

# **(u)Mzantsi Classics**

Dialogues in Decolonisation from Southern Africa

Edited by Samantha Masters, Imkhitha Nzungu & Grant Parker



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*Edited by*

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*and* GRANT PARKER

AFRICAN MINDS

*and*

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# Acknowledgements

This volume, which grew out of a workshop contemplating metamorphosis as a lens on South African contexts of classics, has undergone considerable change of its own. Its circuitous path from workshop to manuscript, slowed by the pandemic, is explained in the first chapter.

The book, conceived after the workshop, has changed character and in the process has, we feel, become a better version of itself.

As editors we would like to thank the contributors for their patience, as well as their valuable insights, collegiality and important contributions to this volume.

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classics in southern Africa, reminding us that it is worthwhile, and that a broader conversation about whether classics matters in Africa – and, if so, how – is beneficial in itself and should continue beyond the publication of this book.

*Samantha Masters, Imkhitha Nzungu and Grant Parker  
Stellenbosch, April 2022*

## CHAPTER ONE

# Nothing about us?<sup>1</sup>

## Reflections on classics in southern Africa

*Samantha Masters, Imkhitha Nzungu and Grant Parker*

The continued study of classical antiquity in a number of African countries, post-independence, may seem like an anomaly, even an anachronism. After the so-called Scramble for Africa (1880s–1920s), only two countries, Ethiopia and Liberia, remained officially free of European occupation.<sup>2</sup> Colonised countries were affected in violent but also intangible ways: the title of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Decolonising the Mind* points to these subtle yet pervasive modes of colonisation. He conjures a haunting image of the impact of colonialism: it has produced ‘a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies’ (Wa Thiong’o 1986: 28). The legacies of colonialism in African countries reach well into the present day, not least of all in language, education and in the very structure and ethos of universities. It is also established that the classical tradition was in certain ways an instrument of colonisation – and even of identity construction – on the African continent. Language, aesthetics and pedagogy have been profoundly affected and the classical influence has produced a complex network of receptions in differing contexts.

There is considerable literature around the topics of colonisation and its antithesis, decolonisation, as well as related discourse on postcolonialism and neocolonialism. A burgeoning interest in the study of classics as a discipline in Africa is now gaining momentum.<sup>3</sup> The twin quests for legitimacy and relevance have long plagued many classicists on the African continent, who grapple with the question: Are African classicists justified in retaining this field of study in an institutional structure that is historically transplanted from Europe, held elitist associations and



sometimes served supremacist ideologies? This book looks to address the issue of ‘why classics matters’<sup>4</sup> in Africa, starting with the question: Does it? In our view, this is one of the key questions that should be asked and this book sets out to stage critical dialogues about, with and between actors in the field of classics in sub-Saharan Africa.

*(u)Mzantsi Classics* originated in a round-table workshop on ‘Metamorphoses: Classical Reflections of a Changing South Africa’, involving established and younger scholars in Oxford in July 2018. Discussion centred on an eclectic mix of papers related to the changing face of classics in southern Africa. This dialectical approach is applied in the structure of this book, though only some voices are the same as those at the Oxford seminar. An international call for papers aimed to broaden the scope for a publication on the subject of classics and change in Africa. The responses still focused on the southern part of Africa and this circumstance has in many ways shaped this book.

While classical scholarship is typically dominated by established international networks and well-known voices, often of the Global North, this book project uses a model that strives to centre southern African experiences of studying, teaching and researching classics. All contributors have a strong connection to a southern African country, by some combination of residence and origin; most are currently based at a southern African university. The *(u)Mzantsi* in the title is an adaptation of a Nguni word colloquially used to refer to South Africa, ‘*emZantsi Afrika*’, which can also be applied to the general area of southern Africa. In isiXhosa, *umZantsi* translates to ‘south’ in English; moreover, the ‘-zantsi’ root also has the connotations of ‘below’ (*ezantsi*) and ‘bottom’ (*amazantsi, umzantsi*) (Fischer et al. 2013). This reflects an interesting angle of contemplation. The book is not only a southern African approach but also a ‘bottom-up’ approach to classics. In addition to the contributions by established scholars, the editors also engaged South African students and early career academics in informal one-on-one conversations in which they were asked for candid reflections on their own relationship with classics. This volume takes its subtitle from the ancient Greek dialogue, both a concept and a literary genre, most familiar as Plato’s renditions of Socrates’ wisdom. At the same time it draws inspiration from the African concept of ‘ubuntu’, the idea that a person’s humanity exists in relation to others – a sense of mutuality that is distinct from some of the more individualistic ideologies

of the Global North (Ogude 2019). The model of dialogue – conversation – between established scholars and new voices then emerges as the most appropriate frame for the exploration of the topic of the state and future of classics in southern Africa and aims to identify the most important issues facing classics on this continent in the early 2020s.

This book was born in the aftermath of student protests in South Africa – the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall (‘Fallist’) movements of 2015/2016 – in a campus climate urgently seeking transformation and decolonisation of thought and curricula. One of its aims is to ask what shape and value the discipline still has on the continent. In South African universities, and elsewhere, the grip of Western hegemonies has been questioned and past injustices addressed in relation to reparations and even repatriations. What place can classics possibly have in university curricula? What acts of reimagination can offer new perspectives and motivation for studying this ideologically laden discipline? What might decolonisation look like for classics on the continent of Africa?

The chapters present attempts to counteract exclusionary systems of knowledge production which the field of classics may historically have been used to justify. The book itself is conceived as a contribution to the *process* of decolonisation, not only the concept. *(u)Mzantsi Classics* aims to initiate conversations about decolonising, transformative praxis by investigating histories and (re)imaginings of classics in Africa, on the one hand, and, on the other, turning the spotlight on pedagogies and on the experiences of teaching and learning in a particularly African context. It captures many faces and voices in southern African classics today, both established and emerging. While the established voices bring a ‘longer view’ and experience to the project, the book creates space for younger, emerging academics in the field to add other fresh and dynamic perspectives. The younger academics all have in common that they were full-time students during the 2015/2016 student demonstrations in South Africa and, to varying extents, their reflections have been shaped by these. Their insights into recent or current experiences of classics express scepticism, worries and also hope for its future. Rather than condemn classics to an accelerated end or destructive co-optation, the contributors in *(u)Mzantsi Classics* probe ways of framing classics in order to demonstrate its potential value and its ongoing vitality. The model of dialogue for the exploration of *(u)Mzantsi Classics* contributes to the ongoing dialectic about the topic.

## The lay of the land

Can we save the soul and future of a discipline that has historically been implicated in fascism and colonialism – one that continues to be enmeshed in white supremacy and misogyny – in the face of declining enrolments, the student debt crisis, and the unstable academic job market? And even if we do somehow figure out how to save it, will we be studying Classics over Zoom in socially-distanced boats because all of our coastal cities are underwater?

There's ample reason to despair.

— Donna Zuckerberg, classicist, former editor-in-chief at *Eidolon*  
(2019)

Donna Zuckerberg's comment demonstrates clear scepticism about the future of the subject of classics in the United States. It expresses deep concerns about student debt, the environment and climate change but also demonstrates that the questions around the continuing viability of classics are not unique to Africa and its decolonisation turn. When in 2021 Princeton's Department of Classics chose to make its undergraduate language requirements more flexible, and the Classics major thereby more inclusive, heated debate ensued in both mainstream and social media.<sup>5</sup> Many welcomed the move as a tangible step in the direction of widened access. Others were concerned at what they considered the dilution of pure classics, the compromise of disciplinary integrity and even of Western values. The intensity of the debate made it clear that not merely curricula were at stake: classics had become a focal point or even a proxy for Trump-era tensions around inclusion, diversity, race, class and privilege – issues which echo the 'culture wars' of an earlier period but with a uniquely 21<sup>st</sup>-century inflexion.

Some broader trends are clear. The humanities have been losing prestige internationally in the last decades, and the once illustrious reputation of a classical education has diminished in an increasingly technologically driven world. While humanities enrolments have suffered across the board amidst increasing economic pressures and emphasis on workplace skills, a report on several African institutions showed a trend of an increase in enrolments in humanities and social sciences (Cloete et al. 2018: 41). Classics has not benefitted from this African upswing, which has typically boosted more professionally oriented fields of study.

Challenges faced by the humanities in Africa have been complicated by a growing consciousness of what many students and faculty have experienced as the detachment from regional and local concerns. For many, the institutional form of modern African universities seems like an import, inspired by the model of colonial modernity, in other words modelled on western European universities of the colonial period. The ambition of the colonial African university as it was founded was to ‘create universal scholars, men and women who stood for excellence, regardless of context, and who would serve as the vanguard of the “civilising mission” without reservation, or remorse’ (Mamdani 2019: 51). Mamdani calls particular attention to the debt owed to the European Enlightenment experience by the fields of the humanities and social sciences: ‘In their universal reach for the human, the humanities and the social sciences both proclaimed the oneness of humanity and defined that oneness as sameness – from a very European vantage point’ (Mamdani 2019: 51). This history left classical education especially prone to instrumentalisation as a tool of exclusion in education since its foundation.

Lambert describes the introduction of formal education to the Cape Colony in terms of the settler impetus to educate native populations: as education for the purposes of subjection (Lambert 2011: 23–24). The close association of classics with the early university is evident through the prioritisation of the teaching of Greek for theological students and Latin for legal students in European settler metropolises; thus, it reaches the Cape in the 1600s already laden with conferred value and elitist weight. Many enslaved persons were given classical names (Parker 2018: 21; Shell 1994: 242). Thus, from the outset, the reception of the classical tradition in the Cape came, in Lambert’s words, ‘inscribed ... in relationships of dominance and subservience’ (Lambert 2011: 24). When the first formal Latin school in the region was opened in 1714, it admitted (only) the sons of Dutch, German and French Huguenot settlers to what was already a racially exclusive environment.

Lambert’s history of the classical tradition in South Africa discusses the intersections of three identities: white Afrikaans speaking, white English speaking and black South Africans.<sup>6</sup> Historically, Latin has predominated over Greek at various levels of education, an imbalance that has been unintentionally reflected in the present volume. On the African continent, teeming with cultural and linguistic diversity, the fate of Greek and

Latin may be seen in the context of larger discussions about indigenous languages and knowledge systems. While the era of European occupation formally ended in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, clear footprints remain. Neocolonialism is implicit in the continuing use of the settlers' languages, including English, French and Portuguese.<sup>7</sup> These have retained a firm grip, English in particular being the lingua franca of many colonial and neocolonial institutions, business, science and global organisations. Nowhere is this grip more pervasive than in education.<sup>8</sup> Experiences of students at South African universities demonstrate that the colonial educational institution, schooling as much as the university, does little to validate non-European or non-Western cultures and their epistemologies, even after the official demise of colonialism.

An extract from 'Colonial Girls School', a poem by the Jamaican Olive Senior, gives a glimpse into this kind of institutional experience:<sup>9</sup>

Borrowed images  
willed our skins pale  
muffled our laughter  
lowered our voices  
let out our hems  
dekinked our hair  
denied our sex in gym tunics and bloomers  
harnessed our voices to madrigals  
and genteel airs  
yoked our minds to declensions in Latin  
and the language of Shakespeare  
Told us nothing about ourselves  
There was nothing about us at all

Educational experience in the previously colonised world is still described by many as overwhelmingly alienating; language is one of the deeply divisive phenomena of the postcolony. Colonial-era suppression of indigenous languages in schooling, science and scholarship still privileges the languages of colonialism. In such a linguistic context it is difficult to argue in favour of some languages without seeming to argue against others.<sup>10</sup> In other words, for the vast majority of students and pupils on the continent, their education still requires them, from a very young age,

to learn – and learn *in* – a foreign language (Mamdani 2019: 57). It is true that multiple language acquisition can be advantageous. However, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o suggests in his influential writings on the aftermaths of colonialism, early formal education in a foreign language has the potential to wreak psychic havoc on young persons (wa Thiong’o 1986: 28).

For historically disadvantaged and excluded students in the postcolonial African education system, language is but one of many symbolic barriers to entry. For example, for many first-generation South African students, the post-apartheid experience of historically white campuses has been marked by a sense of alienation and dislocation (Luescher et al. 2020).<sup>11</sup> They feel that such institutions continue to take the social, financial and educational capacities of middle-income students for granted even as the country’s higher education system has diversified with the end of apartheid, widening access to higher education to include historically marginalised groups since the 1990s (Van Schalkwyk et al. 2022). Such psychic alienation is compounded by the physical spaces in which this life-changing learning is supposed to take place. Mbembe describes how,

[t]o some extent, a good university education is impossible without an extensive material infrastructure/architecture. Intellectual life can be dependent on the sort of buildings in which conversation takes place. [Colonial] architecture – which prevails in most of our higher learning institutions – is not conducive to breathing. (Mbembe 2016: 30)<sup>12</sup>

Feelings of alienation in the higher education system, long repressed, were expressed by the Fallist movements of 2015/2016 in South Africa. In its most positive form, their legacy has been to pose profound questions about the very nature and functioning of African universities, voicing the recognition that something about the workings of the postcolonial African university is, and has been since its establishment, awry. It is from this standpoint that the Fallist movements’ calls have resonated in the halls of academia. Combined with even a brief background on the history of universities and their original purpose on the continent, their urgent argument is that change is necessary. Eurocentric academic models have brought marginalisation of non-European knowledge systems, experience and aesthetics.

## Decolonisation

Colonialism and its effects still cast a long shadow on African soil. The accompanying photograph of steps leading up to the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Sarah Baartman Hall – formerly Jameson Hall but now sans the statue of Cecil John Rhodes – literally illustrates the shadow cast by colonialism (fig. 1). Two grey boxes mark the former position of the statue, and on the steps in front of the plinth, while paint effects exaggerate the shadow it might cast on a sunny late afternoon. Decolonisation is a gradual, complex, many-pronged process and a concept that encounters resistance and disagreement about its definition. African and diasporic African thinkers began to vocalise the experience of the colonised African in the colonial and newly postcolonial eras. Out of this came the seminal insights of Fanon, Biko and wa Thiong'o, which continue to resonate in discussions of transformation, postcolonialism, neocolonialism and decolonisation. For Mbembe, Mamdani and others, decolonisation is itself a fraught term, and easier to define in theory than to implement in practice (Jansen 2019). Along the same lines, Long (2018) distrusts the rhetoric of decolonisation, specifically in relation to the South African higher education sector: the term can become an 'empty signifier' and even counter-productive to the cause.

In his criticism of the Fallist movement in South Africa, Long (2018) considers its proponents motivated by the concerns of an emerging middle class: for him, markers of social identity predominate over radical social change. In this view, those advocating decolonisation of higher education institutions fail to situate the problems of South African education at their source, namely elementary, primary and secondary schools. While Long acknowledges such students' lived experience of profound alienation, for him, the groundwork for the issues raised is laid well before enrolment at university. It is at the entry level or lower phase of schooling that the system already fails learners and leaves them unprepared for the culture, and culture of learning, at universities. Household conditions, ethos and the acquisition of what Boughey and McKenna (2021: 58) call 'a particular set of literacy practices and dispositions validated and reinforced in a middle-class childhood' play a significant role in successful education.<sup>13</sup> Decolonisation then, is not only needed at the level of university, but for the entire educational journey of students. Students from historically disadvantaged



*Figure 1: The site of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the UCT campus. In the background beneath Table Mountain is Jameson Hall, renamed Sarah Baartman Hall in 2018. [Photo credit: Samantha Masters]*

backgrounds and lower-income students are already disadvantaged through the historical and inherited imbalance in the system. Decolonisation aims to be the antidote to this malady of extreme inequity.

The most influential articulation of decolonisation is that of wa Thiong'o (1986) in *Decolonising the Mind*, where the term was first used with a more expansive meaning than it would later acquire. Decolonising is 'not an event that happens once and for all at a given time and place, but an ongoing process of "seeing ourselves clearly"; emerging out of a state of either blindness or dizziness' (Mbembe 2016: 34). Therefore, there is significance in the historical recurrence of decolonisation discourse: it is at once a theory and a continuous practice. In simple terms, it can be crystallised into general questions of centre, periphery and their relation.



More specifically, we on the African continent need to ask ourselves the following: From what base do we look at the world? (Wa Thiong'o 1986: 94). How may African experiences become the centre so that we can view other experiences in relationship to them? Is it possible for former colonies to liberate themselves from colonial inheritances and dependencies – intellectual and economic – that persist?

Much baggage remains behind even after political dependence may have arrived. One call of the Fallist movements in South Africa was the querying of university curricula, and the seeming detachment of university policy and aesthetics from broader histories. In essence, the decolonising impulse questions social and historical contexts of pedagogy. In a classical context this means centring African perspectives anew in teaching and research.

Decolonisation questions whether 'liberated' postcolonial African countries have in reality emerged independent from their former overlords. Several recent examples demonstrate the grip of neocolonialism in Africa, and the Global North's fraught relationship with the continent. The controversial *Monument de la Renaissance Africaine* (African Renaissance Monument) in Dakar, Senegal (fig. 2), though intended to signal precisely this type of triumphant emancipation, is a stark and poignant reminder that political liberation is not equal to decolonisation, and that its biggest obstacles can come from within (De Jong & Foucher 2010). The gigantic bronze statue which looms above the suburb of Ouakam was based on a design of the then president, Abdoulaye Wade, commissioned at enormous cost and built by the North Korean company Mansudae Overseas Projects. Completed in 2010, the statue, which was designed to celebrate 50 years of freedom from colonialism, uses a clichéd Western vernacular style to conjure a fantasy of African identity: an Africa that is supposedly resurgent, expressed as a nuclear family of father, mother, child dressed in scant 'tribal' African costume. Little attempt was made by Mansudae to adapt the default East Asian facial features of its designs to the needs of its Senegalese client. Apart from the anomaly of extravagant public art in an underdeveloped country, to say nothing of the effective spurning of Senegalese artists and contractors, the statue is incongruous for another reason: the immodestly clad nuclear family offended the sensibilities of the country's Muslim majority. The statue presents an artificial depiction of the national identity, a failed heritage project that shows the kind of

ideological dependency that is typical in the postcolony. This statue is a particularly interesting case: the overall aesthetic is that of Western, classicising figurative statuary but this particular instance was created by a new colonising bloc, East Asian rather than European.

Neocoloniality is another barrier to efforts to decolonise. An example of the disregard for African countries as equal to Western or Global North counterparts can be read in another image, in this case by Senegalese–Belgian photographer Fabrice Monteiro. By chance this picture was also taken outside Dakar, in this case at the landfill at Mbeubeuss (fig. 3). This image is the first in a striking series of photographs in what would become the series ‘The Prophecy’.<sup>14</sup> In this deceptively beautiful photograph, a woman is transfigured into what looks like a spirit rising up from a rubbish dump. Her gown comprises landfill waste. What seems on first glance to be a fashion shoot from a glamorous magazine on closer examination speaks eloquently of decay, alienation and environmental exploitation. Shot on location at what used to be swampland prior to its current second life as a landfill, Mbeubeuss is a 175-hectare span established in 1968 a short distance from the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>15</sup> In this series of images, the artist bemoans the destruction of the environment resulting from consumption under the sign of global capital.

Mistreatment of the environment and the excessive proportions of waste are a worldwide problem, and Monteiro purposely chose a wide range of international locations for this series. However, in an interview with *The Guardian*, Monteiro specifically comments that the source of much of this waste is not traceable to African soil (Siddons 2021). While overconsumption has continued to increase globally over the centuries under capitalism, the globalisation of the waste trade has seen rich nations, whose consumption habits dwarf those of most African nations, shipping their waste off, exporting sites (and sights) like these to the developing world. That this is the blueprint of the future of global waste disposal is evident from one of the COP26 agreements, that on carbon trading (Traore 2021). The setting up of Africa and other nations in the Global South to be the North and West’s literal and indiscriminate dumping ground is centuries old, as is the conceptualisation of Africa as the West’s ‘appendix’.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 brought to light in a vivid way an attitude of paternalism towards the continent of Africa and demonstrates that life and livelihood in many of the former colonies still



*Figure 2: Women walk past rubbish heaps and unfinished homes in a neighbourhood at the base of the hill atop which rises the Monument of the African Renaissance under construction in 2009 in Dakar, Senegal. [Photo credit: Rebecca Blackwell/AP]*



*Figure 3: 'The Prophecy' by Fabrice Monteiro [Photo credit: Fabrice Monteiro]*

hinge on the whims of its former colonisers. With the discovery of the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus in November 2021 by African scientists, Europe (and the Global North) quickly closed the door to most African countries, benefitting from the science but demonising the continent in a knee-jerk reaction that brought financial disruption and other hardship. Hassan, London and Gonsalves (2021) put it this way: ‘From vaccine inequity, to blocking the TRIPS waiver, and selective travel bans – the Global South has consistently been treated in a paternalistic and racist way.’ Though the continent may be politically independent of its former colonists, in many ways it still takes its cue from the Global North.

### Dialogues from southern Africa

The outdated concept of Africa as the appendix to the Global North has been challenged fiercely in general terms, as the decolonisation debate demonstrates. This perception of the continent as passive recipient of Western initiatives is not only implied in international trade but has also been rife in the knowledge economy. Of all the university subjects available, one could even argue that few embody this state of epistemic injustice and baggage more than classics. The subject has historically presented itself as the epitome of learning and education, as intellectual canon, and as West-derived, Eurocentric to the extreme. Yet current attempts to reimagine the field of classics and its future, to rid it of its exclusive and elite connotations, come not only in the context of a crisis of decentring the canon, but also in the context of practitioners of classics in southern Africa finding it difficult to attract, nurture and promote black students and academics. One solution to this situation, which is not unique to southern Africa, has seen faculties extend their focus well beyond language-based studies: classical or ancient culture, comparative studies and reception. University departments have taken different approaches, some more innovatively than others. The current book aims to enter into such dialogues: *(u)Mzantsi Classics* explores the potential ways of making African classics relevant, engaged and engaging to a contemporary and situated audience.

Four main topics have emerged from the chapters as well as the discussions in the interviews and these topics have led the editors to structure the volume into four sections or dialogues. Each section consists of two chapters by established academics, and one interview with a

student or emerging scholar. The first dialogue, ‘On baggage’, looks at the associations attached to classics in former colonies, through the historical realities of its use in the settler colonial project. The chapters in this section, by Glenn and Mlambo and McClymont, show how classics has been a part of the colonial imaginary – specifically the colonial storytelling about ‘indigenous others’ – for some time. The chapters are chiefly historical and interrogate European cultural paradigms, many based on classics and its products, imposed on colonised Africans in colonial times. The interviews with younger academics also confront this inherited baggage and Christiaan Bronkhorst contemplates the monumentality of the university (and traditional classics) and the associated discomfort and burden that both of these may hold in a postcolonial context.

The second dialogue, ‘On intersecting identities’, is concerned with the particularities of context and the construction of identities involving ancient Greece and Rome. The chapters by Claassen and Kolabhai and Viljoen raise important issues around identity and context, also very much of concern to the interviewees. Chanté Bhugwanth finds the exploration of identity in Dido of Virgil’s *Aeneid* pertinent to her own lived experience. This section probes questions around an identity for classics in southern Africa in the contemporary postcolonial context. The chapters and interviews also deal with adapting classics pedagogy to the needs and life experiences of particular contexts and communities in a changed and changing world.

Looming large in African classics is the issue of canonicity, for which classics may seem to be the very poster child. In the third dialogue, ‘On classics and the canon’, the inheritance of classical ideas and ideals, already discussed in relation to baggage, re-enters the conversation. In relation to the canon, the younger academics expressed feelings of restriction and intimidation. The chapters of Moyo and Masters both offer alternatives to the traditional pedagogical approach, focused on canonical content, both texts and artefacts: ‘thinking through classics’ as applied to real-world and local political events. Amy Daniels contemplates her own experience with the canon and imagines a syllabus without it.

The fourth dialogue, ‘From reception to reimagination’, turns to the opportunities for metamorphoses of classics. Having found the canon and baggage of classics to be limited in scope and appeal, this section proposes alternative approaches to southern African relationships with classics and histories in general. Bocchetti reimagines classics in Africa by reframing it

within global history. Van Schoor's chapter puts forward the paradigm of a 'Dionysian poetics of interpretation' of canonical culture as decolonising praxis; he advocates for the critical 'cannibalising' of the canon, rather than its purging. Nuraan Essop reflects on the absolute need for a situated classics that can keep reinventing itself through constant renewal in the face of current and world events.

In the final chapter, Grant Parker envisions a productive African classics. Through the lens of metamorphosis, southern Africa's many identities and knowledge systems come into view. Ancient Greece and Rome offer opportunities for discovery, innovation and reimagination – making use of tradition rather than being subordinated to it. Despite its baggage, classics invites reinterpretation, recontextualising and self-knowledge. In this light, creation can become an antidote to despair.

The book explores southern African contexts for the study of the classical world. Implicitly it argues against any temptation to imagine the classical inheritance as some kind of linear by-product of colonialism. While the contributors and interviewees are Southern African and many of the examples and discourses in the volume are of a particularly South African bent, we believe its vision has relevance and applicability elsewhere on the continent and in the world. The book presents classics as imagined and lived at the southern end of Africa. It aims to spur debate about decolonising, transformative praxis by reimagining classics in Africa, on the one hand, and, on the other, turning the spotlight on pedagogies and experiences of students and scholars at different stages of their careers. The chapters present an attempt to identify and even redress some of the damage caused by exclusionary systems of knowledge production which the field of classics may have been used to justify, as well as combat the often paternalistic approaches of the Global North towards African classics. *(u)Mzantsi classics* captures many voices of southern African classics today, crossing past, present and future haunts and harbours, and bringing something of our ourselves to the conversation.

## Notes

- 1 From 'Colonial Girls School' by Olive Senior. An extract containing this line is quoted on p. 6 of this chapter.
- 2 This was the period in which European colonisation of Africa was at its most concentrated.
- 3 In addition to the work of scholars such as Barbara Goff (2005, 2014), Lambert (2011)

- and Parker (2017), there are new projects in the making, such as a ‘Classics in Africa: The ways forward’, a panel organised by Michael K Okyere Asante with support from the ‘Ancient world, modern communities’ initiative of the Society for Classical Studies; and the inauguration of a network for African Classics in 2022 hosted by Stellenbosch University’s Department of Ancient Studies, which is partnering with African Minds and Liverpool University Press in publications related to African classics.
- 4 To use the subtitle of Simon Goldhill’s *Love, Sex and Tragedy: Why Classics Matters* (2005).
  - 5 <https://classics.princeton.edu/departments/news/statement-community-undergraduate-concentration>. The topic ignited discussion on the Liverpool Classics list, for example.
  - 6 These are racial and linguistic categories typical of apartheid classifications.
  - 7 Important work is being published on diminishing linguistic diversity and its potential negative consequences in the name of science. See Cámara-Leret & Bascompte (2021) and on decolonisation see Shahjahan and Edwards (2021).
  - 8 For more in this regard, see Shahjahan and Edwards (2021).
  - 9 Katrak’s article, entitled, ‘Decolonizing culture: Toward a theory for postcolonial women’s texts’, features this poem. ‘The poem moves on to take up that sad refrain with variations: “There was nothing left of ourselves ... Feeling nothing about ourselves/There was nothing about us at all”. Senior testifies to the denials of the histories, traditions, feelings, and culture[s] of a whole race of people’ (Katrak 1989: 171).
  - 10 In South Africa there are 12 official languages, for example, making the linguistic landscape complicated.
  - 11 In the Luescher et al. chapter dedicated to Jerome September’s university experience as a student and two-term member of the Student Representative Council at the University of Cape Town (UCT), he describes his initial experience of institutional culture at the university: ‘It was a very foreign world, a very alien world. It was that stuff [streaking traditions and drinking in residence during first-year orientation], but it was also more subtle things: behaviours in the dining halls; what is appropriate and what is expected of you’ (2020: 62–63). South Africa is also only just starting to get a glimpse into the adverse effects on student mental health with the advent of the exacerbated isolation related to shelter-in-place ordinances and remote learning conditions necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. In her reporting in the *Daily Maverick*, Victoria O’Regan offers a link to the following PowerPoint presentation of the Higher Health and Human Sciences Research Council co-authored study: Social impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on youth in the Post School Education and Training (PSET) Sector in South Africa. The survey indicated that more than 65% of students had reported suffering some form of mild to severe psychological distress during South Africa’s first wave of coronavirus infections in 2020.
  - 12 Mbembe’s original ‘apartheid’ has been substituted here as ‘colonial’ to make for broader application to accommodate the wider colonial African experience.
  - 13 The fuller quotation is: ‘While it makes sense to have rigorous processes to ensure that the very limited spaces in higher education are filled by those most likely to succeed, we need to be wary of how we understand what it is that makes a student most likely to succeed in higher education. When we discursively construct the likelihood of succeeding simply as “talent” or “potential” or “motivation” or “cognitive ability”, we hide the extent to which higher education success is a function of access to a particular set of literacy practices and dispositions validated and reinforced in a middle-class childhood ... This is an uncomfortable notion but one that has been repeatedly established through research around the world’ (Boughey & McKenna 2021: 58).



- 14 All photographs that make up *The Prophecy* can be viewed at <https://fabricemonteiro.viewbook.com/>
- 15 For more on the world's open dumps see: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/oct/06/smelly-contaminated-disease-worlds-open-dumps>

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First dialogue:  
On baggage



## CHAPTER TWO

# Classical imagery and policing the African body 1695–1877<sup>1</sup>

*Ian Glenn*

Je me contenterai de citer un seul exemple bien attesté, & que je donne  
à examiner aux admirateurs de la Police Européenne.

[‘I will only cite one firmly established example for admirers  
of the European police to examine.’]

Rousseau (1755: 258)<sup>2</sup>

In early 1790, Nicolas Chamfort, man of letters, aphorist, former tutor of King Louis XVI’s sister, at the time secretary of the Jacobin club, reviewed a new book of travels to the Cape interior in the *Mercure de France*. He noted with surprise that the author had a very different, positive, opinion of the indigenous people of the Cape than earlier writers. He compared the writer’s savage portrayal of colonial brutality to Juvenal’s *Satires* and then drew the logical conclusion:

It is a very remarkable thing to see the majority of modern travellers in opposition to the former ones who painted in horrible colours the savage, the man of nature, that others have since seen in a more favourable light. Bacon said that one had to re-start human understanding, a rather painful enterprise after so many lost centuries. It is not impossible that in the same way we will have to re-start observations, the basis for the ideas of some philosophers on human nature, a nature they see as inherently evil. (Chamfort 1790) [author’s translation]

If Francis Bacon is the founder of ideological criticism, and Chamfort one of the major influences on Nietzsche, then we can see how important the debates about perceptions of the colonial other were – and remain – for current thinking about race, culture and difference.

This chapter examines the role of classical learning and classical images in how Europeans in South Africa tried to understand and think through difference. It starts with two early writers, Johannes Gulielmus de Grevenbroek, who wrote in Latin, and Peter Kolb (also written Kolbe and Kolben), who wrote in German, and then considers early traditions of illustration and how classical models affected many early portrayals of native Africans.

The chapter then examines the effect of early writings about colonial discovery on Rousseau and Diderot, examining particularly Rousseau's frontispiece to his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* and his analysis of the causes of the ills of modern society that necessitated policing. Their writings in turn influence later portrayals by visitors to the Cape, particularly François Levaillant (born Vaillant, also written Le Vaillant), the author Chamfort was reviewing. Of all the figures mentioned, Levaillant used classical imagery – in writing and visual forms – most fully and with the greatest subtlety, perhaps because of his collaboration with art historian Casimir Varon.

In conclusion, the chapter examines how the use of classical models changed after Levaillant and considers ways in which understanding this classical legacy and influence helps understand the changing observations to which Chamfort referred, observations and views which kept shifting and, arguably, keep shifting.

### **Grevenbroek and Kolb**

There are many early writers who describe the inhabitants of the Cape in the early colonial period and several studies that have investigated their representation. Francois-Xavier Fauvelle has written two important studies of the representations of the Khoi (the currently accepted name for the 'Hottentots', the latter a name now regarded as derogatory and insulting) (Fauvelle 2017; Fauvelle-Aymar 2002), while other studies have ranged more widely (George 1958; Pratt 1992). My focus is on the way in which classical learning and comparisons may have shaped some responses.

Grevenbroek (1644?–1725?) was the secretary of the Dutch East India Council of Policy at the Cape from 1684 to 1694, after which he lived in Stellenbosch as a free burgher (Van Stekelenburg & Claassen 2003). He is, as Katherine George observed, the first author to present a sustained literary critique of white colonialism (George 1958). He does this explicitly through direct statement when he notes of the ‘Hottentots’: ‘Candore animi multis nostratium superiores sunt’ (‘In whiteness of soul they are superior to many of our countrymen’) (Schapera 1933: 174–175).

A more complex literary example comes when Grevenbroek describes the shipwrecked *Stavenisse* survivors’ departure from the Xhosa society where they had been hospitably received. In describing the departure of the shipwrecked English sailors, Grevenbroek made emotional sense of the passage by alluding to two scenes from Vergil’s *Aeneid*:

*quod Barbara, proficiscentem Anglum quendam, sexum egressa in litus usque lachrymans lugubri ejulatu prosquitur, immisericordi anniculum patri (cui cum corpore animum dederat) Iulum, quem ex eo pepererat, palmasque ad caelum, inter advolentium undarum impetum, dirasque imprecationes, ingrata hospiti factas, gemitu, querelisque confecta tollit, dum Britannus tanquam Marpesia cautes firmus, institutum iter persequitur.* (Schapera 1933: 228)

As one of the Englishmen set off, a native woman, defying the restrictions of her sex, followed him right down to the shore with piteous tears and lamentations, holding up to the unrelenting father (to whom she had given her heart along with her body) a little one-year-old Iulus, his son; then she raised her arms to heaven, and standing in the rush of the waves, called down curses on the head of the faithless stranger until exhausted with cries and groans. All the time the Englishman held upon his adopted course, firm as a Marpesian rock. (Schapera 1933: 229)

If this woman is ‘Barbara,’ a barbarian, and outside the example of Greek or Roman law, then she seems to be Aeneas’ Dido – the Carthaginian queen who, in Book IV, rages at her betrayal by a faithless shipwrecked man who has exploited her. But the classical model helps Grevenbroek do more than imagine the pain of the abandoned woman.

Schapera notes that there 'is no mention of this incident in the available records' (1933: 229) and the name 'Iulus' suggests a different, powerful, ironic and creative reading of the situation. For any educated reader of Grevenbroek's Latin, Iulus, the son of Aeneas and Creusa, was to be the founding father of the Roman people and thus of the later 'Julius' Caesar (Van Stekelenburg & Claassen 2003). (Van Stekelenburg, though seeing this passage as one of the few successful uses of classical allusion in Grevenbroek, omits any analysis of the Iulus reference.) The specific reference is to Book II of the *Aeneid* in which Aeneas is telling Dido of the fall of Troy and of how Creusa reproached him for going out to fight and leaving her and their young son behind:

*Hinc ferro accingor rursus, clipeoque sinistram  
Insertabam aptans, meque extra tecta ferebam.  
Ecce autem complexa pedes in limine conjux  
Haerebat, parvumque patri tendebat Iulum:  
'Si periturus abis, et nos rape in omnia tecum;  
Sin aliquam expertus sumptis spem ponis in armis  
Hanc primum tutare domum. Cui parvus Iulus,  
Cui pater, et conjux quondam tua dicta reliquor?'*  
(2.671–679)

I buckled on  
Swordbelt and blade and slid my left forearm  
Into the shield-strap, turning to go out,  
But at the door Croesus [*sic*] hugged my knees,  
Then held up little Iulus to his father.  
'If you are going out to die, take us  
To face the whole thing with you. If experience  
Leads you to put some hope in weaponry  
Such as you now take, guard your own house here.  
When you have gone, to whom is Iulus left?  
Your father? Wife? – one called that long ago'  
(tr. Fitzgerald II. 877–887)

Immediately after this, the gods light Iulus with a divine flame, marking his imperial destiny and convincing Anchises and Aeneas to take him and leave the women to follow behind them.

We have then in Grevenbroek two aspects of the Aeneas story interwoven: the man's abandonment of a woman to keep to an imperial duty, and the embodiment of the future in the figure of a divinely sanctioned son. Like Aeneas hearing Creusa's entreaties, the father in Grevenbroek's account hears a plea from the woman, but the conflicting call of some imperial duty here cannot involve the colonised people or his son.

Grevenbroek's classical allusion gives a dual sexual-political possibility for the white man: to found a new city in Africa, something Dido invokes when she wishes that Aeneas had given her a son as a memory; or to return to another duty and way of life. White colonial identity in South Africa is shaped by his failure to stay and found a new hybrid culture – to make South Africa more like Brazil, let us suggest; while his departure seems like an irresponsible and inhumane action.

Peter Kolb (1675–1726) worked at the Cape from 1705–1715, though his original ambition to work on a collaborative astronomical project was never fully realised (Good 2006; Huigen 2009). His description of the Cape in 1719, *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum*, was widely read across Europe in many translations (Kolb & Medley 1731; Kolbe 1741; Kolben 1719). Kolb's original notebooks have not had adequate scholarly attention and a proper reassessment of him must await a scholarly re-edition as the translations in French and English (both of which abridged the original text) have been attacked as partial and biased by Penn (1997), Merians (2001), Good (2006) and Huigen (2009). We have two paradoxes here: the first is that the original German text seems to have been the most radical and critical of colonialism; the second that modern scholars such as Duchet (1995) and Pratt (1992) base their critiques of colonial writing on amended texts that do not fully reflect Kolb's (or many other authors') original intentions, a scholarly bias explored in an earlier analysis of naturalist writing about the Cape (Glenn 2012).

Kolb, perhaps in part because he drew on Grevenbroek's work (Van Stekelenburg & Claassen 2003), was in many ways the first powerful voice of Enlightenment self-critique and a sceptical observer of any claims of Western perfection. Though he very often starts by granting that the hostile critical views of the 'Hottentots' had some justification, he then often undermines or makes such claims dubious. The first lengthy account in the English or French editions is the story of Klaas, a worthy 'Hottentot' who displays Job-like patience as he is treated appallingly and unjustly by the Dutch authorities and his own people alike (Kolb & Medley 1731; Kolbe 1741).



In his preface to a 1968 reprint edition, anthropologist Peter Carstens notes that ‘throughout [Kolb’s] text one is repeatedly struck by his satirical attacks on the European way of life when he is comparing the two cultures’ (Kolb 1968: ix). Good notes that in the original text of Kolb, he ‘crafted his description of the Khoikhoi to talk back to European culture’ (Good 2006: 85). Good points out that what happened fairly systematically in later versions of Kolb was that sensational facts or incidents were taken out of his original context where they might have made more sense as cultural comparisons with events in European culture.

In his concluding remarks on the ‘Hottentot’ character and its strengths and weaknesses in the English edition, Kolb set down his overall sense of their virtues, and this passage is, till the 1780s and 1790s, the single most powerful example of the trend Carstens and Good note. It goes a long way to explaining ways in which 18<sup>th</sup> century travel accounts fed into ideas of the noble savage, and particularly into Rousseau’s critique of man in acquisitive, envy-ridden, policed Western society:

The Integrity of the *Hottentots*, their Strictness and Celerity in the Execution of justice, and their Chastity are Things in which they excell all or most other Nations in the World. A most beautiful Simplicity of Manners runs through All the Nations of ‘em. [A]nd Numbers of ‘em have told me, that the Vices they saw prevail among the Christians; their Avarice, their Envy and Hatred of one another, their restless discontented Tempers, their Lasciviousness and Injustice were the Things that principally kept the *Hottentots* from Harkening to Christianity. (Kolb 1968: 336)

As the frontispiece to Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality* shows (fig. 1), this critique of modernity which invoked a set of classical values (Justice, Chastity, Simplicity set against Injustice, Lasciviousness, Discontent) rather than invoking a pre-social or asocial humanity, was highly influential.

What of early visual portrayals of the indigenous habitants of the Cape? European society was fascinated by the ‘Hottentots’, with hundreds of descriptions available by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Merians 2001; Good 2006). While many portrayals veered towards the grotesque and hostile, as Van Wyk Smith (1992) notes, there were other trends as well.

Bassani and Tedeschi look at the classical influences on early depictions of the ‘Hottentots’, noting an aulic or courtly tradition of portraiture (Bassani & Tedeschi 1990: 163). By the time Levaillant was writing in the 1780s and 1790s, the influence of Tahiti and the erotics of the exotic also played a role in visual expectations and portrayals. But a more important influence on Levaillant was the critical work of Rousseau and Diderot, work informed by earlier travel writers and personal meetings.

### Rousseau and Diderot

The importance of the Cape in Rousseau’s thinking about civilisation and its discontents is clear. His sardonic rejection of the necessity of the European police and Hobbesian force precedes a quote from an excerpt from Kolb that had been included in a widely translated compendium of travel writing. That quote and the praise for the integrity of the ‘Hottentots’ in the passage cited earlier influence the thinking throughout Rousseau’s



Figure 1: *Frontispiece of Rousseau’s Discourse on Inequality, 1755*

discourse and the tensions are crystallised in the famous frontispiece to his influential theoretical text.

This picture, described in Note XVI, is based on a story in Kolb's account in which a 'Hottentot', who has been educated since childhood by Governor van der Stel and worked in the Indies for the Company, returns to the Cape and visits his relatives. He then decides to quit the service of the Company, telling the governor that he will keep his sword and necklace as a sign of his esteem for the Dutch, but that he is returning to the ways of his ancestors (Rousseau & Starobinski 1969: 151, 263).

What Rousseau's interpretation of this story does is to turn European thought away from one possible set of responses ('you can't civilise these people or bring them to Christian ways') to another ('their ways of life are more authentic, truer, better'). That tension between man in a natural state and man in society still runs through debates about education, politics – and policing.

A full analysis of the visual conventions of the frontispiece, the role of the artists and Rousseau's collaboration with them is beyond the scope of this summary, but Rolf Schneider has suggested that the artist has taken elements of classical visual depictions of Hercules at the crossroads to give nobility and power to the man's decision and decisive actions.<sup>3</sup> He leaves the hat and adornments of bourgeois Dutch society behind to return to a state which seems imbued not only with the freedom of the noble savage but with the strength and grace of the classical tradition.

The other major anti-colonial theorist, Denis Diderot, met Colonel Robert Gordon whose experiences of the Cape gave Diderot a first-hand account that helped dispel hostile and pejorative views of the Khoi (Cullinan 1992). Diderot's counter-narrative of the Bougainville expedition, 1766–1789, (Diderot & Lanni 2003), and his explosive contribution about the Cape to Raynal's censored third edition of *Histoire des Deux Indes* show how thoroughly leading Enlightenment thinkers had absorbed critiques of colonial discourses and behaviour (Glenn 2018; Raynal 1780).

## Levaillant

The French explorer and ornithologist François Levaillant (1753–1824) has been described as the first major modern ornithologist (Stresemann 1975) but he also produced a highly influential account of his visit to southern Africa from 1781–1784 in his *Voyage dans l'Intérieur* and *Second*

*Voyage dans l'Intérieur* (Le Vaillant 1790, 1795; Le Vaillant et al. 2007). His books were among the most widely read and translated travel writing of his time with rival English translations appearing in 1790 and translations into Dutch, German, Russian, Swedish, Danish and Italian (Glenn 2018; Rookmaaker et al. 2004). It was the most widely translated work about South Africa until Nelson Mandela's autobiography nearly two centuries later. His works were illustrated but many additional illustrations were not published at the time. A lavishly illustrated map of his travels was produced for Louis XVI by the Marquis de Laborde (Glenn 2007b).

Levaillant's account was sharply critical of colonial brutality and his critique was often omitted or misunderstood in translated versions. In working on the re-translation for an edited edition (Le Vaillant et al. 2007), it was striking to see how often the original attack on 'colons' (settlers) in French would, for example, be changed into a criticism of the indigenous peoples. Worse was to come in the 1930s when a right-wing French editor produced a summarised edition which, as he boasted in his Preface, omitted all the Rousseauistic nonsense about noble savages and in effect produced a politically bowdlerised version of Levaillant (Boulenger 1932). None of Levaillant's shocking accounts of how the colonists behaved survived in this edition.

This edition was the one used by Pratt and Duchet, invalidating most of their analysis of Levaillant's political and social outlook (Duchet 1995; Pratt 1992). In the original, Levaillant's account stands as one of the texts that shook any self-confident and self-congratulating colonial ideology. Huigen is quite right to say that 'Le Vaillant was an early postcolonial author' (Huigen 2009: 122).

