

Afrikaans is a major African asset – Dele Olojede

The more we eliminate this diversity, the lesser we become, says Africa's first Pulitzer Prize winner

Willem de Vries

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What does Afrikaans mean in the context of Africa? And what can an institution such as Stellenbosch University gain, should it make work of ensuring there is no lesser place for it? Willem de Vries spoke to one of the continent's foremost journalists, Dele Olojede, who has become a supporter of the campaign, **Gelyke Kanse** (Equal Opportunities).



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As founder and publisher of Nigeria's *Next* newspapers, he saw his publications shut down due to pressure from government and big business. His staff refused to take bribes from or write PR for paying politicians. His efforts to bring about ethical change in Nigeria and journalism there have led to various accolades, among them the American **John P McNulty Prize** for his efforts to bring about social change through innovative projects.

Olojede grew up in the university town of Ife in western Nigeria. "Wole Soyinka was a young professor there. In fact, that's how I was influenced to become a writer – because of these kinds of guys in my hometown – loads of young people and intellectuals."

Currently, he and his wife reside in Stellenbosch. They moved from Johannesburg a year ago, but the Olojedes' experience of South Africa goes back further.

"We lived here (in South Africa) before, in the early nineties. I was sent from New York, where I was with *Newsday* at the time. Mandela had been released, other political prisoners were released and the ANC was unbanned. So, things were moving. The newspaper said, well, it didn't have any footprint in Africa, so go open an Africa bureau in Johannesburg. So, in '92, I moved here and the family joined me later. This was until the end of '96. Then, I was posted in China. We were there for three years, and then I went back to New York, became foreign editor and eventually left the paper at the end of 2004 – because I wanted to do this project (*Next* newspapers) in Nigeria. We decided to move back to South Africa in 2005. I commuted back and forth to Lagos, setting up *Next* and running it."

Olojede is currently splitting time between New York and Stellenbosch, working on a venture called *Afar*, which should launch by the end of the first quarter next year in New York. It's a digital magazine for long-form writing about the African world. As part of the publication's subscription model, *Afar* will host a series of salons on various topics internationally.

"This is where Stellenbosch comes in – everything is to culminate in a big Ideas Festival at Spier once a year. And the Ideas Festival you can think of as, sort of, the anti-Davos. Davos is about money and power. This is about people with the brightest ideas, who have the potential to solve some of the biggest challenges that we face on the continent, and as human beings in general. So, if you're rethinking public education in a way that reintroduces equality to society, or if you are cracking the malaria code, we want to put you on stage. It must have some kind of relationship with Africa. And, if you're going to host the world in Stellenbosch, you might as well maintain some kind of foothold in Stellenbosch.

"And also with this, there's the other 'mission' of reforming Stellenbosch from within – that's my joking part – I am now a fully fledged member of the Stellenbosch Mafia, with a mission of reforming it from within." This brings us to the language debate in Stellenbosch.

According to the South African Constitution, languages are equal, but all but one South African university have ditched this fine practice – although it may be arduous to realise – in order to take the confining road of English

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“The most basic and obvious one is this: when you are an individual, a family, a community, a society, a country, you have all kinds of challenges and you’re trying to go from one state to another. And so, first, there is this: do no harm. Then, look for ways to play to your strengths. You already have some assets. Do not degrade them. Build on that. That’s the broad reason that I support Afrikaans.”

How does Afrikaans tie in with other indigenous languages on the continent? Olojede gives an overview of dynamics through which languages have spread in Africa – and everywhere – pointing out that Afrikaans is no different to Swahili.

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“Afrikaans is a major African asset. It’s a very strong African language in many ways. And it has evolved exactly the way all languages evolve, which is an accretion of different influences and streams that form a river. So, Afrikaans is no different to Swahili, which evolved from local languages and traders’ languages and strong Arabic inflection. It’s not different from Yoruba, which is my native tongue. And Yoruba evolved, basically, by conquest, like any other language. Yoruba predominates in western Nigeria and into the neighbouring Benin Republic and Togo. It is now spoken by about 60 million people. How did Yoruba spread to all these regions? The Yoruba empire conquered those places, including the Yoruba heartland itself.”

He highlights Zulu as a further example. “Zulu did not really exist until, what, 150 years ago, when Shaka ransacked all his neighbouring villages, right? So, every language has expanded through conquest. So, that isn’t enough reason to want to degrade a language.”

In terms of international languages of conquest, he discusses English and French as the most obvious examples of this.

