

*No Lesser Place*

**The taaldebat**

at Stellenbosch

Chris Brink





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# Preface

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In South Africa we have eleven official languages, all of which, according to the Constitution, enjoy “parity of esteem”. But what is eleven? In one sense, eleven equals one plus ten: one international language, and ten indigenous languages. In another sense, eleven equals two plus nine. Not only English, the argument goes, but also Afrikaans, has fully developed “high status” domains: they are languages spanning the entire range of literature, the humanities, social science, natural science and technology.

What has become known as the *taaldebat* at Stellenbosch is essentially a long-running campaign to maintain the “high status” domains of Afrikaans. To some, this campaign is a matter of such importance that it amounts to a *taalstryd* – a language struggle. Because the struggle is concerned with maintaining the “higher functions” of Afrikaans, the main battles are in education, and particularly in higher education. Accordingly, the notion of an “Afrikaans university” has featured prominently in the *taaldebat*. And, because of its history and location, Stellenbosch University has been the primary battle-ground.

As a public issue – an interesting and important one – which has consumed barrels of ink and produced acres of newsprint, the *taaldebat* has three curious features. The first is that the majority of South Africans are unaware of it. This is because the debate *about* Afrikaans has been conducted almost exclusively *within* Afrikaans. Thus, whatever the merits or demerits of the various arguments may be, and whatever lessons may be learnt for our other indigenous languages, or higher education, or nation-building, it *cannot be heard by all*. In its present form, the *taaldebat* is unlikely to make any significant contribution at national level to the cause it professes to serve: the advancement of Afrikaans. That is why this monograph concerning Afrikaans is written in English.

The second curious feature of the *taaldebat* at Stellenbosch is that its central concept, that of an “Afrikaans university”, has remained virtually unexamined. And yet even the slightest acquaintance with the arguments and rhetoric of the past few years would make one realise that for many

people “Afrikaans university” means much more than “University at which Afrikaans is used as medium of instruction”. For a proper understanding of the *taaldebat*, therefore, and for a consideration of our way ahead, it is necessary to ask: what do the *taalstryders* (the “language warriors”) mean by an “Afrikaans university”? Only once it is clear what kind of a university we are talking about, can the various arguments be addressed. That is why most of this monograph is taken up with the case of Stellenbosch University.

The third curious feature of the *taaldebat* is that it is more of a political campaign than a debate. The *taaldebat*, I believe, is not just about language. It is about *identity*. In the hard sense the issue is about a *reaffirmation* of identity – the group identity, namely, of the Afrikaners. It is part of my thesis that, ten years and more into our democracy, Afrikaner nationalism is taking shape again. In the soft sense the *taaldebat* is about a *search* for identity – an elusive group identity, namely, of all those who speak Afrikaans as their mother tongue. Such a group identity of Afrikaans-speakers might have evolved naturally across racial, religious and class divides over the past century, but – tragically – it didn’t. Thus the issue of Afrikaans as medium of instruction at Stellenbosch becomes the issue of an “Afrikaans University”, which grows into the issue of Afrikaans as an indigenous language, which becomes an issue regarding the place and role of Afrikaners and Afrikaans speakers in South Africa. I believe that if Stellenbosch does not become part of the mainstream of our new South Africanness, the Afrikaners – and perhaps the Afrikaans speakers – will not become part of the mainstream, which would impair the whole grand experiment of building a non-racial society in our country. The question of what role Stellenbosch University can and will play in our evolving democracy is an important one – for historical reasons, for symbolic reasons, and for practical reasons. That is why I wrote this monograph.

Insofar as the *taaldebat* is a debate and not just a campaign, it may be considered as representing the interplay between two directions of thought regarding the future of Afrikaans. There are those whose point of departure is that Afrikaans should be *protected*, and that the best way of doing so is by *making rules*. And there are those who believe that Afrikaans should be *promoted*, and that the best way of doing so is by *making friends*.

That is, some take a protectionist stance, and some a multiculturalist stance – a distinction that may also be observed at universities elsewhere in the world.

Clearly the future of Afrikaans is an emotional matter to many. Clearly Stellenbosch University has a strong historical connection with Afrikaans. Clearly Stellenbosch is situated in the province where most Afrikaans speakers happen to live. And, also clearly, there are enough Afrikaans speakers in the country who feel strongly about the matter to warrant using Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in higher education. For all these reasons, and more, it makes good sense for Stellenbosch to maintain its commitment to Afrikaans. But if the University is to do so, it must be as a *free choice* exercised by academics. It is not an obligation the University should be burdened with by history, or by Afrikanerdom, or for that matter by the state. And the choice should be exercised not only by asking what is in the best interest of Afrikaans, but also what is in the best interest of the University. For it is *as a university* that Stellenbosch is in service of the country. The business of a university is not about language, but about knowledge. While Stellenbosch University may choose to promote Afrikaans as a language of teaching and science, it is not the business of Stellenbosch University to *save* Afrikaans.

Such, in short, are the conclusions I come to after surveying the background, the debate and the issues involved. I have found it impossible to make a reasoned case for these conclusions without branching off into related topics: historical background, language in higher education, changes within higher education, and recent developments within Afrikanerdom. I am not a political scientist, and definitely not a politician. I am not a constitutional lawyer, a linguist, a sociologist, a social anthropologist or an historian. I am, however, a career academic with some experience of interdisciplinary work and of university management. As such, I have tried to put into a coherent framework the things I have been hearing and reading, saying and writing, over the past five years about Afrikaans, Afrikaners, South Africa and Stellenbosch University. Of course logic isn't everything. We are not making deductions in an axiomatic system. We are operating within a complex dynamic system, where things change, butterfly wings can cause tempests, and there are feedback loops



with unpredictable consequences. There are no algorithmic solutions, and no risk-free options.

I need to mention a couple of technical details. I use a number of Afrikaans words, printed in *italics*, and there is a glossary explaining them at the end of the book. Likewise, there is a glossary of abbreviations. All references are given in footnotes at the bottom of the page, and books are also listed in the bibliography. I have made use freely of web addresses, accepting the consequence that such references are essentially ephemeral. All the translations from Afrikaans into English in this monograph are my own.

I also wish to make a disclaimer. The opinions I express in this monograph are a matter of public record, and I either quote directly from my previous public pronouncements or speak in terms consonant with those views. Nonetheless, writing this monograph falls beyond my scope of duties as Rector of Stellenbosch University. It represents my personal opinion, written to clarify and facilitate the debate. It does not necessarily represent the official viewpoint of the University.

Many authors end a preface by thanking their families; I feel I should conclude by apologising to mine. I am sorry about the tree house that didn't get built, about missing the Grade 1 Advent Concert at school, and about the list of DIY jobs that has not been attended to. I am sorry about taking my laptop with me on holiday. I am sorry that things got so tense in Stellenbosch on occasion that Tobeia had to take the kids and leave town for a while. If there is anything I grudge about the whole *taaldebat*, it is the cost it has exacted from my wife and family. Still, I could not have asked for a more interesting job.

*Chris Brink*

Stellenbosch

14 February 2006

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# *Stellenbosch and Afrikaans*

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## 1.1 Introduction

Stellenbosch is remarkable in many respects. It is, after Cape Town, the oldest European settlement in South Africa, having been founded by the Dutch Governor Simon van der Stel in 1679.<sup>1</sup> It is a classic university town, in the centre of the winelands of the Cape, in an area of breathtaking natural beauty. Stellenbosch University goes back to the founding of a theological seminary for the Dutch Reformed Church in 1859, and the *Stellenbossche Gymnasium*<sup>2</sup> of 1866 (renamed Victoria College in 1887). It was formally founded in 1918 as an independent university, against all odds, to serve the cause of the Afrikaners at a time when British imperialism – political, cultural and linguistic – seemed to have triumphed in Southern Africa. The University became the nexus where Afrikaans was turned from a local patois into a language of literature and science. Some of the great Afrikaner business enterprises started in Stellenbosch.<sup>3</sup> For some time the name Stellenbosch was practically synonymous with the sport of rugby in South Africa. And then, of course, Stellenbosch was one of the main intellectual sources of apartheid.<sup>4</sup>

For a long time the association of the University with the power structures of Afrikanerdom was a close one. DF Malan, the first apartheid prime

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<sup>1</sup> The name “Stellenbosch” is a play on words: “the wood of Van der Stel”.

<sup>2</sup> According to the minutes of the founding meeting in 1864, “*Het doel van het Gymnasium is een grondig onderwijs in de vakken, welke tot een beschaafde opvoeding gerekend worden*” (“The goal of the Gymnasium is a thorough instruction in those subjects considered to be part of a civilised education”). *Gedenkboek van het Victoria-Kollege*, De Nationale Pers, Kaapstad, 1918 (p.39).

<sup>3</sup> It is no coincidence that the National Party, the insurance giant Sanlam (“Born out of the *volk* to serve the *volk*”) and the publishing empire now called Naspers (at first *De Nationale Pers*, with *De Burger* as its first publication) were founded in the same decade as the University of Stellenbosch – the latter actually also at Stellenbosch.

<sup>4</sup> See Hermann Giliomee’s *The Afrikaners* (Tafelberg Publishers, Cape Town, 2003), Chapter 13: “The Making of a Radical Survival Plan”.

minister, was a Stellenbosch man. Hendrik Verwoerd was a professor of Sociology and Social Work here, before turning to politics. John Vorster was a prominent Matie<sup>5</sup> student leader, who later, as Prime Minister, became Chancellor of the University. President PW Botha, likewise, became Chancellor at the peak of his political power, even though he had had no previous connection with the University. Rectors of the University were, typically, prominent members of the *Afrikaner Broederbond*.

But Stellenbosch also produced a number of Afrikaners who became iconic figures outside the fold of a structured and inward-looking Afrikanerdom. A good example is General Jan Smuts, who, as Prime Minister of South Africa, also assumed the role of world statesman during the first half of the 20th century. Field Marshall of the British Empire during World War II, Chancellor of Cambridge University, author and originator of the philosophy of holism,<sup>6</sup> and a highly regarded botanist, Smuts was a towering figure. Nonetheless, he lost the election of 1948 to DF Malan (and, Smuts commented bitterly, to the *Broederbond*). On a more general level, and despite the University's ties with the apartheid state, Stellenbosch produced a number of significant intellectuals who, in varying degrees, questioned apartheid dogma. Some are well known, such as Beyers Naudé, the *dominee* of the Dutch Reformed Church who had the courage to challenge apartheid from the very pulpit of the church that underpinned it. He, too, was a Stellenbosch man: a former chairperson of the Students' Representative Council, Head Student of Wilgenhof men's residence, and believed to be an up-and-coming star of the Afrikaner establishment. Others are not so well known, but deserve honourable mention for engaging with the basic ethical and practical problems posed by apartheid. Willie Esterhuyse, Professor of Philosophy, and still at the time an active member of the *Broederbond*, published his book *Afskeid van Apartheid* (translated as *Apartheid Must Die*) in 1979, unleashing an avalanche of scorn. Nico Smith, another *dominee*, gave up his professorship at Stellenbosch to become a pastor in the black township of Mamelodi. Van Zyl Slabbert left Stellenbosch, turned to politics and became Leader of the

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<sup>5</sup> Stellenbosch students are known as "Maties", and the university is often referred to as "Matieland".

<sup>6</sup> See his book *Holism and Evolution*, Macmillan, London, 1927.

Opposition in the late 1970s. André du Toit went to the University of Cape Town, and founded an Afrikaans anti-apartheid magazine called, tellingly, *Die Suid-Afrikaan*. All of them, and a number of others, suffered in varying degrees from the ridicule and venom to which Afrikanerdom subjects its dissidents.

In 1989, after the departure of PW Botha from the political scene, the University slowly started, on a symbolic level at least, to loosen its ties with the existing power structures – for example, through the appointment of a “non-political” Chancellor in the person of JG van der Horst of the insurance company Old Mutual. By this time the notion of Stellenbosch as *volksuniversiteit*<sup>7</sup> had already lost much of its former gloss, and increasingly ideas emphasising the universalistic nature of a university, without necessarily sacrificing all particularistic elements, became part of the discourse.<sup>8</sup> With the formal loss of Afrikaner parliamentary power in 1994 and the transition to dominant African National Congress rule, Stellenbosch experienced a concomitant loss of pre-eminence in the world view of the new incumbents of power.

It is fair to say that for the remainder of the 1990s, despite some internal re-alignments, the University kept a relatively low profile in national developments and debates. Thus the creative energy unleashed in the higher education sector after 1994 largely passed Stellenbosch University by – there was never, for example, the kind of “Broad Transformation Forum” that other universities established. There was, however, a sufficient number of transformation-minded academics to press for, and come up with, a Strategic Planning Framework<sup>9</sup> in 2000. This document (to which I will return in Chapter 4) was a remarkable step forward in outlining a conceptual framework for transformation. It still remains a core document for the implementation of the University’s transformation agenda.

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<sup>7</sup> Rector HB Thom made the characterisation of Stellenbosch as a *volksuniversiteit* explicit during the 1960s. See the memorial volume *Professor HB Thom*, published by the University in 1969.

<sup>8</sup> See former Vice-Rector Hennie Rossouw’s book *Universiteit, Wetenskap en Kultuur* (“University, Science and Culture”), Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/stratplan/statengels>.

Over the past few years what is easily the most contentious question regarding Stellenbosch University has been the matter of its language policy. The idea of Stellenbosch being an “Afrikaans university” is strongly entrenched – to some, it is virtually axiomatic. It is an idea which evokes different views – and often strong reactions – from a wide spectrum of commentators. Often when I travel abroad on business for the University and meet people for whom Stellenbosch is at most a name and an image, I have to respond to the puzzled question “But do you actually *teach* in Afrikaans?”, as if doing so were a quaint anachronism. Within South Africa, from people for whom the name Stellenbosch evokes negative images of “the bastion of Afrikanerdom”, the question may have an element of distrust, even hostility, manifesting itself in a different emphasis: “But do you *still* teach in Afrikaans?” – as though doing so showed a lack of commitment to a democratic South Africa. And, at the other side of the spectrum, from the *taalstryders*, from Afrikaners, from second- and third-generation alumni, there may be an equal measure of distrust and/or hostility, but with entirely the opposite concern: “But *do* you still teach in Afrikaans?” – and, more to the point: “Do you promise to *continue* doing so?”

The short answer is that, yes, we do still teach in Afrikaans, and we would like to continue doing so. The long answer, which spells out that we also hope to do other things, and why, is given in the rest of this monograph.

## 1.2 Afrikaans in higher education

South Africa is at present a country of 45 million people and 11 official languages.<sup>10</sup> These are all minority languages, in the sense that for no language does its mother-tongue speakers constitute a majority of the population. The Zulu speakers are the largest language group, numbering about 9 million, followed by Xhosa speakers (about 7 million) and Afrikaans speakers (just under 6 million). Mother-tongue English speakers, according to the census of 2002, number only about 3,7 million people (8,2% of the population). The question of second- or third-language competency is not so clear, since the last census in 2002 did not enquire

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<sup>10</sup> Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.

about it. But it is fair to say that the majority of South Africans speak at least two official languages with some measure of competence.<sup>11</sup> Mother-tongue English speakers are the group most likely to be monolingual, while mother-tongue speakers of the other 10 languages are likely to have some measure of competence in English (although this would be less so under poor socio-economic circumstances). There are no hard census figures to establish the *lingua franca* status of other languages.

Of the 5,98 million mother-tongue Afrikaans speakers, the majority are not White. In fact, only 42,4% are White. It seems to follow, then, that 57,6% of Afrikaans speakers must be Black – which is true, except that “Black” in South Africa may mean one of three things: African Black, “Coloured”, or Indian. It seems peculiar that these categories are still in use, but after 1994 their retention was considered necessary in order to track progress in reversing the legacy of apartheid. Census figures, for example, use these categories. It is difficult to explain just what “Coloured” means,<sup>12</sup> but the short answer is that it refers to people of mixed descent, many of whom would see their African roots in the Khoi and San people.

The majority of mother-tongue Afrikaans speakers are Coloured. The precise breakdown of mother-tongue Afrikaans speakers by racial classification group is:<sup>13</sup>

African Black	Indian	Coloured	White
4,2%	0,3%	53,0%	42,4%

The largest concentration of Afrikaans speakers is in the Western Cape – the province where Stellenbosch is situated, and where the three official languages are Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa. Two and a half million Afrikaans speakers live here, the great majority (79%) of whom are

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<sup>11</sup> Illiteracy is not a negligible factor in South Africa, so speaking a language does not necessarily mean being able to write it.

<sup>12</sup> The term itself is not uncontroversial, especially amongst people who might themselves be thought of as “Coloured”. Some writers insist, for example, on using the phrase “so-called Coloureds”, while others may embrace the terminology as a marker of identity. I will drop the quotation marks from here onwards.

<sup>13</sup> Percentages, here and elsewhere, may not add up to 100% exactly because of rounding-off variations.



Coloured. Looked at from another angle: the total population of the Western Cape numbers 4,5 million people, of whom the majority (55,3%) are mother-tongue Afrikaans speakers, 19,3% are English speakers, and 25% speak other South African languages – mostly isiXhosa.

The Constitution<sup>14</sup> of South Africa refers to language in Chapter 1, the Founding Provisions, where, besides defining the 11 official languages (and referring in addition to historical languages, community languages, languages used for religious purposes and sign language), it stipulates that “all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably”. Then, in Chapter 2, the Bill of Rights, in Subsection 29(2) on Education, it is further stipulated that:

*Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of, this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single-medium institutions, taking into account*

*ǃ equity;*

*ǃ practicability; and*

*ǃ the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices.*

Clearly there is some tension in the Constitution between, on the one hand, the right to education in your language of choice and, on the other hand, taking into account factors such as the need for equity, practicability and historical redress. As we will see, this same internal tension also features in the debate about Afrikaans at Stellenbosch – and, moreover, in the vision statement of the University.

In order to make the idea of linguistic “parity of esteem” a reality, the Constitution makes provision for a Pan South African Language Board

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<sup>14</sup> Act 108 of 1996:

<http://www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/constitution/saconst.html?rebookmark=1>.

(PANSALB),<sup>15</sup> with a subcommittee of the Board devoted to the protection and promotion of each of the 11 languages. The subcommittee devoted to Afrikaans is called the *Nasionale Taalliggaam vir Afrikaans* (the “National Language Body for Afrikaans”). It is important to keep in mind that before 1994, South Africa had only two official languages: English and Afrikaans. Each, therefore, has had, and still has, a stronger educational infrastructure than the other nine official languages. Specifically, while most schools use English as their medium of instruction, and a number use Afrikaans, comparatively few schools at present use one of the other nine languages as medium of instruction. This raises the question of mother-tongue teaching, something that the Minister of Education recently added to her list of issues requiring attention. To complicate matters, primary and secondary schooling fall under provincial, rather than national, jurisdiction.

Tertiary education, however, is a national competence. As regards language in higher education: by the 1970s there were five White Afrikaans-medium universities in South Africa: Stellenbosch, the University of Pretoria, the University of the Orange Free State in Bloemfontein, the *Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys* (Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education) and the *Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit* (Rand Afrikaans University) in Johannesburg. The latter was one of the wave of new universities created by the apartheid government; it was intended to provide an intellectual home for the Afrikaner population of the Witwatersrand (the area around Johannesburg), and as such to act as a counterpart for the English-medium University of the Witwatersrand. The University of Port Elizabeth (UPE) was created at about the same time to serve the Eastern Cape, even though Rhodes University at Grahamstown had been in existence since 1904. Interestingly, UPE was created as a bilingual English/Afrikaans institution, and functioned that way for some time. Besides these, the government created a number of “Black” universities. For the Coloured population, the University of the Western Cape (UWC) came into being. It was created as an Afrikaans-medium institution, and, like the other “Black” universities, was initially staffed mainly by Afrikaners. Other “Black” universities were established in the Bantustan mini-states that were part of the grand plan of

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.pansalb.org.za>.

apartheid. Thus came into being the University of the Transkei, the University of Zululand, the University of Bophuthatswana, the University of Venda, and so on.

Here lies one of the ironies of South African history. For the Afrikaners, having “their own” universities was a cherished ideal and an eventual achievement. In the minds of the architects of apartheid, therefore, to establish “their own” universities for Black people must have been regarded as a gesture of magnificent generosity. When, as it turned out, Black people, and students in particular, were less than grateful for this favour, the initial bewilderment soon turned into a conviction that such dissent could only be the work of agitators with political motives.<sup>16</sup>

“Bantu education” increasingly became a tainted notion to the black population during the time of apartheid. It was always to be expected, therefore, that the post-1994 government would soon turn its attention to a re-engineering of education. This indeed turned out to be the case, also in higher education. The National Plan on Higher Education (NPHE)<sup>17</sup> was launched in March 2001, after an extensive process of discussion and policy papers. It posited “a single higher education system, with shared goals, values and principles”, in which redress of historical inequities would be a central theme. “Our universities and technikons”, said the Minister, “must be the powerhouses for the development of a critical mass of black intellectuals and researchers”. As for implementation:

*The planning process, in conjunction with funding and an appropriate regulatory framework will be the main levers through which the Ministry will ensure that the targets and goals of this National Plan are realised.*<sup>18</sup>

Here we see a strongly centrist and interventionist “regulatory framework” taking shape – no doubt with the best possible intentions. Academics live

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<sup>16</sup> It must be remembered that this was the time when the Cold War was at its height, and the government could play two trumps, both internally and externally: *swart gevaar* (“black danger”), and *rooi gevaar* (“red danger” – i.e. communism).

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/misc/higheredu1.htm?rebookmark=1>.

<sup>18</sup> The previous three quotations are from the press release of the then Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, on 5 March 2001. See <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2001/0103061145a1001.htm>.

in perennial hope that governments will be generous with their funding and frugal with their policies, but governments typically prefer the opposite approach. The NPHE is no exception. Whether this particular plan will escape the law of unintended consequences remains to be seen.

Its implementation has been pursued with vigour. The most far-reaching outcome of the NPHE was a nationwide restructuring of all universities and technikons,<sup>19</sup> to do away with the higher education landscape left by apartheid. This became known as the “mergers and amalgamations” exercise. The NPHE promised such a shake-up, but it also promised that no educational site would be closed. In consequence, some rather curious combinations had to be made. In some cases merged institutions find themselves having to manage campuses hundreds of kilometres apart. Also, although the NPHE paid lip-service to the idea of a binary system (meaning a distinction between universities and technikons), and while warning of the dangers of what is called “academic drift”, the Plan nonetheless proceeded with some mergers between a university and a technikon, these new entities being known as “Comprehensive Institutions”. As for the remaining technikons, they successfully petitioned to be renamed “universities of technology”. At the time of writing the jury is still out on the question of whether the mergers and amalgamations exercise has been worthwhile.<sup>20</sup> The systemic energy required for implementation has been significant, even though government provided some special funding to offset this effect.

As regards the five historically Afrikaans universities (HAUs): by the time of the mergers and amalgamations exercise, three<sup>21</sup> of them had already opted for bilingualism, in the shape of parallel-medium teaching. The five were restructured in different ways. The (White) *Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys* amalgamated with the (Black) University of the

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<sup>19</sup> “Technikon” was the South African name for what used to be called “polytechnics” in the United Kingdom.

<sup>20</sup> The eventual outcome of the mergers and incorporations exercise has been to reduce the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) from 36 to 24: 11 universities, 5 universities of technology, 6 comprehensive institutions and 2 institutes of higher education.

<sup>21</sup> The University of Pretoria, the University of the Orange Free State and the (former) *Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit*.

Northwest (formerly the University of Bophuthatswana – “Bophuthatswana” being the name of one of the apartheid Bantustans), two hours’ drive away, to create Northwest University. The (White) *Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit* amalgamated with the (Black) Technikon Witwatersrand to become a “Comprehensive”, known as the University of Johannesburg. The University of Pretoria absorbed some Black campuses, cementing its place as the largest residential university in the country. Free State University amalgamated with the Bloemfontein campus of the former Vista University. Stellenbosch did not amalgamate with any other institution, but ceded its Dentistry sub-Faculty to the University of the Western Cape.

The National Plan on Higher Education did not only decree a restructuring of higher education; it also considered language in higher education – meaning, in particular, Afrikaans, on which it took a fairly strong line.

*Second, although the historically white Afrikaans-medium institutions are gradually moving towards the adoption of a combination of dual and parallel-medium language strategies, language continues to act as a barrier to access at some of these institutions. This is especially the case at the undergraduate level within some of the universities. Furthermore, even where a dual and parallel-medium language policy is in place, its implementation remains uneven as not all the courses within a degree or diploma programme are offered in dual and parallel-medium mode. This is unacceptable and cannot continue.*<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, there had to be a separate process considering language:

*The Ministry has requested the Council on Higher Education to advise on the development of an appropriate language policy framework. The Council’s recommendations, which are expected by mid-2001, will provide a basis for determining a language policy for higher education.*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> NPHE, Section 3.1.2.

<sup>23</sup> NPHE, Section 3.1.2.

To understand how the story unfolded from there, it is necessary first to devote some space to a document which has become a canonical point of reference in the *taaldebat*: the Gerwel report.

### 1.3 The Gerwel report

One arm of the Department of Education is an advisory body called the Council on Higher Education (CHE).<sup>24</sup> As one outcome of the National Plan on Higher Education, the Ministry requested the CHE to advise it on an appropriate language policy framework, thus setting in motion the machinery which by November 2002 produced the Language Policy for Higher Education. In the meantime the Minister had also done something else. He invited Professor Jakes Gerwel “to convene and consult with an informal task group” regarding the role and future of Afrikaans in higher education.

In retrospect, this request looks like a poisoned chalice. Professor Gerwel was not asked to lead a Commission of Inquiry, or to work within the structures of the CHE, or in any other official capacity. His “informal task group” was to have no official standing. Moreover, he was to convene this “informal task group” himself, rather than to chair a panel appointed by the Minister.

Given, however, that these were the rules of the game, the Minister could hardly have picked a better person. In terms of the official South African racial classification, Jakes Gerwel is a “Coloured”. He is Afrikaans-speaking, grew up on the *platteland*, studied at the University of the Western Cape when it was still a *Broederbond*-run institution, became a Professor of Afrikaans, and eventually the Vice-Chancellor of UWC. How, under his leadership, UWC moved from an apartheid creation to being “the intellectual home of the left”, and how it broke with Afrikaans as part of that transformation, is one of the fascinating stories of our political history that still remains to be told. When Nelson Mandela came to power, Jakes Gerwel headed the Presidential office, and when the first post-1994

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<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.che.ac.za/>. The CHE is an independent statutory body with the responsibility to advise the Minister of Education on all matters related to higher education policy issues and quality assurance within higher education and training.

Cabinet assembled, a substantial number of the new ministers had had an active association with UWC. When Mandela left government, so did Jakes Gerwel.

The brief of the Gerwel Committee was as follows:

1. *Taking cognisance of:*
  - (i) *the founding values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, the advancement of human rights and freedoms, non-racial and non-sexism as proclaimed in the Constitution;*
  - (ii) *the Constitutional provision regarding all official languages enjoying parity of esteem and equality of treatment;*
  - (iii) *the Constitutional provision pertaining to the right to receive education in the official language(s) of choice, taking into consideration equity, practicability, and the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices;*
  - (iv) *the Constitutional provision dealing with language and culture; as well as*
  - (v) *any other relevant Constitutional, legislative or policy provisions; and*
2. *After conducting such consultations and investigations as may be deemed necessary, keeping in mind the work already done by the Council on Higher Education's Task Group on Language Policy in Higher Education;*
3. *Provide the Minister with advice and recommendations about ways in which Afrikaans, whose achievements as scientific and academic language had been recognised as a national asset by the National Commission on Higher Education, can be assured of continued long term maintenance, growth and development as a language of science and scholarship in the higher education system without non-Afrikaans speakers being unfairly denied access within the system, or the use and development of the language as a medium of instruction wittingly or unwittingly becoming the basis for racial, ethnic or cultural division and discrimination.*

The Gerwel Committee included not only prominent Afrikaans figures such as (philosopher and political commentator) Professor Willie

Esterhuysen and (poet, author and journalist) Antjie Krog, but also senior academics such as Professor Njabulo Ndebele, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town. They eventually submitted their report on 14 January 2002, but not before a preliminary version had somehow found its way into the public domain, not only leading to widespread discussion in the Afrikaans media, but also creating all sorts of expectations.

Given its brief, the Gerwel Committee might well have spent time on advising on ways in which the use of Afrikaans as access-restricting medium should be addressed. It chose, instead, to concentrate on the positive aspect of advising on how the future of Afrikaans is to be secured. It did so by arguing from the general to the specific. At the outer level, it argued for the value of socio-diversity as a common good and drew an analogy with biodiversity.

*Progressive societies – and South Africa communally imagines itself one of the foremost progressive societies in the current world – expend resources on the nurturing and protection of biodiversity and the natural environment even where the economic and practical returns are not immediately forthcoming. Erosive threats to species and formations are anticipated and acted on, ensuring that the pressures of the immediate present do not endanger diversity and sustainability in the longer term. Our Constitution’s repeated emphasis on aspects of social diversity as the constituent elements of sustainable national unity supposes an analogous commitment. There is nowhere in the South African Constitution the hint of an implied wish for a reduction in the number of forms of social or cultural expression, least of all as concerns language.*

And:

*The recognition and nurturing of socio-diversity is as intrinsically essential to the building of sustainable living-together-in-society as is the nurturing of biodiversity for a sustainable natural environment.*

At the next level the report argued for multilingualism in South Africa as one form of socio-diversity.



*The promotion of multi-lingualism is an important manifestation of the recognition and nurturing of social diversity. As with the other two clusters of values cited in conjunction with this one, its implementation and expression in practice will always be in tension with competing imperatives and considerations. In our specific circumstances financial affordability and the rights of others immediately present themselves as limiting and competing considerations. The Constitution is explicit about such rights as receiving education in the official language(s) of choice being subject to not only considerations of practicability but more fundamentally those of equity and the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices.*

*The primary premise, though, is that there is a societal obligation to promote multi-lingualism, inter alia through attention to the development of the various functions of the different languages.*

The report spoke about all national languages collectively, about English specifically, and mostly about Afrikaans.

*While it does not have the brief to advise on the position of other languages, the Committee cannot but comment on Afrikaans within the combined context of the other South African languages.*

...

*There is, analogous to the case of natural environment phenomena, the danger that languages (and other expressions of social diversity) could through benign neglect be subject to steady and eventually irreversible erosion. The South African languages other than English are particularly in danger of this fate as English, through no malevolent designs, comfortably provides in the various needs, thus steadily supplanting the other languages.*

...

*Positive steps and the active development of the languages are required to prevent and forestall such erosion.*

Regarding English, the Committee said:

*While this Committee has as its point of departure the obligation and intrinsic desirability to promote multi-lingualism, it situates that firmly*

*within a positive acceptance that South Africa is a leading country within the anglophone world; that English is our medium towards access and competitiveness in the globalised modern world; that English is a major binding language amongst South Africans; and, that for all the preceding reasons the promotion of competence in English amongst all South Africans should be an important part of the multi-lingual thrust.*

Regarding Afrikaans, the Committee made no bones about the past:

*The level of development attained by the Afrikaans language is in demonstrable ways connected to aspects of the history of colonial-settler domination and particularly in its latter phases to the dominant position of a sector of the Afrikaans-speaking communities in the apartheid order. Afrikaans became the language most closely associated with the formalisation and execution of apartheid. To a great proportion of South Africans it probably calls up first and foremost associations of discrimination, oppression and systematic humiliation of others.*

*These associations understandably often affect the approaches people take to the role and future of Afrikaans. That history of association with racism and racially based practices is one that Afrikaans-speaking communities will have to confront and deal with. That is part of the challenge of healing, reconciliation and reparation our society will continue to face for a considerable time to come.*

But the core of the Gerwel report was, of course, about the future of Afrikaans. Essentially, the conclusion was one reached in the spirit of reconciliation: the common good of sociodiversity and multilingualism had to include Afrikaans, its somewhat chequered past notwithstanding. And somebody had to take care of it.

*In practical terms it would require that for each of the official African languages (amongst whom we consider Afrikaans for these purposes) one or more universities be assigned the task of promoting the development of that language.*

...

*The University of Stellenbosch and Potchefstroom University are the two that the Committee would recommend for being tasked with having as one of their main responsibilities attending to the sustained development of Afrikaans as academic and scientific medium.*

...

*Exactly how the execution of that obligation is arranged in practice should largely be left to the autonomous management of the institutions. What should be required, though, is the submission of a plan that will have to be monitored on an agreed upon regular basis.*

...

*The approach and recommendations of the Committee were informed by that spirit of generous inclusivity that marked our transition and found expression in our Constitution. The Committee would recommend to the two institutions that they in similar spirit develop and submit to the Minister comprehensive plans as to how they would ensure that their predominantly Afrikaans-medium character is at the same time one of inclusivity.*

The Gerwel report was a thoughtful, generous document. Perhaps too generous. Once the report had been leaked, quite a while before its formal submission, word got around that Jakes Gerwel would recommend to the Minister that Potchefstroom and Stellenbosch be designated as “Afrikaans Universities” (terminology that does not appear in the Gerwel recommendations). Any decision by government, once that idea had taken root, was bound to be a disappointment to the *taalstryders*. As, indeed, it turned out to be.

When the Language Policy on Higher Education<sup>25</sup> was made public in November 2002, it endorsed the general tenor of the Gerwel report, but disagreed with the principle of designation.

*The Ministry acknowledges that Afrikaans as a language of scholarship and science is a national resource. It, therefore, fully supports the retention of Afrikaans as a medium of academic expression and communication in higher education and is committed to ensuring that the capacity of Afrikaans to function as such a medium is not eroded.*

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<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.polity.org.za/pdf/languagepolicy.pdf>.

...

*The Ministry does not believe, however, that the sustainability of Afrikaans in higher education necessarily requires the designation of the University of Stellenbosch and the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education as 'custodians' of the academic use of the Afrikaans language, as proposed by the Gerwel Committee.*

...

*The concern is that the designation of one or more institutions in this manner could have the unintended consequence of concentrating Afrikaans-speaking students in some institutions and in so doing setting back the transformation agendas of institutions that have embraced parallel or dual-medium approaches as a means of promoting diversity.*

...

*The Ministry is also concerned that some individuals have equated institutional responsibility for promoting Afrikaans as an academic medium to the establishment of 'Afrikaans' universities. The notion of Afrikaans universities runs counter to the end goal of a transformed higher education system, which as indicated in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) is the creation of higher education institutions whose identity and cultural orientation is neither black nor white, English or Afrikaans-speaking, but unabashedly and unashamedly South African (NPHE: p.82).*

...

*[The] Ministry will, in consultation with the historically Afrikaans-medium institutions, examine the feasibility of different strategies, including the use of Afrikaans as a primary but not sole medium of instruction.*

Of course there was a lot more. The Language Policy was, after all, for all our languages, and all higher education institutions, not just for Afrikaans, or Stellenbosch. There was, for example, the requirement that all universities should develop a language policy. Stellenbosch had by that time already done so, and other universities now had to follow suit.

The promulgation of the National Language Policy brings the story of Afrikaans, and Afrikaans in higher education, up to the end of 2002. I will continue with the story of Afrikaans at Stellenbosch since then in Section 1.5. To do justice to that story, however, one needs some

understanding of the intimate relationship between Stellenbosch and Afrikaans since the founding of the university.

## 1.4 The beginnings

Let us go back a hundred years and more. At the time of the Boer War (or, as a previous generation of Afrikaners called it, the “English War”) the educational institution at Stellenbosch was known as Victoria College. This was the time of rampant British imperialism, part of which was a policy of coercive Anglicisation. There was considerable sympathy amongst Afrikaners in the Cape Colony for the Boer republics. They had put up a valiant fight, offering the world the first demonstration of guerrilla tactics against an army of occupation. The British, on their side, countered with a scorched earth policy and a new invention: concentration camps. Once the British victory had been formalised, after 1901, it seemed that the Afrikaners would now simply be absorbed into the Empire. In 1910 the Union of South Africa was created, combining the two former Boer republics with the former colonies of the Cape and Natal. The incoming government espoused a policy of reconciliation between “the two races” – meaning English people and Afrikaners. Black people were not considered part of the equation. Shortly afterwards, in 1912, the African National Congress was founded.

There are interesting parallels between the years after 1910 and the years after 1994.<sup>26</sup> In each case there was a flurry of policy-making and restructuring, and in each case one such restructuring was in the area of higher education. Part of the post-1910 restructuring was to create autonomous regional universities, and in the Cape Province it was proposed to amalgamate the South African College in Cape Town with Victoria College. The teaching language was to be English.

This confirmed all the fears and inflamed all the passions of those who wished to maintain the identity of the Afrikaners. The *Eerste Taalbeweging* (“First Language Movement”) for recognition of Afrikaans as a language in its own right had already started pre-1900, in Paarl, close to

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<sup>26</sup> This was first pointed out to me by Professor Hermann Giliomee, who also supplied me with some references.

