

# Open Stellenbosch Memorandum of Demands

May 13, 2015

## Preamble

The time has come for the management of Stellenbosch University to make an active effort to change the rhetoric employed when talking about and implementing Transformation. Stellenbosch can no longer proclaim to be committed to transformation, while at the same time viewing itself publically as the protector of the white Afrikaans culture, whether through language or institutional cultural practices. It is time for Council to affirm that transformation is the main agenda of council, and that it is our most urgent and pressing concern if the university wishes not only to continue to promote excellence but to fulfil its role as a public institution working for the public good. Institutional traditions must be actively broken down, and replaced with recognition of the urgent need to create an integrated and transformed campus.

This document has been compiled following three weeks of extensive engagement with students and discussions of their shared experiences with the culture of exclusion at Stellenbosch. These engagements and discussions have taken place in open spaces, where students have felt comfortable to air their grievances. It also draws on the insights of those who have engaged with the struggle to transform universities after the end of Apartheid since 1994. The demands and proposals capture those measures that are necessary to begin the process of purging the remnants of Apartheid from Stellenbosch. The list is not closed, and our movement will continue to work towards the creation of a university that is open, transformed and African.

## 1 The Language Policy

The Language Policy of SU functions to position Afrikaans language and culture as vulnerable and as under attack. It is therefore the duty of the policy to protect this language, not only as a means of communication, but also as a site of cultural production. It is for this reason that we ought to interrogate the rhetoric of the Language Policy in order to trace in it the Apartheid nostalgia that undergirds its very existence. It states in its aims and overview that it is, first and foremost, committed to the use, safeguarding and sustained de-

velopment of Afrikaans as an academic language in a multilingual context (pg 2). This function runs in tandem with the aim to increase teaching offerings in English (pg 2). In addition, the Policy acknowledge[s] language diversity and promote[s] accessibility for staff and students (pg 2). However, this policy is applied through a pragmatic (pg 2) approach, which takes into account the resources for support mechanisms. The policy seeks to persuade us to think that the intended aim is to develop multilingualism, or the loaded term, language diversity. But the giveaway, as we see it, lies in the defensive rhetoric that seeks to preserve those forms of power predicated on white privilege and cultural hegemony. And so, the term safeguard is used throughout the policy to somehow suggest that Afrikaans as an historical entity, as a communication tool, as a socio-spatial culture is under attack. The resultant logic is that the Policy will be its defender.

What we have, in this instance, is a discursive strategy that attempts to refigure whiteness as actually disadvantageous and not beneficial in post-Apartheid South Africa. It is no wonder that many white SU students argue, as they are known to have argued on many platforms, that whiteness in South Africa has become a liability and that they sought refuge in Stellenbosch, one of the last bastions of Afrikaner nationalism. The suggestion conveyed by the Policy is, in the first instance, a flagging of the possibility that white Afrikaners are increasingly becoming an unprotected minority in the country. This idea stems from the view that whiteness generally considers the slate as having been wiped cleaned by the new dispensation and political reforms that have come into place in a post-Apartheid context. We have also noted that the proposition from these students often involves an argument that states is that even talking about race is itself racist, since we ought to see people for their individuality rather than as members of a collective group.

This is precisely what we are fighting, and it has been noted even by Vice Chancellors at other universities, including the VC of Rhodes University, Dr Sizwe Mabizela; former VC of Rhodes and now Director of the Mellon Foundation Dr Saleem Badat; Dr Adam Habib at Wits University; and even Dr Max Price at the University of Cape Town. We call for our own VC and Stellenbosch University to face up to this structural racism, by firstly addressing the very foundations of the Language Policy, and not merely the procedural modifications about teaching and translating. It is the very process of translating that presumes Afrikaans as the normative code, to which every other non-speaker, generally non-white, is expected to adhere. The Rector at the University of the Free State noted in connection with the passing of the former VC, Russel Botman, that:

"Some of the historically white Afrikaans universities have a perfect alibi for not transforming - Afrikaans. When the Potchefstroom campus of North West University or the University of Stellenbosch is pushed to enrol more black students, they take refuge in language rights protected by the constitution. Somebody must tell these campus leaders that in the wake of our horrific racist past, white-

dominant campuses in this country are morally unacceptable, demographically unjust and educationally dangerous. Afrikaans as a language is vital to our multilingual democracy, and must expand, but as the handmaiden of social justice, not racial exclusion”.