“The French, in particular, must be feeling really remorseful that they helped America gain independence in 1776. They were the main European country that supported the American push for independence – of course, as a dig to the English. Then, America became the world’s most powerful and influential country, and therefore it made English the predominant language. Up until then, French was the language of diplomacy, trade, culture, of philosophy and art. Even the czars were all learning French, and Petersburg was very self-consciously French. With the rise of American power and money and influence and wars – they won, after all, World War I, then World War II – English spread like wildfire.”

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Paul Kagame's forces won – they had been based in Uganda, which is English-speaking – their revulsion at the role the French had played in the genocide made them turn their back on French as a language. Now, most people speak English in Rwanda as the language of government, of transaction, of business and so on. But it used to be purely French. So, this is how language spreads by circumstance, but mostly by conquest. So, there is nothing at all unique about Afrikaans as a language, other than that it is a language that flourished from this soil. So, why throw it away?

“My third reason is this. This language is spoken by a big chunk of the South African population, and is one of the few languages – in fact, one of two languages – that has taken substantial root as a medium of instruction, educating people both black and white. Mandela learnt to speak this language in prison. I don't see why a language that has produced a world-class institution such as the one on whose campus we're sitting on (Stellenbosch) should then be downgraded, unless it's for the most extraordinary reasons, which have yet to be articulated to me.”

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Despite those reasons, however, he has a lot of respect for the people who were aggrieved at the predominance of Afrikaans as the language of instruction at Stellenbosch for recent historical reasons. “We have to understand that though logic may be on our side, most of life is lived in the heart, in emotion. And if you are trying to persuade people, you have to appeal to their hearts. You can marshal logic, but logic has to be marshalled in the service of the emotions, so that people can be on your side. At least, you reduce their antipathy to the idea. Because, people do have reason to be resentful, given the recent history – I emphasise *recent* – history of Afrikaans.”

Prior to the Nationalists' misuse of the language, people had a very different experience of languages in South Africa.

“Afrikaans was betrayed by the Afrikaner political elite, which turned it into a bludgeoning instrument for oppressing people. That was not its origins; it was not its use. People were speaking it freely. They were trading with it freely. They were intermingling. Afrikaans-speaking people were speaking Sotho and Tswana, and vice versa. This was not a barrier until it was made a political instrument in the service of apartheid.”

The bias of recency makes things that are more recent loom larger in importance, as if this had never

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He draws an interesting comparison between Yoruba and Afrikaans, and the effects of education in people's mother tongue at an early age: his immediate younger sister, who is now 55 years old, got her PhD at Stellenbosch in theology. Her master's degree is in linguistics, and she used to teach this subject at Lagos State University.

“What makes her interesting for this story is this: a department at the university in Ife decided to conduct a multi-year experiment, where they wanted to instruct young pupils from first grade in their mother tongue, through sixth grade. So, my younger sister was in this experimental class as a first-grader. So, throughout her elementary school, she was taught only in Yoruba. Then, they tracked them, so in high school, they started learning some subjects in English. They recorded the highest pass rate of any class and the highest rate of acceptance to university. This conclusively proves that if, in early education, you use the native tongue to teach people, you will get extraordinary results.

“So, this (decision to support Gelyke Kanse) was a no-brainer for me. At the very least, you are going to be affecting the proper education of at least six million people in South Africa whose native tongue is Afrikaans. So, rather than fight Afrikaans, we should be strengthening it and also improving the practical application of the other languages. There are beautiful languages here. I love Xhosa, especially, with its cascades of plosives and fricatives, and its liberal borrowing, naturally, from Afrikaans and English and Zulu and Sotho. You have diversity; let them flourish. Strengthen them. Let them not disappear.”

On the topic of language and commerce, he highlights the “particular centrifugal force that compels the consolidation of languages into one – and that is money”.

“Commerce is what English is riding on right now. Even the Chinese are learning English. The largest economies in the world for the past hundred years have dominated with the English language, the US being the big elephant in the room. So, everybody, needing also to trade and make money, started learning English. And, of course, with the inbuilt advantage of the British Empire – India being a big factor, and Nigeria a big factor with 200 million people – symbolic steps have to be taken. The problem I think South Africa has is structural problems, the most obvious among them being that wealth or well-being almost racially correlates, which is a disaster for any country. So, that's a structural problem that takes two or three generations of dedicated work, and no foolishness, to fix it in a rational, patient, consistent and determined manner. That requires all the available talents in the society, from whichever quarter.”

