

Mandela and Afrikaans: From Language of the Oppressor to Language of Reconciliation

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Abstract

It wasn't just a rabbit that Mandela pulled out of a hat when he quoted Ingrid Jonker's poem *Die Kind (The Child)* in his inaugural State of the Nation address to Parliament in May 1994 (Joubert, 2003). He had cherished his love and respect for Afrikaans for a long time. In a nation as diverse as South Africa, language is an important and emotional issue. In this paper I will describe why Madiba studied Afrikaans in prison on Robben Island, why he used Afrikaans to reach out to the Afrikaans speaking community of South Africa, why he asked Stellenbosch University to change their language policy, but more importantly, how he used the Afrikaans language to understand the Afrikaner, their history and their culture in order to create a new South Africa where everybody, including Afrikaners who felt under threat, could feel welcome. When South Africa became a democracy in 1994, the nation accepted a new Constitution which stated that everyone has the right to education in one of the official languages provided it is reasonably practicable. By offering official status to Afrikaans and nine other indigenous languages alongside English, Mandela afforded all South Africans the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue. As such, Madiba transformed the education landscape in South Africa for ever. Against the backdrop of South Africa's diverse and multilingual cultural heritage, this paper describes how Nelson Mandela took up the challenge of leading a young democracy by improving the education system.

Keywords: Afrikaans-speaking person, Afrikaner, Afrikaanse, Madiba, nationalist, apartheid, activist, indigenous language, uprising, boeremeisie (Afrikaner girl).

Introduction

The National Party, under the leadership of Dr DF Malan, a former minister of the Dutch Reformed Church and editor of the Afrikaans newspaper, *Die Burger*, was a party animated by bitterness –bitterness towards the English, who had treated them as inferiors for decades, and bitterness towards Africans, who the Nationalists believed were threatening the prosperity and purity of Afrikaner culture (Mandela, 1994:127). This bitterness is clearly evident in the words of the father of Zeldi le Grange, former president Nelson Mandela's personal assistant for more than 19 years (2014:15), on the day Madiba was released:

On 2 February 1990 President De Klerk announced that Nelson Mandela would be released unconditionally after twenty-seven years imprisonment. I was in the

swimming pool when my father came out of the house. I could see he had something on his mind and asked what was wrong. After a short silence he answered: 'Now we are in trouble. The terrorist has been released.'

Because of this bitterness that Afrikaner people felt towards black people and their politics, White children had been deprived of the history of someone as great as Nelson Mandela. Le Grange (2014:16) revealed that she had no idea who Mandela was or what his release would mean to the people of South Africa. The situation as described above by Zelda le Grange (2014) was the same in many Afrikaner homes. Famous poet and apartheid activist Antjie Krog (2013) put it as follows:

When I grew up, in the 1960s, the name Nelson Mandela never featured in our Afrikaner home". Feelings of racial superiority precluded any thought that a remarkable or successful black leader might exist. If a banned name slipped through in the liberal press, it was assumed that either the liberals or the regime were secretly "using" him. It was simple: there was no agency to praise or respect black people.

In contrast, Afrikaner children knew the names of Afrikaner "traitors" by heart: those who betrayed them during the Anglo-Boer War and those who later joined the "terrorists and communists" against apartheid (Krog, 2013). However, as the anti-apartheid struggle grew in intensity, certain names kept recurring. One was the name of Nelson Mandela. As years went by the name Mandela, shouted during torture or celebrated in underground songs and poetry, became – in the words of Krog (2013)– "a metaphor for hope and terror in the psyche of South Africans long before he became a person or president." This author remembers how we sang freedom songs during the uprising against apartheid in the seventies and the eighties on the campus of the University of the Western Cape, where I studied for my first degree.

When Mandela was released in 1990, Afrikaners lived in fear and confusion. In the words of Krog (2013): "Afrikaners uneasily began to suspect that Nelson Mandela was 'like them' and would therefore definitely do unto them what 'they' had done unto him." Le Grange (2014:19) said it was the same in her family: "We expected revenge. But nothing happened on that day. "What must have amazed Afrikaners was the fact that Mandela made a special effort to reach out to Afrikaners and paid attention to the history of which Afrikaners felt proud (Krog, 2013). Although they did not share the same political views, Carel Boshoff (2013), leader of the Afrikaans cultural movement, Orania, said: "Mandela's legacy will ensure him a place in South African history".

Part of that legacy was Mandela's affection for the Afrikaans language. It wasn't just a rabbit that Mandela pulled out of a hat when he quoted Ingrid Jonker's poem in Parliament (Joubert, 2003). He had cherished his love and respect for Afrikaans for a long time. How then did it come about that Mandela, who was hated so much by Afrikaners, developed such a love for their language? Why did he go the extra mile to learn Afrikaans? Why did he allow Afrikaans to continue to be a language of teaching – given the negativity around Afrikaans and the Soweto Uprising in 1976 – and why was he so much in favour of the development of all our indigenous languages? And how did all of this contribute to his legacy? These are some of the questions that I will attempt to answer in this paper.