It should by now be clear, or shall become clearer as we proceed, that the language question at Stellenbosch is indeed the mechanism through which systemic segregation functions at SU. Having dealt with some of the problematic foundations of this Policy and SU, we can endeavour to explore the intricacies and how they operate in the classroom. The foremost way in which the current language policy marginalises students is by negatively affecting the academic performance of non-Afrikaans speaking students. Many students struggle to understand the content of lessons because they are excluded through the use of Afrikaans in lectures. The interpretation devices given to non-Afrikaans speaking students are inefficient, inaudible and often do not work. They also make students feel uncomfortable, highlighting their status as those who do not belong at this university. There are lecturers at this university who refuse to teach or answer questions in English. Non-Afrikaans speaking students are excluded by having to constantly ask their peers for help in understanding the language used in class, distracting them from the underlying academic content. The result is that many non-Afrikaans speaking students come out of lectures feeling as though they have only understood half of the lesson. Secondly, we highlight the obvious impracticality for lecturers of having to teach in two languages at once. One sentence Afrikaans, one sentence English. We ask, how can this possibly translate into a fluent transfer of ideas to students? Lecturers in the Open Stellenbosch movement have emphasized the pedagogical short sightedness in terms of the language policy, and how it translates into the teaching experience. In residences the marginalisation of especially black students is most evident. Many residence meetings are conducted exclusively in Afrikaans and this feeds into some of the racist traditions which permeate many of the more traditionally Afrikaner residences. Many black students feel they cannot contribute to the Residence experience because they cannot speak Afrikaans. The same can be said about student departmental leadership positions. Following on from this, the language policy directly discriminates against non-Afrikaans speaking students and lecturers by denying them access to other opportunities on campus, such as having Afrikaans as a condition for employment.

For these reasons we insist that at this campus, language is currently used to divide, exclude and marginalise.

The following measures should be in place by January 2016

- All classes must be available in English.
- The use of translators and translation-devices must be discontinued, as

they are ineffective, inaudible and highlight the place of non-Afrikaans-speaking students at Stellenbosch as those who do not belong.

- All official and unofficial communication from management, faculty and university departments must be available in English. This includes communication between faculty and staff, and not simply the communicate from management.
- All residence, faculty, departmental and administrative meetings and correspondence must be conducted in English.
- Afrikaans must not be a requirement for employment or appointment to leadership positions.
- The University must stop using isiXhosa as a front for multilingualism when it has clearly invested minimal resources in its development on campus. Alternatively, significant investment must be directed at developing isiXhosa on campus.
- All signage on campus must be available in English.

## **2 The Re-establishment of The Centre for Diversity and Inclusivity**

The Centre for Diversity and Inclusivity must be re-established. This must be done by the end of the September 2015. If the university is serious about Transformation, then council should insist on the employment of Director who is black, since the office that is responsible for Transformation must itself be transformed. In addition, the importance of this office must be reflected in its name. The philosophy of mere 'inclusivity' is itself an upholding of whiteness, since it relegates black subjects to mere appendages of a white Afrikaner culture. Therefore, the term Transformation or Institutional Culture or Equity and Redress and so on, must be encompassed in the title of the office.

## **3 Curriculum Changes**

Our approach to curriculum change at Stellenbosch University draws on the philosophy of African intellectuals such as Professor Achille Mbembe, Professor Premesh Lalu and Professor Amina Mama, who have addressed the issue of transformation in post-Apartheid universities (Decolonising Knowledge and the Question of the Archive).

We second Mbembes call for a curriculum audit in order to establish what is currently taught, and the ways in which it is taught, in order to ground a discussion about what needs to be changed.

We call for the decolonization of our curricula in order to produce a new kind of university, one that works for the public good.

Mbembe argues, for instance, that curricula devised to serve the needs of the colonial and Apartheid regimes remain largely intact. He argues that we have not yet done the necessary work that will make our universities truly democratic spaces.