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He sees the land issue as structurally a problem from the legacy of this country. “But wise people have to balance many things.” Apartheid has left an indelible mark on the South African consciousness. He explains how a philosophical approach to the idea of justice shows the way forward: “This (one of the things wise people have to balance) is fundamental to the series I did 14 years after the Rwandan genocide (for which he won the Pulitzer): some crimes are so thoroughly perpetrated, that simply applying the letter of the law would destroy whatever is left. Some injustices are not possible to rectify literally.

“But you can always take other measures that help society to heal, and over a long period of time you get to a good place. Archbishop Tutu said to me that an eye for an eye makes everyone blind. It is no less true for being a cliché.

“I raise Rwanda in the sense that a clear example under Rwandan law is that murder is a capital offence, while 60% of the population either directly killed or collaborated in killing their fellow citizens. So, if you applied the letter of the law, you would have to execute 60% of your population. So, is that wise or practical? What they did is that they focused only on the ringleaders, chasing only the top thousand. Many of the other direct participants were put in jail for a while and then released. Go back to your villages. Go confess to your community what you did. And help to build whatever is left for the survivors, whether that’s to help replant their orange or banana groves, or help rebuild their homes, because there’s an understanding that justice, when there’s a perfect crime, is an impossibility. You can only try to do something for the future, something symbolically, now, to lessen the hurt and the resentment. But to build for the future, where there’s social cohesion, more equality, with race being less a predictor of where you end up in life – that takes fortitude and wisdom, and the whole society pulling together. Part of the resentment towards Afrikaans playing a leading role in prominent public institutions such as Stellenbosch University is obviously a function of the very recent apartheid past, and an emotionally satisfying desire, perhaps, to bloody someone’s nose. It will not get us where we want to go, but we have to be acutely mindful of where the resentment is coming from, and defend Afrikaans with care, with understanding, with consideration. The opposition is not an enemy, and we are not always right.

“To me, wise leaders would find the right language to communicate these ideas to the public, and inclusive language that begins by acknowledging the legitimacy of the other side. And wise leaders would reduce the heat. And the more heat is reduced, the more reason – the area where we prefer to dwell – prevails. In the heat, nobody wants to listen to reason.

“So, if someone wants to do a purely vengeful and narrowly rational argument, they might have some logic behind them to say, well, all this land was seized by white people, and now we will seize it from them. But wise people then understand that you’re going to crash the economy and you will become poor and you will become Zimbabwe in no time. It is proven that you will then become Zimbabwe; there is no doubt about that. So, the thing now for wise leadership to do is to manage the obvious urge for some kind of restitution with all the other competing interests of society: social cohesion, balance, economic growth – restitution of past injustices to the extent practicable, but always with an eye to the future.

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then explodes into irrationality through the exploitation of loudmouth populists and roughnecks. There is no gap that exists that you won't find some political extremist willing to exploit."

The issue of the land is actually, in fact, almost similar to this argument about Afrikaans, says Olojede. "The person saying no more Afrikaans, in a narrowly cast way, cannot be irrational. However, is it wise? Does it help today's society you are trying to build? Assuredly not.

"You need the kind of leadership that can speak the language that allows people to understand the complexity of these issues and, therefore, bring them together around a certain set of ideas, around fairness, around justice, around equality. As public goods, they are taking lots of time to achieve. But, if everybody is walking together quite visibly to achieve it, people are willing to wait.

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"If you say, we are not going to let you sleep in the street or die of hunger, but we may not be able to do more than that; however, your children – I can guarantee you – they will be equal to all the other people's children, most people will take that bargain. But that's hard work of thirty years. And, if you have the political leadership that is sophisticated, determined, honest, and has the scale of ambition to do it, then it will happen. At independence, many Singaporeans were so poor they were sleeping with their pigs and goats. Inspired and committed leadership altered their trajectory.

"After 25 years of independence after apartheid, people can say with justification: come on, there's no movement for the bottom 30% (of the population), which is true. Even the broad middle lives a precarious existence, terrified of slipping back into poverty with the smallest misfortune. In the face of that, people start lashing out. Well, that's not the solution. That only happens because there has been some laxity in pursuing the just society this country requires in order to heal properly and be made whole over time."

Given our diversity due to movements of history and of people, but also the need to functionally forge a nation that can fill the national space with benefits for all, does he think that the sometimes vigorous expressions of diversity in unity could be a precondition to a functioning democracy?

"You want people pulling in the same direction, you want a just society, you want more equality; therefore, what are the public goods that need to be produced for that to happen over time? It may take 30, 40 years – and

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“See how great people felt after they got rid of Zuma together. It was a moment of great relief. It brought joy, however temporary. People still felt: wow! So, we can still achieve things together. That’s a good thing. We should build on that.”