Terminology

A few terms that I will use in this paper need to be explained.

Afrikaners: According to the HAT (Hand Dictionary of the Afrikaans Language, 2005:26), an Afrikaner is a person who is Afrikaans through birth or descent and speaks Afrikaans as

mother tongue. According to Wikipedia, ¹Afrikaners are a Southern African ethnic group descended from predominantly Dutch settlers first arriving in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They have traditionally dominated South Africa's politics and agriculture. Afrikaners make up approximately 5.2% of the total South African population based on the number of white South Africans who speak Afrikaans – South Africa's third most widely spoken language – as a first language.² The word 'Afrikaner' also has a specific political and cultural connotation. Afrikaners see themselves as Christian Nationalists. They are very sensitive about their history that includes the Great Trek when they left the Cape, a British colony, 175 years ago. Some of the earliest Afrikaner, nationalist leaders, like Dr D.F. Malan and Dr H.F. Verwoerd, are deemed to be the architects of apartheid. Not all white people are Afrikaners and coloured and black speakers of Afrikaans don't identify with this specific group. However, the word 'Afrikaner' as used in this paper is much more encompassing than indicated in the HAT or Wikipedia.

Afrikaanse: According to the HAT (2005:26), an "Afrikaanse person is someone who in the widest sense associates with Afrikaans." The term is much more inclusive than the word "Afrikaner" and comes with much less political baggage than is the case with *Afrikaner*.

AfrikaansSpeaking Person (*Afrikaanssprekende*): This is the most commonly accepted term to refer to everybody who speaks Afrikaans, either as a home language or as a second language and includes white, coloured and black speakers of Afrikaans. It is often used as an alternative for "Afrikaanses".

Madiba: In this paper I will at times refer to Mr Mandela as *Madiba*. This is the name of the clan of which Mr Mandela was a member. A clan name is much more important than a surname as it refers to the ancestor from whom a person is descended. Madiba was the name of a Thembu chief who ruled in the Transkei in the 18th century. It is considered very polite to use someone's clan name.³

Mandela: Student of Afrikaans

Nelson Mandela learned to speak Afrikaans in prison so that he could communicate better with the prison wardens on Robben Island. This was according to Mary Maxadana, chief of Staff in Mandela's office, who told it to Zelda le Grange (Le Grange, 2014:29). Mandela (1994:556) talks in his autobiography about his and his inmates 'commitment to education and their determination to study. He also mentioned several subjects that they used to study such as English, Arts, Geography, and Mathematics, and of course Afrikaans. He writes:

In the struggle, Robben Island was known as the 'University'. This is not only because of what we learned from books ... or because so many of our men ... earned multiple degrees. Robben Island was known as the 'University' because of what we learned from each other. We became our own faculty, with our own professors, our own curriculum, our own courses.

Very few of the inmates in his section had BA degrees, a few did not have high school certificates; some like Govan Mbeki and Neville Alexander were already well educated, but others had not gone past Standard 6. Mandela (1994:489) added that within months, virtually, all of them were studying for one qualification or another. At night their cell block seemed more like a study hall than a prison.

¹<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrikaner>

²National Census of 2011

³ <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/names>.

Two of the finest scholars who were with Mandela in prison on Robben Island were Neville Alexander, whom Mandela referred to as a “prominent coloured intellectual” (1994:457) and who later became a professor at the University of Cape (UCT) until his death in 2012, and Fekile Bam, a law student from the UCT, who became Judge-President at the Lands Claim Court from 1995 till his death in 2011. Both men were members of the Non-European Unity Movement who formed a radical offshoot called the *Yu Chi Chan Club*. Bam, who was in prison with Mandela for ten years, revealed in an interview more information about Mandela’s striving to learn: “Nelson was very serious about his Afrikaans (...) and put a lot of work and effort in learning to speak Afrikaans and to use it”. Bam remembered the lecturer in Afrikaans methodology at Free State University’s education faculty, BAJ van Rensburg, who said Madiba had been one of her students when she lectured at UNISA: “He always tried his best”, she said (Carlin, 1995).

Prof Jakes Gerwel, Director-General in the President’s Office while Madiba was head of state, a former Afrikaans professor and Vice-Chancellor at the University of the Western Cape and well-known for his love of Afrikaans, said (in Joubert, 2013):

Yes, Madiba was very proud of his Afrikaans. It sometimes amused me, because he spoke Afrikaans better than many other languages.