Part of the reason Levaillant's text was so socially critical was that he worked with Casimir Varon to produce his travel writing. Varon was a protégé of David and himself an art historian who had studied in Rome and intended to publish a study of Winckelmann. He became a leading revolutionary ideologue and functionary of the arts during the French Revolution and Levaillant dedicated his second volume of travels to him.

Levaillant's portrayal, in text and illustration, of a young Gonaqua woman whom he named Narina is a powerful evocation of the classical frame of reference (fig. 2).

In this encounter, the black female body is erotically powerful, but has the dignity and grace of classical art:

*[A]u milieu de ces offrandes réciproques, et des sentiments affectueux qu'elles nous inspiroient mutuellement, je remarquai une jeune fille de seize ans; confondue dans la foule, elle montrait moins d'empressement à partager les bijoux que je distribuois à ses*



Figure 2: 'The Gonaqua girl, Narina' [Le Vaillant water colour collection #35. Courtesy of the South African Library of Parliament]

*compagnes, que de curiosité pour ma personne: elle m'examinait avec une attention si marquée, que je m'approchai d'elle pour lui donner tout le temps de me considérer à son aise; je lui trouvai la figure charmante; elle avoit les plus fraîches et les plus belles dents du monde; sa taille élégante et svelte, et les formes amoureuses de son corps, auroient servi le pinceau d'Albane. C'étoit la plus jeune des Graces sous la figure d'une Hottentote.*

*Les impressions de la beauté sont universelles, c'est une souveraine dont l'empire est par-tout; je sentis à la prodigalité de mes présents, que je pliois un peu sous sa puissance.*

In the midst of these reciprocal offerings of friendship, I remarked a young girl of about sixteen, who shewed less eagerness to partake of the ornaments I bestowed on her companions, than to consider my person; she examined me with such marked attention, that I drew near, to satisfy her curiosity. Her figure was charming, her teeth beautifully white, her height and shape, elegant and easy, and might have served as a model for the pencil of Albano; in short, she was the youngest sister of the graces, under the figure of a female Hottentot.

The force of beauty is universal, 'tis a sovereign whose power is unlimited. I felt by the prodigality of my presents that I paid some deference to its power. (Helme I: 424–425)

The account starts with a shift of perception and control. It is the young woman who notices him, and in doing so inspires and permits his interest and reaction. The Helme translation, typically, either euphemises or misses the physicality of the passage both in describing Narina and in Levaillant's reaction. The Robinson translator seems to get the masculine force of the ending of the passage more accurately:

[H]er person was slender and elegant, and her shape, formed to inspire love, might have served as a model for the pencil of Albano. She was the youngest of the Graces, under the figure of a Hottentot.

The impressions made by beauty are universal: it is a sovereign who reigns over all; and I was sensible, by the profusion of my presents, that I bowed a little under its sway. (Le Vaillant 1790: I. 359)

That comes closer to getting the force of the *'formes amoureuses'* and of the empire of beauty which demands a physical tribute of disturbed balance, not a cold commercial tax, as the Helme translation suggests. Levaillant's choice of terms such as *'svelte'* deliberately uses European sophistication for Narina to stress the universality of the reign of female beauty, a tribute reinforced by the divine classical form.

The Albano reference may have been subtly invoking one of his paintings depicting classical scenes such as Actaeon spying on Diana and her nymphs bathing, for the text picked up that possibility when Levaillant soon after their encounter spies Narina and her friends bathing naked.

After Narina and her companions return to their village, Levaillant decides to pay them a formal visit. In the text, Levaillant meets the *'Roi Haabas'* and his men and eventually asks after Narina, who shyly comes forward, without any covering of fat for her body as she knows that he dislikes it. In the illustration of this visit, however, Narina and her companions are fully assimilated into the aulic or courtly tradition, with Narina almost as a princess awaiting an arriving royal or a bride awaiting a groom, with other young women around her, highlighting her importance. Levaillant's full account of this meeting, in print and painting, suggests he was taking a deliberately anti-erotic stance towards this meeting, concerned, after Diderot's critiques of colonial male exploitation of the black female body, not to repeat that pattern (Glenn 2020). In this politically and ethically significant move, he marks a different use of classical imagery from what many scholars have seen as the dominant exploitative strand (Derbew 2019).

It may be that the vogue for Tahiti in France and Europe at the time drove the publishers and Levaillant to portray exotic eroticism, even as Levaillant distanced himself from it at points, but Levaillant elsewhere used classical imagery and references to make a political statement. A sharply political use of classical history is given by the description in his *New Travels* of the Kabobiqua man in battle dress:

[W]hen I saw him enter my tent with his quiver at his back, his buckler on his arm, and his body ornamented with a long mantle which swept the ground, and when he sternly rested on his lance, with his head elevated, and a determined look, I was struck with his martial air and his dignified appearance.





Figure 3: Levaillant and his party approach King Haabas on the left with Narina and her companions in the centre  
[Le Vaillant water colour collection #12. Courtesy of the South African Library of Parliament]



He several times stopped my work to admire it; while I, transported in imagination to the remotest periods, and to countries situated under the same latitude on the other side of the equator, seemed to behold a Jugurtha or a Syphax in arms, marching to combat in the deserts of Numidia, in defence of his kingdom against the Romans. (II: 83)

The Numidians, who lived in what is presently Algeria, represent an African opposition to Roman imperialism, and Levaillant is able to draw a telling parallel between resistance to Roman and modern imperialisms. It is worth noting that in the classical frame of reference, as set out in Lovejoy and Boas's study, the Numidians and Carthaginians were certainly not classified as noble savages or even primitives – that place being reserved for the Scythians (Lovejoy & Boas 1965). Levaillant, in other words, uses the classical frame of reference to draw particular historical parallels, not simply generalise about noble savages.

Though this reference is in the later volume of travels when Varon was no longer collaborating closely with Levaillant, the reference to Syphax may owe something to a marble statue of him in the Vatican Museum that Varon could have studied during his time in Rome.

What strengthens this link is Varon's work on Winckelmann. Rolf Schneider points out that the German art historian explicitly set out a description of African nobility and beauty with an allusion to Syphax:

*Livius [27.19.8–9] redet von einem außerordentlich schönen jungen Numidier, welchen Scipio [Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Calvus] in der Schlacht mit dem Asdrubal bey Baecula in Spanien gefangen nahm, und die berühmte Punische Schönheit, Sophonisba, des Asdrubals Tochter, welche zu erst mit dem Syphax, und nachher mit dem Masinissa vermählet war, ist in allen Geschichten bekannt.* (Winckelmann 1764: 69)

The Roman historian Livy [27.19.8–9] mentions a young Numidian of extraordinary beauty, whom Scipio took prisoner in the battle with Asdrubal at Baecula in Spain; and the famous Punic beauty, Sophonisba, Asdrubal's daughter who was first wedded to Syphax and later to Masinissa, is known in all histories. [Schneider's translation]



*un Chef des Kabobiquois, nommé Jugurtha  
par M. Le Vaillant, couvert de ses Ornaments et Joyaux  
armé de son Bouclier et de sa Lance.*

Figure 4: 'Kabobiqua man' [Le Vaillant water colour collection #57.  
Courtesy of the South African Library of Parliament]



*Figure 5: Statue of a male in the Vatican Museum, called 'Syphax, King of Numidia'*

Keith Dietrich points out that Levaillant was the first European artist to produce head and shoulders portraits of indigenous South Africans (Dietrich 1993). Some of these, like the portrait of a ‘Houzouana woman’ (fig. 6), seem to owe something to classical busts, particularly if Varon or Levaillant was aware of black busts that Schneider has analysed (Schneider 1986: plates 42–45), though the portraits have authentic local details, such as the ostrich-shell necklace.

The description of Klaas, the faithful companion, when he kills a lion in the second volume of travels, moves gently in and out of satire, showing that the recourse to classical parallels was available for a variety of situations and feelings:

When the animal was flayed, Klaas very naturally threw the skin over his shoulders to carry it to the kraal, whither he was accompanied with shouts by all the horde. I observed this new Alcides; and, distant as I was from the lions of Nemea, the resemblance was so striking, that I caught myself marching gravely in the midst of this renewal of the Grecian festival. If my Klaas obtained not all the honours of the son of Alcmena, it was apparently because a more powerful deity had directed his arm. (II: 254)

### **The influence of Levaillant**

Levaillant’s political commentary may have influenced many of his contemporaries in France and elsewhere (Johnson 2012; Le Vaillant et al. 2007; Merians 2001). In comparing him to Juvenal, Chamfort remarked, as the French Revolution was starting in earnest, that Levaillant gives the Dutch East India Company excellent advice ‘from which they will not benefit because despite counsel and warnings, power marches blindly right up to the moment when it falls’ – something which should probably be read as a comment on France rather than the Cape (Chamfort 1790). When Chamfort remarked in his maxim 519 that ‘the poor are the blacks of Europe’ or defended Rousseau in maxim 470 by turning to the Cape as evidence, it seems clear that he had read Levaillant carefully and been influenced by him.

Chamfort’s comment on the ideological aspects of colonial representation were borne out by the way Levaillant’s praise of the indigenous peoples and



Figure 6: 'Houzouana woman' [Le Vaillant water colour collection #63.  
Courtesy of the South African Library of Parliament]



criticism of colonialism divided political opinion in England (Merians 2001). In spite of ideological differences, however, classical models remained a remarkably constant element of verbal and visual illustrations of black South Africans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bank 1998).

Levaillant's evocation of the erotic possibilities of the classical-exotic were to be very influential. In *Makanna; or, the Land of the Savage*, the first substantial South African novel, the narrator uses the description of the mischievously named Cousha (*veux-tu coucher avec moi?*), the young slave-concubine of the Dutch innkeeper and villain, to play on the word 'fair' and to set up a witty dramatic situation where the narrator's comparison between white women and black causes trouble. Levaillant is central to the implicit debate on beauty:

The name of the female was Cousha, and she was a Hottentot – 'Oh, patience,' exclaims some blushing fair one, with skin of alabaster and cheek of roses – and whose sensitive delicacy is all turned the wrong way, like the hair of an electrified cat, at the bare idea of an African belle of the second table.

But Cousha was not only young, but fair! that is, using the term in its better sense, rather than as distinctive of that subtle mixture of the seven primitive colours which the negro allots to the devil. Yes, she was fair; – just about the height of that statue 'that enchants the world,' which, by the way, is the general standard of her race. And although it must be admitted, that 'the human form divine' is so outrageously burlesqued in the persons of the Hottentot ladies past a certain age, that he who sees, may die of laughter; yet with their juvenile sisters, with whom the heyday of youth is yet in full career, the reverse is so often apparent, that, on the word of La Vailant [sic], if Zeuxis had had the opportunity of taken [sic] one as a model, he might have escaped the trouble of congregating the flower of the grecian maidens, that he, vain mortal, might in a single picture combine their varied charms. (Anonymous 1834: I. 164–165)

Even when not specifically mentioned, it seems that Levaillant's use of classical references influenced much of the English writing that came later. Mary Louise Pratt (1992) has characterised Sir John Barrow's style

as the antithesis of Levaillant's in being coldly scientific and objective, but Barrow was very much under Levaillant's influence in his descriptions of the Xhosa. The continuity with Levaillant is striking as Barrow's lyrical aestheticism emerges beneath the civil servant prose. He observes a

young man of about twenty, of six feet ten inches high, [who] was one of the finest figures that perhaps was ever created. He was a perfect Hercules; and a cast from his body would not have disgraced the pedestal in the Farnese palace. Many of them indeed had very much the appearance of bronze figures. (Barrow 1806)

In *Makanna*, the convention of the Xhosa warrior as a Hercules is regarded as being well-enough established to be used almost as a figure of fun. The lady-in-waiting to the captured heroine – a comic lower-class foil to the upper-class heroine – comments, when the heroine teases her on the prospect of marriage to one of the Xhosa warriors: 'I never see one of the great he things, but what he puts me in mind of the Major's bronze statue of Hercules, that used to stand in the temple of departure, at Calcutta!' (Anonymous 1834: III. 46).

Cowper Rose's description of the impact the Xhosa made physically on colonists of some sensibility was influential:

The Chief is generally distinguished from his followers by a carosse of tiger's skin, and by a narrow tasteful beaded band worn round the head; and when he stands surrounded by his armed attendants, wrapped in their dark cloaks, it forms a most imposing sight, and one which, though my expectation had been raised, surprised me. Their figures are the noblest that my eye ever gazed upon, their movements the most graceful, and their attitudes the proudest, standing like forms of monumental bronze. I was much struck with the strong resemblance that a group of Kaffers bears to the Greek and Etruscan antique remains, except that the savage drapery is more scanty; and falls in simpler folds; their mantles, like those seen on the figures of the ancient vases, are generally fastened over the shoulder of the naked arm, while the other side is wholly concealed; but they have many ways of wearing the carosse, and of giving variety to their only garment.

Through our interpreter, we prevailed on Enno to order a dance of the men; their movement was different to that of the women but still kept time to their voices; they threw their carosses off, and forming a semicircle, bowed their heads low, and bounded upward with a spring, which almost left it in doubt whether their dark forms belonged to the earth. (Rose 1829: 87–88)

This Keatsian passage in which the Xhosa become the very antithesis of autochthonous men was striking enough to have the section on the Greek vases quoted by Edward Kendall in his novel of 1834, *An English boy at the Cape* (Kendall & Bone 1835). Kendall went further and at the beginning of the third volume gave a kind of compendium of views of the ‘Caffres’ that showed him drawing on classical sources on Africa, the work of Barrow and Moodie, articles in the *Athenaeum* hostile to the British government, and other reading. The classical imagery comes as a given: ‘These Caffres, then, are a people of full stature, Roman features, long hair, and jet-black complexion’ (III: 6).

Kendall bolsters his novel with copious notes from different travellers attesting to, for example, Xhosa society with explicit comparisons between the Xhosa, ancient Greeks and Romans, and North American Indians. As Snader observes about the genre of the captivity novel more generally, long tracts of ethnographic observation and speculation can alternate with narrative quite disconcertingly (Glenn 2019; Snader 2000). Here Kendall turns into a comparative scholar, quoting, for example, Moodie’s *Ten Years in South Africa* and then reacting to criticism of it (III: 17–19).

What Kendall’s work shows is that the classical imagery was not merely literary habit, or hyperbole, but was so well established as no longer to be a question of likeness but of identity. If Kolb had explored the notion that the Khoi might be the lost tribes of Israel, the Xhosa were no longer seen as being ‘like’ the Romans or Egyptians, but as originally Romans or Egyptians. Questions of their appearance became questions of how to classify the group in terms of national and racial origins. Speculation on an Egyptian or Bedouin origin for the Xhosa (which seems to be first expressed in Barrow) went beyond the political comparison of Numidians with locals in Levaillant.

Even 20 or more years later, in works such as Forester’s *Everard Tunstall*, the imagery of Clu Clu turns naturally to the Roman and classical statuary:



In personal appearance, he was one of the finest specimens of the human kind. Tall and finely proportioned, his every attitude was graceful, and every motion was performed with ease. The expanded forehead bespoke his intellectual capacity; the nose had a tendency to the aquiline; the teeth were brilliantly white; the large eye, with its quick glance, was full of expression; and the whole countenance beamed with intelligence, and was easily softened into a smile, which gave even those dark features an air of benevolence ...

His head was bare, after the manner of his people, but his feet were protected by buskins of tanned hide. The general effect of his appearance would be best represented by that of a statue of Hercules moulded in bronze. (Forester 1851: II. 35–37)

Elsewhere Forester later describes Hintsa and his followers ‘with their leopard-skin karosses, bull’s hide mantles, and brawny limbs, looking like figures on a Grecian frieze’ (III: 206).

The use of classical reference went beyond any adherence to a Rousseauistic sense of the noble savage or of political sympathy. One of the first important conservative, pro-settler writers was Mrs Harriet Ward, whose writings on the Xhosa can scarcely be accused of sentimentality or painting a rosy picture. Even for her, the use of classical reference was so well established that when she saw a group of young maidens swimming, she saw them as ‘a crowd of dusky Nereides ... taking their evening bath’ (Ward 1851: I. 191). A little later, the description of the ‘boy warrior ... in form like a young Apollo’ (I: 203) shows that Mrs Ward did not suffer from any maidenly aversion of her eyes from the black male form.

Levaillant’s merging of classical with exotic imagery may have affected French 19<sup>th</sup> century culture too. The most interesting case is that of his great-nephew Charles Baudelaire, who boasted about his illustrious great-uncle and, while a young teenager at boarding school, asked for one of Levaillant’s volumes to be sent to him (Baudelaire 1973). If one suspects that the portrait of the bare-breasted Narina may have been part of his interest, perhaps Baudelaire’s later fascination with the creole woman Jeanne Duval whom he called his ‘Venus noire’ had a South African origin.

### Classical naming and satire

It may be objected that a positive account of the use of classical names in South Africa runs counter to the overwhelming tendency to use such names derogatorily or satirically and that a harsher version of the gentle irony occasionally noted in Levaillant was in fact the predominant mode of usage in the culture as a whole. This question has been debated by Robert Shell and John Hilton from the perspective of historians, but these literary examples may add new evidence (Hilton 2004; Shell 1994).

Adoons, the typical name for a baboon, for example, is a corrupt form of Adonis, and in English the Hottentot Venus was certainly a classical tag used ironically. Elphick comments in his *The Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa* that from the time of Van der Stel, the chiefs were given ‘classical names like Asdrubal, Scipio, Africanus, Hercules, Mars, or Hannibal. It is likely that these names were intentionally ludicrous’ (Elphick & Giliomee 1989: 191).

Kendall in *The English Boy at the Cape* adds another element in one of his explanatory footnotes. The footnote in question is to elucidate the names ‘Lavinia, Phyllis, Chloe, Diana, Venus, and Latona’ used for ‘Negro girls and matrons’. Kendall’s note reads:

The Dutch and other colonists have studiously given to their slaves the divine or human names of Pagan antiquity, upon the principle of shunning a supposed profaneness in the allowance of the usual Christian names to those who are not Christians. (Kendall & Bone 1835: III. 74)

To name the slave as other than Christian might thus have had an economic and a social benefit in keeping him or her other, distant, outside. If the colonists did the same, by extension, with chiefs with whom they made treaties, this attempt must be distinguished from the use of classical figures carrying a predominantly positive rather than satiric force.

The Hottentot Venus figure was, to be sure, a figure taken as grotesque, and Sarah Baartman and the indignities she suffered in her life and posthumously have been analysed by Sander Gilman and others (Derbew 2019; Gilman 1985; Magubane 2001; Qureshi 2004). There are occasional uses of the term in writers such as Gordon-Cumming, where he uses the

mock-heroic terms for indigenous women to characterise the amours of his 'Hottentot' servants, but in these passages, the authors are in general amused by lower-class affections or affectations or sexual appetite rather than by appearance (Gordon-Cumming 1850). As the passage from *Makanna* above showed, authors were quite able to circumvent conventionally hostile portrayals of black women to insist, however guardedly or mischievously, on their beauty and sensuality.

The use of classical models in seeing or portraying black South Africans was typical of educated visitors to the Cape over a long period, but particularly in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The use of this imagery was not neutral or unthought, not mere rhetorical flourish or clichéd comparison.

We may, in duly suspicious mode, observe that the use of such imagery may be just one more way of imposing a cultural model rather than truly appreciating difference, but for many of the educated and more sophisticated visitors, the use of classical figures enabled them to work on a valued cultural model of difference, in which blacks could not be disqualified simply as being non-Christian, or technologically backward, or as speaking another language. This way of seeing blacks valued their appearance, their lifestyle, their beauty. In Levillant's illustrations, authentic anthropological details of hair fashioning and ornaments go with classical grace and nobility. Given the preponderance of academic emphasis on the hostile or ironic use of classical imagery in the figure of Sarah Baartman, it is worth pointing out that other more generous modes were in use and influential and that positive classical imagery and iconography often gave way to more hostile and negative portrayals influenced by religious and scientific thought.

The classical comparison influenced and was in turn influenced by iconographic modes of presenting indigenous persons, whose shields and clothing and bearing took on classic casts. At its most powerful, this comparative tendency could undermine or be used to undermine the centrality and certainty of the viewer, by providing an anthropological reverse view of his or her own modern European culture. We see this in the passage from Grevenbroek which casts an ironic glance at the white male founding and desertion of a new empire, to some extent in the passage from *Makanna*, and in many other striking examples in writing from southern Africa in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This comparative and rhetorical device lost currency during the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the increasing prestige of scientific notions, which in part explains the increasingly racist and indifferent treatment of blacks by English writers as the century progressed. The perceptual paradigm or intellectual background enabling earlier writers to see the Xhosa or other black South Africans as inherently graceful, beautiful or noble was not available to, or did not suit, a settler culture determined to impose its own values and uses on the indigenous population.

This did not mean that the tradition disappeared completely, particularly with British writers on South Africa, for a quite conventional writer like Emma Watts Phillips who could produce the pre-Conradian ‘A Kaffir wife! Oh, horror!’ (133) was still able in the 1870s to write of a ‘rather good-looking Kaffir, possessing a figure like the marble statues I had seen in other lands’ (Phillips 1872: 88). Yet by this time the trope had lost its force and other elements dominated. When Ballantyne came to write in *The Settler and the Savage* of the ‘long files of Kafir women, straight and graceful as Venus in body, ugly almost as baboons in visage’ (Ballantyne

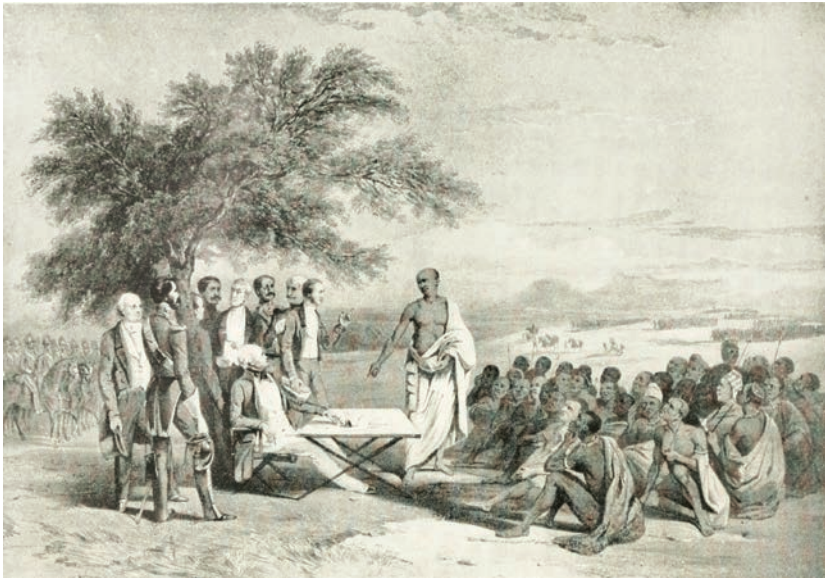


Figure 7: Nkosi Sandile meeting with Colonel Hare  
[Sketch by Harry Darell; frontispiece to *Theal* (1915)]

1877: 259), we see the vestiges of an earlier humane tradition onto which a crude social Darwinism has been literally superimposed.

Even the great conservative South African historian George McCall Theal (1915) seems to have felt the force of the classical turn of mind, even if he presented these images as something from a distant past. When he chose the frontispiece for his magnum opus on South African history, it was of a meeting between Colonel Hare and Sandile in which the Xhosa chief, clad in what seems to be a toga rather than a karosse, has the dignity and nobility of a Roman senator, caught in the wrong millennium perhaps, but no less dignified for that (fig. 7).

In his sardonic comment on admirers of the European police, Rousseau opposed the natural strength and classical virtues of the black body and being to the state of man in the acquisitive society. In the age of Black Lives Matter and arguments about defunding the police, his arguments about the origins of inequality still matter and the ways in which commentators on African bodies who influenced Rousseau and were influenced by him used positive classical frames deserve greater recognition.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter draws on several earlier articles and book sections, particularly Glenn (2007a, 2012, 2018). I thank Rolf Schneider for several suggestions concerning images.
- 2 This quote from Rousseau precedes his discussion of the significance of the episode encapsulated in the frontispiece to the book.
- 3 The most detailed version of the story is that of Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–34: Socrates argues against vice-ridden immediate gratification and in favour of the path of virtue. The theme was adapted by the epic poet Silius Italicus to the Roman general Scipio Africanus (*Punica* 15.18–128). It would endure in art through the Middle Ages into the Baroque as a model of human virtue.

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## CHAPTER THREE

# Imagining Africans through the lens of a classical education

## The politics of colonial administration in Southern Rhodesia

*Obert Bernard Mlambo and John Douglas McClymont*

As postcolonial Africa moves towards thinking for itself and seeks to free itself from Western hegemonic discourse, it faces choices on the mode of decolonisation of the mind, and this impacts on the way in which classics is approached in Africa. This task should not be conceived simplistically; as a rehash of the apartheid paradigm with black discourse occupying the hegemonic position that white discourse used to occupy (cf. McClymont 2018: 240–242). Rather, there is an opportunity for considering the issue from an ancient perspective. In particular, Africans may ask how classics can help in the re-visioning of race relations. For instance, we may now ask whether the oppression or colonisation suffered by blacks was mirrored in classical times, and how that will change the way we view or evaluate the classical heritage.

Under the aegis of the British imperial government from 1890–1923, Cecil John Rhodes and the British South Africa Company (BSAC) occupied the region which was later called ‘Southern Rhodesia’. Rhodes achieved this after various other forays into expansion in Africa (Steele 1972: 2). This urge for conquest was generally believed to have been fundamentally fuelled by strategic and economic imperatives, since it had been rumoured that the area was filled with gold deposits rivalling the ‘First Rand’ in South Africa (Steele 1972: 2).

This chapter explores the varied socio-religious, linguistic, legal and historical classical motifs that manifested themselves in the colonial politics of the then Southern Rhodesia during the 1920s. The emphasis here is on exploring the application by the British colonial politics of Southern Rhodesia of the makeshift Roman administrative policy to which ancient Britons and other non-Romans were exposed in ancient times, as the colonisers understood this to comprise. This chapter is particularly interested in the political dimension of colonialism within the southern African context. Entry points such as social ethnographic theory, popular fiction, anthropology, racism or the pedagogical aspects of classical antiquity as introduced into Southern Rhodesia, and Africa at large, have been explored by other scholars. For instance, Professor Allan Bloom's work *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987: 37–40) focuses on ethnocentrism and anthropology, Frank M Snowden's *Blacks in Antiquity* (1970) and *Before Colour Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (1983) stresses the ancients' (positive) view of blacks, and Carol Summers' 'Boys, Brats and Education: Reproducing White Maturity in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1915–1935' (2013) deals with classical education in Southern Rhodesia. In this chapter, we aim to establish the significance of classical political motifs and structures as dialogical manifestations between the indigenous people of Southern Rhodesia and of ancient Britain and their shared space within respective colonial regimes.

In sum, this chapter explores the reception of classics and politics in Southern Rhodesia. To begin with, some Roman colonial policies in ancient Britain will be explored. Seeing local Africans as 'ancient Britons' was apparently attractive to white settlers, as this enabled them to cast themselves as the 'civilizing Romans', bringing ordered culture to a barbarous, albeit promising, people (Jeater 2005: 8). Following this, British colonial administrative structures will be explored and compared to those of their former imperial masters of close to two millennia earlier. Due to the constraints of space, emphasis will be laid on similarities between the two rather than on differences. We shall hence consider the British conception of the classical political tradition and its application in Southern Rhodesia. To this end, the central questions guiding the chapter are:

- How did the British colonialists make use of Roman precedents and practices in their political administration in Southern Rhodesia, and to what end?

- In what way was the indigenous population of Southern Rhodesia involved in the classical reception embedded within British colonial administration?
- Did British colonial administration policy mimic, consciously or unconsciously, a classical past, to the point of displacing the indigenous past of the native Southern Rhodesians?<sup>1</sup>

To some extent we may suspect a conscious and unconscious awareness of the resemblance to ancient Rome on the part of the Britons of colonial times, on the grounds that these Britons would have been aware of the classical past but not reductively dominated by it. In antiquity Britain was under the colonial subjugation of the powerful empire of Rome. The ancient Britons were, then, at the receiving end of Roman colonial policies, but 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britons became the enforcers of such policies. The heritage of classical antiquity was always a vital part of the colonial legacy during both the Dutch-ruled and British-ruled periods of southern African history (Parker 2012: 4). Studying the reception of classical material in the interlocking relations of colonial Southern Rhodesia is not a mere anachronism. In fact, it is useful to demonstrate the particular significance of classical political motifs in the lived reality of colonial Africans. This chapter draws historical parallels between Roman colonial administrative systems and those of the BSAC and its successor government, led by Sir Charles Coghlan, in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

The argument issues from an approach similar to that of Jeater (2005), who traces various sources, such as the Bible and classical literature, that the colonialists used as a lens to define and justify their relationship with Africans. Similarly, Summers describes how colonial symbols used by the British were useful tools in their effort to impose and consolidate white domination (2013: 134).

### **Classical antiquity and the colonial legacy in southern Africa: A general background**

In classical literature, concepts of sub-Saharan Africa tend to be somewhat vague. In Homer, the Ethiopians are called ‘the remotest of men, some of whom live where the sun sets and some where he rises’ (*Od.* 1.22–26; Jones 2017a). Book 2 of Herodotus contains detailed descriptions of Egyptian

customs and religion, but much less about the customs and religion of Ethiopians or sub-Saharan African peoples (*Herod.* 2.29–30, 35ff). Herodotus mentions that little was known about the source of the Nile or its more southerly portion (cf. *Herod.* 2.28, 31). In Roman times, Sallust mentions that most people placed Africa in the third part of the world, but a minority believed that Asia and Europe comprised the only two divisions of the world, and that Africa was part of Europe (*Sall. Jug.* 17; Jones 2017b). This minority view is one difficult to imagine arising under modern conditions.

The term ‘Africa’ was used widely in Roman times to refer initially to a Roman province in North Africa, which the Greeks had originally called Libya (Zezeza 2006: 15). In classical antiquity the extent of the African continent was barely known (Parker 2012: 10). Parker (2012: 20) posits that the southern part of Africa was Europe’s *terra incognita*. He says, ‘Herodotus is pointedly vague when, in the course of describing Nilotic geography, he comes to the area south of the Elephantine’, the Elephantine being an area roughly coincident with the southern border of the modern state of Egypt (2012: 13). This makes southern Africa something largely unknown to the Greeks of Herodotus’ time. Although further exploration by various Western individuals was to take place, Africa would for centuries still be viewed as a very wild, exotic and unknown place, even in British colonial times. Moreover, Jeater (2005: 2–3) asserts that

Whites knew very little about the territory that became Southern Rhodesia when they began to occupy it in the late 1890s. Native Commissioners learned from scratch, trying to find out basic information about the territory which they had been allocated.

Essentially, it can be stressed that deficiency in knowledge of the indigenous peoples of Southern Rhodesia led to rather desperate measures by the European colonialists in seeking to understand them. Against this backdrop, the success of colonial administration corresponded to the extent to which the British overlords understood the Southern Rhodesian Africans (Parker 2012). In an attempt to do this, the British Native Affairs Department resorted to the deployment of classical motifs or ideas to which their education had grounded them. For example, Jackson (1905: 13) traces how the codification of ‘Native law’ in Southern Rhodesia had used Roman inheritance law as a yardstick for illuminating African legal administrative systems.

## Classics and the notion of colonialism

To situate the discussion, it is essential to clarify the use of the term ‘classics’, as it yields to several interpretations. Essentially, the word ‘classical’ has two (often divergent) meanings: ‘what pertains to Graeco-Roman antiquity’, and ‘what sets an ideal standard’. The confusion of these two distinct concepts underlies much of colonial thought. What makes ‘classics’ difficult to define is its interdisciplinary nature, encompassing the literature, language, art, history, science, technology, religion and philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome. Points of difficulty which also emerge in our attempt to define the classics are their geographical parameters and the scope of ‘known civilisation’. Some scholars contend that ‘classics is limited to Europe and its dominant Graeco-Roman empires’ (Learner 2009: 7), while some contend that the study of the classical world encompasses the study of Africa and how it passed on its cultural heritage to the Western world (Bernal 1987: 129; Keita 1994: 149–150). This constitutes a debate on its own which is not the focus of this chapter. In this chapter, ‘classics’ refers to the ancient ideas, motifs and images which had their foundations in Greek and Roman society. In addition, the term ‘antiquity’ as used in this chapter refers to ancient Graeco-Roman cultures. We also use the concept of ‘the classics’ to include references to ancient literature, history and myth (Goff 2013: 2). Here we use the term as it was apparently understood by British officials in the colonies, who had largely been exposed to a British educational system which at the time was by definition ‘classical’. A degree in classics was the requirement for appointment to colonial administration in India and other British colonies.

The usage of the terms ‘colonialism’, ‘colony’ and ‘colonisation’, as applied to Graeco-Roman studies in antiquity, is also a contested matter. This may pose a problem for addressing the key issues in this chapter, as some scholars discourage the application of the theme of colonisation in antiquity to the modern dynamics of what constitutes colonisation (in Sommer 2011: 185). Greco asserts that there is no Greek ‘colonisation’ in an etymological sense (2011: 233). Sommer explains that although the word *colonia* comes from Latin, it still carries a different nuance from the modern application of the term ‘colonisation’ (2011: 185). To talk of colonisation in relation to the Classical period, according to Osborne (in Sommer 2011: 184), is inappropriate, but for the purposes of this chapter

we shall assume that British officials viewed the British subjugation of India and parts of Africa and the West Indies through the lens of their perception of the subjugation by the Romans of Britain and parts of northern Africa.

These varied positions may be addressed by referring to a revisionist account by Moses Finley of the terms ‘colony’, ‘colonisation’ and ‘colonialism’ (1976: 167). Finley implies that the study of colonisation can be applied across the spectrum of different socio-historical contexts from the ancient world up to the present (Finley in Sommer 2011: 189). Hence, without complicating the terms in question, De Angelis (2010: 20) explains that ‘using the language that speaks of colonialism, colonies and colonisation readily brings to mind a mental picture that we have ... conveying the subject in all its dimensions.’

This chapter adopts the working framework of colonisation proposed by Osterhammel, that ‘it is the rule or process of ruling one collectivity by another, with the life of the ruled being determined ... by a minority of colonial masters, which is culturally “foreign”’ (Osterhammel 1997: 21, quoted in Sommer 2011: 189). In particular, we shall consider the admittedly conjectural ‘mental picture’ as applied by British officials to the area that had been subjugated by Cecil John Rhodes. They apparently applied their sometimes fragmentary knowledge of ancient Roman administration to their own contemporary administrations within the ‘colonies’ Britain had acquired, however they understood this somewhat loaded term. It is important to remember that British administrators would have developed a particular mindset as a result of their compulsory classical education. Their perceptions and perhaps sometimes inadequate memories of Roman systems of government, as they had read of these in Caesar, Sallust, Tacitus and even Cicero, would have seemed a useful paradigm to follow.

### **Colonial administration of Britain in classical antiquity: The classical colonial experience of Britain**

These officials would have recalled that Britons were colonised over 1 700 years earlier by the Romans before they themselves became colonisers. Without implying that the way Britons were treated by the ancient Romans informed their own methods, it is safe to conjecture that their perceptions of the nature of empire and expansion might in some way have set the standard which the British would later imitate in their own project of empire, and particularly to Africans. For this reason, we devote some

attention to the administration of Britain during the Roman period. The first, not very successful, attempts to conquer Britain were undertaken by Julius Caesar in 55 and 54 BCE, more successfully followed by the emperor Claudius some 90 years later, in 43 CE. By the fourth century CE Roman rule had been well established and Roman customs and norms very well assimilated by many ancient Britons.

### *The imaging of Britons*

At the time of the colonial encroachment by the initial Roman conquerors of Britain, the island was undeveloped in comparison with the rest of the Roman Empire, so that Romans could describe the inhabitants of Britain as savages and barbarians. The authorship of *De Bello Gallico* is ascribed to Julius Caesar, although it has been postulated that the 'informative' material in the Gallic War commentaries, that is, the digressions on geography, natural history and custom, may not all be of Caesar's composition, and that much of it was not verified first-hand by Caesar.

The accounts of Caesar's campaigns in Gaul and Britain in the *De Bello Gallico* contain material descriptive of the customs of non-Roman peoples (*BGall.* 5.14, 6.13ff), as does Cornelius Tacitus in *Annales* 14.29–39, about the Romans' second attempt at conquest of Britain under Claudius. Descriptions of Gaulish customs include references to the Druids and to human sacrifice (*BGall.* 6.13, 16) while those of the Britons include their outlandish appearance and their community of wives (*BGall.* 5.14: 136). According to a passage in *De Bello Gallico* (*BGall.* 5.14; tr. Edwards 1930: 253):

All the Britons, indeed, dye themselves with woad, which occasions a bluish color, and thereby have a more terrible appearance in fight. They wear their hair long, and have every part of their body shaved except their head and upper lip.

The effect of these descriptions of Gauls and Britons is to set them apart from Romans as exotic or *other*, rather than treating them as 'normal' or 'ordinary' human beings. One can imagine British schoolboys fed on a diet of Caesar being both amused and embarrassed by the thought that their ancestors had been so 'primitive'. This would have been further buttressed by later reading for the classics degree requisite for entry into the British foreign service.

### *Treatment of the governed*

Although the success of Julius Caesar's British expeditions is subject to debate, it must be stressed that he and his successors for the next three centuries or so unquestioningly applied political structures as already developed by the Romans in relation to other subjugated peoples, whether 'civilised' Greeks or 'barbaric' easterners. This system was based on 'client-relationship' terms, as well as on the imposition of tribute taxes (Braman 2011: 142). This type of Roman political administration incorporated the indigenous Britons. This later led to what was known as 'client-state' or 'client-kingdom' relationships between Romans and various British tribal kingdoms, such as the Catuvellauni, Iceni, Atrebates and Cantiaci (Braman 2011: 142).

Each city was governed by a local elite, in *civitates* (Haigh 1985: 392). This allowed Roman rule in Britain to be based on a small administrative unit, as they relied on delegation, or ruling indirectly through local British agents. For instance, the ruler Mandubracius was enthroned by Caesar among the Trinovantes of the Roman frontiers of Britain (Braman 2011: 116).

One could say that the Roman system of political administration in ancient Britain was used as the standard for the nature of British colonial politics in Southern Rhodesia. This is manifest in other areas too. For example, the institution of Roman-Dutch law as the *locus standi* of jurisprudence in Southern Rhodesia calls to mind the Roman law itself, to which ancient Britons had also been subjected (Mlambo 2022: 38). Yet Roman-Dutch law was applied here, but not necessarily elsewhere, because Britain had taken this legal system over from the Dutch in the South African Cape Province when they annexed it in 1805 – at the time essentially to keep Napoleon out of southern Africa, and to safeguard for Britain the sea route for trade to and from the more lucrative East.

## **The colonial government in Southern Rhodesia**

### *The nature of Company and settler government colonial policy*

It appears that initially British colonialists in Southern Rhodesia administered their colonies by mirroring the classical Roman political administrative strategy as they understood it. In this they were following a system encouraged by Cecil John Rhodes. Apparently, Rhodes had a more



nuanced approach to colonial rule than is often postulated. His wordy last will and testament formulated his ideas on the role of Britain in the colonies and may be summarised as follows: It behoves the ‘English race’ as the ‘pinnacle of Creation’, to unite in a worldwide federation in order wisely to rule the ‘darker races’ of Africa and Asia under precepts similar to those of the Constitution of the United States of America, but with local home rule. Whether under an American president or British king is immaterial.<sup>2</sup> This means that Rhodes wanted to employ the Roman system of co-opting the indigenous elite as collaborators in ruling the local inhabitants.

Initially the settler government of the BSAC was not interested in administering the affairs of the Africans living in Southern Rhodesia. The Mashona were in a sense seen as the subjects of the local tribal chief, Lobengula, although their Charter specified that the Company was to preserve peace and order, administer justice, put an end to slavery and prohibit the selling of liquor to Africans (Steele 1972: 2). There was no clearly stated, formal, uniform policy regarding relations with the ‘natives’, and contact as such was basically of an informal nature. It is in this context that Diana Jeater categorises Southern Rhodesia as an ‘oddity’ in the history of British-ruled Africa (2005: 2). However, Shona rebellions of 1896–1897 led to a reorganisation and regularisation of the administration, embedded in the Order Council of 1898. This saw the Native Affairs Department (NAD) instituted, as well as its Native Commissioners (NC). The NCs were placed in the colonial districts and made to correspond with the chiefs in Mashonaland or principal *indunas* (‘headmen’) in Matabeleland. This type of administration was a ‘divide and conquer’ makeshift policy which naturally evolved further under the auspices of indirect rule.

*Colonial administration of Southern Rhodesia  
in the name of the Pax Britannica*

The nature and function in colonial politics of colonists’ recourse to their conception of the ‘benign rule’ of ancient Rome help us to understand justifications and anxieties regarding British imperialism (Vasunia 2013, cited in Mlambo 2022: 201, n15). The thinking that underpinned the colonists’ ‘native policy’ was determined by their perceptions of African culture, aspirations and potential, and their own aspirations for the indigenous populations (Jeater 2005). Thus, comparing Rome and Britain

formed a ready template for the colonists of Southern Rhodesia. They used this template to look at Africans, sometimes deploying the template in contradictory or unstable ways. Jeater (2005: 6) indicates that the 'ancient times' to which colonists compared African conditions could be vague; she quotes debates in the Legislative Assembly by one source (a Mr Hadfield in 1927) who referred to 18<sup>th</sup>-century England, and another (a Captain Green in 1929) who referred to Britain at the time of the Roman landing. Nevertheless, what was prevalent, as we show in this chapter, was the manner in which they drew on ideas from their European background in general and their classical education in particular, involving ancient Greece and Rome. British colonial administrative operations were militant and informed by a religious complex in which the colonists, just as in their view of classical Roman colonisers, were figures sent out to the ailing and barbaric world, to convert it to 'civil' politics.

Not only was the nature of the *Pax Britannica* violent in outlook, but it was divisive in administration. As noted by Makambe (1982: 6), 'promoting African factionalism was certainly a bizarre method of achieving *Pax Britannica* in early Southern Rhodesia.' The significance of the *Pax Britannica* as a colonial administrative policy is that it flourished on a 'divide and rule' basis (Makambe 1982: 6). This is illustrated by the way Zimbabwe from the days of the BSAC and the creation of the Colony of Southern Rhodesia was early on divided into two administrative provinces, Matabeleland (southwestern Zimbabwe, a mineral-rich area usurped in 1893 after the defeat of Lobengula) and Mashonaland (northern Zimbabwe, occupied as early as 1890), in order to consolidate white colonial domination.

In sum, British officials initially implemented the Roman imperial system of indirect rule. It can be said that, largely following the paradigm later strongly advocated in Rhodes' will, indirect rule in the British Empire mimicked the client-kingdom or *civitas* relationship that the ancient Britons (and other subjugated peoples) were accustomed to under their Roman overlords in antiquity. To some extent this was a practical arrangement due to the exigencies involved in taking care of imperial subjects with minimal unhelpful violence, to which end co-optation of indigenous rulers might appear a useful strategy. Of course, Roman colonial rule may be seen as pioneering while British colonisers were merely following a pattern which they perceived to have worked for their ancient predecessors.

In spite of the fact that Rhodes and members of the NAD were by no

means profound classical scholars, they relied on the classical structures of knowledge, power and desire that supported Rhodes' imperial dream. Later colonists drew their knowledge about the local Africans from the Native Affairs Department Annual (NADA), the publication of information gathered about Africans by NCs since the 1890s. The NADA's first publication appeared in 1923, after Southern Rhodesia had been formally declared a British colony, as an attempt to record the research that had been collected about Africans. Vasunia stresses the interconnectedness between classics and competing spheres of activity even outside the university, an indication of how discourses of antiquity intersected with the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century worlds of politics and empire, or with concepts of race and nationhood (Vasunia 2013: 120). Hence the reciprocal embeddedness of classics in national politics elsewhere in the British Empire was also taken for granted in Southern Rhodesia.

Debates of the later (after 1923) Legislative Assembly of Southern Rhodesia featured comparison of Southern Rhodesia with the pre-Roman peoples of Britain (the 'Mr Hadfield', 1927, also cited above, in Jeater 2005: 6). In the debates the African native was considered 'a child' as far as his present state of civilisation was concerned (a 'Mr Thompson', 1927, cited in Jeater 2005: 2).<sup>3</sup> This comparison was appropriated to allow for the possibility that Africans could eventually develop to modernity in similar ways that ancient Britons had eagerly accepted Roman civilisation (Jeater 2005, cited in Mlambo 2022: 201, n15).