There is, however, the idea of rising nationalism, and that is something always looking for an enemy. So, Afrikaans can be vilified in that sense. How does he see the role of language activists where there’s a monolingual agenda, an imposition of a single language on a society?

“Broadly speaking, that would be true, because in order to rally around a nationalistic agenda, it requires the exclusion of others. I don’t believe that South Africa is facing that, even though many South Africans think that, in terms of a populist movement. But it seems to me that the numbers do not justify that. The loudest voices may give that impression, but if you look at all the elections that have taken place in this country since 1994, roughly 90% of the people have voted for moderate parties. And the extremist voices, when you put them together – Freedom Front or EFF or whatever – they all together make about 10%. So, South Africa still has an enormous consensus about what kind of country it should be.”

Olojede says the stress South Africans are facing is that the further they move from that elation of independence, of a new beginning, the lesser the impact is on a certain bottom 35–40% of the population, and then the more frayed that fabric becomes. “Within that, it leaves a lot of opportunity for those who seek to build a more sort of chest-thumping tribalism – because nationalism is another word for tribalism – so that they can gain power.”

Helen Zille, the Western Cape premier, recently spoke in Parliament about minorities in South Africa as being demonised on grounds of cultural specificity. Olojede disagrees.

“Firstly, the blanket statement that minorities are oppressed in South Africa – I don’t agree with that at all, because the facts don’t seem to support it for me. South Africa – and I don’t know whether it is an advantage or disadvantage – does not actually have one dominant group, either numerically or linguistically. And, with the one that might achieve a level of dominance linguistically, which would be English, the native speakers of it are so small in number that they are not able to achieve true practical dominance as a result. Helen Zille, in recent times, has sounded less and less coherent, a pity for a talented politician who seems to have curdled into some kind of queen of resentment, full of inflammation.

“I think the EFF played a fairly important role in the fight against Zuma, but the EFF by itself is not a morally driven organisation. We’ve now seen very clearly that a lot of its leadership was engaged in the same sort of things the Zuma forces were engaged in. So, theirs was just a play for power, not a desire to improve society. People like that tend to attract, at least temporarily, a level of followership, or at least are able to put pressure on the mainstream political organisations that are afraid that, if they don’t respond, people might move over to them.

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How would one engage people at a time when there's a hardening of political identities?

"This may be a little controversial and might sound more cynical than is intended, and I almost don't want to admit it in public, but my view of human nature, when you strip all the romance from it, is that people are sheep. They can be led up the mountain, but they can also be led into the ravine. And the key element always is leadership. It's the same Americans who elected Obama – twice, with huge majorities – who elected Trump now. People can be shifted. It is frightening how easily that can be achieved for entirely opposite ends."

This is why for any society, organisation, community, family – any unit of human organisation – leadership is absolutely essential, says Olojede.

"Enlightened, generous-hearted, empathetic, ambitious leadership to lead people to a better place. Christianity didn't emerge fully clothed all by itself; it had to be created by a leader. The same with Islam, the same with communism, the same with anything that captures the imagination on a large scale, for good or bad."

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He sees among mainly white groups in South Africa that things are being portrayed in their most extreme form. "Like this thing that they're murdering white farmers. South Africans are being murdered because of high crime rates and less-than-effective law enforcement. The farmers who are being murdered are also South Africans who, unfortunately, are murdered by criminals the way all people are murdered. No credible numbers suggest a disproportionate murder of white farmers compared to murder rates overall. It's a crock of shit being peddled in the service of white nationalism.

"There is not, it seems to me, any targeting of white farmers that can be justified by the evidence that shows that the murders that are taking place on the farms are because they are targeting white farmers for killing. We know from numbers that most people killed on farms are the farm workers, and that most murder victims overall are overwhelmingly black people, in numbers disproportionate to their percentage of the population. This also does not show that black people are targeted for murder; it simply means that, everywhere and at all times, most victims of crime are poor people, and in South Africa, race unfortunately correlates with poverty. So, a black populist could look at the crime statistics and start screaming that there is a plot to murder black people. It is a ridiculous thing, this so-called murder of white farmers.

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“I have not seen this country behave in this way yet. I have seen a country that suddenly experienced a rapid decline in its capacity to govern itself wisely and well, which has now exacerbated the structural problems that we’ve inherited, like savage inequalities. That’s what I see. I do not see a group really being targeted.

“Of course, in all the contestations, emotions run high. Some low level real estate clerk in Durban says, look at these black people trashing the beach. And the whole country is screaming about that for a whole week. Are you people out of your minds? People always say stuff. But, because social media amplifies everything, people now get distracted from the work at hand.