Apart from Ingrid Jonker, Madiba also loved the work of C J Langenhoven and Elsa Joubert. While he was president, he invited Joubert and her husband, writer Klaas Steytler, to dinner. Gerwel said Mandela remembered virtually everything he had read and he especially liked C. Louis Leipoldt’s poems about the Anglo-Boer War (Joubert, 2003).

Madiba Talked to Me in Afrikaans

In her book *Good Morning Mr Mandela* Zelda le Grange (2014:28) spoke about how shocked she was when she met Madiba for the first time in his office. She greeted him in English: “Good Morning Mr Mandela”. What happened after that was too much for her to handle. This is how she describes the moment:

After I settled my thoughts – or was it my stomach, I’m not sure which, I realised that Madiba was talking to me in Afrikaans. My home language. I was not sure whether I should reply in English or Afrikaans, and can’t remember which one I chose...

She adds that she was overwhelmed by her emotions, that she felt a deep sense of guilt because Mr Mandela spoke to her in her language while her people had put him in jail for so long. She could not wait to tell her parents that Madiba talked to her in Afrikaans. However, they did not take much notice and could not care less (Le Grange, 2014:29).

As Mr Mandela’s working relationship with Zelda grew, so his relationship with Afrikaans also intensified. When Dr Johan Heyns, a prominent Afrikaner leader in the Dutch Reformed Church was murdered, the president called all his generals to his office. When Gen. Constand Viljoen, the Afrikaans-speaking leader of the Defence Force, arrived, he was introduced to Zelda by the president in Afrikaans. Madiba also mentioned that Zelda was “nregte Boeremeisie” (a true Afrikaner girl) (Le Grange, 2014:34). The word “Boeremeisie” is a loaded term as it points to her Afrikaner heritage. The president often introduced her in Afrikaans to various ministers (cf. 2014:43). Le Grange (2014:51) adds that she soon realised that she could speak Afrikaans with the president when she was not sure what was expected of her. Madiba would then very calmly explain the protocol to her in Afrikaans.

Mandela: Sensitive to Diversity and Unity

Nelson Mandela was always very sensitive to diversity and demographics, a characteristic that was evident since his first day in prison on Robben Island (cf. Mandela, 1994:526). When he was elected as South Africa's first ever democratic president, Mr Mandela right from the beginning chose his staff members so that they would be representative of South Africa's demographics. According to Le Grange (2014:24), Madiba invited black and white people for interviews, including white Afrikaans-speaking people. She states that Madiba wanted to ensure that a young, white Afrikaner woman, like herself, who represented her community stayed close to him. He made sure that people from the conservative Afrikaner community, were included in the new Government of National Unity. Furthermore, Mandela was prepared to make use of the skills and knowledge of white professionals who were not members of the ANC. Examples are the inclusion of competent economists and bankers such as Derek Keys and Chris Liebenberg in his cabinet, as well as using officials from the previous government (Pretorius, 2012:551). According to Le Grange (2014:59), Mandela wanted to make a success of his Government of National Unity, which is why he set an example to show to the world that he was willing to practise what he preached.

Mandela Read Afrikaans Newspapers

Mr Mandela read all five daily newspapers published in and around Johannesburg, and especially liked to read Afrikaans newspapers (Joubert, 2003). According to Madiba, the Afrikaans papers reported more accurately than the English papers (Le Grange, 2014:63). One day he called Zelda to his home. Madiba just had an eye operation and was not ready yet to read the papers by himself. This is why he asked Zelda to read the Johannesburg based Afrikaans paper *Beeld* to him (Le Grange, 2014: 35). At times he asked her to stop, to explain something and to put things in context, before she continued. She had to read quite a few articles to him, including the lead stories and the editorial commentary. The Afrikaans journalist Jan-Jan Joubert (2003) stated that when a programme was broadcast by the BBC in that year about *A day in the life of Mandela*, a friend living in Oxford commented that Madiba "was reading *Beeld* throughout the programme". Joubert also referred to Jakes Gerwel, who himself remembered Madiba sometimes phoning him early on a Sunday morning to discuss "what Z B du Toit had written in *Rapport* that particular day".