As the title of this section suggests, Southern Rhodesian Africans were the colonial clientele of the '*Pax Britannica*', which was itself inspired by the *Pax Romana*. Cecil John Rhodes largely viewed the Southern Rhodesians using the lens of Julius Caesar's succinct summary, '*Veni, vidi, vici*', of his attempts at conquest of Gaul and ancient Britain (Jeater 2005: 8, cited in Mlambo 2022: 36). Jeater implies that this provided a political framework within which the British colonisers situated their claims to be 'civilised', and reinforced a worldview involving Southern Rhodesian Africans as potentially 'civilisable', in which the *Pax Britannica* was seen as the direct descendant of the *Pax Romana* (Jeater 2005: 8, cited in Mlambo 2022: 36) and the BSAC was seen as its representative.

The Oxford don, author and art critic, John Ruskin (1819–1900), is said to have inspired the students of Rhodes' time with the idea of Englishmen as the pinnacle of creation with the holy task of 'civilising' the potentially

‘noble savage’ and spreading their ‘Englishness’ across the world (Claassen 2009: 71). Hilton (2017: 90) mentions that Rhodes was said to have ‘imbibed a heady, mystical brew justifying ... the fervour of imperialism’ (2017: 90). He compares Rhodes with several Roman emperors: he was involved in military action and diplomacy like Julius Caesar, displayed inscrutability like Augustus, resembled Titus in physical appearance, and adopted a stoical and consolatory view of life influenced by the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius (Hilton 2017: 94–95). Nevertheless, Hilton (2017: 90) also states that the Englishmen William Winwood Reade and Rhodes did not necessarily always have a positive view of Roman imperialism; they attributed importance to British science and technological progress, and these stood in contrast to Reade’s description of ‘the condition of the Roman empire in the pagan days – a cold-hearted infidelity above, a sordid superstition below’ (Reade 1934: 188). Hilton emphasises that Rhodes was familiar with Rome’s failings, as portrayed in Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (2018: 94–95). The mirroring of ancient Rome in British imperialism was therefore perhaps not a matter of uncritical imitation (Mlambo 2022: 39). We can argue for a general appropriation of British imperialism, especially by Rhodes, and admiration of ancient Roman achievements, but this type of admiration does not rule out an awareness of defects in the Roman Empire and appreciation of the improvements brought by the modernity of his time (Mlambo 2022: 39).

Rhodes’ view of the British Empire would have been coloured by his belief in the superiority of the English race, reflected in his words: ‘You are an Englishman, and have subsequently drawn the greatest prize in the lottery of life’ (Greene 2020, cited in Mlambo 2022: 39). The association of Rhodes with racism is well known, and some view him as having paved the way for apartheid in South Africa by working to alter laws on voting and land ownership (Greene 2020, cited in Mlambo 2022: 39). Although he is reported to have said, ‘I could never accept the position that we should disqualify a human being on account of his colour,’ nevertheless it might be argued that in practice his administration, by raising the financial qualifications requisite for voting, effectively restricted the rights of black Africans (Parkinson 2015).

Subsequent to the ending of administration by the BSAC, when Charles Coghlan (1863–1927) became the first premier of the newly established ‘self-governing’ Colony of Southern Rhodesia in 1923, he declared: ‘It should suffice to teach the Native to strive for civilisation and nothing

else' (*Proclamation* 1925, Section 2).<sup>4</sup> This kind of imaging of the Africans resembles the manner in which the British themselves were apparently perceived by their Roman imperial masters in antiquity.

The adoption of classical parallels or metaphors by the British colonialists was instrumental not only in their explanation of African societal phenomena, but as a means of justifying their conduct and administration (Jeater 2005: 1). Hence, it must be stressed that perceived classical parallels offered a pattern for a mutually beneficial dialogical process, enabling meaningful interaction between the white colonialists and African society. Yet while the Romans and the British in most parts of their empire practised indirect rule, Southern Rhodesia was still an oddity in the history of British colonialism in Africa, as it had no clearly worked-out system of indirect rule but its native policy was not directed from London (Jeater 2005: 1). In spite of Rhodes' hopes for the contrary, by the 1920s direct rule enabled NCs to collect taxes, to administer civil justice and control labour, hence creating the need to guard closely against potential unrest. Hence in Southern Rhodesia, then, we have some deviation from the Roman system of indirect rule as initially applied by the first administrators, until the defeat of Lobengula.

### *Classical education, Latin and the politics of Southern Rhodesia*

It should be noted that the British rule of Southern Rhodesia is not the only reflection of ancient imperial conditions in history. After Rome fell, the 'Holy Roman Empire' exerted its power in Europe and prevailed for some time. The British Empire, for its own part, was not confined to Africa but also extended to India, and Vasunia (2013: 121) refers to comparisons between the Roman and the British Empire made by writers in India and Britain, and, moreover, by Britons and Indians. Even though the colonialisms and imperialisms of history are not carbon copies of each other (cf. Lenin in Vasunia 2013: 119), nevertheless the general recurrence of imperial domination is something observable through history, and resemblances between Rome and later imperialisms have been assumed to exist, whether consciously in virtue of the use of titles like 'Holy Roman Empire', or unconsciously by the use of the term 'empire' to describe both Rome and Britain.

It is clear that the command of classical languages had a political significance in the colonial administration of Southern Rhodesia. For

instance, language expertise in its officials (by definition, ‘whites’) was valued by the BSAC administration, being ‘a useful tool to exercise power’ (Jeater 2001: 450).

In the case of Southern Rhodesia, Rhodes’ engagement with antiquity had many facets (Parker 2012: 15). This included the commissioning of a series of translations from Greek and Latin to English (Parker 2012: 15), which Parker (2012: 15) deems ironic given that his command of Greek and Latin was barely adequate for the attainment of an Oxford degree. Colonial administration in Southern Rhodesia was also coloured by Latin as the medium of legal discourse (Hilton 2017: 1). This saw the role of classics flourish in an ameliorative way for the Africans (Parker 2012: 14). It may be argued that valid decolonisation of the mind is more about minimising the oppressive use of culture and challenging the monopoly of useful cultural material by an oppressing race, rather than alienating oneself from this useful culture (cf. McClymont 2018: 240–242). As far as this ameliorative function is concerned, various members of the metropolitan-trained colonial elite took up Latin and it became a source of social mobility. Both Parker (2012: 26) and Lambert (2011) attest to the notion that the classics, as part of the educational curriculum in southern African institutions such as the University of Fort Hare, enabled the rise to high echelons of power of a generation of southern African political leaders, such as Nelson Mandela<sup>5</sup> and Oliver Tambo. Notably, in Southern Rhodesia, Robert Mugabe was part of the generation influenced by the classics owing to his study of Latin, which was a part of the curriculum of legal studies at Fort Hare University (Parker 2012: 26).

The fact that these figures arose as African leaders under the auspices of British or Afrikaner colonial educational schemes draws attention to another facet of Graeco-Roman politics. David Braund (1996: 14) states that not only conquest but also ‘ideas of Greek philosophers on kingship’ relevant to administration of the provincial regime of a Roman governor mattered in Roman thought and politics. Cicero, in Roman politics, embraces the Greek ideal of the philosopher-king envisaged by Plato in his *Republic* (*Rep.* 5.473, 6.484, etc., Braund 1996: 14). It may be argued that the rise to political power of the African educated elite in Southern Rhodesia was influenced by classical parallels under the mentorship of their British colonial masters, who were well versed in Graeco-Roman political administrative thought.

*Classical philology, chiShona and British colonial attitudes  
in Southern Rhodesia*

Classical philology had some role in the treatment of colonised peoples in Southern Rhodesia. This is readily observable when one considers how, under white rule, Romanised orthography was used for the chiShona language. One of the major scholars who was instrumental in this cause was CM Doke (1893–1980). During the 1920s Doke accepted an invitation from the government of Southern Rhodesia for the formation of a common medium of communication or overarching language based on the Shona dialects (Fortune 1994: 103). The main motive for this invitation was his experience in classical philology, which he had even demonstrated on his previous research among the Lumba people in Northern Rhodesia. He drafted a set of so-called ‘Seven Recommendations’, in the second of which he advocated the unifying of the Shona dialects into ‘one unified literary language’ (Doke, in Fortune 1994: 110). For this chapter, Recommendation 7 is of particular significance, as it relates to a classical paradigm. Recommendation 7 called for the adoption of the African Alphabet of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (present-day IAI), founded in London by its first chairman, Frederick Lugard, in 1926 (Fortune 1994: 110). In its memorandum, entitled *Practical Orthography of African Languages*, the IAI recommended that African languages should be written on a Romanic basis (IAI 1927: 3–4). This saw the orthography of chiShona established in such a way that it used the Roman alphabet, and this remains the case to date (Jeater 2001: 450).

It should be noted, however, that the form of Romanised Shona imposed could be subject to controversy. Cripps (cited in Fortune 1994: 118) captured a complaint by the Shona people regarding this issue: ‘Are our tribes going to be dispossessed of their own speech as well as of their land?’ The Reverend Mr MJ Rusike, a prominent member of the Methodist Church of the time and critic of the new orthography, lamented the use of a new form of Roman-Shona orthography, saying, ‘*Barungu bari kuita rurimi rutswa rwa banotimanikidza kuti titauré*’ (‘The Europeans are making up a new language which they will force us to speak’) (Cripps, cited in Fortune 1994: 118). Rusike was objecting not to Roman-like orthography per se, but to a revised way of writing Shona as a ‘standardised spelling’ proposed at the time.

Rusike’s remark was perhaps counter-productive, but it demonstrates the

struggle over cultural resources that characterised the interactions between the colonisers and the indigenous people. Referring to developments in West Africa, Barbara Goff notes that within such a relationship, the dynamics of education appeared compromised, as the Latin language was represented as a counter in a conflict rather than as a neutral, or even positive, piece of educational equipment (Goff 2013: 1).

Yet the establishment of the orthography of the Shona language, using the basis of the Roman alphabet, demonstrates the usefulness also of classical motifs in looking at the politics of Southern Rhodesia. The alphabet not only was an imposition by the coloniser; it was the basis of the literary civilisation attained in Southern Rhodesia, but also of its attendant negative effects, such as those articulated by Goff (2013). Nevertheless, not every aspect of the 'white man's' educational system was seen as 'bad'. The colonisers built schools and hospitals in Southern Rhodesia which would help Africans to get better careers in the existing colonial world. Mission without education would not have been the best choice. The missionary tradition promoted education through reading, writing, mathematics, and basic science. This developed chiShona to be a language that could be read and written. The only writing system known by the missionaries was the Roman script, hence there was no other choice.

The Roman script was a medium for graphing local languages, alphabetising the population and making them literate in their mother tongues (Pasch 2008: 65). In this sense the aim of the colonial administrators was to export their Western-orientated culture to make 'modern' people of the local population and involve them in a Western-led economy (Pasch 2008: 65). The writing systems developed in Africa, then, were the result of joint cooperation between missionaries and colonial administrators and meant to unify different African dialects in their respective communities (Pasch 2008: 65).

*Classical jurisprudence and colonial administration  
in Southern Rhodesia*

As early as 10 June 1891, the British High Commissioner declared that Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) was to be governed by the laws instituted in the Cape Colony. Lenel (2002: 5) explains that in Southern Rhodesia the law applicable was both Roman-Dutch and English law.



Judicial administration was subject to Roman-Dutch law, especially in cases involving a European, and the administration of Africans by Africans was gradually suppressed, as they were thought of as unsuited to understand such a 'civil' process (Jeater 2001: 457). Thus, chiefs and headmen were denied any jurisdiction in both criminal and civil cases; yet, at the same time, they could be tried under Roman-Dutch law (Steele 1972: 77). Steele considers, in fact, that the traditional leaders' control over the Africans was destroyed by European dominance (Steele 1972: 78). This is a topic that requires further research, and will not be treated in any depth here.

*Classical imagery and coloniser attitudes towards indigenous communities*

Just as the Britons and Gauls were made to seem artificially exotic by Caesar through description of their customs, so in colonial times studies of African customs effectively presented the Africans as exotic and foreign. This was often expressed by uses of imagery culled from ethnographers' own educational background, which in the early 1920s was still largely classical. Classical imagery, of the kind to be found in classical literature, gained currency in terms of political and administrative significance. Kaarsholm (1997: 251) cites an authoritative text of this period by Charles Bullock, an amateur ethnologist and official in the NAD who published a treatise, *The Mashona (the Indigenous Natives of Southern Rhodesia)* (1928). Bullock alluded to the classical myth of the Golden Age by portraying the 'Golden Age' of indigenous Southern Rhodesians as typical of hunter-gathering societies when 'men found the kindly fruits of the Earth sufficient for all' (Bullock, cited in Jeater 2005: 10). The idea of the Golden Age, alluded to in this phrase, while seemingly a positive concept, had connotations of primitiveness in classical mythology. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* represents the Golden Age as having no law courts, no ships, no weapons, no hoeing nor ploughshares. People lived on fruit, and although there was wheat, the earth was not tilled (Innes 1955: 31–32). This state of primitivity is actually inferior to that of traditional Shona culture, which is agrarian, with tilling and sowing a prominent part of daily life. With such a glaring and grave miscalculation made by Bullock, this classical mythological parallel was exaggerated as a lens through which to view and imagine southern African people.

It may be further noted that Bullock's later *The Mashona and the Matabele* (1950) did not treat the Shona and Ndebele (Matabele) people

as separate ethnic entities, simply because he lacked first-hand knowledge of the Matabele, and focused on the Shona people who constituted the majority of the population that he knew.

Classical pastoral imagery also had its influence. Jeater declares that 'having placed the Africans in the Classical Age, writers with a knowledge of Classical literature could paint them not only as the barbarians at the gate, but also as the nymphs and shepherds of the classical *pastorale*' (2005: 9, cited in Mlambo 2022: 36). With this pastoral model, the British colonial officials could justify the perpetuation of direct rule (Jeater 2005: 9). They did this by validating the claim that Africans were so backward or primitive that they were incapable of being political administrative custodians of themselves; thus, to put it in Thomas Hobbes' terms, they were still living in the 'state of nature' in which human life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' (Hobbes, in Tuck 1991: 184).

In 1922 the work of the classicist and anthropologist JG Frazer (1922), the famous *Golden Bough*, was available in an abridged edition, and this contained references to customs in Africa that would have seemed strange to Westerners. In southern Africa, Frazer (1922: 41, 283, 310–313, 325) referred to the use of rats' hair as a charm, the enforced seclusion of one who has slain a foe in battle, the disposal of hair and nails so as to avoid witchcraft, the preservation of vermin which fall off people's heads, taboos concerning spitting and taboos on mentioning personal names. While Frazer was probably focusing on material relevant to his study, the inadvertent effect of such references might have been to make Africans seem artificially strange, since such references were not accompanied by any material that showed in what ways Africans and Britons were similar. Although Frazer did not refer to Southern Rhodesia specifically, it may be plausibly suspected that his treatment of African customs as 'foreign' or 'strange' may have reflected or even influenced how Europeans generally perceived native customs in Africa in the 1920s.

Frazer and Julius Caesar have in common the problem of not having relied exclusively on first-hand information. We have noted how Caesar's digressions on geography, natural history and customs may not all have been from personal observation; and as for Frazer, he himself had never personally met any indigenous Africans (Sharpe 1986: 89). Sharpe (1986: 89) notes that Frazer has been criticised as an 'armchair anthropologist' and accused of 'attempting to understand the primitive mind from the

safety and comfort of a Cambridge study'. He argues, however, that Frazer did the best he could, given the conditions of his time.

In comparing Frazer with Julius Caesar, moreover, we may note that Frazer's approach to African culture was influenced by aspects of modern Western science, which did not exist in the same sense in antiquity.<sup>6</sup> The distorted view of indigenes in Caesar and Frazer, while comparable, may in Frazer's case have been influenced by forms of thought that did not exist in antiquity.

### **Further similarities to and some differences from ancient Roman colonising practices**

Along with the similarities between ancient Roman and British imperial colonialism there are of course differences that need to be acknowledged. One of these is that, in spite of the influence of the classical heritage on Africa implemented by British colonisers, the Latin language was not the mother tongue of the British colonial administrators, as it was for the Romans; it was acquired through education. English was its colonial equivalent as a means of communication by the colonisers with the colonised.

Another important difference is that Christianity was introduced along with colonial rule and that there were many attempts by both colonisers and missionaries to persuade the locals to abandon their traditional beliefs and practices. The Roman custom was to display great religious tolerance, although 'barbaric' practices such as human sacrifice were suppressed where known. Roman deities were imported into Britain, temples erected and, from the era of Claudius onward, when a departed emperor had been deified, it became customary to erect a temple to the new *deus*. Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.32) records at least one British rebellion (by the queen of the Iceni, Boudicca) triggered by the erection of a temple to *Divus Claudius*, under Nero. By contrast, the colonisation of Africa was associated with Christian missionaries and mostly was accepted peacefully. However, missionaries largely accepted the authority of the colonial government, in some cases influencing policy, and they were perceived by certain Africans as 'apologists – or even agents – of political and cultural imperialism' (Wiedner 1962: 182).

We may also note that in the 1920s there was a familiarity with and practice of science and technology of a kind that had not developed in Roman times. It may be remembered, however, that the Romans who colonised Britain

brought in their share of ‘civilised’ amenities, for example establishing a basilica and forum in London (Brigham 1990: 53; see also illustration in Airne n.d.: 57) and an extensive bathing complex at the city now called Bath. So, the bringing in of an advanced standard of living is something Roman and British colonists had in common, even if the type of advancement Britons brought into Africa exceeds what the Romans were able to bring into Britain. One might, however, raise questions about whether the Africans had fair access to these amenities, on a par with the whites.

Another possible difference lies in the area of racial prejudice. It has been observed how both ancient Britons and Africans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were considered ‘strange’ and barbarian. This indicates prejudice of a kind by colonists against the natives of an occupied territory. But whether this prejudice, in the case of the Romans, was specifically racial seems unlikely, in the light of evidence that Romans did not display an inherent racial prejudice against North African blacks as a separate, ‘inferior’ race in the modern sense, nor did they apparently view the ancient Britons as racially inferior, but merely as displaying different cultural practices. This was amply proven by Snowden in his two publications (1970 and 1983). Thompson (1989: 157) agrees that, although there were sometimes negative attitudes to black Africans among the Romans, these had nothing to do with the modern phenomenon of racial differentiation.

Other sources also deny that the ancient Romans displayed the kind of racial prejudice against Africans that was displayed by modern British colonialists. Haley (2009: 49) deems it ‘too simplistic’ to assume the Romans had no skin-colour prejudice. Yet, while claiming that it is ‘plausible’ (but not knowable for sure) that skin colour contributed to Roman construction of difference, Haley argues that skin colour is just one of many factors in such construction, and warns against reading our construction of race into ancient cultures (Haley 2009: 30). Gruen (2011: 197) observes that the ancients were certainly aware of skin colour; yet, for him, “‘race’ may be an altogether misleading and erroneous category’. He adds, ‘There is little to suggest that the ancients ascribed moral, intellectual or cultural deficiencies to persons on the basis of their colour’ (Gruen 2011: 197–198). Those ancient Britons (or Africans, as was the case of Cornelius Fronto, the beloved teacher of the emperor Marcus Aurelius) who had become romanised, were accepted freely as ‘fully Roman’. This is certainly a point of difference from the attitudes of British colonists in southern Africa.

This does not mean that there was no racial stereotyping in antiquity (Isaac 2004: 503ff). It should be realised that the famous philosopher Aristotle himself *did* view certain northern Europeans as racially inferior to the Greeks; for him, Europeans dwelling in the colder regions were courageous, but lacking in skill and brain power (Sinclair 1962: 269). It can be argued that ancient Britons may have been considered as a race living in colder regions, but whether the Romans applied Aristotle's racial criteria to Britons is unclear.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing we may infer that the following phenomena of colonial political administration in Southern Rhodesia seem to have been based on colonisers' awareness of classical precedents. First, the initial treatment of African communities as *civitates*, in the case where indirect rule was utilised by the colonialists. Second, the use of the Roman alphabet for the Shona dialect. Third, the use of classically based Roman-Dutch law. Fourth, the interpretation of Africans as primitives like those of the classical Golden Age, an image tailor-made to perpetuate direct rule; and the recording of African customs in such a way as to make Africans appear exotic and strange. Fifth, the bringing in of civilised amenities to which the colonists had been accustomed within their own culture. Perhaps the most salient difference is, as was noted above, that use of these amenities was not always, or even usually, allowed to the locals.

The successive settler governments' success in Southern Rhodesia should be judged, among other factors, in terms of government officials' own basic knowledge and understanding of the Africans (Steele 1972: 11). The question remains: did the British colonialists come to know and understand Zimbabweans? Or did they simply seek to eradicate the Africans' heritage of their ancient past, and replace it with the romances of the classics, if not with the *Pax Romana* itself? Perhaps the latter is plausible, in the light of Alois S Mlambo's assertion (1998: 123): 'following the occupation of Zimbabwe by the British in 1890, the British South Africa Company government, and subsequently the various government administrations, cherished the dream of developing Rhodesia as a white

man's country.' Hence, the importance of classical symbols and metaphors as a colonial inheritance in Southern Rhodesia cannot be overemphasised, as to this day Zimbabweans use them to construct their lived realities.

We trust that this chapter has sufficiently shown that the classical heritage has not had a uniformly beneficial influence on Africa, especially in the way Africans were viewed by certain colonisers relying on classical literary precedents. The effect of classics in Africa certainly should not now be glamourised, as though it had nothing but good to offer Africa. On the other hand, neither should we view classics as a waste of time to study. Comparing the British and that of the Romans as colonisers can illuminate the similarities and differences between our situation and that of the Romans, and help us appreciate how issues of civilisation and the confrontation between different races arise again and again in history. There is a certain sweet irony in reflecting, as we suggested above, that although Romans may not have been prejudiced against Africans on the basis of skin colour, in the modern sense, they were apparently initially racially prejudiced against the 'primitive and barbaric' Britons themselves. These very Britons (albeit with a subsequent admix of many other strains) were the ancestors of the Britons who would in later ages colonise Africa, using the varied tools which their own classical education had bequeathed them.

## Notes

- 1 We explore the possible influence of 19<sup>th</sup>-century British officials' apparently rather simplistic view of the development of the Roman imperial political culture from 55 BCE to ca500 CE and their application of this view within their administration of their African colonies (see Webster 2003: 13).
- 2 This was what he had in mind when instituting the 'Rhodes Scholarship' system, which is still supported by the vast fortune he made from mining activities in southern Africa (Claassen 2009: 76).
- 3 This section was developed from ideas discussed in detail in Mlambo (2022).
- 4 'Self-governing' in this context meant government by white settlers.
- 5 Nelson Mandela did not complete his legal degree at Fort Hare, but later graduated from the University of South Africa [Editors].
- 6 As Lloyd (1970: xiii) observes, there is no one term corresponding in ancient Greek exactly to our 'science', although the terms *philosophia* (philosophy), *episteme* (knowledge), *theoria* (contemplation) and *peri physeos historia* (inquiry concerning nature) can in certain contexts be translated as 'science' in English.

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## Conversation with Christiaan Bronkhorst

Grant Parker (GP): Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and your background?

Christiaan Bronkhorst (CB): I'm 26. I grew up mostly in Bloemfontein. I have an Afrikaans mother and I went to an Anglican boys' school. I did Latin at school and I think I was one of the few in the country at the time who still did Latin for matric. I chose it partly because I liked *Asterix & Obelix* as a young boy and partly because I was interested in its historical aspects. And so I did Latin as a subject. After matric I went on to study at UCT [University of Cape Town] where I did a BA majoring both in Latin and in Afrikaans and Netherlandic Studies. My honours degree is technically in Latin language and literature but along the way I studied both Latin and Greek.

GP: Could you say a little bit more about what brought you to classics specifically when you had the opportunity to choose?

CB: I could study whatever I wanted to because I was lucky enough that my marks were quite good. I was unsure about what I actually wanted to do for the rest of my life. I think it's a massive ask of an 18 year old to decide what they want to do and then invest a couple of hundred thousand rand and a couple of years of their life in fulfilling that decision. That was part of it. Also, I hadn't really found something that particularly attracted me as much as Ancient Studies did, because it's such a varied field: you can pursue anything from politics and philosophy to art or poetry, even video game analysis. There's always something new and interesting about it: that's

one of the other great attractions. So I did my BA, as one does in the old British system, enjoyed the subject and grew quite passionate about it and decided at the time that I wanted to pursue it further.

GP: What kinds of topics and methods did you feel drawn to and why?

CB: I'd say two things. One would be the kind of puzzle of working out how something may have happened, or why it may have happened, when it may have happened, a kind of detailed historical thinking and research. The other would be literature, which I think is probably a greater passion than history. I'm particularly interested in the literature of outsiders – all the strange, marginal figures that do come through in the ancient record – and, associated with that, the sort of cultural dialogue between both Greece and Rome, Roman and other non-Roman societies, the past and the present.

GP: Could we move to your student experience and particularly the fact that you were a student at UCT at the time of Rhodes Must Fall, Shackville and Fees Must Fall protests? Could you share any thoughts about these?

CB: Like I said, I grew up in an Afrikaans family. People often say I don't sound Afrikaans, but that's probably the English boys' school talking. Something that I distinctly remember about first walking onto campus was walking past the statue of He Who Must Not Be Named [Cecil John Rhodes] and thinking to myself, 'Why is there a statue of this man and why does Jameson Hall have that name?' The building has now been renamed, of course. I remember thinking these things because I was acutely aware of the influence of English imperialism on white Afrikaans-speaking people during the Anglo-Boer War.

It's one of those interesting things. I mean, a person at my mother's church recently confessed to her that he'd just forgiven the English for the Anglo-Boer War and it's 110 years later. You and I would perhaps find that a bit strange or maybe a bit sad. But if a Jewish person were to say something similar to you about the Nazis, would you think the same way? And if a Jewish person said such a thing about the sacking of the Temple – that was thousands of years ago but still has a profound cultural impact – would you think the same way? There's not really a right answer. I remember my grandmother told me stories of her grandparents who'd been through the

camps [during the Anglo-Boer War]. And again, I'll make it clear that the war did not just affect white Afrikaans-speaking people it had a massive impact on black African people as well. I find the whole nationalism thing a bit strange but it's important to some people. I remember that my grandmother was quite passionate about it and I thought it's actually kind of odd that her grandson is going to a university which received a lot of money and land given by people who were so directly in conflict with her grandparents, all of this still within living memory.

GP: With the lapse of more than five years since Rhodes Must Fall, if you look back, how does it seem to you now, and how does it compare with your perception in the heat of the moment?

CB: I think I have to confess in some way that I was captured by the institution so in some senses I was quite on board with the cultural academic baggage – the mindset of 'this is how we do things' and it took me a while to realise that actually it wasn't for me. There were a lot of emotions. I was quite upset by the way the movement had handled itself. Up till a certain point I thought, perhaps naively, you should just deal with ideological disputes by debate and the best argument would win. Unfortunately, that's not how things work in universities or in life, for that matter. I was also upset because there was an element of disrespect towards other students. I understand that the movement expressed legitimate grievances. Did that give protesters the right to hold the education of other students to ransom? How can you talk about dismantling power structures when you're willing to play that kind of power game yourself? That is something that I find difficult to come to terms with.

I also have another experience to share. In 2016, when the movement had reached its peak, I was tutoring a first-year class in Roman history, we had gotten back to the class after a disruption and I remember walking into the lecture hall and it was covered in used condoms – hanging over the board and on the lecture podium and over the tables and I was standing there not knowing what to do. I had a group of first years who were mostly women and I was thinking, 'This is such an interesting, terrible experience.' On one hand, it perhaps was not representative of all Fees Must Fall activists; on the other hand, I know that there was a lot of damage to property. But I was also thinking about how my female students would

have felt violated and I believe some did feel that. I certainly did. It was an interesting moment, stirring complex thoughts.

I also think, sadly, that the legitimate aspects of the movement have largely been neutralised. And I see it in the United States now where companies will change their logo, change their mascot, or they'll tell you a special branded version of their product is for Pride month: they pretend that they're on your side politically but actually they're just trying to sell you something. I think in a way the universities in South Africa have pulled a similar trick. They're not reforming as much as they should: what they are reforming is cosmetic so they'll change names of buildings, they'll remove statues, but actually the corrupt power systems that allow a lot of the abuses to continue are unaffected. So, I think we missed an opportunity there ... There's a festering system that is being hidden by the cosmetic change. And I'm afraid, I think, that some of the changes at university are just cosmetic.

GP: What is the most valuable contribution classics could make to South African society? What do you consider productive ways to think about the relation of classics and South African identities?

CB: I suppose the first question we should ask is: Can we assume that classics does have something to offer? In other words, it's how we set the discipline up in relation to society. Maybe we can be a bit more – maybe humble is not the right word but – maybe we shouldn't phrase it in a sense that assumes classics is this wonderful, powerful, important thing that has to have an impact on society. Maybe we should phrase it like, there are lots of lessons that we can learn from this that can have an impact on society.

I think it's a question of attitude. We're definitely going to have to move away from an attitude of superiority, whether that's institutional, whether it's in terms of other academic disciplines, whether it's in terms of the methods it uses and the subjects that it explores. There has to be a shift. Yes, I think the discipline is incredibly powerful for a number of reasons. Firstly, as I said earlier, there's the ability to get into the mindset of someone who lived so long ago, in a different part of the world and who is so different to us and so 'alien'. Maybe that's the right word. It is a wonderful mechanism for building empathy and for building the ability to reach out and think about what another human being is going through or

might be going through. That's the biggest strength of the discipline: the ability to build empathy. And maybe that's something we could focus on. For example, the character of Dido in the *Aeneid*. I'm not a Carthaginian. I'm not a woman. I'm not a queen... Superficially Dido and I are nothing alike. But there's that wonderful passage in Book IV before she dies [*Aeneid* 4.522–532] where Vergil talks about her insomnia: she is maddened by her sleeplessness. Wonderfully, Vergil uses a lot of elision to suggest the collapse of her mental state. That image of Dido's insomnia is something that I identified with strongly because I was struggling with sleeping at the time I read this as an undergrad. In this way you can get into the skin of the character. This is how Ancient Studies can help build empathy – it requires us to see bits of ourselves in people so far removed from us.

Another important thing, as Michael Lambert [classics professor and scholar] correctly points out, we have to admit that classics is tied up and almost irredeemably enmeshed with the colonial project. But Ancient Studies does not have to be that. If classicism is so tied up with the colonial project, we should make a break and build towards a discipline which is something different. We should rather build towards an Ancient Studies or Ancient Greek and Roman studies, whatever we want to call it. But the name of the discipline 'classics' at the moment is itself incredibly arrogant.

The other difficult question that we maybe don't want to talk about is that the discipline is overwhelmingly white and there are black African students who study Ancient Studies but not nearly in proportion to the overall population. And I suppose in my experience, we also have to say that it's often dominated by men, even though most of our students, in my experience, are women. I have read some papers talking about why matric students choose to study certain subjects. The biggest factor is economics: it's a powerful motivator not just for black students but across the board. University study is a massive investment. And that probably is why few students choose to study Ancient Studies as a postgraduate option because of the investment of time and money and effort. Obviously, the languages you have to learn as well. It is quite a lot – it's something that requires dedication. I suspect – and I want to be really careful on how I say this – that there are other factors at play as well. One of them might be cultural, that maybe because of the way classics has been linked to quote unquote 'Western white European culture' historically that has had some kind of residual hangover effects which makes it less attractive to African students.

Maybe. But again, that's speculating; I think someone might have to test that hypothesis.

Maybe the discipline itself is unfriendly to African students. I had the experience as an Afrikaans student at a university which had an English culture and in some ways not fitting in with that. And I wonder if there's a similar problem, surely a worse problem, for African students. Again, I'm not trying to accuse anyone of racism, but I think that is something that we have to think about and be honest with ourselves about. Because it's one of those key things that was highlighted during Fees Must Fall, this institutional arrogance. The assumption that your culture is the right culture.

GP: Is there anything you would like to say in conclusion; what about the future?

CB: As a kind of coda to our discussion, we'll have to start thinking very carefully about how the discipline will survive. It's managing to limp along, I think, primarily by offering courses in medical etymology or offering courses in classical civilisation. There's nothing wrong with that. In a way it feels as if some South African classicists are ashamed of doing that. It seems like they don't feel like real classicists for teaching courses in translation on ancient culture. Again, it's that attitude shift we need to talk about. You know, it's fine to study reception. Reception is a wonderful thing: it makes the discipline relevant and pays the bills at the end of the day. Honestly, I think most of the interest in the discipline is now going to come from people who are exposed to it through popular culture as a contact point between antiquity and the modern world. That's where we should focus a lot of our efforts. In South Africa we can offer a lot in terms of reception studies, whether it's dissecting issues of classics and colonialism, or whether it's dissecting issues of race in Ancient Studies.

And of course, we can study modern reception as well. You don't need a lot of research funding to talk about video games or to read comic books or whatever and look at how popular culture interacts with Ancient Studies. And it's something you can do with relatively few dedicated resources ... The way we think about the ancient world today is markedly different than, say, the way we thought about it in the 1960s and the 1970s. I think we're now at a period where the ancient world is still relevant in popular consciousness, but in a completely different way. It's what I would call

ludifying the past: making a game out of the past, where I think most of my own generation's interactions with the ancient world happen in the form of a video game that's set in, say, ancient Greece, or a TV series or some other kind of game (e.g. board games or trading card games) and you play the past. And that's something I'm quite interested in because it's a relatively new way of receiving the past.

GP: Does this new medium make you think any differently about ancient Greek or for that matter any other mythology? Presumably there wasn't this much of this medium around at a time when you first became interested in classics via *Asterix* and so on.

CB: I think there are a couple of ways that we could look at it. The first way is just to develop a different attitude towards mythology. Often it's presented as something serious and academic. But in fact if you play with it, mythology produces a different experience, creating a kind of emotional attachment as well. This can bring greater familiarity in some ways even if it doesn't necessarily increase your knowledge of the myths beyond surface levels. But the act of playing with the story does create an attachment to the story: there's a strong emotional component which is something we don't talk about enough in reception studies, how we actually feel about what we read.

I think we just need to be creative in how we approach things and there's a lot about the South African experience which I think could shed a lot of insight on the ancient world. One example might be the experiences of families and their domestic workers. There's been a lot of sociological research into those kinds of relationships and I've always wondered if we could map those relationships onto the relationships between slaveholders and their domestic slaves in antiquity. Of course, you have to be careful, I think, to remain respectful to the ancient and modern parties. I've always wondered if there weren't similar dynamics at play. That might be an interesting lens on the subject. There's so much to offer. And our students are great: they work hard, they're inquisitive. I think it's just a case of, maybe, some new energy needs to get into the discipline.

The other thing that I am worried about is that there might be a recolonisation of knowledge because, as well-resourced places like the US and the UK exhaust their own cultural capital, they're going to come looking for it in places like Africa. We have to be careful that research on



African reception of classics or African attitudes to Ancient Studies isn't exclusively done by people outside of Africa. I worry that there might be a kind of recolonisation there and we're not currently exploring the issue as we could.

However, there's so much you can do here. There are books waiting to be written just about the reception of classics in Afrikaans literature, for example. I don't know anything about black African languages so I can't talk about the reception there, but I'm sure there must be. Certainly, some of the stuff that I've read in translation shows dialogue. Something that I enjoy is reading Dutch literature from the Caribbean. So, if you start looking at postcolonial literature written in Caribbean Dutch or in their pidgins (I use the word in the academic sense), then there might be something to explore there as well. Certainly, there is a lot of influence on Dutch literature from the Netherlands. I've been meaning to write something about the Dutch poet Cees Nooteboom. There are classically inspired poems, overall a lot of interesting material. Who's going to do the work? It's ripe for the taking.

Second dialogue:  
On intersecting identities



## CHAPTER FOUR

# Classics for the third millennium

## African options after the Fall

*Jo-Marie Claassen*

The new South Africa shares with the West certain educational problems, such as declining literacy, fuelled in those households that live sufficiently above the breadline to be able to afford it, by television ‘infotainment’ (Claassen 1995). The rise of social media has in many ways led to deterioration in spelling standards, but in other ways it has worked to promote a ‘reading culture’, not necessarily reading of books, but of *reading* per se (and *writing* electronically), rather than young people’s almost mindless watching of entertainment provided by others. Other problems are common to cultures emerging from colonial rule. In a backlash against Eurocentrism, the type of impetus that led to the Rhodes Must Fall movement manifests itself in different ways in other ex-colonies. Still others are unique to South Africa.

Study of the classics arrived in all areas of Africa together with its colonisers, whether Roman, French, English, Portuguese or Dutch.<sup>1</sup> In the era of decolonisation, classical studies sometimes feel under threat. The continuation of ‘the classics’ and their role in education has engaged my attention for many years, leading to various publications.<sup>2</sup> The earliest version of my thoughts on the topic was delivered at the University of Utrecht in 1997.<sup>3</sup> Much of what I said and wrote then is still true; other statements have become obsolete; others again were uncannily predictive of the present situation in South Africa after the student protests of 2015. These protests appeared at the time to signal the beginning of the end of all colonial influence in education, including the end for classical studies,

which seemed stripped of all relevance. The Rhodes Must Fall movement seemed to have gained the upper hand on the campus of the University of Cape Town (UCT), leaving no other South African university campus unaffected and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty in South African academia.<sup>4</sup> Yet two years later appeared Parker's *South Africa, Greece, Rome: Classical Confrontations* (2017). The book featured 16 disparate essays, rounded out by an extensive prologue and afterword by the editor, and showed how embedded the influence of the ancient Mediterranean world is in many aspects of South African life, thereby perhaps breathing new hope in the bosoms of South African classicists, and giving new impetus to their research.

It is impossible to speak for a whole continent; hence, in spite of my title, I shall concentrate on the situation in South Africa and its more immediate neighbour, Zimbabwe. Much of what follows is derived from my work of 22 years ago; obsolete statements have been excised, or cited as no longer apposite; others are updated critically, with an indication of what changed and, in some cases, a prediction of what may still lie ahead.

### **Decolonialising Africa: How can the classics survive?**

This question apparently engages the minds of many classicists worldwide.<sup>5</sup> It is particularly urgent in an African context. Late 20<sup>th</sup> century electronics have turned the world into the proverbial 'global village', with its citizens now even closer together, thanks to strides made in online conferencing, the result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Almost all of Africa, in its 'Westernised' aspects, shares in the spiritual heritage of Europe, including the identity crises of its erstwhile overlords. It often exhibits either a 'cultural cringe', or (increasingly) a militant and overbearing Afrocentrism; both attitudes resulting from contact with a similar strident Eurocentrism. Since the presidential term of Donald Trump in the United States of America, latent racism has become overt, this phenomenon becoming increasingly apparent also in Europe. An almost worldwide new wake-up call to end racism was sparked by the 2019 murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. We are yet to see where it will lead. Simultaneously, Africa experiences extreme physical and socio-economic problems: prevalent poverty, droughts (and in South Africa in 2022, floods), famine, overpopulation, epidemics, lack of educational and health facilities, inadequate housing

and all too often violence and war. Sadly, often African women suffer the most. Since 2020 such hardships have been exacerbated by the worldwide economic downturn in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic, which remains a threat to life and health even now (mid-2022). Those Africans who attempt to escape by crossing the Mediterranean are faced with endless hardships on the often unwelcoming European shores. Refugee camps are most often the lot of those who manage to survive the trip over the Mediterranean in unstable small craft.

Twenty-three years ago, I asked: ‘What is the role of the classics in decolonialised Africa?’ The answer I tried to give then has not changed; but the challenges involved have been exacerbated by the student campaigns of the recent past and have been further complicated by the present health crisis. The kind of intellectual decolonialisation accompanying political decolonisation still often involves stringent attacks on a discipline considered the definitive Eurocentric study, and seen as particularly superfluous in a time of existential distress.<sup>6</sup> Classicists, particularly in South Africa, have to deal with this. Only by constant, versatile adaptation can the classics continue to reinvent itself in every era and area. The endurance of classical education in Africa depends on three factors:

- educational research and innovative teaching;
- formal academic research, involving, in some cases, reinterpretation of the past from an African (or postcolonial) point of view (Dmitriev 2009), part of this being the affirmation of classical research in Africa as being of a ‘world standard,’ in no way inferior to that carried out in a more privileged academic setting;
- community outreach, including informal teaching.

### **Classics in colonial and postcolonial Africa**

Before discussing these ‘African options,’ first some background. A society where over half the population scratches out a living below the breadline may with justice consider the classics esoteric and redundant. Yet, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, throughout Africa, schools and universities have flourished, and the classics have provided an important core in African students’ intellectual training. Liberia was once the great ‘black hope of Africa.’ One of its Afro-American founders, James (‘Africanus’) Horton, planned a rural university, away from the ‘contaminating influence’ of coastal

trade, close to the aboriginals he saw as the family welcoming long-lost cousins torn in previous centuries from the African bosom by rapacious slave traders. The curriculum of this university would, beside the sciences, prominently feature classical studies, a culture innocent of the racial prejudices that tarnish even great Renaissance humanists. This dream was frustrated by colonial authorities (Nwauwa 1999). The first Liberian university was established in 1861 as Liberia College, gaining university status 100 years later. Although Latin and Greek, then taught by the Rev. Edward W Blyden, were offered after the establishment of the College, today the University no longer offers classics. Now, some 16 years after the ending of civil strife, Liberia is still recovering from the effects of war and widespread corruption, in spite of the stability brought by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the promise of strengthened democracy under the new president, George Weah.<sup>7</sup>

More recently, classics departments in Ghana and Nigeria have produced scholars who can offer a uniquely African view of antiquity<sup>8</sup> (e.g. Opeku [1993], on Apuleius' contribution to education in North Africa, or Ilevbare [1980], on the familial succession of Jugurtha as not 'illegitimate' but 'tribal', as in parts of North Africa today<sup>9</sup>). They report a lively interest in classics in translation, and vigorous cultural interchange. This is summarised in an email communication by Michael Okyere Asante (slightly edited):

In Ghana and Nigeria, one of the approaches has been to do a comparative study of Greco-Roman and Ghanaian/Nigerian cultures (see, for instance, <https://rogueclassicism.com/2012/11/23/classics-in-nigeria/>) or show what connection Africa had with classical civilisation. This is reflected in the long essays and dissertations on classics produced in both countries, and in some of the publications of faculty, especially those of Folake Onayemi (Greek/Yoruba culture/literature), Olakunbi Olasope (Roman/Yoruba culture/literature), and Goke Akinboye and Gill Oluwatosin (who often collaborate on Greek/Roman/Nigerian politico-socio-economic themes). One of Akinboye's books is a 2014 publication titled *Africa and the West: An Economic History of Roman Imperialism in Africa*. Nigeria is particularly strong with this approach. It is tempting to

think that this approach is only recent, but as Lambert (2014: 4–5) shows, the approach has existed as one of the ways to decolonise the discipline in Nigeria since independence.

In Malawi, a school for the gifted was started by Kamuzu Banda in 1981, with the classics at its core. After Banda's fall, a move to eradicate Eurocentric elitism in such an Eton-type establishment was countered by economic necessity. The solid classical courses formerly offered at the Kamuzu Academy, and targeted for an Afrocentric purge, were continued for several years under the new management because Latin and Greek, as 'chalk and talk' subjects, were deemed more economical than subjects requiring sophisticated electronic equipment. That they were also considered educationally valuable is obvious. This optimistic report (given me by word of mouth by an ex-teacher during 1996) was later somewhat tempered by revelations of large-scale peculation in funding during the Banda regime (Knight 1997). This situation was apparently overcome and, according to its official website, classics continues to flourish at what is now an elite private school, with both Latin and Greek being compulsory at the lower levels, and one language to be continued to the IGCSE level.