Stellenbosch.<sup>27</sup> By 1905 the basic question about Afrikaans had been put forward at a debating society meeting in Stellenbosch: “*Is het ons ernst?*” (“Are we serious about it?”).<sup>28</sup> To which the answer came, within the next few years, “Yes we are” – emphatically spoken by that same Dr DF Malan who later became the first Prime Minister of the apartheid era. At that time English was still the main teaching language at Victoria College, but the use of “Afrikaans-Dutch” as a medium of instruction at Stellenbosch now became a rallying-cry. A vigorous opposition was put up against the proposed amalgamation in favour of a model whereby Cape Town would serve the English-speaking “half” of the population, and Stellenbosch would serve the Afrikaans speakers. In 1913 the Council of Victoria College submitted a memorandum to the government protesting against the proposed amalgamation.<sup>29</sup> According to this memorandum, drawn up by DF Malan, A Moorrees and JG van der Horst, Victoria College should be regarded as an institution closely coupled with “the spiritual, moral and national life of the Dutch-speaking part of the population”. They added that:

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<sup>27</sup> I do not mean to portray the origin and growth of Afrikaans as an outcome only of the effort and commitment of the people who called themselves Afrikaners. Nor can Stellenbosch or Paarl alone be regarded as the fountainhead of Afrikaans. The story is much more complex. Amongst the earliest manifestations of Afrikaans was its use as a medium of instruction (in Arabic script!) in the religious schools of the Muslim community in Cape Town.

<sup>28</sup> The little wooden podium at which Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr formulated this seminal question, with the original inscription of *Ons spreekuur* (“Our debating hour”) is still used at ceremonial occasions at Stellenbosch today.

<sup>29</sup> I draw here, and for the quotation to follow, from Hermann Giliomee’s paper *Die taal- en kulturele uitdagings van die histories Afrikaanse universiteite* (“The language and cultural challenges of the historically Afrikaans universities”), in H Giliomee & L Schlemmer, Eds: *Kruispad: Die toekoms van Afrikaans as openbare taal* (“Crossroads: the future of Afrikaans as public language”), Tafelberg, 2001.

*[Stellenbosch is the place from which]... the Afrikaner volk can best realise its ideals and exercise the largest influence. It is the best realisation the volk has yet found of a deeply-felt need. Stellenbosch stands for an idea.*<sup>30</sup>

That “Stellenbosch stands for an idea” became a mantra to generations of Matie students. By the 1980s, when apartheid was beginning to fail, it might no longer have been clear exactly what the idea was. But to this day the legacy of DF Malan is a deeply rooted belief that Stellenbosch is *special*.

The turning-point of the fight against the amalgamation plan was a bequest in 1915 of a wealthy Stellenbosch farmer, JH Marais, who left in his will an amount of £100,000, the interest on which was to be used as follows:<sup>31</sup>

*The interest arising from time to time on the capital will be applied and expended for the benefit of the higher education institution currently at Stellenbosch known as Victoria College, or any University (or part of it) which might later be established at Stellenbosch and within which Victoria College is at any time subsumed, for the promotion of higher education in general at the aforementioned College or University, or part of it as the case may be, but more specifically for education in and through the Dutch language in both its forms (that is, Afrikaans and Dutch), and indeed for the purpose that the Dutch language in both its forms as mentioned will occupy no lesser place than the other official language.*

Thus DF Malan claimed Stellenbosch for the idea of Afrikanerdom, and JH Marais claimed Stellenbosch for Afrikaans. Together, these became the canonical formulation of the purpose of Stellenbosch University, which was eventually founded as an autonomous university by an Act of 1918.<sup>32</sup>

“No lesser place” – that single phrase comes as close as anything else to summarising the mindset of the Afrikaner. It was in order to have no lesser

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<sup>30</sup> “[Stellenbosch is die plek van waar] het Afrikanervolk zijn idealen het best kon verwezenlijken en van waaruit het de grootste invloed kon uitoefenen. Zij is de best vervulling, die het volk nog gevonden heeft van een diepgevoelde behoefte. Zij staat voor een idee.”

<sup>31</sup> Translated from the will of JH Marais, in the archives of Stellenbosch University.

<sup>32</sup> At the centre of the central square of Stellenbosch University there is a statue, the inscription of which reads simply: “JH Marais – Our Benefactor”.

place than other free men that the *Voortrekkers* left the Cape Colony in the 1830s. It was in order to have no lesser place than other free countries that the two Boer republics took on the might of the British Empire in 1899, and kept it at bay for three years. It was in order to have no lesser place economically that they started Afrikaner business empires and the *Reddingsdaadbond* to look after the poor whites amongst the Afrikaners. It was in order to have no lesser place politically that the National Party was started and apartheid was conceived. It was in order for Afrikaans to have no lesser place than English that Stellenbosch University arose from the foundations of Victoria College.

There is a very interesting book published in 1918 called *Gedenkboek van het Victoria College* (“Memorial Volume of the Victoria College”), commissioned by the Alumni Association. It contains articles in three languages: Dutch, English and Afrikaans. Some of these were reminiscences of “the old times”, while others were concerned with the future of the new institution. Amongst the latter, there is one called “The New Stellenbosch” from which comes the following interesting passage:

*The new Stellenbosch will have a role to play in South Africa. ... Stellenbosch did not become a university for the Western Province. ... It is [therefore also] not only an institution of higher learning only for the Cape Province. ... It must play a far greater role: it must become the Afrikaans-Dutch institution of higher learning for South Africa.*

That, indeed, became the mission of Stellenbosch. As the Afrikaners slowly clawed their way out of backward socio-economic circumstances into political dominance, which they attained with the election victory of 1948 and only relinquished in 1994, so Afrikaans became, *de facto* as well as *de jure*, a language considered by Afrikaners to be fully equivalent to English. The rise of the Afrikaners was a remarkable reversal of fortunes from the time of the Boer War, driven by an implacable determination and a reverence for education, and accomplished within three generations. But it came at a cost. That cost was its moral credibility.

I will not attempt even to sketch the development of Afrikaans in parallel with Afrikaner nationalism during the 20th century. But clearly education was a key area of implementation of apartheid policies – not in a positive



sense. Hardwired into the consciousness of generations of Black South Africans are the infamous words of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd when, as Minister of Native Affairs, he introduced the Bantu Education Act in 1953:

*What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? What is the use of subjecting a Native Child to a curriculum, which, in the first instance is traditionally European? I just want to remind Honourable Members that if the Native inside South Africa today in any kind of school in existence is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake.*<sup>33</sup>

The logic was clear: since the Black child could only grow up to enter a job market of manual and menial labour, teaching “it” mathematics would be a waste of time and resources. Thus Afrikaans, having been one of the levers of the socio-economic empowerment of the Afrikaners, now became one of the tools of apartheid.<sup>34</sup> The Soweto youth uprising of 1976 was triggered by the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in certain subjects in high schools – “To hell with Afrikaans” read some of the banners of the schoolchildren who marched on that fateful 16th of June. Ironically, from having been the symbol of a defeated people fighting for dignity, Afrikaans had by 1976 become for many the language of oppression.

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<sup>33</sup> Referred to for example by Nelson Mandela in addressing the centenary conference of the SA Institute of Mechanical Engineers, 30 August 1993 (see <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mandela/1993/sp930830.html>); likewise by Finance Minister Trevor Manuel in a speech of 2003 to the South African Statistics Association (see <http://www.treasury.gov.za/speech/2003110501.pdf>). I have extracted the full quotation from <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/opin/jbean.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Not all Afrikaners would agree with this statement, and among those who do, the nature and extent of Afrikaans as a tool of apartheid would be contested.

## 1.5 Stellenbosch University

Stellenbosch is to this day a divided town.<sup>35</sup> There is a world of difference between the rich and well-kept White world of Mostertsdrift and the working-to-middle class Coloured world of Ida's Valley or Cloetesville, and again between the mostly-permanent houses of the Coloured areas and the timber-and-corrugated-iron shacks in the township of Kayamandi.<sup>36</sup> For our purposes, the differences are perhaps best illustrated by looking at the number of school leavers from local schools who enter the University the following year. In any given year over the past five years, the top-flight schools from White Stellenbosch would deliver between 250 and 300 new Matie students. The Coloured schools would deliver, in total, perhaps two dozen new Maties per year. From Kayamandi High (the only "African Black" school in Stellenbosch), less than one dozen students *in total over the past five years* have gained entry to Stellenbosch University.

Stellenbosch University is privileged to enrol many top-flight new students each year. In any given year over the past five years more than three-quarters of the top 20 matriculants in the Western Cape enrolled at Maties. Still, if you look at the disparities, you have to ask: what is the role and responsibility of a university in a town like Stellenbosch? And, in so far as the divisions of Stellenbosch reflect the realities of South Africa, what is the role and responsibility of a university in such a country? In short, what are universities *for*? If we are to consider the *taaldebat* as more than just as a parochial issue of one university (or one language, for that matter), we cannot neglect such matters, and I will therefore return to the question of "what kind of university?" in Chapters 3 and 4. What follows here is a brief factual overview, by way of background, of current facts and figures concerning the University.

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<sup>35</sup> It was not always so. There is a very interesting project underway in the University's History Department to trace the "people's history" of an area of Stellenbosch called *Die Vlakte* ("The Flats"), where in pre-apartheid days Black and White, Afrikaans and English, Christian, Jew and Muslim co-existed in the same neighbourhood.

<sup>36</sup> Mostertsdrift was the first farm given out in Stellenbosch by Governor Simon van der Stel, in 1691. The Coloured suburb called Ida's Valley was established in 1901, while Cloetesville was laid out in the 1970s with the specific purpose of serving as a Coloured area. Kayamandi is the African Black township; it is gradually being upgraded, but many people still live in makeshift shacks.

Stellenbosch University is a comprehensive, research-intensive, medium-sized university, with all the advantages of a classic university town. Its academic offering is structured in 10 Faculties: Agriculture, Arts, Economic and Management Sciences (including a Business School), Education, Engineering, Health Sciences (including Medicine), Law, Military Science, Natural Science, and Theology. These are spread over four sites of delivery: the main campus in the town of Stellenbosch, the Medical School at Tygerberg,<sup>37</sup> the Business School in the fast-growing greater Cape Town area of Durbanville, and the Faculty of Military Sciences, which is also the Military Academy of South Africa, on the West Coast site of Saldanha, two hours' drive away.

In 2005, Stellenbosch University had around 22,000 students, of whom:

- ø 33,4% are postgraduate (meaning post-Bachelors);
- ø 28,4% are Black (i.e. in the South African idiom: Coloured, Indian or African Black);
- ø 51,4% are female;
- ø 7,7% are international students;
- ø 60,4% have Afrikaans as first language;
- ø 28% live in University accommodation;
- ø 83,1% study on the Stellenbosch main campus, and
- ø 63,8% are from the Western Cape province.

The next most common question after “How many Black students does the University have?” is “How has that percentage changed over the past few years?” The answers are given in the following table:

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<sup>37</sup> In the Bellville area, between Stellenbosch and Cape Town.

**Table 1:** Enrolment of Coloured, African Black and Indian contact students at Stellenbosch University as percentage of all contact students for 2001 to 2005

	Undergraduate <sup>1)</sup>				
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Number of enrolments</b>	<b>12 049</b>	<b>12 461</b>	<b>13 113</b>	<b>13 446</b>	<b>13 863</b>
% White	86.6	85.3	82.9	81.1	80.0
% Coloured	10.6	11.3	12.7	14.0	14.7
% African	1.8	2.3	3.0	3.6	4.0
% Indian	1.0	1.1	1.4	1.3	1.4
<b>% Coloured, African and Indian</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>18.9</b>	<b>20.1</b>

1) Excludes special students

	All students				
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Number of enrolments</b>	<b>18 731</b>	<b>19 337</b>	<b>20 303</b>	<b>21 000</b>	<b>21 918</b>
% White	79.8	78.3	76.0	73.9	72.0
% Coloured	11.3	11.5	12.4	13.4	14.3
% African	7.2	8.1	9.3	10.7	11.6
% Indian	1.7	2.1	2.3	2.0	2.0
<b>% Coloured, African and Indian</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>26.1</b>	<b>27.9</b>

The growth in the number of black students is not spectacular, but it has been steady. The University has crossed the 20% threshold for undergraduates and is closing in on 30% for student numbers overall. It takes no great mathematical skill to deduce that if two-thirds of the students are undergraduate, but the ratio of Black students is actually lower for undergraduates than for the total student body, then the ratio of Black students must be considerably higher for the postgraduate students. And this is indeed the case. The number of White postgraduate students has been virtually static over the past five years, whereas Black student numbers have increased by more than 50%. Of the current postgraduate students, 42,5% are Black (compared to 20% for undergraduates).

As regards staff, the demographic situation is more stark. Although 33.1% of the University's overall staff is black, the number of black *academic* staff members is only 11.6% of total academic staff. It is true that staff turnover

is very low (less than 5% per year), but even so it seems peculiar that, in a country where more than 88% of the population is Black, there is a University where more than 88% of the academic staff members are White.

In the academic world, however, the most commonly asked question is not on demographic profile, but on quality. And here Stellenbosch University has reason to be proud. On most of the common performance indicators of academic excellence it would be comfortably within the top five in the country, usually within the top three, and in a number of respects in first position.<sup>38</sup> For example:

- ø Stellenbosch University has been the top performer in South Africa in terms of matching funding from business and industry<sup>39</sup> for a number of years, indicating the extent of our collaboration with business and industry. Recently it won the national Award for the Most Technologically Innovative University in South Africa.<sup>40</sup>
- ø The number and quality of Stellenbosch University researchers, as measured by the ratings awarded by the National Research Foundation (NRF), have increased consistently over the past decade. The University now has the second largest number of NRF-rated researchers of any university in the country.
- ø A number of Stellenbosch University research centres, such as the Bureau for Economic Research, the Centre for Research on Science and Technology, the Desmond Tutu TB Centre and the Centre for Invasion Biology, in effect operate as national think tanks and centres of expertise.
- ø The University houses or participates in a diverse number of well-functioning centres with an Africa focus, such as the African Centre for

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<sup>38</sup> Examples and data substantiating this claim can be found in the Annual Reports of the past few years, as well as in the *Feiteboek* ("Facts Book") of the University. I gave some facts and figures in my annual public report in July 2005; see [http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/midyear2005\\_e.html](http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/midyear2005_e.html).

<sup>39</sup> As measured by awards in the THRIP area of the NRF. ("THRIP" is the acronym for "Technology and Human Resources in Industry Programme")

<sup>40</sup> This prestigious award is made under the auspices of the Innovation Fund, which is run by the national Department of Science and Technology (DST).

Investment Analysis (ACIA), the African Centre for the Management of HIV/AIDS in the Workplace, Agribusiness in Sustainable Natural African Plant Products (ASNAPP), the Network of African Congregational Theology (NetACT), the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS), and the South African Centre for Epidemiological Modelling and Analysis (SACEMA).

- ǃ Matie students do well in national competitions. For example, the University seems to have a firm hold on the winning position in the annual Budget Competition, which students from Stellenbosch have won five times in the past seven years.

It is clear that the slogan on the Stellenbosch University letterhead, “Your Knowledge Partner”, is something that its academic community truly strives to live up to.

The point is that Stellenbosch University is evolving as an institution that tries to position itself as a national asset – something more than a *volksuniversiteit* serving only one section of the community. I will say more on this matter in Chapter 4. For the moment, it will suffice to illustrate the point by quoting the University’s Vision 2012. This is a statement which summarises the University’s Strategic Framework, and responds to the question what kind of a university Stellenbosch would like to be within the next few years.

***Stellenbosch University:***

- ǃ is an academic institution of excellence and a respected knowledge partner
- ǃ contributes towards building the scientific, technological, and intellectual capacity of Africa
- ǃ is an active role-player in the development of South African society
- ǃ has a campus culture that welcomes a diversity of people and ideas
- ǃ promotes Afrikaans as a language of teaching and science in a multilingual context.

These five items display (quite intentionally) some of the inner tensions and competing agendas that the University has to deal with. That there *are* such inner tensions is not necessarily a bad thing. I have argued elsewhere<sup>41</sup> in favour of the creative potential of the juxtaposition of apparent opposites, and even if one does not agree with this view, it is surely better for the University to acknowledge the reality of tensions remaining in South African society today, and to grapple with them, than to try and gloss them over. Also, to some extent universities learn to live with such tensions. For example the “pure vs. applied” debate of a few decades ago, without actually ever having been concluded in favour of one side or the other, has simply faded away in the light of a growing recognition that it is a matter of universities dealing with “pure *and* applied”, rather than “pure *or* applied”.

With that said, however, it is also true that one particular juxtaposition of apparent opposites in Vision 2012 simply leaps out at you – namely, the vision of “a campus culture that welcomes a diversity of people and ideas” juxtaposed immediately in the next item with the aim of promoting Afrikaans as a language of teaching and science. And this, indeed, lies at the heart of the matter, since it is not evident how the envisaged diversity of people can be reconciled with the vision of promoting Afrikaans. Specifically, in South Africa “diversity of people” must surely include African Blacks, amongst whom the number of mother-tongue Afrikaans speakers is statistically negligible. Indeed, for those who favour a hard-line interpretation of either of the last two items of Vision 2012, the matter may well seem to boil down to a simple contradiction. On the other hand, South Africa has proved capable of dealing with apparent contradictions before. In a country where the ultimate dichotomy of Black and White has been resolved, an apparent dichotomy of diversity and language may perhaps not be insuperable either.

These are matters which will unfold in the next two Chapters. For now, let us consider the *taalbeleid* – the language policy – of Stellenbosch

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<sup>41</sup> In the opening address to a Transdisciplinarity Workshop, subsequently distributed at the 2nd World Congress of Transdisciplinarity in Espirito Santo, Brazil, September 2005.

University.<sup>42</sup> It must be remarked at the outset that no other Stellenbosch issue stirs up strong emotions as quickly as language. Perhaps in consequence the *taalbeleid* has assumed almost mythical proportions, sometimes used on either side of the spectrum of opinions to strengthen the very stereotypes that the University is trying to move away from.

The basic thrust of the policy is that:

*The University of Stellenbosch is committed to the use and sustained development of Afrikaans as an academic language in a multilingual context. Language is used at the University in a manner that is directed towards engagement with knowledge in a diverse society.*

As for implementation, this is based on two ideas. The first is that each teaching module should carry a label indicating the medium of instruction: A for Afrikaans, E for English, T for dual medium<sup>43</sup> and A/E for parallel medium. “Parallel medium” means that the module is available in Afrikaans and English simultaneously, and “dual medium” means that the lecturer will use both Afrikaans and English – typically in roughly equal proportions – in the classroom. The second basic idea is that the standard option is the A option – “standard” meaning that, whereas each of the other options should be motivated, the A option is the *default option*. So, unless specified to the contrary, classes are in Afrikaans.

This statement, however, needs to be qualified:

- ø Any course of study taught at Stellenbosch which is not taught elsewhere in South Africa is available in English. (For example: Stellenbosch is the only university offering a Bachelor’s degree in Forestry.)

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<sup>42</sup> The full version of the *taalbeleid* can be found on the Web at <http://www.sun.ac.za/taal/LangPolFinal2002.doc>. The language *policy* is complemented by a *taalplan* – a language *plan* – which can be found at <http://www.sun.ac.za/taal/languageplan2006.doc>.

<sup>43</sup> “T” refers to *tweetaligheid* (“bilingualism”), which also indicates that the so-called T-option allows the lecturer some flexibility. It is not meant to enforce a rigid 50-50 ratio.



- ø Where there is a contractual relationship regarding undergraduate education, the University will respect the language policy of its contractual partner. (For example, all students in the Faculty of Military Science are members of the South African National Defence Force, and the Faculty also functions as the Military Academy of South Africa. The SANDF, unlike the rest of South Africa, is not multilingual. They do not give orders in 11 languages – they give orders only in English. Accordingly, all teaching in the Faculty of Military Science is conducted in English.)
- ø When class sizes are large enough to require breaking up into different groups, some of these parallel groups may be taught in English.
- ø All students have the right to submit their assignments, tests and examinations in their language of choice.
- ø Textbooks may be in Afrikaans or in English, according to the academic judgment of the lecturer.
- ø The University has embarked on an effort to ensure that, over time, all additional lecture notes, transparencies etc. will be available in English. (Increasing use is also made of WebCT for purposes of instruction.)
- ø Interaction in the classroom is guided by a Code of Conduct,<sup>44</sup> which essentially leaves the choice of language to the speaker.
- ø In principle, prospective students should be able to chart their degree studies ahead of time, not only by subject, but also by language of instruction.<sup>45</sup>

At postgraduate level, and particularly for research degrees, the language of teaching and interaction is not prescribed in a top-down manner. Both Afrikaans and English are freely used, according to the circumstances applicable in the various faculties, departments and research units. When one-on-one or small-group interactions between students and staff take place, as in research groups, they speak whatever language suits them best.

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<sup>44</sup> See [http://www.sun.ac.za/taal/gedragkodeklaskamer\\_eng.doc](http://www.sun.ac.za/taal/gedragkodeklaskamer_eng.doc).

<sup>45</sup> This has proved to be easier said than done, because of staff movements (like study leave) and variations in teaching duties, course changes, and the many possible modules that may be used in putting together a degree programme.

In the Music Department, for example, where many teaching modules are interactions around a music instrument, it would seem pedantic to label such modules with a language specification.



# Benchmarking

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Like many topics of debate in South Africa, the language issue is hard to disentangle from the legacy issues of apartheid. In higher education, in particular, it is entwined with the landscape created during the 1960s and 70s. Whatever underlying principles and patterns there may be to help us with language policy at universities, they are often obscured by other, uniquely South African, factors. It is therefore worth doing some benchmarking abroad, at universities where language is an issue. Most of the material of this chapter is based on a study tour<sup>1</sup> I undertook in 2004, a paper<sup>2</sup> I co-authored with the sociolinguist Prof Christa van der Walt for the *South African Journal of Higher Education*, and the 2nd International Conference of Bi- and Multilingual Universities, in Helsinki (1-3 September 2005).<sup>3</sup>

## 2.1 Background

A conscious approach to multilingualism is not new in higher education. The first language centre in Europe was the *Collegium Trilingue*, founded by Desiderius Erasmus in Leuven in 1519. For Erasmus trilingualism meant being fluent in Latin, Hebrew and Greek – accomplishments he regarded as essential prerequisites for academic access to the classical sources of

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<sup>1</sup> During this study tour (September-October 2004) I was based at the *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven* (the Catholic University of Leuven) in Belgium. I would like to express my thanks to the (then) Rector, Prof André Oosterlinck, for hosting my visit and for putting his staff at my disposal. A special thanks goes to Mw An Huts of the *Dienst Internationale Relaties* (International Relations Service) for doing all the hard work relating to logistical matters. I also express my grateful thanks to my hosts at the various universities I visited, where I was always received with great collegiality. At each university I visited I conducted interviews with the Rector and/or senior university managers. Study material had been prepared for me beforehand, and in some cases some follow-up interaction continued afterwards.

<sup>2</sup> C. Brink and C. van der Walt, “Multilingual universities – a national and international overview”. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 19 (4), 2005 (in preparation).

<sup>3</sup> I express my thanks to the organisers, in particular Mr Caesar Paterlini, for inviting me to speak at this conference. See [www.palmenia.helsinki.fi/congress/bilingual2005](http://www.palmenia.helsinki.fi/congress/bilingual2005).

science, philosophy and theology. Languages, indeed, can be seen as the basis of the humanistic philosophy of which Erasmus is regarded as the founder.

Somewhat more recently multilingualism has become an active topic of discussion in the European Union. A UNESCO-sponsored conference was held at the European Centre for Higher Education on “The Bilingual University – its Origins, Mission and Functioning” at Bucharest in May 2000;<sup>4</sup> a seminar on the Multilingual University was held at Maastricht University in February 2001, and a full-blown international conference on “Multilingual Universities – Practice and Standard” took place at Fribourg University in September 2003. Here, it was decided to set up an international network of multilingual institutions of higher education. This has since happened, under the name “MultiLingual Universities Network / Netzwerk MehrSprachige Universitäten / Réseau Universités Plurilingues”.<sup>5</sup> The network recently held its second international conference in Helsinki, in September 2005 and a third such conference is being planned.

It is clear that Europe, with its many states and languages, its highly developed economies and its long tradition of higher education, is an interesting laboratory for multilingual policy and practice. The European Union is comprised of 25 member states, 450 million people and 80 languages, of which 60 are regarded as regional or minority languages, spread over 138 different language communities.<sup>6</sup> However, only five languages, namely English, French, Spanish, German and Russian, account for 95% of language teaching in schools in Europe, with 90% of pupils in upper secondary schools learning English, regardless of whether or not this is compulsory. In the face of such statistics, the European Commission has an Action Plan for 2004-2006 called “Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity”, the key messages of which are that multilingualism is a core value in Europe; that learning a *lingua franca* alone is not enough,

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<sup>4</sup> See [http://www.cepes.ro/hed/policy/biling\\_univ/invit\\_sem.htm](http://www.cepes.ro/hed/policy/biling_univ/invit_sem.htm).

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.unifr.ch/msu>.

<sup>6</sup> I quote the figures and ideas in this section from the keynote address of M. Jacques Delmoly, the Head of the Multilingualism Policy Unit of the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission at the 2005 Helsinki Conference on Bi- and Multilingual Universities. See [www.palmenia.helsinki.fi/congress/bilingual2005](http://www.palmenia.helsinki.fi/congress/bilingual2005).

and the goal that every citizen of an EU country should have meaningful communicative competence in their mother tongue plus *two* other languages. Moreover, as regards higher education, every university should have a coherent language policy and take action to promote its national or regional languages, and every student should study abroad in a foreign language and should gain a language qualification as part of their degree.

These ideas should be compared and contrasted with a path-breaking development towards a common framework for higher education in the European Union, namely the Bologna Agreement<sup>7</sup> of 1999. One important component of this agreement is the adoption of a uniform system of Bachelors and Masters degrees, based on the Anglo-Saxon model. This is to replace a number of often well-regarded but nonetheless localised degree structures such as the *Diplom* in Germany, or the *Doktorandus* in the Netherlands. One consequence of the adoption of this uniform framework is a new emphasis on *taught* Masters degrees (MBAs being a prime example). Moreover, within the framework of the Bologna Agreement strong emphasis is placed on student mobility between institutions (which fits with the advocacy of multilingualism explained above). This is the ERASMUS programme, which stands in the tradition of the peripatetic scholar as a world citizen. It follows that language competence would form an important part of such a programme.

*At a time when the European Union casts the humanist Erasmus as a kind of patron saint of university education, and links his name to a number of programmes associated with international mobility, Erasmus's commitment to language teaching deserves attention too. If students are to acquire*

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<sup>7</sup> In summary (based on <http://www.chea.org/international/multi-lateral.html>): European Ministers of Education signed an agreement in Bologna on 19 June 1999 to construct a "European Higher Education Area" based on fundamental principles of university independence and autonomy to ensure that higher education and research in Europe adapt to the changing needs of society and advances in scientific knowledge. Part of the Agreement is to work together to adopt a system of comparable degrees to promote European citizens and adopt a system of two main cycles – undergraduate and graduate, with the second leading to the masters or doctorate. It was also agreed to establish a system of academic credits that would be easily transferable to promote widespread student mobility, improve access for students and training opportunities, and recognize staff work in Europe.

*international competence and are to be prepared for the international labour market by means of a specific academic programme in combination with experience abroad, language teaching will have to be given an appropriate place in the university's curriculum.*<sup>8</sup>

In addition, most governments now allow – indeed, often encourage – universities to charge “full fees” (i.e. non-subsidised costs) to students who are foreign nationals as a means of supplementing their income. The exception, typically, would be students who come from a partner university on some kind of exchange programme. Although not as far advanced as in Australia, where higher education has become a substantial earner of foreign income – and universities have become utterly dependent on this source – it is nonetheless clear that more and more European universities, including those in Britain, regard foreign students not only as fellow-scholars, but as clients in a money-making enterprise. The code word for this enterprise is “internationalisation”, usually promoted under the banner of attaining or maintaining global academic excellence, but with a definite eye on the financial bottom line.

Of course, taking in foreign students, whether fee-paying or not, means that the issue of language crops up – even though the Bologna Declaration makes no explicit mention of language issues or measures to overcome language barriers. In consequence, the commitment to the student as a citizen of the world has in many places come to mean something very simple: increased offerings by the university, and greater competence required on the part of the staff *in English*. The Rector of the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands, in outlining the strategic direction of his own university, epitomises this sentiment:

*The international mission of Maastricht University goes much further, however, than the ambition to be a Euregional educational centre: we want to be a university for all of Europe, one where access is open because English is one of the working languages. English is the language of science; in no other language is so much educational material available as in English. That*

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<sup>8</sup> Charles van Leuwen, “Feasibility in university language teaching today”, in the volume *Multilingual Approaches in University Education*, C van Leuwen & R Wilkinson (Eds), Maastricht University, 2003.

*is the language we have to use if we wish to prepare our students for an international career in a global world.*<sup>9</sup>

Not everybody would share this emphatic view. Here, for example, is a cautionary note from Norway.<sup>10</sup>

*Making the higher education sector English speaking is not a stated goal of the Bologna Process. ... However, in Norway there seems to be a tacit understanding that English-medium higher education is necessary in order to meet the goals of the Bologna Process. In Norway's 2003 report "Norway – Implementation of the elements of the Bologna Process" it is stated that "Norwegian higher education institutions are encouraged to increase the number of academic courses offered in English at their institutions in order to attract more foreign students to Norway" (page 2). This was backed up by a law amendment in 2002, which repealed the clause "the language of instruction is normally Norwegian" (Universities and Colleges Act, §7).*

Others are not content only to point out the warning signs, but are in effect mounting a campaign against what has been called "killer English". There seem to be two main strands to this development. The first strand is essentially an anti-globalisation argument. The increasing presence and use of English – what might be called *englishification*<sup>11</sup> – is considered to be a form of linguistic neo-imperialism, consciously driven as part of the globalisation agenda.<sup>12</sup> (We will hear much more about englishification in the chapters on the *taaldebat*. The equivalent Afrikaans word is *verengelsing*.) Here the finger is pointed at the USA, which has taken over the mantle from Britain as the driving force behind an "English is enough"

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<sup>9</sup> In Van Leuwen and Wilkinson (cited in the immediately preceding footnote), from the Preface.

<sup>10</sup> Abstract of a paper by Ragnhild Ljosland titled "Norway's misunderstanding of the Bologna Process: When internationalisation becomes Anglicisation", delivered at the Helsinki conference on Bi-and Multinational Universities in September 2005. See [www.palmenia.helsinki.fi/congress/bilingual2005](http://www.palmenia.helsinki.fi/congress/bilingual2005).

<sup>11</sup> To distinguish the drift towards the English language from *Anglicisation*, which would be a drift towards Britishness.

<sup>12</sup> Phillipson, R & Skutnab-Kangas, T. 1999. "Englishisation: one dimension of globalisation". *AILA Review* 13(1):19-36.



kind of attitude. Behind this view is the conviction that globalisation is not a natural development – on the contrary, it is a campaign for world domination by those who have money and power. The second strand (related to the first) is the argument for sociodiversity, often compared to biodiversity.<sup>13</sup> The kind of analogy used here is of English as linguistic equivalent of an invasive biological species, crowding out indigenous and minority languages in the same way that alien biospecies may crowd out indigenous ones. The terminology used to make this point would speak, for example, of “language shift” or “domain loss”.

There is a certain schizophrenia in the discussions on multilingualism. To some, multilingualism is part of a necessary discussion of ways and means of internationalisation, global academic competitiveness, getting published in the best journals, and so on. On this side of the spectrum of opinions, “multilingualism” almost invariably results in the conclusion “more English”. English is seen here as the key to becoming or remaining competitive. This is why Maastricht follows the line they do, and why longstanding bilingual universities such as Helsinki or Fribourg are moving towards trilingualism by adding English to their repertoire. On the other hand, there are those for whom “multilingualism” is essentially a rallying cry for “less English”. On this side of the debate the arguments are in favour of protecting and promoting smaller languages, national languages, minority languages or indigenous languages. The fear is that if multilingualism is to mean the juxtaposition of weaker languages with English, then the evident asymmetry of such an arrangement will simply mean that English will in time push out the others.

Since the USA is cast in the role of prime mover, both of globalisation and of englishification, it is interesting to observe that even there the issue of language is coming to the fore, namely with the growing number of Spanish-speaking citizens.<sup>14</sup> According to the 2004 census, there are now

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<sup>13</sup> See [www.terralingua.org](http://www.terralingua.org).

<sup>14</sup> I quote the facts and figures in this paragraph from the paper “Maintaining bilingualism and biliteracy: Challenges for heritage speakers of Spanish in the U.S. higher education”, delivered by Prof. Claudia Fernandez from DePaul University at the 2005 Helsinki Conference on Bi- and Multilingual Universities.

See [www.palmenia.helsinki.fi/congress/bilingual2005](http://www.palmenia.helsinki.fi/congress/bilingual2005). I am grateful to Prof. Fernandez for making available to me her PowerPoint presentation.

41 million Hispanics in the USA – that is, 13% of the population – and 29 million of these speak Spanish at home. The really astounding figure, however, is that of the total population of the USA under 18 years of age, no less than 34% are Hispanic. Hispanics now account for 27% of the pupils in the largest 500 school districts, and in some urban areas the number reaches 50%, or even 100%. In higher education, Hispanics account for 10% of the total student population in the USA. Yet universities offer practically no Spanish programmes for these students (other than the language itself as a subject), and “historically Spanish students” often experience strong social pressure to use English. Even at school level, by second or third grade, Hispanic children are placed in mainstream classes where instruction is only in English. Heritage languages such as Spanish are often perceived, not least by the speakers themselves, as low-status languages. Children who grow up in these languages perceive this and try to distance themselves from the minority and become more like the majority. Thus the heritage language becomes reduced to informal conversations in the family or the community. Consequently, by the time heritage-language speakers finish high school and enter university, their linguistic abilities in the heritage language have deteriorated and they have become dominant English speakers.

This kind of social dynamic between English and heritage languages may also be observed in South Africa, and indeed in the rest of Africa. Surely one of the great ironies of Africa is that colonialism, generally blamed for much that went wrong in Africa, succeeded so well in linguistic terms. The languages of instruction are (with the exception of Arabic and Afrikaans) exactly the old colonial languages: typically English, French and Portuguese. And those who rail against colonialism often do so in flawless English.

In South Africa, like the rest of Anglophone Africa, English is generally seen as the language of access to job opportunities and financial independence.<sup>15</sup> Despite our 11 languages supposedly enjoying “parity of esteem”, mother-tongue instruction in the 9 indigenous African languages

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<sup>15</sup> I quote in this paragraph from: C Brink and C van der Walt, “Multilingual universities: a national and international overview”, to appear in the *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 19(4), 2005.

is not widespread and, where it exists, only at the lower grades in school. Likewise in the rest of the continent: African languages as media of instruction are generally limited to lower primary school. At secondary school level only Somalia and Madagascar seem to have developed materials in Somali and Malagassy. Moreover, even at the lowest levels of schooling, efforts to improve the position of home or primary languages are patchy and often conflict with parents' and teachers' perceptions of what should happen at school. In Mozambique the then president Samora Machel argued that "none of the national languages was *ideologically or technically* equipped to do a better job than Portuguese". It is true that there is also increasing awareness that English does not necessarily benefit the majority, and that literacy and skills levels may suffer from the view that English as a language of teaching and learning is to everybody's advantage. Nonetheless, there still seems to be a disjunction between talk of "Africanising" universities, or the conceptualisation of "the African university",<sup>16</sup> and the dependence of such universities on non-African languages as means of communication and instruments of teaching. Part of the agenda of Africanisation is the call for study and use of indigenous knowledge systems, yet it is hard to see how such an ambition can come to full fruition if these indigenous knowledge systems are not approached via their respective indigenous languages.

## 2.2 The Leuven option

Nothing in Belgium is simple, not even drinking beer.<sup>17</sup> It is no surprise then that the system of governance is also quite complex. Belgium is, loosely, a federation which divides into constituent parts according to two different criteria.<sup>18</sup> It is necessary to distinguish between the state itself, three territorial areas or *Gewesten*, and three linguistic communities or *Gemeenschappen* (not to mention 10 provinces and 589 local communities or *Gemeenten*). The *Gewesten* are Vlaanderen ("Flanders" in English), Wallonia

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<sup>16</sup> For example, by President Thabo Mbeki in opening the 11<sup>th</sup> General Conference of the Association of African Universities in Cape Town, February 2005.

<sup>17</sup> You need a different glass for every different kind of beer.

<sup>18</sup> The material that follows was supplied by the International Relations Office of the University; it can be found at the website [www.politicsinfo.net/articles/nlbe2.xml?xsl=piprint](http://www.politicsinfo.net/articles/nlbe2.xml?xsl=piprint).

and Brussels. Of the 10,5 million Belgians, the *Gemeenschappen* are the Dutch-speaking community (about 60% of the population), the French-speaking community (about 40%), and the small German-speaking community (only about 66,000 people). The Dutch-speaking community lives largely, but not exclusively, in Flanders and in Brussels. The French-speaking community lives largely, but not exclusively, in Wallonia (excluding the German-speaking part) and in Brussels. The German-speaking community live in the eastern part, close to Germany. Leuven is a university town in one of the Provinces of Flanders called *Vlaams-Brabant* (“Flemish Brabant”).<sup>19</sup> In English *Vlaams* is “Flemish”, but for our purposes it is best thought of as that version of Dutch which is spoken in Flanders.

Belgium is not quite a federation, since the state, the *Gewesten* and the *Gemeenschappen* all have defined areas of competence, and the State has no higher jurisdiction than the other two. The State is responsible for finances, justice, foreign affairs, defence, social security and other national aspects of internal affairs. The *Gewesten* are responsible for aspects of physical infrastructure such as housing, water and energy; also for regional aspects of transport, agriculture and the economy. The *Gemeenschappen* are responsible for language and culture, education, health, media, youth, tourism and other “soft aspects” of daily life. The state, the *Gewesten* and the *Gemeenschappen* each have their own Parliament, with the usual organs of government, such as a Council of Ministers. Between these various parliaments there are complex structural ties, as well as various mechanisms for conflict resolution – for example, a Constitutional Court called the *Arbitragehof*.