The widespread racism on our campus and ignorance about the history of our own country as well as that of our neighbouring countries, and indeed, our continent, is a clear sign that what is being taught is not sufficient to bring about social justice in the aftermath of Apartheid.

- We call on the management of the university and on the Deans of each faculty to hold, encourage and fund faculty level debates on curriculum change with faculty and students.
- Since many of the faculty members studied and began working at the university during Apartheid, we call for open discussions about how Apartheid-era ideologies continue to affect what we are taught in the present and how such forms of knowledge and ways of being affect the work and thought of those who teach students in a Post-Apartheid context.
- We call for the university to fund the development of new curricula that account for social and political changes in our country after Apartheid.

These measures must be taken by January 2016.

## 4 Appendices

We asked people participating in Open Stellenbosch to share stories about their experiences at the university which had motivated them to be part of a movement concerned with transforming the university. The stories which were sent highlighted students experiences of exclusion and marginalisation experienced daily in institutional practices which underpin and inform lectures, residence life, orientation programmes and navigating spaces on and off campus.

### 4.1 Appendix A: Language

All my classes on the accounting side are taught in parallel-medium 1 English class, 1 Afrikaans class. The Law side practices the problematic T-option. I find the T-option problematic in the sense that it is not enforced properly. There are no actual guidelines in the Language policy nor the faculty calendar that we can hold lecturers to. Each lecturer is supposed to speak both Afrikaans

and English in lectures. The problem is that the meaning of what is "fair language use" is left to the discretion of the lecturer. Some repeat everything word for word in both languages, which is tedious but is the most fair option. Others end up favouring one language over the other leaving a group of people at a disadvantage.

At the beginning of my second year in a Roman Law class we took a survey asking the class what language they would prefer to study in. A majority (around 68% of the class) had selected to study in English and the minority (32% either abstained or preferred to study in Afrikaans). In the next class all those who were academically English had to be given translation kits as the lecturer was now going to conduct classes in Afrikaans only.

I had never used translation kits before so I ended up losing about two weeks of class trying to adjust to how they worked, the uncomfortable ear-pieces, etc. Roman Law is a technical subject with lots of Latin terms and specific rules. In the beginning it seemed like the interpreters did not know what they were doing, and there was a lot lost in translation. We complained to the lecturer and the interpreters were trained. So at least it was resolved.

We also complained to Mr X that it was unfair that the majority of the class had to wear translator kits whilst the minority of the class was receiving first-hand information from the lecturer. We took many surveys and the issue was only resolved at the end of the year.

This year for Mercantile Law the lecturer decided on day 1 that for him T-option meant Afrikaans and then clarification of important things in English. Once again we complained and he said that according to the language policy of the University he was allowed to do so. I no longer attend that class and neither many of my fellow English students. The subject has become purely self-study for us because we feel like it is a waste of time to sit in a lecture for 50 minutes and only being taught in a language that you understand for 15 minutes of that lecture.

I'm all for preserving and promoting African languages, but I'm not for the exclusion of others at its expense. The language policy must change AND there must be a place where students can go to complain about the implementation of the policy. We complain and our concerns aren't taken seriously, we are sent around in circles and it's not fair.

During one of my first lectures (I am a first year student) the lecture was based predominantly in Afrikaans. When an English student asked how much of the lectures were going to be based in Afrikaans, (I felt relief that someone else was brave enough to pose the question.) the lecturer shut her down. Justifying the focus on Afrikaans as a teaching medium because academic texts are in English not Afrikaans, he said it was unfair that all the text books were in English and the Afrikaans students were disadvantaged. When majority of your class prefers English as the medium? When majority of the rest of the class is bilingual?

I attended lectures afterwards, but stopped when I felt tired of trying to translate a language I haven't done since I was 12. What was the point? Self-study was easier. Nothing was communicated about the T option at the time of student application to Stellenbosch I didn't apply here with the pretence of speaking Afrikaans. I took isizulu in high school. Nothing was communicated to me about 50/50 lectures either, which aren't practical in anyway.

P.S. I love learning new languages. I have taken it as a mission to learn Afrikaans, but I won't be at a level to participate or benefit in an academic sense for a while.