Material culture with a 'classical' cast occurs in all former colonies, particularly in ex-colonies of the British Empire (which was often seen by its perpetrators as a new and improved 'Roman' empire) such as Zimbabwe.<sup>10</sup> In Zimbabwe after independence, a state requirement that all subjects display an African aspect was met with the institution of an undergraduate course entitled 'Africa in antiquity', but it was soon realised that most segments of ancient culture have some relevance to African students today.<sup>11</sup> University teachers learned to stress these in each course, rather than concentrate all such references within a single rubric. Only in a society that after centuries of Christian missionary activity still has close touch with its animistic roots can a student seriously and without irony comment on Aeneas' sacrificial preparations to meet his father's spirit, 'We offer snuff' – that is, in this context snuff is used as votive offering to the spirits of the ancestors (Maritz [1989], who offers further examples, as does Callinicos [1997]). More recently, two Zimbabwean scholars are producing world-class research on topics with a distinctly 'African' focus.<sup>12</sup> In a recent email Dr Madhlozi Moyo, formerly of the University of Zimbabwe, now of the University of the Free State, wrote the following (slightly edited):



Firstly, I believe that the survival of the classics in Zimbabwe is a little ironic, given recent events (from the years 2000 to date), where Zimbabwean politicians have been openly against the West. A colleague of mine, Associate Professor Obert Bernard Mlambo, and I were the ‘first’ black classicists (after the passing on of our mentor, Ambassador EP Mashaire). Our teaching of classics has naturalised the discipline to Zimbabwe, even politically speaking, and a comparative approach has proven to be our strongest point of contact. My colleague specialises in land redistribution exercises to war veterans in both Zimbabwe and [...] during the Gracchan era in Rome. He lectures in Greek and Roman history, and it is not strange to see his students digging up material on the Zimbabwean land reform exercise in order to compare it with ancient Rome.<sup>13</sup>

Speaking of myself as a lecturer of classical literature, I assure you that the number of commonalities is astounding. I am a strong believer in Classical Humanism, and my studies in Greek literature have always produced interesting results; for instance, I always enjoy teaching students the *Oresteia* because of the similarities in the persecution of Orestes by his mother’s furies. There is a local Shona custom called *kutanda botso* which resonates with the *Eumenides*, and my students are always delighted to note this similarity. The same can be said of the fate of Oedipus, whose story can be compared with a Sena (Malawian) narrative (Knight 1998). The use of ‘African’ praise poetry to understand Archaic Greek poetry (including Pindar) cannot be over-emphasised. I have managed (hopefully) in my PhD (UCT, 2016) to use Kalanga (a language spoken in Zimbabwe and Botswana) to gain more insights into the fragmentary body of Archaic Greek poetry. One of my spiritual (if not academic) testaments has been a polemic discussion of classical allusion in Marechera (Moyo 2013), where I essentially look at the use of the classics in contemporary Zimbabwean fictional writing. In this article, I am against the Zimbabwe government’s (and some readers’?) position that seeks to [c]ensor African creative writers. Some critics of Marechera have been repulsed by the author’s recourse to the classics. My argument in the paper is that those who truly wish to understand Marechera [...] should have at least a grasp of what classics is all about, rather than just flying through the Classicisms.

Much of the above applies to South Africa too. However, since the appointment of the pioneering DDT Jabavu (1885–1959) as professor of African Languages, Classics and History at Fort Hare (Claassen 2017), black South African classicists have been few and far between. The majority of senior South African classicists (so far) are descendants of colonists from Europe or of immigrants from the Far East, both groups carrying with them, inevitably, a certain degree of ‘colonial baggage’, that is, a certain reputation for ‘otherness’ in the eyes of their students. Yet we are Africans, too, even if our forebears were transplanted from the North or East (some as long as 300 and more years ago). Our roots are in Africa. Increasingly, however, student-teacher interaction and the researchers’ own insights have been enriched by contact with students from indigenous African home backgrounds and their living experience of, for example, ancestor veneration.<sup>14</sup> Students benefit too. As in Zimbabwe, representatives of a multicultural, multilingual society meet amicably in the potentially neutral territory of ancient Greece and Rome, removed in space and time from the misunderstandings and violence of our immediate past, and (sometimes still sad) present.<sup>15</sup> About 80% of South Africans come from an essentially pre-feminist culture, and though there is a modern diversity of thought amongst younger generations, there are often disconnections with those whose roots are more closely linked to Europe. Until our society integrates its values, ancient Greek myth can potentially foster mutual understanding between disparate cultures. A society that links a woman’s worth to her fruitfulness understands Niobe’s vaunting herself as the mother of twelve above a mere mother of two, even if Apollo and Artemis were divine (Malan 1995). Through dispassionate appraisal of such a tale, students from different backgrounds, meeting in classrooms now divested of educational apartheid, can explore one another’s divergent attitudes. Hopefully the recent stress on ‘distance education’ brought about by the Covid-19 crisis, which separated students into silo-like interaction with only their lecturers and their books, will soon be replaced by full resumption of classroom contact. Equally, ancient Roman history, which shows the agonies of displacement and attempts at solution of the ensuing problems of the Roman underclass after the civil wars of the last century-and-a-half of the Republican era (one of the topics explored by Prof. Mlambo, cited earlier by Dr Moyo), can help to bridge the divide of non-understanding that separates the descendants of colonialists (and, often, of the instigators of

apartheid) and the descendants of the victims of such oppression, who still experience the disadvantages of such an historic imbalance.

### **What of South African schools after apartheid?**

South Africa has for the last 28 years undergone profound educational changes, along with its general remake. These include the reintegration of a society which had statutorily conformed to former colonial segregation, with few exceptions. Even before statutory apartheid, high schools had been segregated; some universities had not, or not wholly. All this has changed. No educational institution is allowed to be formally segregated, but segregation of domicile will take a generation or more to be eradicated, hence continuing to influence demographics in both primary and secondary schools.

A nationwide system of state high schools was, after 1994, formally integrated. Nine provincial examining boards plus an independent examinations board take responsibility for national school-leaving examinations (certificates are then issued by the national quality assurance body Umalusi). These examinations incorporate university entrance for those candidates offering a suitable combination of subjects and a minimum level of achievement, but several subjects are now examined nationally, of which Latin (set by the Independent Examinations Board, or IEB) is one with a common Grade 12 exit examination. Unfortunately, the numbers of high schools country-wide offering Latin as one of the core subjects have seriously dwindled, with candidates usually registering for Latin as an additional subject, which they study after hours. Where Latin had featured in the curriculum of some traditionally 'black' high schools before the Nationalist Party takeover in 1948, hardened attitudes and severe restructuring of 'black education' into a 'rural', strictly subservient model during the apartheid years removed Latin from all but a few Roman Catholic (RC) theological seminary-type schools (Claassen 1992). Since the increasing encouragement of vernacular RC liturgies, even this source of potential Latin learning has run dry, and virtually no State schools (now theoretically integrated into one system, but practically differing widely in standard, according to area) have in the last 30 years reintroduced Latin where it had been dropped.

Curriculum development is done under the auspices of the Department of Basic Education in consultation with key stakeholders, including the

universities and Umalusi, which is responsible for certification of school-leaving examinations and regulation of university admissions. Students matriculate in six different academic subjects. Although the educational spill-over into other subjects from Latin has never been denied, government efforts at upgrading the education of the masses paradoxically contributed to the near extinction of Latin, as the prescribed minimum school class size of 35 per teacher had for decades no longer been met by Latinists; Latin enrolments are pitifully small. An ambitious new approach was launched by the National Education Department in 1995, which was excoriated by teachers and parents alike. It advocated an ill-defined 'outcomes-based education' that leant heavily on models from New Zealand and Australia. It has since been superseded by various new approaches, the latest of which is the so-called CAPS (Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement) system, which requires constant reporting by teachers, miring them in administration, with less time to attend to their students' needs. Each subject has its own CAPS, which contains the national curriculum for that subject, as well as the assessment policy that applies to the subject.<sup>16</sup> The standard Latin core syllabus and examination system were recently imaginatively adapted by the IEB and compare very well with the standards of British, Australian and Canadian final school examinations.<sup>17</sup> Yet there are very few takers, with fewer than ten out of some three-quarters of a million matriculants annually sitting for Latin finals.

The South African Schools Act of 1996 has been frequently amended, most recently in 2017. The schooling system seems to remain in a perpetual state of flux. A fairly recent announcement (November 2018) by the Minister for Higher Education that a mere 30% for the language in which students are instructed, will serve as a 'pass' (plus a 50% pass in four of five other subjects) will actually have little effect on the final examination of Latin. Latin in South Africa has joined Greek as a university subject only, with rare exceptions. Due to nearly two years of initial full lockdown followed by diminishing systems of lockdown and alternating students' hours at school to ensure 'social distancing,' during which time distance education was compulsory for all schools, the prospects for successful year-end examinations in 2020 and 2021 seemed dire but those who did not fall out of the system completely in this time seemed to fare quite well. At this stage (mid-2022), it is still difficult to predict what lies ahead.

Now, post-apartheid and post-'Fall', language per se is still central to

the ubiquitous disadvantages experienced by students from an African-language background. High school students consistently have to study in a second language (increasingly this is English). This problem of medium of instruction has held my interest for many years (Claassen 1992, 1994a). It is particularly fraught when Latin is formally taught, although traditionally Latin is studied by those students who generally are high achievers and for whom English as instructional medium is no great stumbling block. Yet, even for them, a so-called 'linguistic beachhead' between their mother tongue and the target language, Latin, can prove useful, if only to appeal to their emotions. I have worked on Latin and isiXhosa analysing contrasts and similarities between the two language systems, for use by teachers in a multicultural classroom.<sup>18</sup>

### **The South African university scene**

My greater concern, as a university teacher, is more directly with South African universities. South African university humanities courses follow a Scottish/American-type model. A wide first-year base leads to two majors in the third year. Universities were at the turn of this century in a state of academic flux; the new millennium saw the country-wide introduction of far more structured and streamlined 'programmes', particularly in the humanities, as opposed to the former broader, non-specialised 'courses' leading to general degrees. Such a tremendous makeover was simultaneously disturbing and challenging. The classics had formerly been advantaged by statute, but Latin as a compulsory subject for law was discontinued in 1994.<sup>19</sup> On this, more below.

As in modern Europe and the US, there is a strong movement away from the ideal of 'liberal education' towards functional training, particularly for the masses. Where the apartheid system had discouraged the training of black students in mathematics and the sciences, and where trained engineers and medics are urgently needed, the South African government focuses, perhaps rightly, on fostering the sciences. Business degrees and diplomas are viewed by young people as highly desirable. Competition for scarce job opportunities is won by those better qualified in practical business methods. The first post-apartheid Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997), devised by the National Commission on Higher Education, and following on an earlier Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, was

adopted by Parliament, and broadened by a series of amendments. These documents spelled out for universities the government's ideas about the status and format of academic fare, systems of governance, structuring of courses and the general direction that universities were to go. They served to broaden access and directed emphasis toward the sciences. There have been frequent changes and updates since, the latest being tabled as Act No. 9 of 2017. A Language Policy for Higher Education was promulgated in 2017 and came into effect on 1 January 2019. According to this policy, indigenous languages should be fostered also as academic media, foreign languages must be encouraged as a means of enhancing international contact and language must never serve as a stumbling block to access to higher learning.

Much of the change proposed from 1997 onwards was long overdue; other aspects appeared intimidating to entrenched university faculty members, particularly in the humanities, where retrenchments were instituted. Some of the proposed changes were largely implemented by the transformation of technical or business schools into so-called TVET colleges, which provide for a type of post-school training that can serve as a post-Senior Certificate but pre-university first year and enable multiple-level entry to some areas of higher education. A further important recommendation which the state implemented was the assimilation of technicon (advanced technical college) and university qualifications into a single tertiary system. There has been another change. A preparatory first-year course for underprepared but matriculated students (those students with substandard entrance qualifications) was proposed and now has been accommodated as mandatory by most universities. Such courses appear in different guises within different universities' so-called academic development systems, ranging from a compulsory preparatory year before a student starts with a mainstream first year, to an extended (split) first year taken over two years, with input of additional 'development' subjects, either *ab initio*, or after a 'mainstream' student has fared badly in his or her first set of tests or examinations. In the latter case, the compulsory preparatory year runs from July to June of the next year, after which such a student falls in with the second half of the interrupted first year. Ideally such underprepared students achieve a degree within four successful years, rather than having to repeat failed courses and thereby failing to complete a degree course within the traditional three years. Descriptions of the

format and implications of such variations may be read from the various articles in Coleman (2019).<sup>20</sup>

These changes were further supported by a new stress, through favoured-status funding, on the sciences and rationalisation in the humanities. All made for profound rethinking of the status and structuring of the academic supply. Some of these innovations were perhaps inappropriate: developments within South African society have in the intervening years newly shown the need for many young people to be trained in the humanities. A disintegrating social fabric in a country torn by years of social skewing, the result of inhumane segregationist labour practices, calls for experts in the human sciences, including education and theology, to work towards social integration and upliftment. Additionally, whole segments of a society formerly disadvantaged by law and often still deprived, enter tertiary education through the arts and social sciences. The latter disciplines (sociology, political science, political philosophy, even psychology) are particularly relevant to the reconstruction and development of society. Even here the classics have a role to play; for example, sociological studies of the ancient world offer an immediate relevance that should be capitalised upon.

Additionally, students coming from a non-academic home background ('first generation academics') often experience problems in developing academic awareness. This includes inability to express their thoughts in academic language, to assimilate and organise knowledge, even to interpret examination questions. When Latin was compulsory for studying law, students were subjected to the academic rigour of linguistic studies, with concomitant strengthening of academic skills, an advantage always touted by classicists, and more recently proven as such in a much-publicised series of educational experiments in the US and elsewhere (in South Africa so long ago as Schumann [1990], on which more below). Backlash against such an 'arduous, time-consuming and Euro-centric' discipline and the suspension of compulsory Latin for law left the ranks of most first-year Latin courses sadly depleted. The new directions spelled out by the government in some cases were turned into new opportunities. New directions for the teaching of both culture and languages were sought. At UCT, Gail Solomons established a very successful Word Power course, which serves to compensate for this lack (Solomons 1997).<sup>21</sup> Pretoria University followed a different route, creating specialised medical terminology courses, especially

adapted to the needs of a number of different branches of training for the medical profession.<sup>22</sup> The University of South Africa (Unisa) offers non-credit-bearing 'short learning programmes' in Greek and Latin.<sup>23</sup> North-West University (NWU, formerly Potchefstroom University for Christian-National Education) used to offer a month-long 'short course' in botanical Latin, but have recently discontinued it, instituting, rather, specialised ancillary courses in legal Latin terminology and ancient rhetoric for law students.<sup>24</sup> All such courses, however useful academically, also serve as 'cash cows', boosting student numbers and thereby enabling academics to offer serious mainstream literary or ancient history courses to otherwise inviably small groups of students. Johan Steenkamp, a colleague from NWU, in a fairly recent email communication summed up the situation as follows:

The larger subject field of 'Ancient Languages' has not been guaranteed survival at most universities.<sup>25</sup> Student numbers are still so low that departments have closed at some universities and at some, faculty members are required to ask special permission for lecturing to any class with fewer than 20 students.<sup>26</sup> However, classicists are still regarded as a kind of superhuman academic in many faculties (a subjective opinion we do not discourage). Classics students are considered some of the smartest on campus and our students work as consultants at the writing centre. In the field of languages, classicists are also regarded very highly and I know of some that publish in collaboration with colleagues in other fields.

At Stellenbosch University, the Arts and Humanities Faculty exerted its combined expertise to devise innovative new programmes, ensuring its own survival and catering for the new sharp focus required by the Higher Education Act. Rationalisation led to the semi-voluntary amalgamation of the departments of Classics and Ancient Near Eastern Studies into a new Department of Ancient Studies, with happy – largely unforeseen – results. Besides the obvious offering of language and culture courses in culturally based BA programmes, Ancient Studies positioned itself strongly in the general 'Programme in Humanities' that had been devised to focus on 'Southern African realities'. Ancient Studies also features in a programme that concentrates on 'social dynamics', that is, change management.



Internally, the new department, since its somewhat rapid conception and 'hothouse' gestation, itself became adept at change management.<sup>27</sup> Enforced rethinking of academic fare has brought the change a step further. At both undergraduate and graduate levels, the focus was broadened (commencing with the new millennium, however this is dated) with the whole of the ancient Mediterranean and adjacent territories situating a new, integrated approach to the ancient world. Hybridisation of offerings into a 'pan-Mediterranean' mode made the department newly aware of how interdependent the various parts of the ancient world were, and how prominently that world experienced flux and divergence, which are considered by many as modern phenomena. Management of both cross-cultural exchange and international conflict today may be considered through the dispassionate, distancing lens of study of ancient cultural diversity. Stress is both upon differences in culture in various ancient societies and the degree to which intercultural contact (not least, interculturalism in North Africa) created our common heritage. In sum, amalgamation of the two departments from January 1999 occurred opportunely, just at the time of statutory realignment of courses into closely-knit programmes. At postgraduate level considerations similar to those outlined above obtain, but students may also specialise in a particular cultural milieu.<sup>28</sup>

### **The changing profiles of university students and academic fare**

Through historical circumstances the University of Stellenbosch used to cater largely for the Afrikaans-speaking community, which includes both the former wielders of power *and* a large segment of the formerly disadvantaged (so-called coloured, or mixed-race, people, a designation which is increasingly regarded as offensive). The ancestors of both these groups together forged the Afrikaans language (perhaps the youngest African language) out of Dutch and other languages (cf. Hugo 1971). With increased registration of black African students, the university has, until recently, been racked with disagreements about the correct mix of languages as teaching medium. Traditionalists argued that there are several other universities in the area that teach exclusively in English, hence Afrikaans should remain the main medium of instruction. However, historic injustice cries out for reparation, and progressives argue that English serves as a better *lingua franca*. There is much to be said for both sides of the question,

but in spite of various attempts at compromise, the latter argument has now prevailed. In the most recent past, Afrikaans has been almost completely superseded at university level as teaching medium, with English being treated as the academic *lingua franca*.<sup>29</sup> This brings its own problems for formerly disadvantaged students from a rural background, but that is a different issue for another type of analysis. In sum, Ancient Studies lecturers increasingly deal, within one class, with students with a wide range of home languages. All 11 languages are official on the national level, but each province selects only prominent local languages. About 30 years ago, the now obsolete Latin computer drill programmes at Stellenbosch<sup>30</sup> (devised when Latin was still compulsory for law) presciently included input in an African language, isiXhosa, one of the three official languages of the Western Cape Province.

South Africa, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe are unique in their use of Roman-Dutch law as a basis for jurisprudence. From 1965 onward, a university course in Latin (along with the then two official languages) was statutorily enforced for law students, apparently to ensure the maintenance of standards, where it had previously simply been considered to be a non-negotiable concomitant to legal studies. The statutorily enforced Latin language requirement for study of Roman-Dutch law was then increasingly perceived as a mechanism of the right-wing government<sup>31</sup> to keep black students from the legal profession (Claassen 1988a). Discrimination lay in the fact that the *teaching medium* (language of learning) was not the students' home language. University students from an African home background were studying three more or less unfamiliar languages in their first year (English, Afrikaans, Latin), perhaps four, if 'grammar' is taken as a coded language on its own. During the apartheid years, increasing compartmentalisation of societies consistently reduced black-white contact. Even successful study, on paper, did not always make all students proficient in any of the then three compulsory languages. Since 1994 such restrictions have fallen away and the matriculation system has undergone drastic changes, as indicated above; amongst others, study of both Afrikaans and English is no longer required. Since 1994, with the institution of 11 official languages,<sup>32</sup> a university course in only one 'language of learning' has been required of law students at most universities.

Until November 1994, when this requirement was abandoned, South African universities' classics departments enrolled upwards of 400 Latin

beginners per year, with concomitant large enrolments for the subsequent first (accredited) university level. This dwindled at higher levels. Now Latin is no longer privileged. Law faculties set their own language requirements for aspirant lawyers – and, at some universities, Latin lost out. The reaction against Latin linguistic studies was exacerbated by the fact that nine of the official languages in South Africa are not related to the Indo-European language system. The language of the courts in which successful students will be practising is mainly English, however. That Latin is not only valuable for its own sake, but also for the improvement of facility in English, has frequently been shown (Claassen 1988a). We Latinists have therefore needed in the past 25 years to divest our subject of its political baggage,<sup>33</sup> and to promote a study which stands equal to or ahead of any other discipline (and which incidentally, or deliberately, enhances verbal facility). Latin in some format or another has managed to hold out at some South African universities, with many law students still taking it as an option, and others choosing Latin linguistic study out of interest.

Stellenbosch experienced its own severe dip in Latin enrolments after 1994 with a resultant threat to the tenure of several faculty members. More disquieting has been the loss to the academic equipment of aspirant law students, who confidently face the future Latinless, happy in their freedom of choice. Whether such students, who seemingly did manage to cope in advanced years with the Latin legal terminology permeating all aspects of their legal studies, now swell the ranks of senior advocates and junior judges, or whether past study of Latin still gives some graduates an edge, I am unsure. Thanks to the perspicacity of the then dean of law at Stellenbosch University, Ancient Studies (then still the Department of Latin) could at the time throw at least some of these students a lifeline. We devised and executed a new course virtually from day to day during the first non-compulsory (for many, Latinless) year of legal training. The Classical Legal Culture course at Stellenbosch offered an extended view of the development of Roman legal thinking from Romulus' first 'laying down of the law' (Livy in translation), to the Twelve Tables and aspects of praetorian legislation, to Gaius and Justinian on *delicta* or *iniuria*, also aspects of Latin word formation, its influence on English, and lists of useful Latin legal expressions. Basic grammatical input supported memorisation, turning 'cold' rote-learning of meanings into a cognitive understanding of linguistic processes involved. Fairly aggressive publicity, as well as

satisfied students' word-of-mouth touting of the proven benefits of the course, initially increased enrolments, with the prospect then of continued growth. The course did not remain static but underwent some changes over time. After 25 years the contents of the course have been adapted to include other legal systems (largely Greek and African customary law) in a revised legal culture course, which still, however, is aimed at facilitating law students' understanding of legal thought as well as enhancing their command of academic legal language,<sup>34</sup> now also strengthened with the input of a brief foray into study of the origins of rhetoric and dialectic. Ancient Legal Culture survived well in the new dispensation as an adjunct to various programmes in law at Stellenbosch, with, in 2022, an enrolment of 19 students, but this may change in the immediate future. Sadly, a second course in Ancient Legal Studies (devoted to topics like Greek and Roman attitudes to perennial issues such as abortion and the legal position of the *nasciturus*, or the position of women in a patriarchal society, exile and slavery) has been abandoned, again a result of the realities of funding in the humanities and the requirements of the law faculty. However, some law students continue with other ancient culture modules in their second year, fewer in the third. Unfortunately, the law faculties at some universities changed to a misguidedly narrow Afrocentric approach and no longer allow for Latin or classical legal studies even as electives.<sup>35</sup>

Similar issues are less intense for Greek, which had long since disappeared from the schools. Only the Dutch Reformed and Lutheran traditions still require Greek as a prerequisite to theology. At the time when the University of the Western Cape (UWC) closed its Faculty of Theology (which had largely been moulded in the Reformed tradition) and its students had perforce and virtually overnight to be transferred to Stellenbosch, the Department of Ancient Studies at Stellenbosch had for a time to cope with a virtual rebellion in the ranks of the newly accepted ex-UWC students, who had been pitchforked into what they saw as a discriminatory Greek and Hebrew 'straitjacket' enforced by the prescriptions for preparation for admission to graduate studies at the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary. The Department of Ancient Studies had perforce to subject these aspirant theologians (as all others) to the undergraduate standards in Greek and Hebrew as then required by the Seminary.<sup>36</sup> This, perhaps the first of the student rebellions which became so common in the Fees Must Fall era, was handled with tactful firmness by my colleagues within the department and

the rumblings soon subsided. In subsequent years, students, who might in the earlier dispensation have registered for theology at UWC, came happily and willingly into the Stellenbosch Ancient Studies fold, and it would seem that the need for study of the biblical languages has been accepted without complaint by subsequent aspirant theologians. Moreover, both Greek and Hebrew seem increasingly to be seen as interesting and valuable electives, also by non-theologians, in particular by senior students who wish to continue with graduate work within the broad panoply of Ancient Cultures which the department offers. A core of interested students persists, and at most universities an annual intake, albeit small, of both Latin and Greek first-year students keeps language studies alive.

### Research

So much for the educational aspects of classics in Africa, to the degree that these can be separated from research – academic research should make the researcher a better educator. ‘Undirected’, mainstream academic research must be and is vigorously conducted by classicists at African universities. Participation in international fora ensures the maintenance of academic excellence on our continent. But scholars in Africa need also to extend the frontiers of knowledge about the ancient world as it impinged on, or was influenced by, Africa, for the sake of their students. Research with an African slant may either concentrate on the reinterpretation of the position of Africa and Africans in the ancient world, or on cross-cultural comparison, as in the research by the two Zimbabwean colleagues cited earlier. Senior students should also be encouraged to take this approach.<sup>37</sup> Pre-Roman and Roman North Africa are important, for the study of ancient economy, for the shaping of ancient Christianity, for its Roman art and architecture, for its place within the Roman Empire.<sup>38</sup> This has always been acknowledged, but some European researchers were influenced by the bias of their Roman sources. Alternative interpretations of North African history have increasingly been mooted: by researchers from Nigeria (Ilevbare 1980; Thompson 1993), Ghana (Opeku 1993) and South Africa (Claassen 1993, 2009a; Hilton 1992). As Britons or Germans judge themselves positively through Roman eyes, Africans have a right to stress Africa in antiquity and to encourage archaeological research that lays bare the African contribution to Mediterranean culture. Mattingly and

Hitchner (1995) called for scholars ‘both within and outside the Maghreb’ to re-evaluate the scope of North African archaeology. Now in the strong awareness of the implications of postcolonialism, even the basic tenets of archaeological exploration are being questioned, as witnessed by the topics of the 2019 Liverpool ‘Flagship Seminar’ series.<sup>39</sup>

Spheres of interest can range from comparative mythology and religious studies (Lambert 1990) to the incorporation of Greek myth into modern African literature, such as Guy Butler’s *Demea*, an African ‘Medea’, and, more recently, the startlingly avant-garde peripatetic production by Brett Bailey and Lara Bye of a version of the same drama, titled ‘*medEia*’ (sic) with a chorus singing in both English and isiXhosa and the audience being led through a ‘shantytown’ set that had been constructed for a film (Van Zyl Smit 2007). Afrikaans-speaking scholars such as Van Zyl Smit and PJ Conradie (1994)<sup>40</sup> write on the influence of Greek tragedy in the works of Africans who write in English, such as Achebe and Rotimi. Martine De Marre of Unisa publishes widely on women in antiquity, including African women (for example, De Marre 2018, 2019). Patristic research takes the African origins of various important Church Fathers for granted, and vigorous research continues on, for instance, St Augustine.<sup>41</sup> Africa featured largely in the Greek and Roman historians and there is much still to be done in that direction, as in the collection of articles on the foray of Alexander the Great into Africa and its considerable *Nachleben* (edited by Bosman [2014]). A constant stream of more recent publications has followed. Most recently appeared Parker’s (2017) ambitious publication.

Twenty-three years ago, I wrote:

Unfortunately, there has also been, particularly in the USA, a movement towards a radical reinterpretation of the past that takes little cognizance of facts. A fanciful structure of peripherally academic ‘feel-good’ Afrocentrism has prompted reactions such as Mary Lefkowitz’s ‘*Not out of Africa*’, to name but one example of a vast bibliography both on and prompted by the controversial view of the contribution of Africa to the cradle of Western thought promulgated by Bernal (1987 and 1991). Moderates acknowledge the ancient Mediterranean as an intercultural unit, but stress the leading role of Greece in the development of Western thought. At the practical level, the Afro-American doyen of studies of

*Blacks in Antiquity*, Frank M. Snowden, in various articles (1996, 1997) soberly reviews and largely refutes Bernal's loose equation of various ancient terms for Africans of differing hues. Bernal's revision of accepted wisdom about the origins of ancient societies should, however, not be dismissed out of hand. It did at least prompt a form of revisionism that could entertain alternatives to canonised interpretations of ancient cultures.<sup>42</sup> It also gave direction and impetus to the more sober re-evaluation of the contribution of North Africa to classical civilisation (cf. an earlier Miller, 1985). There is, however, a limit to this approach. Michael Lambert of the then University of Natal strongly stated the alternative: 'To Africanise the classics (or rather the teaching of the classics) is not to research the African connection in Greek and Roman literature. It is *not* an in-depth study of "Roman" Egypt or the archaeology of Leptis Magna or ... even idle speculation on how black Terence and Septimius Severus were ... [It] is to contextualise, for only in contextualisation can there be heart-to-heart contact between Graeco-Roman culture and our situation.' (Lambert 1989: 19–24)<sup>43</sup>

Lambert's plea was for understanding of social issues involved in the ancient world to be related to similar issues in ours. These are legion: from slavery<sup>44</sup> or bilingualism to political intolerance or cross-cultural adaptation, or, at present in South Africa, as it has been in Zimbabwe since the early 2000s, the issue of land appropriation.

Naoko Yamagata (1995) published in a South African journal her credo, as an Asian, teaching classics in London: beside intellectual enrichment, an understanding of the roots of Western culture is indispensable for Western self-knowledge, and for Eastern comprehension of the West. What of understanding of the North by people of the South and vice versa? Reciprocal appreciation of cultures is uniquely possible in African classical studies. African classicists are ahead of their European, Asian and North American colleagues in cross-cultural comparison, in access to living cultures from a different tradition, but similar to those of ancient Greece and early Rome. Two brave forays into such contextualisation have been successfully launched by Richard Whitaker, professor emeritus of the University of Cape Town. His verse-by-verse translations of both the *Iliad* (2012) and the *Odyssey* (2017) contextualise these classics for African

readers. Whitaker, using modern 'South African English', translated certain Homeric concepts with words and expressions taken from a variety of southern African indigenous languages. His purpose was to show that we should not imagine Bronze-age Greek 'kings' as the equivalents of modern-day (Northern) 'royalty' but rather as tribal chiefs such as the famous 19<sup>th</sup>-century king, Shaka Zulu. These borrowings portray a Homeric world that Whitaker, rightly, envisages as closer to the pre-colonial and pre-technological world of early, indigenous southern Africa than the urban sophistication of modern cities and modern royalty. This particular argot includes many words borrowed from various African languages, which depict a traditional, tribal society of chieftains and underlings, praise singers and the payment of a bride price, concepts that far more nearly approach what must have been the cultural set-up of Mycenaean Greece than the 'kings', 'poets laureate' and 'dowries' of more recent Western – or, more precisely, Northern – translations.

Academic effort should be reciprocal: inputs should go in both directions. Scholars of Homer can learn much about oral composition from studying the methods of African praise singers. For example, at President Mandela's inauguration, and at the funeral of struggle activist Joe Slovo, such a singer composed partly in English, incidentally making study of African oral composition easier for non-Africans.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, translation of ancient texts into local indigenous languages is a so far neglected field, apart from translations of the Hebrew and Greek Old and New Testaments and a fairly large body of translations into Afrikaans (cf. Claassen 2014). This field must be encouraged as a means to popularise the classics in Africa and to make them more accessible to some of our students, whose home language is not the language of learning.

### Outreach

Cross-cultural studies should not be disseminated through scholarly journals only. We must write for a larger public, publishing in the popular press. For successful outreach, our own, African-slanted material is needed. With community outreach, the classics in Africa has its greatest task: it should offer the broader African public a means both towards understanding the Graeco-Roman roots of Western thought and of reaffirming its own cultural worth, formerly often despised by proponents



of mainstream Western culture. Through popular articles, talks to schools,<sup>46</sup> in-service training of teachers<sup>47</sup> and public lectures<sup>48</sup> (for which adequate publicity is a prerequisite), decolonialised Africa needs to discover its potential to contribute to an understanding of the past. This will promote a positive African self-image, while creating a favourable atmosphere for the survival of the classics. Close on 30 years ago I occasionally made forays into this field. In the same edition of a Sunday paper (now defunct) that was analysing Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* for a college entry-level examination in English to be taken by mostly African-language speakers, I published a short article comparing the great Roman with Chris Hani, whose assassination by right-wingers shortly before our first democratic elections nearly derailed the process (Claassen 1993b). At a later stage I suggested to a newspaper columnist that he feature some 'great Africans of the past', ranging from Hannibal to St Augustine (Klaaste 1995).

Latin can be extremely useful in enlarging students' academic vocabulary in English. Such preparation should ideally begin at high, or even primary, school level and there, too, we classicists have a role to play. Under 'outreach' also fall attempts at English language enrichment through games-format Latin programmes (communicative teaching) for schoolchildren from marginalised societies, which in South Africa form the majority of the present school population. My theoretical work on the topic (Claassen 1979) was taken up by Corrie Bosman-Schumann of the University of Pretoria (Schumann 1990).<sup>49</sup> Her institution of an afternoon school at her university was superseded by a system of itinerant and correspondence courses for youngsters country-wide (*Schola Latina*), using ready-made material from the US. This precedent has been imitated at various centres, but most have now fallen by the wayside, largely due to time constraints. The correspondence course is now run by a Pretoria-based private school.

At Stellenbosch my attempt, more than 25 years ago, at such English-language enrichment for isiXhosa-speaking high school students through the story of Hannibal in Latin, with English and isiXhosa inputs, was met with great enthusiasm but limited success in a non-compulsory situation. Students, studying on Saturdays, wanted directly appropriate assistance in their matriculation subjects. After my retirement in 2001 from the Department of Ancient Studies at Stellenbosch, I was for three years chair of the Western Cape branch of the CASA. At that time, we

organised annual *Dies Romani* at Stellenbosch, involving day visits by learners from those few schools still offering Latin in the Western Cape.<sup>50</sup> Matriculants' compulsory school projects (essays on aspects of the ancient Mediterranean as well as in some cases very ingenious models of ancient buildings or artefacts) were exhibited and a Latin reading competition (prose by Grade 11 pupils, poetry by the Grade 12s) was held, followed, of course, by refreshments.<sup>51</sup>

Cultural enrichment of non-Latin learners through contact with the ancient world is important. In collaboration with Maridien Schneider, an independent scholar, CASA-WP in 2002 launched a country-wide *Certamen magicum* (magic competition) which capitalised on the Harry Potter craze of the time. Its ostensible aim was extension of learners' English vocabulary by recognition of the Latin roots of many words. Its true aim was publicity for Latin as a valuable subject. The competition was ambitiously publicised as open to all schoolchildren country-wide, but, with limited access to methods of publicity (and before the modern ubiquity of communication by social media), it drew only a limited number of participants. All were rewarded with certificates indicating participation and a few book prizes were despatched to the ultimate winners. Interestingly, the top candidate was also an alumna of the Pretoria-based *Schola Latina*.<sup>52</sup> Earlier, in an ambitious experiment, colleagues at the University of the Western Cape attempted to empower young local pupils to overcome educational disadvantages inherent in the then current apartheid education. Mark Hermans and Bernadette Miller developed their own material based on an imaginary working-class Roman family, to which children from a similar South African background could relate. Political unrest at the time (1993) occasioned some curtailments, but the major constraint was the limits set by heavy university teaching loads. Here, as elsewhere, much must be done.

A fairly successful, fun approach was the 'treasure hunt' I organised, after the amalgamation of Greek, Latin and Semitic studies, for the inauguration of the new Department of Ancient Studies at Stellenbosch, October 1998 to February 1999. The 'hunt' comprised a questionnaire based on an exhibition of ancient artefacts mounted in the university's museum. Schoolchildren, particularly those from an indigenous African home background, enjoyed comparing the shapes of Greek vases and local African pottery, or arrow tips and spear points from the ancient world with

modern African (iron age) ‘traditional weapons’, which still form part of a living culture in some parts of this country. Etruscan or Roman jewellery could be compared with African beadwork, and a little girl proudly told me ‘my grandmother has a traditional dress like the one on display and she allows me to wear it to school on special days’. Both for children from a WASP background and for those who speak an indigenous African language, it was a revelation to discover common ground in the distant past. Book prizes were donated by sponsors.<sup>53</sup>

Twenty-three years ago, I wrote: ‘My emphasis on Africa is unashamedly slanted. Present stress on cross-culturalism and on linguistic spin-offs will keep classical studies alive long enough for the pendulum to swing. Classical education in Africa is in a perpetual process of adaptation and renewal. Only a downward spiral of diminishing resources can thwart its endurance [in this] millennium.’ Probably the biggest constraint on the promotion of the classics to South African schoolchildren by both academics and high school teachers are these ‘diminishing resources’: lack of time, and the demands of our profession.<sup>54</sup> Yet some persist. At a few schools country-wide some teachers offer extra-curricular Latin to interested pupils as seventh or eighth matriculation subject. The Latin Project (see chapter 6 in this volume) was initiated in mid-2019 by the Ancient Studies Department at Stellenbosch University, for interested Grade 8 learners from schools in the area, reaching across all segments of Stellenbosch society. This hopefully would, among its aims of providing a receptive university environment for learners who may be ‘first generation’ and feel intimidated by the idea of university, also serve as a precursor to offering more serious Latin linguistic study or study of culture in general in future years to those who remained enthusiastic. The most enthusiastic participants (and the greatest number) were from the local isiXhosa-speaking community. Unfortunately, commencing in March 2020, the Covid-19 lockdown paused the project, which could not be continued online as so few of the participants have easy access to electronic media. It is hoped that this venture can be resumed soon, and will continue to fuel such interest in the continuation of Latin language learning in South Africa, or, at least, at Stellenbosch.

Obsolete the classical tradition will never be – individual African classics scholars need to ensure that it is not marginalised into extinction. All attempts at outreach require *time* and *effort*. In the present ‘publish-or-perish’ era these are precious commodities. Yet academics can accommodate

such didactic outreach within their research planning: any such efforts at outreach should be theoretically justifiable, and progress must be carefully and adequately recorded and then made available to other colleagues by means of peer-reviewed articles in accredited journals.<sup>55</sup> In that way, our discipline can stay alive through promulgation to the next generation, whilst the aspirations and demands of our own academic careers are simultaneously satisfied. Teaching, research and public service are inextricably linked – we Africans need to strive for excellence in all three domains.

## Notes

- 1 For South Africa, see Van Stekelenburg and Claassen (2003).
- 2 I must apologise for the solipsistic tone and parochial tendency of this chapter, much of which is based on my own experiences as teacher of Latin and Classical Culture at the University of Stellenbosch and my attempts to keep my subject alive.
- 3 The talk, titled 'Classics for the next millennium: African options', was given at the Fifth Conference of the Society for the Study of European Ideas: Memory, History, Critique, in a panel entitled: *AERE PERENNIUS*: The Endurance or Obsolescence of Classical Education in the Third Millennium.' It was subsequently published in a CD-ROM version of the conference proceedings (Claassen 1997) and later republished in the US Latin didactics journal *Classical Outlook* (Claassen 1999).
- 4 Although there were some rumblings at the time, Rhodes University has retained its name, even if the name of its town has been changed from Grahamstown to Makhanda. Rhodes in 2022 boasts eight Latin undergraduates (first year only), five for Greek 1, and 75 first-year students in Classical Studies, 16 at second level and six Classical Studies majors. There is one doctoral candidate in Classical Studies. There has been a slight drop in figures in the last three years.
- 5 A conference held by 'MAP' (*sic*) at Bristol in June 2019 on 'Postcolonial and decolonial reception of European thought' sought contributions on 'Postcolonial / Decolonial reflection on the process of the reception of Classics in non-European contexts' and 'Decolonising movements in Africa and South Asia', focusing on the intersection between African, South Asian and European thought.
- 6 However, Lambert (2014) cites Nigerian academics at the University of Ibadan as dismissing the idea of any clash between Afro- and Eurocentrism as something that affected a previous generation and is no longer an issue.
- 7 No information seems available on whether or where classics is taught in Liberia at present.
- 8 For Nigeria, Lambert (2014) cites a number of Nigerian publications showing Nigerian academic research as focused on both socio-cultural and literary comparison of Nigeria with ancient Greece and Rome.
- 9 Cf. my (Claassen 1993a) comparison of Jugurtha with modern African 'resistance' leaders of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 10 See Maritz (2007) on possible classical influence on monuments in the 'heroes' acre' of the Zimbabwean capital. Particularly rewarding is study of the classical continuum in modern African architecture (among many others, Claassen 1983, 1987, 2002, 2009b; Hilton 2001).
- 11 Such an 'African studies' approach was rejected for all disciplines as early as the 1960s at the

- Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, with the argument that African commonalities with the rest of the world may be best treated within the context of a particular discipline (Paracka 2003: 183–184). Former colonial powers may think differently: for example, the University of Warwick offers a module on ‘Africa and the making of Classical Literature’. See <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/classics/students/modules/africa/>
- 12 See the chapters by these scholars in this volume, Moyo, and Mlambo and McClymont.
  - 13 I have not yet seen Mlambo’s book on the topic which has just recently (March 2022) been published. This topic also drew the interest of a South African scholar, Koos Kritzing (2002: 46), who hoped that South Africa would follow the positive example of agrarian reform cited by Cicero (Aratus of Sicyon), rather than the example of Mugabe in Zimbabwe. The issue is now even more urgent.
  - 14 The first to note and exploit the possibilities of cross-cultural comparison was the Oxbridge scholar John Ferguson, who spent many years in Nigeria (‘J.A.C.’ 1991: 40): ‘his Nigerian pupils ... had an easy familiarity with aspects of Greek and Roman culture that modern Europeans find baffling, such as witches and oracles...’
  - 15 As early as 1960 Prof. Theo Haarhoff of the University of the Witwatersrand commented on how much he had enjoyed gaining ‘experience of non-white students’ at the university of Fort Hare, and helping them (presumably with Latin translation) but also to ‘modify the abstract rules [of apartheid] made by the Minister’ (Hilton 2018: 160).
  - 16 Information supplied by Anne Oberholzer of the IEB.
  - 17 I retired from Umalusi in 2017 after more than 30 years of service as chief Latin moderator. In this time, I had overseen the standardisation and amalgamation of seven different Latin examinations, with varying approaches, into a single system.
  - 18 My short article comparing isiXhosa and Latin (Claassen 1998) is available on the Classical Association of South Africa website under Outreach.
  - 19 Before then, study of Latin was almost ubiquitous in ‘white’ state schools and a single university course in Latin was deemed sufficient for legal studies. Latin had been virtually phased out in most ‘black’ schools. The imposition of up to *two* compulsory university courses in Latin (non-accredited ‘Beginners’ Latin’ plus Latin I) was increasingly seen by black students as an apartheid trick to keep them out of the legal profession.
  - 20 Before my retirement in 2001, I was involved for some years in the then almost unique ‘academic development’ programme within arts and humanities at Stellenbosch. I became aware of the need for boosting underprepared students’ academic skills while not undermining their confidence in themselves or creating a new kind of ‘academic ghetto’. In the late 1990s a USaid grant to the Stellenbosch Arts Faculty was aimed at preparatory academic development courses exclusively for black students entering university, usually in a fully funded three- or four-week residential format before the start of the academic year. Such negative exceptionalism in my opinion served to undermine our ‘new’ students’ confidence. From being the heroes of their schools and families as the first to break the apartheid-driven glass ceiling by entering a traditionally ‘white’ university, they were being relegated to apartheid-style ‘separate development’ in an exclusively black grouping. The faculty then changed its approach to include those white students whose matriculation marks warranted extra preparation for their first year. A non-residential course could accommodate more students. The fare offered was moved from general training in academic language and in ‘thinking skills’ (which students generally despised) to ‘sample lectures’ by all participating departments: students were obliged to attend ten, from which their final five first-year subjects could be chosen in a more informed way. Classics could be touted as an option, which many embraced.