In 1980 the *Vlaamse Gewest* and the *Vlaamse Gemeenschap* decided to merge. In consequence, since then Flanders has only one parliament and government, which exercises the areas of competence both of a *Gewest* and a *Gemeenschap*. What this means is that in Flanders, Dutch (or Flemish, to be precise) has its own territory, where Dutch speakers exercise political power. For most practical purposes Flanders is a country of its own. Linguistically, the situation is perhaps best summed up in the words of one

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<sup>19</sup> There is also a Walloon Brabant, and in the Netherlands there is a province called Brabant as well. Historically, these arise from the Duchy of Brabant. For a Wikipedia article on Flemish Brabant, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flemish\\_Brabant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flemish_Brabant).

of the professors I visited: “Belgium is not a trilingual country. It is a three-times monolingual country”. We will see in Chapters 3 and 4 how this idea, that language and territory ought to go together, is a powerful *leitmotiv* in the *taaldebat*.

Against this background it can come as no surprise that there are in fact two Universities of Leuven. There is the Dutch-speaking *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*,<sup>20</sup> and the French-speaking *Université Catholique de Louvain*,<sup>21</sup> at Louvain-la-Neuve 25 kilometers away. And this situation did not come about naturally. It came about as a deliberate decision in 1968 to split the former single university in Leuven into two separate universities, one for each language group. This was the final resolution of a long-running *taalstryd* – a language conflict. This language conflict, in turn, was part of a wider socio-political movement in Belgium in the mid-20th century whereby the Dutch-speaking population asserted their rights against the former economically-dominant French-speaking population. It must be understood that up to the end of World War I post-primary education in Belgium was primarily in French, as were the organs of government, commerce and law. Dutch was seen by many as an inferior language, not suitable for higher functions. However, since the 19th century there had been a growing *Vlaamse Beweging* (Flemish movement), striving for recognition of Flanders as a separate Dutch-speaking country or region. Flemish people found it simply intolerable that in what they regarded as their own domain they could not study, do business or get justice in their own language. The bilingualism of Brussels was not an attractive option, because of the perceived imbalance between the two languages. Nothing but territorial separation would do. The eventual federalisation of Belgium, and the system of governance outlined above, was the compromise reached to accommodate these aspirations. It also had to do with the decline of those industries in which the French speakers had been better represented, such as mining. And it had to do with the *zeitgeist* in the European universities in 1968. Even today, a lot of professors still live and breathe the spirit of the revolution of 1968, when they were students.

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<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.kuleuven.ac.be>.

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.ucl.ac.be>.

The language conflict at Leuven in the 1960s is a story of its own.<sup>22</sup> Tension increased from the mid-1950s onward between the then still dominant French speakers and the *Vlaamse burgerij* (“Flemish citizenry”), determined to improve what they saw as their inferior position. Each side came to see the other as a threat. By 1962 there was, within the University, a pressure group of French-speaking professors as well as a counterpart, the *Vereniging van Vlaamse Professoren* (“Association of Flemish Professors”). Initially there was still some middle ground, represented by the idea that the University would remain bilingual in some form. But this was seen by the Dutch speakers as a replication of the bilingualism of Brussels and went against their cherished notion of language being an issue of territorial rights. Various commissions and policy documents came and went. By the mid-1960s the idea had taken root of splitting the University into two and moving all French-speaking professors and activities out of Flanders into Wallonia. Student protestors carried banners saying *Alle Walen buiten!* (“All French speakers out!”). During this time the governing role of the Church also came into play – it was after all a Catholic University and the Rector had traditionally been a Bishop of the Church. In a declaration of 13 May 1966 the Bishops stuck to the view that “the institutional and functional unity of the Alma Mater and the fundamental geographic unity of Leuven must be maintained”, and declared themselves against the idea of “two Catholic universities in our country, even if the realisation of this were politically and financially possible”.

That, however, is exactly what happened. The view of the Bishops only served to inflame emotions further. Black flags were hoisted in Leuven; protest marches and strikes followed. The Bishops, without withdrawing their earlier declaration, issued another on 15 July, saying that they would leave the decision on the matter to the political and academic authorities. This, however, was not enough to turn the tide. By January 1967, a small group of French professors came to an agreement with the *Vereniging van Vlaamse Professoren* over the relocation of the French section of the University, under certain conditions. However, the French civil authorities

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<sup>22</sup> The material that follows was extracted from Chapter 6 of a 1976 University publication titled “De Universiteit te Leuven 1425-1975”, *Uitgeverij Universitaire Pers Leuven*.

were not keen. In January 1968, they issued a plan which would involve relocating only the French-speaking medical faculty and maintaining all the rest in Leuven. This led to a new outburst of anger on the Flemish side. A student revolution turned Leuven into an occupied city. Within a month the Belgian government fell. The ensuing election was fought on the basis of maintaining or dissolving unitary structures in Belgium. The outcome was decisively in favour of further separation. And by September 1968 it was officially decided to split the University into two: the Dutch-speaking part to remain in Leuven and to become the *Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven*, and the entire French-speaking part to relocate to a new site in Wallonia and to become a new university.

The Belgian resolution, then, of the situation of French/Dutch bilingualism is a form of territorial language apartheid. The KU Leuven came to be a monolingual Dutch-speaking institution.

Today the KU Leuven is the scientific and research powerhouse of Flanders. The University has about 30,000 students (with over 12% from outside Belgium) and over 3,000 academic staff. Over the past 10 years the University has produced 43% of all scientific publications emanating from Flanders and 45% of all doctorates. It has produced more than 50 spin-off companies from its very successful Leuven Research and Development commercialisation arm. These companies employ about 2,000 people and have a joint annual turnover of about 350 million euro. The undergraduate language of instruction is Dutch, but teaching material is often in English (not French!).

But the language issue has not been finally resolved. With the Bologna Agreement, as well as the pressures of building up an international research presence, a market-driven demand for English courses has arisen, particularly at Master's level. Moreover, as is the case elsewhere, particularly in SET,<sup>23</sup> there has been an increasing use of English textbooks and course material by teaching staff, even at undergraduate level. The University management is in favour of greater internationalisation and catering for a foreign market by using English. (It must be noted that the use of English is definitely seen as being for *foreign* students – but these

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<sup>23</sup> Science, Engineering and Technology.

would include European nationals under the various mobility programmes.) However, a *laissez-faire* approach is not favoured by the more conservative Flemish political groupings. In consequence, the Universities Act has recently been strengthened to guard against the perceived danger of an encroaching englishification of the University. The Act is titled “Proclamation concerning the Restructuring of Higher Education in Flanders”.<sup>24</sup> It is quite strict. It says, inter alia:

1. That the language of teaching in *hogescholen* (polytechnics) and universities shall be Dutch.<sup>25</sup>
2. In Bachelor’s and Master’s, teaching in other languages can only be used in exceptional cases, such as
  - (i) Teaching foreign languages
  - (ii) Teaching by foreign guest lecturers
  - (iii) Teaching done at another university with which there is an exchange agreement.
3. For Bachelor’s teaching, the use of languages other than Dutch<sup>26</sup> is restricted to at most 10% of the teaching programmes.
4. For teaching foreign students at Master’s level, programmes may be offered entirely in another language provided that for every such programme an equivalent programme is offered in parallel in Dutch.
5. The university/polytechnic must report annually to the Flemish government on its use of other languages of instruction.

According to senior members of the University management, the 4th clause is an onerous imposition on the University: it limits the possibilities of internationalisation by requiring a duplication of quite a number of courses. At last count<sup>27</sup> the University was offering 49 Bachelor’s

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<sup>24</sup> “*Decreet betreffende de herstructurering van het hoger onderwijs in Vlaanderen*”, passed by the Flemish Parliament and Flemish Government, dated 4 April 2003. The translations and interpretations are my own.

<sup>25</sup> Previously this condition applied only to universities.

<sup>26</sup> In practice, for “languages other than Dutch” one may read “English”.

<sup>27</sup> As approved by the Flemish Government on 13 February 2004.



programmes in Dutch and 2 in English, followed by 108 Master's programmes<sup>28</sup> in Dutch and 60 in English.

## 2.3 Finland

Finland has a population of about 5.2 million people, of whom the greater majority are Finnish speaking and a minority of 5.6% are Swedish speaking. From the earliest times until 1809 Finland was a province of Sweden; after that it was a grand duchy of Russia, and finally became independent in 1917. According to the Language Act of 1922, Finland is a bilingual country, with both Finnish and Swedish as official languages. Linguistically, Swedish and Finnish are unrelated, with Swedish resembling Norwegian, Danish and Dutch, and Finnish resembling only Estonian and (distantly) Hungarian.

What is now the University of Helsinki was founded as the Royal Academy by Queen Christina in 1640, originally in Turku (*Åbo* in Swedish), which was also the original capital of Finland. During the Russian time, after a big fire in Turku in 1827, the Royal Academy was moved to Helsinki, which was then being constructed as the new capital. Interestingly, the central square of Helsinki has the Government Building on one side, the University main building on the opposite side as an exact replica, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the third side. In 1918 what is now the *Åbo Akademi* University was founded to cater for the Swedish-speaking minority of Finland. It still does so today.

According to the Universities Act, the University of Helsinki shall be bilingual, teaching in Finnish/Swedish, and the *Åbo Akademi* shall be a Swedish-language institution. Besides these two, the Act also names four other higher education institutions (in Business, Music, Art and Theatre) as being individually and collectively “responsible for ensuring that a sufficient number of Swedish-speaking persons are educated to meet national needs”. (There are 20 higher education institutions in Finland altogether.)

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<sup>28</sup> There are in fact two kinds of Master's degrees: an “initial Master's” and a “Master's after Master's”. The distinction, unknown in the Anglophone world, has some relevance in that the language restrictions are more flexible for the second kind of Master's degree.

The University of Helsinki<sup>29</sup> is the largest comprehensive research-led university in Finland. It has impressive international credentials, and is a member of the League of European Research Universities (LERU). It also has the cultural mandate to foster bilingualism. Classes are given both in Finnish and in Swedish, with the choice generally made by the teaching professors themselves, except that each professor must teach at least 50% in the language designated for his/her teaching post. (Finland follows the Continental tradition of entire academic units being built around the person of a particular professor, who would largely determine the courses taught and the way in which they are taught.) There are a number of professorships (about 6% of the total) called the Swedish Professorships, to which people are appointed with the specific understanding that they will teach in Swedish. These Swedish Professorships are built into the financial allocation from the government; in this sense it may be said that there is financial support for the pursuit of bilingualism. Students may choose in which language to attend their courses, but the university cannot guarantee that every course will be available in Swedish. There are some exceptions, though. In certain disciplines, such as Medicine, the University has an obligation to produce Swedish-speaking graduates – it is the only institution in Finland where the degree in Medicine is offered in Swedish. Since the Swedish-speaking population is so small, this means in practice that Swedish-speaking applicants for Medicine get preferential admission. University documentation speaks of a “quota” which must be filled. In practice, the University borders on being a trilingual institution, since internationalisation has led to the increasing use of English. This is particularly true at Master’s level, where many of the courses are given in English. Even at undergraduate level, however, and then particularly in scientific or technical subjects such as Computer Science, study material is often in English. Senior members of staff acknowledged that, while the position of Swedish versus Finnish is stable, the position of Finnish versus English is no longer entirely clear.

*Åbo Akademi*<sup>30</sup> is a different kind of institution altogether. It is smaller (about 8,000 students) and is a minority-language institution rather than a

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<sup>29</sup> See <http://www.helsinki.fi>.

<sup>30</sup> See <http://www.abo.fi>.

nationally bilingual one. In fact, according to its Act, it may teach in any language at all, except Finnish! There are other Swedish-language tertiary institutions, but the *Akademi* is the only multidisciplinary Swedish-language university in Finland. It has an international reputation in its selected focus areas and is a member of the Santander and Coimbra University networks. In practice, it is as much subject to pressures for English-language teaching as are other universities with an internationalisation agenda. Even though the Swedish-speaking minority is small (only about 273,000 people in all), the practice of supporting Swedish as a minority language is so ingrained in the national psyche that the Rector could say quite positively that Swedish is in no danger of marginalisation in Finland. Besides the national linguistic ethos, there are two additional reasons for this confidence. One is that the *Akademi* is very strongly backed by the Swedish-speaking community in Finland – in fact, it was founded in 1918 as a private university, with financial support from the community, and only became a state institution in 1981. The second reason is that in Scandinavia Swedish is of course a majority language, with about 25 million speakers. (Finnish, therefore, is a majority language in Finland, but a minority language in Scandinavia, while the situation is reversed for Swedish.) Thus there is a need and a demand for Swedish speakers in business and industry, and it makes sense to deliver Swedish-speaking graduates. In 2004 the Rector of *Åbo Akademi* (who is a former national Minister of Education) succeeded, for the first time, in persuading government to make an in-principle financial contribution to the *Akademi* for the cost of carrying out its cultural mandate.

## 2.4 The Catalan experience

Spanish is a world language, widely spoken in the Americas as well as in Spain and other European countries. Catalan is a minority language, spoken by about 7,5 million people, mostly concentrated in the province of Catalonia, of which Barcelona is the capital. Catalonia has two official languages: Catalan (also called Valencian) and Spanish (Castilian). The University of Barcelona (UB)<sup>31</sup> was founded in 1450 and has 76,000 students; it is the oldest and largest of the six universities in Barcelona, and

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<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.ub.edu>.

of the ten in Catalonia. According to the Linguistic Policy Act of the Parliament of Catalonia, as well as the Statute of the University, Catalan is the administrative language of the University and the normal vehicle of expression in institutional practices. However, the Act also provides that students and teachers have the right to express themselves, orally and in writing, in whichever official language they prefer. This means, in particular, that teachers may use either Catalan or Spanish in their classes, and that their choice shall be respected.

What makes this *laissez-faire* policy workable is that Spanish and Catalan are both Romance languages, sufficiently close to each other so that students and staff proficient in Spanish can acquire receptive skills in Catalan within a very short time. In addition, the university offers beginners' courses in Catalan. These are entirely voluntary – there is no language proficiency test for students. Spanish-speaking staff are appointed on the assumption that they will acquire receptive skills in Catalan. Appointments are sometimes made of academic staff who speak neither Spanish nor Catalan, and there may then be a requirement on them to acquire proficiency in at least one of these languages (depending on the duration and nature of the appointment). However, the possible pool for recruitment of Spanish-speaking staff is so large that there is little need for such appointments. There is some financial support from the Catalonian government (according to the University management, not enough) to offer beginner's courses in Catalan.

Because the language of instruction depends on the choice of the individual teacher, the ratio of use between Catalan and Spanish varies – also from Faculty to Faculty. However, according to university figures, about 65% of the course offerings at the UB are in Catalan and the remainder in Spanish. Students may write their reports, assignments and examinations in either of the two official languages, regardless of the language in which the course was offered. English is used in a few courses, as part of the internationalisation policy, but in percentage terms its use is very small. Exchange students (over 2000) are normally proficient in Spanish, and hence have little difficulty with Catalan.

It is clear that Catalan/Spanish bilingualism is an accepted way of life in Catalonia and at the University. There is no concern at all that Catalan is

under threat, nor is there any fear of English encroaching on either of the two official languages. Accordingly, within the university there is minimal regulation and maximum freedom for both students and staff. The Rector summarised the situation by saying that there is an “internal free market” of course offerings in both languages. He acknowledged that there are some observers outside the university who keep watch on the ratios, but clearly did not regard this as in any way impacting on the business of the university.

This happy situation was not always thus. In fact, the use of Catalan as a language of higher education has a long history of struggle (now apparently considered to be over). Skipping over the complications of Spanish history between the middle ages and the beginning of the 20th century, the story can start with the First Catalan University Congress in early 1903.<sup>32</sup> It drew attention to the fact that, although Barcelona was the leading industrial city of Spain, over 43% of the population was illiterate. Illiteracy and education thus became rallying-cries for Catalan nationalism – particularly against the background of a decree of the Minister of Public Education of November 1902 stating that teaching the catechism in Catalan was prohibited. At the Congress there was a demand for “Catalanizing” the University, and when petitions in this regard were turned down, the *Estudis Universitaris Catalans* was set up as a kind of prototype “National Catalanian University”. The Secretary of the Organising Committee stated that the *Estudis* wished to be:

*... a form of education that had been summoned to awaken all the energies of the nation, to bring to the Catalan people’s knowledge its own integral personality, its interests and its needs ...; in short, to give it an awareness of itself as a nation, and on an intellectual plane, to endow it with the necessary means to develop its national activity.*

This was clearly a nationalist agenda for the University. Spanish history then took its complicated 20th century course. After the first World War Catalanism was promoted by a cadre of new young professors, but this was

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<sup>32</sup> What follows is a short summary of the long story told in a 1991 university publication titled “La Universitat de Barcelona”, by J Termes, S Alcolea, J Casassas and E Lluch.

complicated by the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. When that fell, the new Minister of Public Education of the Second Republic (proclaimed in April 1931) legalized the use of Catalan in teaching. Towards the end of the 1930s, when political forces had shifted again, there was a movement to create a “Catalan University of the Working Classes”. However, this period also saw the beginning of the fascist Franco regime (1939-1975), bringing a new dimension to developments. For example, the Regulating University Law of 1943 required Rectors to be militant in two fascist organisations. By the mid-1950s, however, the need for structural reform was increasingly self-evident. It was only at that time, for example, that universities other than the “official university” in Madrid were permitted to grant doctoral degrees. After the death of Franco there was a period of top-to-bottom reform of the University. Only in 1985, following a Law of University Autonomy, were the definitive Statutes of the University of Barcelona published. Since then, the situation has evolved as described above.

## **2.5 Two bilingual universities in Switzerland and Canada**

Two countries where one would expect to find bilingualism practised under reasonably optimal conditions are Switzerland and Canada. In this section I report on two case studies: the University of Fribourg, and the University of Ottawa.

The University of Fribourg<sup>33</sup> is a French/German bilingual university, the only one in Switzerland. It is small (about 10,000 students), but strategically situated in a charming university town on the border between the south-west French-speaking part of Switzerland, and the north-east German-speaking part. Because of its location, bilingualism has always been a way of life in the canton of Fribourg, but developing bilingualism as a characteristic feature of the University, and a selling point for recruitment purposes, was a conscious strategic choice of the University management. Being small, and with some of its traditional areas of expertise (like Law) being developed also by other Swiss universities,

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<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.unifr.ch>.

Fribourg needed a distinguishing feature and opted for bilingualism. The opening page of its website proclaims: “Founded in 1889, the University of Fribourg Switzerland is unique for its bilingualism (French-German), its international character and its friendly atmosphere”.

Bilingualism in the teaching programme at Fribourg is premised on the fact that Swiss students arrive at University with fluency either in French or German, and at the very least receptive skills in the other language. This is based on the fact that in all cantons there is compulsory exposure to both languages for most of the 13 years of school. In fact, the language requirement is often stricter. In the canton of Fribourg, children would be taught at school in their mother tongue, but instruction in the other national language would be given from age six onwards. In addition, there is compulsory training in a foreign language (typically English) from age eight. The effect is that many students are well capable of following lectures and using study material in French, German or English. In consequence, there is no language competence test for new students, nor are there any “beginners’ classes” in French or German. Of the 10,000 students at the University, just over 50% have German as mother tongue, just under 30% have French, and the rest have a variety of other languages as mother tongue. Language matters at the University are overseen by a Bilingualism Committee, which is a standing committee of the Rectorate, with representation from all sectors of the university. Its function is to advise and support the Rectorate in promoting bilingualism, the promotion of intercultural dialogue, and giving advice concerning the use of English as a teaching language, particularly as regards Master’s programmes.

The last point is important, since the University is, *de facto*, becoming a trilingual institution. As is the case at other European universities mentioned in this report, Fribourg is making a deliberate and serious effort to strengthen its teaching in English. This is part of its internationalisation endeavour, which has been quite successful. Again as elsewhere, this “englishification as part of internationalisation” takes place mainly at the Master’s level. Already almost 18% of the University’s students come from countries other than Switzerland, and these international students are taught in English. As with all other Swiss universities, the University of Fribourg falls under the financial and legislative jurisdiction of its canton.

Fortunately for the university, the language conditions in the University Act are quite liberal. Article 6 on Language reads as follows:<sup>34</sup>

1. *The languages of teaching and administration are French and German.*
2. *The Faculties may use other teaching languages.*
3. *The University will facilitate and promote the understanding between people from different language areas and cultural background; in particular it will foster bilingual studies in French and German.*

The university carries out its cultural mandate of French/German bilingualism in the first place by a strict policy of bilingualism of institutional language. All university documents are available in both languages. Secondly, it has taken an adventurous step in beginning to offer programmes in what is called “Bilingualism Plus”. The idea here is that whereas “ordinary bilingualism” is premised on, and promises no more than, receptive skills in the second language, with the new programme the University aims to deliver fully fluent bilingual speakers as graduates. To effect this, three steps are taken:

- ø Students in the “Bilingualism Plus” programme must take at least 40% of their courses in their second language.
- ø They have to do an additional 4 hours per week of language training over the full four years of their degree programme. (The cost of this training is borne by the students themselves.)
- ø They have to participate in a course of “cultural familiarisation” in their second language.

In taking this step, the University aims to deliver graduates with a competitive edge in the French/German world of government agencies as well as business and industry. The programme was launched for the academic year 2004/05 in the Faculty of Law and the signs are promising. About 80 students signed up for the Bilingualism Plus degree programme and the University succeeded in raising sufficient outside funding to make it financially viable. In addition, the Faculty of Law already had a system of “double professorships”, where the same material is taught both in French

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<sup>34</sup> I quote from the “Gesetz vom 19. November 1997, über die Universität” of the “Der Grosse Rat des Kantons Freiburg” (the “Ruling of 19 November 1997 regarding the University” of the “Great Council of the Fribourg Canton”).



and in German. No additional duplication of lectures was therefore required to mount the “Bilingualism Plus” programme.

Because the funding of universities is a cantonal rather than federal responsibility, there seems to be no standard basis for comparison of funding parameters across the range of Swiss universities. The question of whether the cost of bilingualism at Fribourg University is compensated for by additional funding seemed to be a new one for senior University managers. It is clear, however, that the cultural mandate of bilingualism is part of the understanding of what the university is for, and that the canton actively supports it.

As in Switzerland, so in Canada one can find the understanding of bilingualism as a way of life and a common good. Canada is a vast country with about 32 million people. Of these, about 7,5 million are French speaking, with most of these (about 6 million) living in the province of Quebec. Ottawa, the federal capital, lies symbolically on the border between mostly-English Ontario and mostly-French Quebec. The University of Ottawa<sup>35</sup> (which markets itself as “Canada’s University”) was founded in 1848 and has from its inception seen itself as an institution fostering English-French bilingualism. According to the *Regulation on Bilingualism at the University of Ottawa 1974*, the University must “further bilingualism and biculturalism and preserve and develop French culture in Ontario”. The commitment to bilingualism is more than just a regulatory requirement; it is a core part of the University ethos. Bilingualism is widely appreciated as a cultural and educational benefit, which means the university can use its bilingual ethos also as a marketing tool for drawing students. In its new strategic plan the University intends to play up bilingualism as a strategic advantage.

Bilingualism as institutional policy and practice works well at the University of Ottawa. To understand why and how, it is necessary to understand (a) that there are a significant number of Canadians who are already fully bilingual in French and English, and (b) that it is common for children to grow up bilingually. With the active encouragement of the federal government, schools have long been offering “total immersion”

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<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.uottawa.ca>.

programmes, where children with one home language may learn to speak the other official language as well. What this means is that there is a sufficiently large pool of bilingual potential students for the University to recruit from, and with whom to continue on the path of bilingualism.

Against this background the following specific points can be made to round off the picture.

1. There is a cost to bilingualism, because many services must be provided (e.g. there is a Second Language Institute which provides language courses) and many course offerings are available in two languages, even when student numbers do not justify this. However, *bilingualism at the University is supported by extra government funding*. Some of these extra funds are part of the annual allocation from the provincial government (in Canada universities fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces), and some are competitive federal grants. Naturally the University argues that the extra funding is not enough to cover the extra cost, but in principle there is agreement that bilingualism is and must be supported financially by provincial and federal investment.
2. As regards academic courses: Most degree courses and individual modules are available in both English and French. There are exceptions, e.g. the senior years in more technical subjects such as Engineering and Computer Science, when the Faculty may argue that they cannot find the staff, the course material or the students to justify offering the course in French as well. (It is clear that the fallback option is always English.) If so, the matter must be approved by the Academic Senate. Students may choose which language stream they wish to follow. There is, however, no guarantee given by the University that a student will be able to spend his/her entire study career in one language stream. It is accepted that language specifications may change from one year to the next for practical reasons (new appointees or retirements, staff on sabbatical, course content changed, etc). Should this happen, students are expected to carry on doing such modules in the other language.
3. As regards the students: the University has about 30,000 students, of whom roughly two-thirds have English as their first language and one-

third French. The expectation is that students should have a measure of competence in both languages, with passive skills at least in their second language. However, bilingual competence is not a condition of entry and there is no compulsory language test for new students. The reality is that there are significant numbers of students with zero or minimal competency in French.

4. As regards academic staff: appointments are made on academic merit, but it is made a condition of appointment that proficiency in both French and English must be acquired within a reasonable time (typically 3-5 years). The type of proficiency required (active or passive) depends on the individual appointment. The University uses bilingualism as one of the criteria of granting tenure. According to the University Secretary, there has over time been a small loss factor of potential appointees due to this requirement, but it is not seen as a significant problem. Experience have shown that even when zero-French speakers were appointed, they usually made a conscious effort (supported by the University) to learn French.
5. As regards the institutional language: at Committee meetings, people simply speak in their language of choice, knowing that others will understand. There is no simultaneous translation service, because it is assumed that none is required. Minutes are written in both French and English, even within one document, following the language as it was spoken in the meeting. A resolution reached in English, or French, is recorded in that particular language. All official university documents (policies, procedures, press releases, marketing documents, etc.), are made available in both an English and a French version. There is a Translation Unit to deal with this workload.

Conditions for fostering bilingualism are probably as good at the University of Ottawa as anywhere else in the world. However, even here all is not plain sailing.

- ✘ Bilingualism tends to be one-sided: Francophone Canadians are keen to learn and speak English, but the Anglophone Canadians are not equally keen to learn and speak French.
- ✘ In purely financial terms, bilingualism is a cost to the University, which every now and again raises the question whether it is justified.

The counterargument, which thus far has stood the test of time, is that the financial cost is offset by cultural and national gains.

- ø Senior members of management report that there remains a certain tension within the student body about language matters. Especially Francophone students insist that they should not be short-changed, and that the University's commitment to bilingualism must have the practical outcome of parity between the two languages. This is difficult for the University to achieve.
- ø Until about 12 years ago a certified measure of competence in bilingualism was a condition of graduation. That requirement has since been dropped. It would be gratifying to say that this was done because its use had become superfluous. The reality, however, is that it was dropped because its use was unsustainable. Students were not universally appreciative of being (as some saw it) coerced into bilingualism, and the University was beginning to experience the requirement as a drawback from a marketing point of view.

## 2.6 Observations

The **first observation** arising from the case studies above is that there is a strong drift towards English. The reasons relate broadly to globalisation and the drive for internationalisation from the universities themselves, and in Europe specifically to the conditions of the Bologna Agreement. University management is generally in favour of this drift and in some cases is deliberately facilitating it.

The **second observation** is that bilingualism costs money. More generally, multilingualism in any form is a cost for the university that practises it. There are direct and indirect costs. The direct costs would include the extra staff required to double up on teaching, the cost of translation, the cost of printing teaching material and institutional documentation in two or more languages, the cost of offering language courses, and usually the cost of maintaining some kind of Language Centre. The indirect costs relate to the academic energy that goes into fostering bilingualism. In cases where it is not financially viable to double up on teaching staff to the same extent as duplicating courses, the staff has to carry a higher teaching load, with negative consequences for research.

Moreover, bilingualism typically requires some institutional energy to go into committee work (for policy-making or monitoring), administration, or internal governance structures.

To balance the observation that bilingualism costs money, it should be pointed out that *not* dealing with multilingualism where it exists may also entail a societal cost. Even the option of total separation into double monolingualism, as was practised in Leuven for example, involved a massive initial outlay of funds to build a parallel university on a greenfields site. In other places the cost of not dealing with multilingualism may feature differently – such as, for example, teaching in English to students not adequately skilled in English (perhaps by staff who are not English speaking either).

The **third observation** is that there is usually some kind of *cultural mandate* at work, emanating from the environment and historical context within which the university is situated. Of these there are two broad types. The first may be called the *protectionist model*. This applies when there is a perceived need for measures to safeguard a language (typically a minority language) against the encroachment of a majority language, or a world language (typically English). Historically, the protectionist model may also relate to some form of nationalism, or minority rights. The *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven* and the *Åbo Akademi* are examples. The other broad type of cultural mandate may be called the *multiculturalist model*. This manifests a belief in the value of bringing different language groups together in an environment conducive to interaction. The multiculturalist model often applies in locations on the borderline between two linguistic regions – like Ottawa or Fribourg.

The **fourth observation** is that university management often favour the multiculturalist model, and may promote bilingualism as a cultural benefit. They are typically less enthusiastic about the protectionist model – particularly when the “protection” sought is against English. University professors and managers tend to find prescriptive protectionist measures irksome, even where they themselves may strive to support multiculturalist measures. Leuven and Ottawa would each be a case in point. An instructive other example is the case of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in Galway. In 1929, eight years after independence, the

Irish government passed an act making the ability to teach in the Irish language a condition for appointment to the academic staff of what was then known as the University College Galway. This requirement eventually came to be seen<sup>36</sup> as too restrictive, and the University successfully lobbied government to have the Act amended to include only a general requirement that the University should promote and provide Irish-medium education.

The **fifth observation** is that there is no one-size-fits-all scenario – just from the few case studies above, a wide range of different circumstances and policies can already be distinguished. For example:

- ø The languages in question may be reasonably closely related (like Spanish and Catalan) or quite different (like Finnish and Swedish).
- ø A minority language in one location may be majority language elsewhere. French is a minority language in Canada, but not in France; Swedish is a minority language in Finland, but not in Scandinavia. On the other hand, a majority language in one country or region may, in the broader context, be quite a small language. Finnish is a small language, and so is Dutch, in the European context, even though both are majority languages in their respective countries.
- ø Language policies tend to differ according to location and history. We have already noted the phenomenon of border-city universities and the influence of nationalist policies.

The **sixth observation** is that, even though there are no identical situations, there are nonetheless a number of similarities when it comes to the practicalities of dealing with multilingualism. These include:

- ø The provision of study material. Increasingly, these are in English, even at undergraduate level.
- ø The desire to increase the number of international students and the use of English as a teaching language for them.

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<sup>36</sup> Personal communication from the Rector of NUI, Prof. Iognaid O’Muircheartaigh, 9 November 2005.

- ð The issues of recruitment of academic staff outside of language boundaries, and the issue of balancing the cultural mandate with the demands of being internationally competitive, particularly in research.

The **seventh observation** is that the university must balance and manage competing agendas. Multilingualism versus the demands of academic output is one example – specifically when there is no extra funding or support available from the state for the multilingualism agenda. On the one hand, each university needs to carve out a niche for itself and multilingualism is one way of doing so. It can be (and mostly is) used as a selling point. On the other hand, universities are fiercely competitive regarding the standard parameters for international academic competitiveness, and multilingualism requires a lot of institutional energy that might have been better spent on other academic enterprises. If the choice is made for multilingualism, other competing agendas kick in. Should the model be protectionist or multiculturalist? Both will have protagonists, and the demand for a protectionist model emanating from a minority that perceives itself to be at risk can be quite fierce. In either case, whatever the model is for the local languages, there is also (possibly in addition) the case of English as an international language, and the demands of delivering internationally competitive graduates. Whatever decisions are taken about what is desirable, it remains necessary to balance these with what is possible, given the constraints of the budget.

Finally, there is actually comparatively little research on bilingualism or multilingualism in *higher* education; previous work having focused mostly on primary or secondary education. Paradoxically, it was the comparatively recent introduction of *English* programmes in European universities that revived the issue of promoting bilingualism in higher education and made academics take notice of bilingual universities on their doorstep.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> I am indebted for this point to the sociolinguist Prof. Christa van der Walt.

*The taaldebate:*  
*Demands on Stellenbosch*

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The story of how the apartheid government, the African National Congress and other stakeholders sat down at the negotiation table and hammered out a new social contract that led to the democratic elections of 27 April 1994 still remains to be fully told. One of the compromises made had to do with the issue of language. To have English as the only official language (as Namibia had done, even though very few of its inhabitants were mother-tongue English speakers) was not acceptable to one of the parties. To continue with Afrikaans and English as the only two official languages was not acceptable to another party. And so the decision was reached in favour of 11 official languages, with the relevant passages in the Constitution cited in Chapter 1.

Thus, even in the lead-up to democracy language was an issue and the first bugles had been blown about Afrikaans being endangered. What may be called the *algemene taaldebate* (“general debate about Afrikaans”) gathered momentum after 1994, as the perception grew that Afrikaans was being eroded, either through benign neglect, or worse, through some active anti-Afrikaans agenda. The use of Afrikaans in the courts, the percentage of programmes in Afrikaans on radio and TV, changes in place names and road signs, the labels on wine bottles or yoghurt cartons – no change away from Afrikaans escaped notice, or negative response. Thus the *algemene taaldebate* became a kind of trench warfare, every inch of territory being fought for – only to be grudgingly conceded in the end.

Nowhere, however, has the insistence on the rights of Afrikaans, or the debate about its future, been more fierce than in the area of education. Within education, most attention has been given to tertiary education. And within tertiary education, most of the attention has been focussed on Stellenbosch University.



I will not attempt an overview of the *algemene taaldebat*. I will concentrate on the debate as it relates to Stellenbosch and the demands being made on the University. This is the *Stellenbosch taaldebat*, and it is the topic of this chapter. In the next chapter I will respond to these views and demands.

### 3.1 What kind of Afrikaans?

Inherent to the *taaldebat* is a paradox, which is that almost all the material and sources making a case for Afrikaans are available only in Afrikaans. Therefore, to many of those who need convincing, the arguments are inaccessible, and to many of those who can access the arguments, convincing is not necessary. As a result of being conducted almost entirely in Afrikaans, the *taaldebat* has not yet become a truly national debate, since most South Africans are simply unaware of it.

A book that could have been a good starting point for a national debate, but, being available only in Afrikaans, wasn't, is *Kruispad: Die toekoms van Afrikaans as openbare taal* ("Crossroads: The future of Afrikaans as public language"), edited by Hermann Giliomee and Lawrence Schlemmer.<sup>1</sup> It displays many of the characteristic features, and makes many of the canonical arguments, of the *taaldebat*.

There is, firstly, and despite a title promising a discourse on Afrikaans as public language, an immediate and sustained focus on Afrikaans as university language. And the reason for this soon becomes clear. What is regarded as important is not Afrikaans as a vernacular, but Afrikaans as regards its "higher functions". In their own overview chapter, Giliomee and Schlemmer, in one paragraph,<sup>2</sup> make it quite clear that they believe the use of Afrikaans at tertiary level is crucial to its survival as a language with "higher functions", and that a language without "higher functions" is a second-rate language.

*The single greatest danger for Afrikaans is, however, that if Afrikaans as university language should diminish or disappear, it would mean the*

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<sup>1</sup> *Kruispad: Die toekoms van Afrikaans as openbare taal*, ed. H Giliomee and L Schlemmer, Tafelberg, 2001. (Published with the financial assistance of *Het Jan Marais Nasionale Fonds*, Stellenbosch.)

<sup>2</sup> *Kruispad*, p. 118.

*downfall of Afrikaans as language of science, as disciplinary language, as language of intellectual discourse and eventually also as literary language.*

*Many languages have survived at grassroots level. isiZulu, seSotho and many other indigenous languages provide proof of this claim. Also, there is little doubt that Afrikaans will survive in sport stadiums, bars, cafes, lounges and bedrooms. But who will take it seriously if it does not excel at the intellectual and professional level? As with other indigenous African languages, Afrikaans would in such a case be decapitated.*

The “single greatest danger”, then, is not that Afrikaans, the language, would disappear. In a paper celebrating the 80th anniversary of Afrikaans becoming an official language,<sup>3</sup> Giliomee makes it quite clear that the survival *per se* of Afrikaans is not the issue.

*The future of Afrikaans as a language of discourse and informal vernacular is assured. Its future as a public language with higher cultural functions is seriously endangered.*

This is clearly an important point. The *taaldebat*, as far as it follows this line of reasoning (which, in the main, it does) is not about Afrikaans as such. It is about a certain *kind* of Afrikaans, and a *certain status* for Afrikaans. What this status amounts to, Giliomee explains<sup>4</sup> as follows:

*By 1999, Afrikaans was still the most important literary language in South Africa, measured by the number of books published locally. Almost three times as much fiction (poetry, dramas and novels) was published in Afrikaans as in English, and twice as many as in the indigenous black languages. It is generally accepted that the level of poetry in Afrikaans is considerably higher than that of English, and that the novelist Karel Schoeman can be named in the same breath as literary greats. In the case of non-fiction, English is ahead because the political crisis in South Africa became internationalised and there was a considerable market for books in English. But in historiography Afrikaans was particularly strong. Between 1938 and 1989, 160 historical works, mainly theses, were published in the Archival Year*

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<sup>3</sup> H Giliomee, *Afrikaans 80*, see [www.praag.co.za/opstelle83gil.htm](http://www.praag.co.za/opstelle83gil.htm).