Mandela and that Springbok Rugby Jersey

Although there was a general feeling of optimism in the country at the time of the first democratic elections, for the majority of South Africans life did not change much after Mandela's inauguration in 1994 (Le Grange, 2014:52). But one very special opportunity arose in 1995 which would become a watershed moment for Mandela's career as president; it happened when South Africa was hosting the Rugby World Cup. Rugby is still seen by most South Africans, and elsewhere, as a white sport, albeit that the coloured population in the Western Cape and black South Africans in the Eastern Cape have played the game for more than a century. But coloured and black players were not allowed to play for the Springboks; in fact, they could not even sit with white people on the stands. Le Grange (2014:52) points to the fact that most Afrikaners still practise and support rugby as if it is a part of their religion. Thus, in 1995, when the Springboks beat their arch rivals, the All Blacks, in the final with only a drop goal by Joel Stransky deciding the match outcome in extra time, the pandemonium that erupted in the Ellis Park Stadium was almost beyond belief. But not even that would match the applause that went up when Madiba entered the stadium wearing the Number 6 jersey of Springbok captain, Francois Pienaar. That gesture by Madiba would ensure him a place in the hearts of the entire rugby nation until his death. Here is how Le Grange (2014:53) experienced that magic moment:

South Africans embraced and hugged one another; strangers kissed each other and many burst out in tears. At that moment our separated past did not matter anymore. Suddenly we were colour blind and for the first time South Africans celebrate something together as one nation.

Krog (2013) states that we know today that after his inauguration Mandela skilfully used the deep attachment of Afrikaners to their history, language and favourite sport, rugby, to lobby their support for his reign as president, something that is confirmed by Pretorius (2012: 550) stating that for many sportsmen and -women Madiba became their hero and icon.

Mandela Reached out in Afrikaans

Nelson Mandela did not just reach out to the prison wardens or to the Springboks. It became clear that he had a mission to meet as many South Africans and people around the world as possible. He had been taken out of society for a very long time and people wanted to see the man they had admired for so long. Famous people across the world fell over their feet just to be in his presence. And Madiba responded willingly. But most of all he wanted to be amongst his own people. Soon it became evident that his eagerness to learn Afrikaans had a deeper, secondary goal. Not only did he want to meet people, he also wanted to address them in their own language. This is why Madiba will always be remembered for one of his most famous comments (Le Grange, 2014:29):

*If you talk to a man in a language he understands, you talk to his mind.
But if you talk to him in his own language, you talk to his heart.*

In the field of education Mandela's love for all South African languages in general and Afrikaans in particular was evident. Pretorius (2012: 550) states that Mandela's effort to reach out to white South Africans was very much appreciated by them. In his interview with Carlin (1995) Fekile Bam made it clear that Mandela had absolutely no qualms about greeting people in Afrikaans, and about trying his Afrikaans out on the warders. Bam also said that Madiba did not have any inhibition at all about Afrikaans (Carlin, 1995). Joubert (2003) writes that Mandela spoke an Afrikaans that was perfect almost to a fault, maybe more so than many Afrikaans-speaking people themselves. As head of state, he spoke Afrikaans in the same way that he used the language while studying and he used every opportunity that he could to speak the language (Joubert, 2003).

One example occurred in 1995 when Madiba was invited to Swellendam, a small Afrikaans town in the Western Cape, where he would receive the freedom of the town. Most of the town's inhabitants are Afrikaners, but a significant number of the citizens who live there are coloured and Afrikaans speaking. Madiba wanted to make an impression and asked Zelda to help him with the pronunciation of his speech. The people of Swellendam accepted him with open arms, but he insisted on walking among the people first. When a small girl came up on to the stage to greet him, he caught everybody off guard by talking to her in Afrikaans. She responded in Afrikaans. Mandela then delivered his whole speech in Afrikaans. This was just one of the many examples where Madiba reached out to the community through his ability to speak Afrikaans. In that way he won the hearts of many Afrikaners (Le Grange, 2014: 47-48). Mandela also made a special effort to reach out to the coloured Afrikaans-speaking people. It is significant that Mandela named his official home *Genadendal* (Valley of Peace), a very small town in the countryside of the Western Cape hosting a small coloured 'Afrikaanse' community. Le Grange (2014:47) said Mandela chose the name for the presidential home to show his respect for the people of this community.

It is well known that the coloured people, especially those in the Western Cape, speak Afrikaans with a very distinct accent, known in the literature as *Kaaps*. The famous poet and

playwright, Adam Small, was the first to use *Kaaps* in the public domain, because he wrote most of his work in this dialect. Small said the following about *Kaaps*:

Kaaps is a language in the sense that it bears the full fate and destiny of the people who speak it; a language in the sense that the people who speak it scream the first screams in their lives in this language, settle all the transactions of their lives in this language, and give their final death rattle in this language. Kaaps is not a joke or an oddity (From: *Kitaarmykruis* [Preface], 1962).

I recently put the case for Kaapsto academics at an international conference in New York, USA (Le Cordeur, 2014). Mandela's love for Afrikaans included its regional dialects because, as Joubert (2003) points out, he did not see the Afrikaans language as monolithic.