- 21 Word Power enrolments at UCT are in the order of 700–800 annually, the same short course being offered four times per year. In Semester I, 2022, 161 were enrolled for the Word Power course, as against 33 in total in Latin language and literature (years 1 to 3), and one in Greek (first year only). Classical Civilisation enrolments in the first and second year in 2022 amounted to a total of 159, with one Latin honours student, three taking Classical Civilisation honours and five reading for an MA in that subject. Doctoral candidates number two, one for each of the two ancient languages.
- 22 Pretoria boasts in 2022 a Medical Terminology roster of 1 075 students (10 of these online), 65 in Classical Culture I, and 32 in its second-year courses; in its third year, 6. For Latin, there are 35 in the first year, four in the second, but none in the third. There are at present no Greek enrolments, against a healthy total of 65, spread over three years, as recently as 2018. Three students registered in 2022 for a BA honours course in Classical Culture and one for a Master's degree.
- 23 Accredited undergraduate enrolments at UNISA in 2022 are: 87 in total for Greek 1, four for Latin 1, as against 21 in Ancient Culture (year 1), and 389 for Ancient History 1, with, respectively, 100 and 75 for Ancient History 2 and 3. UNISA was unique in South Africa in treating the latter as a separate discipline, distinguishable (by official subject-coding) from other classics courses; however, in this past year they have been obliged by University authorities to amalgamate Classical Culture and Ancient History into a single major, but still with different subject codes. At postgraduate level, Unisa's honours BA courses boast two enrolments for Classical Culture and seven for Ancient History; there is one MA student in Classical Culture, with three studying Ancient History topics. Of their nine doctoral students, one has registered a Latin topic, three Classical Culture and five Ancient History topics.
- 24 In 2018 there were 80 enrolments for the botanical course at NWU, presumably all from the science faculty, now in 2022 supplanted by 102 students following the ancillary (legal) course. They have also had an increase from 2018 to 2022 in Latin language students, from 68 (years 1 to 3) to 101, but a decrease in Greek enrolments for the three undergraduate years (from 100 in 2018 to 63 now). There are two doctoral candidates (one in each ancient language). The relatively strong numbers for the languages at NWU are thanks to the ethos of their theological seminary, where both Greek and Latin (together with Hebrew) have traditionally been compulsory for candidates for the ministry.
- 25 The official website of the Classical Association of South Africa (CASA) lists 10 universities that offer classics: UCT, Free State, Johannesburg, KwaZulu-Natal, NWU, Pretoria, Rhodes, Unisa and Stellenbosch. In 2022 there are no undergraduate Latin or ancient Greek students at Johannesburg, with, however, two Greek honours students and a single doctoral candidate in Latin, but healthy enrolments of 43 for Classical Culture 1, 39 at second level, 11 at the third level and 2 in their honours course. Johannesburg also uniquely offers modern Greek, with in 2022 a total of 7 students (none at first-year level, but 4 at second level and 3 modern Greek majors). Two students are registered for honours BA in modern Greek. UWC in 2018 had a viable enrolment of 85 students in total, for first- to third-year courses in Classical Civilisation. The figures for 2022 are, however, respectively, 37, 16, 17, indicating perhaps merely an annual fluctuation in numbers, exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis. At the prestigious University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), where classics was once chaired by the internationally renowned Virgil scholar TJ Haarhoff, classics seem to have disappeared, judging from its official website.
- 26 The then chair of CASA, Anne MacKay (1999: 82–83), tabulated the decline in registration

- figures from 1994–1999 and concomitant reduction in teaching staff at the 12 universities then offering classics. At present only Wits seems to have dropped all forms of classics teaching, and KwaZulu-Natal is an amalgam of the formerly independent Durban, Westville and Pietermaritzburg campuses; 2019 enrolments there were in the order of over 300 in Classical Civilisation (years 1–3), 9 in Latin (ditto) with 3 in Greek 1 only, 1 honours and 4 MA students. Figures I cite for various establishments in notes 4, 21–25, 32 and 35 mostly reflect larger enrolments than in 1999, particularly in classical culture, whereas language enrolments appear stable and postgraduate figures in some cases seem improved. Mackay's suggestion (pp. 85–88), that universities economise on resources by collaborating in offering individual modules, has not been carried out, in spite of the possibilities offered by modern internet communication. This option may become increasingly attractive post-Covid.
- 27 One gains the impression that when the Covid-19 lockdown was instituted in March 2020, the Ancient Studies Department at Stellenbosch (as did others) once more managed effortlessly to change gear as it were, moving to computer-aided distance education virtually overnight.
- 28 Stellenbosch in 2022 has a distribution (years 1 to 3) of 39 in Latin, 52 in Greek (as against, respectively, 42 and 66 in 2019) and 31 in Biblical Hebrew, spread over the first two levels. Ancient Cultures offers an overview of the literature and history of all three languages, with 227 registrations at first-year level in 2022, 67 students more than three years ago. About 136 enrolments are spread over the second- and third-year Ancient Culture modules, which allows students to concentrate on either Graeco-Roman or Semitic-Egyptian topics (16 more than three years previously). There are 13 students at honours level, 4 doing an MA in one of the ancient languages, 10 MA students in Ancient Cultures, and 4 doctoral students each in Ancient Languages and Ancient Cultures, that is, a total of 35 enrolments in postgraduate courses at various levels.
- 29 This situation obtains at most other former Afrikaans-medium universities.
- 30 This project was very successful. Statistics reported in graph format by Claassen and Brand (1995: 172–174) show remarkable improvement in beginners' Latin students' 1994 final examination results after regular participants in computer drilling were rewarded with a few additional marks in the weekly tests (in fact, the median was merely shifted slightly upward). Controlled results at year end showed a positive shift to the right in the shape of the mark distribution bell curve, with far more students than in 1993 achieving averages of 60–69, 70–79 and even 80–100%. The improved distribution reflected individual higher final marks than the added 'reward' marks. The project died in the following year when compulsory Latin was abolished. Colleagues at the University of the Western Cape reported equal success, indicating that isiXhosa-speaking students, who predominated in participating in voluntary computer drills, had started outshining those English- or Afrikaans-speaking classmates who did not participate.
- 31 Mac Sweeney et al. (2019: 13) discuss European right-wing appropriation of aspects of the classics for propaganda, but also show how the classics are appropriated for what they term 'subaltern' activism against the power of political elites, as with the South African cartoonist Zapiro's portrayal of ex-President Zuma as Nero enjoying '*panem et circenses*' while an artist who had painted an irreverent portrait of him was led away to an amphitheatre, presumably to be mauled by lions (a somewhat mixed metaphor).
- 32 The list was apparently recently upgraded to 12, when South African Sign Language was added. 2018 saw the first matriculation examination (for hearing-impaired students only) of South African Sign Language as 'first (or "home") language'. There are calls for a thirteenth, Khoi-San, to be added, a set of languages unrelated to the other African languages and



- originally spoken by hunter-gatherers whose descendants lay claim to being the original 'first peoples' of Africa.
- 33 My students' edition of Nepos' *Vita Hannibalis*' (1994b) with notes, commentary and teacher's handbook in both English and Afrikaans, but with a multilingual vocabulary featuring six African languages in addition to English, 'Africanises' the studying of Latin in English, also by making students aware of an 'African hero' of the ancient world. It is enjoyed by the few students who continue to Latin 2 at Stellenbosch.
  - 34 In the past, some students belatedly discovered that they *did* need Latin and embarked in their senior years on orthodox Latin language study.
  - 35 The University of the Free State, which adopted the same course in the mid-1990s, recently decided to banish both this and Latin as optional subjects for law. The pattern at the university has changed drastically with the removal of the potential for enrolment of law students. Enrolments there were, until 2018, in the order of 300 in Legal Language and Culture and over 30 in Latin language (years 1–3) and about the same for Greek. In 2022 the total for each of the ancient languages is 7 in the first year and 2 each in subsequent years. Enrolments in Classical Culture have dwindled from over 50 in the first year in 2018, to 30 in 2022, and from 6 or 7 in subsequent years to 3 senior students in 2022, with, however, the recent introduction of Ancient History yielding 5 students at second-year level, and one MA candidate each for both Classical Culture and Ancient History.
  - 36 Now that the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary caters for a much larger panoply of denominations, the biblical languages are now compulsory for only some of these, most notably for candidates for the Dutch Reformed or Lutheran ministry.
  - 37 A third-year Latin student at Stellenbosch, Green, won the CASA 2003 essay prize for a paper comparing aspects of Roman and isiXhosa marriage laws.
  - 38 See Mattingly (2011). Africa was also numismatically important; see Maritz (2006) for a sober evaluation of coins portraying a so-called *Dea Africa*.
  - 39 The emailed announcement on the British *Classics List* of 18 March 2019 of a lecture on 19<sup>th</sup> century archaeology in Algeria, planned for 21 March, asked: '*Can archaeology escape its colonial roots? How should we view the history of our disciplines? Should Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology – and indeed the academy at large – care, and why? And if not, why not? Who has responsibility for the past?*'
  - 40 Sadly, Conradie passed away in December 2021 at the age of 90, leaving an established academic tradition of classical reception studies in South Africa, which he had been largely instrumental in promulgating.
  - 41 See, for instance, De Marre (2016) and the many publications of Prof. Annemaré Kotze of Stellenbosch, who is internationally known for her work on Augustine.
  - 42 Bernal's views are of late enjoying less prominence in modern Egyptological research (Prof. Sakkie Cornelius, email communication, March 2019). Those interested in the debate can now refer to the papers in Royon et al. (2011).
  - 43 Lambert (2018) himself does exactly that. This article, on the 'male gaze' in *Lysistrata*, closes on a serious note, asking how South African audiences, in the contemporary context of frequent violence against women and sexual abuse and the current issues of decolonialisation, would react to the scene where the conditions of the 'peace treaty' are mapped out on the (female) body of the 'goddess Reconciliation', ending, however (p. 52), with the rider that Aristophanes himself 'never shied away from offending members of his audience'.
  - 44 Hugo (1971) (*contra* Lambert's [2011] assertion that Hugo withdrew into an apolitical Senecan 'ivory tower', avoiding confrontation with local inequities) in his inaugural lecture



- as professor of Classics at the University of Cape Town, compared aspects of Roman slavery with the role of both local slaves and indigenous Khoi and San people in the development of Afrikaans from Dutch. Cf. Hilton (2004, 2007).
- 45 Praise songs now can be recorded and transcribed as part of the normal system of verbatim recording of transactions in the South African Parliament.
- 46 In the early 1970s I persuaded a local Stellenbosch winery to sponsor 25 copies of books from the 'Asterix' series, *in Latin*, and members of CASA-WP went around to primary schools in the Cape Peninsula, handing over the books for placement in school libraries, with a suitable inscription encouraging young readers to explore the Latin option when they reached high school. I always took along a (heavy) movie projector with an *Encyclopaedia Britannica* roll film on 'the Romans', which Grade 7 pupils loved. Sadly, the number of high schools offering Latin is now almost nil, so that such a project would now be futile.
- 47 CASA-WP also used to hold an annual workshop for Latin teachers with a mixture of academic and cultural fare meant to inspire and encourage the teachers. This was in the 1970s and 1980s, at the height of apartheid, racial segregation and concomitant 'Struggle' resistance with its rallying cry, 'Liberation before education!' Latin teachers from the so-called coloured schools (whom I personally sought out and invited) would attend such academic training sessions, but understandably did not allow their pupils to participate in the 'fun' activities which CASA-WP held almost every quarter. Such workshops were, however, a valuable method of subtly bridging the divide imposed on the classics community by the apartheid government. In that way, lasting friendships were forged and at least one of these teachers later registered at Stellenbosch for a Master's degree, post-1994. Also, twice I could help to intervene when clamping down by the authorities threatened to destabilise Latin teaching at such schools: once when Helen Kies, Latin teacher at Livingstone High School, was unceremoniously incarcerated during the student unrest of the mid-1980s, and again when the projected chaperone of the Garlandale Senior Secondary School tour to Italy, sponsored by the Italian government, was arrested just before the trip was to commence.
- 48 Both the UCT classics faculty (at its annual summer school) and Stellenbosch colleagues (at the university's 'Word Fest') give well-attended public lectures. Parker's 2017 book was launched in this manner at Stellenbosch. Under the leadership of the late Professor Bert van Stekelenburg, then its chair, CASA-WP somewhere in the late 1980s held two very successful lecture sessions at UCT on 'What to expect when you visit Greece/Rome', on consecutive Wednesday evenings, selling tickets at R3 each and serving Mediterranean fare, with the sponsorship of a local olive grower. Flyers were sent to the offices of all Cape Town travel agents, and several hundred eager members of the public streamed to the lectures, to a certain amount of consternation in the ranks of local faculty members.
- 49 Sadly, Schumann-Bosman, who had also initiated the very popular medical terminology course at Pretoria University, passed away in March 2022, just as the final proof-reading stage of this chapter was reached. This humble footnote serves as a small tribute to an enthusiastic and innovative Latin lecturer who was passionate about the teaching of her subject and the beauty of the language.
- 50 I believe participant schools' music and drama pupils were also included.
- 51 In happier times, when school numbers warranted it, CASA-WP held up to four different early-evening events annually, ranging from Latin reading competitions, to playlets written and performed by pupils themselves, to a very successful series of Latin spelling 'bees' (each ingeniously termed an '*Apis verborum*'). Ways and means should ideally be found to adapt

- these ideas to the Latinless, in the hope of boosting schoolchildren's interest in the classical world and perhaps enticing them to university classical culture courses.
- 52 The most ambitious South African 'outreach' was the series of four biennial Latin Olympiads run by me for CASA between 1987 and 1995, the first sponsored by the Italian consulate; from 1989 onward, we solicited sponsorship of computers and bursary money as prizes from businesses. At the last of these, a special 'DDT Jabavu' prize was awarded the highest scorer with a non-Indo-European (African) home language. CASA decided in 1995 to discontinue this competition, as the time and effort involved did not seem well spent. For me, it was, on the one hand, exhilarating to be able really to stretch the minds of the best competitors with interesting literary questions (based on passages from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) but, on the other, it largely amounted to further advantaging the already advantaged, as the winners mostly came from well-funded private schools.
- 53 It is very much a matter of publicity. Local businesses are only too eager to be seen as supporting cultural endeavours and are often willing to donate prizes (either financial or in kind) for competitions, courses or exhibitions. A national bus company for several cycles of the now defunct Latin Olympiad sponsored tickets for prize winners to travel to Cape Town for the prize giving. Corrie Schumann-Bosman (above, n. 49) on another occasion persuaded the then South African Railways and Harbours Company to sponsor several train carriages to bring learners from Potchefstroom to Pretoria for the annual Latin day at the university.
- 54 Interestingly, Hilton (2018) notes that European academics who worked in South Africa for a time during the first half or so of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, published little while here and their publishing careers took off only after they had left the country. He ascribes this to the heavy teaching load they were subjected to in South Africa. This has not changed.
- 55 Claassen (1988b, 1989) and Claassen and Brand (1995), while concentrating on making compulsory Latin more palatable, are examples of the accredited reportage of didactic research.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# The liberatory potential of Latin studies

## Stellenbosch University's Latin Project<sup>1</sup>

*Reshard L Kolabhai and Shani C Viljoen*

*difficultas omnino ediscendae linguae peregrinae, quasi felle aspergebat omnes suavitates graecas fabulosarum narrationum. nulla enim verba illa noveram, et saevis terroribus ac poenis, ut nossem, instabatur mihi vehementer. nam et latina aliquando infans utique nulla noveram, et tamen [...] didici vero illa sine poenali onere urgentium, cum me urgeret cor meum ad parienda concepta sua, id quod non esset, nisi aliqua verba didicissem non a docentibus, sed a loquentibus, in quorum et ego auribus parturiebam quidquid sentiebam. hinc satis elucet maiorem habere vim ad discenda ista liberam curiositatem quam meticulosam necessitatem.<sup>2</sup>*

Since July 2019, Stellenbosch University's Ancient Studies Department has been working on what has internally been termed the 'Latin Project'. In very general terms, this is a project to teach Latin and ancient culture (especially Graeco-Roman) studies to high-school learners from across Stellenbosch. However, the heart of the Project lies far deeper than the mere transmission of Latin translation ability, or of knowledge of ancient Rome. Rather, the Project has actively aimed to use Latin to do good in the face of the ongoing effects of colonialism and apartheid in the town of Stellenbosch. The Project has been put on hold since March 2020 due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. However, this case study nonetheless

shows the potential for a decolonial approach to Latin and Graeco-Roman cultures that is ultimately subversive to the field's colonial history, and that is to some limited degree liberatory for the Project's participants.

### **Philosophical and political background**

A full theoretical consideration of the interaction between Latin<sup>3</sup> and the socio-political context of Stellenbosch is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the approach to the Project, its language and its content has from its inception been consciously driven by social justice. It is thus necessary to briefly place the Project in its political and philosophical context.

As a result of a long history of imperialist colonialism, apartheid, 'racial' capitalism and neoliberalism,<sup>4</sup> South Africa is today ravaged by poverty, inequality and a myriad other social ills.<sup>5</sup> There is often a danger in academic writing of simply mentioning these out of habit, likely as a result of desensitisation. But it must be remembered that these problems are very real and have extremely severe daily consequences for real people, and especially for children. These problems and their particular relevance to Stellenbosch are not accidental. Indeed, the town of Stellenbosch – South Africa's second-oldest Western settlement – is central to South Africa's oppressive history. The Cape Colony of which the town formed part was the site of some of the earliest oppression of indigenous peoples, and of the introduction of servitude and slavery (Terreblanche 2002: 153–183). The town later became the nursery of Afrikaner nationalism and 'white'<sup>8</sup> supremacy, and its university was considered the 'cradle of apartheid' (Botman 2010: 2), where all South African prime ministers from 1919 (Smuts) to 1978 (Vorster) studied (Froneman 2000). The Group Areas Act of 1950, which accelerated spatial segregation in South Africa and had immense ramifications for Stellenbosch itself (Costandius & Alexander 2019: 3–8),<sup>6</sup> was designed by a minister of the interior who had been a lecturer in the law faculty at Stellenbosch, and who later served as chancellor of the university (James 1992; Thom 1959).

The lasting effects of this can still be seen in the town, which remains deeply segregated along the lines of 'race', class and language despite South Africa's political transition from formal apartheid in 1994. From South Africa's most recent census data (see the Appendix),<sup>7</sup> the areas of Stellenbosch which were classified as 'white' under formal apartheid

today continue to be significantly less densely populated than those of other ‘races.’ These areas also have better access to infrastructure, historic buildings and institutions, with the university in particular dominating the central part of the town.

The same data also show that almost all of Stellenbosch (including Cloetesville and Idasvallei) speaks Afrikaans as home language, while Kayamandi speaks isiXhosa as home language. These two linguistic groups tend to not speak each other’s language, with English rather being a relatively common second language across the groups, even if with low proficiency. This is again a result of oppressive and ‘white’ supremacist apartheid policies linked with the notorious system of ‘Bantu Education’, which sought to restrict ‘black African’ people’s access to English (and thus to other academic subjects that were primarily presented in English) (Bunting 1969: 296–338). The role of the Afrikaans language in particular as a historical tool for the oppression and exclusion of ‘coloured’ people in the country reached its climax in 1976, when the apartheid state massacred schoolchildren who protested a new policy that all their subjects were to be taught in Afrikaans – a language they did not speak (Ndlovu 2006: 324–330). It is important to not fall into political-linguistic essentialism here – Afrikaans, English and indeed Latin are not inherently oppressive languages. Critically, however, they cannot be considered as languages in the abstract. Being languages, they exist only in a particular social context, with a particular material history. Thus, while not inherently oppressive in the abstract, they can still be oppressive – and often were and still are oppressive – by virtue of their roles in social systems under colonialism, apartheid and the present regime. The structurally exclusionary nature of Afrikaans towards non-Afrikaans speakers at Stellenbosch University has been well documented, and has been at the core of a fierce debate about the role and dominance of the language at the historically Afrikaner university (Mpatlanyane 2018; Verwoerd 2018).<sup>9</sup> ‘Black’ South Africans in particular generally seek to study in English rather than Afrikaans, whether as first or second language, and thus have suffered under Afrikaans-centric language policies.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the emerging prevalence of English may come at the expense of Afrikaans-speaking students, a percentage of whom are ‘coloured’ students.<sup>11</sup> And, of course, English also has its own history of imperialism and colonialism, and the fact that it is preferred over Afrikaans as *lingua franca* does not change the fact that it also poses some



threat to indigenous languages.<sup>12</sup> There is thus a complex dynamic between the myriad languages and identities at the university.

Academia, of course, is not separate from society. On the contrary, it is both a product and active producer of society. Thus, access to the university in general, particularly in its Western imperialist form, has always been restricted – be it by an explicit colour bar, class exclusion via financial impossibility, linguistic exclusion, or inability to enter on ‘merit’ due to systemic oppression affecting the standard of people of colour’s pre-tertiary education.<sup>13</sup> Stellenbosch is no different, with access even being literally restricted by forced eviction from the property (Costandius & Alexander 2019: 3–8). Most prominently, the Arts and Social Sciences Building, of which the Ancient Studies Department is part, is built on ground that was violently confiscated from the ‘coloured’ community who had long lived there. These people were ‘removed’ from the town centre and placed on the outskirts of Stellenbosch, in Cloetesville and Idasvallei.<sup>14</sup>

The ‘classics’ in particular were impossible for people of colour and poorer ‘white’ people to study – consistent with accounts worldwide of the field being historically classist both in name and substance (Dugan 2019; Whitaker 1997). Latin has generally been limited to elite schools and academic circles in South Africa, and the West more broadly, and has thus played a gatekeeping role in academia. However, it has simultaneously served to prop up and *ratify* oppressive and elitist institutions,<sup>15</sup> culminating ultimately in the supposed origin stories and justificatory narratives of fascist regimes.<sup>16</sup> Latin has thus played a dialectical role in South African society: not only has access to Latin been restricted as a result of oppressive social regimes in South Africa, but Latin itself has been used as a tool of restriction to perpetuate and intensify those regimes.

It is against a deep awareness of this collective background that the Latin Project was conceived. The Project’s political philosophy was primarily inspired by the ideas of Paulo Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In brief, Freire saw the present oppressive state of society as dehumanising, and sought to describe a process of humanisation through collective liberation (Freire 2017: 17–18, 21). *Conscientisation* would be the core tool of liberation: through interaction with the real world around them, learners would gradually unmask for themselves the true nature of things as it concerned them, with they themselves acting as conscious epistemological and political agents (Freire 2017: 18–21). It would be for the

oppressed themselves to develop this knowledge and take action – it could not come from the oppressor, nor from a disinterested or authoritarian teacher. The oppressed were not to be seen as mere depositories of teachers' information or indoctrination, where teachers could later simply withdraw the same unreflective knowledge – a concept Freire referred to as the 'banking' system of learning (Freire 2017: 44–59). Instead, teachers and learners were to cooperate in radically (re)producing knowledge together, thus learning from each other, and functioning as teacher-learners and learner-teachers (Freire 2017: 53). Through this process, the oppressed would liberate themselves and their oppressors both: they would unmask and act to destroy the very structures of oppression themselves, rather than merely usurp those structures to become new oppressors in their own right. Oppressed and oppressor would thus be restored their freedom in this act of becoming more human with each other (Msila 2013: 492–496).

Freire's work deeply influenced Steve Biko, a South African revolutionary and Black Consciousness Movement leader who was murdered by the apartheid regime in 1977 (Jenkins 2004: 36–37; Msila 2013: 492). Biko conceived of the notion of an 'envisioned self': an ideal and emancipated vision of the self in community with others (Biko 1987: 21, 50). For Biko, freedom would come not from ratifying and seeking to integrate into oppressive and epistemicidal colonial systems (Biko 1987: 24–25). Rather, it would come from each person realising their own envisioned self – both 'realising' it by becoming conscientised and thus aware of this self, and 'realising' it in acting to make it real in the world (Biko 1987: 21, 50). For both Biko and Freire, freedom comes from the agency of the individual, learning and acting with their communities. Freedom is thus by its nature simultaneously individual and social, and simultaneously theoretical and practical.

It is this act of learning about and changing one's own world together with others that from the start underpinned the theoretical approach to the Latin Project. But our project was not the first of this kind in Stellenbosch. Freire's thought and pedagogy – including his later *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*<sup>17</sup> – had also influenced the university's first rector of colour, the late Russel Botman, who initiated the HOPE Project in 2010.<sup>18</sup> This was a large-scale, coordinated and financed endeavour which aimed to actively direct academic and other university activities towards community engagement and social justice. While the

HOPE Project ceased after Botman's death in 2014, the Latin Project drew deeply on its inspiration.

## Project aims, beginnings and approach

### *Aims*

Mindful of its socio-political context, the Project aims to critically teach Latin and classical studies to children in Stellenbosch who suffer from exclusion. It seeks, following Freire's thought, to allow learners to 'discover' Latin through having them shape their own views and experiences of it, rather than seeking to reimpose colonial narratives of Latin's 'civilising' mission. It allows both 'learners' and 'teachers' to change their world and simultaneously themselves – through theoretical reconception and practical intervention – and thus, following Biko, to come a bit closer to their 'envisioned selves' with each other. Following Botman, the Project also aims to instil and nurture some small sense of hope.

In terms of the field itself, the Project further aims to scrutinise the hitherto impersonal approach to the study of the language – moving away from the traditional 'analytic' nature of translation-by-numbers towards a Living Latin method,<sup>19</sup> where the learners actually use the language constructively with each other, and thereby learn it more effectively. The language is thus restored to its ordinary use as a linguistic tool used by real people – indeed, by mostly working-class children, chatting to each other on the playground for fun! – rather than being fabricated, reified and frozen into the stuff of imperialist backstories. It also acts as a 'leveller': as no learner has any prior Latin knowledge (though some had prior ancient cultures knowledge), they are all on a relatively level playing field regardless of class in this narrow sense. (Incidentally, the Project's teachers have had little experience in Living Latin, and so are equally only just learning to speak!)

Of course, we also believe that there are many benefits that come from studying a language, such as general linguistic development, improved comprehension, and potentially a better understanding of scientific/legal terms – all of which may aid learners in accessing academia and thus improve their chances of breaking the cycle of poverty. However, we took deliberate care to not be utilitarian in our approach. The Project is not about learning something 'useful' that would increase a learner's worth

in a neoliberal hyper-individualistic competitive capitalist labour market. As noted, poverty and inequality in South Africa are structural. It is an incidental and wonderful benefit that some learners may see slightly better prospects, but the aim of the Project is to contribute to a material change in the world so that underprivileged learners might be less forced to rely on the chance charity of university students for their prospects to be slightly improved.<sup>20</sup> We also take extreme care to not reintroduce Western colonial chauvinism: we are not doing Latin because of its special ‘importance’, or particular ‘cultural significance’, and certainly not for its imperialist aesthetic. We aim to demonstrate the beauty of Latin for what it can be in the learners’ own hands, not for what imperialism has made it out to be.

The language aside, we believe that a critical study of Graeco-Roman culture allows for a comparative mirror to be held up to our own social moment. Learning about people in the distant past together would ultimately help us learn about ourselves and each other. And after having engaged in the Project, we believe university students and faculty would be better able to explore what ancient studies *is* and what it *should be* in a modern South African context. The Project was designed to bring Latin to (real) life for everyone involved, and through this process Latin itself would be imbued with life and relevance in a time and space where its value is increasingly being scrutinised.

At the same time, the Project aims to present historically excluded learners with access to the university in all its manifestations: the university as abstract concept, the academic institution in Stellenbosch and the physical buildings. It aims to break free from the logic of market capitalism by relying on volunteer work and providing free learning to as many learners as we can manage.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, we have made a point of going further by providing learners with free minibus transport from their schools on the outskirts of the town<sup>22</sup> so they are able to attend the classes on campus in central Stellenbosch, and often with free food and drinks to sustain them at the end of their school day. The Project aims to bring together people from across the town, across linguistic divides, across ‘racial’ and class lines, and across the barrier of ‘adult teacher’ and ‘child learner’, all often for the first time – so that they can all learn something from each other in the same space, and thereby become more human in their shared experience.

In short, then, this project aims to actively do good in society via a university-based study of Latin, allowing Latin itself to be part of a

humanising and liberatory project that is ultimately subversive to the field's relatively recent South African colonial trappings. We do not yet know what the 'Latin' that is emerging will look like, but that is the point: the learners must find out for themselves and teach us that.

### *Beginnings*

The Project was initially conceived by the chair of the Department of Ancient Studies, Prof. Annemaré Kotzé. She had for years had the idea and hope of teaching Latin to high-school learners in Stellenbosch, and of starting a new movement of Latin studies in South Africa. The Project and its nature then grew out of discussions with students and members of the department, where the political and liberatory basis of the Project was conceived, theorised and developed (as especially driven by the students). However, there was still no immediate starting impetus for some time. A breakthrough came at the start of 2019, when Prof. Wim de Villiers – present rector of the university – approached Kotzé with a request that the department consider teaching Latin at high schools in Stellenbosch. Latin as a subject had been waning at Paul Roos Gimnasium – an old and 'high status/prestige' (formerly 'whites-only') boys' school in Stellenbosch, and the only school in the town that had historically taught Latin (Kallaway 2006: 169). The rector had sought to ensure that Latin studies did not fully cease at the school, and thus sought the Department of Ancient Studies' assistance. Those working on the Project immediately rejected the idea that Latin should be preserved for mere historical, colonial or elitist reasons. They further rejected that the Project should only occur at an elite school as a means for the school to continue to distinguish itself from other schools. The condition of the students' engagement was thus that the Project be explicitly inclusive. Nonetheless, the rector's request provided the opportunity to properly begin the Project and expand access to Latin across Stellenbosch schools.<sup>23</sup>

Kotzé convened meetings with all those who were likely to be interested in the Project, especially present university students in the department. According to their ability to contribute, university students took over the general running of the Project, with Kotzé performing a supervisory role and liaising with the schools. The organisation of the Project was non-hierarchical; work was assigned and decisions were made by consent

and consensus across staff and students. The nature of the Project soon changed in several ways. While it was initially expected to only have about a dozen learners taking part, the enthusiasm was overwhelming, with about 35 attending through the Project's first term and another 40 joining halfway through the semester. The content also shifted to be even more critical and decolonial, with a concerted effort to push boundaries – thus giving rise to, for example, a greater focus on oral communication and conversational Latin. Explicitly critical ancient cultures studies were also introduced alongside the study of the Latin language itself.

The departmental secretary, Louise Damons, established and maintained contact with various schools in Stellenbosch. She also handled the administrative demands, such as printing, organising transport and communicating with parents. Amy Daniels, a lecturer in the department, offered useful insights concerning childhood development and social interaction, and has also taught some lessons. After a significant amount of administrative and other preparatory work, including recruitment presentations at schools, the Project was able to commence in July 2019.

### *Approach*

The Project is focused around Stellenbosch. Six schools were involved in 2019: Kayamandi High School, Paul Roos Gimnasium (boys only), Stellenbosch High School, Lückhoff High School, Rhenish Girls' High School and Cloeteville High School. From these schools, approximately 75 learners aged 14–15 were involved in the first semester.<sup>24</sup> Participation was wholly voluntary; learners joined the Project and attended class only if they wanted to. We began with only 35 learners, but the Project achieved immediate popular success – each week learners brought more friends, and at the start of the Project's second term a new group of 30 learners from Kayamandi alone joined. The Latin Project had effectively 'gone viral' at the school, and we have had to transition from using the department's own classroom venues to using the larger lecture halls of the faculty.

Six students in the department (mostly postgraduate) took the lead in the execution of the Project. This included planning and designing course content and materials (for both the Latin and ancient cultures components), structuring lessons, delegating responsibilities and teaching every lesson. This also involved a great deal of research work, especially as concerns

the critical and Living Latin approaches to the language and culture. The students had to teach themselves and each other the rudiments of Living Latin so that they could transmit it.<sup>25</sup> The students also had to prepare critical presentations on, for instance, women and slavery in Rome, as the standard texts found in the *Oxford Latin Course* were found to themselves perpetuate uncritical colonial views on these topics. As the course developed, the students also worked on a series of weekly printouts (synthesised from several teaching methods and texts), which were independently designed as a ‘new’ way of teaching Latin – appropriate to the modern South African high-school learner, and to the study and use of Latin as a *language*. It is hoped that these will eventually form a new Latin textbook that will also in some way ‘go viral’, allowing the Project to grow exponentially. All of the students’ work has been wholly voluntary and *pro bono*.

We began with one session of one hour each week, with learners choosing between either a Friday (15h00–16h00) or a Saturday (10h00–11h00) slot. Roughly 40 minutes was dedicated to Latin, with 20 minutes for culture studies. We usually exceeded our time by about 10 minutes; learners tended to arrive about 10 minutes late due to their logistical troubles in travelling to the university campus, and so we had to compensate. The group was often split in two during each session to allow for greater personal attention, although this required doubling the number of student facilitators present. When we received another 40 new learners halfway through the semester, we had to have a ‘junior’ programme running simultaneously, with double the number of student facilitators. This proved impractical, so we stopped splitting the ‘senior’ group. We hoped to have the ‘junior’ and ‘senior’ groups fuse into a single group, as we planned to take in an entirely new cohort once we recommenced for the first semester of 2020.

During the Latin session, printouts would be given to the learners. The facilitator would then present the content of the printouts, which were designed to allow learners to entirely teach themselves the content if they missed a class, which inevitably happened often). These printouts were designed by the postgraduate students, drawing on inspiration and teaching methods from several sources. These included, most prominently, Ørberg’s *Lingua Latina per se Illustrata*, Balme and Morwood’s *Oxford Latin Course* and Traupman’s *Conversational Latin for Oral Proficiency*. Other sources included YouTube channels (such as Latinitium), the university’s own *Lexis Latina* vocabulary book, and numerous online

sources on Latin oral communication and critical approaches to classics. During some sessions, instead of printouts, learning games would be played – such as memory games, match-the-card vocabulary games and communication games.

During the class, we attempted to speak only Latin as far as possible, with the aim of having the learners develop a natural and instinctive feel for the language (as with any second language acquisition). Our conversational Latin skills are presently still limited, however, and there is not enough time during class for learners to fully absorb the language naturally. Thus, for instance, we have no choice but to explain grammatical cases ‘analytically’, as opposed to letting the learners naturally become accustomed to how the endings are formed.

We have tried to make the language as immersive as we can, given our constraints, and so we have had each learner draw a Roman name (with an accompanying factoid – ‘Augustus: First Roman Emperor’) from a hat. We decided we should overcome the gendered nature of the language as far as possible within the limits of the language’s natural operation, as well as make the space as accommodating as we could for learners. We thus have two lists – masculine names ending in ‘-us’, and feminine names ending in ‘-a’ (just to allow for easier consistent application of the case morphology, avoiding ‘Cicronum’ and the like early on). We stress that boys can take feminine names, and girls masculine names, and that those who are uncomfortable with both can take a name that is neither (*neuter*). A number of girls thus took masculine names and assumed masculine identities – when talking about a certain girl, for instance, the learners say ‘*Vergilius laetus est*’. Several boys have also taken feminine names, although two of them asked to exchange them for masculine names after their friends jeered at them (the facilitators intervened, allowing the change but stressing that taking a feminine name has nothing to do with one’s manhood, aside from perhaps indicating that one is not insecure in one’s masculinity). While Latin does not have neuter names, we see no issue with converting ‘Augustus’ to ‘Augustum’ if a learner so requests it – a minor anachronism that the ancient Romans are in any case too dead to mind – although this has not yet occurred.

The names have allowed us to immerse the students a bit more easily in Latin, avoiding dealing with the complex morphological implications of converting their ‘real’ names into Latin, and have also facilitated some



lessons on gender in language and society. The girls and some boys loudly voiced their indignation at the fact that a single masculine entity within a group represented by a plural word implies the whole group is masculine, even if every other entity in the group is feminine. This allowed us to consider the role and social contingency of gender in language. Interestingly, isiXhosa – spoken by the Kayamandi learners in particular – has no grammatical gender, but rather an extensive system of grammatical classes (although the distinction between grammatical gender and class can be debated). This, and a few other linguistic characteristics, has also allowed us to show that many aspects of language are not unchanging or universal, but are constructed. In several instances, Latin acts more closely to isiXhosa (a Nguni language) than to English or Afrikaans (both languages descended from Proto-Indo-European).

Currently, our curriculum has featured the following: basic greetings and introductions; pronunciation; the verb ‘esse’ in present tense; first conjugation verbs in present tense; Latin sentence construction; the three genders; nominative, accusative and vocative cases (and ‘in’ + ablative); imperative mood; noun and adjective agreement; basic questions and answers; basic conversational Latin phrases and responses; and singular and plural numbers for all content mentioned. As mentioned, the approach has been to develop an instinctual ‘feel’ for the language. Learners should be able to understand the language *in* the language, instead of resorting to analytical translation-by-numbers.

The ancient studies component of the lesson is presented by a student different to the language portion’s facilitator, usually with a PowerPoint presentation. Some of these presentations include examination of material culture, such as the department’s collection of ancient coins and statue replicas. Regardless of the topic, we make sure to allow the learners to discover the relevance and interest of it in their own lives today. Learners are able to shape the discussions, and request future ancient cultures topics per their interests.

We give neither homework nor tests. Learners are encouraged to revise their work at home, and are able to complete work at home, but we stress that (like the rest of the Project) this is wholly voluntary. We do not want to create an authoritarian learning environment and contribute to learner stress, as schools and school-like spaces generally do. We do assess learners informally, noting how they progress when we ask them questions in

class, and plan to offer optional check-point tests so students can assess themselves. We had some success with this approach – the Kayamandi learners in particular tended to practise amongst themselves while at school during the week, and we would sometimes find a newcomer to the Project catching up within a week solely through their friends' help and encouragement.

### **Perception and feedback from participants and teachers**

Throughout the Project's duration, from our first request for anonymous feedback in the third week, we have received overwhelmingly positive comments from the learners.<sup>26</sup> They have praised the facilitators, the content, the venues and the concept itself. The 'senior' group stresses that they always want *more* – more content, more lessons. Several of them have outright requested more Latin and less ancient cultures, while a few others have requested more ancient cultures in place of Latin. A couple of learners mentioned that the progress is a bit too fast for them. As noted, the learners from Kayamandi in particular have been so delighted that they have taken to speaking Latin between themselves even at school – which is how the 'senior' group managed to inspire 30 'juniors' to join after just a couple of months. We have endeavoured to keep the communication lines as open as possible, so the learners feel sufficiently comfortable to share their honest thoughts, and so the praise appears to be genuine. (The Kayamandi learners in fact demanded a group hug with the facilitator at the final class of the year!) Some of the teachers at the schools have been equally full of praise for the programme, encouraging more learners to join.

We are still concerned about those learners who have struggled to attend regularly. We are also still doing our best to ensure that the learners can be honest with us, and are reluctant to assume that an absence of critique indicates an absence of shortcoming. However, overall, the Project does appear to have been a success thus far. The learners genuinely do seem to be deeply enjoying themselves.

The facilitators have been equally thrilled by the Project and its prospects. For some university students, the two sessions – even though on a Friday afternoon and Saturday morning – are a highlight of the week, and demonstrate the delight of working as a teacher. However, many students are overcommitted elsewhere and cannot afford to invest too much time

in the Project. Nonetheless, all of us who are involved – both faculty and students – remain determined to do our best to ensure that the Project continues, and that it continues to grow.

## **Future goals, and challenges and limitations**

### *Future goals*

As described throughout this chapter, the Project aims at achieving far more than the mere transmission of Latin translation ability. It aims to provide a space to radically rethink the classics, and to allow the classics to do good in society. From the start, the thought has been that it is almost incidental that the Project is about Latin; the myriad benefits the Project brings could arguably be found in the teaching of any subject, but Latin is the present means by which these benefits are articulated and expressed. Latin is the medium, and it is Latin (rather than, say, science) because Latin is what we know and what we care about. Of course, Latin has played its own particular role in our colonial history, and thus provides us with the very tools and impetus for its own subversion. But the same can be true of all fields, including the sciences.<sup>27</sup> The broadest and most utopian goal, then, is that the positive change we bring becomes a trend in *all* fields – that there are ‘Music Projects’, ‘Science Projects’, ‘English Projects’ and, of course, that the constructed walls between each of these presently ‘discrete’ fields be broken down – and that all their liberatory potential be fully unleashed.

Thus, while Latin skills and knowledge of ancient cultures are the obvious outcomes, the benefits we are hoping to give the learners, ourselves and society go far beyond these: development of general linguistic skills; critical thinking and the ability to think critically about the past; knowledge of both world history and South African history; critical examinations of issues such as ‘race’, class, gender, and colonialism; integration across social barriers; introduction to the university space (physically, socially and academically); general academic development; teamwork and cooperation across class, linguistic and cultural lines, and with ‘strangers’; writing and listening skills; organisational skills; facilitation and curriculum development skills; research skills; the improvement of social cohesion in South Africa; the discovery of potential newfound love for Latin, ancient cultures, languages generally, or teaching; personal development; and very many more.

In terms of longer-term linguistic ability more narrowly, we would like the learners to be able to actively and confidently use Latin with each other. If they are given a text to translate (such as those in the *Oxford Latin Course*), they should be able to ‘read’ the text fluently, rather than resorting to mechanical grammatical analysis. They should also be able to understand and communicate orally, conversationally and usefully (e.g. talking about their computer). Naturally, they should also have the ability to analyse complex poetry as is ‘traditionally’ done, although the experience will likely be significantly different with a solid natural linguistic base on which to rely.

The goal for the near future would have been to expand the offering to more students in a new cohort (year-group), with a new cohort each year roughly corresponding to each new Grade 8 cohort at the schools. In four years, then, there would have been five concurrent cohorts. It was also hoped that other Stellenbosch high schools could be included. This would have been an immense task to manage, and so growth in the facilitator and administrative side would also have needed to be planned, to allow for smooth and gradual expansion of the programme. For instance, the older learners might have been able to assist in facilitation after several years’ experience, and they might in fact become classics students at university themselves. We had also hoped to expand the offering from a mere hour a week (of Latin and cultures combined) to at least an hour and a half, as it is difficult to develop linguistic ability in particular with such little exposure.

### *Challenges and limitations*

There have been numerous challenges in running the Project thus far, and we have handled them as best we could with varying degrees of success. First, ensuring that the Project is a success – and particularly having enough students present to facilitate, and design and prepare coursework – requires significant investment, and the department’s students and staff tend to already be overcommitted. The bulk of the work was necessarily undertaken by very few students. The sustainability and growth of the programme is thus a challenge, as we need some way of drawing in, training and retaining competent facilitators. Such a training and retention programme will itself require a lot of time and work to ‘teach the teachers to teach’. If our goal is to have five concurrent cohorts, we will effectively be managing a small high-school’s worth of students, and so need to prepare

for that. The alternative is that we continue with only the existing cohort, and that the Project be a once-off endeavour with only one group of students over a few years, but this is certainly not the vision we have been hoping to see realised.

Second, there are also financial concerns as to the Project's sustainability and growth. As we teach for free – accessibility being at the very heart of the Project – we are wholly dependent on funding from other sources. Steady and sufficient financial support is generally necessary to ensure continuity and expansion in the offering and recruitment of education programmes. Without that steady and sufficient support, matching the growing demand is challenging. It is possible that in some years we shall simply have no effective facilitators who are willing and able to help, or we shall not have money to supply transport from the outskirts of Stellenbosch. In such a case, the entire Project could collapse in a year, as it inherently relies on continuity over time. Even if the effects are not quite so final, it is extremely difficult to think that we may have to turn away structurally impoverished children who are so eager to study Latin and ancient cultures that they would do so outside and on top of their regular school commitments and at weekends. Worse still, that we may have to turn them away due to our effective inability to 'afford' them because, despite our efforts, our 'racial'-capitalist society's market logic deems them, and their futures, unworthy of investment.

Third, the heart of the Project – the social justice aspect – has naturally presented challenges. Thus far, the learners have not had enough time to truly begin reaching across barriers and making friends from other spaces in the short time they spend in the classroom. Transport, and paying for and coordinating it, has been an issue. We cannot expect learners to purchase their own textbooks, and cannot afford to buy textbooks for their personal use at home, and so we must design our own material for home use.<sup>28</sup> We also cannot expect learners to have access to the internet or computers, and so are limited in the resources that we can give them – we can essentially only rely on printouts. It has also been a challenge – albeit a positive and enriching one – to constantly ensure that we are making the space as safe and encouraging as possible for everyone involved. It is very easy for students from particular backgrounds to feel excluded or ill at ease (especially given the socio-political dynamics of the town and university), and we want the Project to be a haven that slowly grows outwards and

changes the world around it, rather than a mere extension or perpetuation of the social and economic ills that plague South Africa. As with Freire, the teachers must be taught by the learners as well, and so every moment is a learning experience for us.

Fourth, there were numerous 'hard constraints' on us at the start of 2020. Due to personnel, venue and financial constraints, we could only offer students one hour-long class a week. The learners themselves also had school and other commitments, and so they were unable to attend more, and often had to miss class. In particular, there were a few learners who had issues in attending regularly. We attempted to maintain open communication channels with them, and they let us know that they had other commitments at weekends. However, we are concerned that there may be other factors at play, such as transport issues or linguistic difficulties.<sup>29</sup> We do not want any learners falling through the cracks, and establishing what may have gone wrong, if anything, is a challenge.

Some very limited funding had been supplied by the university as a once-off allocation. Cognisant of the 'racial' and class divides in the town and the cohort, and the need to minimise barriers to entry as well as potential shame or embarrassment, we have prioritised this funding for the issues of greatest need. We have thus provided weekly bus transport for the learners from Kayamandi, who cannot afford to travel to the university, while other learners make their own way. We have also provided some basic food and drinks for the learners, who are often hungry after a long school day, and may be suffering from food insecurity. We have done all printing of the course content for the students, and have supplied them with files in which to store this content and take it home. We also supply pens and paper, which many learners do not have easy access to. At the end of the year, we had a small 'class party', with juice and chips. Finally, we purchased about three dozen copies of Balme and Morwood's *Oxford Latin Course: Part I*, for the learners' use during class-time.<sup>30</sup> We have thus far been able to use the department's own venues, and not had to pay extra to rent them.

However, as the university's funding was once-off, we are not sure if we will receive it again. We at least had enough funding to keep the transport (our largest expense) going for a few weeks at the start of 2020. We plan to approach potential sponsors so that the Project is not forced to shutter so early despite its clear potential. We are also hoping that we will not be made to pay for the larger venues we use, as this may force us

to significantly curtail our growth so that we can fit into the department's small classrooms.