I've lived in the Middle East for 10 years and moved back two and a half years ago. This meant I was exempt from learning a South African language. I had signed up to do General Linguistics as one of my classes. Most of the class was in Afrikaans and there were only a few non-Afrikaans speakers so the lecturer mainly spoke in Afrikaans. The slides were in both English and Afrikaans, but the explanation was mostly Afrikaans. I had to rely on a friend to translate everything for me, making it difficult for both of us. In the end I dropped the class, after giving it two weeks. I decided to take up English because I knew it would be in English.

Being in a T-Option class is really ridiculous, because the lecturer speaks English when they are dealing with basic issues and when it comes to intricate issues that actually matter, they shift over to Afrikaans, where I lose out and I have to stop the lecturer and ask what he said; sometimes I don't because the lecturer then becomes annoyed and you can see it. However, as much as we can say I have to continue asking it is my right, yes, BUT you realise that the lecturer has something held against you because you challenge them with regards to language, this is seen in your results. And if you would look at your black friends marks compared with white friends, there is clear differences.

The problems of relying on translators and interpreting devices The Translators (interpreting devices), WE SIMPLY CANNOT ENGAGE WITH LECTURERS!!! We are busy trying to make out what this whispering is saying, writing notes and simply cannot communicate with lecturers. The person who is translating is not trained in the field, so they will say it in their form. Asking questions is a joke because they will be answered in Afrikaans, which you just cannot say "That was not my question/ can I get clarity" because there are just too many channels to go through. This is then reflected in our grades.

How lecturers identify with Afrikaans students in class not only by speaking predominantly in Afrikaans but also by being closer to them physically and emotionally. Afrikaner students are prioritised in class, the lecturer even stands closer to where they are. In our classes we sit segregated because as black people it is HARD to communicate and build some form of relations with the lecturer, BUT Afrikaner students share jokes and meetings after class because the avenue

for that is open only for them through Language.

In my Ancient Cultures lectures the lecturer makes the majority of his jokes in Afrikaans. I just sit there and stare blankly at him because I don't know what he is saying. Recently, especially after the discussion on the language policy he has been making jokes/comments about making jokes in Afrikaans. I don't really know how to explain it, but an example is yesterday he made these comments about how he can't make a joke in Afrikaans but he can in "kaapse" because it isn't really Afrikaans.

My class lecturer (a white man) only gave his class in Afrikaans, we went to speak with him about it. He was very reluctant but started giving classes in English. The racist Afrikaans students immediately started complaining saying that the module is an Afrikaans module.

Students deserve so much more. The Stellenbosch language policy hinders the success of many driven and ambitious young students

Stellenbosch alumni:

I had a lecturer tell me that she was doing me a favour, for replying in English when I asked her to explain a concept to me. Students deserve so much more, they deserve sufficient resources which allow for the success. Frankly, the Stellenbosch language policy hinders the success of many driven and ambitious young students.

## **4.2 Appendix B: Being questioned why they come to Stellenbosch if they don't speak Afrikaans**

Stellenbosch Alumnus:

I remember sitting in a lecture when a student raised her hand to clarify something with the lecturer in English. He then took the opportunity to inappropriately use his lecturer's podium to rant about his obviously personal viewpoint on the language policy. He spent a good couple of minutes telling us things like "YOU people come to our place and expect US to change???" That man saw no problem saying these things to us, and that is indicative of the status quo at Stellenbosch. He's still there as far as I know, teaching you, probably thinking these same thoughts.