<sup>4</sup> In the same paper cited in the previous footnote.

*Book for South African history, the great majority in Afrikaans. In law all the main areas were covered by Afrikaans books, written by disciplinary experts.*

You can almost hear the echo of JH Marais muttering from beyond the grave: *No lesser place than English!*

There are various responses one can make about such claims for Afrikaans, but I will not do so here. Instead, at the risk of labouring the point, I give some more examples. For Giliomee is by no means alone in his evaluation of the achievements of Afrikaans. In *Kruispad*, for example, law professor Max Loubser writes:<sup>5</sup>

*People sometimes forget that Afrikaans as legal language developed in a remarkably short time – the last 70 years of the 20th century. This achievement is not equalled anywhere in Africa by an indigenous language.*

...

*The golden age of Afrikaans as judicial language was from the late sixties to the early nineties.*

Again, one might note that this “golden age of Afrikaans as judicial language” coincided pretty much with the “golden age” of apartheid, when by and large it was Afrikaners who made the law, applied the law and administered the law. And one might consider the possibility (as, in fact, the Gerwel Committee did) that there was a causal connection between the political power of the Afrikaners, and Afrikaans acquiring at least some of its “higher functions”. On this score, however, Giliomee has absolutely no uncertainty:<sup>6</sup>

*One often hears, for example, the nonsense that Afrikaans had a special advantage in the era of white rule in South Africa. The real state of affairs is that functional and actual equality between English and Dutch was the cornerstone of the constitution which the Union of South Africa adopted in 1909. In 1925 Afrikaans inherited this position from Dutch.*

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<sup>5</sup> *Kruispad*, p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> In the paper *Afrikaans 80*, cited in footnote 3 above.

*The state therefore built Afrikaans schools and universities, published official documents in two languages, compelled officials to be bilingual, advertised in Afrikaans, and made provision for Afrikaans-language radio and television stations. This was not “advantaging” Afrikaans, but discharging its constitutional duty.*

As a final example of displaying the higher functions of Afrikaans, consider the book entitled *Afrikaans, Lewende Taal van Miljoene*<sup>7</sup> (“Afrikaans, Living Language of Millions”). Published under the auspices of “The Friday Group” – without any explanation of who or what the Friday Group is – the book originated, according to the editor, from the necessity for Afrikaans “to display its assets, not in order to be boastful, but to draw sober attention to what the country may lose if the downscaling [of Afrikaans] is to be condoned and meekly accepted”.<sup>8</sup> Its 22 contributors, mostly retired white Afrikaner males, then discourse on the assets of Afrikaans in the arts, broadcasting, education, law, theology, science and technology, and so on. Again, there is a strong sense of pride in the “higher functions”.

*Afrikaans is no “nondescript little language” – its greatest literary texts are in no way inferior to the word-achievements of a world language like English.*<sup>9</sup>

As with Giliomee pointing out one particular piece of “nonsense” regarding the relationship between Afrikaans and Afrikaner political power, *Lewende Taal* also contains a number of contributions intended, as the editor writes in the preface, “to put misperceptions under the magnifying glass”. One of the six items thus examined is the “misperception” that the 1976 youth uprising in Soweto was essentially directed against Afrikaans. The author tasked with addressing this “misperception” is Advocate Louis Pienaar, a former Cabinet Minister during the apartheid years. The bibliography cited

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<sup>7</sup> Ed. Fij van Rensburg, Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria, 2004, 190 pp. Financial backing came from the *Afrikanerbond*, the *Dameskring* (“Ladies’ Circle”), *Solidariteit* and the *Taalsekretariaat* (“Language Secretariat”).

<sup>8</sup> From the Introduction to *Lewende Taal van Miljoene* (entitled “Justification”), pp. ix-x.

<sup>9</sup> R. Pretorius, *Lewende Taal*, p. 2.

by Advocate Pienaar is perhaps a little short, containing as it does only one item, namely the Report of the One-man Commission of Inquiry (Judge PM Cillié) appointed by the then government in the wake of the Soweto uprising. Nonetheless, in a fascinating contribution, drawing on this source, Advocate Pienaar comes to the conclusion<sup>10</sup> that:

*There can be little doubt that ... Afrikaans was made a political scapegoat. ... They [the youth leaders of Soweto] were cold-blooded enough to lead defenceless pupils into the crossfire. The role of intimidation should also not be disregarded.*

...

*[There was] a reckless exploitation of the situation for political gain by black power movements, cum suis, which sent 15 pupils to their death, and which led, in the aftermath, during unrest lasting another two years, to the death of a further 500 people.*

### **3.2 The notion of an “Afrikaans university”**

A second characteristic feature of the *taaldebat*, particularly in the Afrikaans press, has been the centrality of the notion of an “Afrikaans university”, to the extent that a large part of the acres of newsprint that have appeared on the topic is not so much about the language Afrikaans as it is about a certain kind of university.

If the real issue about Afrikaans is indeed the preservation of its “higher functions”, one can understand the focus on Afrikaans at university level. It is at universities, the argument goes, that the “higher functions” of language are to be nurtured, honed and preserved. And, indeed, this is also a conclusion of the Gerwel Committee: Afrikaans *does* have “higher functions”, there *is* a danger of erosion, and some universities *should* be addressing this:

*Afrikaans is no longer the dominant and officially favoured and protected language it was until democratic change. Many of the high-status functions it obtained competencies for are in danger of being eroded ...*

...

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<sup>10</sup> *Lewende Taal*, p.140.

*There is in our view the need for an agreement ... one or more universities that shall have the specific obligation to cater for the (continued) development of Afrikaans as a language of high-status functions, including particularly those of science or scholarship.*<sup>11</sup>

More generally (as we saw in Chapter 1):

*In practical terms this would require that, for each of the official African languages (amongst which we consider Afrikaans for these purposes), one or more universities be assigned the task of promoting the development of that language.*<sup>12</sup>

The Gerwel report said that Afrikaans should be *promoted* and that one or more universities should be assigned the responsibility for doing so. What the Gerwel report did *not* say is that there should be one or more “Afrikaans universities”. The idea of Stellenbosch as being *essentially* an “Afrikaans university”, and that it must be *maintained* as such, is a thread running through the entire *taaldebat*. It is therefore worth considering how the notion of a university that is “assigned the task of promoting the development” of Afrikaans morphed into the notion of an “Afrikaans university”.

But first: what *is* an “Afrikaans university”? This question has hardly been asked during the entire *taaldebat* – as though, even if the existence of an “Afrikaans university” needs to be argued for, its nature needs no explaining. One definition, at least, can be found in a paper entitled “University Education in Afrikaans”, in the Giliomee/Schlemmer book *Kruispad*:<sup>13</sup>

*The designated Afrikaans-medium universities should therefore be classified as such in respect of the following:*

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<sup>11</sup> Gerwel report, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Gerwel report, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Bertie du Plessis: “*Universiteitsonderrig in Afrikaans. Toewysing van universiteite volgens onderrigtaal: demografiese, ekonomiese en onderwysdata*” (“University teaching in Afrikaans. Designation of universities according to language of tuition: demographic, economic and educational data”). In *Kruispad*, pp. 15-33.

- ∅ *All residential students should have a reasonable knowledge of Afrikaans, should be able to follow lectures in Afrikaans, and should be able to participate in student activities in Afrikaans.*
- ∅ *Academics who teach at undergraduate level must be able to lecture in Afrikaans.*

*The goal is to ensure that these universities have the following characteristics: the business of the convocation, council, senate, students' representative council and the official student publications is conducted in Afrikaans, and undergraduate education is offered only in Afrikaans; at postgraduate level this may be relaxed, especially because of smaller numbers and more international interaction.*

In summary, then: an “Afrikaans university” is one where all undergraduate students can understand Afrikaans, all undergraduate education takes place only in Afrikaans, all official business is conducted in Afrikaans and all student activities take place in Afrikaans.

The author of this definition concludes, on the basis of an analysis of demographic, economic and educational data, that “Afrikaans speakers are entitled to between 2,7 and 7,8 residential universities”.<sup>14</sup> Later in the *Kruispad* book, Giliomee and Schlemmer offer, somewhat in passing, their own definition of an Afrikaans university:<sup>15</sup>

*[The best way is ...] to follow at two of the historically Afrikaans universities an institutional language policy which entrenches Afrikaans as primary language. The needs of other-language students should be taken into consideration and reasonable concessions be made, but the rule must be that no subject will be offered in English at second-year level, and that at first-year level this will be done only where class sizes justify it and Afrikaans will not be undermined. This institutional language policy should be clearly laid down and be non-negotiable. Academics should be informed that any deviation will be regarded as a serious misdemeanour.*

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<sup>14</sup> *Kruispad*, p.23.

<sup>15</sup> *Kruispad*, p. 125.

As with the previous definition, “Afrikaans university” is clearly understood here as one where undergraduate education is, with at most a few exceptions, offered only in Afrikaans. There must be, as it were, a *cordon sanitaire* around Afrikaans as undergraduate medium of instruction, no contamination from the English virus being allowed. And this quarantine must be enforced.

There is a no-compromise attitude taking shape here.<sup>16</sup> Giliomee, writing on his own in *Kruispad*, reinforces the idea of compulsion:<sup>17</sup>

*Language policy at a university should not be devolved to a department or to the individual academic; there must be a university policy and it must be rigorously enforced.*

The Afrikaners have always had an authoritarian streak in them, but in this case there is more than just a cultural attribute behind the insistence on compulsion. It is based, namely, on one aspect of an argument put forward by a French-Canadian author called Jean Laponce more than 20 years ago. Laponce, and in particular his 1987 book *Languages and Their Territories*<sup>18</sup> (translated from the original French), have been so frequently cited by Giliomee and other *taalstryders* as to embody the Bellman’s dictum that “what I tell you three times is true”.<sup>19</sup> It is worth looking at the entirety of Laponce’s thesis, and I will do so in Chapter 4. For the moment, though, we should just pay attention to what Laponce is *reported* to be saying:

*The French-Canadian language sociologist Jean Laponce shows, by using studies in Canada, Belgium and the Soviet Union, that when a universal language is the language of the state and of commerce, a parallel- or dual-medium system at a university is fatal for the smaller language.*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Here also is the conceptual origin of the “slippery slope” argument so prominent in the rhetoric of the *taaldebat*. I will comment on this metaphor later in this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> *Kruispad*, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> JA Laponce, *Languages and Their Territories*, University of Toronto, 1987.

<sup>19</sup> In Lewis Carroll’s poem *The Hunting of the Snark*.

<sup>20</sup> Hermann Giliomee and Lawrence Schlemmer, *Kruispad*, p. 3.



You will find a similar passage, of about the same length, citing the same authority, in many of the *Kruispad*-type of writings on Afrikaans. I have to say, though, that the closest approximation to this view I have found in Laponce's own book is the following comment:

*However, a bilingual school system generally has only the appearance of equality. Even when it is balanced at the level of courses, it is in fact unbalanced in favour of the dominant language which dominates the environment outside the school. Bilingualism in education is thus generally a bilingualism of transition, which in the long run facilitates linguistic assimilation with the dominant group.*<sup>21</sup>

The Laponcian view, or at least the interpretation given to Laponce above, justifies a hard-line definition of an "Afrikaans university" on two grounds. The first is the argument that the smaller language must have a clearly delineated and strongly defended little territory of its own, within which it will be dominant. The weaker, so goes the argument, must have a strongly defended territory within which it will be the stronger – that is, within which the minority will be the majority.

In short, on this argument, *Afrikaans needs an enclave to survive*.

Secondly, it is argued further that even the smallest concession would escalate the potential "transition" where the smaller language, inevitably it is claimed, loses out to the dominant language. This is commonly illustrated in the *taaldebat* with the picturesque metaphor of the smaller language being on a "slippery slope" to extinction. Even just a small movement may make you lose control.

For historical reasons, for demographic reasons and for ideological reasons, the possibility that most easily springs to mind as an Afrikaans enclave would be Stellenbosch. No surprise, then, that almost everybody agrees that if there *are* to be any "Afrikaans universities", Stellenbosch would be one of them. What does not spring to mind quite so easily, but which has

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<sup>21</sup> JA Laponce, *Languages and Their Territories*, University of Toronto, 1987, p.170.

nonetheless been maintained, is that for the survival of Afrikaans, Stellenbosch is actually *indispensable*. Giliomee again:<sup>22</sup>

*If Stellenbosch University is to verengels any further, then it is Ichabod for Afrikaans.*

One can only speculate about what this implies about our other 9 indigenous languages, none of which is a “university language”, or has a designated university of its own.

### **3.3 The neo-Afrikaners**

A third feature of the *taaldebat* is that it is embedded in another discussion, one about Afrikaner identity. As a topic, the nature of *Afrikanerskap* has occupied Afrikaner intellectuals about as long as there have been Afrikaners.<sup>23</sup> But that is not the issue here. My concern is with a recent development, still taking shape: the rise of the neo-Afrikaners.

In February 2004, close to the ten-year anniversary of the “miracle election” of 1994, an interesting short article appeared in *Rapport* under the title *Daar’s weer lewe ná tien jaar* (“There’s life again *after* ten years”), by Flip Buys, the CEO of the trade union *Solidariteit*. It starts off by talking about Afrikaans:<sup>24</sup>

*It seems that, after ten years, the Afrikaans community is beginning to shake off its paralysis and starting to live again.*

*It is too early to speak of a large-scale revival, but a new energy is coming to the fore. Those who wish for an old-fashioned nationalistic uprising in aid of a better past will hope in vain. It is, rather, the first tentative steps of a modern Afrikaans movement focused on the future rather than the past. A*

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<sup>22</sup> *Kruispad*, p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> The canonical work on the history of the Afrikaners is Hermann Giliomee’s magisterial volume *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Tafelberg and the University of Virginia Press, 2003). First published in English, the book was subsequently translated into Afrikaans and published with the financial assistance of the *Het Jan Marais Nasionale Fonds*.

<sup>24</sup> *Rapport*, 21 November 2004.

*movement that, in a sometimes very hostile environment, tries to open a new democratic space for Afrikaans.*

Within a few paragraphs, however, the talk is no longer about Afrikaans, but about Afrikaners.

*New Afrikaners are not yearning for the past, are not just moaning and groaning, would like to reach out to their compatriots, but are also not gullible yard monkeys<sup>25</sup> who believe that everything will be fine as long as we trust the government to look after our welfare. They love this country, but are not afraid to criticise the government where necessary. They are prepared to cooperate where they can, but they know that greater independence for the Afrikaners is necessary for their future.*

Buyts then mentions a few recent success stories of the Afrikaners such as: the new image of the Voortrekker Monument, the many actions regarding Afrikaans, the growth of *Solidariteit* itself, the “community alliance” between *Solidariteit*, the *Afrikanerbond* and the Afrikaans churches, and the rejuvenation of the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (FAK – the “Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organisations”), concluding that:

*All the signs are there that Afrikaners are leaving their subservience behind, and are coming of age as democrats.*

*Solidariteit*, as Buyts rightly says, is a success story. It grew out of the old *Mynwerkersunie* (the Mine Workers Union), and, under a dynamic young Afrikaner leadership, has transformed itself into a sleek and efficient labour organisation, with a thousand branches in around 7 000 workplaces around the country. If you look up its website and click on the heading “*Wie is ons*”<sup>26</sup> (“Who are we”), you find *Solidariteit* defining itself in terms of twelve criteria, the last of which reads:

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<sup>25</sup> “Yard monkeys” is my translation of *wesbobbegane* – a pejorative term describing useless hangers-on. I believe the expression has its origin in the common habit of *platteland* Afrikaners a few decades ago to keep a monkey or baboon chained to a pedestal in the back yard.

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.solidaritysa.co.za/Tuis/wie\\_is\\_ons.html](http://www.solidaritysa.co.za/Tuis/wie_is_ons.html)

## 12. Afrikaans organisation.

*Solidariteit organises members on the basis of free association, within the framework of the Constitution and the realities of our country. The union is traditionally an Afrikaans organisation and, without being exclusive, it is mostly members of minority groups concerned about the outcomes of unfair corrective action who associate themselves with the union. These groups are regarded as the niche market of Solidariteit, since they are the least organised groups as regards trade unions.*

This is shrewd positioning as well as clever writing. The “minority group” most concerned about corrective action is surely the Afrikaners. (Curiously, though, if you enter the website not through the medium of Afrikaans, but through the English option, and click on the *English* “Who are we” button<sup>27</sup>, you find only eleven criteria listed, not twelve – the one about *Solidariteit* being an Afrikaans organisation having disappeared.<sup>28</sup>) A year later Buys, by now a regular contributor to *Rapport*, again followed up the theme of a new *Afrikanerskap*. Under the heading *Só kan Afrikaner na nuwe toekoms reik* (“This is how the Afrikaner can reach for a new future”) he writes:

*A great stumbling-block is that, constitutional protection notwithstanding, the voice of Afrikaners in their schools, universities, workplaces, local governments and other institutions is systematically being eroded. ... For many Afrikaners it seems as though the ANC is continuing its struggle with the help of state power, as if the government is conducting a cold war against Afrikaans and Afrikaans institutions. ... Of course the question of what the Afrikaner community should be doing in the next decade has no easy or final answers. Most important, however, is that Afrikaners will have to learn to function successfully as a group in the new environment. ... A common Afrikaans agenda will have to be developed for this purpose, as well as a*

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<sup>27</sup> [http://www.solidaritysa.co.za/Home/who\\_are\\_we.html](http://www.solidaritysa.co.za/Home/who_are_we.html)

<sup>28</sup> This was the case from early January 2006, when I first noticed it, until this manuscript was completed at the end of February. Just to make sure that I did not misinterpret the functioning of *Solidariteit*'s website, I had it checked by the Stellenbosch University Information Technology Department, who in turn had it verified by the University's internal auditors, KPMG.

*coordinating forum to drive and manage the process, and to deal with the interaction with the broad Afrikaner community.*

One begins to see a pattern: a primary concern with Afrikanerdom (“as a group”), but presented in a cloak of concern about Afrikaans, the language.

The same pattern can be observed in the re-engineering of the FAK, the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings*. The name itself suggests an umbrella organisation for those concerned with the language Afrikaans, and according to its home page<sup>29</sup> it does have Afrikaans organisations as members. Indeed, for long the FAK was probably best known for the *FAK Sangbundel* – the compendium of popular Afrikaans folk songs which virtually every Afrikaner child grew up with. In September 2004, however, the FAK elected a new Chair, Professor Danie Goosen, who sent out, within weeks of taking office, a message recommitting the FAK to its original charter:<sup>30</sup>

*As you know, Afrikaners and the Afrikaans community are today facing a number of historic challenges. Against this background the FAK would like to recommit itself to the primary aims of the FAK as formulated in its Founding Charter, namely “establishing, fusing, maintaining and promoting Afrikaner interests and maintaining and promoting the Afrikaans language and culture”.*

So the federation of *Afrikaans* cultural organisations has recommitted itself to promoting *Afrikaner* interests. Since then the FAK has started an internet magazine called *Die Vrye Afrikaan*,<sup>31</sup> which has concerned itself a great deal with the *taaldebat* generally and Stellenbosch in particular. It has also embarked on a national round of consultative meetings on the topic *Afrikaners en die Nasionale Vraagstuk* (“Afrikaners and the National Question”). The aim is “to consult with Afrikaners on how the relationship between the Afrikaners as a cultural-historical community and the state can be placed on a sensible footing”. In his Christmas message for 2005 Professor Goosen reported as follows:

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<sup>29</sup> See <http://www.fak.org.za/page.php?id=1>.

<sup>30</sup> Email widely distributed on 27 October 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Literally, “The free African”. See [www.vryeafrikaan.co.za](http://www.vryeafrikaan.co.za).

*The FAK approaches these meetings from the position of one central question: how can democracy in South Africa today be strengthened and extended? By “democracy” we refer to the constitutional dispensation by which unity as well as plurality (of, amongst others, cultural-historical communities) are recognised and celebrated. In other words, the question at issue is how the federational aspects of the existing constitutional dispensation can be extended and strengthened.*

Afrikaners, Professor Goosen reports...

*are agreed that the federational aspects of the Constitution, and in particular those constitutional stipulations which give a meaningful voice to cultural-historical communities, are currently under severe pressure. The perception amongst Afrikaners is that the federational aspects of the Constitution are being weakened by centralist tendencies in the state.*

Thus the neo-Afrikaners are regrouping, not in the first place around language, but around identity. *Afrikanerdom* is being repositioned as an endangered minority within a liberal democracy.

From a strategic point of view this must be judged a good move. Internationally, there is currently a debate questioning many of the tenets of classic liberalism and asking how minority rights can be accommodated within a framework of majority decision-making.<sup>32</sup> At a stroke the entire debate around minority rights and multiculturalism becomes applicable to *Afrikanerdom*, and all the arguments in favour of group rights are swung into place behind the re-engineering of *Afrikanerskap*. And the purpose of such a redefinition? To retain a collective identity, but this time a legitimate one, occupying the moral high ground. For this purpose the neo-Afrikaners – the ones who wish to “extend democracy” to “give a meaningful voice to cultural-historical communities” – are using exactly

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<sup>32</sup> Entire volumes have been devoted to this topic in recent years. A good starting-point is Will Kymlicka’s book *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995). For a contrary point of view see Brian Barry’s book *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge, England, Polity Press, 2001). An author sometimes cited in the *taaldebat* is Charles Taylor, particularly his book *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton University Press, 1995).

those rights and privileges guaranteed by that admirable Constitution, the benefits of which Afrikaners wished to deny to others before 1994.

Consider the following thought experiment. If you wish to embark on the path of positioning your “cultural-historical” group as an endangered minority within a liberal democracy, what is it you would require?

Firstly, you must of course have cultural organisations, since being a *cultural* minority is the key to being eligible for the benefits of the international argument regarding multiculturalism. Fortunately, Afrikanerdom has a plethora of those. Besides the FAK, which evidently sees a leadership role for itself, many of the old Afrikaner organisations have continued pretty much as they were: the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* (“South African Academy for Science and the Arts” – except that it does not seem to have an English name), the *Broederbond* (renamed the *Afrikanerbond*), the *Voortrekkers* (Afrikaner equivalent of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides movement), the *Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging* (“Afrikaans Language and Cultural Organisation”), and so on. In addition, a bewildering array of sometimes ephemeral and generally not highly structured organisations and informal discussion groups have sprung up since 1994: the *Groep van 63* (“Group of 63”), *Taalsekretariaat* (“Language Secretariat”), *Vriende van Afrikaans* (“Friends of Afrikaans”), and so on.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, a strong and active labour organisation would be very useful – a role amply fulfilled for the Afrikaners by *Solidariteit*. Far from the old image of a union of mine workers, *Solidariteit* has rapidly moved into

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<sup>33</sup> For completeness, and because his hyperactivity in propounding extremist views regarding *Afrikanerskap* and Afrikaans brings him to the notice even of the English press, the one-man organisation called *Pro-Afrikaanse Aksiegroep* (PRAAG) of Dr Dan Roodt, and his website [www.praag.co.za](http://www.praag.co.za), must also be mentioned. Dr Roodt’s views are often so distasteful that people do not wish to enter into debate with him. Thus, for example, when the organisers of the Stellenbosch *Woordfees* (“Wordfest”) invited him, “as an author”, to participate in their programme, this created a minor controversy of its own, with some invited participants withdrawing rather than having to share the stage with Dr Roodt. Stellenbosch University took the unusual step at that time of publishing (in *Die Burger* and *The Argus*, 19 March 2005) a statement, as an advertisement, saying that the University does not wish to be associated with the views of Dr Roodt.

white-collar territory and built up a public image of being streetwise and gutsy in protecting Afrikaners against affirmative action. Within weeks of Stellenbosch University embarking on a restructuring exercise, *Solidariteit* ran an advertisement<sup>34</sup> on campus inviting disgruntled staff members to “Join *Solidariteit* now – the union with bite!”.

This is not the place for a discussion on the merits or demerits of affirmative action, but it is worth mentioning that, in the same way as the Afrikaners are tapping into an international debate on multiculturalism, as well as an international debate on multilingualism, international opinion on – or rather against – affirmative action has also been brought to bear on the local situation. A good example is the book *Affirmative Action Around the World: An Empirical Study*,<sup>35</sup> by Thomas Sowell, a black American conservative. Sowell argues, and cites data from India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Nigeria in support of his point, that experience has shown that *affirmative action does not work*. It is a well-argued book and Sowell is a highly regarded academic. But it is richly ironic when Afrikaners, surely an excellent example of a minority that benefited from a very successful programme of affirmative action, hold up Sowell’s work as an argument against current government policy – as the Deputy CEO of *Solidariteit* did in a speech to the Cape Press Club.<sup>36</sup>

Thirdly, you need a sympathetic press – a press that gives you space, engages with your arguments, and by the volume of their sales helps to propagate your ideas. Here the position for the neo-Afrikaners could hardly be better. The Afrikaans newspapers<sup>37</sup> are all in the Naspers stable – Naspers being the descendant of *De Nasionale Pers* founded (in Stellenbosch) at around the same time as the National Party and Stellenbosch University. There is therefore a rich institutional memory of Afrikanerdom to draw upon and a guaranteed interest in the subject. Also, Afrikaans is not only a matter of cultural interest to the Afrikaans media – it is a matter of hard-

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<sup>34</sup> On the University’s own e-mail system – quite illegally, and not repeated since, but the desired effect had been achieved.

<sup>35</sup> Yale University Press, 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Reported in *Die Burger*, 4 March 2005.

<sup>37</sup> *Die Burger* in the Western Cape, *Beeld* in Gauteng, *Volksblad* in the Free State and *Rapport* as a national Sunday newspaper.



nosed business interest. Afrikaans newspapers need Afrikaans readers and any investment that might be considered advantageous to the future of Afrikaans is likely to be considered money well spent.<sup>38</sup> Thus, for example, we find Naspers as the main backer of an organisation called *Stigting vir Bemagtiging deur Afrikaans* (“Foundation for Empowerment through Afrikaans”), or the recently-established *Suidoosterfees* (“South-Easter Festival”) promoting Afrikaans.

Fourthly, and key to the entire enterprise of positioning the Afrikaners as an endangered minority within a liberal democracy: you need an *intellectual nexus*. You need some ideas of a “cultural-historical” nature as a bonding agent for a group of people who *think alike*. And what better bonding agent could there be than the issue of Afrikaans as an endangered language? After all, the language in which we think and write and speak is an important factor in *how* we think, write and speak. In formulating our thoughts, in any language, we are to some extent conditioned by the structural features of that language, its metaphors and its literature. Ideally, in addition to such an intellectual territory, you should also have had some fairly well-delineated geographical territory. This is the old *volkstaat* idea. When it became clear that the apartheid era was drawing to a close, the idea arose of, as it were, inverting the structure of apartheid. Instead of the Whites owning and controlling South Africa at large, with Blacks supposedly exercising their rights in Bantustan homelands, the new thought was that, even if Blacks did get to exercise majority rule in the new South Africa that was looming on the horizon, perhaps there could still be a kind of “Afrikanerstan” homeland. This idea featured in the pre-1994

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<sup>38</sup> It is true that Naspers has become an international business empire far beyond its original Afrikaans beginnings – reportedly only about 12% of the company’s business relies on Afrikaans. Still, 12% of the business of a company with a market capitalization of around R40 billion (mid-February 2006, see <http://www.psg-online.co.za>) is hardly small change.

negotiations,<sup>39</sup> and remains the official policy of an Afrikaner party called the *Vryheidsfront Plus* (“Freedom Front Plus”).<sup>40</sup>

A decade and more after 1994 it seems clear that, apart from a quaint and harmless self-proclaimed Afrikaner homeland called Orania,<sup>41</sup> the time for any serious consideration of the *volkstaat* as a politically independent physical territory is over. However, if you cannot have a physical territory, perhaps you can still have a mental territory. This, I believe, is the core of the neo-Afrikaner agenda: *a volkstaat of the mind*. Just as in a physical enclave the landscape is the same for everybody, in a *volkstaat* of the mind, when the inhabitants cast their mind’s eye over the world, it would look the same to all of them. They would share the same beliefs, assumptions, views, opinions – about themselves and about “the others”. And just as people may migrate to form a physical *volkstaat*, there would be an *inward migration* for a *volkstaat* of the mind. In these days when we speak easily of cyberspace, and accord it a certain ontological status as a reality, such an idea of a *volkstaat* of the mind is all the more appealing. (The idea of an Afrikaner community across the internet has already been mooted.) Nonetheless, even for a community of the mind, it would be good if there were a place where those who think alike could congregate. And what better place could there be than Stellenbosch? After all, to quote DF Malan again, *Stellenbosch stands for an idea*.

This concludes the thought experiment. The four prerequisites I have mentioned for positioning a “cultural-historical” group as an endangered minority within a liberal democracy are, with the possible exception of the fourth, amply met in the case of the neo-Afrikaner agenda.

The issues concerning “cultural-historical minorities” and discussions regarding the nature of democracy in the new South Africa crop up

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<sup>39</sup> As did the idea of constructing the new South Africa as a federation.

<sup>40</sup> See [www.vryheidsfront.co.za](http://www.vryheidsfront.co.za) (available in Afrikaans, English, French, German, Russian, Setswana, Spanish and Zulu). One item in the seven-point manifesto on the home page is that the *Vryheidsfront* aims to “promote regional autonomy for all communities claiming that right”.

<sup>41</sup> See [www.orania.co.za](http://www.orania.co.za). There is a restricted English-language version (using tiny Union Jacks as icons) available at [www.orania.co.za/default\\_eng.asp](http://www.orania.co.za/default_eng.asp). For a Wikipedia article, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orania>.

regularly in the context of the *taaldebat*. The Giliomee/Schlemmer book *Kruispad*, for example, clearly situates the case for Afrikaans within such a framework. In response to the National Plan for Higher Education saying that universities should be “unashamedly South African”, the editors in their Introduction ask the rhetorical question:<sup>42</sup>

*But who determines what is South African? The various communities, trying to give expression to their own cultural needs, or a small elite group with its own representation of what South African culture should be?*

We should at this stage distinguish between a number of overlapping issues. There is the neo-Afrikaner agenda of positioning the Afrikaners as a “cultural-historical” group and claiming for Afrikanerdom as much autonomy as possible. Presumably such autonomy would include some conception of cultural rights generally, and language rights specifically. In consequence, the neo-Afrikaner agenda includes a pro-Afrikaans agenda. But the converse is not true: those who are concerned about the role and future of Afrikaans do not necessarily support the neo-Afrikaner agenda – and, in fact, some may oppose it. For one thing, there are many Afrikaans speakers who are not Afrikaners.<sup>43</sup> There are also White, Afrikaans-speaking Protestants who do not regard themselves as Afrikaners – or are simply indifferent to such an identification.

This gives rise to another level of the debate: whether Afrikaans speakers, all of them, should be considered a “cultural-historical community”.<sup>44</sup> Some say yes. Thus, for example, the editor of *Rapport*, Tim du Plessis:

*There is only one Afrikaans community, and it has no colour.*

The problem seems to be that those propounding this sentiment of an inclusive community of Afrikaans speakers across racial lines are mostly

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<sup>42</sup> *Kruispad*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Some White Afrikaners claim that there are also Coloured Afrikaners. This is possible, but I have no evidence of any significant numbers or identifiable groups of Coloureds identifying themselves as Afrikaners.

<sup>44</sup> Self-evidently, Afrikaans speakers are a *linguistic* group – but “community” carries a somewhat stronger connotation.

White Afrikaners. Non-Afrikaner Afrikaans speakers appear a little more reticent. For example, in *Rapport* of 16 January 2005,<sup>45</sup> “Coloured” commentator Jason Lloyd, under the heading “White, brown Afrikaans speakers remain apart”, responds to Tim du Plessis as follows:

*I support this sentiment, but unfortunately it remains only a sentiment, and one totally removed from reality. In short, I would say that the idea of one Afrikaans community at this stage is wishful thinking.*

...

*On too many levels, still, Afrikaners treat Coloured people as second-class Afrikaans speakers.*

...

*At the moment there are two Afrikaans communities: one White and typically rich, and the other Coloured and mostly poor. Before we speak of one Afrikaans community, White and Coloured would have to start talking about how we could give shape to that which du Plessis writes about. Because one Afrikaans community at present simply does not exist.*

To pursue this matter further at this stage will take us beyond the context of this chapter, which deals with the Stellenbosch *taaldebat*. But evidently these issues are important and relevant. I will return to the issue of a putative White-and-Coloured Afrikaans community in Chapter 4.

### **3.4 The arguments of the *taaldebat***

“Argument” is a word which, like “funny”, has two meanings. An argument can be a logical construct, a process of reasoning, drawing conclusions from premises. But an argument can also be a quarrel, a dispute, an altercation, a slanging match. In other words, there is the logical side and the rhetorical side. The arguments of the *taaldebat* are of both kinds. In this section I will be concerned with the logical side, in the next section with the rhetorical side.

I have already distinguished between the “soft” recommendation that Stellenbosch should have and exercise a commitment to Afrikaans, and the

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<sup>45</sup> Ironically, the same issue in which Flip Buys’s article “This is how the Afrikaner can reach for a new future” appeared.

“hard” demand that Stellenbosch should have the non-negotiable and sharply-delineated identity of an “Afrikaans university”. Naturally, there is also a range of options and opinions in between. The arguments made during the *taaldebat* display a similar spectrum. On the soft side there are arguments such as were already made by the Gerwel Committee, that promoting the “higher functions” of Afrikaans serves the higher purpose of socio-diversity as a common good. Such arguments could apply anywhere else in the world – and not only to language either. On the hard side there is, for example, the Laponcian argument that a small language like Afrikaans should find an enclave within which it will be able to exercise power in order to keep the stronger language(s) at bay. Such arguments cash out in various mechanisms of exclusion and compulsion, including a number of Stellenbosch-specific demands regarding student admissions and staff appointments. In the background, or at least overlapping strongly with the hard end of the *taaldebat*, there is the neo-Afrikaner agenda of a *volkstaat* of the mind.

In what follows I give an outline of arguments that have featured in the *taaldebat* in more or less this order, from soft to hard, from general to specific, presented against the backdrop of the discussion in the preceding Sections. Describing an argument does not necessarily mean that I agree with it. I will respond to the thrust of these arguments in Chapter 4.

ð **The sociodiversity argument.**

(See also the discussion of the Gerwel Report in Chapter 1, and the arguments regarding multilingualism in the European context in Chapter 2.) The sociodiversity argument, by analogy with the argument for biodiversity, proceeds as follows. The state has the responsibility to maintain the existence of minority groups, including linguistic minorities, for the same reasons as it should maintain the existence of the rainforests, or the whales, or the lesser spotted eagle. In the case of biodiversity, we accept that a species going out of existence is a loss to all. We might not know whether there is any causal connection between the lesser spotted eagle with our life, liberty or happiness – but we would like the species to continue in existence anyway, on the argument that they are part of a web of biodiversity which is being eroded, and where any loss is bad. Even

though we may not fully understand the interconnections in the web of biodiversity, we are nonetheless prepared to accept that the loss of any nodes or interconnections in the web weakens the web itself. Consequently we are inclined towards maintaining all individual parts in order to maintain the integrity and value of the whole. Likewise, it is argued, for sociodiversity. A web of social structures has value in itself, because it offers an interconnected network of differences and complexities that a monocultural society does not. And such a more varied social environment is beneficial to all, because a complex environment provides more opportunities for learning, innovation and cross-fertilisation than a homogeneous one. The loss of a culture, a language or a religion is a loss to our sociodiversity, and it is the responsibility of all of us to guard against such loss. *Ergo*, given that Afrikaans has an indisputable presence in South Africa, and certainly contributes to our diversity of languages, it should be maintained and its future safeguarded.

ø **Afrikaans as role model for African languages.**

South Africa has eleven official languages. But what is eleven? Is it two plus nine, or one plus ten? The answer, of course, is “both” – but you may choose which breakdown you prefer depending on the point you wish to make. If you break down eleven as two plus nine, you are propounding the view that there are two “developed languages” in South Africa, equal in the accomplishments of their “higher functions”, and both used as medium of instruction at university level – and then there are nine undeveloped indigenous languages, without the advantages of a highly developed literature, scientific and technological nomenclature, and an educated reading public. On the other hand, if you present eleven as one plus ten, then you accept that there is a *fundamental asymmetry* between English and our other ten national languages.<sup>46</sup> The distinction is easily made: English is an international language, the other ten are indigenous languages.

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<sup>46</sup> I first made this point in my opening address at the *Nasionale Taalberaad oor Afrikaans* (“National Language Convention on Afrikaans”) at Stellenbosch in August 2004. See <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/management/Rector/languageforum.htm>.

The feature of Afrikaans that makes it different, as the Gerwel Committee had already recognised, is that it is the one that straddles the divide. Afrikaans is both indigenous and “developed”. From there it is an easy step to argue that the “higher functions” of Afrikaans should be nurtured and protected to serve as a role model for the other nine indigenous languages. This point has been strongly made by Neville Alexander, a well-known commentator on language policy in South Africa.<sup>47</sup>

*I would like to put my position briefly and clearly. The current debate concerning the future of Afrikaans as medium of instruction at universities is very important for other minority and indigenous language groups, and can be regarded as a watershed for the lot of these languages.*<sup>48</sup>

(The point also links up with recommendations made later by another Ministerial advisory group, the Ndebele Committee, which I will discuss in Section 3.6.) There are, as one may expect, variations of this argument. But a common thread seems to be the view that, if Afrikaans cannot *retain* its “higher functions”, then there is no chance that the African languages will *attain* them.

