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OPINIONISTA

The Taal Monument can be a symbol of hope, nation building and social cohesion



(www.dailymaverick.co.za/author/michael-jonas/)

By Michael Jonas (<https://>

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which in 2020 will celebrate its 45th year, is not just a beacon of hope for a liberated Afrikaans, but for all African languages.



12 min

My first real acquaintance with the wonders of Afrikaans and the educational value of the language was around standard 5 (Grade 7) thanks to DJ Opperman's *Groot Verseboek* (a definitive collection of Afrikaans poetry). This masterpiece with its blue cover made its way into the Jonas household in a Stellenbosch suburb as a book prize that my older brother, Johnny, received as a top achiever in Afrikaans in his matric year. His love for and studies in languages at the University of

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1995, when I arrived at my parents' home, my now deceased Dad awaited me with a cut-out advertisement for the position as head of the Language Museum in Paarl. I will never forget his excited voice and body language. At the same time, also the disappointment on his face when I explained how both the time and I were not ready to manage this institution with so much history, emotion, symbolic value and political luggage. But the seed was planted and I already dreamed of heading up of the monument as soon as the time was ripe. This happened 21 years later.

The challenge that I and the previous directors have faced is how to manage the monument successfully as our activities, services and programmes must represent and reflect a diverse language community. How does the monument

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developed countries take for granted.

Indigenous languages find themselves at the edge of the political landscape and Afrikaans even more so because of its link to the apartheid state.

Looking at court rulings on language aspects at the universities of Pretoria, Stellenbosch and Free State, as well as events at Overvaal High School, there are clear signs of a calculated attempt to further reduce the survival of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.

The reasons given by Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng in his court ruling on the future, exclusive use of English in the courts, suggest hostilities at government level and confirm that Afrikaans is still seen among some as the language of the oppressor. An institution such as the monument is regarded as a visible manifestation

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movement by formerly marginalised Afrikaans speakers to (re)claim the language; an energy that the monument supports by promoting conversations and interactions between Afrikaans speakers.

The composition of the monument staff and council reflects the diverse reality of the speakers and it is increasingly regarded as a space where people celebrate a shared love, Afrikaans, together. The totality of Afrikaans speakers is owning the language, to the benefit of all and especially the language. Since the liberation of the language in 1994, there is a historical revival of Afrikaans literature, music and films. In the cyber space it is just as busy; Google “Afrikaans” and see for yourself.

~~The monument strives for the well-being of~~

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African languages and use it at all levels. In this light, we consider the monument not only as a symbol of hope for Afrikaans, but for all African languages. What was possible for Afrikaans, IS possible for all.

While there is a progressive, social cohesive reality at the monument and museum, many South Africans experience Afrikaans in a negative way; from personal interactions with Afrikaans speakers to what they see and hear on the internet. Furthermore, the debate about the future of Afrikaans is still partially dominated by traditional (white) Afrikaner and civil society organisations who sometimes want to negotiate on behalf of all language partners on cultural issues. An attitude of superiority and demanding the language as solely its own by certain sectors within the Afrikaans-

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varieties are still mistakenly considered to be backward, comical and/or inferior. An attitude of regarding only the standardised spoken and written variety as acceptable, serves as an instrument for the deliberate exclusion of probably the largest group of Afrikaans speakers' unique interaction with Afrikaans.

The monument was partially born in apartheid sin, but it does not mean that the baby should be thrown out with the bath water. The opening of both the museum, 14 August 1975, and the monument, 10 October 1975, was made possible by private initiatives that sought to separate Afrikaans from politics, but it was during the high point of white Afrikaner power which meant that the language was once again abused by some politicians to gain support.

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different conflicting ideas, perceptions and perspectives are expressed. In addition, Afrikaans was partially formed a “contact language” between different language groups, and visitors bring their own interpretation and perspectives to the monument. Permanent collections or temporary exhibitions are ecosystems or habitats that are managed, developed, expanded and sometimes pruned. The monument seeks to facilitate processes and establish partnerships for the collection and conservation of Afrikaans communities’ objects, living heritage and cultural uses *in situ*.

For a decade we have been actively documenting non-recorded Afrikaans and Afrikaans living worlds, especially in the Northern Cape, and preserving them in a digital format for the

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We commemorate several national and public days, such as 16 June, and this year we offered free entrance to all foreign Africans in South Africa on Africa Day. Throughout the year the monument hosts exciting musical, educational and other events, that attract a diverse audience – see www.taalmonument.co.za (<http://www.taalmonument.co.za/>) for more.

It appears that the Language Monument is increasingly regarded as a must-see tourism attraction by locals and foreigners. By creating and maintaining the above-mentioned visitor experiences and services, we want to expand the monument into a dynamic and inclusive setting promoting the multilingual diversity of Afrikaans in the context of a multilingual community.

~~I am held responsible for an institution that some~~

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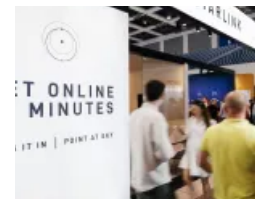
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