“The work at hand for South Africa is to create the world’s best public school system, so that the kid in Soshanguve and the kid in Khayelitsha and the kid in Sandhurst in Johannesburg or Westcliff have the same roughly equal chance to succeed. That is the task before South Africa. It is not that somebody said something while on holiday in Greece, and then there’s a fretting and lashing out for the next two weeks. These are distractions; these are irrelevant things, in the broader scope, and even in the narrow scope.

“You want to create jobs so people can fend for their families, but more broadly, you want to create a new generation that is broadly equally equipped for the challenges and opportunities of life. And it’s a 30-year project of serious, concentrated work. Not in fits and starts. So, if you can explain that to the public, you will rally most people behind you, because they have a goal in mind. The kid in Khayelitsha and the kid in Westcliff, Johannesburg, must have roughly the same chance of progress in their lives for the fulfilment of their highest potential. And only public education delivers that. Let us get the work going, instead of: this person said my family are monkeys, and now we are going to have a race war.”

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When you go through a period where you go from Mandela to Zuma in ten years, obviously you are going to have problems, says Olojede. “It’s irrational not to expect to have problems. What you now need is a new kind of leadership. You will be shocked how quickly society changes.

“Already, we can notice that the overwhelmingly divisive language of the Zuma years, up until a year ago, has now suddenly dissipated. ‘White monopoly capital’ is no longer in current usage. The ‘us versus them’ has lessened. Just by changing a tiny part of the top leadership. You haven’t even changed the core of the leadership. The dunderheads are still in the cabinet, the ones who want to pick up the rand from the floor. But,

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“If you have good leadership, generous of spirit, ambitious and enlightened, that brings people together. Not everybody can be Mandela, but we can at least be a little below that, and not dramatically below that. Then, all this would change. I’m not worried about that. When things are happening in the moment, we can think, ‘Oh, my God, the end is nigh.’ No, no, the end is not nigh at all. Let us find the best among us and put them in charge of our affairs as a country.”

Returning to questions surrounding English and economic power, the power of money has always been with us, but it’s almost as if it has in its own right become all-pervasive in decision-making. What dynamics have brought this about?

“Now, in this era, we have turbo-charged capitalism, unrestrained capitalism, a kind of Darwinian jungle unleavened by common purpose – unrestrained, unfettered capitalism. Over the last 40 years, the elite have removed all the constraints of regulation. This has meant more of the gains from higher productivity have gone to only them.”

What has happened in Nigeria he states as a case in point.

“Nigeria emerged from decades of destructive military rule in 1999. Obasanjo took over a broken country – bad economics, and so, bad policies. They began to reform the economy.

“From about 2003 to about 2013 – a full decade – Nigeria’s GDP growth was 7% a year on average. That was a period when the size of the economy surpassed South Africa’s. But what happened? The percentage of people living in absolute poverty in Nigeria is roughly defined by the World Bank, and so on, as \$1,90 or less a day. The percentage moved from 50% to 70%, and then there’s 7% annual GDP growth. That means all the gains, and then some, were cornered by a tiny few, probably less than 0,01% of the population.

“This produced people like Dangote – Africa’s richest man – as if that’s a badge of honour. What you should be looking at is what portion of the population is in poverty. So, the ‘biggest economy’ story is complete bullshit, because it is not felt by ordinary people. If anything, they are cheating more of them now than ever before. Because absolute poverty, roughly defined, was only 50% of the population – that’s not ‘only’, that’s huge. However, after ten years of an annual growth of 7%, it went up, not down, so the public goods are not being evenly distributed. In fact, they’re not being distributed at all. They’re just cornered by a few. So, that’s what it means to create unfettered, uncontrolled, runaway, turbo-charged capitalism. That is wreaking havoc through society.”

Things get drawn into a marketplace that shouldn’t be, and it influences the cultural diversity and the role of indigenous languages. What gets lost for South African languages when an establishment is bent on modernisation coupled with an economical approach?

“So, if we know the price of everything but the value of nothing, as the sage said, this is what you get: where

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“The overall values of the established religions – those that at least pay lip service to the concept of being kind to your neighbour and helping the orphan and all of these good things that make us whole – they get lost because everything is now measured in money. And everyone wants to drive the big cars, so we have become high-powered consumerist beings, rather than soulful empathetic beings, to which we should aspire. So, the more money dominates everything, the more division, the more envy, the more aggression, the more mindless competition for scarce resources you’re going to get.