All these issues on their own already made it somewhat difficult to develop the learners' linguistic abilities and retain continuity, as there was so little language exposure time. We also spent some time revising for those who were absent (and willing) to catch up, and this slowed down our progress. We were working on potential solutions to this, including developing dedicated support sessions, giving more resources for students to take home, and encouraging the learners to communicate more with each other in Latin whenever they could during the week.

Of course, our greatest challenge by far is the recent Covid-19 pandemic, which immediately halted our course in March 2020. Before South Africa entered lockdown, the Latin Project classes had already ceased, in order to limit the spread of the disease. The first province to see a surge in cases was the Western Cape, where Stellenbosch is located. At the time of writing (July 2020), South Africa is still in some degree of lockdown, with cases surging in general and at schools in particular. As the schools themselves were closed for some time, we have been unable to reach the learners. They also do not have easy and equitable access to computers, the internet or online learning facilities.

The students working on the Project have not been able to enter campus, and have returned home; their primary concern has also been to stay safe and transition to online learning to salvage their own academic year. It is critical to note that the fallout from the pandemic is human-made, not natural: the worst hit will be those without work, without steady and sufficient income, without space to socially distance, without adequate healthcare and shelter and sanitation and education and transport, without safe and stable social relations.

The gap between the haves and have-nots – indeed, the gaps of all kinds between the learners in our classes – will become more severe than in modern memory. This crisis is systemic, and originated long before the virus appeared. The pandemic is merely the most extreme manifestation of the structural socio-political problems that the Latin Project sought, in some very small way, to address.

We have not even begun to think of how we could go about starting the Project up again. We certainly do not wish to do so in the near future, given the risks involved for the learners and their families (and ourselves

and our families as well). But this draws our attention to the fundamental political and philosophical limitations of the Project. The Project is an attempt at subversion, at some small liberation in some small way in the context of a violently oppressive society. We had to always hope for the best outcomes of the Project. Very often we were surprised by how much of a positive impact it seemed to have on all of those involved, whether learner, facilitator or even family member. But, Covid-19 or not, we could never believe that this Project on its own would bring liberation in some full sense – it could only contribute towards the struggle for liberation. Nor could Latin itself be truly liberated without restructuring our society along genuinely democratic lines.

These fundamental limitations on our freedom will have to be addressed in a project far bigger than this. In the meantime, however, we can – indeed *must* – use Latin as one hopeful tool towards wider liberation, and we must continue – full of hope – subverting the restrictive dialectic Latin has formed part of in South Africa. Latin has historically been restricted, and been used to restrict. Now, in this time of escalating crisis, we believe we must keep using Latin to shape our freedom, and our freedom to shape our Latin.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter was written in mid-2020, during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa, and reflects the developments at that time. The authors were two university students involved in coordinating the Latin Project in 2019.
- 2 For the drudgery of learning a foreign language sprinkled bitterness over all the sweetness of the Greek tales. I did not know a word of the language: and I was driven with threats and savage punishments to learn. There had been a time of infancy when I knew no Latin either. Yet [...] I learnt it *without the painful pressure of compulsion*, by the sole pressure of *my own desire* to express what was in *my* mind, which would have been impossible unless I had learnt words: and I learnt them *not through people teaching me but simply through people speaking*: to whom I was striving to utter *my own* feelings. All this goes to prove that *free* curiosity is of more value in learning than harsh discipline. Augustine *Confessions* I.4; translation FJ Sheed (1943). Emphasis added.
- 3 Throughout this chapter, ‘Latin’ will act as shorthand to refer to the language, Graeco-Roman cultures, and the studies of these both, except where it is clear that only the language itself is intended.
- 4 See generally Ashman et al. (2011); Bunting (1969); Terreblanche (2002) and (2012: 37–90).
- 5 30.4 million South Africans, or 55.5% of the population, were living in poverty in 2015 (Stats SA 2017: 18–20). Men are consistently less likely to suffer poverty than women (Stats SA 2017: 56–57). Due to structural inequality and poverty, the ‘black’ majority remains overwhelmingly poor today (Stats SA 2017: 18–20; Terreblanche 2002: 25–49, 2012:



- 101–115). On average, ‘white’ people earn three times as much as ‘black’ people (Stats SA 2019: 146). 90–95% of all South African wealth is possessed by the wealthiest 10% of South Africans; 55–60% of all income goes to the highest 10% of earners. The poorest half of the country has no measurable wealth, and only earns 10% of all income (Orthofer 2016: 4–6). South Africa has the highest GINI coefficient (the measure of the distribution of income across a population) on record in the world, and inequality has in fact increased since the end of formal apartheid (World Bank 2018: xv).
- 6 For a history of this particular forced eviction and the historical context of Stellenbosch, see Grundlingh (2015).
  - 7 Table 1 data are from Stats SA *Census 2011* (2012). The data on linguistic and ‘racial’ geography have been excellently plotted on interactive maps by Frith at <https://dotmap.adrianfrith.com/>; the visual representation is quite striking.
  - 8 ‘Racial’ categories are historical and unscientific social constructs that arbitrarily group humans together for the purpose of discrimination: see generally Smedley and Smedley (2005); Bunting (1969: 159–160, 189). However, these constructs have material social, political and economic implications, and thus reference to them is necessary. The categories are referred to with quotation marks to emphasise their constructed and non-essentialist nature; in this chapter, as in the Project, we aim to problematise ‘race’ essentialism.
  - 9 This is not unique to Stellenbosch. The debates over the role of Afrikaans and English in the languages policies of formally Afrikaans-only education institutions have led to a spate of disputes, and indeed several Constitutional Court cases. See *Gelyke Kanse v Chairperson of the Senate of the University of Stellenbosch* 2020 (1) SA 368 (CC), which discusses the situation at Stellenbosch in some depth. See also *AfriForum v University of the Free State* 2018 (2) SA 185 (CC); *Chairperson of the Council of UNISA v AfriForum NPC* 2022 (2) SA 1 (CC); and *Head of Department: Mpumalanga Department of Education v Hoërskool Ermelo* 2010 (2) SA 415 (CC).
  - 10 There have simultaneously been incidents of racism against ‘black’ students specifically for not speaking Afrikaans (Mpatlanyane 2018: 12–13).
  - 11 In 2018, the university’s ‘racial’ demographics were as follows: 20% ‘African black’, 18% ‘coloured’, 3% ‘Indian’ and 58% ‘white’. Its home language demographics were as follows: 38% Afrikaans, 48% English and 4% isiXhosa. There has been some degree of change over the past 10 years: in 2013, the university was 56% Afrikaans (Stellenbosch University 2018). These statistics are very disproportionate compared to the demographics for the country in general, or of the Western Cape in particular – see the Appendix. For an argument in favour of Afrikaans over English at Stellenbosch University, see Scholtz and Scholtz (2008).
  - 12 Cameron J wrote in the unanimous judgment concerning Stellenbosch’s language policy that the ‘flood-tide of English risks jeopardising the precious value of our entire indigenous linguistic heritage’. *Gelyke Kanse v Chairperson of the Senate of the University of Stellenbosch* 2020 (1) SA 368 (CC) para. 48. Froneman J’s concurring judgment explores the complexities in some depth: paras 64–98.
  - 13 There remains a massive divide between former ‘whites-only’ schools, which generally excel academically, and schools for ‘black’ people, which are structurally dysfunctional (Spaull 2012).
  - 14 The Arts and Social Sciences Building was formerly known as the BJ Vorster building – named for the prime minister who built the apartheid police state (Costandius & Alexander 2019: 3–8). For a history of this particular violent eviction and the historical context of Stellenbosch, see Grundlingh (2015).

- 15 Roman law was instrumentalised to play at least some role in the supposed justification for slavery in South Africa (Hilton 2007).
- 16 See for instance Stone (1999). For an examination of the links between Nazi Germany and the fascism of apartheid South Africa, see Bunting (1969: 56–78).
- 17 See Freire (1994).
- 18 See Botman (2011); Le Grange (2011: 183–189).
- 19 Living Latin (or ‘Latinitas Vita’) refers to the use of Latin as a living language that can be constructively and effectively used in a modern context. This approach presents a break with the ‘traditional’ analytic method of studying Latin as an ancient ‘dead’ language. See generally Lloyd (2017).
- 20 Anecdotally, a social-justice-minded senior professor at the university expressed her lack of interest in the Latin Project to one of the present authors, because she believed Latin to be both colonial and not useful for underprivileged learners. She instead recommended a project to teach learners French. Indeed, we would wholly back a ‘French Project’ – alongside our own! But in any case, as noted, we do not believe Latin to be inherently colonial, and we do believe it to be ‘useful’, although we reject ‘usefulness’ as a necessary requirement: ‘Bread for all, and Roses, too!’
- 21 Unpaid labour can of course be *particularly* exploited labour under capitalism when used to produce commodities for the market. Our labour deliberately broke free from this, as we produced socially meaningful outcomes which were explicitly and intentionally uncommodified. To our knowledge, the university did not even benefit from any positive public relations marketing related to our labour. This does not mean we were not ourselves subject to financial constraints, as we discuss later; even our best attempts at breaking free from the market are still, in the end, limited.
- 22 It must be remembered that these learners are on the periphery because of deliberate apartheid segregationist town planning and forced removals, again as a dialectic result of the university itself: the university shaped violence and exclusion, and violence and exclusion shaped the university in turn.
- 23 It is important to again note the disparity in terms of class and ‘race’ at South African schools, with former ‘whites-only’ schools generally excelling while former ‘black’ schools struggle – see Spaul (2012). Each of the schools in Stellenbosch is situated within one of a number of highly segregated areas, and the schools’ resources, infrastructure and performance thus follow a similar pattern.
- 24 That is, in the latter half of 2019.
- 25 Oral communication, pronunciation, translation into Latin and indeed any useful communication in Latin is not a feature of the present university curriculum, which focuses primarily on translation from classical Latin texts.
- 26 This feedback is on file with the authors.
- 27 On eugenics and ‘racial science’ at Stellenbosch University, see Walters (2018).
- 28 As noted, this has allowed us to design work on our own terms, although it requires a great deal of time and labour investment.
- 29 These learners were Afrikaans speaking and struggled with English, which was the only medium of instruction (other than Latin) available to some facilitators.
- 30 A further recent development has been our notification by the publisher that this textbook is now out of print, and so we will be unable to order any more copies.

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## Appendix

*Table 1: Stellenbosch by 'race' and home language'*

Note: Brandwacht, Cloeteville, Dalsig, Idasvallei, Kayamandi and Stellenbosch (Town) are 'main areas' which fall within Stellenbosch Local Municipality, within the Cape Winelands District Municipality in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Percentages (except where <1%) have been rounded by the authors. Not all main areas within Stellenbosch Municipality are listed, and only the three primary 'racial' and linguistic classifications are listed. Linguistic breakdown refers to first language use. Notes and analysis of statistics are by the present authors. Data are from Stats SA *Census 2011* (2012). The data on linguistic and 'racial' geography have been plotted by Frith at <https://dotmap.adrianfrith.com/>

Place	Population density (persons per km <sup>2</sup> )	'Racial' breakdown (%)			Linguistic breakdown (%)			Notes
		'Black African'	'Coloured'	'White'	Afrikaans	English	isiXhosa	
South Africa	42	80	9	9	14	10	16	isiXhosa has the second-highest population of mother tongue speakers. It is exceeded only by isiZulu, which for its part only has 23% of the population. There is thus quite a spread in first languages nationally.
Western Cape	45	33	49	16	50	20	25	
Cape Winelands	37	62	24	13	75	4	17	
Stellenbosch Municipality	187	28	52	18	68	7	21	As with the Cape Winelands District and the Western Cape Province, the municipality is largely rural.
Stellenbosch University (2018 data)	-	20	18	58	38	48	4	
Brandwacht	1 064	4	2	94	64	29	0.38	Adjacent to Dalsig.
Cloeteville	8 943	6	88	5	94	3	1	Destination of 'Die Vlakte' forced removals.
Dalsig	879	4	2	91	72	23	0.24	Near three elite former 'whites-only' schools.
Idasvallei	4 179	5	94	1	91	6	1	Destination of 'Die Vlakte' forced removals.
Khayamandi [sic]	15 968	95	5	0.17	6	3	85	Founded as a 'black location'.*
Stellenbosch (Town)	2 313	16	16	66	71	21	2	More diverse and higher density due to the majority being a student-age population (57% of residents are in the age range 15–24), with students being able to stay in more affordable high-density university residences.

\* All data barring those on Stellenbosch University are sourced from the 2011 South African Census (Stats SA 2012); Stats SA Community Profile Databases of Census 2011 (2012); the subnational data in the table are sourced from the easy geographic navigation by Frith at <https://census2011.adrianfrith.com>. The data on Stellenbosch University are from its own report in 2018 (Stellenbosch University 2018).

\*\* See generally Rock (2011).

## Conversation with Chanté Bhugwanth

Amy Daniels (AD): What led you to study Ancient Cultures?

Chanté Bhugwanth (CB): I took Ancient Cultures from first year and I thought ancient history was interesting and it stayed interesting even after the first year. After meeting with you at the beginning of my second year, I decided that I was very much interested in pursuing Ancient Cultures as an academic career. And since then I have had more in-depth experience with the various cultures that we study. I also took Philosophy and Political Science, but I majored in English and Ancient Cultures, and the two complemented each other quite well. In my third year I did Meta Science and one of the assignments in that module was to come up with a proposal. My lecturer advised me to pick something that I could see myself doing in my honours year because he knew I was going to be doing honours in Ancient Cultures. So, I picked a topic which related to an essay I did in my second year for Dr Nitschke, which was a module on Rome and Carthage. I did my proposal on perceptions of Carthaginians within Roman literature, specifically the *Aeneid*. I ended up doing my honours thesis on perceptions and representations of Carthaginians within the *Aeneid* and I looked at Dido and Aeneas and basically their opposing and yet similar roles within the *Aeneid* despite their difference in identity – or, what do you call it? – nationality.

AD: That's great because your MA is also Carthage-related and you're also doing Latin. You're finishing up your Latin undergrad this year on top of your Master's and on top of carrying on with your Greek?

CB: Yes. The choice to carry on or to pick up the languages in my honours year was because I wasn't aware that if I wanted to go on internationally I'd need those languages and so I'm having to play catch up at the moment. The reason why Carthage is present throughout is because, when I look at Carthage and Rome, I'm interested in the cultural contact between them and the way that these pieces of literature characterise that contact between the two different cultures. That's where my interest lies, it's not purely in a single culture. [It stems from] our South African background, ... my own personal history: the person that I am now is influenced by the fact that South Africa's history is a history of cultural contact. We know the contact was not exactly great contact but still a form of contact which has impacted us today and that's why I look at it. I'm Indian but I don't really identify with the norms and stereotypes, I could say, of the culture. And I think that's a lot to do with our history – not just apartheid – but the colonial history of South Africa as well.

AD: That is heavy because our identities – as researchers – are so closely tied with what we choose to do research on and how we look at things. You seem to have found a niche and a way into classics or to Ancient Cultures (as we call it at Stellenbosch) that you wouldn't have had were you not a South African or an Indian South African. So, has there been anything the other way? Has Ancient Cultures somehow fed into how you're thinking about the world? Are you seeing a place or value in having devoted the past several years to studying this cultural contact between people that are long dead?

CB: It's difficult to say because classics has such a loaded history itself in all countries and in this one as well. But I think, if you're asking that question – if you feel you need to ask the question both ways around then I think you're also assuming that the study of Ancient Cultures is a fixed thing, untouchable in a sense. And I don't think that's the case, especially if you need to ask the question of its relevance to different kinds of people. People need to be able to be informed by it but to also inform it itself.

AD: I'm going to try to get you to say more about that because I think it's important. I love that you brought up the idea that Ancient Cultures or classics is not a fixed, untouchable thing. We have to look at it in certain ways or it has to influence everything because, as our first-year students often say, 'It is the root of our culture.' What culture? [laughter] Can you say more about how you think that is lived out in your experience or in your own work?

CB: My MA topic basically stems from some of my English studies, actually. In one of my seminars we looked at personal narratives of migration and that involved people of mixed origins and heritage moving around the continent or the world, people from Africa specifically to the UK or Europe. I found it relevant to me personally given that the people that were the focus of these stories had mixed heritages because of parents from different cultures. They were able to move from one country to the next, one culture to the next, yet still felt very displaced, and not as if they belonged. To get that sense of belonging was quite a long journey. It made me start to think about this sort of diversity that was present in antiquity and just how many different peoples were around at the time that end up being glossed over because of the problem of sources. What kinds of similar stories could be told? I don't have all the answers but that's where my approach of looking at cultural contact comes into play. It's easier in English studies because it's contemporary; for antiquity it can be more difficult to relate to it on a very personal level, but that is the sort of gap I'm trying to bridge.

AD: And it's an important gap. You mentioned Dr Nitschke's Ancient Cultures module from 2016, your second year. Was that really the only place [subject field] where you as a student were given the space to talk about the Fees Must Fall protest action while it was happening? I heard that there was one day where only a handful turned up and you had a space in an Ancient Cultures lecture, of all places, to talk about your experience of the protests.

CB: Yes. It was amazing because this was the first person who'd ever done it so directly and she wasn't even South African. But I think that's why she felt she could talk about it and get people to talk about it. Basically, there were hardly any people as you say and I think one of the caretakers came



bursting into the room and we thought, 'Oh no! What's happening?' He said: 'There might be something happening.' And then he walked out. We all thought that we would have to leave soon. Dr Nitschke stopped and said, 'Before we go anywhere let's take a few minutes to actually talk about what's going on. Let's talk about these protests.' And then she started to explain and ask questions and you had people from both sides – I mean, who spoke for pros and cons of what was going on. And Dr Nitschke played devil's advocate and compared the experience of US campuses. She also spoke about the lack of representation within our room itself, let alone our university. And so that's the kind of discussion we had which was very eye-opening for me, even on the topic of those protests at the time.

AD: That's quite an intense experience to have. To me her approach demonstrates the perspective you've just been talking about where you're taking your training in one field and you're able to transfer those skills to another and to use those skills to make meaning. That's not something everyone has the opportunity to do with a subject that gives you critical distance. So, yes, classics or Ancient Cultures can be really difficult to work with because everybody's dead but on the other hand, it gives you critical distance; you're not going to offend anyone.

CB: Yes. It was a good experience. The topic of Rome and Carthage helped our presence of mind: in that module itself Dr Nitschke would reiterate, 'This is what was *said*' to be causes of something, and this is how Carthaginians were *said* to be. Via later materials, from, say, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century material, she would point to the depiction of Carthaginians in relation to the own era. She gave two essay topics: one situated in antiquity where you had to talk about the *Aeneid*, and then the other option which required you to look at modern reinterpretations of this particular incident or occurrence in history. And she warned us that though you'd think the modern one is easier, it's actually a lot harder and I think that also got people thinking along very different lines.

Third dialogue:  
On classics and the canon



## CHAPTER SIX

# Responses to crisis

## Cicero in Zimbabwe

*Madhlozi Moyo*

After the harmonious elections of 29 March 2008 in Zimbabwe, and during the bloody run-up to the election run-off of 27 June 2008, this author tasked the University of Zimbabwe Classical Studies first years (CLS1020) to react to the following assignment question: What is the relevance of Cicero's *On Duties III* to contemporary Zimbabwe?<sup>1</sup> Responses demonstrated a great ability to contextualise Classical Roman thought within students' own situations. The major weakness of this approach is that most essays were largely biased, and in some cases, some students chose to not engage due to fear and distrust.

Writing a decade after the pedagogical exercise was conducted, one cannot help but realise the enduring nature of *On Duties III*. In Zimbabwe, the political events have since taken an even more interesting turn, having yielded a military coup against Mugabe in November 2017. The state of the economy has not improved, however, while the army has been unleashed into the streets.<sup>2</sup> It should also be interesting to examine how Cicero would have viewed some of the 'test cases' in the current Zimbabwean crisis.

### **The social and political backgrounds**

Rome 44–43 BCE shared some similarities with Zimbabwe (the years 2000–2008 especially). In Rome, the dictatorship of Caesar came to its tragic end on the Ides of March (44 BCE), ushering in an era of chaos.

In Zimbabwe, after the harmonious elections of 29 March 2008, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) accused the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) of robbing them of a clear election victory. Civil strife, political violence and deteriorating standards in education, healthcare, and many aspects of Zimbabwean life were some of the issues that students tackled in their assignments. The cholera outbreak that would leave 4 283 people dead was a lurking reality.<sup>3</sup> On the economic scene, the hyperinflation rate of the Zimbabwean dollar reached an astounding 230 million per cent (Raftopoulos 2009: 220). In Rome, the most important event was the assassination of Julius Caesar on the Ides of March – signalling to Cicero a possible chance at returning to the normalcy of the republic. This was thwarted by the appearance of Antony, who was showing tendencies towards autocracy, and for whose vilification Cicero was concurrently composing the *Philippics*, the series of invectives that would earn Cicero his death the following year (43 BCE). On the part of most students, the election of 29 March 2008 signalled the one and only chance to return to democracy through legal means – an opportunity that came and went. As such, the essays (including this one) could only be emotional, and biased. The looming concern was that of falling back into despotic rule. Michael Grant says, ‘*On Duties* represents an attempt to provide a moral code for an aristocracy liberated from one tyranny and in danger of being enslaved by another – the loss of political rights being clearly recognised as a corrupter of moral values’ (Grant 1960: 158). Looking back after a decade, one realises that such an opportunity also presented itself in Zimbabwe in 2017 when Mugabe was toppled, only to be replaced by his henchman, Emerson Mnangagwa, after the military coup. Mnangagwa’s rule has not proven to be any better, as the army has shot and killed protesters in at least two instances. Former education minister and human rights lawyer David Coltart warned in the wake of the coup:

In all of our euphoria we must never become so intoxicated as to forget that it was the same generals who allowed Mugabe to come to power in 2008 and 2013 ... Once any change of power in any nation comes through a means other than the strict fulfillment of the constitution, in letter and spirit, a dangerous precedent is set, which is hard to reverse. (Quoted in Thomas-Greenfield & Wharton 2019: 7)

However, despite these apparent similarities, some responses noted that some of Cicero's concerns would never be as relevant to Zimbabwe as they were in Roman context. But, one student noted in her introduction that,

Although what Cicero says in *On Duties III* may seem far fetched to Zimbabwe, one can still maintain that for the goodness and uprightness of Zimbabwe, most of his philosophies could be of great help towards the creation or conceptualisation of *officium* (a sense of duty) in the Zimbabwean context.

Others argued that the creation of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe by the former Roman colony of Britannia supplied the link with the ancient classical world, citing scholars like Charles Howard McIlwain, who says:

As a consequence, Greek doctrines of political relations and law combined with principles drawn from Italic custom to be handed on together at a later time to the newer peoples of Western Europe as the basis of their law and politics. This combination and this transmission together constitute the role of Rome in the drama of the growth of western political ideas, a role second to none in political importance. (McIlwain 1932: 105)

It is my reasonable belief that the British left indelible marks on their former colonies. The contemporary African is largely westernised, using Western languages, Western-styled constitutions, institutions and even conceptions of citizenship and nationhood. The use of Cicero as a lens to look into Zimbabwean problems is motivated by the fact that the modern state of Zimbabwe is still anchored on Western *systems*. Cicero played a central role in informing the rise of many Western civilisations. Hilton has identified classics as one of the influences behind Cecil John Rhodes as he set about colonising southern Africa: 'In this he may have been influenced by the example set by Rome's control of much of the known world in the first four centuries of our era' (Hilton 2017: 89). Despite these stubborn (and highly contested) facts, this chapter is not of the antiquarian type that seeks to worship the classics, or Western civilisation. Balot contends:

Study of the ancient city implies neither nostalgia for classical

antiquity nor envy of the political lives of ancient citizens. Instead, the ubiquitously rich and deeply alien world of classical antiquity can be recovered as a repository of imaginative and theoretical resources. (Balot 2009: 6)

Furthermore, the Zimbabwean judicial system is grounded on Roman-Dutch law, compounded by customary law, an equivalent of the *ius gentium* in ancient Roman society. To add on, Cicero's *humanitas*, 'being humane', also aptly translates to *ubuntu*, a leading ideal of 'being humane' in African philosophical thought. Desmond Tutu defines *ubuntu* as follows:

A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed. (Tutu 1999: 35)

However, Mangena has argued against a holistic use of these Western theories on African material because Western theories prioritise reason and individualism (Mangena 2012: 1–2). For Mangena, the theory and worldview of *ubuntu* is appropriate for handling African data because individualism does not sit well with most African societies, 'as these locate the morality of actions within a particular group of persons' (Mangena 2012: 7). Taking the approach of universal humanism, the present work seeks to reconcile Cicero's *humanitas* and *ubuntu*. In fact, these two terms supply the link between fellow human beings, regardless of race. Grant says:

[Cicero] explained himself in terms of the Stoic doctrine that all human beings possess within themselves a spark of the divinity, the force that pervades the entire natural world. About further aspects of god or the gods, Cicero was a doubter, a man who, true to academic principle, was not prepared to swallow dogmas. But one thing Cicero did persistently maintain was the Stoic belief that the universe had been created, and was governed by a divine plan and that since this plan granted every individual the wonderful

endowment of reason, humans must one and all do everything in their power to develop this higher faculty, which is what distinguishes them from animals. (Grant 1980: 96, s.v. Cicero)

In the introduction to *On Duties III*, Cicero says, ‘To everyone who proposes to have a good career, moral philosophy is indispensable’ (Grant 1960: 161). *Humanitas*, being a word of Scipio Aemilianus, demanded that a man be an individual, a scholar and a gentleman, but since he was already a man, he must devote his energies to the service of his country.<sup>4</sup> Both *ubuntu* and *humanitas* emphasise the oneness of mankind. McIlwain explains: ‘the prime cause of [people] coming together is not weakness but rather a sort of natural affinity for each other; for they are gregarious by an instinct that is inborn’ (McIlwain 1932: 107). What differ are the frames of reference that must accommodate questions of space and time; and there is too wide a gap between ancient Rome and contemporary Zimbabwe. The unifying aspect is universal humanism (Hilton 2017: 113). Human beings are fallible and prone to excesses and must be routinely checked by their own laws so as to maintain an orderly and habitable human community – a just society.

### Ideas on autocracy

In this chapter, I understand autocracy as rule outside the constitutional mandate, or ruling against the wishes of the majority (Norena 2009: 270). Concerning dictatorships, my students were unanimous that, apart from violating the natural order, dictators also had to be excluded from human society, in agreement with Cicero on the score that this is a noble duty to the state.<sup>5</sup> This was said in answer to the question of whether advantage could be found in an action like murdering a dictator, which is one of the major preoccupations of *On Duties III*. Cicero’s answer is that in cases such as the assassination of dictators, advantage will come from right action, as the two are synonymous, not that advantage has come from a wrong action. Concerning the then recent assassination of Julius Caesar, Cicero asks: ‘Has advantage then, in this case, prevailed over right? No; advantage has *come from right*’ (Grant 1960: 166). Cicero is arguing against the Academics and the Peripatetics who regard right as preferable to apparent advantage. Cicero professes his admiration for the Stoics because they go



further and actually identify advantage with right, insisting that something must be right before it is advantageous (Grant 1960: 166). Ergo, for Cicero, killing a dictator is a right and advantageous action. In Zimbabwe this was seen with the worldwide celebration of the bloodless coup against Robert Mugabe, and his subsequent replacement by Emerson Mnangagwa. The drama of the two weeks that culminated in Mugabe stepping down is artistically captured in the novel *These Bones Will Rise Again* by Panashe Chigumadzi, who depicts the narrator's ambivalence at the replacement of Mugabe by Mnangagwa. 'A Ndebele friend on a WhatsApp group questions how his fellow citizens can ask him to celebrate the ascension of a man who was instrumental in the murders of members of his family' (Chigumadzi 2018: 105).

Furthermore, for Cicero, 'justice is the mistress and queen of virtue.' Elaborating on Cicero's statement, EM Atkins says, 'first, it is the most important of the four primary virtues [including courage, wisdom, temperance]; secondly, and consequently, it helps to define the other virtues which must be limited by it' (Atkins 1990: 258; Norena 2009: 274). The implementation of justice depends, as mentioned above, on spatial and temporal planes. The point of convergence can be seen in Laszlo Versenyi's summary of Protagoras' man-measure statement:

Laws are the teachers of man (Protagoras 326D), legal punishment is a kind of education (326E), and the whole legal-political system aims at providing a climate and a way of intercourse between men that promotes growth and development of individuals and enables them to attain human excellence, excellence in living. (Versenyi 1963: 35)

In a similar manner, some responses were encouraging of civil disobedience as a solution to Zimbabwe's problems, in line with Cicero's prescription that autocracies are counter-productive. 'Brittle indeed are the fortunes of a people if they depend upon the will or the caprices of one man' (McIlwain 1932: 109). The antithesis (Epicurean) of this argument is that the urgings towards violence suffer the disadvantage of being drastic decisions that can lead to further violence, the kind which would lead to the death of innocent civilians. Zimbabweans, then, had a reputation of being most peaceable and most tolerant. A bad example of politicians setting the masses against each

other had just enacted itself in Kenya, where the Raila Odinga-led Orange Democratic Party began to march against the Party of National Unity in December 2007. Another more recent example (then) on the futility of unarmed citizens taking on dictatorships had repeated itself in Iran and Honduras. In Zimbabwe, this was recently witnessed during the Harare shootings after the elections (2018 and 2019), and during the shutdown, respectively. However, despite this, according to Cicero, ‘it is more truly natural to model oneself on Hercules and undergo the most terrible labours and troubles in order to help and save all nations of the earth, than to live a secluded, untroubled life with plenty of money and pleasures’ (Grant 1960: 167). In *The Republic*, Cicero attacks the Peripatetics:

Then too they allege the danger to which life is exposed, and confront brave men with a dishonourable fear of death; yet such men are wont to regard it a greater misfortune to be consumed by the processes of Nature and old age, than to be granted the opportunity of surrendering for their country’s sake, in preference to all else, that life which in any event must be surrendered to Nature. (I. iii.4)

Cicero is therefore encouraging of civil disobedience by this attack on pusillanimity, even if civil disobedience may lead to loss of life.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it is ironic that Zimbabwe got independence through the agency of civil disobedience and armed resistance. Here some students made the observation that Cicero is being idealistic, and my reaction to them was that it is possible that he is being idealistic indeed. Cicero can be severely inconsistent in his marriage of philosophy and political reality – although he is consistent in the view that philosophy should serve political purposes.

The students also suggested, in agreement with Cicero, the use of oratory as a way of motivating a sense of rebellion in the people. Laszlo Versenyi explains the value of public speaking in 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Greece: ‘it is necessary that each side present its case as well as possible, making even the weakest case as strong as possible so that it will be apparent to others. In all this, rhetoric, the art of expression and presentation, is necessary’ (Versenyi 1963: 37). I am sure this observation was mainly inspired by sporadic demonstrations that students were in the habit of conducting (with very little success, if any). In the current Zimbabwean scenario, social media sites

like WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook have been used to mobilise protests, with the result that the government has moved in and blocked the internet, as it did during the shutdown of January 2019, for instance.

Another point that Cicero raises is that ‘a leader should be liked, not feared.’ My students also gave examples, not of classical personalities like the Seven Sages, but by drawing a sharp contrast between Zimbabwean politicians and the former South African president Nelson Mandela. One student said, ‘Old Mugabe thunders at us like a typical dictator that Cicero hates.’ The students also understood the use by Cicero of examples based on Themistocles, Pericles and Alexander the Great, and even went as far as giving examples of King Mzilikazi of the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe, as well as Chaminuka, the legendary leader of the Shona. These, students argued, were incomparable to the current crop of Zimbabwean leaders because they adhered to the Nguni maxim, *inkosi yinkosi ngabantu*, ‘A king is a king because of his people.’ For Cicero, to win a good reputation one must be considered just and intelligent such that people should feel confident in one to be a better judge of the future – one who will be able to deal with critical situations.<sup>7</sup> This, one of my students said, was illustrated ‘by the support that the people have given to Morgan Tsvangirai and Simba Makoni in the previous election [March 2008].’ I suppose this affinity would naturally cascade to Nelson Chamisa today, whose MDC Alliance party had the highest urban votes in the election of 2018.

Concerning the allegedly rigged electoral process of 29 March 2008, and the MDC’s withdrawal from the 27 June run-off, citing violence against its members and supporters, my students concurred with Cicero, arguing that the ‘rigged’ electoral process in Zimbabwe was a denial of the rule of law, and it cancelled prospects for change. ‘Politics is no longer a means to an end, but an end in itself,’ wrote one student. Said another, ‘The problem in Zimbabwe is that we have a leadership which sees politics as an end in itself, not as a means for achieving a desired purpose, which is to serve and nurture a strong Zimbabwean State.’ Here, my students demonstrated an awareness and understanding of the stoic ideal that virtue is the only good. This is against the hypothetical proposition that ‘politics is good’; good in the sense that if you become a politician, your material life improves: ‘For justice to control *magnitudo animi* is for the *vir magni animi* to use his energy and ambition for the common good, not for selfish interest,’ says Atkins (1990: 260). Christopher Gill asks, ‘What is it that motivates

the shift from selecting primary natural things as ends in themselves, to seeing virtue alone as the only good?’ (2009: 145). The good, according to my class, is the equivalent of Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*, the activity of the soul in accordance with the best and most complete; or the resemblance of the pure form or model of goodness which is the standard of all value and judgements, in Platonic terms. I share the view that political participation at high levels, like material goods, should ideally be reserved for those who know how to employ and use it for the benefit of many.<sup>8</sup> Christopher Gill answers his own question (asked above) in terms of ethical holism and psychological holism. The framework of holism ‘expresses the idea that goodness belongs to entities, including human beings, conceived as structured wholes rather than as containers of “cores” or “essences” which are the primary bearer[s] of value’ (Gill 2009: 145).

As such, the beating, torture and rape, allegedly by ZANU-PF thugs and the military, that came especially towards the 27 June run-off in Operation *Wakavhotera ani?* (Shona) (‘Whom did you vote for?’ [in the election of 29 March]), undermined the pledged loyalty to the general public of Zimbabwe by those in eminent political positions, that is, the ruling party and the state apparatus. A decade later, these allegations still abound, with the military now leading the pack of the accused. Such were the views of some of my students concerning the government of Zimbabwe unleashing security forces on the populace – which it still does. By and large, students tied this argument up by agreeing that Cicero is the progenitor of the doctrine of human rights which the Zimbabwean government is frequently accused of violating. A picture of Morgan Tsvangirai was widely published after he was ‘bashed’ (to use Mugabe’s word), allegedly by members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police, whose insignia reads ‘*Pro Patria, Pro Populo*’. Another example is that of the Chinese merchant ship, the *An Yue Jiang*, which was labelled the ‘Ship of Death’, and is said to have contained guns that were to be used by the government against unarmed civilians. After a decade, members of the military appeared on social media shooting into crowds of people who were protesting the delay of the announcement of the 2018 election results in Harare. As the Catilinarian conspiracy was not required reading, my students missed the point where Cicero himself arguably used excessive force against Catilina and his allies. The students also distanced God from the nature of the Zimbabwean problem, saying that the gods/God are/is not capable of doing harm to mortals, citing the greatest source of harm to man as man himself.

Responses also attacked the government for the Gukurahundi genocide (1981-1987) and Operation Murambatsvina (May 2005) (Chigumadzi 2018: 91; Coltart 2016; Muzondidya 2009: 167-200; Werbner 1991: 160). In the former, a genocide was instigated by the Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwe National Army against the people of Matabeleland and parts of Midlands where at least 20 000 people were killed. In the latter, the government destroyed almost all illegal dwellings and house extensions in urban areas. Both acts are still regarded as crimes against humanity. Students emotively pointed out that the genocide violated the political rights of the people of Matabeleland and Midlands. Concerning the latter operation, ‘The State failed to do what was natural through the protection of private property.’ The ‘Clean Up’ that Operation Murambatsvina purported to be was also described as a farce that sought to depopulate the towns and cities – not very different from Augustus’ ‘back to the land’ policies. In the run-up to the election of 29 March 2008, the government of Zimbabwe embarked on a constituency delimitation exercise which sought to diminish the number of constituencies in towns and cities, which are the strongholds of the opposition MDC. Those whose homes were destroyed during the operation were rounded up into concentration camps like Caledonia Farm outside Harare, or at any rate, found their way back to their rural homes which, in theory, are ZANU-PF strongholds.

As Cicero indicates, a deteriorating political environment is usually characterised by a plunge in morals. In Zimbabwe, the major problems are manifest poor governance, a dilapidated water supply, poor sewage reticulation, poor education (the University of Zimbabwe was yet to remain closed from November 2008 to August 2009), and poor health delivery, among many other things. The students attacked the now defunct Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) for failing to supply treated water, as is espoused in the Bill of Human Rights: ‘It is incumbent on all those who are in charge of a nation’s affairs to make certain that its people possess an abundant supply of the necessities.’ The above-mentioned cholera outbreak was already an imminent reality waiting to explode, and that it did within a few weeks.

The Platonic myth of Gyges was popular among my students and transplanted into various attacks on political intrigues, and sugar daddies who (though generally married) privately took advantage of female students’ poverty and ‘abused’ them. Said a female student: ‘This leads

to degradation and social chaos which is evident in Zimbabwe.’ Still on morality, one student indicated, in the stoic manner, that passion is a lack of ethos (*ubuntu/humanitas*): ‘we have no control over our sexuality or sexual appetites.’

To round up this section, one can note that Cicero’s treatment of the commendable leadership styles resonates with Zimbabwe. The major premise for the similarity is that the Zimbabwean state fabric is of Western origins – even the borders are colonial set-ups. Most national inscriptions still appear in Latin and English languages, regardless of political independence. This justifies my use of Cicero to look at Zimbabwe. In the main, my students censured the way the government and ZANU-PF abused arms of the state, like the military, for political gain. This section revealed a number of points in which Cicero speaks to the Zimbabwean political situation.

### **Ideas on the land reform programme (ca 2000–present)**

On the hotly contested topic of land reform, my students (all of them black) concurred that the black majority of Zimbabwe ‘should get their land back’, seeing that it was taken ‘by wrong means’ by the ‘white settlers/farmers’. Anderson (2000) explains:

There are good reasons for African bitterness over land. Whites in colonial Rhodesia simply took the land they wanted by conquest. They paid no compensation to the Africans they dispossessed. European farms, big and small, dominated the productive Highveld by 1900 and still do today. Land was free. Labour was cheap. And throughout the colonial period, the state provided enormous financial subsidies to Rhodesia’s white farmers.

However, my class agreed that the land had to be parcelled out in a transparent manner. As the course is of a double nature, which sees first-year students do a history module alongside literature and culture, my students used their knowledge of the Gracchan land reforms to make comments on the current Zimbabwean scenario: ‘Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus gave land to the masses, but in Zimbabwe the land is mainly given to war veterans and ZANU-PF big shots. They get farm machinery

while peasants suffer.’ The question of gaining unfair (apparent) advantage at the expense of other people was handled in two ways: first, the students agreed that the white settlers had gained the vast patches of land through unfair means (colonialism), as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 39) explains, ‘Concession seekers put pressure on African leaders to *sign* the fraudulent Rudd Concession that was used to justify the occupation, conquest and colonisation of Zimbabwe in the 1890s.’<sup>9</sup>

Another critique of gaining apparent advantage by wrong means is the alleged replacement of these settlers by the largely ZANU-PF petty bourgeois class. ‘Like falling from the frying pan into the fire,’ wrote one student as a way of illustrating the double standards in the politics of the emancipation of the Zimbabwean peasant. Quoting from Cicero, another student said, ‘To use affairs of the state for personal gain is not immoral; it is sin and a crime.’ ‘The misguided land reform,’ wrote another, ‘was for the benefit of the elite.’ In a speech delivered upon his assumption of the consulship in 63 BCE, Cicero says he has nothing against agrarian legislation *per se*. But he does not like the way in which the tribune, P Servilius Rullus, intends to carry it out. As consul, Cicero thinks it is wrong for Rullus to desire popularity by promising to distribute land to the Roman people. Rullus ‘tricks out his proposals in gaudy and attractive terms for his own sinister and secret devices.’<sup>10</sup> According to Cicero, it is our duty to be generous to our allies (Grant 1960: 174–175). In Zimbabwe the Land Reform Programme tends to favour the ruling ZANU-PF party and its allies, but a right-minded decision would be to cater for every citizen’s interest. By and large, the students agreed that the land reform was a strategic error on the part of the Zimbabwean government. Mommsen noted the non-partisan way in which Tiberius Gracchus sought to distribute land to the people (Mommsen 1970: 14).

The antithesis of this argument is to say that the Zimbabwean government violated the white farmers’ right to enjoy private property, to which Cicero says we are all entitled as long as we do not infringe on the rights of others in our quest for private property. ‘In vain is a wise man wise if he cannot benefit himself.’ In this light, Cicero quotes Chrysippus’ metaphor of the race: ‘A man running a race in the stadium ought to try his best and exert himself to the utmost in order to win. In no circumstances, however, should he trip up his competitors or impede them with his hand’ (Grant 1960: 174). My black students would counter and say that the infringement

happened at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during colonisation. This throws the debate into the realm of subjective relativism. Versenyi indicates that relativity of value (for Protagoras) ‘meant simply that nothing was good or evil in itself, absolutely and universally, but always for some man, animal, plant, organism, or organisation, in a given situation, at a given time’ (Versenyi 1963: 29). I am most certain that the moral legitimacy of the land reform (even if it were done in a ‘transparent’ manner) would remain a chicken and egg argument as is demonstrated by Zimbabwe’s view of the West, and the West’s attitude to Zimbabwe.

### Reflections on trade

The conflict between self-interest and common interest (altruism) evoked arguments mainly on the business or economic aspects of Zimbabwean life. In some cases, students cited examples of vendors who, for example, when selling boxes of safety matches, proceed to remove, say, five matchsticks from each box – thereby gaining extra profits by selling a larger number of matchboxes with less contents. According to some students, a desperately hungry person could also be forced to buy half a bucket of maize meal for the price of a full bucket. Also, the exchange of money on the parallel market is apparently advantageous, but some arguments concurred on its immorality. The reader must picture a poor Zimbabwean family upon receipt of USD 100 from a relative abroad. The family is faced with the dilemma of changing the currency legally at a bank for a very low exchange rate, or taking the same USD 100 to the streets to get, illegally, a higher exchange rate. In Ciceronian terms, what ought the poor Zimbabwean family to do: change the currency legally in the bank (*cum officio*) for the miserly rate, or change it illegally for a higher amount?

Concerning the use of intrigue in business transactions, one student responded, ‘It is not gainful to appear to gain from knavery.’<sup>11</sup> This is a proper interpretation of Cicero, especially on the safety matches and maize meal issues, but it becomes problematic on the USD 100 issue. The hard-line Ciceronian view was criticised as impractical by some students. Cicero says there are some courses of action that look intelligent and consequently advantageous, yet are the reverse of right (Grant 1960: 197). Some of my students retaliated by indicating that changing currency on the streets for a higher exchange rate was practical and beneficial as it served



the ends of preservation of life. I am of the interpretation that changing currency on the streets for a people who live from hand to mouth serves common/communal interests. In *Institutiones D*, I.I.2-3, Florentinus points out that ‘an act done for the protection of one’s person is held to be rightful’ (quoted from McIlwain 1932: 126). Changing currency in the streets for a higher exchange rate increases the chances to send children to school, to feed the household, among other things, and is therefore good. The idealistic Ciceronian view of the problem, unfortunately for my students and myself, would still be that the black market remains morally wrong, even when it appears to be advantageous. It undermines the health of the economy, such that in the end there is no good even for the poor family itself since it exists within a ruined economy (Grant 1960: 171). In the end, this becomes a fallacious argument of attributing wrong causes to the problem at hand. No economy, as some students rightly observed, can be built up or crippled by the way people spend their pocket money. Rather, the reason for the economy’s sickness lay in reduced agrarian and industrial output, they said.

