



PIONEERS. The statue of a Voortrekker woman and her children stands at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. Picture: iStock

Afrikaans has black roots

COMPLEX: TIED TO COUNTRY'S IDENTITY

→ **Contrary to narratives, the language's history is entrenched in the history of black South Africans.**

Simnikiwe Hlatshaneni

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But little gets emphasised on the cultural significance of the language, its role in South Africa's history and the complexities of its role in racial, cultural and social identity for a large portion of the population, which uses it as a first language.

These were the ponderings of sociology scholar Warren McGregor as, in his argument that, contrary to popular and often divisive narratives, the history of Afrikaans is deeply entrenched in the his-

English language was considered an international language which had more practical functions, while at the time of the 16 June Soweto uprising, the imposition of Afrikaans as primary medium of instruction was seen as an attempt to further colonise and oppress black people.

McGregor notes that, around the time of the uprising in 1976, groups across colour and tribal lines organised, discussed and planned for revolt against numerous points of oppression, a movement which eventually culminated in the revolt against Afrikaans in schools.

That coloured people often attended Afrikaans-only schools and spoke the language as a mother tongue did not preclude them from seeing the injustice of enforcing the language upon those for whom it was not native. Youth in coloured communities fought alongside blacks.

In her book, Boggempoel relays how she came to understand that her slave ancestors were the originators of much of what is today referred to as Afrikaner culture and the language itself.

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This week, the SCA ruled that the removal of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at Unisa was unlawful and unconstitutional.

The appeal was lodged by AfriForum following a High Court in Pretoria ruling on 26 April, 2018 in favour of a language policy that English be the primary language of instruction at the institution.

The SCA also ordered the university to publish prominent notices in three Afrikaans newspapers and on its website to bring the ruling to the attention of students and the public.

The court also ordered Unisa to e-mail to all its students a notice containing a full list of the modules on offer in Afrikaans as at 28 April, 2016 and offering all prospective students for the next academic year admission to such modules on first-year level.

The university should also offer all existing students, if they were enrolled in any of those courses or "would have enrolled for the subsequent year courses

Education should accommodate more native languages

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Its roots can be traced back to Indonesian slaves who, together with their Dutch masters in the 1700s, sought to create a means of communication.

Even more severely understated, he says, are the complex class politics between people who today refer to themselves as Afrikaner.

From its significance in the cultural and political identity of Dutch descendant farmers to its development in the communities of those descended from Cape-Malay slaves and indigenous tribes, Afrikaans is a tapestry of South Africa's very formation as a multiracial nation.

Though tainted with a history that represents the overcoming of oppression for all groups who speak it as a first language, for South Africa's black majority it became the language of oppression - more so than that of English, despite the colonial histories of both languages.

This apparent paradox, says Jesmane Boggenpoel, author of the book *My Blood Divides and Unites*, exists because the

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In her book, Boggenpoel relays how she came to understand that her slave ancestors were the originators of much of what is today referred to as Afrikaner culture and the language itself.

"Indeed, some historians argue that slaves drove the development of the language as they attempted to communicate with slave owners, most of whom spoke Dutch.

"The slaves also had a major influence on South African cuisine, introducing new cooking methods, recipes such as curry, *bobotie* and *koeksisters*," she points out.

To demonstrate this point, she points out that the Indonesian word for banana was *pisang* from which the Afrikaans word for banana, *piesang* was derived.

Of equal cultural significance to the development of Afrikaans and Afrikaner culture were the enslaved Khoekhoe and San people, who were indigenous to South Africa. According to the Slave Lodge, these two groups were preferred as slaves by stock farmers or pastoralists, for example *trekboers*.

In the ongoing project of reconciliation, it was important, McGregor, concluded, that the story of Afrikaans not be painted as only shameful and racist, but used as a tool to discuss, heal and celebrate the country's history.

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available in Afrikaans, but had perforce to follow the module in English", a choice to follow the module in Afrikaans until completion of their studies.

'Accommodate more native languages'

According to Alana Bailey, head of cultural affairs at AfriForum, the ruling – which comes after a five-year battle – is of interest to all Afrikaans students, but is important for the future of Afrikaans as a high-function language.

"The Supreme Court of Appeal ... is the highest court that has yet ruled in favour of Afrikaans education on tertiary level.

"The costs order against Unisa further confirms the moral high ground of students who demand the right to education in their native language.

"It is important that it is eventually acknowledged that access to tertiary education must be extended to

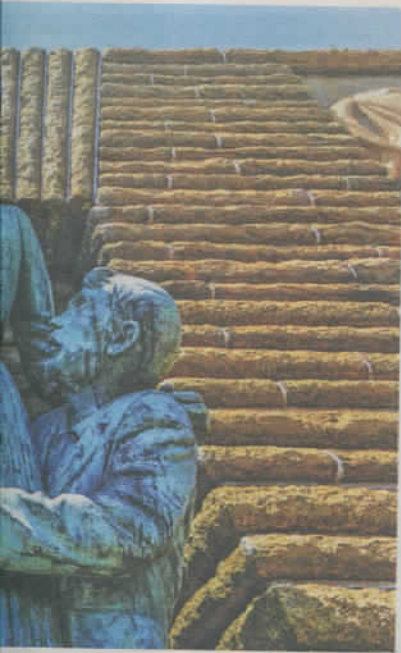
not only create room for English first-language speakers, but to also accommodate more native languages.

"Unisa has yet again excluded Afrikaans recently from their plans to encourage staff and students to master more languages.

"The ruling emphasises that Afrikaans also has a place on government-supported campuses," Bailey said.

The university is yet to respond.
– News24 Wire

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