Mandela Earned the Respect of Afrikaners

Three consecutive polls in the 1980s showed that four fifths of Afrikaners believed that under black majority rule there would be serious reverse "discrimination" (Pretorius, 2012: 550). According to Krog (2013), "Afrikaners were scared of what Mandela would do to us (but how wrong we were)". Krog mentions several examples of how Mandela made special effort to earn the respect of the Afrikaner. He condemned apartheid as a crime against humanity, but condoned Afrikaner nationalism as a legitimate indigenous movement against colonialism. He would mention the famous Boer General Christiaan de Wet in the same breath as Afrikaner communist Bram Fischer. He paid attention to the history of which Afrikaners felt proud and offered alternatives for that part of which they felt ashamed.

Pretorius (2012: 550) agrees with Krog and makes the point that Madiba was very sensitive to the heritage of the Afrikaner. Le Grange (2014:31) adds that Madiba insisted that the pictures of the former presidents and prime ministers must be maintained in Tuynhuis, the Cape Town presidential office, despite the fact that they sent him to jail –because he felt they were part of South African history.

Krog (2013) argues that Afrikaners found themselves captivated in a state of "charismatic bewilderment". She felt that the consistency of Mandela's gestures towards Afrikaners indicated more than mere political manoeuvring, as Madiba was bringing a sense of the collective which opened up new possibilities for Afrikaners who felt under threat. Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2013:3) agrees: "Mandela had reached out to the Afrikaans community such as visiting widows of apartheid presidents to ensure Afrikaners felt part of the new nation," he said. Tutu, as does Bigalke (2014:11), also reminds us that Mandela intervened to retain an Afrikaans verse of the former apartheid national anthem in its multi-lingual successor adopted after 1994 as yet another gesture towards Afrikaners.

Mandela: Debating Afrikaans at Stellenbosch

Following the dismantling of apartheid, it was imperative to transform the higher education system in South Africa to overcome the legacies of apartheid; issues of language, access, equity and quality were serious challenges in South African higher education. The vision of a transformed higher education landscape was captured in the *Education White Paper 3* and a series of policies that were developed to address this need (DoBE 1997: 7). The White Paper also stipulates the requirements necessary for the transformation of higher education in South Africa, which include the need to "increase [the numbers of] blacks, women and disabled students" and to develop "new curricula and flexible models of learning and teaching" (DoBE 1997:10).

In this context two key questions emerged specifically with respect to Stellenbosch University: whether the curriculum has been transformed to play its role to create an institution where a welcoming culture prevails in accordance with the values of the Constitution; and whether the *language* through which the curriculum is transmitted is suited to enabling a transformed curriculum to play its role effectively (cf. Soudien *et al.*, 2008). The language issue was branded in the Afrikaans media as “Die Taaldebat” (language debate) at Stellenbosch University (SU) and centred on the continued use of Afrikaans as language of instruction at the former Afrikaans universities. Some Afrikaner leaders are convinced that SU can still continue as an exclusively Afrikaans institution even after democracy (Gilomee, 2012). Theuns Eloff (2014), former Vice-Chancellor of the North-West University (NWU), points to Section 29 (2) of the new Constitution, which gives all South Africans the right to education in the language of their choice where this is reasonable and fair. According to him, Afrikaans still deserves a permanent place in higher education. But the minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande (1996:12), believes that Afrikaans is been misused to keep certain universities white. Adam Habib (2014), Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), pleads that the Constitution be used as a mechanism to address the imbalances of the past. He also is of the opinion that we must create a new national identity amongst all South Africans. Jonathan Jansen (2014), Vice-Chancellor of the Frees State University, is much more direct, saying that SU is not Afrikaner property but a public institution. He writes (2014):

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.

Again it was Nelson Mandela, while visiting the campus of SU in 1994, who came up with the solution that would guide all further negotiations on this matter, when he said:

Stellenbosch University must in future reflect the demographics of the whole of South Africa and to achieve this, the university will have to adapt its policy about Afrikaans as the medium of teaching. Furthermore, SU will have to make available all of its resources in a creative but purposeful way to the less privileged communities. (*Eikestadnuus*, 1994:2)

Mandela elaborated by saying the most important challenge facing SU is to move away from a system that benefits and empowers only the Afrikaner minority. SU must use its rich resources to the advantage of the whole of South Africa, Mandela said. According to Mandela, this does not mean that Afrikaans no longer has a role as a medium of instruction. However, he pleaded for the University to revisit its language policy in order to create greater accessibility to SU. These wise words of Mandela would find their way into the Report of the Ministerial Committee investigating the issue of access to our universities. The chair of that committee, Deputy Vice-Chancellor at UCT, Crain Soudien, summed this up:

South African universities (that) use language as a gate-keeping mechanism ...should embrace the conception of universities as open spaces for intellectual and cultural exchanges, encouraging and supporting cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity, which have a vital role to play in Africa and the knowledge society (Soudien *et al.*, 2008:321).