The students also attacked the business community for ‘exploiting consumers’, ‘hiding commodities while people queue for 24 hours’. An example was proffered concerning milling companies in Ruwa, a dormitory town outside Harare. Students reported that some millers bought subsidised maize from Zimbabwe’s Grain Marketing Board (GMB) so that they could make it available to the public. Instead of selling the maize meal at the gazetted price, the milling companies proceeded to seek higher (and unfair) profits by selling it to the likes of the vendor in Mbare who sells half a bucket for the price of a full bucket. Local parlance called it ‘creating artificial shortages of basic commodities’. The motive behind such an act, said one of my students, ‘is profiting from other people’s loss’. ‘We ought to serve our interests in harmony with [that of] others.’ Cicero forbids us to increase our means by despoiling others. He says, ‘Give what is morally right preference over what seems expedient.’ David Schaps portrays ancient Greek societies as ones in which wealth was not in itself the problem, but how it was amassed.<sup>12</sup>

My students also complained that their own landlords were demanding high rentals in foreign currency and groceries in lieu of rent. As none of them was resident on campus, the students alleged that they were largely victims of this exploitation by the university’s neighbours. ‘They disregard

the critical conditions under which we all live.’ By and large, my students concurred on the illicitness of these underhand dealings, but pleaded hunger as an excuse to violate the good for *their own* apparent advantage. The argument only becomes sour when landlords start exploiting students’ desperation for their own (the landlords’) enrichment.

The metaphor of the man who is selling an unsanitary house was paired up with the sale of machines like cars and cell phones. ‘We sell a car when it develops a problem, or a cell phone when it develops a problem in its charging system,’ said one student. Places like the Ximex Mall (razed by the government in 2015 on this account) and 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Harare, were and still are the hubs of these activities, and many a student (and teacher?) has been bamboozled, especially on account of a cell phone. Concerning the sale of defective products, Cicero says, ‘The laws in our civil code relating to real property stipulate that in a sale any defects known to the seller have to be declared’ (Grant 1960: 183).

The parable of the unsanitary house was also equated to the charging of foreign exchange and groceries for small, unsanitary and overcrowded rooms to poor students. The students also blamed the rich because they themselves have no means and/or the ability to exploit. By and large, issues to do with private property and trade ranged from the rampant corruption scandals to financial misconduct, and gaining at the expense of the community, and, like the myth of Gyges, ‘as long as people do not find out’. Cicero resolves the issue by arguing that one should not find oneself in such a difficult position of moral indecision for two reasons: either that in committing such an act, the doer is not aware that it is a bad thing to do; or that the doer knows that what he is doing is wrong and does not consider it as more unnatural than death, or pain or loss – in which case, says Cicero, ‘is he not beyond argument?’<sup>13</sup>

To end this discussion, one may observe that Cicero’s treatise, *On Duties III*, does relate to present-day Zimbabwe in many aspects of life, for example, in politics, social issues, or trade and economics and the area of human rights. This may be because the situation in Rome during Cicero’s time was similar to the present-day situation in Zimbabwe where people are under what seems like despotic tyrannical rule. It is important (sad, perhaps) to note that the situation in Zimbabwe has not improved, 12 years later. Though some ideas are contextual, one can still maintain that it is the substance of those contexts that do apply and are of great relevance to

Zimbabwe. Cicero has the creation of an ideal Roman society adapted to the practical needs of the Roman citizen – guided by the rule of law and total respect for humanity and independence. Applying the principles of stoicism which emphasised fraternity and respect for fellow human beings, Cicero’s vision was to see these principles wedded to Roman experience. My students concurred that they would like to see this happen in Zimbabwe too. Summarily, *De Officiis* naturally suits young men and women, and is fittingly addressed to the young and restless son of Cicero, Marcus, who was studying at Athens. It was received by young Zimbabwean men and women with astounding success!

### Notes

- 1 The situation at the time is described by Raftopoulos (2009: 202): ‘A key aspect of the crisis was the rapid decline of the economy, characterised by, among other things: steep declines in industrial and agricultural productivity; historic levels of hyperinflation; the informalisation of labour, the dollarisation of economic transactions; displacements; and a critical erosion of livelihoods’; see also Coltart (2016: 485). Note that I have protected the students’ identities for ethical and political reasons.
- 2 Thomas-Greenfield and Wharton (2019: 17) report the killing of at least 12 people, and the wounding of 68 by live gunfire shot by the military.
- 3 BBC (2009). The site also gives 98 309 as the number of reported cases. Raftopoulos (2009: 226) notes that the humanitarian crisis signalled the state’s incapacity to provide basic services for its citizens. See also Coltart (2016: 485).
- 4 According to Nybakken (1939: 396), ‘Roman *humanitas*, fostered in the Scipionic Circle and most adequately expressed in literary terms by Cicero, included the ideals of both humanism and humanitarianism and ennobled the *lebensanschauung* of those Romans who understood its principles and acted according to them.’
- 5 Grant (1960: 165): ‘Yet surely someone who kills a tyrant, however close friends the two men have been, has not committed a crime.’
- 6 *De Re Publica* (I.v.9): ‘Therefore, they [the Epicureans] maintain, a wise man should not attempt to take the reins, as he cannot restrain the insane and untamed fury of the common herd; nor is it proper for a freeman, by contending with vile and wicked opponents, to submit to the scourgings of abuse or expose himself to wrongs which are intolerable to the wise ...’
- 7 Norena (2009: 274) gives a longer list of ancient virtues that a leader was expected to exhibit. They include: courage (*andreia*, *virtus*, *fortitudo*), temperance (*sophrosyne*, *enkrateia*, *moderatio*, *temperantia*, *continentia*), reverence for the gods (*eusebeia*, *hosiotes*, *pietas*) and benevolence (*philanthropia*, *liberalitas*, *indulgentia*, *humanitas*).
- 8 ‘[O]nly such a man [a wise man] will consider that our military commands and consulships are to be classed among things necessary rather than desirable, and that they are to be undertaken from a sense of duty and not sought for profit or glory’ (I.xvii.27). Cf. also Plato, *Republic*, I,347B: ‘good men will not consent to hold office for the sake either of money or of honour.’

- 9 Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 39): The other 'fraudulent' treaties were the Grobler Treaty of 1887, and the Moffat Treaty of 1888.
- 10 *De lege Agraria*, 'Now to tell the truth, gentlemen, I have nothing against agrarian legislation as such. Indeed I can think of two very able and distinguished patriots, true lovers of the Roman people, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, who distributed to the people public land which had hitherto been held as private property (II, 10–11). Quoted from Lacey and Wilson (1970: 103).
- 11 Atkins (1990: 262): 'Where *prudentia* [discretion] is involved, as in the case of Gyges or of the corn merchant, or the question of trading in 91, the point is that *prudentia* cannot be divorced from what is just. Cleverness that is unjust is not a virtue.'
- 12 'The worst they [Hesiod and Theognis] could say about wealth that was not excessive was that ill-gotten gains would be lost indeed, not because the money was baneful in itself, but because the gods would punish the unjust amasser of wealth' (Schaps 2003: 143).
- 13 'But if he sees nothing unnatural in wronging a fellow man, is he not beyond the reach of argument?' (Grant 1960: 168).

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Rethinking the commemorative landscape in South Africa after the Fall

A pedagogical case study<sup>1</sup>

*Samantha Masters*

I'm not sure that we need statues at all –  
it's a colonialist thing, like marking territory.<sup>2</sup>  
Sethembile Msezane

Memory, heritage and public commemoration through statuary – or its opposite, public denigration through attacks on statuary – have been highly topical issues in the past decade. These practices are of course not modern, but have been carried out for centuries, in fact millennia. In 2020, images of the statue of slave merchant Edward Colston in Bristol, UK, being pulled down, jumped on, rolled down the road and thrown into the Bristol harbour amid cheering protestors went viral.<sup>3</sup> This footage is perhaps to become one of the iconic visuals of this practice. This act was ignited by an international wave of anti-racism protest, catalysed by the unwarranted killing of African-American George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in the US – another iconic, and more tragic, moment of that year. Sporadic attacks on statues in South Africa also occurred in this climate: notably the head of colonialist Cecil John Rhodes at his own monument on the side of Table Mountain was hacked off its bust and stolen on 12/13 July of the same year.<sup>4</sup> And few of us living in or connected with South Africa in recent years would not have seen the iconic image of a crane removing

the paint-spattered statue of Rhodes from its vantage point at the foot of Jameson Steps on the University of Cape Town campus on 9 April 2015.

Schmahmann (2016: 90) recalls the urgent demands for the removal of Rhodes' statue one month earlier thus:

On March 9, 2015, about a dozen protestors gathered in front of a large and imposing sculpture of mining magnate and politician Cecil John Rhodes – a work centrally placed at the University of Cape Town (UCT) ... Calling for its removal as well as an end to the racism they considered operative at the university, the group's protest culminated in one participant, Chumani Maxwele, tossing a bucket of human excrement at the sculpture.

RhodesMustFall, as the movement quickly became known, raised issues of inequality, racism and the need for decolonisation of the university's structures and curricula. It was about so much more than 'just a statue', but the statue and other statuary country-wide became the concrete embodiment and visual reminder of the pervasive and inhumane legacies of colonialism and apartheid.<sup>5</sup> A year later, in 2016, I taught a 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup>-year Ancient Cultures course entitled 'Rome, Empire and Material Remains'. This course aimed to investigate the power of images and material artefacts (coins, statues, buildings and monuments, for example) during the expansion and heyday of the Roman Empire. With issues of memory, commemoration, colonialism and statuary being so topical, this provided an ideal opportunity to use Rome as a lens through which to examine more recent, local and contemporary examples of imperial and political propaganda. This included Dutch, British and apartheid-era architecture and statuary in South Africa. It also included examining the Roman practices of veneration and memorialisation of prominent figures, as well as memory sanctions, or *damnatio memoriae*. These memory sanctions are, in effect, the opposite of remembering; they amount to a conscious forgetting, a type of cultural amnesia, comparable to the damage and removal of statues in the current era.

The link between Roman *damnatio memoriae* and contemporary statuary is one that other scholars have made<sup>6</sup> and 'thinking through classics' is an established approach in our field, not novel by any means. It strikes me, however, that in the changing face of our country, where

classics can also be seen as, like Sethembile Msezane's idea of statues, just a relic of a bygone and 'colonising' mentality, the subject should be metamorphosing as well. We should be doing more to frame courses using the questions pertinent to our context; this is one of the ways in which we can actively contribute to the decolonisation of the curriculum and the subject in general.

### **Public statuary, memorialisation and forgetting: Rome**

Large-scale public statues are, in addition to being a part of the actual urban landscape or cityscape, also an important part of the historical and political landscape in ancient societies, as well as contemporary ones. How such statuary is treated over time is revealing. Romans spent much effort, expense and energy on the conscious remembering of individuals. Vitruvius (6.3), Pliny (*Hist. Nat.* 35: 4–11), Polybius (6.53) and Juvenal (8.3, 9, 15, 17–18) tell us that ancestors were commemorated in *imagines maiorum*, or likenesses of different kinds. Wax portraits, likenesses of dead ancestors cast from their actual faces, were stored in the house and paraded through the streets during funerary processions. Ancestors' portraits were also typically displayed in the house, either in bust form or round bronze or silver shield portraits containing the portrait head of an ancestor, often hung on walls. Individuals and families were publicly commemorated through tombs and grand mausolea often set up along the main roads in and out of Roman cities, such as the Via Appia (Borg 2019: *passim*). They served as types of 'billboards' of remembrance along a highway – the wealthy citizens trying to outdo each other in terms of scale and decoration.

Political leaders, and especially emperors of Rome, were immortalised in public statuary and monuments, normally voted by the senate and often paid for by wealthy patrons seeking favour with the political elite (Ramage 1983: 202). Hannestad (1988: 47) tells us that to familiarise a growing empire with the image of the emperor, '[m]assive circulation of the emperor's portrait began with Augustus ... No [Roman emperor] left as many likenesses as he did' (there are about 250 surviving). This again makes us think of Msezane's comment that 'it's ... like marking territory': the statue is part of the material footprint of empire. Images of the emperor were, in fact, not just politically important, but were sacrosanct, and it was sacrilege to harm or deface such an image.<sup>7</sup>



The ancient Roman landscape, then, was filled with commemorative buildings, statuary and inscriptions, visible indicators of public benefaction, status, power and prestige. However, statues, monuments and their inscriptions were not necessarily permanent fixtures – though made of stone or bronze and at some point sacrosanct – but were at times mutilated, removed or repurposed. The urban landscape was hardly fixed, but in a way, metamorphosed – changed its form – as it was regularly ‘updated’ in a variety of ways. So despite making a concerted effort to remember, like us, Romans also grappled with the question of what, or whom, to forget.

Much has been written about the Roman practice known as *damnatio memoriae*.<sup>8</sup> The term itself is relatively modern: Omissi (2016: 171) describes how, after being coined in 1689 (as the title of a dissertation published in Leipzig), the term *damnatio memoriae* became entrenched in scholarship to refer to ‘a bundle of ancient Roman practices that were directed at convicted traitors, usually after their death’. It is not a straightforward single practice, but a series of acts overt and subtle, state-decreed and spontaneous, designed to erase or desecrate the memory of public figures. These were mainly, but not exclusively, ‘bad emperors’. Suetonius (*Dom.* 23) and Pliny (*Panegyric* 52.4–5) both recount the dramatic attack on Domitian’s portraits and the subsequent decree by the senate to damn his memory. With this directive, his titles would officially be stripped, acts annulled, coinage recalled, inscriptions erased, statues melted down or removed, portraits recut into other imperial portraits, or entire heads replaced by new portraits.<sup>9</sup> Hackworth Peterson (2011) recounts the Latin words used in the ancient literature to describe this as well as the perceived intentions of these practices. The ancient combination of the word *memoria* with verbs like *eradere* (eradicate), *abolere* (to abolish), *condemnare* (to condemn) and *damnare* (to damn) tells us that the goal clearly was, in her words, a ‘conscious forgetting, analogous to wiping a slate or ancient wax tablet clean’ (Hackworth Peterson 2011: 1). This idea of a purposeful eradication from memory is what has been described above as a kind of deliberate cultural amnesia.

### Comparisons with South African statuary

It was possible to use this obvious comparison between such overt types of Roman memory sanction – in particular the violent or symbolic attacks on

statuary – and the recent RhodesMustFall context as a teaching opportunity. After 1994, the new democratically elected South African government revisited the important topic of public memory, and heritage legislation was revisited and revised. The question of problematic or negative heritage, including public statuary that was part of the old South African colonial and apartheid past, was addressed and an array of bills and acts were proposed and enacted.<sup>10</sup> However, a very conservative, ‘circumspect’ approach was adopted (Schmahmann 2016: 93). New heritage policies aimed to address the past, but also sought to be inclusive and reconciliatory. The policies included the addition of a more representative array of ‘heroes’, particularly from the struggle against the apartheid regime. It allowed for the removal of statuary, but only under particular circumstances, and this would require the consent of the local authority and stringent processes.<sup>11</sup>

This resulted in only the most ‘problematic’ and contentious monuments or statues of individuals being addressed, such as statues of the architect of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd (Coombes 2003: 22). These were slowly removed, placed in ‘safe spaces’ or undisclosed locations; in fact, the last known public statue of Verwoerd was, according to news articles, only removed from mid-Vaal in 2011.<sup>12</sup> In the spirit of reconciliation, then, most other monuments and statues were allowed to remain. These include statues from the Dutch and British colonial eras, and the years afterwards, such as Afrikaner heroes like Paul Kruger. In the spirit of optimism and euphoria for the rainbow nation that swept the country in its early democracy, and in the spirit of forgiveness proffered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it can be said that the South African government opted for a kind of cultural amnesty, not the amnesia that appears to have been a key goal of Roman and other memory sanctions. Amnesty and amnesia represent two opposing approaches to memory and the ‘wrongs’ and painful memories of the past.<sup>13</sup>

Twenty-one years after the fall of apartheid, with the issue of problematic statuary in South Africa resurfacing in a powerful way, I wanted to investigate my students’ experience of this issue. I wanted the students, mostly of the ‘born free’ generation, to explore – empathetically – their own views on the issue of negative heritage (Meskell 2002: 558) and the vandalism of statues, and to understand other perspectives on this topic, thinking through the Roman practice of *damnatio memoriae*.

## Memory and emotion

One of the most insightful comments from a member of the class, an isiXhosa student from the Eastern Cape who is the first member of her family to attend university, was: ‘While I don’t really like the idea of destroying a statue, I can identify with the trashing of statues like those of Rhodes. He was a bigot and a racist and his legacy continues to haunt us. Anyway, *where was our moment of catharsis?*’ One of the most profound points of comparison between Roman *damnatio memoriae*, the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall movement, and the removal of the statue of Edward Colston, is not just the causing of damage, but what this student pointed out: catharsis. The emotional charge with which the damage is inflicted in the ancient texts or modern videos recording these moments is palpable. Suetonius (*Dom.* 23) draws specific attention to the emotions of those pulling down the statues or images of Domitian.<sup>14</sup> The people are both angry at the tyranny and injustices perpetrated by the emperor and also euphoric at his death. The acts associated with *damnatio memoriae* are cathartic and even therapeutic.

Pliny (*Panegyric* 52.4–5) gives an even more dramatic description of the emotional content of the practice of smashing statues or melting them down, again in relation to Domitian’s statues:

It was our delight to dash those proud faces to the ground, to smite them with the sword and savage them with the axe, as if blood and agony could follow from every blow. Our transports of joy – so long deferred – were unrestrained; all sought a form of vengeance in beholding those bodies mutilated, limbs hacked in pieces, and finally that baleful, fearsome visage cast into fire, to be melted down, so that from such menacing terror something for man’s use and enjoyment should rise out of the flames.’ (tr. Radice 1975)

The kind of practices described here and elsewhere draws attention to the emotional satisfaction felt by those carrying out the destruction and defacement of statuary. This emotional content and context of these acts is what also emerged very clearly in discussions about the RhodesMustFall movement in the Ancient Cultures course. In reading texts like Suetonius and Pliny, discussing such kinds of overt and violent *damnatio memoriae*,

watching YouTube videos of statuary being destroyed, I realised that the students, in a reasonably diverse classroom in South Africa in 2016, had very different emotional responses to these acts.

The student responses ranged from horror to delight. Some felt extremely strongly about defending the statues, letting them remain as they viewed them as fixtures, and as part of the landscape and 'of history'. They strongly favoured the approach of amnesty, with the addition of more statuary to balance out the biases and tell the neglected histories. Others strongly favoured the swift and dramatic removal of 'offensive' statues, and the forgetting of the individuals who represented the heinous injustices of colonialism and apartheid. In this way they tended in the direction of amnesia.

Without considering the identity of the statues, many students had preconceived ideas about statuary per se, as they felt statues are important simply because they were skilfully made with great effort and at great expense. These students expressed shock and anger at the act of damaging a piece of 'art'. These students I would describe as those from privileged upbringings, who had attended private or 'model C' schools, and had an assumption that 'art' has value and that it is, in a way, untouchable (or even sacrosanct). Some students referred to the damage as outright 'sacrilege'.

Others did not have the same awe of the statues. Their own comments claimed that this had much to do with their background and education and that they were not taught to 'appreciate art'. For many the initial response to the destruction of the image of a human being, or damage to it, was the difficult element; that it was a human likeness was problematic.

Other students felt neutral about damage to the statuary of particular individuals or, on the other hand, their remaining, based on the lapse of time since they were set up ('Rhodes was long ago'), or their own family history, cultural background and affinity. For example, white middle-class English-speaking students did not care much about the statues of Afrikaner heroes. But neither did they care about the Anglophone statues of Queen Elizabeth or Cecil John Rhodes. However, one of the most interesting outcomes was the discovery that many students did not know the history of their own country and the impact many of the people memorialised in statues had had. These students acknowledged that they had no traumatic family or community history to call on, many of them being white, and therefore of the group that had benefitted most from the legacy of colonial and/or apartheid practices and policies.

Many students, however, felt extremely emotional about the statuary – either in favour of attacking and removing these figures of repression, symbols of past wrongs, or defending them. The responses were based on a complex intersectionality of background, race and identity, social conscience, family history and personal affront. This kind of tension between amnesty and amnesia is what is, in my view, epitomised in the South African discourse around heritage and the Rhodes Must Fall movement. Twenty-four years after the fall of apartheid, the conservative approach to heritage (amnesty) was no longer palatable to many. The movements of 2015 demonstrate the ongoing challenges of transformation and reconciliation that are yet to be broached/healed. But is the antagonistic approach that opts for ‘collective amnesia’ any better than amnesty? Schmahmann (2016: 101) laments that ‘[the Rhodes statue’s] removal from campus may be argued to have foreclosed a critical and self-reflexive engagement with Rhodes’ legacy and its import on UCT’. The question I put to my students in the next phase of the exercise is: what can we do with ‘negative heritage’ (Meskell 2002: 558) instead?

This kind of critical reflection opens up a third type of treatment of problematic statuary and heritage: in between amnesia and amnesty is another approach, one that we could term agonistic. This term – from the Greek word *agon*, which means competition or struggle – suggests an approach that does not destroy, damage or ignore but confronts and challenges the heritage landscape, and seeks to frame a variety of issues critically, constructively, using a creative imagination, and even a new vernacular. In this vein, the students were asked to use readings such as an article by Sibusiso Tshabalala and Nadine Botha (2015), ‘8 things to do with unwanted statues and monuments’, as a springboard and come up with solutions that do not involve the two extremes of amnesia (total obliteration) or amnesty (just leave them where they are).

### **Insights from this teaching opportunity**

This interactive course led to an excellent, frank and also emotional discussion with the students about a topical issue of local and international relevance. Of those initially ‘defending’ the statues and their right to remain (granting them amnesty), many students were able to view the issue for the first time from the perspective of those wanting to attack or obliterate them.

This allowed for acknowledgement of how the damage and destruction of statues could both demonstrate unresolved psychological trauma of the South African past, and also be cathartic. At the same time, some of the students advocating defacement or removal (amnesia) recognised how these acts of vengeance or redress could in turn *cause* psychological trauma: as Vladislavic (2008: 100–102) puts it: ‘People may feel the loss of symbols more acutely than the loss of direct political power or economic status.’

In conclusion, the key goal of the exercise, and so too this chapter, is to recognise the usefulness of employing an ancient lens to look at a contemporary issue, in this case the issue of heritage and memory. Through reflecting on an ancient problem still applicable to modern societies, it was possible to bring about some excellent critical discussion, as well as moments of recognition or even empathy. The potential for education to effect a paradigm shift, to transform an outlook and bring about personal growth and change, should be harnessed, and while ‘transformation’ through teaching classics may seem like an overly optimistic and idealistic goal, it is one that should be taken seriously.

There are challenges in teaching classics in a country which is in flux, confronting its past and increasingly being held to account for its stagnant intellectual frameworks and curriculum content. In finding ways of remaining relevant and useful, seizing all such teaching opportunities should be a default position. The possibility that classics becomes cast aside as ‘cultural detritus’ can be alleviated somewhat by growing something new and constructive from this fertile substrate. Failing this, one can, in the long run, simply be left with a stale, bad odour.

## Notes

- 1 Five converging interests have led to the subject of this paper on Roman practices of *damnatio memoriae* and heritage in South Africa: (1) my interest in ancient material culture in general; (2) my interest in South African heritage and changing heritage practices in our postcolonial, post-apartheid and post-RhodesMustFall context; (3) the urgency to think about our own context as scholars of antiquity, and how to make this field relevant to our own time and place; (4) the theme of metamorphosis as applied to the changing cityscape and to the offering of an age-old subject in a ‘reborn’ country that is still trying to re-invent itself; and (5) the possibility to effect change through teaching particular topics in a particular way.
- 2 <https://face2faceafrica.com/article/sethembile-msezane-cecil-rhodes>
- 3 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/07/blm-protesters-topple-statue-of-bristol-slave-trader-edward-colston>

- 4 <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/cecil-john-rhodes-statue-no-arrests-as-police-probe-who-chopped-off-busts-head-in-cape-town-20200715>
- 5 Rhodes Must Fall had a knock-on effect and spurred several other attacks on statues in South Africa, but also gave impetus to the Fees Must Fall student movement. The urgency of the issue of public statuary and memorialisation returned to public attention, resulting in a public consultation meeting at Freedom Park on the Transformation of the Heritage Landscape in South Africa (17 April 2015). Draft guidelines and a further white paper on arts, culture and heritage were produced: Heritage Western Cape Draft Guidelines for Public Monuments and Memorials 2015; Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (Second Draft) November 2016.
- 6 For example, Platt (2020), Forrest and Johnson (2019) and Freedberg (2003).
- 7 Justinian's *Digest* 48.4 describes damage to a statue of the emperor as '*crimen maiestatis*'.
- 8 For example, Bundrick and Varner (2001); Flower (2006); Varner (2004); Calomino (2016).
- 9 Ancient Roman memory sanctions can for the sake of scholarly study be categorised into official and unofficial or *de facto damnatio memoriae*, one officially decreed, and one that happens anyway based on a spontaneous emotional response. They can happen at roughly the same time, but the decree is not a prerequisite for the actions. In addition, one could differentiate between overt acts of *damnatio memoriae* such as the destruction of images of individuals, or statues removed from circulation, statues recut as other people, such as Caligula statues reworked as Augustus or Claudius, the recall of coinage, and the annulment of acts (all of these being applied to the memory of Caligula) and more subtle forms of *damnatio memoriae* such as the use of counter-messages (Ramage 1983).
- 10 National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act (Act 43 of 1996); Legal Deposit Act (Act 54 of 1997); National Library of South Africa Act (Act 92 of 1998); National Heritage Bill (1998); Cultural Institutions Act (Act 119 of 1998); South African Geographical Names Council Act (Act 118 of 1998); National Heritage Council Bill (1999); National Heritage Resources Bill (1999); National Heritage Council Act (Act 11 of 1999); National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999); National Council of Library and Information Services Act (Act 6 of 2001); Public Monuments and Memorials Project by SAHRA for DAC 2003 (South African Heritage Resources Agency [SAHRA] management body).
- 11 National Resources Heritage Act (1999).
- 12 The only places where statues of Verwoerd are still accessible are in the Afrikaner enclave of Orania, and at the Voortrekker Monument, where they are available on request. <https://www.news24.com/news24/Archives/City-Press/Voetsek-Verwoerd-20150430>; <https://mg.co.za/article/2011-06-17-finding-verwoerd-lifting-the-lid-on-dustbin-of-history/>
- 13 It is interesting to note that the words 'amnesia' and 'amnesty' derive from the same Greek prefix and verb – 'a' means not and the '*mnes*' root refers to memory/remembering. While both words therefore mean 'a forgetting' of sorts, *amnesia* (amnesia) comes to mean specifically 'a purposeful forgetting of wrong, a political act of forgiveness' (Plut. *Mor.* 814b) while amnesia means a 'forgetting' or 'oblivion'.
- 14 'The senators [...] were so overjoyed, that they raced to fill the House, where they did not refrain from assailing the dead emperor with the most insulting and stinging kind of outcries. They even had ladders brought and his shields and images torn down before their eyes and dashed upon the ground.' And then he adds that the senate 'finally [...] passed a decree that [Domitian's] inscriptions should everywhere be erased, and all record of him obliterated.' Suetonius, *Dom.* 23 (translation by JC Rolfe 1979).

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## Conversation with Amy Daniels

Grant Parker (GP): Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and your background and what brought you to classics?

Amy Daniels (AD): I'm a lecturer of Ancient Cultures and Latin at Stellenbosch University. My falling into classics actually began with a bout of laryngitis where I lost my singing voice and so could not do a BMus. On registration day I was torn between doing a 'proper' subject – as my family called it – such as Psychology, and doing Latin, which was my promise to a Latin teacher at my school, Mr Rutter. I ended up sitting next to a classicist on registration who said, 'Hey, do Ancient Cultures. See what makes Latinists tick.' So, I got into it not because I knew what it was, but because of a promise I made to a teacher that had never taught me. I stayed, I think because I grew up around classical music and around very Anglocentric children's books, and that kind of thing, and so the stories I was exposed to would often make reference to classical themes: I always knew who Pandora was; I always knew who Hercules was, and so forth. I always knew who Dido and Aeneas were. So, that's sort of the long and the short of how I got into classics

GP: So, between your first study of classics and 2020, has classics changed?

AD: I think it has. When I first started, some of the notes that we were studying from were still typed on typewriters, and in terms of classics we were told things like, 'Greek art is beautiful in and of itself,' and then you just had to study the technical aspects of it. Whereas now I think there has been

a move towards interrogating ideas of beauty and then looking at where those ideas come from and so forth. So my experience of being taught in the past is that the content was decontextualised, it was something that we studied for itself – classics for classics sake. We are very much now aiming to contextualise what we're teaching and make it relevant to students or to show them a way of seeing it as relevant, of incorporating what they learn in the rest of their studies. In other respects, I suppose, just listening to discussions at conferences, at staff meetings, that kind of thing, there is still a big concern for teaching students the 'canon', if that even exists. So, in that sense I can't say whether or not it has changed. I also came at it after graduating with my undergrad from having meandered off and looked at classical reception in German literature towards the end of East Germany [laughter] – so very, very focused, all Christa Wolf and others, and then falling back into it with a focus on late antiquity and St Augustine and his *Confessions* and a more philosophical bent. I can't really even remember where I started with that one.

GP: Is there a place for the canon today?

AD: That is something I've been wrestling with since I started teaching in 2014. And I have at moments just been so distressed by this – this question – and have asked colleagues what they think and often the answer I would get was: 'That's why you're here. You need to figure this out for us.' 'I come from the old guard' is sort of the answer I would get from various people. I suppose, the place of a canon depends on how it is being studied and how it is being taught. And by that, I mean if we are simply going to do philological studies of lines and lines of, I don't know, Herodotus, Tacitus, whoever, then I don't actually see any place or value in a South African context because we could be doing that with other texts, texts that perhaps have a more direct influence on how South Africans are thinking or the questions that we're grappling with right now. However, if, as I said earlier, we are concerned for bringing ourselves to texts; if we are concerned with bringing our contexts to the texts and vice versa, bringing those texts to ourselves and to our contexts, then perhaps there is a place for a classical canon today in Africa. How you do that I have no idea.

GP: Well, I'd like to know more about that. I'd like to think about some

possibilities. I wonder, for example, if some kind of canon is required for any common language. In an extreme view, I mean, this is something English departments may have faced and perhaps German departments around Goethe and, whoever: that if there's no canon, whether it's the Bible or Shakespeare or Milton or whatever you like, if there's no canon then there's no *koine*. There's nothing to talk about with other people that are interested in the same thing. And then, ultimately, what is the same thing?

AD: I think your last question is the key: what is the same thing? Is the same thing Shakespeare or is the same thing Elizabethan ideas on masculinity and, I don't know, race? Is the same thing a text or is it your approach to a text or themes that you're interested in in a text? Yes, I'm not entirely convinced that a canon is necessary for there to be a *koine*. I think we should be able to speak with one another whether or not we have studied the same thing. I mean, right now there is nothing more exciting to me than an interdisciplinary discussion on some issue or some theme or some text or whatever the case may be. Yeah. Also, I say this because my own training in my discipline is one that could be described as patchy, but I would like to think of it as diverse and dynamic. So, at the moment, we have had postgraduate students coming to us and asking what they should be reading in terms of canonical texts. And so I've been looking at these lists my colleagues have been sending out and I haven't read half those texts, but I've read other works that allow me to bring insights to any discussion we have amongst ourselves as classicists and as Ancient Near Eastern scholars and Semitic scholars in our department. So yes, I don't know if that adds meaningfully to any type of answer that we could possibly get to.

GP: Why do we need to have the answer? Why are we, as in you [chuckle], not able to pose the question, 'What is a canon and what does the canon mean in Ancient Studies?' So, let me put it this way: If you were to convene such a conversation – 'What does, what might the notion of canon mean in Ancient Studies?' – what would you want to be in that conversation?

AD: I think, partly due to feedback from students, and on another level, due to some feedback and discussion from certain colleagues, I would want to know how we define 'ancient' when we think of Ancient Studies because, in some ways, that name has almost become a misnomer: people

sign up and they think they're going to learn about ancient Africa and, by ancient Africa, they exclude – and I have no idea why – Egypt. So, I would want to think about what 'ancient' is; at the moment we define it in our department from at least 3000 BCE or even earlier to the fall of the western Roman Empire. Who came up with that, I'm not quite sure. But I would want to bring that question to the table. I'd also want to know what we mean by 'ancient studies'; so, at the moment, we mainly have ancient Mediterranean studies, ancient Western Asia and North Africa happening. So, I'd want to get the geography right and I'd want to have African Studies at the table; that's not really a thing in Africa, funnily enough. I would like to get linguists at the table. I would also want to retain the perspective of those who study ancient Western Asia and North Africa. I'd want them at the table. Then I would want classicists as well, particularly because of actually how young the influence of the Graeco-Roman world is in our context. I say young because it comes to us via Europe; even though it takes on a life of its own once it reaches our shores, it still comes to us only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. So, it is relevant, but I think that sort of broad spectrum would be helpful. Also, I don't want my colleagues out of jobs.

GP: So–

AD: See, that's my problem with canon because where we are now as Ancient Studies in Africa – and by 'ancient studies' right now I'm referring to what we have at my institution as Ancient Studies. I think if I were to remodel it, to rethink it or to think of what would be relevant in terms of a possible canon, it stretches so widely and so yes – it's just so broad that I'm not entirely certain whether we'd want a canon or whether we just want a taste of everything. Even as it stands, the reason I don't have, perhaps, a massive amount of reading in Graeco-Roman literature is that at the same time I was being trained in that, I was also reading ancient Western Asian wisdom literature and that kind of thing.

GP: So, you're saying the depth and breadth are, in practice, antithetical, but ideally, they should not be?

AD: Yes. That's exactly what I'm trying to express. I mean, in any discipline, besides medicine, the ideal of depth of knowledge – I think we specialise

so early that it's not really possible to go deep in equal measure; eventually you'll have to choose something to investigate further. But ideally, I think we'd want people exposed to more, so the breadth there is important.

GP: Could you imagine an anthology of key texts? Because you've taught many of them. You've read many more than you've taught. But if you were to think of what you thought are – if you want to think about the ideal student that read everything she was supposed to and was open to everything equally and came with an inquiring mind and no prejudice, what would you want that student to read? How would you go about compiling that reader? I only suggest this as a kind of project that could instantiate, could give form to the challenges, the ideals you've expressed. What would your ideal sourcebook look like?

AD: I actually have very little idea. I think also because I come from a background where literature is so important, I'm really tempted to go with texts in translation, be they *The Conversation between a Man and His Ba* or *The Patient Sufferer* of Babylonian literature or *Antigone* or whatever, but that gives primacy to a very specific type of reading. Are we reading – can we read, I don't know, rock art? But how would you unify something like that? How would you do these texts – and I use 'texts' loosely – justice in a course reader like that? We already struggle to do that at the moment.

GP: The reason I'm asking you is purely selfish: I've faced that exact challenge having signed up to teach exactly such a course before knowing what it should contain. So, yes. I've come up with a list of the best texts; the most accessible, productive, interesting texts that I can think of but not yet knowing how hard they will be to scaffold – to contextualise. Anyway, I simply say that to indicate that the question you raise is one that I'm grappling with right now. And I don't think there are pre-cut answers – I don't think there are predetermined answers ... just like I think everyone should be reinventing the canon for themselves, creating their own personalised canon that gives enough to discuss with other people, but is not prescriptive.

AD: I do appreciate that idea because I think that's been my experience of my students. They seem to be educated in that way, whereas I was right on the tail-end of an era where for English studies you had to read Chaucer,

you had to read Shakespeare, you had to do, I don't know, some modern American poetry, and a lot of British literature and maybe some JM Coetzee. I still had to read Goethe and Schiller in my undergrad straight out of matric. So, I just see the way my students are able to engage across disciplines with very specific questions and I think that has to do with context. I mean, if you spoke to a student at a different university, they'd be engaging with different questions quite possibly. But yes. I quite like this idea of reinventing the canon for yourself or for your discipline or for your little island within your discipline, so that you and your student and whoever are able to converse across boundaries or disciplinary boundaries, as it were. But also actually be comfortable with the discomfort that comes from being in a space where you know a little bit about something but maybe not as much as the person next to you; where you are cultivating curiosity and a skill set that helps you to deal with this new canon of yours or whatever it is – this new set of texts – however they may or may not be unified.

GP: So, is it possible to see a text or a text equivalent as an invitation? As a happy provocation?

AD: Absolutely. And not even always happy. It is always an invitation to think. It is always an invitation to reconsider yourself because ultimately, we bring our thoughts and selves to texts and text equivalents. I'm just going to say 'text' in the Derrida sense of texts: you're a text; I'm a text; everything's a text. So, yes. It is an invitation to think. It's an invitation possibly to change. And a text itself, you could see it as a happy provocation; so if you're excited about that change. But often the process of change or the process of thought is a painful one. So, it can be a troubling one. And I think the key is to become ok with being uncomfortable and being troubled, being a little bit out of your depth which is actually why I've been teaching what I've been teaching for so long. I don't always see that lightbulb moment in students, but if you're teaching something that is so far removed from their experience and their thought worlds, they are often troubled or confused or may feel alienated from the material that you're approaching or that you're presenting to them – presenting them with. And my goal is always to have that experience become something that is ok. Something that could act as a bridge to new understanding or to a whole new world. I suppose what I'm thinking about here is: so, I've been looking a lot at my teaching

philosophy today, that's been my project for the day – it's actually my project for the week. And I looked over my notes from our Oxford conference where I was trying to think about whether a pedagogy of discomfort could lead in some way – because I was just noticing this discomfort amongst students and even more so since I've started teaching grammar; they're really uncomfortable with grammar in the first year – how that could lead to approaching other things, other subjects, other disciplines with what a Stellenbosch scholar has called 'critical hope', building on Freire; critical hope as opposed to naïve hope. So, always being aware that there is hope and, within the realm of understanding, hope of new understanding; hope of building bridges, and so forth.

GP: So, for example, much of the debate around monuments involves discomfort, people taking offence. In our university, one week after the next there's a crisis created by somebody taking offence, most recently, to somebody that studies hip-hop music using the n-word in a quotation, in a highly contextualised quotation in a class. So, is discomfort the same as taking offence? Or is there any connection? Is the common denominator the alienation that many students feel coming to a university that looks so much unlike them?

AD: I don't think they're entirely disconnected. But for me, being able to engage in a pedagogy of discomfort needs to happen – or to use discomfort productively there needs to be trust first. So, Christo van der Merwe [Professor Emeritus of the Ancient Studies Department at Stellenbosch University] often says: 'Amy, teaching is about trust. The students need to trust that you're never going to test them on anything you haven't done in class and they need to understand that you trust that they're not going to cheat. They need to trust that you have their best interests at heart.' So all of it is built on this trust that one is able to build in a lecture setting or in a class setting. And I think that for me is where the discomfort comes in. If there is no trust first, then discomfort will very quickly lead, I think, to offence. And often – so, I've been doing a lot of work on why I've been experiencing certain colourised and race discussions as emotionally triggering, triggering to my anxiety, and so forth, and I think it has a lot to do with this trust issue, now that I'm sitting here. Can I trust that what is being said is coming from a place of goodwill and not malice? Now on

the example you mention, I'm a little taken aback by it being within such a highly contextualised situation or context, where I'm assuming there is this trust, in a discussion of a genre that uses the n-word in a way that is trying to, as I understand it, reclaim it. So, I don't know. It's a difficult one. I have no idea. As for the monuments: you know, obviously redress is necessary. I think when all of this first started with Rhodes Must Fall, that was quite a sharp wake-up call for me. As someone who had assimilated a lot of the dominant cultures in these spaces that these discussions were taking place in, from going to the – when was it? – Wednesday night *sokkie* [dance] in the Neelsie to embracing French existentialism with everything I had in me without even questioning why I was learning that at the southern tip of Africa; being presented with, as I said earlier, these ideas about aesthetics and how the Western ideal *is* the ideal, I sort of internalised all of that. So, I don't know if I'm the right person to even comment on monuments and their place.

GP: Ok. As we wind up, can I come back – if you will – to Augustine and, I don't know the nature of your relationship with the *Confessions* at this point, but if you had any confessions to make of your own [laughter] inspired by Augustine? So, that's just an invitation to talk about that side of things if you so wish.

AD: I'm not sure about confessions. I think I've sort of already started 'spilling my guts', in a sense, where I've just been unable to figure out for myself the relevance and value of what I'm engaged in for my context, not as it stands at the moment. Yes, I think I'm just grappling with the moral purposefulness of classics research. It's easier to imagine that what I'm doing is morally defensible when I'm referring to my teaching because there it's about the people, and again it was the people in this discipline at my institution who drew me to it in the first place: it was a person at my high school who drew me to Latin; it was just people who were interested in me and in what I was thinking that drew me to this place. And so, I want to pay that forward. They were good ancestors to me in classics; I want to be a good ancestor to those who come after me in whatever discipline.

GP: That seems to me a great place to end.





Fourth dialogue:  
From reception to reimagination



## CHAPTER EIGHT

# African port cities and the classics

*Carla Bocchetti*

The collection of objects housed at the Governor's Palace Museum of Decorative Art in Ilha de Moçambique, speaks of the multiple confluences of cultures that occur in port cities on the South/East African coast. A similar collection, *Patterns of Contact: Designs from the Indian Ocean World*, was temporarily exhibited at Iziko National Gallery in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2014.<sup>1</sup> These two collections that represent hundreds of years of contact along African shores were housed in neoclassical buildings, which were built mainly during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as government offices, in the colonial period. This chapter will study the impact that classical references and neoclassicism<sup>2</sup> had in port cities in South/East Africa, and the dialogues they established with other types of influences circulating in those ports. The context will be framed within methodologies originating in those of global history, to argue that classical forms/neoclassicism travelled around the world and were consumed as a hybrid global product.<sup>3</sup>

Global history<sup>4</sup> is a critique to Eurocentrism and, in this respect, it is an alternative to the study of classical references outside Europe, going beyond the critiques of postcolonial theories. Global history emphasises horizontal relationships across large areas of the world, and within that new dynamic, classics<sup>5</sup> starts to lose its privileged position in universal history. Global history also goes beyond nations and expands the limits of research, emphasising contacts and communication, for it studies larger geographical areas and the ways in which they were connected through trade and commerce. In this respect it offers an opportunity to rethink

classics outside the scheme of national or imperial and colonial history. If we approach the classical world using the methodologies employed by global historians, what implications could there be for our understanding of the impact of antiquity (Greece and Rome) in the modern world?

Global historians have started to narrate histories through objects, emphasising trade and commerce, and targeting the grand narratives of Western exceptionalism. Studies on global history and material culture have flourished, particularly at the University of Warwick with the work of Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (2015a: 13). In *The Global Lives of Things* they state that ‘the global turn meant that historians began to see objects as part of wider stories that crossed geographical and chronological zones’ (Gerritsen & Riello 2015a: 13). I have argued elsewhere<sup>6</sup> that classics can benefit from the methodologies of global history, as they open up new directions from postcolonial approaches. It provides the possibility of studying material remains and antiquities and their modern replicas and forms (neoclassicism) as global commodities, consumed around the world. In my view classics, as a discipline, should no longer be regarded simply as a monolithic unity of ideas, and a vehicle of exclusion during the colonial period. Using the perspective of global history, classical references can be viewed as travelling hand in hand with imperial culture and, in the trajectory of its movement, these references became a hybrid global product influenced by people and places where they arrived.

When laying emphasis on material culture, objects take centre stage, as they tell stories of their material, production, techniques, trajectories, hybridity, aesthetics, social life, mercantile relations and port cities. Objects travel to vast geographical areas and play an important role in the creation of mercantile networks, thus creating connections and relationships within multiple social groups, distributed throughout diverse geographical locations.

There is a new interest in the study of ancient Greeks and Romans in the context of global history. The book by Pitts and Versluys (2015), *Globalisation and the Roman World: World History, Connectivity and Material Culture*, takes account of different views of globalisation to address ‘Romanisation’. Although the book aims to be a pioneer in the field, it presents some difficulties: while it refers to a wide range of theories on global history, it leaves aside consumption theories that are central in the discussion of global history and in understanding the dynamics of antiquity both inside

and outside of Europe. Global history studies objects as commodities. For Gerritsen and Riello (2015a: 11), ‘things which Appadurai refers to as commodities, have economic value in “motion,” as they circulate in social life,’ and also highlight their mercantile value: ‘the shift from objects to goods, and from qualitative to quantitative approaches [...] is captured by the term consumption.’ Rather, Pitts and Versluys’ introduction leaves a gap in addressing the complexities that arise in material culture studies in relation to consumption theories.

For instance, the chapter by Versluys (2015) draws examples from the religious world (the statue of the goddess Iris in Roman times) which I would argue is not exactly a commodity in terms of consumption patterns, in the same way as the extensive presence of porcelain in the East African coast. Religious syncretism as well as votive objects have a different dynamic to that of objects of consumption in daily life. Chinese-style pottery and Islam were, for instance, both arriving at East African ports as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE onwards, but represented different categories in the market. While on the one hand, luxury items of consumption such as Chinese pottery (‘china’) normally had a set price and an established network, on the other hand, religious objects, such as *Qur’ans*, statues and votive figures entangled a social interaction which is different from that of the standard mercantile trade.