“Among the corrupt political elite in South Africa, some of their defence is quite astonishingly that ‘these people did it when they were there, so what is wrong with us having money?’ It is such a stupid way to make an argument. People didn’t die so that you can behave the same way. So, where is the higher purpose? Where is the better place that Mandela and Tambo and Sisulu and Tutu and Biko and Dadoo – all of these great people – are commanding us to go?

“I was listening to Albie Sachs about six weeks ago at a seminar at Spier. He said we want a country of human beings. Then, one of the seminarians asked: but, Judge Sachs, why is it that our freedom has delivered all these advantages to white people; why are they so protected?

“Albie Sachs said: ‘White people are not protected because they are white, but because they are human beings. We fought for a country of human beings.’ I have really never heard something that powerful that so encapsulates for me the higher spirit we should be seeking to attain. This is our lodestar; we want to be a country of human beings. Because, if you create a country of human beings, all the other big problems are solved as a consequence – a just, cohesive and mild-mannered country of human beings, where we can pursue our highest happiness, the Aristotelian happiness.”

There’s a multidisciplinary conversation where people are saying, let’s put a cap on capitalism, let’s focus more on community-driven initiatives to create a better society. Capitalists, however, are not listening.

Olojede agrees, and says this is why society must come together to define for itself what is best for it.

“Capitalism has some incredible strengths. It allocates resources more efficiently than anything else we know. And, therefore, it can create periods of growth – properly managed and regulated – that can lift most boats. Then, arm society with the resources, with a guardrail for those who are left behind or are unable to perform optimally under such a system, because every system will have its victims.

“A humane society will create a system with some guardrails to prevent people from falling over the cliff. So, capitalism has shown itself to be very good at raising productivity, but it is also dangerous. It is when we lose sight of how to constrain it properly and wisely that we get this extremism in our society. I don’t believe in ‘degrowth’, because we keep expanding as a species. So, we need more food tomorrow than we needed today. Therefore, we need growth. The question is, can we focus on sustainable growth that does not destroy the environment for generations yet to come?

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Ja Nee Koekiebeleid

of commerce and economic growth and deal-making, as if that is the only good that we seek. It's a very narrow argument to make. It is not without its interior logic, but the wider question is: is that the totality of what we seek as human beings and as a society? And, if the answer is assuredly no, then we can't use that as a sole basis for making a decision like this.

"There's this wonderful Americanism: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Go fix what is broken; don't go break what is already working. Rally everyone to have this joint project of fixing what is broken in South African society. And a lot of it is broken. But we've also seen extraordinary acts of human valour and empathy and sheer joy that this society produces. This is why everybody was misty-eyed in those years of just managing themselves out of darkness into a better place. It's a great example – this country is capable of that. But it needs to be properly led for it to get us to the Promised Land. In the past decade or so, that has not been the case, quite clearly."

Olojede views the use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction at Stellenbosch as a matter of principle.

"I have not engaged in any detail in the question of the university administration and what they are doing or not doing. I'm sort of from 10 000 feet saying, as a principle, you should not do that (lessen the higher functions of and possibility of studying in Afrikaans), because you are just weakening and dividing yourself and destroying a good thing you already have, instead of building more and more good things alongside the good thing you already have.

"So, the university has already shown itself to be world-class in that language of instruction. Keep that. Build more universities; expand others that are using English, and hopefully one day some will use Xhosa or Tswana."

What he is advocating is, don't dismantle what has already proved to work very well in creating world-class scholars out of this research university. It already works, he reiterates.

"Wise people in power should be thinking Stellenbosch is working just fine, and we have millions of native Afrikaans speakers; that's fine by me. Good things are happening to South African citizens; what's your problem?

"We've had Nigerians going to French, Chinese and Russian universities, and they have flourished there. They don't speak Russian in Nigeria. But, in the old communist days, they used to do third world solidarity, and bring scholarship students. Many went to universities in China; they learnt there and they flourished. Why would that be any different here? Just because someone is not originally Afrikaans-speaking doesn't mean they can't go here. That is not true. When the Mexicans rush to the US and they start to go to school there, they don't speak any English. But they learn and they flourish. It seems to me so obvious, the logic. But, as I've said, it's not only logic that drives people, but also emotion and all the other weaknesses of the heart, including greed and ambition and so on – the urge to please the powers, and all of those things."

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beings to solve problems that seem intractable. You can do it again; you just need to be led.”

.....

“South Africa has, time and again over the last 30 to 40 years, demonstrated to us the extraordinary capacity of human beings to solve problems that seem intractable. You can do it again; you just need to be led.”

.....