### ø **The numbers argument.**

This simply says that six million mother-tongue speakers, anywhere in the world, are surely enough to justify a university operating in that language – particularly when the language in question has demonstrated its capacity for expressing the “higher functions” of literature and science. At a regional level the case appears even clearer: the majority of the people in the Western Cape are mother-tongue Afrikaans speakers – 2,5 million of them. Of the 24 higher education institutions in South Africa, it seems perfectly reasonable that at least one should be using Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, preferably where the concentration of Afrikaans-speakers is highest.

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<sup>47</sup> Director of PRAESA, the Project for Alternative Education in South Africa, at the University of Cape Town. For a short profile, see <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/alexander,n.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> *Kruispad*, p.12.

ð **“It is our right”.**

According to the Constitution, all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem, and in order for that to be possible the state must consider as one reasonable alternative the possibility of single-medium institutions. That is easily interpreted as meaning that a single-medium educational institution is entirely *bona fide*, subject only to the caveats of equity, practicability and redress. So the “rights” case for an “Afrikaans university” is either presented as a matter of constitutional guarantee, or by arguing that the constitutional caveats do not apply. Practicability is not seen as a problem, since teaching in Afrikaans has been done at Stellenbosch for the best part of a century. Equity is taken to mean no more than that we should treat all people alike, irrespective of race, colour or creed – in other words no special deals for anybody. And as regards redress, see the arguments below about Afrikaans as an instrument of empowerment, and about there being two English-medium universities close by. *Ergo*, the Constitution allows those who want an Afrikaans-medium institution to have one. In an elaboration of the “rights” argument, there is also the claim that Stellenbosch has a *historical* right to be an Afrikaans university, the will of JH Marais often being cited in this regard. Formulated even more clearly as a “rights” issue is the neo-Afrikaner argument concerning the “federational aspects” of the Constitution regarding “cultural-historical” minorities.

ð **Afrikaans as an instrument of empowerment.**

If you start with the standard racial breakdown of African Black, Coloured, Indian and White, and you ask for the participation rate of young people (say ages 20-24) in higher education amongst those groups, an interesting feature emerges.<sup>49</sup> The participation rate of the Coloured population is the lowest of all four groups: 9.48%. Second lowest is African Blacks, at 10.83%. The participation rate amongst the Indian population is far higher, at 42.69%, while that of Whites is the highest overall, at 59.18%. If you now proceed to break these figures down further by Afrikaans/English language categories in each case, even more stark disparities emerge: the participation rate of

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<sup>49</sup> Statistics provided by Stellenbosch University’s Department of Institutional Planning.



*Afrikaans-speaking* Coloureds in tertiary education is the lowest in the country, at a mere 4.5%. English-speaking Coloureds, on the other hand, have a considerably higher participation rate, namely 28.94%. The same difference by language group appears amongst Whites. The participation rate of Afrikaans-speaking Whites is 50.72%, while for English-speaking Whites it is 71.75% – by far the highest in the country.

Evidently, then, Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds are at the bottom of the pile when it comes to reaping the benefits of tertiary education. Similar figures can be cited to show that in many respects the Coloured population of the Western Cape, particularly in the area known as the Cape Flats, find themselves on one of the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder. The best way of addressing this societal problem, it can be argued, is mother-tongue education, which means Afrikaans. By positioning Stellenbosch as an “Afrikaans university”, so the argument goes, the participation rate of Afrikaans-speaking Coloured students could be raised significantly.

Overlapping with this empowerment argument, but a topic in its own right, is the argument concerning the benefits of mother-tongue education. While undoubtedly applicable to young children, some would think that mother-tongue education is of lesser importance at tertiary level, where the need for competence in an international language becomes more pronounced. But not all would agree. Giliomee, for example, is adamant:

*It is the case that scientific contributions are conveyed in their sharpest, most creative, and most nuanced form in the mother tongue. Academic breakthroughs are often made in this way, in contrast to contributions made in a mechanical and blunt manner in a second language.*<sup>50</sup>

∞ **“There are two English universities close by”.**

This is the argument that nobody will be disadvantaged from a language point of view if Stellenbosch is to be an “Afrikaans university”, since those who prefer to receive their university

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<sup>50</sup> *Kruispad*, p.69.

education in English have the choice of two English universities close by, namely the University of the Western Cape or the University of Cape Town. (The distance between UCT and Stellenbosch is about 50 km, and UWC is roughly half-way in between.) Also, the few courses taught at Stellenbosch which are not taught at either UWC or UCT as well are, in terms of the current language policy, already available in English at Stellenbosch. Thus, even with Stellenbosch functioning as an “Afrikaans university”, language would not be a barrier to access – *in the Western Cape*. It must be said that there is a hard edge to this argument when applied to existing students at Stellenbosch. When requesting help in English, they may well be met with a response, implicit or explicit, that if they wish to receive their teaching in English they should have gone (or, can still go) to an English-medium university. (This is the other side of the “English veto” story, which I will come to in the next Section.)

ø **The argument for recognition of “cultural-historical minorities”.**

I have explained this position at some length in Section 3.3. As applicable to the *taaldebat* at Stellenbosch, the hard version of this argument arises when the “cultural-historical minority” in question is Afrikanerdom; the softer version is evident when it is claimed that Afrikaans speakers generally form such an identifiable minority. Either of these may be coupled also to the idea of concentrating on some physical territory (the Western Cape, or Stellenbosch in particular). This is sometimes called the *Leuven option*: the idea that Stellenbosch could position itself as an “Afrikaans university” in the Western Cape in somewhat the same way as the *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven* positioned itself as a Dutch-medium university in Flanders more than 40 years ago. (See Chapter 2.)

ø **The no-compromise (Laponcian) argument.**

I have already cited (in Section 3.2) the argument, based on the work of Jean Laponce, that no compromises and no concessions should be made in establishing and safeguarding a domain within which Afrikaans can be dominant. Such, then, would be an “Afrikaans university” at Stellenbosch; one where there is a rigid language policy, compulsory

for all staff and students, with any transgression considered a serious misdemeanour. In consequence, a number of fairly stringent demands are often made. There should be conditions on the admission of undergraduate students: they should have competence in Afrikaans, or sign up for an intensive language course in Afrikaans. Otherwise they should go elsewhere. There should be conditions on the appointment of academic staff: they should be competent to teach in Afrikaans, or sign up for a language course in Afrikaans in order to acquire such competence. Otherwise they should not be eligible for appointment, or, if already appointed, should be eligible for dismissal. There should be conditions set for the promotion of Afrikaans as a scholarly language: staff could, for example, be compelled to submit at least one article per year to an academic journal<sup>51</sup> – or (in a somewhat softer approach) the University could award a special subsidy for articles published in Afrikaans. There should be conditions on how student life should be conducted: the student newspaper should be compelled to publish mostly in Afrikaans, the Students' Representative Council meetings should be conducted in Afrikaans, and likewise with the activities of student organisations. The business of the Faculties, Senate and Council should be conducted in Afrikaans, the agendas and minutes should be in Afrikaans, and all policy documents should be in Afrikaans. On top of all this there should be external monitoring of these measures – not by the state, but by that “cultural-historical” minority which the Afrikaans university is intended to serve. A recent proposal in this regard effectively amounts to posting language spies on campus to check up on the language use of the lecturers in the classrooms.<sup>52</sup>

Such rigid measures of exclusion and compulsion are necessary, so the argument goes, to define and defend an enclave within which Afrikaans will be strong. Essentially, therefore, this is an argument that power is necessary for survival.

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<sup>51</sup> Hermann Giliomee, in *Kruispad*, p. 134.

<sup>52</sup> Hermann Giliomee, “Language management and language complaints under the magnifying glass”, *Die Burger*, 10 January 2006.

ð **The “slippery slope” argument.**<sup>53</sup>

This is a derivative of the no-compromise argument. It says that if any concession were made, no matter how small or well-merited, this may be just the little shove that sets you sliding uncontrollably down the slippery slope towards *verengelsing*. In other words: being accommodating means that you risk *losing control*. From the point of view of those who believe that language, language policy and the sustainability of language are matters of exclusion and compulsion, losing control would be an intolerable situation. Therefore, they argue, no such concessions should be made.

### 3.5 The rhetoric of the *taaldebat*

When, in January 2002, I arrived back in South Africa from Australia with my wife and family to take up the position of Rector of Stellenbosch University, we were a hot item on the social circuit for a while. One event to which we were invited was the annual general meeting of the *Oudstudentebond* (the alumni organisation) of one of the University’s oldest male residences. It was a well-attended dinner, with good food and wine and fellowship and speeches. I had by that time already made a few controversial moves, so the welcome extended to the new Rector, while cordial, was perhaps a little restrained. But the moment that sticks in my mind was when the President of the *Oudstudentebond*, at the end of his welcoming speech, having accepted that new Rectors would no doubt want to do new things, spoke a word of advice. “But just keep in mind, Professor”, he said, “that this is *our* place”. He was smiling – but he was not joking.

I had occasion to reflect on this matter of perceived ownership two years later, when a furore erupted amongst Afrikaners about the university’s decision to award an honorary doctorate, posthumously, to a man called Bram Fischer. Born in 1908, Bram Fischer was a scion of the Afrikaner elite from the Orange Free State, the son of a Judge-President of the Free State Supreme Court and grandson of the Premier of the Orange River

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<sup>53</sup> The “slippery slope” metaphor is perhaps the most common feature of the *taaldebat*. Numerous commentators have made use of it.

Colony (which is what the former republic became after the Anglo-Boer War). As a young man, possibly while at Oxford, where he went on a Rhodes scholarship in 1932, he became attracted to the Communist Party – at a time when the great danger to European civilization was seen to be fascism, and the Soviet Union still had the romantic aura of a post-revolutionary society. Fischer returned to South Africa in 1934, and was admitted to the Bar in 1935. A noted anti-apartheid activist, he served for the defence in the Treason Trial of 1956 and led the defence team at the Rivonia Trial of 1963, where Nelson Mandela was one of the accused. He went underground in 1964 after the Communist Party was banned, was captured, tried for treason, sentenced and died a prisoner in 1975. When Nelson Mandela, with typical generosity, cautioned South Africans against believing that all Afrikaners had supported apartheid, he gave two examples of Afrikaner heroes of the liberation struggle: Beyers Naudé and Bram Fischer.

Of the many interesting things one can say about Fischer, one is relevant here: he was an *Afrikaner* anti-apartheid activist, who never denied his roots, and at his trial in 1966 stated: “I speak as an Afrikaner”.<sup>54</sup> For Stellenbosch as a university striving to redefine itself, it seemed appropriate to many<sup>55</sup> that it would be a symbolic step towards making peace with the past to honour Bram Fischer, albeit posthumously. The reaction amongst the traditional constituency of the university was straightforward outrage. No matter that this was an Afrikaner who had had the courage to oppose the will of his own people when they were wrong – *the man had been a communist*. Hermann Giliomee, writing in *Die Burger*,<sup>56</sup> constructed a chain of reasoning starting from Bram Fischer the individual, went on to the communism of Stalin, from there to the influence of the South African Communist Party in the ANC, from there to the issue of land reform, and culminating in the question whether, by conferring this honorary doctorate, Stellenbosch University was sending a signal that it approves of radical land reform in the style of the SACP. For the English

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Hermann Giliomee’s book *The Afrikaners*, Tafelberg Publishers, 2003, p. 533.

<sup>55</sup> Including the majority of Senate, and the Council, both of which voted on the proposal. The award was also supported by the Students’ Representative Council.

<sup>56</sup> *Die Burger*, 26 October 2004.

press Giliomee wrote an article appearing under the title “Strange degree for Fischer suggests that Stellenbosch University is sick”.<sup>57</sup>

At the somewhat fraught meeting of Convocation<sup>58</sup> where this matter was discussed, I took the opportunity to talk about the sense of ownership that many members of our traditional constituency feel over the University.<sup>59</sup> A number of debates concerning Stellenbosch University, I said, have this core concept in common: ownership. We therefore have to address the simple but profound question: *whose place is this?*

*I can see two Stellenbosch University constituencies. One is an older constituency (and when I say “older” I refer not only to years) to whom ownership belonged, and for whom it remains precious. The other is a newer constituency (and when I say “newer” I do not only mean younger), who are increasingly and rightfully beginning to demand ownership as well. The older constituency actually falls within the newer one – but perhaps neither of the two have fully realised this as yet.*

*The older community is primarily an Afrikaner community. This circumstance arises from the kind of country we were before 1994, and from the fact that Stellenbosch was reserved for white Afrikaans speakers for such a long time. The newer community is a broader university community, which extends across colour boundaries, across religious boundaries, across age boundaries, across gender boundaries, and across territorial boundaries. This new Stellenbosch community is primarily, but not exclusively, Afrikaans speaking. The newer community buys into the idea that, from the point of view of language, Stellenbosch University must serve all Afrikaans speakers, but not only Afrikaans speakers.*

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<sup>57</sup> Hermann Giliomee in the *Sunday Times*, 21 November 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Convocation is one of the statutory bodies of the university. It has no decision-making powers, but can advise the University Council on any matter it chooses. Convocation consists of all alumni who are graduates and all academic staff members. The University have about 70,000 alumni on its database, but when Convocation meets, as it does at least once a year, of course only a tiny fraction can attend. The highest attendance on record was in 2005, at the height of the *taaldebat*, when around 1,000 members attended.

<sup>59</sup> In what follows I draw on that speech, the full version of which is available on the web at <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/convocation.htm>.

*The older community, consisting primarily of Afrikaners, believed for a long time, and some continue to believe, that Stellenbosch is their place – that its ownership is vested in them. The newer and broader community is increasingly pointing out that Stellenbosch is their place as well. The older community is hesitant to give up its ownership, because it is uncertain what will happen to the inheritance that its members created. And the newer community is not entirely sure yet whether it wants to accept the responsibility of ownership, because that inheritance also carries a number of encumbrances.*

...

*To be an Afrikaner-Matie does not disqualify one from membership of the newer and broader Stellenbosch community. On the contrary. This group is an inseparable part of what Stellenbosch wants to be. But not only them. Others as well.*

The sense of ownership which the older constituency feels over Stellenbosch University has been a significant factor in the *taaldebat*. There is an implicit assumption that the University's business is "everybody's" business, and a shared understanding that the first and best place in which to discuss any matter regarding the University, or raise any concern, is the letters page of *Die Burger*. But who is "everybody"? For many Afrikaners, it would seem, "everybody" still just means "us Afrikaners". Consider, for example, the following contribution from a columnist in *Die Burger*.<sup>60</sup>

*A well-read woman tells me that, according to anthropological findings, we South Africans are the second-most clever nation in the world. Just a short step behind the Scots. If you consider our gene pool, it is no wonder. Dutch seafarers with planning genius, fiery Huguenots, refined Settlers, a small handful of crafty Germans, warm-blooded Italians and many foreign nationalities.*

What is this? It is denying the status of compatriot to those who do not share your gene pool. More precisely: it is the arrogation of a collective identity – "we South Africans" – to the Afrikaners alone. It is exactly this

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<sup>60</sup> Annelie Botes, in the column *Van alle kante* ("From all sides"), *Die Burger*, 18 Januarie 2005.

arrogation of identity which makes it so difficult for “old Stellenbosch” to hear what “new Stellenbosch” is saying. “New Stellenbosch” speaks as a compatriot – but “old Stellenbosch” only hears the voice of a stranger. It is the same with the concept of a *Stellenbosser*. To this day I meet young Afrikaners who grew up in Stellenbosch but who have never set foot in Kayamandi or Cloeteville,<sup>61</sup> whose conception of what “Stellenbosch” means simply does not include these neighbourhoods, and to whom the idea of an African Black *Stellenbosser* would be an oxymoron.

A whole dissertation could be written about the cultural psychology of readers’ letters in *Die Burger*. In style, they display the existential angst of the Afrikaner. In content, they come in small spurts of venom. Take the opinion of André van Greunen of Bellville<sup>62</sup> in mid-2004 on the matter of racial quotas in sport:

*During a newscast on SABC2’s morning programme there was a report on athletes from our country who will be participating in Sweden at the Games for intellectually handicapped people. Video clips were shown of the South African team during a dinner in Cape Town. It should gladden Mr Ramsamy’s heart<sup>63</sup> that the team is highly representative of our country’s demographic make-up, since at least 95% of the athletes are from previously disadvantaged communities.*

Besides the once-off writers, there are the habitual writers, some under their own names, some under imaginative pseudonyms, some under their own name and pseudonyms, and some under various different pseudonyms. In a study<sup>64</sup> I commissioned in 2005 of letters to *Die Burger* between early 2002 and early 2005, it turned out that Stellenbosch University had been the topic of well over 600 letters, predominantly

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<sup>61</sup> Kayamandi is the Black township of Stellenbosch, still largely a shanty-town. Cloeteville is a Coloured township, one of the legacies of apartheid town planning.

<sup>62</sup> *Die Burger*, 26 July 2004.

<sup>63</sup> Mr Sam Ramsamy is a high-profile sports administrator, well-remembered for his role at the time when South Africa was being refused admission to the Olympics.

<sup>64</sup> “Stellenbosch University as a topic of readers’ letters in the newspaper *Die Burger*”, by a project team from the Department of Journalism, Stellenbosch University. The report served before the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) audit team in October 2005.



negative in tone. That places the topic of Stellenbosch University on an equal footing as a matter of public complaint with the topic of crime and violence. The two issues most commonly raised regarding the University were transformation and Afrikaans. In fairness it must be acknowledged that all university towns have an active rumour mill – but even taking that fact into account, it must be added that Stellenbosch gossip is truly of Olympic standard.<sup>65</sup> To have the in-house affairs of a university playing out in public in a newspaper with over half a million readers daily is, in my experience, unusual.

This brings up the paradox to which I have alluded before, and which I have called elsewhere the *language trap*:<sup>66</sup> both in terms of style and content, the debate *about* Afrikaans remains trapped *within* Afrikaans. Regarding content: if the debate about Afrikaans is relevant also to a larger debate about multilingualism or minorities – if, in fact, the case of Afrikaans is to serve as a role model for our other indigenous languages – then a debate about Afrikaans in which nobody except Afrikaans speakers can participate does not serve a wider purpose. This is why I have argued publicly<sup>67</sup> that, if the proponents for Afrikaans language rights really wish to make an impact, they should conduct their arguments in English as well. Regarding style: the sheer level of aggression and *verdagmakery* in the debate is in itself illuminating – it is almost as though Afrikaans provides a soundproof blanket under which you may swear at the world. Consider, for example, the case of the Stellenbosch University student choir. They are excellent. We know that, because they participated in the International Choral Olympics in Bremen in 2004, and came home with the gold medal in their category (mixed youth choirs). You would think that this would be newsworthy. And so it was, but not in the sense one might have anticipated. Instead of being congratulated, the choir was roundly

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<sup>65</sup> A previous Chair of Council tells me that when he was elected, in a closed meeting of Council, his wife received a phone call at home from a family friend to congratulate her – before the meeting had been concluded.

<sup>66</sup> In my 2005 public report. See [www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/midyear2005\\_e.html](http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/midyear2005_e.html).

<sup>67</sup> For example at the *Nasionale Taalberaad vir Afrikaans* (“National Language Convention for Afrikaans”) in August 2004. See [www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/languageforum.htm](http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/languageforum.htm).

condemned in the Afrikaans press – because they did not sing in Afrikaans.<sup>68</sup> This was clearly just another sign of a spineless Stellenbosch on the slippery slope to *verengelsing*. So much so that one particularly incensed patriot published in *Die Burger*<sup>69</sup> an obituary for the Stellenbosch University Choir, “as a herald of Stellenbosch University, on behalf of all true Maties and Afrikaners”.

The use of Afrikaans to pitch your message according to your audience is not new. It was common for National Party politicians to deliver the more robust parts of their speeches in Afrikaans and the more conciliatory parts in English. And we saw above how *Solidariteit* promotes itself as an Afrikaans organisation on the Afrikaans page of its website, but simply omits that part on the corresponding English page. Likewise, when Hermann Giliomee, writing in Afrikaans for an extremist Afrikaner website,<sup>70</sup> says “One often hears, for example, the nonsense that Afrikaans had a special advantage in the era of white rule in South Africa”, that may be contrasted with what he wrote in his book *The Afrikaners* (published first in English, in South Africa and the USA):

*One of the main reasons for the advance of Afrikaans was Article 137 of the Union Constitution. This clause ... provided for the equality of the two official languages. It implied that civil servants had to be bilingual, but this was only strictly enforced after 1948. Van Wyk Louw, poet and essayist, called the Afrikaans language the ‘socialism of the poor Afrikaner’. Once the state enforced Afrikaans as an official language, the ‘small man’ knew that his language would help him to get work. ... To Afrikaners, Afrikaans provided a sense of personal worth, as well as jobs and other economic advantages.*<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> As it happens, the rules of the competition allowed only one item from your country of origin, and that had to be a recent composition. Our choir chose to deliver an item in isiZulu.

<sup>69</sup> *Die Burger*, 14 July 2004, obituaries.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted above in Section 3.1, from Dan Roodt’s PRAAG website, [www.praag.co.za/opstelle83gil.htm](http://www.praag.co.za/opstelle83gil.htm).

<sup>71</sup> Giliomee, H: *The Afrikaners – Biography of a People*, Tafelberg, Cape Town, and University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, USA, 2003, p. 545.

There are also further characteristics of the *taaldebat* which can only be understood by considering a wider context than the arguments on their own. One such has to do with a shift in the way we have been seeing the world since the end of the Cold War and the coming of the internet. In 1994 the then Secretary General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), one Michael Gibbons, together with a number of other authors, published an influential book, *The New Production of Knowledge*.<sup>72</sup> The idea set out in this book is essentially that the end of the Cold War coincided with more changes than merely a transition to a world with only one superpower. It coincided with what Gibbons *et al.* call a transition from a “Mode 1 Society” to what they call a “Mode 2 Society”. Unimaginative as the terminology may be, the associated concepts caught the imagination and gained broad acceptance amongst higher education planners and policy makers – also in South Africa. I quote from a more recent article by Gibbons<sup>73</sup> in which he explains the issue.

*During the twilight of the Cold War, if not before, the relative institutional separation between society’s major institutions had begun to break down . . . The once clear lines of demarcation between government, industry and the universities, between the science of the universities and the technology of industry, between basic research, applied research and product development, between careers in academe and those in industry seem no longer to apply. Instead, there is movement across established categories, greater permeability of institutional boundaries, greater blurring of professional identities, greater diversity of career patterns. In sum, the major institutions of society have been transgressed as institutions and have crossed onto one another’s terrain.*

Furthermore:

*Contemporary society, too, is characterised by a pervasive uncertainty, generated by the same process of transgression that science is experiencing. Here, too, the formerly clear boundaries between the State, the market and*

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<sup>72</sup> M Gibbons, C Limoges, H Nowotny, S Schwartzman, P Scott & M Trow: *The New Production of Knowledge*, SAGE Publications, London 1994.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Gibbons, “Engagement as a core value in a Mode 2 Society”, in S Bjarnason & P Coldstream: *The idea of Engagement – Universities in Society*. London: Association of Commonwealth Universities, 2003, pp 48-70.

*culture have become more permeable. Here, too, uncertainty, in its turn, is generating greater willingness to explore alternatives, whether in organisational forms, or inter-institutional cooperation, which in turn affects the jobs people do and those with whom they are prepared to work. The upshot is that societies now comprise more open, experimentally-oriented systems. In society and science, this openness and experimental orientation is both a cause of, and a response to, growing complexity and uncertainty of the problems and issues that need to be addressed.*

The idea of complexity is of key importance here. It does not only mean that things are more complicated. It also includes the technical meaning of complex dynamic processes that influence each other in such a way that there is an inherent unpredictability in the entire system. The interactions are of a non-linear nature, which means that you cannot predict the outcomes by simply extrapolating from the inputs and the functioning of the respective systems themselves. Also, there is a butterfly effect at work, where small perturbations at one place in the system can have large consequences elsewhere.

The Mode 1/Mode 2 distinction, and understanding the sense of ownership, help us to discern some of the cultural characteristics behind the *taaldebat*.

∞ **Dichotomies.** There is, firstly, the fact that many of the old constituency (and many of all of us) grew up in a Mode 1 world of either/or.<sup>74</sup> In this world we easily and conveniently categorised, or even stereotyped, people, ideas and actions as, in a manner of speaking, either black or white. There were two superpowers and countries were capitalist or communist. You were Afrikaans or English, a Matie or a Tukkier, a physicist or a philosopher, town or gown. Things were right or wrong, good or bad, beautiful or ugly. What the new world demands, however, is a Mode 2 thinking in terms of change, grey areas and uncertainty. It is not a world of either/or,

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<sup>74</sup> I first made this point in my inaugural speech as Rector on 10 April 2002. The full speech is available at <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/inauguration.html>.

but a world of and/and. We have to think in terms of black *and* white, Afrikaans *and* English, good *and* bad. Since the boundaries are not so clear, decision-making is not so easy.

The relevance of the Mode 1/Mode 2 distinction to the *taaldebat* is clear. If you reason in Mode 1, you will conclude that there must be a *solution* to the matter and that it consists of a choice: either a full-on “Afrikaans university” or *verengelsing*. If you reason in Mode 2, you accept that you have a developing situation, with multiple inputs and feedback loops with unforeseen consequences. You will accept that there are no algorithmic solutions and no risk-free options.

ø **Certainty.** Certainty, in Mode 1, is a prized possession, and one clear feature of the *taaldebat* has been a quest for certainty concerning the future of Afrikaans. “Promises are not good enough”, wrote the Deputy Editor of *Die Burger*, “one looks for guarantees”.<sup>75</sup> The wish for an “Afrikaans university” along the lines outlined above, a “crystal-clear language policy” drawing rigid distinctions and laying down clear rules, the neo-Afrikaner ideal of some kind of negotiated deal between their “cultural-historical” minority and the government – these are all manifestations of the quest for certainty.

My view is that there are no guarantees.<sup>76</sup> It is true that universities generally have had a risk-averse culture. It is also true, at Stellenbosch in particular, that the quest for certainty is not restricted to the matter of Afrikaans. In the change-management process, there is probably no other question to which I have had to respond with a No as often as the question “Can you guarantee that it will work?”. But that is changing, both in higher education generally and within the University in particular. We have to learn to work with uncertainty, because that is the kind of world we find ourselves in. In a Mode 2 society one does not have the luxury of waiting until the outcome is certain before you make your move, and if you don’t move you may be left behind. The

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<sup>75</sup> Leopoldt Scholtz, *Die Burger*, 2 December 2005.

<sup>76</sup> I first made this point explicit in a speech to the *Kaapse Sakekamer* (“Cape Town Chamber of Commerce”) on 23 June 2004 (see <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/business.htm>) and have repeated it often since then.

Stellenbosch University Strategic Planning Framework recognises this when it says:

*Two of the most important features [of a strongly entrepreneurial institutional culture] is the willingness towards self-criticism and self-renewal, and the willingness to take calculated risks.*

- ø **Power and authority.** Afrikaans is rich in metaphors of power and authority. To “have marrow in your bones”, “make your voice thick”, *staan jou man* (literally: “stand up and be a man”) – these all have a positive connotation. If you are not seen to be doing so, you may be regarded as *politiek gediensig* (“politically servile”), or worse, a *papbroek* (literally: “flabby trousers”; an abject coward). When the Arts Faculty at Stellenbosch University decided to extend dual-medium instruction to the third year of undergraduate study (and Senate approved), one *taalstryder* wrote that “one almost despairs at hearing the news that the Arts Faculty Board and the Senate of Stellenbosch University preferred political servility above reason and logic”.<sup>77</sup>

A strong thread running through the *taaldebat* has been the notion that Afrikaans is endangered *because it has powerful enemies*. Of these, it is supposed, there are two kinds: those who sin by omission, not doing what they should be doing for Afrikaans, and those who sin by commission, doing what they should not be doing against Afrikaans. The most likely candidate for the latter kind has been a body called “the ANC government”. I have lost count of the number of times Afrikaners have sympathised with me for the amount of pressure the government is thought to be bringing to bear on the University to move away from Afrikaans. As for sins of omission, the University management often finds itself accused of not keeping Afrikaans a safe distance away from the slippery slope of *verengelsing*.

It appears that to the *taalstryders*, the idea of a body of Stellenbosch academics taking a step away from a rigid pro-Afrikaans position *of their own volition* is entirely incomprehensible. When the Arts Faculty decision on dual-medium instruction became known, it was first

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<sup>77</sup> Leopoldt Scholtz, *Die Burger*, 2 December 2005.

reported in *Die Burger*<sup>78</sup> that lecturers “have been ordered” by management to use dual medium. But this first reaction is, when you think about it, not surprising. We saw above how management has been exhorted to *use* power in “rigorously enforcing” a language policy protecting Afrikaans. We have also seen how the University is accused of buckling *under* the power of (a presumably malicious) government. It fits the pattern, then, when management is automatically accused of having *exercised* power, even in the case of an academic decision taken in the usual academic-democratic manner. Behind it all lies the supposition of power as the prime mover in decision making. It seems that old habits die hard. If the exercise of power is the only decision-making method you are accustomed to, it must be difficult to think of any other reason behind any decision.

- ð **Agency.** Linked to the idea of power as the prime mover of decision-making is the idea that someone – some agent – actually *exercises* that power. And this relates to a venerable philosophical dispute. Do things just happen, or do people make them happen? Take globalism. Is it a natural development in terms of the way the world is at present, or is it an agenda being driven by (take your pick) the American government, the multinational corporations, or the World Bank? Or take the drift to English as a *lingua franca* – is it a natural tendency in the wake of globalisation, or is English being consciously pushed forward for various nefarious purposes (the globalisation “agenda”, for example)? The same, I think, goes for the *taaldebat*. If there is a drift towards English at the historically Afrikaans universities, is it just happening, or is it being consciously driven?

The verb *verengels* – “englishify”, as I have translated it – illustrates the point nicely. To some, *verengelsing* (“englishification”) is something that is simply *happening*, as naturally as water flowing downhill. To others, *verengelsing* is something that is *made* to happen – there must be somebody responsible for doing it. The former is the naturalistic view, the latter is the agency view. By and large, the taalstryders, in what they see as their struggle against *verengelsing*, favour the agency view.

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<sup>78</sup> *Die Burger*, 22 September 2005.

When you combine that view with their assumptions about power, you have a fertile field for mistrust and conspiracy theories.

In a Mode 1 discourse you either have to adopt the naturalistic view, that things just happen, or the agency view, that they are made to happen. In a Mode 2 discourse, on the other hand, you may accept the idea of feedback loops between societal developments and human agendas. For example, millions of individuals decide to learn English, or, as the case may be, publish their academic papers in English, because they see it as a passport to a better life. In that sense the drift to English as a *lingua franca* is perfectly natural. On the other hand, if you are a world power called the USA there is every reason, of convenience as well as gain, to act on the assumption that those who wish to do business with you will do so in your language.

Having said all this, it comes as no surprise to find, in the rhetoric of the *taaldebat*, that those who do *not* follow a hard line on Stellenbosch as an “Afrikaans university” are typically characterised as (a) stupid, or (b) cowardly, or (c) malicious. The first category stereotypes the soft-liners as being naive or uninformed, not having done their research, not understanding the consequences of their actions, or just not seeing “reason and logic”.<sup>79</sup> The second comes from the supposition of their buckling under pressure, not standing up for their rights, or not claiming what belongs to “us”.<sup>80</sup> And as for malice, besides the supposition of there being enemies of Afrikaans, actively working towards *verengelsing*, the more general charges are of hidden agendas, “smuggling through” change, commitments not met, or promises not kept.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> “Will Stellenbosch come to its senses?”, asks Deputy Editor Leopoldt Scholtz in *Die Burger* of 30 September 2005 – claiming, among other things, that “The Stellenbosch decision [regarding dual medium in the Arts Faculty] helps to create a climate within which there may also be discrimination against African languages and speakers”.

<sup>80</sup> The CEO of Naspers writes in *Die Burger* of 26 October 2005: “If Stellenbosch were to *verengels* it would in my view be choosing the route of *papbroekigheid* [abject cowardliness]. It would be turning its back on its roots in Africa and on our Coloured little brothers and sisters.”

<sup>81</sup> In *Die Burger* of 18 October 2005 the President of Convocation contributed an article on how Stellenbosch University is reneging on its own vision statement.



It is interesting to see just how much venom of this kind can be packed into a short missive. Such as this one:

*[The Afrikaans speakers] have already lain down passively to be kicked. Also by Prof Chris Brink and Co, who, while buttering people up under the banner of “pragmatism”, have (purposely?) started to “Tshwane” the university – a habit of bringing change about, against all earlier agreements and promises, just to satisfy a political master.<sup>82</sup>*

Finally, for completeness, it remains to explain the notion of the “English veto” and how it features in the *taaldebat*. By way of background, here is a little anecdote.

A year or two ago, in what I thought was something of a breakthrough, the Students’ Representative Council at Stellenbosch (mostly White) joined with the Black Students’ Association in mounting a Freedom Day<sup>83</sup> celebration on campus. They went to a lot of trouble organising a programme, bussing in school children from surrounding schools, and arranging – besides the keynote speakers – some really crowd-pulling music. The main event was held in the Student Centre, which has a large indoor open space, arranged cafeteria style, surrounded by fast-food outlets and convenience shops, with a small stage in the centre. In a gesture of courtesy, one of the invited speakers was an experienced Afrikaans politician who had served in parliament, as a National Party member, even before 1994. The event took place at a time when the *taaldebat* was in one of its periodic flare-ups, and the Eminent Person warned me, somewhat grim-faced, that his entire speech would be in Afrikaans. I assured him that he was welcome to speak in his language of choice, and he duly went ahead. After a while, however, it must have become clear to him that something was amiss. Many students and school children were talking amongst themselves, drifting off to get a Coke, or inspecting the musical equipment. Eventually the truth dawned on him. They were not being disrespectful – they simply *did not understand what he*

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<sup>82</sup> Naas Viljoen of Hermanus, letter to *Die Burger*, 23 September 2005. The verb “Tshwane” is a reference to the new name of the greater Pretoria district – a new name not much welcomed by Afrikaners.

<sup>83</sup> Freedom Day is 27 April, the day of the “miracle election” in 1994.

was saying. And they were *not a captive audience*. Because of the layout of the place, they *had a choice*. So here was a dilemma. He could exercise his right to speak in Afrikaans, knowing, now, that many of his audience, and perhaps exactly those to whom his message was addressed, did not understand what he was saying. Or he could give preference to getting his message across, in which case – since he could not speak Xhosa – it would have to be in English.

It is not necessary to report here on how the Eminent Person (whose actual speech, I thought, was suitable, sensible and reconciliatory) dealt with this dilemma. The point is not his reaction, but what the little story illustrates: the dilemma of the “English veto”. This is the situation where speakers of Afrikaans (or any small language) are in a company where some – and perhaps the large majority – of their listeners *do* understand Afrikaans, while some others – perhaps even just a tiny minority – *don’t*. What is the speaker to do?

This must surely be a familiar situation in many places in the world. But at Stellenbosch it took on a particular significance within the *taaldebat*, partly because of the way the situation was framed as a problem: can a few non-Afrikaans speakers – and, specifically, a few English speakers – *exercise a veto power* over a conversation in Afrikaans? Specifically: can this happen at Stellenbosch University – for example in a classroom? Can a few English-speaking students, simply by not understanding Afrikaans, force a change in the medium of instruction? This is the matter of the “English veto”.

I addressed this matter, amongst others, in a speech to Convocation at its meeting of 14 November 2002<sup>84</sup> – a speech which seems to have become something of a landmark in the *taaldebat*. I quote the relevant passage in full:

*After everything has been said about tradition and renewal, about our socio-political environment, and about Afrikaans as medium of instruction, we are still faced with a practical issue. I have repeatedly said that the issue of Afrikaans at Stellenbosch is not so much a problem that has to be solved, as it*

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<sup>84</sup> “Tradition and renewal, and the future of Stellenbosch University”. Speech to the Convocation. See <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/convocation14nov.html>.

is a matter to be managed. It is this practical management aspect that I would like to illustrate with a few examples of questions that have by now achieved a virtually iconic status.

The first example is the one which, if I remember correctly, led to the start of the present debate early this year. In a class of, say, 40 students, there are one or two who are English-speaking, the rest are Afrikaans-speaking. The lecture is in Afrikaans. During the lecture one of the English-speaking students puts up his hand and says, "I'm sorry, I can't follow that. Could you repeat it in English?" What should the lecturer do? More generally: does an English-speaking student have the power of veto over Afrikaans in the classroom?

The answer is "No". There is no such power of veto. What there should be, I believe (acknowledging that we have not yet reached such a stage), is a code of conduct to which lecturers and students, as well as the University as a whole, are committed. The University has the responsibility to make known beforehand what the medium of instruction will be for a particular module or course. Students then enrol knowing full well what they are letting themselves in for, as far as language is concerned. Once they have made an informed decision, students cannot then make further demands in respect of the language to be used. However, the hypothetical student mentioned above, like any other student, might reasonably expect that his or her learning experience will be optimally facilitated. Explaining a concept for a second or even a third time is nothing unusual for an experienced lecturer. (Ask anyone who has lectured on mathematics.) If you as a lecturer need to explain the same concept again, there can be no loss, there will very likely be some gain for everyone, in giving the second explanation in English. But, as I have said, that is part of the learning process, not a veto over the medium of instruction.