The first letter I received from the university was that my application to study BA Law was accepted, but if I do not understand Afrikaans at all, it is "strongly recommended that I do not do this course." I felt from the onset that this was exclusionary and cut me off from taking a course that I may have enjoyed. The most common response I get when I complain to my fellow South African students (especially Afrikaners), is "Why would you come to Stellenbosch if

you can't speak Afrikaans?" Stellenbosch University cannot continue to have its cake and eat it. If this institution wants to be at the pinnacle of global academic recognition, it needs to realise that inclusion of others in its very exclusive culture is paramount to real change

### **4.3 Appendix C: Students experiences of marginalisation and exclusion in residences**

When I was in first year I was surprised to move into one of the female university residences where the HK (house committee) had put me with another girl of colour. I later noticed that this was a trend as the last year that I was in my residence, our new HK wanted to implement a rule where they placed each first year into racially segregated rooms. This was done because they believed different racial groups would not be able to identify with each other culturally. The HK was represented by majority white Afrikaans speaking girls. A year or two later another incident happened where a white girl asked the HK to move her to another room as she could not get along with her roommate, who was a coloured girl, because there were yet again too many cultural differences. The HK did as the girl asked.

Afrikaans is always used in residence meetings or announcements and we are asked to ask a person sitting next to us if we don't understand. I Had to greet the HK in Afrikaans, when they knew that some students like myself don't speak the language.

The music during events only accommodates the white people and when people of colour request different music we are told that it makes them uncomfortable.

The black people in res are always told that they are too loud and referred to as "ratchet."

During my welcoming programme at one of the PSOs, the programme and daily activities were all conducted in Afrikaans. Myself and other international students had no idea what was going on, and upon repeated request for an English programme or a simple translation, nothing pragmatic was done. I joined a 2nd year committee thinking I could help make a change and help other students at the PSO feel more welcome, and maybe one day be a part of the HK. Within 2 months of being a part of it, all that was done was organising Skakels, feeling more excluded, and being the only black girl on the committee I didn't want to feel like I stood out but I did. I almost felt I had to prove my worth, on top of asking for translations of what we were actually doing every day. Eventually I quit because I was gaining nothing from it.

Orientation week is the most tedious thing in Stellenbosch. As a young black man, I felt like I was being forced into a system that wanted to change who I was and what I believed in. I was told that I should learn Afrikaans if I want to

survive. Meetings were all in Afrikaans and it suddenly hit me that it was going to be a long 3 years. No one is willing to accept that people come from different backgrounds and that we need to accommodate those people. Instead, you have to put aside who you are; in order to 'survive'. If you choose to question things at seem irrelevant, you are labelled as a "Moeg Jarre".

From Robertson, M. (2015) Real men, Proper ladies and Mixing in between: a qualitative study of social cohesion and discrimination (in terms of race and gender) within residences at Stellenbosch University, Masters Sociology dissertation.

Skakeling is a practice which takes place amongst all residences in Stellenbosch as well as private students. Skakels are an organised practice in which female and male residences socialise. Generally the event begins by both residences lining up facing each other. They then greet each other with a communal pre-arranged greeting, and many times the male residence will serenade the females. The activity then begins, often with the males having to approach the females. Sometimes the males indicate the specific female they have chosen to interact with by giving her a gift of a rose, chocolate, or other items. A few of these skakels take place throughout the first week and continue (although less frequent) throughout the first year and sometimes second year of a students time in residence. Skakels take on different forms of socialising, from picnics, to dances, and to simply talking to each other. However, they are always formal and are almost always focused on males and females interacting with each other in heterosexual and often romantic ways.

The skakel I think is also very degrading to females as all the skakels with the exception of few consisted of standing in a neat row the men observing and judging us (the females) followed by the men greeting us in Afrikaans and then our greetings being slightly more sexual followed by standing there hoping that someone would find you attractive to talk to you and if you weren't Afrikaans speaking people would literally run away from you as if you had a disease (including the respective HK).

Asie, a black woman student interviewed by Megan Robertson (2015) Robertson (2015) found that black and coloured women students, in particular, complained about feeling marginalised and rejected in skakels, and cites the experiences of Asie, a black woman in an all womens residence which was skakeling with a boys residence: Asie: I have gone through a bad experience. And what happens is that we had girls and guys. So all the girls had to throw their shoe on the dance floor, and a guy had to pick up just one shoe and the raise it up. And if it was your shoe then he had to dance with you. So I did that and one picked my shoe. And then they just looked at me and threw it at me and laughed with their friends. So that was something that was really...it hurt me a lot...thats why I hate skakels. I hate them...

Megan: Why do you think he did that?

Asie: I think he did that because he was Afrikaans and obviously he didnt want

to dance with a black girl.