Eventually Mandela’s request and Soudien’s recommendation formed the basis of a new act promulgated by Minister Blade Nzimande (*Die Burger*, 2014:2) instructing universities to promote integration and to make sure that language and any other practices would not exclude certain groups from tertiary institutions.

Mandela and ‘*The Child*’ by Ingrid Jonker

When Nelson Mandela delivered his inaugural State of the Nation address to Parliament in May 1994, he read out in full *Die Kind* (The Child), an Afrikaans poem by South African poet Ingrid Jonker. Ingrid Jonker (1933–1965) reached iconic status in South Africa and is often called the South African Sylvia Plath, owing to the intensity of her work and the tragic course of her turbulent life. Although she wrote in Afrikaans, her poems have been widely translated into other languages. Joubert (2003) states that it wasn’t just a rabbit that Mandela pulled out of a hat when he quoted the poem. He says the majority of Afrikaans-speaking people regard Mandela’s reading of the poem as a gesture to reach out to the Afrikaner community. Krog (2013) argues that Madiba deliberately chose a text which affirmed this cult Afrikaner poet’s anti-apartheid stance. During the night of 19 July 1965 Jonker walked into the sea at Three Anchor Bay in Cape Town, where she committed suicide.⁴

In commenting on Jonker’s poem, Mandela said: “in this glorious vision, she instructs that our endeavours must be about the liberation of the woman, the emancipation of the man and the liberty of the child.” Of Jonker herself, Mandela said: “She was both a poet and a South African. She was both an Afrikaner and an African. She was both an artist and a human being. In the midst of despair, she celebrated hope. Confronted by death, she asserted the beauty of life.” (State of the Nation Address, 24 May, 1994)

According to Boesak (2013:85), Jonker was “a beautiful tortured soul and a poet without measure (who) spoke of Sharpeville in the tones of one touched by a wounded and aching God.” She wrote in Afrikaans, “but those who spoke the language on the white, Afrikaner side of the fence, their minds clouded by suppressed guilt and their hearts constricted by fear, did not hear nor understand her” (Boesak, 2013:85). Willemse (in Naudé, 2008:22) agrees:

The poem – ‘Die kind’ (The Child) – did not start off as a poem of reconciliation. It was a very simple and honest poem by a sensitive woman who, in her time of life, observed the impact of a political system on the life of a child. Some Afrikaans critics and Afrikaans readers did not take her or her poem seriously. As a matter of fact they despised her and her poem.

But when Nelson Mandela read that poem at the opening of the first democratic parliament in 1994, her words, so long ignored, almost forgotten, were reborn, reached out and embraced all of us, her uncaptured audience, black and white, Boesak describes his feelings as follows:

For the first time in the South African parliament, Afrikaans was heard as the language of all people. And on that day Ingrid Jonker walked back out of that sea into our hearts, never to be forgotten again (Boesak, 2009:85).

The poem first appeared in 1963 in Afrikaans, but since then it has been translated into many languages – and after Mandela’s citing of it, even more so. Here is the English version:

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingrid_Jonker

*The child is not dead
not at Langa nor at Nyanga
not at Orlando nor at Sharpeville
nor at the police station in Philippi
where he lies with a bullet through his brain
The child is the shadow of the soldiers
on guard with rifles Saracens and batons
the child is present at all gatherings and law-giving
the child peers through the windows of houses and into the
hearts of mothers
this child who just wanted to play in the sun at Nyanga is
everywhere
the child grown into a man treks all over Africa
the child grown to a giant travels through the whole world
Without a pass (From: Joyce, 1989)*



In the picture above the body of the 13-year-old, Hector Peterson, who was the first person to be killed by the police in the Soweto Uprising, is being carried away by a friend. Soweto (*South Western Township* of Johannesburg) was the place where the 1976 uprising started when thousands of youths decided to stand up against legislation that forced blacks schools to teach all blacks learners in Afrikaans (Le Grange, 2014:36).

This picture has since become the worldwide symbol of the 1976 uprising and what black people in South Africa experienced under apartheid (Le Grange, 2014:37) and to this day it is still regarded as Afrikaans's worst nightmare. This tragic incident took place more than a decade after Jonker's premature death. Although her death and the poem written in the 1960s have no relation whatsoever with what happened in 1976, many people will draw parallels. Some suggest that Jonker's poem was a prophetic premonition of what could happen in the future. It is significant that Mandela instructed a member of National Intelligence to take Zelda Le Grange on a tour of the Hector Peterson Museum in Soweto (2014: 35).