What I was hoping for is that we could, as a university, find a way forward based on shared values, rather than rigid rules. Hence the idea of a code of conduct – which has since then indeed been drawn up and put into practice (as has the idea of language specifications of teaching modules). I was also making implicit use – or so I thought – of the distinction between rights and responsibilities. The English-speaking student cannot, to my mind, as

*of right* demand that the lecture be given in English, or even that the particular explanation be repeated in English. On the other hand, the lecturer has a *responsibility* to optimize the learning experience of all students, given the practicalities of the situation. One has to acknowledge that this is not clear-cut. There is no algorithm for resolving such a situation. On the other hand, that's what life is like. The student exercises a choice of what to request, and the lecturer exercises a choice of what to offer; both operate in a context of teaching and learning. The situation only needs "resolving" if it is cast into the mould of being a problem.

This little classroom cameo reflects the larger situation addressed by the Constitution when it says that language rights are subject to certain caveats which are based on responsibilities. For those who are interested in such matters, there are further conceptual intricacies. For example, *my* responsibilities may well be related to *your* needs. In the case in question, this harks back to what I called the "fundamental asymmetry" between English and our other indigenous languages. The reality is that, nine times out of ten, if English speaker X at Stellenbosch asks for Afrikaans to be translated into English, that request is based on a *need*, since X does not understand Afrikaans, or at least not well enough. On the other hand, nine times out of ten, if Afrikaans speaker Y at Stellenbosch asks for English to be translated into Afrikaans, that request is based on the exercise of a *right*, since Y understands English perfectly well. And so the argument may continue.

But I leave the conceptual analysis at this point to return to the rhetorical aspects. As it turned out, there was a difference between what I thought I had said, and what Convocation thought they had heard. What I thought I had said I explained above. What Convocation thought they had heard was that the Rector had promised that he would use his power to ensure that the "English veto" will not be exercised at Stellenbosch University. No wonder, then, that the recent *taaldebat*, in the wake of the Arts Faculty decision to move more strongly towards dual-medium instruction, has been littered with accusations of breach of promise, buckling under pressure, or just being plain *skelm*.

I would therefore like to apologise to those who thought they heard me giving a guarantee against the English veto. I never thought of having given

a guarantee, since I do not believe that such guarantees can be given. But, with hindsight, I should have been more attuned to the mindset filters through which my message had to pass.

### 3.6 Other voices

To get back to the point I made towards the end of Section 3.3: many people support the case for Afrikaans, at Stellenbosch or in general, from a progressive standpoint rather than a reactionary position. As reported, there is a neo-Afrikaner agenda, and the neo-Afrikaner agenda includes an Afrikaans agenda, but not everybody with an Afrikaans agenda would support a neo-Afrikaner agenda. To be clear on this point, we should pay attention also to the “other voices” relevant to the *taaldebat*, even when their direct participation may have been minimal.

There is surely no starting point with greater legitimacy than the voice of Nelson Mandela. In accepting an Honorary Doctorate from Stellenbosch University on 25 October 1996, he said (in Afrikaans):

*Nobody is asking for the denigration of the Afrikaners; nobody is asking for Afrikaners to humiliate themselves in public. However, what nobody can deny is that apartheid committed a terrible injustice to this country and its inhabitants, and that the Afrikaners played a central and essential role in it.*

...

*As is surely the case with all languages, Afrikaans can thank or blame the power relations in society for its particular development. The fact of the matter is, however, that it is a highly developed academic and scientific language. And, as also mentioned by the Commission on Higher Education in their report: Afrikaans as a language of science is a national asset.*

*The challenge, therefore, does not revolve around the extermination or not of Afrikaans as academic medium. Rather, the question is: how do we negotiate amongst ourselves a dispensation in the South African university system which satisfies the following three characteristics. First, that a space be created and sustained for Afrikaans to keep growing as a language of science. At the same time, that non-Afrikaans speakers not unfairly be deprived of access within the system. And, further, that use and development of any*

*language medium not, wittingly or unwittingly, become the basis for the promotion of racial, ethnic or narrow cultural isolation.*

*To put the case entirely soberly and simply: surely it must be possible, within a system comprising more than twenty universities, to come to an agreement that there should be at least one university which has as a main function to watch over the continued development of Afrikaans as academic medium.*

*How that institution is to accommodate other languages as well is a matter of detail which can be negotiated. If we could solve the great political conflicts by negotiation, such a matter should not be insurmountable for the learned of the land.*

This is very much in the same spirit as the Gerwel recommendations – which is not surprising, since Jakes Gerwel (as he mentioned some years later) drafted Mandela’s speech. The “surely it must be possible” paragraph has often been quoted in the *taaldebat*, almost as a sanctification by Mandela of the idea of an “Afrikaans university”. But of course he did not use such terminology, and it is questionable whether he would have sanctioned, let alone sanctified, the narrow notion of an “Afrikaans university” as outlined in Section 5.2. What is not so often quoted is that Mandela also said, in the same speech:

*Much has changed since [the dark years of apartheid], but it remains my wish that we will all be subsumed into this great land.*

*And that Afrikaans institutions, and Afrikaans people, will never again stand surly and apart on the sidelines, but will become entwined with the newness that we are creating.*

*It is knowing that this university has a great role to play in making this wish come true that I accept the honour of becoming an alumnus of Stellenbosch University.*

The juxtaposition of the generous acknowledgment of Afrikaans with the idea of responsibility for its “higher functions” residing primarily in one institution, *without* it becoming an enclave standing “surly and apart” on the sidelines of our national development – this is the heart of the matter. And

every now and then, amidst the rhetoric and emotion of the *taaldebat*, this idea of a progressive move towards ensuring sustainability shines through. It is the antithesis of some of the wilder neo-Afrikaner pronouncements, such as the following:

*Afrikaans was the origin of the Afrikaner. If we lose our Afrikanerskap, we lose an identity. This would of course be good for “one-nationhood”, and the “Afrikaners with English hearts” will also be satisfied ... But perhaps there are some who will get gatvol [“fed up”], and start thinking of ethnic mobilisation. ... Ethnicity can be dangerous, that we know from the past. But what if talk no longer helps, and while there are still Afrikaners passionate about their language?*<sup>85</sup>

Having quoted one president, it is only fair to quote another. Thus spoke Thabo Mbeki in the year he became President:<sup>86</sup>

*...the building blocks of this nation are all our languages working together, our unique idiomatic expressions that reveal the inner meanings of our experiences. These are the foundations on which our common dream of nationhood should be built... The nurturing of this reality depends on our willingness to learn the languages of others, so that we in practice accord all our languages the same respect. In sharing one’s language with another, one does not lose possession of one’s words, but agrees to share these words so as to enrich the lives of others. For it is when the borderline between one language and another is erased, when the social barriers between the speaker of one language and another are broken, that a bridge is built, connecting what were previously two separate sites into one big space for human interaction, and, out of this, a new world emerges and a new nation is born.*

Thabo Mbeki, too, has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Stellenbosch University. He too, in his address, touched on the matter of Afrikaans:<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ampie Coetzee of Mowbray, in *Die Burger*, 24 September 2005.

<sup>86</sup> On 27 August 1999. Quoted as a preamble to the Language Policy for Higher Education.

*This University has great educational and symbolic value for Afrikaans speakers, as well as many people from other language groups. It is also an important national asset for our entire diverse society, and not just a particular group. Changes and practices at Stellenbosch are therefore closely watched, and have a significant ripple or multiplier effect.*

*And indeed as Professor Brink said in the speech we have already cited:<sup>87</sup> “There is a strong body of opinion that says that if Stellenbosch cannot become part of the mainstream, then the Afrikaners will not become part of the mainstream, and this would impair the whole grand experiment of building a non-racial society in our country ... The question of what role Stellenbosch can and will play in the new South Africa is an important one – for historical reasons, for symbolic reasons, and for practical reasons”*

...

*The question we must answer together is how linguistic diversity can be utilised and developed in order to promote a creative interaction of people and ideas in our universities. This question should be answered by the universities themselves, within the framework of national policy and policy with regard to higher education.*

...

*We must together ask ourselves the question – have Afrikaans speakers in general really come home to the new South Africa? How many of them have migrated inwards, rather than merely fashioning a tolerable physical existence for themselves in our diverse society? And what role will Stellenbosch University, with its large component of Afrikaans speakers, play to facilitate the homecoming of the Afrikaans speakers?*

With Mandela and Mbeki one sees something taking shape which can, if you look carefully, also be found in a few other commentators. It is the idea that Afrikaans be supported in the sense of a national identity, not in

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<sup>87</sup> Address on Accepting an Honorary Doctorate from Stellenbosch University, 20 February 2004. See <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/2004/tm0220.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Mr Mbeki quoted from a speech entitled “Quality needs diversity”, which I delivered in January 2003 as part of the centenary celebrations of the Rhodes Scholarships. I return to this topic in Chapter 4. For the speech, see <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/rhodes2003e.html>.



the sense of a narrow group identity. Consider, for example, the voice of Neville Alexander (another Robben Island veteran).<sup>89</sup> He, too, shares the concern about erosion of the “higher functions” of Afrikaans, and draws the parallel with other indigenous languages:<sup>90</sup>

*If no preventive measures are taken, a language like Afrikaans will shortly be heard only in the church or in family and community circles, and perhaps in the first three years of primary school. Afrikaans radio and pay-TV programmes could still be “enjoyed”, since that is after all the situation in which the other official languages, except English, find themselves. But who would claim that the Afrikaans press could remain viable when the number of people who can read or write the language starts declining?*

So far, so familiar. But then a crucial difference emerges.

*I am not in favour of the entrenchment of language rights as group rights, although I know that in this respect I differ from many of my most esteemed colleagues. A university which offers undergraduate classes in Afrikaans, but also sees to it that other languages are accommodated at undergraduate and particularly postgraduate level is not – as I see it – an “Afrikaans university”. It is, however, a university where the maintenance and further development of Afrikaans as a language will be assured – an Afrikaans-oriented university, therefore.*

An “Afrikaans-oriented university” – a concept significantly different from the hardline “Afrikaans university” as outlined previously.

Finally, it was foreseen in the Language Policy for Higher Education, when it appeared in November 2002, that the Ministry would establish a task team to advise on the development of the national languages other than English or Afrikaans as languages of instruction at tertiary level. This became a Ministerial Committee, chaired by Prof. Njabulo Ndebele, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, who had also been a member

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<sup>89</sup> For a profile of Neville Alexander, see

<http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/alexander,n.htm>.

<sup>90</sup> Both the following quotations are from his article “The necessity of universities for the survival of the non-dominant languages in South Africa”, in *Kruispad*, pp. 8-14.

of the Gerwel Committee. The brief of the Ndebele Committee was “to advise the Minister of Education on a framework for the development of indigenous languages for use as mediums of instruction in higher education”. It is worth noting that the idea of all indigenous languages eventually being used for teaching at tertiary level was pitched, not as a question of whether, but a question of how. The Ndebele Committee eventually submitted its report, entitled “The development of indigenous African languages as mediums of instruction”, to the Minister (another Minister, by that time) in March 2005.

The Ndebele report, working from the outside in, first notes that indigenous African languages are endangered:

*Emanating from our deliberations is our strong view that a crisis is looming in South Africa regarding the preservation, maintenance and associated identity of our indigenous African languages. The strong preference for English instead of African languages in all the formal sectors of society, both private and public, continues unabated in general social practice. Even in institutions of higher learning which are the focus of this current project, investment – both human and financial – in the teaching and study of African languages shows a declining trend. Departments of African Languages are closing down because student numbers have fallen drastically. The future of the indigenous African languages as mediums of instruction is bleak unless a long-range plan is devised that could be implemented as a concerted effort over the next two to three decades.*

And the framework for such a long-range plan is, essentially, that:

*Each higher education institution should be required to identify an indigenous African language of its choice for initial development as a medium of instruction.*

There is much more, as one would expect, but this is the core recommendation, and the one most relevant to the *taaldebat*. Essentially, Ndebele agrees with Gerwel that the locus for development of the “higher functions” of a language should be at a university. However, there are some subtle but important differences. First: the emphasis is much more

on a national strategy, for the national good, than on an exceptional case for a particular segment of the nation. Second, whereas the Gerwel Committee envisaged that the government would *assign* responsibility to a university for a language, the Ndebele Committee envisaged that universities would be required to *choose* which language they would wish to develop as a medium of instruction (and how). And third, in the case of African languages, the recommendation that a university should take responsibility for the “higher functions” of a language, say isiZulu or isiXhosa, has not turned into a demand for a “Zulu university”, or a “Xhosa university”, in the way that the recommendation that Stellenbosch should take responsibility for Afrikaans has been presented as an argument that Stellenbosch should be an “Afrikaans university”. I will pick up on these matters again in Chapter 4.

## *The taaldebat:*

### *A response from Stellenbosch*

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Much as the idea of Stellenbosch as an “Afrikaans university” has featured in the *taaldebat*, these particular words do not actually appear in any of the governing documents of the University. The Higher Education Act does not identify Stellenbosch as such. Neither does the Statute of the University,<sup>1</sup> according to which its business is conducted. The Strategic Framework of 2000, which maps out the road into the new millennium, does not use the phrase “Afrikaans university” at all. Nor does Vision 2012 – or indeed any of the policy documents of the University.<sup>2</sup>

But if Stellenbosch is not an “Afrikaans university”, in the sense that the neo-Afrikaners and *taalstryders* would have it, what kind of university is it? Or, better: what kind of a university does it wish to be? I respond to this question in Section 4.1. The response, as we will see, raises a question which seems to me central to the entire *taaldebat*, and which is discussed in Section 4.2. This gives the necessary background for a response to the arguments of the *taaldebat*, which follows in Section 4.3. Finally, in Section 4.4, I summarise, draw some conclusions and look to the future.

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/US\\_Amp\\_dok/statute.htm](http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/US_Amp_dok/statute.htm).

<sup>2</sup> It is sometimes claimed that Stellenbosch *used* to be identified officially as an “Afrikaans university”, when it was still defined by its own act of Parliament. (Pre-1994, each university had its own Act – now all repealed.) But this is a half-truth. The only reference to Afrikaans you would have found in the former University of Stellenbosch Private Act of 1992 was in Section 18, which merely stipulated that “the language medium of the university is Afrikaans” – adding the rider that “other languages may be used for instruction where such use is, in the opinion of the senate, necessary for effective instruction”.

## 4.1 What kind of university?

As the new millennium approached, the academic community at Stellenbosch University started shaping their future – one in which they would chart a new direction. The resulting document, entitled “A Strategic Framework for the Turn of the Century and Beyond”<sup>3</sup> raised the flag for the classic academic values, but envisaged an entirely new social dimension at the University.

The business of the University, the Strategic Framework says unequivocally, is about knowledge.

*The mission statement emphasises that a concern with knowledge is the University’s essential and distinctive raison d’être*

...

*The [mission] of the University of Stellenbosch is to create and sustain ... an environment in which knowledge can be discovered, can be shared, and can be applied to the benefit of the community.*

This starting point is significant. The business of the University is not ethnicity, nor culture, nor language, nor regional agendas – although the Strategic Framework does go on to consider each of these concepts, and to outline the stance of the University regarding them. By saying, upfront and at the outset, that the business of the University is about knowledge, Stellenbosch nails its colours to the mast for what has sometimes been called the “generalist”, as opposed to the “particularist”, view of what a university is for. A *volksuniversiteit* is clearly an example of a particularist university. Likewise for an “Afrikaans university” – at least if one adopts the strict definition of this concept preferred by the *taalstryders*. Any university will and must have links and commitments to its region, its historical setting and a certain community. But any university must also have and demonstrate a commitment to the centuries-old ideal of a community of scholars pursuing truth and knowledge, and engaged in intellectual pursuits. (There are modern variations of, and spin-offs from, that ideal: entrepreneurship, for example, and the concept of intellectual property – but that is not to the point here.) It is in the nature of the game,

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/StratPlan/index.htm>.

therefore, for a university to position itself somewhere on a spectrum ranging from “particularist” to “generalist” by the manner and extent to which it engages with the particularities of its setting, as well as the universalities of the pursuit of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

What Stellenbosch University did in adopting its Strategic Framework in 2000 is to move significantly towards the “generalist” side of the spectrum. This, perhaps, was part of a realisation that the extent to which the University had tended towards the “particularist” side in the past was also the extent to which it was accountable for what had happened in that past. Accordingly:

*The University acknowledges its contribution to the injustices of the past, and therefore commits itself to appropriate redress and development initiatives.*

There is a commitment to change – not just in numbers, but in nature:

*The university commits itself to an open, broad process of self-scrutiny and self-renewal. This process involves, not just the making of projections, but a serious and critical reassessment of the University’s institutional character.*

And what could be more central to institutional character than language?

*The University positions itself as a language-friendly university, with a responsive and flexible approach to language of instruction, and with Afrikaans as its point of departure.*

...

*Any person who has the requisite intellectual capacity and intends to study or work at the University must, within reasonable limits, be enabled to do so.*

...

*A pragmatic, flexible approach to language of instruction must be followed at the University, taking into account (i) students’ preferences,*

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<sup>4</sup> In discussions of “the nature of the university” there are some pitfalls which, fortunately, have been reasonably well charted by now. I should just make it clear, therefore, that the debate regarding “particularist” vis-à-vis “generalist” universities should not be confused with another distinction, that between a “theoretical” or “applied” orientation in the pursuit of knowledge. That is a different matter altogether.

(ii) the number of students involved, (iii) the cost of alternatives, (iv) the logistic implications of alternatives, (v) market needs, (vi) the question of scarcity or uniqueness, in a regional or national context, of the instructional programmes concerned, and (vii) the University's vision, commitments and values...

...

*The University acknowledges institutional culture as a factor in accessibility. Accordingly, it commits itself to an ongoing and critical appraisal of its institutional culture and of the implications of that culture for accessibility.*

It is significant that language, in the sense of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, while getting its due regard in the transformation agenda spelled out by the Strategic Framework, is hardly the centrepiece of the document. This reflects also an observation that can be applied to the entire *taaldebat*: there has been more heat and emotion about Afrikaans at Stellenbosch outside of Stellenbosch than on the campus itself. By and large the academics and students prefer to get on with their core business, which is the business of teaching and learning. This had already been noted by Lawrence Schlemmer in a study of 1999:<sup>5</sup>

*To summarise: the impression is that it cannot be expected of senior Afrikaans academics to be proactive in the taal-issue. As functionaries in the midst of a transition process they would rather react to the forces impinging on their institutions. With few exceptions, they are unemotional, rational adapters who have already attained that which they could not in the days of apartheid – to be accepted outside Afrikaans circles as serious academic institutions.*

...

*That is the core problem: who speaks for Afrikaans? Exactly those people whose opinions carry much weight, the senior Afrikaans academics, are clearly not all devotees of the taal-issue.*

This reinforces the fourth observation we made in Section 2.6: university professors and managers tend to find protectionist measures for language

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<sup>5</sup> Reported in *Kruispad*, Chapter 5, entitled *Menings van die publiek* ("Opinions of the public"). See p.108.

irksome. But this is not so strange. One may take the view – as is done in the Strategic Framework – that if Afrikaans academics are in the first instance devoted to teaching and learning, rather than to the promotion of Afrikaans, then that is exactly right. Teaching and learning are what they *ought* in the first instance to be devoted to.

There is, moreover, a sober realisation in the Strategic Framework that language as a feature of institutional character is dependent on who speaks that language. That is, that the demographic make-up of the University is an important issue, which needs to be addressed. This is treated under the heading of institutional diversity.

*In their approach to diversity, higher education institutions internationally can be said to have in general positioned themselves in relation to two extremes – one extreme being defined in an exclusive mode, with reference to national, religious, ethnic and/or social identities; and the other extreme defined inclusively, with diversity seen as an asset capable of adding value to the institution.*

Again, this reinforces a previous observation (the third, in Section 2.6): that we may distinguish between a *protectionist* approach to language, and a *multiculturalist* approach. The protectionist stance, as we have seen, is reinforced by methods of exclusion and compulsion. The Strategic Framework proceeds to position the University firmly on the multiculturalist side – the inclusive side of diversity.

*[One of the focuses for repositioning is] a deliberate effort to turn the riches of the country's diversity to advantage as an asset – this means, specifically, efforts to advance interracial, inter-ethnic, multicultural and intercultural understanding, tolerance and cooperation.*

It speaks repeatedly of broadening the demographic base of the University. Both under “Strategic Priorities for Teaching and Learning” and as a “Focus for Repositioning” we find:

*...bringing about a demographically more representative body of excellent students, teaching staff and administrative staff.*



And, it adds, under the heading of “Redress”:

*[That] the need for demographic broadening of the University calls for a sustained critical appraisal of its accessibility. Redress requires a proactive approach in regard to both the student body and the staff body.*

The adoption of the Strategic Framework was a crucial decision-making moment for Stellenbosch University. It was, moreover, a decision of the University community *by and for itself*. Curiously, though, the point that the University takes its own decisions has largely been lost sight of in the rhetoric of the *taaldebat*. If anything, the opposite view has been prevalent. There are, so the neo-Afrikaners would have us believe, essentially only two protagonists: the “ANC government”, on the one hand, responsible (either by commission or omission) for the erosion of Afrikaans, and “the Afrikaans community” (or perhaps simply the Afrikaners), on the other hand, fighting to halt and reverse such erosion. Decision-making, in this view, is a winner-or-loser contest between these two opponents. The idea that the academic community of the University is perfectly capable of taking decisions for itself, and that this is where decisions *ought* to be taken, has hardly been entertained.<sup>6</sup>

But the point is essential, because it is, amongst other things, also a matter of academic freedom. Let us first note that the choice of which language to use as a medium of instruction very definitely falls under the heading of academic freedom. In the South African context the best-known formulation of this principle is probably that by TB Davy, who was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town in the 1950s. Academic freedom, he said, is the freedom to decide four questions:

- ø Who shall teach?
- ø Who shall be taught?
- ø What shall be taught?
- ø How shall it be taught?

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<sup>6</sup> In Section 3.5, under the heading of the rhetoric of the *taaldebat*, I discussed the example of the Arts Faculty decision to move towards dual-medium teaching, and the reaction to that decision.

This is exactly what happened, for example, in deciding on dual medium teaching in the Faculty of Arts. It has to do with whom we want to admit as students, what tuition we want to offer them, who should offer that tuition, and how we can best offer that tuition. It concerns the academic freedom of the academics to take such decisions.

The topic of academic freedom mostly arises in the context of the relationship between the university and the state, and perhaps rightly so. But academic freedom does not just mean that *the state* should not prescribe how the pursuit of truth and knowledge is to be carried out – it means that *nobody*, other than the academics themselves, should decide how the academic business is to be conducted.<sup>7</sup> Specifically: no “cultural-historical community” – not even one that may feel a sense of ownership arising from past participation – should be able to prescribe to the university what to do. Take an interest and participate, yes. Advise, guide, express concern, warn – all of these. But the decision-making power must reside in the university itself.

The same conclusion is also reached by a very different route. Increasingly, the business of the university results in *business*, in the sense of money. One of the most significant developments relating to tertiary education over the past two or three decades has been the realisation that knowledge is not just a form of power; it is also a source of profit. Thus arose the notion of the knowledge economy, in which progress and prosperity are based on expertise in dealing with knowledge as a commodity. In such a situation, of all economically active sectors of society, there must surely be a central place for those who create knowledge, disseminate knowledge, apply knowledge and integrate knowledge. In other words: universities. And this is indeed happening. For example, the total income of Stellenbosch University for 2005 breaks down as follows.<sup>8</sup> Approximately 31% comes from the state in the form of an annual subsidy; around 21% comes from

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<sup>7</sup> Academic freedom is a large topic and I am aware that a statement like this one is subject to all sorts of caveats and qualifications. But my point is simple: whatever concerns may be raised about the role of the state under the heading of academic freedom could, in the case of Stellenbosch University, likewise be raised about the role of Afrikanerdom.

<sup>8</sup> I made this point in my address to Convocation in November 2005. See <http://www.sun.ac.za/rector/convocation2005.html>.

tuition and residence fees; approximately 5% from investments, and the remaining 43% – thus by far the greatest single portion – from so-called “third-stream” income.<sup>9</sup> What is this third-stream income? In brief, it is money that academics earn for the University through their research, their contracts with the commercial and industrial sectors, from donations received, intellectual property transactions and entrepreneurship. Thus most of the income of the University is generated by its employees themselves. It follows that one should grant the employees a high degree of decision-making power regarding the way they want to run their business. They are, after all, the people who teach the students, do the research, execute the contracts and generate the intellectual property.

As a slight diversion, this may also be the appropriate place to dispel a small but annoying myth regarding the financial position of Stellenbosch, namely that it is largely beholden to its alumni for funding its day-to-day operations. In the early days of the *taaldebat* it did not take long for the point to surface that an all-too-adventurous policy may lead to a situation where donor support from the alumni corps might be withdrawn. I addressed this matter in my annual public report in 2003:<sup>10</sup>

*I know that the topic of alumni contributions to university funds was often raised in the recent debates - sometimes with concern that the cheque books might be slammed shut if too many changes took place. Some clarity on this issue might be helpful. Donations from alumni are very important to us - but they are not yet as important as we would like them to be. For example, during the past five years we have never received donations from more than 5% of our alumni. Also, during the past five years the donations from alumni in any given year never amounted to more than 8% of the total donations - in a typical year this figure is under 6%. Last year, for example, donations from alumni amounted to R4,2 million of the total amount of donations of R62,2 million (that is 6,75%).*

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<sup>9</sup> Expressed as percentages of total income, third-stream income has been steadily rising, state subsidy has been steadily declining, and the contribution of student fees and investments has been more or less constant. In 1997 state subsidy comprised 41% of the total income, and third-stream income 31%.

<sup>10</sup> At that time the older constituency first started raising in public the question “What is happening at Stellenbosch?”, so I used this as the title of my report. See <http://www.sun.ac.za/rector/midyear.html>.

Of course Stellenbosch University does have donors, and many of them are alumni. The University is grateful for their support and tries to deal with them as stakeholders and partners. But the idea that the older constituency, and the “cultural-historical” Afrikaner minority in particular, practically keeps the University afloat is not an accurate reflection of reality.

To summarise: Stellenbosch University had already by 2000 opted to be a certain kind of university: generalist rather than particularist, multicultural rather than monocultural, and “language-friendly” rather than strictly Afrikaans. And this development has been consciously continued and reinforced since then. Essentially, the Strategic Framework charts a *transformation route* for the University, with the 5-point Vision 2012 providing the compass.

As we saw in Chapter 3, to some Afrikaners “transformation” means nothing more than “affirmative action” – seen as something negative; a process of systematically winking out white people in the workplace and replacing them with black people. In higher education, however, “transformation” has many faces. Professor Barney Pityana, Vice-Chancellor of UNISA, refers to:

*[a] plethora of competing demands ... that higher education is being subjected to: ... transformation as sound financial management within diminishing resources; transformation as throughput rates and research profile; transformation as representativity reflecting the demographic profile of the country at all levels of the life of the institution; transformation as strategic positioning and occupying a place of esteem amongst one’s peers and attracting large financial resources from the private sector.<sup>11</sup>*

And there’s more. Think for example of the emphasis of the National Plan on Higher Education on increased access, and the process of re-engineering the sector manifested in the national “mergers and amalgamations” exercise. Amongst senior black academics transformation is often primarily

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<sup>11</sup> From an article entitled “If not now, then when?”, in the *Mail and Guardian*, 7-13 May 2004.

seen as *Africanisation*.<sup>12</sup> More generally, it may be regarded as culture change. (Whether the culture change is experienced positively or negatively is another question. As we have seen, those who complain that Afrikaans is being eroded in higher education often attribute this to a transformation-as-culture-change agenda of the government.) Transformation could simply mean academic changes: the curriculum, the research foci, or the discipline structures. Or it could mean changing the business processes – budgeting, human resource management, procurement, risk management, quality assurance and the like.

But it seems best not to get entangled in debates on “what transformation really is”. Stellenbosch University has found that a very simple characterisation will suffice:

*At Stellenbosch, transformation involves the attainment of Vision 2012.*

What this means is that transformation is more in the nature of a mind game than a numbers game. It involves changing the way people think: about the world and about their place in the world. Transformation at Stellenbosch involves a gradual merging of the older constituency into the newer constituency. During 2004 the University checked its progress in this regard by commissioning a study on perceptions of the Stellenbosch University brand, particularly as regards transformation.<sup>13</sup> This study showed that there is a strong middle ground developing between the extremes of the two constituencies I have mentioned. The almost 6 000 respondents in the study can be divided into three clear groups:

- ð **Group 1:** Those who agree that transformation is taking place, and believe that the process is being responsibly managed.

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<sup>12</sup> There is a very useful collection of articles around this topic in the *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 18(3), 2004.

<sup>13</sup> The study was carried out by CREST, the Centre for Research on Science and Technology. They have a long track record of such studies, e.g. for the HSRC and government agencies. The full report is available at <http://academic.sun.ac.za/abgv/Dokumente//USbeleid/Handelsmerk%20Verslag%20Maart%202005>.

- ð **Group 2:** Those who agree that transformation is taking place, but are of the opinion that it is managed irresponsibly, with scant regard for tradition.
- ð **Group 3:** Those who do not agree that transformation is happening, or who believe that it is happening much too slowly.

And the percentages are as follows: Group 1 comprises about 60% of respondents, Group 2 comprises 23%, and Group 3 comprises 17%. This, then, is how Stellenbosch University was perceived five years after starting to walk down the transformation road mapped out by the Strategic Framework. It shows that the University is succeeding in taking most people along with it.

With the characterisation of transformation as the attainment of Vision 2012, the University community can spend its time on deciding what to do to make Vision 2012 come true, and on *doing* it, rather than analysing an abstraction. It soon becomes clear then, that there is a lot that needs to be done, touching on practically all the topics mentioned above. To digress for a while, consider by way of example, under the heading of “transformation as a change in institutional culture”, the legacy issue of initiation rituals in the student residences.

Stellenbosch is a university town and the University has long been regarded as a residential university.<sup>14</sup> Thousands of students are housed in university residences, some of which are over a hundred years old. Over time, most residences evolved a robust “residence culture” of their own, with various in-house customs and traditions. One such custom was that there should be some ritual initiation of first-year students – backed up by the conviction that this was somehow a positive thing to do. The Afrikaans vernacular for initiation is *ontgroening* – literally, “de-greening” – which indicates that newcomers need to be changed from their “green” state of ignorance into an awareness and acceptance of, and loyal support for, the *gees en kultuur* (“spirit and culture”) of the residence. This process took many forms, mostly consisting of physical and/or mental abuse, evidently on the assumption that the spirit of the newcomer had to be broken down before

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<sup>14</sup> Public transport infrastructure is poor. There is no scheduled bus service inside Stellenbosch, and the trains are unreliable and unsafe.

it could be built up again. In the year before I came to Stellenbosch a student died during one of these rituals – and this was not the first time this had happened. My view was, and is, that initiation is a form of structural violence and that the University needed a culture change whereby such practices would simply evaporate out of the system in the course of time. It was clear that the rule-driven approach, whereby initiation practices were officially forbidden, had not been overly successful. Such was the culture of silence and connivance that only an exceptionally brave student would have the courage to lodge an official complaint, while the disciplinary procedures for following up on such complaints were cumbersome and largely ineffective.<sup>15</sup> Besides, it appeared that many newcomers actually *wanted* to undergo the process of initiation, partly because they may have been inculcated with a romanticised version of *koshuisgees* (“residence spirit”) at school or in the home, partly as a simple trade-off (“next year it will be my turn”), but mostly in consequence of a mindset in which power and authority have credence.

To address this aspect of transformation, the University minimised the rules and embarked on a value-driven approach. The rules were simple:

- ø No compulsion.
- ø No secrecy.
- ø No infringement of human dignity.

But mostly the push was to challenge the students themselves. On what values do you base your in-house programme for new students? Can you realise your goals without degrading practices? What contribution are *you* making to the vision of the University?

Changing the culture of initiation is a story worth telling, but not here. For current purposes it suffices to make two points. First, we are beginning to see the signs of a culture change – for which, incidentally, the students should get more credit than the University itself. Once new doors of the mind were opened to them, they rose to the challenge. A telling example

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<sup>15</sup> Besides, those charged could usually count on excellent legal representation forthcoming from a network of parents, family and friends.

was when one residence built its entire programme for new students around the activity of a house-building project in one of the black neighbourhoods.<sup>16</sup> The second point is that transformation in the sense of culture change requires a new kind of approach – an approach which in itself manifests the features of that changed state that one hopes to bring about. A *rule-driven* approach to dealing with culture change is of limited value because it is a “Mode 1” approach, and thus depends on the features of a “Mode 1” context. If we accept that we are no longer operating in such a context, but in a “Mode 2” context instead, then we have to adopt ways and means of transformation suitable to this new context.

To return to the main point, illustrated by this digression: for transformation-as-culture-change, a *value-driven* approach is more suitable than a rule-driven approach. The problem with the rigid “Afrikaans university” of the *taalstryders* is that essentially it posits a rule-based institution. That is exactly the kind of institution in which it would be difficult to deliver on a transformation agenda that includes a change of institutional culture.

The Stellenbosch University community made a conscious decision to transform itself into a certain (different) kind of university. It is worth considering the reasons for such a decision. One may hope, for instance, that Stellenbosch had learnt something from its history, and that the post-1994 spirit of nation building had not left it untouched. And there may be other reasons, dispersed between the many individuals and groupings making up the collective called “the University”. I would like to put up for consideration what I believe to be a central motivation for such a change. It is, quite simply, that such a change was (and is) seen as a necessary part of Stellenbosch growing in stature as a university of quality. Students and staff brought this change about as part of maximising their opportunities to be top-class professionals.

It comes down to a matter of quality. Vision 2012, in listing the University’s first goal as being “an academic institution of excellence and a respected knowledge partner”, probably reflects the essential purpose of

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<sup>16</sup> A more recent example was when one of our men’s residences actually published their entire reception programme for new students on the web.



every university in the world. But is there a single gold standard of academic excellence? I would argue not. Choosing to be a certain kind of university carries with it a concomitant understanding of quality, and a commitment to that particular notion. In a multicultural, heterogeneous university, comfortable within a “Mode 2” context, quality does not lie so much in compliance with a set of criteria as it does in optimising the learning experience. And this links up with the notion of diversity. For surely, the opportunities for learning are greater in an environment with “a diversity of people and ideas” than in a monocultural environment. I first raised this point in my inaugural lecture in April 2002.<sup>17</sup> A year later, in an address at the centenary celebrations of the Rhodes scholarships,<sup>18</sup> I coined the phrase that *quality needs diversity*. The argument goes as follows.

*In this country the word “diversity” is, understandably, often taken as a code word for black and white. And a more realistic racial mix is certainly an important example of what I have in mind. We do need more black students, and more black staff. And we have started to take steps to realise this.*

...

*But diversity of black and white is not all I have in mind. My view is that Stellenbosch needs more diversity in the full sense of the word. We need more diversity in terms of colour, of gender, of religion, of ability and disability, of sexual orientation, of geographic origin, of financial capacity – we need, in short, more diversity of those attributes common in South African society. But there is still more. We need not just a diversity of people. We need the true diversity of ideas.*

*Depending on what part of the world you come from, this may or may not sound like much. But it is a sobering fact that a significant proportion of South African society still views the idea of increased diversity with apprehension. This is also the case here – at this beautiful place, the symbolically important and historically homogeneous University of Stellenbosch.*

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/speech2002.html>.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/rhodes2003e.html>. On re-reading my arguments I have not been able to improve on them, so I quote the entire piece of reasoning in full.

No wonder, then, that there is a ready and even pre-emptive response against the idea of increasing diversity. I call it the “yes-but” response. The “yes-but” response to the plan of increased diversity goes like this: “Yes, of course I am entirely in favour of increasing diversity. But what about standards?” What this does is to position the concept of diversity at the outset as if it were in opposition to the concept of excellence. There is an implicit claim in the “yes-but” response that increasing diversity will inevitably lead to decreasing quality. And this is based on an implicit assumption that quality and diversity are conflicting concepts; that pursuing both of these is at best a balancing act, but more likely a trade-off.

To this, I say No. It is my thesis, and it is part of the strategic thinking for this university, that quality needs diversity. Diversity is not a hindrance or a danger to quality. Nor is it in opposition to quality. Diversity is one of the necessary conditions for quality.

I would like to give you some reasons for thinking that quality needs diversity.

First: Diversity has an inherent educational value. That is why we need more of it. The university is an educational institution. Our business is about knowledge. That means that we all have to learn, all the time. Students learn through their lectures, their assignments, their tutorials. Staff learn through their research, through their interaction with the community, and through their teaching. One way or another, we all have to learn, and keep on learning. And we will learn more from those people, those ideas, and those phenomena that we do not know, than from those we know only too well. We need around us people who represent the rich spectrum of South African life, and we need the diversity of ideas that are new to us. We need to pursue this diversity of people and ideas to increase the quality of our core business - which is to learn. Only in this way, I believe, can we really meet our responsibility to our students. We need, and we wish, to prepare our students to become active and confident participants in a multicultural and globalised society. Whatever the advantages may be of a mono-cultural institution, they do not include the opportunity to meet and engage with many different viewpoints, and to learn about many different environments. One reason why our engagement with diversity of colour is so urgent for us in South Africa is

that engagement between black and white people is such a powerful training ground for engagement with different ideas.