This resonates with findings from Yach, D. (2011) Equality Impact Assessment of the Student Experience, For the Faculty of Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University. Extract from the Yach Report:

Women students have also reported that when they are introduced to male students as part of the ritual of male and female residences getting together, white male students avoid black and coloured women students linking up with white women students. This creates distinct cliques reinforcing the sense that black and coloured women are tolerated but not really welcome on campus.

#### 4.4 Appendix D: The significance of race at Stellenbosch

During Vensters (orientation programme for new students at the beginning of the academic year) my friends were discussing what was holding South Africa back from becoming a more equal society and I said it was race. There were some people standing around and listening to our discussion. When we were queuing to do our act thing, this guy came up to me and told the only reason I say race is because I'm black and that shouldn't be at Stellenbosch because I'm black and that I should go back to Zuma and his wives. And then he started pulling monkey faces at me until I told him to fuck off and I walked away. My mum is coloured and my dad is Indian by the way.

As Orientation started I realized that something wasn't right. For the first time in my life I was confined to only associating myself with people of the same ethnicity as myself (coloured), I have never had this experience as I was never taught to see colour but to rather judge a person on character but everyone around me forced me to only speak and associate with them so I did this thinking that this was the norm here at Stellenbosch.

Stellenbosch Alumnus:

I sit and wonder how I managed to graduate in record time. For two years, I had all my majors in Afrikaans. It was a struggle, but I pushed. I watched how most of my friends got spat out by the system. The system in Stellenbosch wasn't designed for success of black people... That's why majority of black people never make it to graduation; I know this cause there were only about 7 black people who walked up the stage during my graduation. I remember how so many people left, gave up recruitment bursaries and stuff; cause they weren't happy. No one should ever feel like they don't belong in a place, not in South Africa.

Stellenbosch Alumnus:

I am completely bilingual. I am fluent in English and Afrikaans. It is not really just about language. If it were then why would I, raised by Afrikaans speaking

parents, who considers Afrikaans my language too, feel excluded in res and feel like the campus was many times a hostile environment? Language is not the reason I experienced countless racist incidents during my time there. Language is not the reason why most of the students of colour in my res sat separate from the rest in the dining hall, they were all predominantly Afrikaans speaking too. I repeat, it is not just about language. It is about a particular culture being pushed on us in res. It is about an institutional culture at Stellenbosch that allows racism to flourish. It is the mentality that this is not our place too, that we do not belong there.

I have been living in Stellenbosch for three and a half years. While I cannot speak Afrikaans - as well as I would like anyway - it is the focus of my research: the literary, social, cultural and political histories. With this in mind my experience of Afrikaans begins from a point that is de-centred. I think this is important to mention because Afrikaans has never been a white language, and has never had a fixed 'centre' despite the evil minds behind Apartheid that tried to make it so. What started as a kombuistaal eventually became the de facto language of oppression. I say this because I see lots of discussion about Afrikaans, Stellenbosch University and the culture of white privilege each of these elements contains and promotes. It is not a crime to be an Afrikaner, and it is not a crime to speak Afrikaans.

It seems Afrikaans has come to imply race, which is so dangerous. It is no different than someone referring to 'black' languages when referring to isiXhosa or SeSotho. Language, like identity, is not fixed. No language implies race, but in South Africa it does which further punctuates the idea that 'race' is a social construct. Since I have seen much quoting from the likes of Steve Biko (what about Robert Sobukwe?) and, for whatever reason, Che Guevara (although I think those citing this individual for inspiration in relation to academic decolonisation need to do more reading) I will refer to another voice for input. There is an important South African writer named Jacob Dlamini who writes in his book *Native Nostalgia* (2009) that Afrikaans is the language of black nostalgia in South Africa. To me, at least, this certainly complicates the complex history of languages in South Africa and opens up new discussions where the use of the language can be seen as something other than promoting exclusionary practices. I make these points because I feel as though the entire context of Coloured experiences and their relationship to Afrikaans is glossed over in favour of attaching it to white South Africans. For lack of a better phrase, the history of this country, whether it is the racial, social, political, economic or cultural is far more than 'black' and 'white'.