Afrikaans-speaking people countrywide, who could perhaps have been worried about possible marginalisation in the new political dispensation, were flattered and astounded. Many felt – as did Joubert (2003) – that it ensured the poem would live on in the national memory. The following comments by leading South Africans collected by Naudé (2008: 21-23) put the poem and Madiba's role in it into perspective:

After all his years in prison, Mandela was in a unique position to quote the poem at his inauguration and by doing so emphasised that reconciliation would play a major role during his term of office. (Prof. J.C. Kannemeyer, prize-winning author and scholar)

At a very stressful time in our history the quotation of the poem created awareness amongst a very concerned Afrikaner nation that Madibaknew about us, and it sent out a subtle sign that he was willing to keep us in mind under the new dispensation. (Chris Chameleon, Afrikaans singer who set Jonker's poems to music on CD).

*The poem became the symbol of reaching out and reconciliation when Nelson Mandela quoted the poem in 1994 in his inaugural speech; typical Mandela, he saw the poem as symbol for reaching out to the Afrikaner community. With this poem he wanted to salute Afrikaans and Afrikaners to show that Afrikaner culture does have a place in a democratic South Africa. It was his way to demonstrate that South Africa could become a home for all. (Prof. Hein Willemsse, Editor, *Literature Journal*, University Pretoria).*

The reconciliation and worth of Ingrid Jonker's poem lies in the fact that it was written in Afrikaans. Afrikaners have been helped tremendously to develop a sense of worth amongst Afrikaner children and to free them from a feeling of inferiority towards the English. Jonker's poem is a celebration in Afrikaans about the black child's voice to freedom and equality". (Prof Hermann Giliomee, Afrikaner leader and prize-winning scholar)

Madiba's message to all of us was that the time has come to heal our nation's wounds and to unleash the soul of forgiveness in our nation. Mandela accepted all South Africans as equal. The poem touched all of us forever. (Ms Patricia de Lille, Mayor of Cape Town)

Because of whom he (Madiba) is and taking our country's situation in consideration, his message of reconciliation evoked even bigger response. It says a lot to all of us in South Africa. (Kobus Wiese, Springbok rugby player and 1995 World Cup winner)

Afrikaans: A Political Strategy

In his interview with Carlin (1995), Bam stressed that Mandela was very serious about his Afrikaans, and not just the language; he was very serious about learning to understand the Afrikaner, their minds, their psyche and what they thought. According to Bam, Mandela had the idea – and he actually preached this – that the Afrikaner was an African who belonged to the soil, and that whatever solution there was going to be on the political issues was going to involve Afrikaans people. Bam added that Mandela always advocated the view that the Afrikaner was part and parcel of the land; apart from the fact that they were the rulers of the land, they had a history in the country, which he wanted to understand (Carlin, 1995).

Furthermore, Bam told Carlin (1995) that although Mandela and his *struggle* friends had been sentenced to life imprisonment, he made it clear in all his conversations with his inmates that it was unlikely that they would finish all their time in prison. Mandela urged all his comrades to believe they would survive the prison, to believe that the struggle would be successful in the end. Bam continued:

He never stopped motivating us that we would be out of prison one day. Nelson actually lived that belief more than anyone else. But it applied to all of us. We never thought we were going to serve the whole sentence... we believed, and had to believe, that something would happen, that the people would be released before they died in prison (Carlin, 1995).

Le Grange (2014:19) firmly believed that Madiba wanted to impress the apartheid leaders with his good Afrikaans when meeting with them for negotiations. In Brussels he spoke Afrikaans to the Belgian prime minister and once, while attending peace talks in Burundi, he and Defence Minister, Mosioua Lekota, openly spoke in Afrikaans when discussing tactics, because they knew no one would understand what they were saying (Joubert, 2003).

Mandela's striving to learn Afrikaans also counted in his favour in a memorable scene which played itself out in a final confrontation between Mandela and three Afrikaner Defence Force Generals (Krog (2013). The generals described their impressive, well-equipped army, indicating readiness to fight a war indefinitely. Mandela conceded their strength, but after sketching their victory as of little worth to either side, he suggested negotiations to become part of something larger. This counter-intuitive alternative changed the course of South Africa's history. The generals could not think about negotiations, because they had been "socialised to defend white privilege", Krog said. This prevented them from imagining a common interest with 'outsiders'. In contrast, Mandela's innate sense of the collective

enabled him to formulate a vision of mutual dependence which included Afrikaners (Krog, 2013)

Anxious Afrikaners await a Post-Mandela World

Krog (2013) points out that Mandela's collective sense of inclusiveness also worked on another, more disruptive level. Mandela insisted that one was embedded in one's community was to impress on the world that one was not an exception (Krog, 2013). Mandela added: "If I am remarkable, so is the black community, so is South Africa." Despite Mandela's efforts, many Afrikaners balked at suggestions of being connected to all black people – preferring to treat the man who changed South Africa's status from polecat to crown prince as a unique individual and an exception (Krog, 2013).