Second: The concept of quality is not one-dimensional. There are, of course, fields of endeavour in which we measure best on a linear scale. When the 100m sprint takes place at the Olympics, there is only one standard, and that is the time in which the race is run. Whoever runs fastest is regarded as the highest quality athlete. But it is worth keeping in mind that in order to run fastest, athletes would engage in a whole diverse range of activities. It is my contention that in many fields of endeavour, and in higher education in particular, quality is best not measured on a linear scale. Quality is after all a qualitative concept, not a quantitative one. Take the example of research. There was a time when the disciplinary specialist was king in academia, but nowadays we tend to give at least as much credit, and sometimes more, for cross-disciplinary work. We have come to realise that excellence resides not only in the analytical capacity of taking things apart. It also resides in the synthetic capacity of bringing many and diverse things together. Excellence in research, especially at the collective or institutional level, requires, to my mind, the horizontal dimension of cross-disciplinarity. This is where we deal with the integration of ideas. It is not a matter of accommodating different ideas. It is a matter of deliberately using contrasting, even conflicting ideas, to arrive at a new synthesis.

My third reason for saying that quality needs diversity concerns the role of a university in society – and more particularly the role of this university, in South African society. I have said that we wish to be a top-class university, and we certainly do. But so do most other universities. We have to be more specific: what does quality mean for us? Certainly it means good research and innovation. Certainly it also means turning out top-quality graduates, well-educated intellectually and well-prepared for the world of work. But I would argue that there is more. For Stellenbosch to be a top-quality university, in the realities of the here and now, must mean also that we are an active participant and role-player in the exciting process of creating a new South African society. Our quality as a university, I would argue, is also judged on the quality of our contribution to society.

And that, in the end, is what it is all about. We wish to be a top-quality university for a reason: to make a contribution to the development of this

country, and the development of Africa. We wish to be participants, not spectators, in the new democratic dispensation. We wish to go to work. If this university grew strong during the days of apartheid, let that strength now be put to work for the benefit of all. Let us use this university as a national asset. There is a strong argument that the pursuit of diversity should take place because we owe it to the past. But I believe there is an even stronger argument that the pursuit of diversity is necessary because we owe it to our future.

The argument that *quality needs diversity* has not remained unchallenged. That happened, first, because of a small logical error of interpretation, second, because of a misunderstanding, and third, because of a certain type of counter-argument.

The small logical error is that some commentators thought I was saying that diversity is *sufficient* for quality – that, to put it crudely, if only we had more Black students and staff, that would suffice for being a good university. I am not saying that at all. I am saying that diversity is *necessary* for quality – that if we don't increase our diversity of people and ideas, we won't be a truly excellent university, because we will not have optimised our opportunities for learning and utilised those opportunities. Second, there has been somewhat of a misunderstanding, namely that, in saying that quality needs diversity, and maintaining also that the Stellenbosch of the past was a particularly un-diverse community, I have been interpreted as claiming that the education received by previous students (and hence current alumni) was inferior. I am not making any such claim. It is necessary to recognise, as I did above, that the choice of what kind of university you wish to be carries with it a concomitant notion of quality. The Stellenbosch of the past operated in the environment of the past, and measured its quality by the yardsticks of the past. If we change our understanding of quality, along with a change in our conception of the University, there is little point in such comparisons. I am not saying Stellenbosch University did not have quality. It did. But it was quality of a different nature, suited to a different world – which has now passed. I have no doubt that the physicists or engineers or accountants produced by the University in former times were perfectly competent for their

environment – but today our graduates have to be competent for today’s environment. And, ideally, they should feel *part* of today’s environment.

The third matter to mention is a certain counter-argument relating to the *taaldebat*. It says that, if Stellenbosch were to be an “Afrikaans university”, it would thereby be *adding* to national diversity. The same argument can also be discerned in neo-Afrikaner discussions of “extending democracy” by striving to enhance “the federational aspects of the Constitution” and generating “greater independence for the Afrikaners”. This is the argument that diversity is best implemented, not as a diversity of individuals, but as a diversity of groups. On this argument, a diverse society is one with a diverse number of monocultures, each a clearly identifiable “cultural-historical” group, more or less looking after its own affairs. And a university embracing diversity, one must conclude on the same line of argument, would be one noticeably different from all other universities by the uniformity of its internal make-up.

Consider, by way of analogy, a box of Smarties.<sup>19</sup> When you open it, you will find inside many individual Smarties, of many different colours, all mixed together. That is one kind of diversity: the diversity of individuals. Imagine, now, that the manufacturers choose tomorrow to package their product in a different way. In the new Smarties packet, when you open it, you will find a number of smaller packets: one containing all the red Smarties, the second containing all the green ones, the third all the yellow ones, and so on. That is a different kind of diversity: the diversity of groups.

The argument of the neo-Afrikaners is for repackaging Smarties into different small boxes according to their colour. But the argument at Stellenbosch, by Stellenbosch, and for Stellenbosch, that *quality needs diversity*, is the argument for diversity in the sense of a box of Smarties all mixed together.

In summary: I have argued that the essential reason and main driver of the change of direction at Stellenbosch University has been the desire to be a

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<sup>19</sup> For non-South Africans: “Smarties” is a popular brand of sweets. Each Smarty is a small ellipsoid of chocolate covered in candy, in a striking colour. Since they are of many different colours, a lot of them together make a pretty picture.

top-quality university – nothing more and nothing less. At the risk of labouring the point: the business of the University is about knowledge, not culture or language. The first priority is to provide students with a good education which will prepare them for the world in which they will live and work, and to optimise the opportunities for our staff to do good teaching and research, and interact with the community. In adopting the Strategic Framework of 2000, the academics were saying that their core business is the knowledge business, and that issues such as culture or language (or religion or politics or money, for that matter) should be considered within that context.

One final matter remains to be mentioned here. I have already pointed out one reason why the *taaldebat* should not be construed simplistically as a contestation between a united Afrikanerdom, on the one hand, and a hegemonic “ANC government”, on the other hand. That reason is that the University is perfectly capable of taking its own decisions and values its independence from the government no more or less than its independence from the kind of “cultural-historical minority” that the neo-Afrikaners envisage. There is, however, also another reason. The second reason is that, more and more, the notion of a united Afrikanerdom is unravelling. The rise of the neo-Afrikaners is exactly the kind of counter-reaction that demonstrates this fact. In no way should the neo-Afrikaners be taken as the voice of a single and united Afrikanerdom. On the contrary. As much as the neo-Afrikaners work to enhance the centripetal forces required to reshape an Afrikaner identity, there are also centrifugal forces at work. One such is a growing tendency which may be called *Afrikaner agnosticism*. Like all forms of agnosticism, it is not so much something you believe, as the absence of a belief. Specifically, Afrikaner agnosticism is the view of some people who, by all external criteria of birth, language and skin colour, would be classified as Afrikaners, that, after all, *Afrikanerskap* is not particularly important to them. Thus, for example, the philosopher Anton van Niekerk:<sup>20</sup>

*It is time for us to stop making so much, with endless egotism, about our identity and our “Afrikanerskap”. There is a world outside overflowing with opportunities – also for the Afrikaans-speakers amongst us (just ask the new*

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<sup>20</sup> In *Rapport*, 6 February 2005.

generation of young Afrikaans entrepreneurs!) – to live life to the full in South Africa. Of course South Africa is not perfect or without fault. But the world is changed piecemeal – not by lamentations and jeremiads concerning everything which is wrong and which ought, in one all-encompassing vision, to be changed instantaneously. Thank God we are where we are today in South Africa, and no longer in the mess of 20 years ago. The challenge is to have, in another 20 years, a world which in turn will be free of today's faults and miseries. Can't we simply start working on that future as South Africans, without forever looking in the mirror to see who we are?

One problem with agnosticism is that it is in constant danger of reinterpretation as atheism – that is, that the absence of any convictions pro-X comes to be seen as a conviction *anti-X*. And sure enough, the point made by Van Niekerk (and others) that perhaps we should *stop* doing something, namely worrying so much about *Afrikanerskap*, soon became re-interpreted as a demand to *start* doing something, namely to *divest* yourself of *Afrikanerskap* – to take the trouble to shed that skin, so to speak. Thus, for example, Van Niekerk's colleague, Willie van der Merwe:<sup>21</sup>

*What makes the current debate [regarding Afrikanerskap] different, is that one party is setting itself up – paradoxically, in the light of history – as departed Afrikaners, unseen Afrikaners, thus non-Afrikaners.*

*They find it necessary to rid themselves of the “baggage” of Afrikanerskap, as they see it, in order to become part of the larger discourse of the new South African nation.*

*When I observe their sycophantic behaviour towards the new hegemonic regime, I am reminded of the anecdote of the elitist German Jews who, in fear of the advance of Nazism, protested against Jewishness with banners reading “Heraus mit uns!”.*

...

*My question to some of these departed Afrikaners is why do we have to say farewell to “Afrikanerskap” to participate in the “overflowing opportunities”. Is any such demand made of other South Africans? It is precisely here, at this*

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<sup>21</sup> In an article in the Saturday supplement to *Die Burger* called *By*, 2 April 2005.

point, where I part ways with the non-Afrikaners, to whom I will – with reference to our joint history – henceforth refer as *hanskakies*.<sup>22</sup>

The answer, surely, is that nobody is making any such demand. Those who wish to retain their identity as Afrikaners, and to participate in the “overflowing opportunities” of the new South Africa as *Afrikaners*, are free to do so. But then it must be clear that there are also those who say: “Not in my name!” It is not the case that all of those who *look* like Afrikaners choose to *identify* themselves as such. For some apparent Afrikaners, *Afrikanerskap* has simply become a matter of indifference. It is neither a blessing nor a curse; it is part of you as much (and no more) as having red hair or a birthmark. If you regarded such a feature as a curse you would dye your hair or have the birthmark removed; if you regarded it as a blessing you would accentuate it. But if you don’t care, you would simply leave it – knowing that others can see it, but not regarding that fact as being of much significance for who you are. That is the position of the Afrikaner agnostics: being identified as an Afrikaner, by external criteria such as the way you look or speak, is simply a part of your external make-up – not a part of what you believe or who you are. And, being indifferent, Afrikaner agnostics are hardly likely to make much of an issue about *Afrikanerskap*. Thus, for example, yet another philosopher, Paul Cilliers, in a letter to *Die Burger*<sup>23</sup> at the height of the *taaldebat*:

*I do not know whether it was the will of God, or just an evolutionary accident, but as it happens I am Afrikaans. This is a circumstance with which I am normally perfectly content.*

*The truth is that I actually do not think about it too much, just as I do not think about it too much that I have a liver. The current flutterings about*

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<sup>22</sup> This requires explanation. The term *hanskakie* is a pejorative term going back to the Anglo-Boer War. British soldiers were called *kakies*, because they wore khaki uniforms. The prefix *hans-* is an indication of being hand-reared – thus, for example, when a lamb is cast away by its mother and is bottle-fed in the farm kitchen, that lamb is a *hanslam*. The term *hanskakies*, accordingly, was applied to Afrikaners who were “bottle-fed by the khakis” – in today’s jargon: “wannabe-khakis”.

<sup>23</sup> *Die Burger*, 10 October 2005.



*Afrikaans, however, I find disturbing. It is not doing the image of Afrikaners, and hence also of Afrikaans, any good.*

*A mere ten years after the end of apartheid (yes, there was such a thing, and it was evil) to beat one's chest in such a self-justificatory manner, is bad taste morally.*

...

*We are ... being called up by certain parties to mobilise for Afrikaans, to fight for the survival of Afrikaans, and for minority rights. The problem is, however, that I do not see myself currently as part of a minority.*

*When, in the 1970s and 1980s, as an Afrikaner, I resisted apartheid – and not in the 1990s when it became fashionable – then I felt myself part of a minority. At present I mainly find myself with an enormous feeling of moral relief.*

*I would now like to carry on with my life and make a constructive contribution at the level of content. I do not wish to have to write letters like this one.*

## 4.2 The fundamental question

When all the arguments for Stellenbosch as an “Afrikaans university” have been heard; when we have considered the ambition of Stellenbosch itself to become a certain kind of university; when we consider the juxtaposition of all five key words in Vision 2012, the entire conundrum of a language policy for Stellenbosch University can be summarised in one question, central, albeit hitherto implicit, in the *taaldebat*:

***Is it, or is it not, part of our vision for Stellenbosch University that there will be significant numbers of African Blacks on our campus as students and academics?***

The value of this question is that answering it clarifies two divergent strategic directions.

ð If you believe that Stellenbosch should be an “Afrikaans university”, in the strict sense of the *taalstryders*, then you must accept the

consequence that there will not be significant numbers of African Black Maties in the foreseeable future.

- ø If it is part of your vision that there will be significant numbers of African Black Maties in the foreseeable future, then you must accept that Stellenbosch cannot be an “Afrikaans university” in the strict sense of the *taalstryders*.

Experience as well as statistics tell us that, as long as Stellenbosch University retains the image and reality of a strict “Afrikaans university” – let alone the image of an *Afrikaner* university – it will not attract Black students or staff in any significant numbers. When, as part of the development of a Business Plan for the University in 2004, the management asked for a report on ways and means of attracting more African Black students to Stellenbosch, the answer came back unequivocally: the language policy of “Afrikaans as the automatic option in undergraduate teaching”, and the perceptions of Stellenbosch as an “Afrikaans university”, severely limit the possibility of recruiting significant numbers of African Blacks at undergraduate level.<sup>24</sup> As we saw in Chapter 1, only 4% of undergraduate students at Stellenbosch in 2005 were African Blacks. Elaborating further on the numbers given there, and as corroborating evidence, consider the fact that the University has been quite successful in raising the number of Black students at *postgraduate*<sup>25</sup> level. Between 2001 and 2005 the number of White postgraduates remained practically constant (at just over 4 000 students), while Black postgraduate numbers rose by more than 50%, from less than 2 000 to over 3 000. Thus the entire growth in postgraduate enrolments over this period is the result of attracting more Black students, and of these the highest increase – 68,6% – has been in African Black students. The details are as follows:

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<sup>24</sup> As one seasoned recruiting officer said about her experience when going out to schools and talking to African Black learners about coming to Stellenbosch: “Professor, they laugh at us”.

<sup>25</sup> “Postgraduate” in South Africa means “post-Baccalaureate”. It includes, for example, taught Masters’ courses. The figures given here are for *residential* students – i.e. not including any distance-education students.

**Table 2:** SU postgraduate enrolments by racial classification, 2001-2005

Race	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	% increase in 5 years
White	4 102	4 091	4 123	4 171	4 213	2.7
Coloured	648	656	662	860	1 017	56.9
Indian	238	253	266	239	232	-2.5
African Black	1 057	1 160	1 289	1 587	1 782	68.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 045</b>	<b>6 160</b>	<b>6 340</b>	<b>6 857</b>	<b>7 244</b>	<b>19.8</b>

But it is exactly at postgraduate level where the University has been fairly free and easy about language. Many taught courses at postgraduate level are available in English, and the language of communication between research students and their supervisors is sorted out between themselves. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a relaxed approach to language at postgraduate level has benefited growth in that area.

As regards numbers: the census figures show that only 4,2% of Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers are African Blacks – that is, only about a quarter of a million people, of all ages and from all walks of life. That does not provide a large pool of potential students. It is not clear how many African Blacks have second- or third-language competence in Afrikaans. But even if that number were significant, being taught in Afrikaans (as your second or third language) at Stellenbosch is not necessarily a more attractive choice than being taught in English elsewhere – even when English is also your second or third language. The University does, of course, offer bursaries and scholarships to African Black students to come to Stellenbosch. And there are indeed examples of non-Afrikaans-speaking African Black students who come to Stellenbosch of their own volition, and do integrate with an Afrikaans culture. But these are exceptional cases. The Recruitment Office warns that there is a tendency for prospective students to accept Stellenbosch bursaries only after having been turned down at English-medium universities. This raises two concerns: one of quality and the other of students approaching their studies in Afrikaans with some measure of resentment. The first is not good for the University, the second is not good for the student. Despite all obstacles, and given the very small numbers involved, the University has in fact succeeded in raising the percentage of African Black undergraduates slightly – from 1,8% in 2001

to 4% in 2005. But now that they are approaching critical mass, the African Black students have made it clear that they would prefer their teaching to be in English.<sup>26</sup>

As regards academic and general staff, somewhat the same situation obtains. In 2004, as another Business Plan project, the management asked a task team to address the question of how Stellenbosch University could attract and retain more African Blacks as academic staff. Again, and independently, the answer came back: the single greatest obstacle in this respect is a strict language policy. Up-and-coming young Black academics have many opportunities in South Africa today. Coming to work at Stellenbosch University, where you may be expected to teach in Afrikaans, where academic and social discourse is primarily in Afrikaans, and where real estate is highly expensive, is not an automatic first choice – even if the quality of academic work done here is of high calibre.

It is worth reminding ourselves (from Section 3.2) what the demands for an “Afrikaans university” at Stellenbosch involve:

- ǃ *All residential students should have a reasonable knowledge of Afrikaans, should be able to follow lectures in Afrikaans, and should be able to participate in student activities in Afrikaans.*
- ǃ *Academics who teach at undergraduate level must be able to lecture in Afrikaans.*

*And:*

*... the rule must be that no subject will be offered in English at second-year level, and that at first-year level it will only be done where class sizes justify it and Afrikaans will not be undermined. This institutional language policy should be clearly laid down, and non-negotiable. Academics should be informed that any deviation will be regarded as a serious misdemeanour.*

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<sup>26</sup> At a protest march against the current language policy organised by the ANC Youth League and SASCO branches on campus in 2005, I was able to point out that the very fact that they could muster enough numbers to organise a march represented an improvement on the situation of a few years ago.

This would be a different kind of university altogether from the Stellenbosch University envisaged in the Strategic Framework 2000 and aimed for in Vision 2012. I have argued that, inasmuch as Stellenbosch University may stand accused of Vision 2012 risking a slippery slope towards *verengelsing*, the other direction, of pursuing the strictly “Afrikaans university” of the *taalstryders*, would put the University at even greater risk – the risk, namely of a slippery slope towards parochialism and academic isolation.

*If we regard the risk of multilingualism as that of a slippery slope to verengelsing, then we must, on the other hand, regard the risk of Afrikaans monolingualism as that of a slippery slope to isolation. In the complex world in which the University finds itself, within the force fields of globalisation, the University as a whole will easily be able to slide back to the position of a small, parochial, regional university. Surely this is not what we want for our children. And it is no use denying this risk by saying that it did not happen in the past, because the Stellenbosch of the past was a different world from the Stellenbosch of the present or the future.*

*We are thus poised between the risks of two possible slippery slopes: verengelsing and isolation. Where the former might place Afrikaans at risk, the latter, to my mind, is even more fundamental, because it places the entire University at risk. The way of sustainability, I believe, is to be so vigilant that, in our efforts to steer clear of the one slippery slope, we don't end up on the other one. I would like to say that there are encouraging signs that we have thus far succeeded fairly well in this balancing act.<sup>27</sup>*

Consider what would need to be done in order to become the kind of “Afrikaans university” envisaged by the *taalstryders*. As regards students, the most straightforward way would be for the University to implement an admissions policy which makes proficiency in Afrikaans a precondition for enrolment. But then consider the case of Siphon X.<sup>28</sup> Siphon was born in

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<sup>27</sup> I quote here from my address to Convocation of 10 November 2005, at the height of the heat and emotion regarding the decision of the Arts Faculty to extend dual-medium teaching to the third year of undergraduate studies.

See [www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/convocation2005.html](http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/convocation2005.html).

<sup>28</sup> A real person, but not his real name.

Kayamandi (the black township of Stellenbosch) and matriculated from Kayamandi High School. His mother tongue is isiXhosa and he is competent in English, but not in Afrikaans, of which he has only limited understanding. His school-leaving results are quite sufficient to get into university, which he is keen to do. Being poor and unable to afford the travel or accommodation costs that going to another university would entail, it seems to be his great good fortune that there is a good university right on his doorstep. However, if Stellenbosch University had an enrolment policy which made proficiency in Afrikaans a precondition, *we would have had to turn Siphon X down*. Which raises some interesting questions. Is he not a *Stellenbosser*, just like any White Afrikaans kid who grew up on the other side of the tracks? What are Siphon's constitutional rights in this matter? Can we really tell him that he cannot attend Stellenbosch University because he is not proficient in Afrikaans? And if we do, will turning Siphon X away from his home-town university really benefit Afrikaans in the long run?

There is also a somewhat softer approach, whereby Siphon won't be barred – but he won't be welcomed either. Effectively, the University would say: “Listen Siphon, this is an Afrikaans university, and we teach in Afrikaans. If you want your lectures in English you really ought to go somewhere else. We won't stop you from enrolling, but then you have to conform to the way we do things here. The choice is yours, and the risk is yours.” Again some interesting issues arise. As a refusal to help Siphon, is this approach *morally* any different from barring him outright? Or, at a practical level, is it not risky for a university whose state subsidy partly depends on its throughput rate to accept a student whom it refuses to help towards success? And there are further possibilities. Stellenbosch could admit Siphon and continue teaching in Afrikaans, but require him to *learn* Afrikaans. However, if we *compel* him to do so, we have merely changed a precondition for enrolment to a precondition for graduation, with the

same questions arising as before,<sup>29</sup> while if acquiring Afrikaans proficiency is *voluntary*, we are back to the situation of unloading the risk onto the client.

Irrespective of the approach taken towards requiring Afrikaans proficiency for studying at Stellenbosch, one fact is clear: it would severely limit our ability to attract and retain African Black students. And likewise for Black academic staff. One of the demands of the *taalstryders* is that the ability to lecture in Afrikaans (or an obligation to acquire this ability) should be a precondition for appointment to the academic staff. Whatever may be the merits of such a proposal for promoting Afrikaans, from the point of view of recruiting top academics, it is a killer. It is not as though Stellenbosch can pick and choose amongst top-notch applicants who are so keen to join our University that acquiring a new language would be as nothing compared to the privilege of working here. And, while there really are top-notch Afrikaans-speaking academics, they are in limited supply, besides having plenty of other options.

The argument against the University adopting some policy of compulsion regarding Afrikaans applies of course to all non-Afrikaans speakers – South African or foreign, White or Black. However, they apply in particular to African Blacks for a further reason as well, which is that, for an African Black to come to Stellenbosch, is still to make a statement – either of compliance or of dissent. Academics are mostly not particularly interested in making such a statement. The same conclusions follow from the other conditions envisaged for an “Afrikaans university”. If the institutional business of the University is conducted in Afrikaans only, if the student activities are all and only in Afrikaans, if there are elements of exclusion and compulsion in the measures taken to “protect” Afrikaans, then non-Afrikaans people will not be keen to come here, will not feel welcome once they are here and are likely not to stay long in consequence. All of

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<sup>29</sup> Those who favour the option of students who lack proficiency in Afrikaans being required to learn Afrikaans often cite the example of foreign students in Germany being required to learn German – for example, through an immersion course offered by the Goethe Institute – as a precondition to studying in Germany. On the other hand, it could be mentioned that Germany is a monolingual country, which South Africa is not. Also, that the pattern of dealing with foreign students in European countries is changing in many places, as explained in Chapter 2.

this will strengthen the centripetal forces of a monoculture, limiting our ability to draw on top talent from outside this monoculture.

If Stellenbosch were to become the kind of “Afrikaans university” outlined above, the most likely scenario, in my view, is that it would in reality maintain itself as an *Afrikaner* university for the foreseeable future. It would be exactly the kind of enclave that the neo-Afrikaners are striving for: an intellectual nexus for the “cultural-historical” minority called Afrikanerdom.

This is an option the University has explicitly rejected. In my annual public report of 2004 I stated:

*The fact is that there are still those Afrikaners who would like to claim Stellenbosch University as a bastion of Afrikanerdom. We have no desire or intention to be anything of the sort. A bastion is designed to keep people out. That is not what we want to do. We have built into our Vision Statement that we wish to promote Afrikaans as a language of teaching and science in a multilingual context. Our aim is to bring people in, not keep them out. Part of our delivering on that promise, therefore, consists of disengaging the language Afrikaans from the ideology of an encapsulated white Afrikanerdom.*<sup>30</sup>

There is, however, also another view: that an “Afrikaans university” would be – or at least would become – a reflection, not of an Afrikaner community, but of a community of Afrikaans speakers – where “community” means something more than just a *linguistic* community. This is the view we encountered at the end of Section 3.3 and it is one which merits thorough discussion.

The first point to make is one we have already heard: the existence of an “Afrikaans community”, binding together Coloureds and Afrikaners in particular, is more of a wish than a reality. Afrikaner voices tend to posit an “Afrikaans community” as an actuality. But, insofar as there are Coloured voices speaking about this matter at all, they are at most in support of the notion of an “Afrikaans community” as a potentiality. Thus,

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<sup>30</sup> See <http://www.sun.ac.za/reaktor/toesprake.html>.



for example, the (Coloured) CEO of the *Stigting vir Bemagtiging deur Afrikaans*, recently, on the matter of Afrikaans festivals:<sup>31</sup>

*The Southeaster Festival has again brought to my attention our isolated existences in the Western Cape, and the potential of the arts to bring communities together.*

*Local Coloured, Black and White communities are still trapped in separate social, political or economic zones of comfort or conflict, and I have no doubt that this Festival offers us the opportunity to rid ourselves of the prejudices and negative feelings with which we have been burdened.*

It must be said, secondly, that even if there were an actual “Afrikaans community”, such a community would at present be dominated by the Afrikaners. There is no point in saying that there are more Coloured people than Afrikaners who are mother-tongue Afrikaans speakers, unless you acknowledge in the same breath that the Afrikaners, as a group, are richer, more privileged and more powerful than their Afrikaans-speaking Coloured compatriots. As regards higher education: we have seen that the participation rate of the Afrikaners (who make up 42,4% of the 5,98 million Afrikaans speakers) is 50,72%; while the participation rate of the Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds (who make up 53% of all Afrikaans speakers) is merely 4,5%. No surprises here, then. Miracles aside, White Afrikaans-speaking students at university will outnumber Coloured Afrikaans-speaking students for a long time to come.

But the numbers won’t take us to the heart of the matter. As a thought experiment, therefore, suppose that the most optimistic scenario of those who see or foresee a community of Afrikaans speakers holds true. Suppose, moreover, that Stellenbosch is (re-)constructed as an “Afrikaans university” and that it has developed its diversity profile as far as possible within the boundaries imposed by that definition. Since African Blacks would for all practical purposes be excluded, Stellenbosch would then be, not a white

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<sup>31</sup> CO van der Rheede, letter to *Die Burger*, 30 January 2006.

Afrikaner university, but a *White-and-Coloured* “Afrikaans university”.<sup>32</sup> Which brings us to a derivative version of our fundamental question:

*If Stellenbosch, as an “Afrikaans university”, can at most attain the diversity profile of a White-and-Coloured university, would we be satisfied?*

For myself, the answer is ‘No’. And I believe that for the kind of university envisaged in the Strategic Framework of 2000 the answer must be ‘No’ as well. Here are my reasons.

- ø A White-and-Coloured “Afrikaans university” will, by definition, be an enclave. In order to be maintained in the form in which it is conceived, it would have to have some mechanisms of exclusion and compulsion. Conceptually, therefore, there is no difference between a White-and-Coloured enclave and an Afrikaner enclave. But *the kind of university Stellenbosch has already chosen to be is the antithesis of the idea of an enclave.*
- ø Becoming a White-and-Coloured “Afrikaans university” will put Stellenbosch University on the slippery slope towards regionalism, parochialism and isolation. At best, for the foreseeable future, a White-and-Coloured “Afrikaans university” will be a mostly-White-with-a-few-Coloureds university. In terms of numbers, therefore, the danger of a slippery slope towards parochialism is pretty much the same here as it would be for an Afrikaner university. (Which is in no way saying that Coloureds – or Afrikaners, for that matter – are not just as talented, or just as capable of academic excellence, as anybody else.) It may be argued to the contrary that there are good examples of monolingual minority language universities elsewhere which have not experienced such a slide. That is true – but on that line of argument we would have to look at the conditions of success. Leuven is a monolingual Dutch university, which is academically very strong. But Leuven is in Flanders, practically an independent state, where the Dutch speakers have political power. The *Åbo Akademi* is a monolingual Swedish university, representing a tiny minority within Finland – and

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<sup>32</sup> A few years ago, when I first started propounding the thesis that Stellenbosch University needs more diversity, *Rapport* (27 July 2003) trumpeted from its front page: “*Bruin Maties’ oor 10 jaar*” (“Brown Maties’ in 10 years”).

it is academically very strong. But, although Swedish is a minority language in Finland, it is very much a majority language in Sweden, thus ensuring a big pool (bigger than Finnish) of Swedish speakers, students, academics and “higher functions” right next door. The University of Barcelona is academically strong, even though it teaches in Catalan, which is a tiny indigenous language compared to Spanish, a strong world language. However, Catalan is linguistically close to Spanish, and Spanish speakers make the transition to Catalan without too much trouble.

- ∅ Even should Stellenbosch as a White-and-Coloured “Afrikaans university” be a resounding academic success, it will not, in this country, escape accusations of racism. The argument that it is multi-racial, because it is not just White but also Coloured, is unlikely to win many converts in a country where by far the greater majority of people are African Black. Of course, one may argue that such accusations ought not to be made, or ought to be disregarded, or are unfair. But the point is that they will be made, and that this will impact on the image, and hence the effectiveness, of the University.
- ∅ If we accept that Afrikaans, as an indigenous language, cannot and will not ask for anything more (or less) than the other nine indigenous languages; if Afrikaans needs an “Afrikaans university” (of whatever racial make-up) in order to retain its “higher functions”; and if Afrikaans is to be a role model showing the way for other indigenous languages, then it follows that isiZulu will need a “Zulu university”, isiXhosa will need a “Xhosa university”, and so on – and that each of these will have to have the same characteristics of exclusion and compulsion as are being advocated for an “Afrikaans university”. To which only one question need to be asked in response: how would this differ from apartheid universities?

It must be acknowledged that in some measure these reasons for saying ‘No’ to the question whether White-and-Coloured is a sufficient measure of diversity amount to making choices. And it must further be acknowledged that in each case there would be people – the neo-Afrikaners, definitely, perhaps some Coloureds, and statistically speaking probably some other people as well – who would prefer the opposite

choice, and respond with a ‘Yes’ to the same question. If so, they must also accept the concomitant risks and trade-offs.

Take the matter of academic quality. If you are convinced that the survival of Afrikaans requires an enclave, and if you rank the survival of Afrikaans above any other consideration, you may well choose for an “Afrikaans university”, even while agreeing that the trade-off would be parochialism and academic isolation. This fact is nicely illustrated by the consideration given some years ago in Afrikaner circles to the possibility of starting a new “Afrikaans university” in Oudtshoorn, in the Karoo. Lawrence Schlemmer reported on this investigation in *Kruispad*, as follows:<sup>33</sup>

*An investigation was done into the possibility of a university or satellite campus in a mostly Afrikaans-speaking part of the country where there is at present no university – the Southern Cape. The aim was to test the hypothetical support for a mostly Afrikaans-language institution.*

*Since the great majority of people in this region, Coloured and White, are Afrikaans speaking, and since they would in all probability make up the majority of the students, that could mean that prescriptions regarding language policy would be superfluous. The plan (at least in 1999) was that the institution would be open to all students of all races and groupings who would desire or accept Afrikaans as the primary language of instruction.*

To anybody who has any conception of what it costs to run a good-quality university – let alone start one from scratch – the idea of a new university in a sparsely-populated area, catering mostly to that area, must seem bizarre. But that would be to miss the point. The point is that to those who commissioned such an investigation the primary aim would not be academic quality, but *being Afrikaans*. If such a “University of Oudtshoorn” turned out to be feasible in the form of a teaching-only extension of high school – in other words a parochial and isolated tertiary institution – such an outcome would very likely have been regarded as an acceptable *quid pro quo* for being Afrikaans. In the event, support for the idea proved less than overwhelming. While all respondents agreed strongly with the position

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<sup>33</sup> Lawrence Schlemmer, in a chapter entitled “Opinions of the public”, in *Kruispad*, p. 101.

that “mother tongue education at tertiary level is a basic right of all South Africans”, 72% of Afrikaans-speaking respondents (Coloureds as well as Whites) also agreed with the position that “English-language teaching provides more value and opportunities”. As for supporting such a venture financially, only 11% of Coloured respondents said “yes” to the possibility of a once-off financial contribution, and even fewer – 5% – said “yes” to the possibility of a regular financial contribution. (The corresponding figures for White Afrikaans-speaking respondents were not particularly encouraging either: 19% and 12%, respectively.)<sup>34</sup>

Another choice which has been mooted is to pre-empt the political fall-out of a racially based White-and-Coloured “Afrikaans university” by *making a deal*. The idea (as I understand it) is that such a deal would have two parts. One part would be a kind of *pact* between the Afrikaners and the Coloureds to join forces for Afrikaans – typically with the incentive that this would involve material gain for the Coloureds. The other part would be for this coalition to *negotiate a deal* with the government according to which the racial exclusivity of the enclave it wishes to establish will be overlooked as the price of preserving Afrikaans.

We have already seen that the aim of the Afrikaners as a “cultural-historical” community negotiating and making a deal with the government (on the presumption, one assumes, of a meeting of equals) is part of the neo-Afrikaner agenda. Of more interest here is the idea of a pact between Afrikaners and Coloureds. One can see the attraction of this idea. At last, the Coloureds would be acknowledged by the Afrikaners as *ons eie mense* (“our own people”). The Afrikaners would acknowledge, explicitly or implicitly, that it was a mistake to alienate the Coloured people by putting them on the other side of the fence during the apartheid days. In an act of atonement, they would put their economic muscle behind the empowerment of Coloured people, uplifting them from the socio-economic doldrums. In return, the Coloured people would, as it were, *enter the laager*, thereby legitimising as non-racial the exclusivity of a white-and-Coloured “Afrikaans community” in a country numerically dominated by black people. The whole idea has been well-formulated by Mr Koos Bekker, CEO of Naspers:

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<sup>34</sup> All figures quoted here are as given by Schlemmer in the chapter cited above.

*Perhaps the white Afrikaans speaker can say to his Coloured brother: my friend, for 300 years you have been done an injustice. Let us raise each other up. I can help you materially, such as in helping your children get an education, and you can help me recover my self-respect.<sup>35</sup>*

It is interesting to contrast this proposal with the views expressed by Dr Wynoma Michaels, a Coloured alumnus of Stellenbosch, and past president of the Students' Representative Council, a few weeks later:<sup>36</sup>

*The proposed approach of promoting diversity at Stellenbosch University, namely by means of an overarching attempt to recruit students primarily from Coloured Afrikaans communities, contradicts our commitment to diversity. It does so in the following ways:*

- 1. On the one hand it would serve as proof that we understand "diversity" in the most narrow and attenuated sense of the word, and that we are not taking the aspects of inclusiveness and reconciliation into account.*
- 2. On the other hand it would contradict our commitment to diversity, in the sense that we would choose only to be inclusive within a particular group, while other groups are once again not part of the equation – and are excluded by implication.*
- 3. Moreover, such an approach simply creates the impression that particular communities may be used as instruments for particular purposes, and the intrinsic nature and freedom of communities are thereby denied.*

Indeed, and with good reason, suspicions amongst Coloureds of a pact of any kind with the Afrikaners must run deep. At least twice within the last half-century the Afrikaners grossly misused their Afrikaans-speaking Coloured compatriots. One such occasion was in 1956, when the National Party removed Coloureds from the common voters' roll by the expedient of enlarging the Senate (which had been blocking the move) with sufficient new members from its own ranks. The second time was in 1984, when the

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<sup>35</sup> *Die Burger*, 26 October 2005.

<sup>36</sup> She was speaking from the podium at the Convocation meeting of 14 November 2005 in support of a motion supporting the extension of dual medium teaching in the Arts Faculty. (This motion was roundly defeated by a vote of the Convocation members present at the meeting.)

tricameral parliament was instituted, with Whites, Coloureds and Indians elected to separate houses in a 4:2:1 ratio – and African Blacks with no representation at all outside of the homelands. The kind of move now being proposed for a White-and-Coloured “Afrikaans university” seems entirely analogous: a move to legitimise exclusivity under the guise of its being “multiracial”.

It must be admitted that the idea of “diversity through Afrikaans” is a seductive one. In fact, I believe I can claim the credit (if such it is) for inventing the phrase. In my very first major speech at Stellenbosch<sup>37</sup>, within weeks from arriving in the country, I said:

*The development of Afrikaans, and the development of diversity, can and must go hand in hand. The reason why I say this is simple: There is a great deal of diversity in and around the Afrikaans language. We just have to exploit it. Within the context of a predominantly Afrikaans university we can go a long way towards increasing our diversity. Surely, within the context of Afrikaans, we do have diversity of gender – to begin with. We have far too few women in senior positions on our staff. ... Within the context of Afrikaans, we also have diversity of creeds – it is wrong to think that Afrikaans is essentially linked to one church or one creed. After all, one of the first uses of spoken and written Afrikaans, as early as the 19th century, was for teaching in Islamic schools in the Cape. Within the context of Afrikaans, we also have diversity of colour. Afrikaans belongs to the whole country, and we find the language in use among people of all colours. The demographic figures speak for themselves. We have, within the context of Afrikaans, diversity of origin – it is not spoken only in the Western Cape. ... We have diversity of means – it is not only middle-class people in the suburbs who speak Afrikaans. And we have diversity of sexual preference – gays, too, speak Afrikaans.*

While I see no reason now to retract any of this, I regret to admit that these unqualified and uncontextualised remarks encouraged a view I had not intended to support, namely that a strategy of “diversity through

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<sup>37</sup> At the academic opening of Stellenbosch University, 30 January 2002. See <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/speech2002.html>.

