact that he uses a negative image to describe a positive course of action suggests that this discourse is so deeply embedded in the political culture of our time that it is often employed uncritically and without awareness of its inherent illogicality.

A more effective and positive purpose of using the metaphor of war was to convey the seriousness of the AIDS pandemic and the magnitude of the response required to overcome it. Implicit is the sense that massive commitment and investment are needed. Sontag makes the point that 'war-making is one of the few activities that people are not supposed to view ... with an eye to expense .... In all-out war, expenditure is all-out, unprudent – war being defined as an emergency in which no sacrifice is excessive' (1989:11).

Most significantly, Mandela's use of this metaphor drew on shared background knowledge of the supremely important fact that the fight against apartheid was eventually successful. As Sherry points out: 'talk of war ... presumes that victory or defeat will be the outcome' (1993:49). Mandela is the living proof that the struggle ended in victory. By analogy, the audience was being persuaded to believe that efforts to contain AIDS can also succeed. This offers hope which in turn promotes motivation and the will to act. This aspect of the comparison between apartheid and AIDS functions as a positive incentive to effort.

Developing the struggle metaphor at the 46664 concert, the artist Bono stated: 'Madiba's greatest gift to the world is to say: 'I was in prison for all those years. Those people with AIDS, they're in prison. Let them out. Let them go''. These words echo the title of the book *Let My People Go*, written by another South African Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Chief Albert Luthuli[24].

The words: 'Let my people go' recall, in turn, Moses' words to Pharoah[25]. This took place a another time and place in another, much earlier

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[24] Albert Luthuli (1898-1967) was a Zulu teacher, religious leader, and President of the ANC (1952-60). He was the first African to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace (1960) in recognition of his non-violent struggle against racial discrimination.

[25] Exodus 5:1.

liberation struggle[26]. Several other direct comparisons were made between Mandela's imprisonment and the condition of being infected with HIV. While there are points of similarity between the two conditions – a jail cell places limits on one's life, as does illness – the metaphor is not apt in all respects. People cannot be freed from AIDS as completely as they can be freed from prison. They may be helped by ARV therapy, but they cannot be cured. This is something of a false equivalence. However, it was made to create optimism and encourage the belief that trends can be reversed; that miracles can happen.

The apartheid/AIDS metaphor, while often lacking clarity or internal consistency, was used at the 46664 concert to construct inspirational meanings. The intended effect was to uplift. Far more than an entertaining event, the 46664 concert was a text loaded with cultural assumptions and a multiplicity of conflicting meanings: explicit and implicit; past and present, present and absent. It illustrates that 'a text is made up of a contradictory mix of different cultural forces' (Storey 2001:12) and that popular cultural happenings are sites where the politics of signification are played out in attempts to win readers to particular ways of seeing the world (Hall 1985:36).

Conclusion

AIDS is having a marked effect on the South African linguistic landscape in a variety of ways. The phenomenon is laden with political, social and cultural significance and this is creating a multi-layered and complex discourse. Whilst an explicit sexual discourse has been legitimated in the interests of education, many new terms to avoid naming HIV/AIDS are being coined as a result of the fear and stigma attached to the condition.

Apartheid discourse has been heavily utilised in the emotive debates that have raged around AIDS-related issues. The fact that so much of the metaphorical language used in the AIDS debate has been taken from recent history suggests how deeply the political past is ingrained in the South

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[26] This kind of intertextuality illustrates Derrida's view that 'meaning is always deferred, never fully present, always both present and absent' in a text (Storey 2001:73).

interests of education, many new terms to avoid naming HIV/AIDS are being coined as a result of the fear and stigma attached to the condition.

Apartheid discourse has been heavily utilised in the emotive debates that have raged around AIDS-related issues. The fact that so much of the metaphorical language used in the AIDS debate has been taken from recent history suggests how deeply the political past is ingrained in the South African psyche. As we have seen, the use of the war metaphor in relation to AIDS is generally regarded as undesirable because of the negative connotations of war, but, in South Africa, the particularisation of the discourse to include the apartheid conflict has created positive meanings as well. The apartheid analogy has been manipulated in different ways – sometimes ambiguously, illogically and destructively – to fit different AIDS-related purposes, but, ten years into the new democracy, it has also been invoked to energise and inspire.

The issue of AIDS appears to have displaced – even replaced – the liberation struggle. In our post-apartheid society the cause of AIDS has become a liberation struggle in its own right. It could be called the liberation struggle of the 'new' South Africa.

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