But not everybody was happy with Mandela's collective approach. Some – especially the youth – said that perhaps Mandela was giving too much attention to the speakers of Afrikaans. Gerwel gave the following explanation:

Madiba firmly believes in political stability. He believed one should respect a person's language. If one takes Afrikaans and Afrikaner politics seriously, one should also consider the language in a serious light (Joubert, 2003).

Zimbabwean president, Robert Mugabe, said when interviewed in June 2013 by Dali Tambo, son of ANC stalwart and lifelong friend of Mandela, Oliver Tambo:

Nelson Mandela is too much of a Saint. He was too good to white people, to the detriment of black people in his country (Le Grange, 2014:99).

Le Grange (2014:107) also points to the feeling amongst the disenfranchised and unemployed black youth that Mandela focused too much on his efforts to reach out to whites in order to unite the country. This group hold the opinion that South Africa was united only during big sport events such as the Rugby World Cup in 1995 and the Soccer World Cup in 2010, but for them these were only superficial cosmetic moments that did not make a real difference.

As for the Afrikaners, many were grateful for Mandela's reconciliation of the races and the majority of Afrikaners interviewed by *The Observer* on the day of Madiba's death expressed sorrow at his loss and admiration for his ability to bridge the nation's racial divide (Smith, 2013). When he heard about Madiba's death, former president FW de Klerk (2013) said the Afrikaans community have warm feelings towards Madiba and will pay tribute to his legacy. However, several people also spoke of a deep-rooted fear that Mandela's death could dismantle the social pact of 1994 and lead to persecution, or worse, of the white minority (Smith, 2013). These fears are significant, in the light of the Afrikaner community's exclusion from Madiba's funeral. In contrast to the poem Mandela read at his inauguration, only a few sentences in Afrikaans were uttered at his funeral, to Tutu's (2013) utter disbelief.

Krog (2013) states this is the main reason why Afrikaners feared his death. Smith (2013) is of the opinion that some of the white minority still express fears of a 'night of the long knives'. Mandela was for them the only worthwhile product ever produced by Africa. Afrikaners are scared and anxious and many still await a post-Mandela world. In the words of Antjie Krog:

"Through him they could belong. His death severs their tenuous link to the continent after which they so passionately named themselves and their language, but which they, deep down, despise." (2013)

Conclusion

This paper focused on former president Nelson Mandela's legacy with regards to education, particularly on his love for the Afrikaans language and how he saw in it the opportunity to involve the Afrikaner in post-apartheid South Africa. From the time of the Soweto Uprising in June 1976 Afrikaans was stigmatised as the *language of the oppressor*, because it carried the political baggage of being the language of the Afrikaner that was used to oppress the black and coloured people of South Africa. Afrikaners therefore expected the worst: However, not only did Mandela 'liberate' all formerly marginalised languages, but he also freed Afrikaans from its apartheid past. Subsequently all these languages together with English were granted official status in our new Constitution. From an Afrikaner point of view it was a bonus that Afrikaans was maintained as a language of teaching. This meant a lot for mother tongue education and many Afrikaans schools became oases of quality teaching which boasted good results. Many black and coloured learners who studied at these schools excelled and were given opportunities for further study, access to jobs and a foot in the South African economy.

Through Afrikaans Mandela extended the hand of friendship to Afrikaners, something they never expected. Hence Afrikaans became part of a strategy that would allow Mandela access to Afrikaner knowledge as well as their skills and economic power. By re-positioning Afrikaans as the *language of reconciliation*, Madiba succeeded putting our young democracy on an economic path that would benefit the whole nation. On the negative side, there will be those who argue that Madiba paid too much attention to white people and their language with no positive outcome for black education or wellbeing. However, Mandela left behind an enormous legacy in education – something he devoted his whole life to. The Mandela Children's Fund and the Nelson Mandela Foundation have made a difference to the lives of thousands of children and will continue to support thousands of children to go to school or to further their studies.

A few people would not have minded if he had sought revenge when he was in a position to do so. But he did not. Instead, he preached reconciliation and forgiveness. He pardoned his enemies, knowing all too well they too were victims of their circumstances. I conclude with a phrase from the poem, *Exodus* by the Hertzog Prize winner, Adam Small (1962):

*Nou het 'n Moses virjulleopgestaan (Now a new Moses stood up for you)
Wat al julleverleiers in die grond in slaan, (He will destroy all those leaders who)
Hywysvirjulle die wegna Kanaän... (are false, and show the way to Kanaan to you...)*

Nelson Mandela was meant to lead his people out of the desert of apartheid to the promised land of democracy. He was the right man for the right time.

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