The writer Breyten Breytenbach, taking his cue from concerned activists who preceded him, has mentioned that the acceptable survival of Afrikaans dovetails with many other struggles and realities on the continent. What needs to change for indigenous languages to be able to take up their role in broadening our knowledge of and our approach to the rich complexities of our heritage?

“If you use people’s native tongue to give basic instruction at an early age, even if you use a different language later, the foundation is so strong for the children that you are creating something wonderful. That’s one thing to do for this rich cultural tapestry that we have in Africa.

“As I work on *Afar*, this digital magazine that I’m working on right now, I even say *Afar* is focused on the African world – on Africa not as a colour or even as a place, but as an idea. Because Africa is many things. Africa is Tuareg, Afrikaans, Yoruba, Wolof, Kinyarwanda. Africa is not a race or a colour. Africa lives in Brazil, in Haiti, in Cuba and in the United States, which has one of the world’s biggest populations of African people. So, Africa is everywhere in the world. Because Africa is the world. So, Africa is an idea, a state of mind, a sense of broad identity as humans.

“I have just come from Johannesburg, two days ago, with all these jacarandas all over the place. It is beautiful to see. We’re not saying, because Stellenbosch is Oak Town, that only oaks must be planted in Stellenbosch. That’s boring. The sparkle of colour, of difference and diversity – the more diverse a natural environment is, the more alive it is, with insects, with birds, with trees, plants and humans. The diversity of an ecosystem represents the strength in biology and anthropology in everything of that system and community.”

And, if you look at South African languages as ecology, what affects one has a direct influence on the others.

.....

“The more we eliminate this diversity, the lesser we become. The same is true in language as is true in music, as is true in art. And the interesting people, the interesting experiments and experiences, are

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“Everything is connected. This is what we are learning now. We used to know this, before money and unrestrained capitalism – or weaponised capitalism, as I prefer to call it – took over all our daily lives and thinking. We knew this to be true. In the natural environment, this is the way people lived. Out of many, one. But there have to be the many first. The many are the foundation of the one. In fact, diversity ultimately leads to balance, to cohesion.

“The more we eliminate this diversity, the lesser we become. The same is true in language as is true in music, as is true in art. And the interesting people, the interesting experiments and experiences, are where things mix. And where things mix, that seam is where our world resides. Interesting things come out of that. The same with Afrikaans.”

Also read

Litigating multilingualism

“The 2017 new revised language policy for higher education favours multilingualism and should be applauded. However, the judiciary seems completely oblivious to this revised policy, and the judgments are at odds with higher education, where multilingualism is seen as a resource.”



LitNet

4

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The challenge of language in post-apartheid South Africa

"Literacy in the indigenous African languages is, needless to say, crucial. For, without literacy in the languages of the masses, science and technology cannot be culturally owned by Africans. Africans will remain mere consumers, incapable of creating competitive goods, services and value-additions in this era of globalisation."



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3



Photo of Dele Olojede: provided

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13

Kommentaar



Hanno Visagie

2018-11-22 at 14:59

Ongelukkig raak hierdie man heelparty politieke korrekthede kwyd wat gerus uitgewys en reggestel kan word.

Reply

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Ja

Nee

Koekiebeleid

done positive things for/to my life.

[Reply](#)



Lettie Seegers.I

2018-11-26 at 13:48

Uistekend! Brilliant - none more true words spoken!

[Reply](#)



Wonder

2018-11-27 at 07:37

Daar's hy, eenvoudige opbouwende logika, 'common sense'. Moenie afbreek wat werk nie, neem die model en bou voort daarop, brei uit na ander tale en versterk diversiteit en skep geleenthede vir almal wat wil leer en onderrig gee in ander tale. Hoekom is dit so moeilik vir die bestuur by US om dit te verstaan? En dit terwyl 'n objektiewe (maar intelligente) buitestaander dit so klaarhelder kan sien ...

[Reply](#)



Philippus P Janse van Rensburg

2018-11-27 at 07:50

Een ding in hierdie lewe is seker, alles verander van oomblik tot oomblik! Dit skyn vir my die grootste struikelblok vir my begrip van die wêreld om my te wees.

Onlangs het ek van omgewing verander, woon nou op 'n ander plek. En dit was asof ek van een kontinent na 'n ander verhuis het. Mense tree anders op as waaraan ek gewoon geraak het. Afrikaans/Engels swaai net om. Verbasend hoe mense aanpas.