Afrikaans” will suffice. With the benefit of hindsight, I can see now that I contributed to an argument that diversity at Stellenbosch should be pursued *only* within Afrikaans. I am sorry about that. The irony is that I have found that even the diversity that *is* possible within Afrikaans has not been as actively pursued as one might have hoped.

In conclusion: there are those – and I am one of them – who believe that a vision of Stellenbosch University which excludes African Black people is morally indefensible and strategically unwise. But, as we have seen, there are also those who believe that the survival of Afrikaans, and particularly its “higher functions”, requires Stellenbosch to be a rule-based “Afrikaans university”. Moreover, there are those who would accept the consequence that at such a university African Blacks can have only a marginal presence and role, and who would argue that the survival of Afrikaans is a matter of sufficient importance to justify such a consequence.

### **4.3 Response to the arguments of the *taaldebat***

To repeat a previous comment: we should distinguish between the “soft” recommendation that Stellenbosch should retain, and exercise, a commitment to Afrikaans, and the “hard” demand that Stellenbosch should have the non-negotiable and sharply-delineated identity of an “Afrikaans university”. In Section 3.4 I outlined the arguments featuring in the *taaldebat* in more or less that order, from soft to hard, from general to specific. In this section I respond in the opposite order, from hard to soft – an order which reflects reasonably well the range of my own opinions, from disagreement to agreement.

#### **ǝ The no-compromise (Laponcian) argument.**

On the hard side we may start with the argument, attributed to Laponce, that when a university juxtaposes in its teaching a smaller language with a strong international language, then, unless rigorous protective measures are instituted and maintained, the inevitable result is the demise of the smaller language. I say “attributed to Laponce”, because, as we saw in Section 3.2, although, something along these lines can indeed be extracted from Laponce’s ideas, the fact is that in his book *Languages and Their Territories*, cited as the source of such an argument, his central thesis is not about education at all. The topic of



his book is language and political power. More specifically, the real Laponcian thesis is that *a language needs its own territory to survive*. To be precise:

*To protect a minority language, not by ineffective individual rights but by group rights, requires territorial rights.*<sup>38</sup>

Anybody who takes the trouble to look at Laponce's book will find the thrust of this argument right from the inside cover page, through the Introduction, in every chapter. Thus:

*Each language group strives to establish its domination and exclusivity in a given territory, goals much more easily achieved if a language has control of the machinery of government and in particular the control of an independent state.*<sup>39</sup>

...

*This work will be essentially an essay in political linguistics and in political geography. Its themes are, quite simply, that languages protect themselves by territoriality; that today this territoriality is assured first and foremost by the state; and that the modern state, which requires the active participation of the masses through both the spoken and the written word, is ... destructive of its minority languages.*<sup>40</sup>

...

*A dominant language in close contact with a minor language tends to exclude, eliminate, and achieve total victory over the minor. A normal state between languages is that of war.*<sup>41</sup>

...

*Generally speaking, the language that controls the political power eliminates its rivals; and to do this, the preferred instrument is the state. A language without a state does not necessarily lack an immediate future ... but it has a very uncertain long-term future.*<sup>42</sup>

...

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<sup>38</sup> *Languages and Their Territories*, p. 156.

<sup>39</sup> *Languages and Their Territories*, description of the book on its inside front cover.

<sup>40</sup> *Languages and Their Territories*, last paragraph of Introduction, p.4.

<sup>41</sup> *Languages and Their Territories*, p.70.

<sup>42</sup> *Languages and Their Territories*, p.91.

*Ethnic groups, linguistic ethnic groups in particular, can and often do fight to the death in the bosom of the state in which they are embodied.*<sup>43</sup>

It is just about enough to make you slit your wrists. However, since much of the argumentation of the *taalstryders* can be traced back to such Laponcian views, we should follow up. We may note first that Laponce's argument precedes by a good decade the debate, mentioned in Chapter 3, about minority rights within a liberal democracy. The trend of that argument is exactly that there is *not* an inevitable clash between minority rights and individual rights. You do *not* need to carve out your own territory and political power in order to sustain what you regard as your social rights. (This would surely go for language rights as much as anything else.) Secondly, the whole argument of inevitability has a "Mode 1" flavour which, as Gibbons *et al.* pointed out,<sup>44</sup> is characteristic of Cold War times: the idea that the future is a linear extrapolation of the past, the emphasis on power, the dichotomy of winners and losers. On the Laponcian arguments, pre-1994 South Africa could only have ended up in a state of civil war – but it didn't. Thirdly, one can see from the Laponcian point of view why the *taalstryders* find the "Leuven option" so attractive: their closest linguistic cousin, Dutch, managed in a multilingual country to carve out a territory for itself, and to control within that territory most of the levers of political power. And fourthly, it can be seen clearly now how the Laponcian thesis links up with the neo-Afrikaner agenda of self-determination: for the survival of Afrikaans, they say, the language must have its own territory – preferably a physical territory, or, if that is not attainable, then some kind of territorial centre of gravity, but at the very least a territory of the mind.

The Laponcian strategy – or at least the strategy based on an interpretation of Laponce's views – is essentially the strategy whereby a minority carves out and claims as its own a territory within which it becomes a majority. Thus, for example, in the island called Ireland, the majority of the people are Catholics and the minority are

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<sup>43</sup> *Languages and Their Territories*, p.189.

<sup>44</sup> See the discussion of Mode 1 and Mode 2 in Section 3.5.

Protestants. However, in the part called Northern Ireland, *if you only consider that part*, the Protestants are a majority and the Catholics a minority. Likewise, Jewish people are a minority in the Middle East – but a majority in the state called Israel. On this approach, the minority in the larger domain seeks its security by positioning itself as a majority within a smaller domain. The analogy with the neo-Afrikaner notion of what an “Afrikaans university” at Stellenbosch would be like is obvious: it would be an enclave within which the minority Afrikaans speakers would be the majority – and exercise power in order to remain so. We have already responded to this notion in considering (in Section 4.2) the fundamental question whether or not African Blacks are part of our vision for Stellenbosch. If they are, the Laponcian strategy must be ruled out.

But the Laponcian strategy, of a language carving out a territory of its own, must also be ruled out on purely practical grounds. *The Leuven option is just not available*. Perhaps if the Afrikaners in the 1960s did what the Flemish did, which was to claim and be content with a small part of the country, it might have worked. But the Afrikaners did the opposite: they claimed the whole country. And, as Anton Rupert said, he who wants to keep everything may lose everything. In post-1994 South Africa, the idea of Afrikaans speakers – let alone Afrikaners – exercising political control *as a group* in some territorial enclave is not, in my view, a viable proposition.

Strangest of all, however, in the frequent citing of Laponce within the *taaldebat*, is that you cannot simultaneously believe that “the language that controls the political power eliminates its rivals” *and* claim, as Giliomee does, that it is “nonsense that Afrikaans had a special advantage in the era of white rule in South Africa”.<sup>45</sup> To believe either is possible, albeit debatable, but to believe both is inconsistent. If you believe that the language with political power is at war with other languages, and that it will inevitably win that war, then you must also agree that it has, through its political power, a special advantage in that war. In which case, Afrikaans, when it had political power, must be a

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<sup>45</sup> See Section 3.1. The quotation is from *Afrikaans 80*, see [www.praag.co.za/opstelle83gil.htm](http://www.praag.co.za/opstelle83gil.htm).

case in point. Conversely, if you believe that it is nonsense to say that Afrikaans had a special advantage in the era of White rule, and you do not contest the indisputable fact that it had political power, then Laponce's thesis that the language with power must inevitably eliminate its lesser rivals cannot be true.

ø **The “slippery slope” argument.**

I have already responded to this argument in Section 4.2: inasmuch as there is a risk of a slippery slope towards *verengelsing* in not taking measures of exclusion and compulsion, there is an opposite and (in my view greater) risk of a slippery slope towards parochialism and isolation in actually taking such measures. In order not to slip down either slope, the University needs an adaptable strategy, suitable to the dynamics of a complex system, rather than a rule-bound approach of exclusion and compulsion.

ø **The argument for recognition of “cultural-historical minorities”.**

In Section 3.3 we unpacked a shrewd strategy of the neo-Afrikaners, namely to reposition Afrikanerdom as an endangered minority within a liberal democracy. Doing so is their democratic right. In principle there is nothing wrong, morally or otherwise, with some Afrikaners exerting themselves on behalf of what they perceive as “their” minority. Not, at least, as long as other apparent Afrikaners (White, Protestant, Afrikaans speakers) are equally free to *decline* membership of such a community and to say: “Not in my name”. (And further caveats would arise if the strategies include exploitation and compulsion – as they did under apartheid.) But the question regarding Stellenbosch is not one of generalities; it is a very specific question, the answer to which can be deliberated by all, but can only be decided by the academic community itself. We have also seen how the agenda to push for Stellenbosch as a White-and-Coloured “Afrikaans university” *assumes* the existence of an Afrikaans-speaking community – the reification, so to speak, of a desire. Two questions then arise. The first is whether such an Afrikaans-speaking community actually exists *as a community* – as anything more than a linguistic aggregation. We have seen in this regard how the “yes” answer tends to come from

Afrikaners, and the doubting voices from the non-Afrikaner Afrikaans speakers. Let us assume, however, that such an Afrikaans-speaking community exists at least as a *potentiality* (as a “sentiment”, as we quoted one commentator as saying in Section 3.3). That gives rise to the second question: if we are to *build* an Afrikaans-speaking community – presumably by making friends and influencing people – we have to ask: are the strategies of exclusion and compulsion being proposed for an “Afrikaans university” the best ones for this purpose? I would argue that they are not. I did this, for example, in addressing a meeting of students petitioning against dual-medium teaching.<sup>46</sup>

*[The] path to sustainability for Afrikaans is not through making rules, but by making friends. A brutal Afrikaans is not a sustainable Afrikaans. An aloof Afrikaans is not a sustainable Afrikaans. However, an Afrikaans that audibly and visibly aligns herself with the other nine indigenous languages is an Afrikaans that is truly South African. If we are truly South African, rather than just Afrikaans, we will be truly sustainable.*

ð **“There are two English universities close by”.**

This argument rests largely on the exploitation of an ambiguity. At an “Afrikaans university”, in the sense in which it is advocated by the *taalstryders*, Afrikaans is much more than just a medium of communication. It is an integral part of the (presumed or envisaged) cultural identity of a certain group of people. But “English university” is the opposite. Very few people, if any, would argue that English at the University of Cape Town, or Western Cape, or Witwatersrand, is an expression of cultural identity. Language, at these “English universities”, is simply a medium of communication. They are not “British universities”, but universities which, like the University of Auckland, Vancouver or Nairobi, happen to teach in English. Indeed, in the sense in which “English” would express a cultural identity, there are probably no “English universities” in South Africa at all. So the comparison between Stellenbosch as an “Afrikaans university” and UCT and UWC as “two English universities close by” does not hold in the sense of cultural identity, but only in the sense of language as a

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<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/petition.html>.

medium of communication and teaching. And in that sense the argument does indeed have merit: the idea that Afrikaans teaching ought to be *available* in the Western Cape has not been in dispute. Likewise, teaching in isiXhosa ought to be available in the Western Cape, so that all three the official provincial languages are catered for. But on this line of thought the questions are of a much more practical nature: how much, at what level, in which disciplines, and so on.

ø **Afrikaans as an instrument of empowerment.**

By definition, Afrikaans can only be used as an instrument of empowerment for Afrikaans speakers. At the outset, therefore, the empowerment argument for an “Afrikaans university” involves a choice: that empowerment through such a university will focus primarily on one particular “cultural-historical” group, namely the Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds, primarily in the Western Cape. Whether or not *this* particular aggregation can be regarded as a “community” is as much a moot point as the question whether Afrikaans speakers of all races form a “community”. As a recent correspondent to *Die Burger* wrote:

*Even given that Coloureds were excluded from certain opportunities [under apartheid], I have to admit that we were encouraged to believe that we were better than African Blacks. ... After years of advantage, Coloured people have difficulty in accepting (or understanding) that they are equal to other South Africans. ... The sad part is, however, that [a certain political party] is once again deliberately trying to make Coloureds feel “special” – and to buy their loyalty with certain privileges and attention. ... When Coloured people see themselves as part of this united country and developing democracy ... we will be making progress as a country.*

*The [same political party] has already lost my vote, since I would rather vote for an organisation committed to building that ideal country based on the principles of non-racialism and representation, than vote for anybody who makes me feel like a “Kleurling” [“Coloured’] of old. Never again!*<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Joey Williams of Bellville South, in *Die Burger*, 8 February 2006.

Let us, for the sake of argument, waive these considerations for the moment. The next question then is whether, if Stellenbosch University is to contribute towards improving the educational circumstances of Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds of the Western Cape, becoming an “Afrikaans university” in the strict sense of the *taalstryders* would be the best way of doing so. I would argue that it is not. My argument is that, while it is possible that teaching in Afrikaans may be useful to some students, money and mathematics would be even more useful.<sup>48</sup> We do not have any evidence that teaching in Afrikaans is a terrific crowd-puller for prospective Coloured students (and, as pointed out above, it is a definite turn-off for African Black students). If we analyse the student data<sup>49</sup> for 2003 for Stellenbosch, UWC and UCT, we see that there are 23% more *Afrikaans-speaking* Coloured students at UWC – where teaching is in English – than at Stellenbosch (2 381 as against 1 656). Overall, there are two-and-a-half times as many Coloured students at UWC than at Stellenbosch, and 6% more at UCT than at Stellenbosch. If Afrikaans was the main draw card, one would have expected the opposite. (Like the other two universities, Stellenbosch also offers scholarships, loans and academic support.) One relevant factor is that UWC, and to a lesser extent UCT, is much more accessible from the Cape Flats than Stellenbosch, which means that many students could study from home, cutting down costs. Given the prevailing socio-economic circumstances on the Cape Flats, the choice of university for many Coloured students is not a matter of language, but of bread-and-butter issues. Such is the opinion I put to Convocation:

*My hypothesis is that, if we want to draw more Coloured people to Stellenbosch, we will have to mobilise more resources before we hoist the flag of Afrikaans. And by mobilising more resources I do not only mean that we*

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<sup>48</sup> I made the same kind of argument to the then Minister of Education in 2002, in arguing about the mantra in the National Plan on Higher Education that “language must not be a barrier to access”. The real “barriers to access” are money and mathematics.

<sup>49</sup> These are figures for 2003, available from HEMIS (the Higher Education Management Information System), compiled by the Institutional Planning Department at Stellenbosch University.

should offer more bursaries, although this is obviously very important. I mean that we should offer a total support package. For example, it remains an anomaly to me that we so readily offer wealthy students from privileged homes and schools, whose parents live in Stellenbosch, accommodation in our residences, while at the same time we easily refuse a disadvantaged Coloured student from Eerste River a place in a residence because her matriculation marks are not good enough. What message does this send about the empowerment we talk about so glibly? Do we really expect the Coloured student, from a less privileged environment, who is struggling with her first-year workload, to spend two hours commuting to Stellenbosch every day just for the privilege of attending classes in Afrikaans?<sup>50</sup>

The same point was made independently by Dr Wynoma Michaels:<sup>51</sup>

*If one reads Die Burger nowadays, you cannot help asking the following questions:*

- Whose language is it anyway?*
- Who is or should be the keeper of Afrikaans?*
- Who should speak for the Coloured Afrikaans speakers of the Western Cape? The letter writers to Die Burger?*

*I wonder if the letter writers to Die Burger who write about Coloured Afrikaans speakers have ever been to the Cape Flats? Do they know Elsiesrivier, Bishop Lavis, Bonteheuwel or perhaps Manenberg? If they knew these places, they would have known that it is almost impossible financially for our people to come to Stellenbosch.*

*So, who would pay for the cost of studying? The University? I don't think so! If Convocation feels so strongly about taal and diversity, this is a valid opportunity to prove their commitment. As they say: 'Talk is cheap'.*

ø **“It is our right”.**

Let us accept that the Constitution allows those who want an “Afrikaans university” to have one. Let us then note that the

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<sup>50</sup> Address to the Convocation, 14 November 2005.

See <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/convocation2005.html>.

<sup>51</sup> At the same meeting of Convocation, 14 November 2005.



Constitution also allows those who want an Orania to have one. But not everybody does. The fact that a right is available is a different matter from the question whether, and to what extent, people (individually or collectively) choose to exercise that right. I have already argued above that Stellenbosch University has, through its Strategic Framework, chosen not to be an enclave of any kind. But let us delve deeper. If having an “Afrikaans university” is “our” right, then (besides asking who “we” are) we have to ask: what kind of right is this? I have argued elsewhere<sup>52</sup> that minority rights are not *natural rights* (like life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness) which you should enjoy no matter what, but *social rights* (like health care, social security or pensions), which are constrained by available resources. As regards the *taaldebat*, it seems to me that interpreting educational rights as social rights fits the spirit of the Constitution when it says: “Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable.” If, therefore, an “Afrikaans university” is regarded as “our right”, in the sense of a *social right*, then it is a matter of being weighed up against other social rights, with choices and trade-offs being made on pragmatic grounds. It is only on the argument that an “Afrikaans university” is a natural right that one can argue further that it must be provided (by the state, presumably) *no matter what*.

ð **The numbers argument.**

This is the argument that says six million speakers of any language can expect a university servicing them in that language. Which may be true as a principle, but does not by itself offer conclusive proof that six million Afrikaans speakers must have an “Afrikaans university” at Stellenbosch. A more reasonable interpretation of the numbers argument, for example, would be that six million Afrikaans speakers may well create a market whereby a number of universities would vie with each other in offering teaching in Afrikaans, in order to tap into that market. And that any university that wishes to cater for that market would, in making available offerings in Afrikaans, not necessarily thereby rule out offerings in English. However, such

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<sup>52</sup> C. Brink, “On minorities”, *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 24(3), 2005, pp.1-23.

universities would not be interested so much in the number of speakers as in the number of potential students, which, as we saw in Section 4.2 above, is a different matter altogether. The numbers argument is one that says there is a demand, but it cannot prescribe how that demand should be catered for.

ø **Afrikaans as role model for African languages.**

If Afrikaans is to be a role model for our other nine indigenous languages – if, that is, Afrikaans is to *retain* its “higher functions” so that the African languages can *attain* them, as seems to be the argument – then Afrikaans cannot at the same time claim for itself rights or privileges that the other nine languages cannot realistically claim or aspire to. Nor, in this role, should it claim rights or privileges that the other nine languages – that is, the speakers of the other nine languages – do not *wish* to claim or aspire to. The notion of an “Afrikaans university”, as propounded by the *taalstryders*, is a case in point. As discussed in Section 4.2, if Afrikaans is to insist on an “Afrikaans university”, and if it really is a role model, then it must believe that in the same sense isiXhosa needs and aspires to a “Xhosa university”, isiZulu to a “Zulu university”, and so on – such universities having the same kind of rigid definition as is propounded for an “Afrikaans university”. Most of the arguments made for an “Afrikaans university” would apply: isiZulu and isiXhosa each has a recognisable territory, both have more mother-tongue speakers than Afrikaans, each could be used as an instrument of empowerment, etc. However, there is no evidence that, either in the country we have now, or in the country we aspire to be, there is any such demand. There are, I believe, the beginnings of a desire for tertiary teaching to be *available* in isiXhosa, or isiZulu, or the other indigenous languages. And that is entirely compatible with the desire that there should be tertiary teaching *available* in Afrikaans. But nowhere is there any indication of a desire that a university which would, for whatever reason, decide to offer teaching in isiZulu or isiXhosa, should transform itself into a “Zulu university” or a “Xhosa university”.

ø **The sociodiversity argument.**

The easiest way to respond to the sociodiversity argument is to agree with it. Having then reached consensus on the way the world ought to

be, we may next consider what is feasible within the world the way it is. That Afrikaans, “higher functions” and all, should preferably continue in existence, even if for no other reason than that it contributes to the web of our sociodiversity, is a proposition very few South Africans would dissent from. But as to who should do what, and who should refrain from doing what, and what the costs and benefits are of doing things or refraining from doing them – that is where consensus becomes strained. The *taalstryders* desire to retain Afrikaans for South Africa and our children, and claim that in order to do so we should fence it off in an enclave. With exactly the same desire, others say that fencing Afrikaans off in an enclave, maintained by exclusivity and compulsion, is exactly the wrong thing to do. Which brings the arguments back to practicalities and pragmatics. If we are not going to have an “Afrikaans university”, but we do wish to “promote Afrikaans as a language of teaching and science”, what is it that we can do?

#### 4.4 Conclusion

To say that Stellenbosch University is important to the future of Afrikaans is surely true. But the University is even more important to the future of South Africa. There is great symbolic significance for our evolving democracy in the free choice for inclusivity made by that place which, more than any other, contributed to the conceptual framework of apartheid. The choices made by the Stellenbosch University should be choices made for South Africa. And while Afrikaans is South African, South Africa is not Afrikaans. The choices made by Stellenbosch University, moreover, should be choices made *as a university*. A university is not a cultural organisation. While it fits the Stellenbosch University vision of being a role-player in South African society to retain its commitment to Afrikaans, the choice of how to exercise that commitment should be made in the context of executing the core business of the University.

It is not part of the vision of Stellenbosch University to become an “English university”. It is part of its vision to promote Afrikaans. How to do so without practising a form of *taal-apartheid* is its challenge. If we can, over time, help to make sure “that Afrikaans institutions, and Afrikaans people, will never again stand surly and apart on the sidelines, but will become

entwined with the newness that we are creating”,<sup>53</sup> then we will have made a contribution worthy of this University.

We have seen how the *taaldebat* essentially reflects two lines of thought: a protectionist stance and a multiculturalist stance. We have heard arguments, pro and con, for either side. We have benchmarked these arguments against what is happening elsewhere, and we have cited numbers in support of them. We have analysed the mental environment within which arguments take place, distinguishing in the “Mode 1/Mode 2” terminology also patterns of thought that changed from one to the other roughly around the same time as South Africa changed from one kind of country to another.

In the end, however, we have to admit that rationality only goes so far. The attachment to Afrikaans transcends rationality. And so the *taaldebat* is not just an exercise in weighing up options. It is also a clash of convictions. The conviction of the *taalstryders* that Afrikaans is *different*, that this difference must be *protected*, and that such protection requires an *enclave*, is the heart of the matter. Afrikaans, they say, is different from English because it is indigenous, and different from other indigenous languages because it has “higher functions”. Both these claims have credibility. But to conclude from there that *Afrikaans needs a place of its own* is not to make a deduction, but to posit a belief.

The most difficult thing for a true believer to understand is that others may not be interested in your belief. To a believer, indifference is an affront worse than opposition – as St John was instructed to tell the Laodiceans.<sup>54</sup> Exactly so with the *taalstryders*. It must be difficult for them to understand the fact that there are Afrikaans-speaking people – *even Afrikaners* – who are pretty much indifferent to their proposals for “saving” Afrikaans. Being unable to comprehend indifference, they can only conclude that there must

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<sup>53</sup> From then President Mandela’s speech on accepting an honorary doctorate from Stellenbosch University, quoted in Section 3.6.

<sup>54</sup> Revelations, Chapter 3, verses 14-16 (King James Version): “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.”

be opposition and react accordingly. But there is a dangerous feedback loop in this dynamic. The more strident the *taalstryders* become, the more extreme their proposals of exclusion and compulsion, the more this will generate, if not opposition, then indifference – *indifference to the future of Afrikaans*. I have found that the higher the temperature of the *taaldebat*, the higher the tendency for people, who, under normal conditions, would unhesitatingly speak up for Afrikaans, to withdraw. “This is not my fight”, I have often heard, or “I don’t need this”, or “I can’t be bothered” – as in the case of the philosopher Paul Cilliers, quoted at the end of Section 4.1. It is the very ardour of the *taalstryders* that loses friends for Afrikaans – just as one tends to shy away next time from the bore at the party who backed you into a corner last time. There is truth in the little insider joke that says the first thing Afrikaans should be saved from is the people who are trying to save Afrikaans.

The same is true at Stellenbosch University. As I have tried to explain, there are many academics to whom having a good university is more important than having an “Afrikaans university”, and who take their decisions on that basis. Most of them would like Stellenbosch to retain a commitment to Afrikaans, and many would be prepared to make a contribution in this regard. But doing so is not their primary concern. Their primary concern is being good academics. And most academics draw the line at mechanisms of exclusion and compulsion, because such mechanisms do not fit their conception of what a university is for. The more there is a pattern, therefore, of continuous carping about Afrikaans being neglected – which cannot be interpreted as anything other than an accusation that the academics are not doing something they are supposed to be doing – and the less credit is given for performance in the core academic functions, the more academics will simply shrug their shoulders and walk away from the whole issue of promoting Afrikaans.

The *taaldebat*, then, becomes self-defeating. It does not win converts, but alienates current friends and potential allies. For all the value there is in airing differences, and much as we value a diversity of ideas, I am not convinced that the *taaldebat* has taken Afrikaans one inch forward. I am not convinced that we have made one new friend for Afrikaans. And I am

concerned that people will walk away from Afrikaans because they do not wish to get involved in a bun fight.

But why all the carping? Why the nitpicking and *verdagmakery*? No doubt various conjectures can be made. To a political scientist it may have to do with loss of power and search for identity. A cultural psychologist may see a guilt complex under the emotions – guilt, because the *taalstryders* know that their grandchildren in London or Perth or Vancouver can no longer speak Afrikaans at all. If so, much of the *taaldebat* is a kind of self-flagellation; an expiation of guilt for the sins of the children. But I have a simpler hypothesis. I think much of the aggression (and hence, the negative consequences) of the *taaldebat* comes back to an unshakeable belief that Stellenbosch is no longer what it *ought to be*, and that for this state of affairs *somebody must be responsible*.

And I think perhaps Stellenbosch University must bear some responsibility for playing up to that belief. As long as the notion of an “Afrikaans university” is left unanalysed and unchallenged, the University remains vulnerable to the natural assumption that what “Afrikaans university” *means* is the meaning given to the term by the *taalstryders*. And if that becomes the canonical meaning, it must be clear that Stellenbosch does not answer to such an interpretation. Which in turn leads to accusations of neglect of responsibility, or malicious interventions. To address this issue, I believe we should turn the debate around. Instead of debating about what Stellenbosch is *not* doing for Afrikaans, we should focus much more on what Stellenbosch *is* doing, and *can* do.

- ø I believe that Stellenbosch can and should play an important part in the promotion of Afrikaans, and in building an inclusive future for the language, based on a value-driven approach.
- ø I believe that it is perfectly possible for Stellenbosch to promote Afrikaans as a language of teaching and science in a multilingual context, without being a rule-driven “Afrikaans university” using mechanisms of exclusion and compulsion as envisaged by the *taalstryders*.

- ø I believe that the kind of “Afrikaans university” envisaged by the *taalstryders* would be inimical to the future of Stellenbosch University, and to the future of Afrikaans itself.
- ø I believe it is *not only* Stellenbosch that should play a role in promoting Afrikaans.
- ø I believe Stellenbosch University should offer teaching *not only* in Afrikaans.
- ø I believe that it is not the primary task of the University to “save” Afrikaans.

To distinguish what is being outlined here from the “Afrikaans university” of the *taalstryders*, let us borrow the term “Afrikaans-oriented university” from Neville Alexander.<sup>55</sup> What is the difference? First, that an Afrikaans-oriented university may seek to promote Afrikaans the language, but not in the context or with the motivation of group identity or group rights. Second, it is a university which offers teaching in Afrikaans, but not *only* in Afrikaans. Third, it is a university comfortable with multilingualism as the context within which it is working. Fourth, it will eschew methods of exclusion and compulsion. Fifth, it will be a university which *chooses* to promote Afrikaans, in its own way, without being designated as such or manoeuvred into such a position by any external party, be that the government or some “cultural-historical minority”.

The Gerwel Report considered (at the request of the Minister) Afrikaans, but not the other indigenous languages. The Ndebele Report considered (at the request of another Minister) the nine African indigenous languages, but not Afrikaans. It is time for us to consider all ten indigenous languages together, in the context of promoting multilingualism, and knowing that these ten are all cheek by jowl with English, our international language.

Imagine that multilingualism becomes a core value and a prized attribute of all South African citizens. Imagine that we inculcate the habit that our children, as they progress into adulthood, should become accustomed to *three* languages. First, mother tongue, as the language of early childhood, and the first language of instruction at school. Then, English as a second

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<sup>55</sup> In his article “The necessity of universities for the survival of the non-dominant languages in South Africa”, in *Kruispad*, pp. 8-14, already referred to in Section 3.6 .

language,<sup>56</sup> as a means of communication and a passport to opportunities nationally and internationally. And third, *another indigenous language*, as an expression of our common commitment to nation building.<sup>57</sup> (One of the ironies of the *taaldebat*, in which much is made of Afrikaans as a role model for African languages, is that African Black people are as a rule more multilingual than Afrikaners.) As things stand, most of our nine provinces have three or more official languages, therefore such a policy should find expression fairly naturally within provincial boundaries. Within the Western Cape, one would like to imagine, in one or two generations everybody could be trilingual in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa.<sup>58</sup>

*But this will not happen if we practise language apartheid.*

The Gerwel Report, in my view, was a document which put forward a good idea at the wrong time from the wrong angle. The good idea was to say that one or more universities should *take responsibility* for Afrikaans (and in particular its “higher functions”, as discussed in Chapter 2). The wrong angle was to say that they should be *tasked by the government* with such a responsibility, rather than to say that they may *exercise such a choice*. (This is the line that the Ndebele Report took, three years later, for African languages.) But the real problem was that the time was just not ripe. I am convinced that, had the Gerwel Report been accepted by the Minister of Education in 2002, Stellenbosch today would have been, not just an “Afrikaans university” in the sense of the *taalstryders*, but an *Afrikaner university*. And that it would thereby have been on the slippery slope towards parochialism and isolation.

I believe that part of the price to secure the future of Afrikaans as a vibrant South African language is that it should disengage from the identity of *Afrikanerskap*. In the *taaldebat* we are asked to believe that Afrikaans has two futures: one as a mere vernacular, the other as a language with “higher

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<sup>56</sup> Comparatively few people in South Africa speak English as a first language: 8.2% of the population, as we saw in Chapter 1.

<sup>57</sup> I borrow these ideas on trilingualism from a submission the Rectors of the five historically Afrikaans Universities made to the Minister of Education in December 2005, with due acknowledgement to the four co-authors of that document.

<sup>58</sup> We saw in Chapter 2 how such a conception of trilingualism is being encouraged in the European Union.



functions”. I agree that Afrikaans has two futures, but I would categorise them differently: one is a future with legitimacy, the other is a future hampered by an unfortunate legacy. If the neo-Afrikaner agenda succeeds and Afrikanerdom gets its *volkstaat* of the mind, Afrikaans will shrink to an Afrikaner language. The other future is for Afrikaans to walk away from protectionism and exclusivity, and accept the concomitant risks of multiculturalism *in order to grow*. These risks are the risk of the “higher functions” being eroded, the risk of the lamb lying down with the lion, and the risk of making friends rather than making rules.

We are beginning to hear a non-Afrikaner voice for Afrikaans – something that was conspicuous by its absence even just a few years ago. We are beginning to hear the young white Afrikaans speakers say something different from their parents and grandparents. And we are beginning to hear the pride of ownership of a new Stellenbosch from a new multicultural generation of students. Here is a quote from a White, Afrikaans-speaking senior student:<sup>59</sup>

*I used to see diversity as a threat to tradition and culture. Only now do I realise how strong traditional Afrikaans culture is in our University, and how difficult it is for someone from a different background to become part of it. We isolate ourselves from wonderfully rich other cultures. It is extremely important to cross these barriers and to create a space where we can all feel at home to make the most of our study years and to prepare ourselves to be influential in the world outside.*

And from an African Black second-year student:

*I am a proud black South African woman who prides herself on being an African, a South African, a Matie! ... I look forward to the time when my grandchildren will be Maties and I can say to them that I was one of the leaders of my time who pushed for diversity and multiculturalism, cultural preservation and equality for all.*

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in the Stellenbosch University Annual Report for 2004.

If we summarise the entire *taaldebat* as the interplay between a protectionist stance and a multiculturalist stance, then these students, speaking as the voice of Stellenbosch University, are saying that they prefer the latter.

On the occasion of my inauguration as Rector of Stellenbosch University I said:

*We must never forget that our task as a university is to pursue knowledge, to strive for understanding, and to hope for wisdom. Beyond the simplicities of yes-or-no, across the boundaries of our disciplines, on the other side of the mountains, there is a diffuse and demanding world where we can make a contribution, act within our value system, and strive for excellence by engaging with complexity... Our job is to open the gates of paradise, not only so that those on the outside can come in, but also so that those on the inside can venture out. Let us not be prisoners in paradise.<sup>60</sup>*

I would say exactly the same today regarding Afrikaans at Stellenbosch University. The protectionist stance arises from fear. The multiculturalist stance arises from hope. I believe that, for Afrikaans and for South Africa, we should spend our energy working towards the things for which we hope, rather than working against the things we fear.

----- *End* -----

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<sup>60</sup> Inaugural Address, 10 April 2002. See <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/Rector/inauguration.html>.



# Glossary of Afrikaans terms and colloquialisms

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**Boer** just means farmer, but when spelled with a capital B it is taken as a synonym for Afrikaner.

**Bruinmense** means, literally, “brown people”; in the racial classification still used by the government, called “Coloureds”. Also known as *Kleurlinge*.

**Dominee**, an ordained minister in the Dutch Reformed Church (and other Afrikaans churches).

**Gatvol** means, literally, “with a full arse”. The more polite English equivalent would be “fed up to the back teeth”.

**Inkommer** means, literally, “incomer”. Used to refer to people who may live in Stellenbosch, but are not regarded as true *Stellenbossers*.

**Kleurlinge** means, literally “people of colour”; in the racial classification still used by the government, called “Coloureds”. Also known as *Bruinmense*.

**Koshuis** is a university residence for students – a “dormitory”, in the American idiom.

**Koshuisgees** is literally “the spirit of the residence” – that is, the *esprit de corps*.

**Maties** is the name given to Stellenbosch University students.

**Matieland** is Stellenbosch University.

**Ontgroening** is a colloquialism for initiation rituals, typically in a *koshuis*, in support of *koshuisgees*.

**Papbroek** means, literally, “flabby trousers”; it indicates an abject coward. Also: softy, milksop, spineless fellow, weakling, poltroon, sissy.

**Platteland** means, literally, “flat country”, but figuratively it refers to the (mostly Afrikaans-speaking) rural parts of South Africa.

**Regstellende aksie** means, literally, “corrective action”, but the phrase is often used in Afrikaans to refer to the government’s overall framework of affirmative action, because it also means “fixing what was wrong”.

**Skelm** means “sly”, but can also be a noun: a rogue, a sly person.

**Stellenbosser** – someone who is not only a long-time Stellenbosch resident (very likely born in Stellenbosch, and preferably with family connections going back a few generations), but also imbued with the idea of Stellenbosch as a place essentially different from ordinary towns.

**Taal** just means language, but is often taken as a synonym for Afrikaans, as in: “the *taal*”.

**Taalbeleid** means language policy.

**Taaldebat** means the language debate regarding Afrikaans.

**Taalplan** means language plan.

**Taalstryd** means language struggle or language war, particularly as regards the *taal*.

**Taalstryders** means, literally, those who struggle for the *taal*; “language warriors”.

**Technikon** was a South African word for what in the United Kingdom were called Polytechnics. In the restructured higher education landscape the word is no longer in use. Institutions offering a technical tertiary education are now called Universities of Technology.

**Tukkies** is the name given to University of Pretoria students.

**Verdagmakery** means, literally, the action of making somebody or something appear suspect.

**Verengels** is a verb indicating a tendency towards greater use of the English language. “Anglicising” may be the best available translation, but the idea is probably better captured by coining the word *englishify*.

**Verengelsing** is the noun coming from the verb *verengels*; hence “englishification”.

**Volk** means the Afrikaner people.

**Volkstaat** means a politically independent state for the Afrikaner people.

**Volksuniversiteit** means a university for the Afrikaner people.

**Werfbobbejaan** is a useless hanger-on – a “yard monkey”.

# *Glossary of abbreviations*

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ACU = Association of Commonwealth Universities  
ANC = African National Congress  
ANCYL = ANC Youth League  
CEO = Chief Executive Officer  
CHE – Council on Higher Education  
DoE = Department of Education  
DST = Department of Science and Technology  
FAK = *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings*  
HAU = Historically Afrikaans University  
HBU = Historically Black University  
HEI = Higher Education Institution  
HEMIS = Higher Education Management Information System  
HEQC = Higher Education Quality Committee  
HWU = Historically White University  
LERU = League of European Research Universities  
NPHE = National Plan on Higher Education  
NRF = National Research Foundation  
NUI = National University of Ireland  
PANSALB = Pan South African Language Board  
SANDF = South African National Defence Force  
SACP = South African Communist Party  
SASCO = South African Students' Congress  
SET = Science, Engineering and Technology  
SU = Stellenbosch University  
THRIP = Technology and Human Resources in Industry Programme  
UB = University of Barcelona  
UCT = University of Cape Town  
UNISA = University of South Africa  
UPE = University of Port Elizabeth  
*US* (in Afrikaans) = *Universiteit Stellenbosch*  
UWC = University of the Western Cape.



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