[Reply](#)



Jean-Pierre Grégoire

2018-11-30 at 01:55

Ik vind het fantastisch dat ik als Nederlander ook vandaag de dag nog Afrikaans zo goed kan lezen en verstaan, en dat ook zwarte mensen er geen probleem mee hebben Afrikaans te spreken. Ik was ooit in Swaziland, waar ik de Zuid-Afrikaanse radio kon ontvangen. De speaker wisselde voortdurend tussen Afrikaans en Engels. En ja, apartheid is het enige Afrikaanse woord dat in de hele wereld wordt gebruikt, I think that this is verskriklik.

[Reply](#)



Victor Honey

2018-11-30 at 10:12

Ek is so bly om hierdie reaksie te sien/hoor!.

Hierdie neiging om teen Afrikaans te draai is om teen Afrikaans-sprekende mense te draai. Dit was die Engelse - nie die Afrikaner nie - wat eerste in die praktyk teen bruin en swart mense gediskrimineer het. Dit verskoon nie die

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[Ja](#)

[Nee](#)

[Koekiebeleid](#)



Van den Vos Reynaerde

2018-12-02 at 20:06

Interessante onderhoud, en ek bedank mnr Olojede vir sy nugtere beskouings. Sy beskouing dat "No credible numbers suggest a disproportionate murder of white farmers compared to murder rates overall. It's a crock of shit being peddled in the service of white nationalism" is egter 'n uitsondering.

Vir 'n aantal alternatiewe beskouings oor die plaasmoorde, sal die leser (en mnr Olojede, as joernalis) die volgende beskouings dalk insiggewend vind:

<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/murder-when-outrage-is-and-is-not-allowed>

<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/comment/on-rightwing-monsters-and-media-mythmaking>

<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/comment/farm-murders-factchecking-the-factcheckers>

<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/the-origins-of-south-africas-farm-murder-epidemic>

<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/comment/the-africa-checkists>

Reply



Gerhard Scheepers

2018-12-09 at 11:25

Cons: As below but perhaps for another day.

Pros: Many and varied, thank you Mr Olojede. Since South Africa and Africa are some of the primary concerns raised here I am happy to find towards the end of the article that capitalism is not simply vilified but recognised and afforded a needed goodness that works for our time. What is not however similarly given good ground is cultural diversity which gets shut down under the large and ever expanding banner of equality. What is this, an African thing, or something rather sinister?

Have you ever seen, let alone met even as few as two equal people? If not, then, whence these powerfully held ideas on equality other than before the law? How can you possibly expect that child A in position XX on the planet shall have equal ... and ... and opportunity to child AA in position X, or anywhere else, even next door to yourselves? How other than to say education shall be a State affair and One State shall rule all. Ag please Daddy, if that's your view, come, think again.

Equality may be the State's affair, and that is, under the Law, but keep the State away, far away from our education except for the funds, perhaps. We may be unequal even in hunger, equal in specifically what? Respect that or take cultural diversity and freedom out of the equation as being too inhuman for your equality preferences.

Have you considered that capitalists are remaining mum because you are not yet making sense enough for them to respond to? That in paying taxes they are sharing their wealth? That perhaps you, who not being capitalists but teachers or lawmakers, say, yet allow yourselves greed?

And concerning lawmakers especially where in SA the law is being forced to enforce inequality, how shall we police them? By affording some people only the right to make a law, and this not on a party platform? What are human laws really for? For financial contracts only?

Reply



Etienne Terblanche

2018-12-10 at 12:01

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Ja

Nee

Koekiebeleid



Gielie Hill

2018-12-16 at 15:22

Fact, Afrikaans was originally called a kitchen language, because kitchen servants spoke it and the Dutch children picked it up and adopted it. 17 million 1st, 2nd and 3rd language speakers. More than 75% is not European.

Reply



Charles

2019-01-03 at 13:35

Jean-Pierre- baie dankie vir jou bydrae - maar jou stelling is nie korrek nie - dink maar aan bv "trek", "stoep", "meerkat", "wildebees" en seker nog baie meer as mens gaan soek; en ook "stoel" - stoel. Baie dankie.

Reply



Lili

2020-06-29 at 15:39

Dankie vir 'n uitstekende artikel. Dis vir my net jammer dat daar nie melding gemaak word daarvan dat Afrikaans ook die huistaal van die e bruinmense is nie!

Reply

Reageer

Jou e-posadres sal nie gepubliseer word nie. Kommentaar is onderhewig aan moderering.

Reageer

Jou naam*

Sybrandus Adema

Jou e-posadres*

sybrandus.adema@gmail.com

☒ Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

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Ja Nee Koekiebeleid

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Ja Nee Koekiebeleid