Religious objects and their globalisation are less connected to the arrival of commodities and more related to the foundation of sanctuaries in different parts of the world, such as the Achilles cult in the Black Sea (Malkin 2011), or St Francis Xavier, a Christian saint, in Goa (Gupta 2014), or the *Qur’ans* placed in wall niches (*sidakas*) on houses on Lamu island, off the Kenyan coast.<sup>7</sup> Votive figures/statues were associated with pilgrimage, and although pilgrimage followed the same commercial routes as ‘things’, objects from the religious sphere, they have different behaviour from the market point of view. That is why religious objects less accurately illustrate the global history of material culture, for they are not in the same position in the market as were cotton or china, for instance.<sup>8</sup>

In considering classical references as a hybrid global product, we can describe a classical reference as a commodity, with forms and context in movement, and one which is being consumed around the world. According to the current debates on global history, the transmission of material culture across regions of the world leads us to narratives of interaction, trade and

economic development, hybridity in taste and fashion; a cosmopolitanism that is exemplified in the diversity of objects circulating through African port cities. That is the case of the exhibitions at the Governor's Palace in Ilha de Moçambique, and at Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town, two collections which display Chinese pottery, Swahili furniture, elaborate Indian chairs and beds, Zanzibari chests, textiles, carpets, pots, jewellery and cloth. Classical architectural forms in the shape of columns, pediments, arches, and also elements of interior decoration, such as chandeliers, statues, furniture, silverware and glass – all in neoclassical 'fashion' – were also arriving at these ports of Africa during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Global history and the classics**

Global history conceives of the world in horizontal terms, not purely linear histories, especially creating connections outside of a Eurocentric interpretation of the world. Alongside that view, classics has now reconsidered some old views about 'authority', but could benefit from new terms and definitions from other areas of research. It has been some time since African archaeological sites were interpreted in relation to classical antiquity. Examples of such thinking are Cecil John Rhodes' interpretation of Great Zimbabwe, which he suggested was Phoenician in origin because it was too magnificent to have been built by Africans (Fauvelle-Aymar 2013); or Breuil, the French anthropologist, who compared a figure in a rock painting in Namibia with the Cretan fresco 'the Lady of the Lilies', arguing for the artist as Mediterranean. The figure was subsequently named the 'White Lady of Brandberg' (Breuil et al. 1955). The view that classics performed a 'civilising mission' in the colonies is also being interrogated. In fact, there has recently been a shift to focus on the indigenous actors and the social and cultural anxieties that were projected through the neoclassical manifestation outside Europe.

Another approach that remains popular in teaching classics is that studying the ancient Greeks and Romans helps us to understand the way the world is today. I think this idea needs refining since of course the classical world represents only a part of world history, and it needs to be studied in relation to other historical realities. The use of classical references should be studied as a hybrid phenomenon occurring around

the world, which changes and modifies its form and context as it moves through vast geographical areas. Problems arise with terminology such as 'identity', 'empire' and 'race' as categories for interpreting the classical world; according to Glassman (2011) and Cooper (2014), these categories of analysis are dissolving. In order to situate classics within the major discussion offered by global history, we can start by trying to erase the centre/periphery dichotomy and no longer see classical references as having originated in one place and then spread to other areas in a copied, less valuable form.

Another term that has started to lose prestige is 'authority'. This term refers to a solid unity of established ideas on a subject and implies exclusion of others. Classics, however, refers to porous realities too, and the term 'connectivity' instead of 'authority' expresses much more accurately the new historical realities through which the past should be viewed. It also offers an opportunity to open up a space for antiquity within contemporary preoccupations in global history.<sup>9</sup> The classical references we encounter today were shaped by the diverse contacts and the many geographical locations through which they travelled. In that respect, classical references should be regarded as a form of connectivity in which references to the ancient world come to frame new modes of social and cultural relations.

The term 'hybridity' is a useful one and can be applied to classical studies. Hybridity denotes permeable boundaries, for cultures are collective and are inherently heterogeneous. Dean and Leibsohn (2003: 5, 13) emphasise that in the concept of hybridity, when related to colonialism, indigenous mixes are less potent and visible than the presence of cultural references brought by the coloniser.

However, a revision of the classical references in the colonised world should no longer be seen as forms of appropriation or denigration of other peoples' culture. The revision of the concept of hybridity allows us to understand classical forms as realities that were also subject to mixture and adaptations, that were permeated through local influences and through different practices with which they interacted. One of the purposes of including hybridity in the study of classics in the colonial world is to emphasise convergence instead of conflict.

Within the complexities of crafting colonial cultures, Jasanoff (2005: 6) has argued, for instance, that the British Empire was not as coherent as it seems on a map. It was also shaped by contingencies and contradictions,



thus itself becoming an example of a fractured reality, marked by circumstances, cultural entanglements and accidents. In relation to that, classics should also be decentred from imperial culture, as it is connected to other realities by many layers of different interaction, of which imperial culture is one layer, but not necessarily the only one of value. As history moves away from the Eurocentric view, and classics dismisses its position as universal history, will classics dissolve while a non-Eurocentric view of the world advances?

South African port cities as well as Ilha de Moçambique offer interesting examples through which to see classics in new relationships with these colonial contexts. Having left its privileged position, classics can be seen within a network of travel and connectivity: port cities suggest patterns of consumption of objects and goods created by a network of merchants across oceanic spaces. I argue that classical forms (neoclassicism) can be studied as a hybrid global product, as objects in transit travelling on the decks of ships, and arriving at distant port cities as commodities. We can see classical references not only attached to the British Empire both in Africa and Asia but to other colonial geographies, such as the French islands of Reunion, Mauritius and Madagascar,<sup>10</sup> or Asmara, 'Ethiopia's Rome', or the classical influence in Latin America, or the Portuguese cities of Lourenço Marques (Maputo) or Ilha de Moçambique. Using global history, classical scholars can establish a dialogue with other disciplines and open up new spaces of cross-references with disciplines to which classics has not normally been related. As the nationalistic/imperial frame is broken, it also spans disciplinary limits to engage in new discussion and academic debates rarely associated before with the classical world.

### **The Indian Ocean and the classics**

Work on the Indian Ocean has traditionally been focused mainly on the Asian subcontinent, and only recently have African relationships and the ocean received more attention (Sugata 2006). Indian Ocean port cities of South Africa such as Cape Town and Durban have been neglected to an extent in the literature, but are rapidly building a place for themselves in the historiography of the Indian Ocean. Theories of the Global South are often concerned with non-Western histories and intercolonial exchanges; but South African history includes the complex factors of forced migrant

labour, slavery and mining capital (Hofmeyr et al. 2016: 125), a volatile area of racial and ethnic tensions during the colonial period.

A book edited by Grant Parker (2017b) addresses the confrontations of the classical world within the imperial histories in South Africa. According to Hilton (2017), Cecil Rhodes' interest in classical antiquity and the monuments fashioned in the classical style to celebrate his life and achievements, fuelled imperialistic ideas and shaped the neoclassical vision of the Cape. Indeed, normally classics has been conceived as a source of social hierarchy and division – a discipline in which most of the colonial administrators were trained. South African port cities are often associated with forced labour and prison assemblages which were central to the building of colonial infrastructure and played a key role in the spectacle of terror and punishment (Hofmeyr et al. 2016: 378). However, as Parker (2017a: 6–7) argues, classical references can also have a surprising afterlife in political and cultural arenas, for they not only helped to shape subversive discourses in colonial contexts, but also had a role as bridge-builders in breaking political tensions.

Theories and methodologies from global history can help us understand the reception of antiquity beyond the paradigm of postcolonial studies. Therefore, the common view of classics as a vehicle for imperial culture can now be regarded as only one part of the story. In response to the perceived spectre of colonial authority that permeates the presence of classical references in the postcolonial worlds, it is important to formulate new categories of analysis and thereby give classics a chance to offer a new perspective.

### **The Governor's Palace at Ilha de Moçambique**

Colonial port cities were regarded as urban spaces of global trade and mixed culture. This section aims to offer a potential new reading of what neoclassical buildings and their contents may have contributed to shaping interactions of European and non-European identities. Neoclassicism has been viewed as a feature in defining and limiting 'other' people's traditions and culture during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bhabha 1994). But it is also of importance to consider the possible dialogues that it enabled with other types of traditions both present and arriving at the shores of South/East Africa.<sup>11</sup>

The East African coast is populated by Swahili-speaking people. As Vernet has explained, Swahili was the product of a fusion of cultures, a fluid and porous identity in which multiple influences converged: African, Persian, Omani, Hadhrami, South Asian and Portuguese (Vernet 2015).<sup>12</sup> The term 'Swahili' though is not easy to define; rather, it was an umbrella term to describe the people of the East African coast. For example, in Mozambique such people were called Ajojo (those coming from the Comoros) and Maka, those based in the coastal area of Angoshe. According to Rocha (1989),<sup>13</sup> the strong presence of Arabic culture in the Swahili identity was not so present in Mozambique, where Swahili settlements were relatively autonomous from the dynasties of Zanzibar, and much more related to Indians, Portuguese, Malagasy and Comorans. According to Prestholdt (2001: 386), 'Swahili became a respected society in the Portuguese imagination.' The Portuguese accounts describing the East African coast and the Swahili emphasise more of the similarities and familiarities they shared with them, rather than the differences, and this made it possible for the Swahili culture to spread without being rejected or challenged by the Portuguese. In that respect, the Swahili culture became a transversal line permeating all levels of social and cultural life in port cities of East Africa.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Ilha de Moçambique became the leading Portuguese settlement on the East African coast. Before the arrival of the Portuguese, however, there is evidence that the Swahili had been trading there since the 7<sup>th</sup> century; it was a natural port, an entrepot of trade from the interior (the kingdom of Monomotapa) to the Indian Ocean. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ilha de Moçambique was an Afro-Islamic town, depending on the sultanate of Kilwa (Chittick 1974; Liesegang 1999: 39).<sup>14</sup> According to tradition, Ilha was especially well known for its ship building (Newitt 1995).<sup>15</sup> While Ilha was a way station of the gold route to Kilwa in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there was also the less known ancient kingdom of Sofala<sup>16</sup> in Mozambique to which gold from Great Zimbabwe arrived and was shipped to Kilwa. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Portuguese presence along the Swahili corridor has been strong, especially in Malindi and Mombasa, where it is still visible in the Fort Jesus Museum, with its collection of Chinese porcelain, and the Portuguese graffiti depicting maritime war scenes (see fig. 1).

The Swahili built stone towns along the coast, of which Ibo island in Mozambique is an example. There are also other examples of stone towns,



Figure 1: Graffito of a ship, part of a larger mural painting depicting a maritime battle, Fort Jesus Museum, Mombasa, Kenya [Photo credit: Carla Bocchetti]

such as Lamu, Manda island and Pate off the Kenyan coast, and Kilwa and Zanzibar off the Tanzanian coast. These stone towns are of Swahili architecture, characterised by labyrinthine narrow streets and an Arabic flavour (Wynne-Jones & Fleisher 2015). A different case is that of the stone town (*cidade de pedra e cal*) of Ilha de Moçambique, which was inspired by European models. There are wide streets, avenues planted with trees, plaza-type open spaces, and many buildings reference a neoclassical style, resembling the architecture of Damao, Diu and Goa in India, which were also Portuguese settlements (fig. 2). During Portuguese rule, Ilha was actually governed from Goa. Other prominently neoclassical architectural forms can be seen in the San Sebastian Fort and in the large hospital with colonnaded façade and an entablature that mimics that of a Greek temple. A few remains of Swahili houses in Ilha are also still visible: wooden crafted doors of ‘Lamu style’, as well as the famous niches of the walls, called *sidakas* – which incidentally visually evoke both classical and Arabic arches – in



*Figure 2: Street with arched colonnade in Ilha de Moçambique  
[Photo credit: Carla Bocchetti]*

which Chinese plates were placed for house interior decoration<sup>17</sup> (fig. 3). Alongside the neoclassical facade of the city, including columns, statues, lanterns and pediments (though today in ruinous state), was Swahili culture exemplified by numerous objects circulating on the island.

The Governor's Palace in Ilha de Moçambique is an impressive neoclassical building which houses a collection of objects coming from the cosmopolitan arena of the Indian Ocean, but nevertheless arranged within the Western urban aesthetics dictated by neoclassicism – an influence which permeated the colonial world in East/Southern Africa and beyond (fig. 4).

Bronze statues on short fluted column bases and holding torches dominate the entrance to the main staircase of the palace. At the top of the stairs the main doorway is framed by two neoclassical pilasters with elaborate capitals. During the restoration of the museum in 1969, many objects were collected and bought from different locations, both in Ilha de Moçambique and from abroad, to present what the Governor's Palace





*Figure 3: Niches decorating Swahili houses (sidaka) [Photo credit: Carla Bocchetti]*



*Figure 4: Façade, Governor's Palace, Museum of Decorative Art, Ilha de Moçambique [Photo credit: Carla Bocchetti]*

must have been like in its time of splendour. Inside the house the collection includes Persian rugs; Indian and European tables; Indian, European and Chinese chairs; French mirrors and pictures; European clocks; Asian and European porcelain; and European chandeliers, vases, glassware and desks.<sup>18</sup> There are doors carved in intricate Gujarati style, and Bombay accents as well as Swahili-Omani furniture. The ‘Bombay style’ refers to densely carved and pierced blackwood tables and side tables which were exported from Bombay in the 1870s–1880s. The dark massive forms were in fact based on Victorian prototypes transformed into shapes of intertwining serpents, flowers and foliated ornaments that evoke the exoticism of the oriental (Meier 2009: 15). Chinese pottery is one of the most famous items circulating on the East African coast; it was in demand not only by Europeans, but also collected by local patricians to decorate their houses (Meier 2015; Zhao 2003). Indeed, colonised people collecting porcelain, offer an interesting example of the way in which narrating history through objects complicates the picture of colonial consumption and power. Aspects of non-European influences into the colonial system operate at different levels. For instance, the case of the altar of the Capella de Sao Paulo, made and brought from Goa in India and placed at the church of the Museum of the Governor’s Palace in Ilha de Moçambique (fig. 5), offers another interesting example of the porous boundaries of the colonial world (Rodrigues et al. 2009).

Also of interest is the similarity of this collection and the way in which it is displayed, to the collection of the Sultan’s Palace in Zanzibar, where it was also fashionable to juxtapose technological innovations like Victorian wall clocks and French chandeliers, with Indo-Portuguese furniture<sup>19</sup> (see fig. 6). The hybridity of these objects also reveals the hybridity of the neoclassical forms bending towards a ‘negotiation’ with other forms/objects that were configuring the general scenario on the East African coast. Collections of objects from the Indian Ocean together with neoclassicism include forms of transnational memory: objects that go beyond national boundaries. These collections represent memorials of years of trade and hybridity and exemplify a public history of translocation and of varying levels of cosmopolitanism in places far from the presumed European ‘centre’ (Declich 2007).

Classical references were numerous in this global process. In areas of contact, classical references should be seen as merchandise, consumer

goods arriving at ports; a phenomenon that took place in frontier zones, intersected by the unfolding of empire, and a new network of exchange created by colonial dynamics. Neoclassicism was also rooted in oceanic transculturation. People and objects travelling around these ports, ‘the travelling culture’ (Clifford 1997), were not only elites and luxury products; sailors, small-business people and slaves of all varieties constituted the vast majority of people arriving at port cities. This led to a possibility of democratisation of some objects, umbrellas and mirrors being two examples. Even the reuse of empty containers made of porcelain was available to a larger population. Consumerism, or emphasis on objects to communicate social ideas, can be regarded as a strategy for representing the self within the diversity of port cities. As objects open up societies to dynamics of cosmopolitanism, they take part in the engagement of societies with new cultural value systems.



Figure 5 [left]: Altar, capella de Sao Paulo. Governor's Palace, Museum of Decorative Art, Ilha de Moçambique. [Photo credit: Carla Bocchetti]



Figure 6 [above]: Exhibition Patterns of Contact: Designs from the Indian Ocean World, Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town [Photo credit: Carla Bocchetti]



## **Patterns of Contact: Designs from the Indian Ocean World exhibition at Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town**

South African port cities share with Ilha de Moçambique the maritime infrastructure of a society built by the confluence of different traditions and exposure to multiculturalism. An exhibition at the Iziko National Gallery in Cape Town, *Patterns of Contact* (2014), displayed, in a neoclassical building, over a thousand years of contact that is part of the narrative of South African national heritage. The exhibition gathered objects from different parts of the Indian Ocean and included a copy of an ancient Chinese map (1389 CE) in which the whole African continent is depicted, along with portraits, Zanzibari chests, Chinese porcelain from shipwrecks, Bombay-style furniture, textiles, paintings, and artefacts of different materials, such as precious metals, ceramics and wood. It also included glass- and silverware from the Groote Schuur Art Collection, and Batavian and early Cape furniture (Kaufmann 2016: 151–160) (fig. 6).

Amid examples of neoclassical furniture, silverware and glass, the combination of so many cultural artefacts tells the story of multiple agents interacting on these coasts, and permeating European culture through hybrid material. Simultaneously, the exhibition challenges the transversal idea of slavery in South Africa. How can a collection of objects circulating on the African coast set a new context for understanding the role of the classical references in the colonial world?

This type of collection has never been displayed before in South Africa and was exhibited to show other dimensions to South African heritage. This is very important, because the story narrated through these objects totally subverts the political and traditional narratives of racial segregation.

The exhibition creates a cosmopolitan narrative, demonstrating the diversity and complexity of tensions, anxieties, erasures, peripheries that characterise the social dynamics of port cities in the South/East African coast, and where classical references were fairly dominant. This collection shares similarities not only with the exhibition at the Governor's Palace at Ilha de Moçambique, but also with other displays of decorative art in Zanzibar, Lamu and Mombasa. However, it differs from them in the sense that those examples of material culture were neglected in South African national narratives. The exhibition was an initiative by curators intent on demonstrating the availability of new meanings of a complex network of

social relationships imbued in objects. It also shows the importance of how a museum's exhibition helps to articulate new languages for understanding the past and its conflicts. The entanglement of objects is highly fractured, referring to the value system and strategies of self-representation, layering diverse cultural encounters. Performing the classics was beyond reading them. It was also the urban landscape of port cities that expressed the forms in which new influences were arriving and departing within a heterogeneous swarm of the floating population.

A revision of how heritage is invented, imagined and made visual in an exhibition that contemplates the multiple groups and individuals in South/East Africa is therefore important, as it gives informative perspectives from private narratives of self-performance to public display of the self through objects. The classical past has to be negotiated with the distinct but interrelated spaces, where distinction of class, ethnicity and belonging participate in the formation of the social and cultural life of port cities.

Patterns of contact intertwined cities such as Lamu, Mombasa, Gede, Pate, Manda, Zanzibar and Ilha de Moçambique as part of a cultural geography that is key to understanding the colonial period in Africa, and the classical references attached to it. The interwoven logic of the South/East African collections displayed at Ilha de Moçambique and Iziko South African National Gallery illuminate the complicated reciprocities enacted in transcultural and cosmopolitan spaces of coastal urban life. The classical or neoclassical form was one of the many influences circulating around the Indian Ocean shores: while statues, marbles and amphoras from Greece and Rome were becoming the norm among European collections, the classical influence was in negotiation with other options/forces challenging the socio-cultural landscape of port cities in the colonial world. Classical references in colonial geographies become a vehicle of fluid identities, porous senses of belonging and fragmented identities, representing pieces of a larger puzzle of hybridity and cosmopolitanism in port cities.

## Notes

- 1 The catalogue can be seen at <https://issuu.com/izikomuseums/docs/patternsofcontact>; for an analysis by the curator of the exhibition, see Kaufmann (2016).
- 2 The terms 'classical references/neoclassicism' in this chapter refer to motives in architecture and design such as arches, pediments and columns, or elements of interior decoration that follow a style inspired by the Greek and/or Roman pasts.

- 3 I have studied the idea of classics as a hybrid global product in Bocchetti (2016: 7–18).
- 4 See Berg (2013); Conrad (2012); Pearson (1998). See also 38 podcasts with several professors on the subject of global history, including, among others, Ken Pomeranz, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Chris Bayly, Linda Colley and Martha Ajmar, published by the University of Warwick/British Academy in 2014: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCf-DeXtdZOrsO\\_CExy1dJ9A](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCf-DeXtdZOrsO_CExy1dJ9A).
- 5 The term 'classics' refers to both the physical remains of the ancient Graeco-Roman world and also subsequent discourses concerning these remains; a rhetorical construction that draws a direct line between a limited reading of Classical Antiquity and the foundation of the Western world. See Bocchetti (2016: 7–18).
- 6 Bocchetti (2016).
- 7 See 'Frikishafi', an old poem referring to the ancient splendour of the Swahili world. See also De Vere Allen (1992).
- 8 For more on cotton, see Riello (2013); and broadly on the significance of material culture in mappings of global history, see Gerritsen and Riello (2015b).
- 9 See, for example, Subrahmanyam (1993).
- 10 Musée des arts décoratifs de l'océan Indien (MADOI) (2011).
- 11 Some scholars are of the opinion that the concept of the 'other' is not suitable to describe all types of Western/non-Western encounters. For example, according to Prestholdt, 'Portuguese expressions of familiarity were integral to their mapping and colonisation of East Africa' (2001: 386).
- 12 See Horton and Middleton (2000) for more on the mobile and commercial nature of Swahili society.
- 13 See also Declich (2007: 15).
- 14 Chittick (1974); Liesegang (1999: 39).
- 15 For Swahili ship building, see Rita-Ferreira (1992).
- 16 The ancient kingdom of Sofala has not been found, but there are many references to it in ancient documents: see Freeman-Grenville (1974).
- 17 Meier (2009).
- 18 See Lobato (1945) and, regarding the famous reception in which the objects of the Governor's Palace can be seen in performance during an event at the palace, see Lobato (1971).
- 19 Sarah Longair (2016) has studied the particular display of objects at the private house of the British governor in Zanzibar and its cultural implications. Also see Masters (2017) for collections of ancient art in South Africa displayed together with African animals. This combination is particularly present in colonial exhibitions, per Coombes (1994).

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CHAPTER NINE

Wilder than Polyphemus  
On the postcolonial consumption of symbols

*David van Schoor*

*Excudent alii spirantia mollius aera  
(Credo equidem), vivos ducent de marmore vultus,  
orabunt causas melius, caelique meatus  
describent radio et surgentia sidera dicent:  
tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento  
(hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,  
parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.<sup>1</sup>*

More delicately, others will forge bronzes that seem to breathe  
(I believe it truly), they will draw living expressions from marble,  
Will plead cases better, and with their instruments will chart  
The motions of the heavens and predict the rising of the stars:  
You, Roman, hold in your mind the ruling of peoples in your power,  
(Your arts will be these), to establish the way of peace,  
Give mercy to the downtrodden and subdue arrogant men.

It is one of the most famous passages of Vergil's nation-building Roman epic. The ghost of the hero's father Anchises is addressing his still living son in the land of the dead. He prophesies that, whilst other peoples will excel in artistry, speech making or sciences, the Roman's special skill will be in governing. He will turn his domination of the world to good: peace, compassion and the subduing of the arrogant. It is a remarkable

passage, and amongst other things it will call to mind Jakob Burckhardt in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* writing so memorably about the Italian conception of the 'State as a Work of Art'. But in postcolonial Africa we read it also with all the irony and scepticism of people who have touched the grain of history and known that freedom has often meant going against it. Where are we Africans in the catalogue of different peoples and their assorted contributions; are we better suited to being sculptors of monumental bronzes, astronomers, speech makers, rulers or permanently ruled, all or none of these? Whatever Africa and the African polity is to be, a central question for African thinkers, just as it was for Vergil and his Rome, is the role and function of different qualities of political emotions and their place in our reimagining of African civilisation, in that imaginary African *urbs*, which is the precondition for the real, historical African polity we wish to see arising.

In the following argument I ask you to entertain a possibility. More precisely, here are two possibilities that at first may seem mutually exclusive, but if there is sense in what I am proposing, they will be seen together as forming one healthy paradox, rather than a contradiction. In brief, I want to suggest, first, that the political emotionalism of 'fallism' and of popular political discourse more generally, is a dead-end because *furor*, the seductively energising political emotion of anger and revenge, is invariably self-destroying.

Second, I put it that rejecting *furor* need not be tantamount to a quietism or any neutering of political will; on the contrary, it is the prerequisite for perseverance and true flourishing in the long term. We could always ask not what our imagined enemies deserve, but what will best serve our own interests and those of our descendants. It is, perhaps, through a reconceptualising of ourselves and of our past rather than by perpetuating the repetitious cycles of outrage, reprisal and self-assertion that we will best serve ourselves. Our current models of response, our habitual historical imaginaries, have failed us. One fresh understanding of ourselves is the Brazilian modernists' *antropofagia*, offered here as an example which is hoped may contribute to the development of a finer handling of our controlling metaphors and tropes. This is an interpretive strategy by which we African readers and citizens would see ourselves as anthropophagous consumers of world culture, cannibals of the bodies of symbols and works the last 500 years of globalisation have brought to our shores; not simply the victims of foreign bodies but their agentive consumers.

I offer, too, a specifically African addition to the Brazilian *antropofagia*: a first run at outlining something like a cannibalist, Dionysian poetics of interpretation and consumption. The classicising Portuguese poet Camões dismissively characterised Africans as the ‘children of Bacchus’, to convey our putative wildness and hostility to his Christian European civilisation and its children of an idealised, Marian Venus. This proposed poetics, amongst other things, would enact the defiantly happy reclamation of the gifts and freedoms of that Greek god, Bacchus or Dionysus, who was the greatest benefactor of the human race.

### ***Pacique imponere morem:*<sup>2</sup> The habit of tranquillity**

*Nothing stirred in the brute the least excitement.*<sup>3</sup>

It is the famous wrath of Achilles, his *mēnis*, that precipitates the action, or the warrior’s absence from action, which forms the main plot line of the first work of Western literature, Homer’s *Iliad* (ca 750 BCE).<sup>4</sup> Wrath – *ingqumbo* – is also the central emotional problem of the plot of the first novel written in isiXhosa, *The Wrath of the Ancestors* or *Ingqumbo Yeminyana* by AC Jordan, published in 1940. I heard a video artist speaking at a conference in 2019, someone who had suffered exclusion from his university for his role in Fallist demonstrations. He talked about the place of *ingqumbo* in his work and its importance to him. Something he said stayed with me: *ingqumbo*, he suggested, is not simply a reactive or circumstantial emotion, but permanently maintained; it is a ‘refusing to forget’.<sup>5</sup>

That is a resonant and significant formulation. One’s thoughts may turn back to Achilles, his wounded pride, his very human need for social recognition. Retrieving one’s always socially constituted sense of self-worth is the structuring action of the work, on various levels. The overarching story is an expedition against Troy, which is itself Menelaus’ project of winning back his lost wife and honour. The historian Herodotus, claiming his place in the Homeric tradition, later opened his own great work with several pages in which history is described as just such a sequence of escalating injuries and reprisals. The earliest intact, surviving history is framed, then, by just such a Homeric view of the human past as organised by emotions of outrage and reaction.

Achilles’ stubborn unwillingness to be palliated is certainly a strong



and consequential *refusal to forget*. The *Iliad* describes an arc of feeling that starts with an insult, travels through refusal and its tragic consequences, and culminates in a moving recognition of humanity and reconciliation. In Vergil's national epic of Rome, *ingqumbo* or *mēnis* is again the central problem. The wrath of savage Juno, whose sense of injury is itself an obdurate refusal, pursues the hero and founding father of Rome, Aeneas. His adventures will bring home to him and to the reader or Augustan listener, the tragic nature of human life, the sorrows inherent in historical memory; in being a survivor haunted by history's ghosts. It is a study in sympathy for victims, and it foregrounds the destructiveness of certain qualities of emotional response to memory and its representation. History leaves in its wake those who were conquered by the strong, but also, more subtly, those who were mastered and destroyed by their own rage. There is this pity and pathos of history, which is always tragic. The *Aeneid*, one may go so far as to say, is a richly developed study in *furor: ingqumbo*, wrath. It was the poetic equivalent of just the kind of project that newly democratic South Africa itself needed to realise in the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century: Vergil's project attempted to reconcile his fellows to their past sufferings, to invest those with meaning, and transform loss into a philosophical and emotional gain. It was a national epic rich in philosophical import and therapeutic powers. That is the kind of more profound transformation from which we in Africa too could truly benefit, the transformation of passions like anger, for which Mandela is justly celebrated.

Memory, the inability to forget, and the blessings of being conciled to the past, are from the outset chief themes of literary tradition. *Hubris*, the ineradicable human frailty dramatised so powerfully in Greek tragedy and such a fatal feature of post-liberation tyrannies in Africa, is a form of temporary forgetting. It is a kind of *amnesia*, being unmindful of one's mortal limitation and its ethical implications for behaviour. Mind, mindlessness and mindfulness are central preoccupations of classical drama, itself the art of the god most integrally associated with loss of self and *mania*, Dionysus or Bacchus. He was a slippery figure who transcended the normal rules of logic in discourse, so that he represented both the mindfulness incurred through suffering and the cathartic release of forgetting, so necessary for existential coping. He is both the flower of civilisation and the savage, sometimes bestially cannibalistic force, that subverts it. He unites opposites and revitalises where logic merely rules

out. In Dionysus' theatre, classical Athens explored its political emotions and symbolically resolved its tensions. In Aeschylus' trilogy the *Oresteia*, for example, which is named for Orestes, the royal son driven mad with vengeful wrath over his murdered father, a cycle of historic retribution, complete with cannibalistic feasts and fraternal murders, is finally escaped and the founding of democratic processes of legal settlement and conciliation under law is dramatised onstage. *Atē* is the madness into which wrath draws individuals and it is the greatest threat to the well-being of the body politic. Orestes, consumed with wrath for his ancestors and pursued by the demons of revenge, is destroyed by his *atai*, those states of mind he could not escape.

Passion in politics and public life in Africa is hostile to the real upliftment of peoples, however vitalising and exciting it may feel for the university students who will one day constitute the middle classes they may now taunt and impotently defy. The culture wars that play out in South Africa, a country plagued by the lethal diseases of xenophobia, extreme inequality and chronic corruption and incompetence, are only a symptom of privilege. And privilege in South Africa remains in absolute dereliction of the civic responsibilities that would compel us to materially and not merely symbolically transform the polity. In South Africa, the handling of symbols, no less than the practical organisation of the political and social economy, has always been a criminally inept affair, and so it still is. We are aporetic, at a dead-end, politically, emotionally and philosophically. We would benefit, then, from new articulations and descriptions, new visions of ourselves as historical subjects. Certainly, we have little to lose in experimenting with our definitions and our perspectives. For one recharacterising of the relationship of South African people to the cargo that has washed up on our shores over the last few hundred years, I wish to borrow from Brazil across the Atlantic – another postcolonial and deeply unequal but much more culturally self-confident country. I want to suggest – and this is where the apparent contradiction lies – that in recognition of the deceptiveness and destructiveness of strong feeling, we still our political passions, that we quiet ourselves however outraged and justified we may be, and at the same time that we become like the cannibal; that we embrace a savage and anthropophagous attitude towards the consumption of culture. It is not quietist passivity that I advocate, but a more productive deployment of our political emotions. Anger or a mere refusal to forget will not be as

generative or creative as, for instance, the kind of voracious integration and transformation of symbols, legends and meanings accomplished by that great cultural appropriator and consumer of forms, Vergil the Roman, or the synthesiser of experience and understanding, Mandela.

Public discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is as vehement as it was in the turbulent internecine years of the declining Republic of Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. And ours is discourse warped by just those emotions and ethical deficits which ancient philosophy understood so well to be the chief threats to human well-being: anger, intemperance, unrestraint, self-pity. Anonymously or nakedly self-promoting, individuals circulate extreme points of view unchecked by any commitment to balance; any ideal transcending the insatiable human libido for social power and its physical rewards, self-assertion and recognition. It is an age of unbridled passions, what the Greeks reflecting on the good of the *polis* called *epithumia*, and the Romans, *furor*. Attendant on febrile political passion is the distortion of the realities we are able to perceive and the thoroughgoing diminishment of political agency.

The political emotions of outrage, moralistic indignation and self-pity – whether on left or right – succeed in attracting many followers to the *causes du jour* of rulers as *influencers*, whose qualifications are the strength of their feeling and the rhetorical facilitations of the internet. The states of ungovernable, passionate feeling that should really disqualify us from the impassive and clear-headed processes of democratic deliberation, those are exactly what many people today regard as their chief justification and political vindication. South Africans in the post-apartheid era have calamitously failed to end poverty and racialised inequality. Apartheid's injustices live and breathe, insuperable in the face of indifference, incompetence and hypocrisy. This is not the fault of Cecil John Rhodes, it must be said. But he certainly makes a useful and dramatic scapegoat. Considerable resources for redressing historical injustice have been at hand, backed up by an initially impressive tax-collection infrastructure and a remarkably progressive justice system, such that hesitation to rebuke post-apartheid leaders for their errors or extravagant corruption appears to mask a subtly patronising or even racist pattern of low standards for blacks. While that dancer, Jacob Zuma, was impoverishing the people of South Africa and presiding imperially over the extraction of its wealth to havens in Dubai, it was the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Rhodes who had to be toppled

and white, colonial hegemony was attacked as if we had not had a black, democratic government in power for 24 ineffectual years of betrayed promise.

At least, then, we can displace our political emotions upon the symbols of the past and berate the strawmen of history, like Rhodes. Post-apartheid democratic South African government, with a mandate from the people, has not *his* excuse. The racism of lowered expectations can make it seem forbidden to criticise in Africa, and perilous to question impassioned student movements, as if to disagree with some things equates to a wholesale rejection of everything someone *claims* they stand for. But that is the discursive logic of a politics of *furor*, its phantoms and its smokescreens. Failing to truly transform our political world and trapped by the impotence of wrath, it becomes all the more important to project anger and frustration upon the apparently unlimited agency of the wicked white man and on his brazen memorials. Ghosts make easy, inexhaustible targets. This is not a harmless misidentification of culprits, it is precisely the emotional and rhetorical reaction and misdirection which empowers derelict governments everywhere in Africa. We do not express frustration in elections, so all the more is it necessary to vent feeling in the shadowy, virtual domain of emotion.

Like Aeneas, a drowning refugee, an exiled victim of war and civic destruction, at the opening of the Roman national epic, we are swept forward on waves of historiographic heroism, when we live in a post-struggle, post-heroic age where Achilles and Agamemnon and their destructive egotism are out of place. But, like Dido, a queen in Africa who failed to build a new civilisation for her people because she fell under the spell of narcissistic self-involvement called *amor* (a victim of structural, cosmic hostility, we are meant to understand in the Roman telling), we have been unequal to the mundane tasks of real, practical reorganisation and rebuilding of our new republic. How fortunate for us, then, that we have at our disposal the virtual dragons of colonialism to slay, that we may expend ourselves on addictive fury, and thereby stifle any frustrations or inadequacies we may feel over the betrayal of our earlier hopes for a more just and prospering Africa. When most we need realism, we are victims of the political passions that most reliably distort reality.

The *durée* of history is *longue* however, and the only lasting rulers are the metaphors. Scriptures and literary works, those enduring rhetorical

packets, myths and memes so effortlessly communicable, these form the dynasties and self-propagating heirs who organise and imperceptibly tyrannise these virtual principalities called ‘culture’, which we inhabit. I do not wish, here, to argue over whether ideas or material conditions guide and shape historical change and conditions more. To many it is now clear that they interact with and even mutually reconstitute one another as they determine human historical experience and are perpetually redetermined. It should be acknowledged by most that there is never any human interaction with a posited material reality that is ever unmediated by the symbolic.<sup>6</sup> That said, I hope the reader will entertain an argument premised on the notion that metaphors, figures of thought, ideas can enjoy something like an independent life over time. They are activated by living persons moving about in their *Lebenswelt* and are drawn into what Anthony Giddens called the ‘day-to-day *durée*’ of human life (1984: 66). In a privileged way they exert great pressure on the shape and possibilities of mental life. Symbolic forms, our activating emotions, and their interpretation also provide those opportunities, which represent potentially the fullest flowering of human agency.

Metaphors are surely devices of magic and royal charisma, rulers and houses nearly impossible to depose. Or, let us say more topically in the early 2020s, they are viruses for their very infectious power. I mean viral in Dawkins’ original sense of the meme.<sup>7</sup> And that there is no vaccine to permanently inoculate us against their mutations, for they are not simply additions to thought, but the very constituents or building materials of our mental life. Metaphors are our ways of seeing and the mechanisms of our sight. They frame the world and its past, determine the range and delimit the horizons of what the human mind imagines, determining, even, what it is capable of seeing. They are the vehicles by which we imaginatively traverse that virtual underworld we call history, vehicles activated and driven by our emotions. It is possible that when changing our metaphors we may transform our historical emotions, and conversely that in learning richer historical and political emotions we will require new metaphorical regimes.

Consider the myth of Noah and his sons, about which Eliot Weinberger has pertinently written (Weinberger 1993: 158–198). From the ca 1000 BCE account, in the early chapters of Genesis, of an ancient patriarch who gets drunk and feels that one of his three sons, Ham, has humiliated him while the other two (Shem and Japheth) have been duly respectful,

who thus curses the line of Canaan, Ham's son, for all time, comes the fascinatingly persistent meme of the cursed race, the enslavement of which has this biblical precedent and endorsement. Who is tagged Ham has, of course, shifted over time. The modern era, with the settling by Europeans of the New World, since about 1500 CE; the tragic expediency of Africans as slaves for Central and North American commerce; their inherited resistance both to diseases of the tropics and those borne by the urbanised Europeans; the fateful east winds of the Middle Passage: these established the perfect conditions for settling upon African peoples, rather than, say, native Americans or other Europeans, the designation of Hamitic, of *the* naturally cursed and marked of the modern era.

As often, a human, cultural institution became naturalised through the power of myth. At the base of the effective myth, its own mythological character invisible, is the myth of nature itself. The myth of nature in the modern era also entails the idea of science and its independence from figuration, and yet science remains always dependent on human language and imagination, which is constitutionally figurative and guided by subjective choices (Rodgers 2011: 10).<sup>8</sup> Of all emotions, wrath is the most effective at obscuring the relationship between things, our capacity for truer interpretation. But it is not that there is an objective historical reality to which we are appealing. It is more that the true shape of things and the manner of constitution of societies will always remain distorted or blurred behind the mist of political passions unequipped to divine the full import of signs, symbols, myths and histories. This is not to advocate a discredited Cartesianism either. We should not wish to expunge emotion from political life; a healthy political life, as Aristotle understood, depends on the cultivation of healthy political emotions. We would do better to argue for a defter way with feeling, so that our emotions do not entail the neutralisation of agency but its subtler fostering.

To every Shem and Japheth, their Ham. As guardians must have their guardians, so will the cursed find those whom they in turn will curse. From ancient Palestine with its Hebrews and Canaanites; to Rome with its Thracian, Rufus, the stock red-headed slave; to the non-Muslim, non-Semitic Persians, slaves to the Arabs, until they converted; to Balkan Slavs; and many other different constellations of power won through the appropriation of lands and peoples, we arrive in mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century South Africa, where the apartheid government found not only legal but spiritual

justifications in the pristine origin story of Noah, his malediction of Canaan's line and his privileging of Shem and Japheth and their Japhetic (European) and S[h]emitic (Asian) lines. In Rwanda in 1994, Hutus threw the bodies of their despised Tutsi enemies to be swept downriver, contemptuously dispatching them as the cursed descendants of Ham (Weinberger 1993: 197–198). Rwandans could be stirred and excited to the grimmest acts by appeal to ideas about who is worthy and who congenitally not so. Metaphors, memes and myths rule human life, making certain things possible and visible and others not.

### Noah's arc, Ham's rainbow

Barack Obama, who practised so well the arts of persuasion, famously spoke of 'the arc of history' as bending towards a better world (and when he did so he was paraphrasing someone else's metaphor).<sup>9</sup> This reflects an ingenuous belief, unless it is rather more a disingenuous rhetorical trigger, in unstoppable progress and improvement. Such credulousness or wilful optimism, Obama's stomping poetics of permanent hopefulness, which was obviously both a rhetorical strategy as well as something he may have sincerely believed, will doom us to disappointment and disillusion. For human life and the world of human history are irremediably tragic. And saying so need not depress initiative or endeavour; it is possible to be both warily disabused and energetically proactive.

What we require for a proper relationship to our history is a tragic poetics of human memory. We need the stoic's commitment to enduring good and bad with equanimity; and a maturely disabused historiography commensurate with achieving the pragmatism which alone will bring about the measure of justice possible to us. We would be well served by a Dionysian poetics of uncertainty, world-historical irony, reversed not effaced significations, and a fearless historical pessimism that does not daunt us in depressive inertia but inspires us to construct without illusions.<sup>10</sup> We will remain, otherwise, always an unfinished and self-regarding Carthage and never a self-reliant republic, strong and confidently endowed to show mercy and compassionate understanding even to those who may have done us harm.

Are Ham's son Canaan and all his descendants cursed? But of the three sons of that inebriated patriarch, flushed-out humanity's great, embarrassed survivor, Ham is the one Oedipal, which is to say modern,

hero. For in the Genesis account he finds his father passed out in a state of drunken shame and calls his brothers to see. They dutifully avert their eyes from the spectacle of their humiliated father. Ham is the one who sees paternal authority in its arbitrariness and imperfection, the one most ready to laugh at the pretensions of power to point out the emperor's nakedness. Perhaps his purported descendants will practise as their birth right this pre-possessing defiance and anti-authoritarianism, and will scoff at the curses of the entitled 'races'? Perhaps the sense of licence in Ham is a typology of that emotional reaction of the prodigal son, in that myth told by another Galilean son who had occasion to feel abandoned by his father? How we shall interpret our governing myths will be decisive for the worlds we build. When we merely extirpate them for weeds, they are sure to spring up as such again in undignified and rank repetition. Our tragic outcomes, which will always remain inevitably tragic, whatever we do, need to be more profoundly appreciated and enriching. In dramatic tragedy we learn that we cannot do anything to obviate catastrophe for always, but we become dignified through the quality of our responses to suffering. The one thing assured by revolutions is disappointment and disillusion. Apartheid, certainly, is alive and flourishing in South Africa and it is no coincidence that the same tired myths, shallow histories and reactions also still obtain.

Insolent Ham finding his drunken father sprawled in his tent, obedient Japheth and Shem averting their eyes, that mythical episode of a desert people in Western Asia three millennia ago, and its consequences, this is a meme which has been very successfully, pandemically viral for so many centuries. It is impressively enduring. Ham's story, his descendants the fated hewers of wood and drawers of water, is a triumphant meme, Weinberger showed, because it serves so well the opportunistic claims of humans in their *ad hoc* struggles for domination over one another. For, American presidential rhetoric notwithstanding, there is no teleological arc bending one way or another, there are only haphazard events *ex tempore*, aggregated *post hoc* and lent an apparent narrative structure. This opaque context of radical arbitrariness, of the indomitable sway of what the Romans called *fortuna* and the Greeks *tuchē*, is the condition of the historical tragic.

The Brazilian modernists' strategy for the cannibalising interpretation of culture, memory and symbols presents one possibility available to us for secession from the imaginative regimes that continue to shape and influence



our inherited conceptions of African consumption and readership, and the relationship of colonised with colonial *imaginaires*. I wish to draw on 20<sup>th</sup>-century Brazilian creativity in hermeneutics as I consider a literary topos and an image: the image is of the wild cannibal Polyphemus, and the paradigmatic historic topos, the moment of first sighting or contact of a savage people by a civilised one. This is an originary and prophetic moment in the myth of the modern era, its racialised caste systems and chronic global disparities. Here I am adducing the first literary account about an indigenous person of southern Africa, who from the very outset is cast as the savage cannibal of ancient epic, Polyphemus. This we find in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Portuguese national poet, and sailor, Luis Vaz de Camões.

### **Calibanised: I saw a stranger**

Here comes dinner hopping along. (De Campos 2007: 160)

Following are some lines taken from that work which is generally considered to contain the first literary reference to the inhabitants of southern African shores. The verses are from *The Lusíads*, that ‘Mediterranean baroque extravaganza’ (as one South African scholar has called it),<sup>11</sup> by Luis Camões, the ‘Vergil of the Tagus’.<sup>12</sup> He himself was on board one of those early Portuguese expeditions that rounded the Cape in that consequential enterprise, to find a route to India:

We found we had long ago left behind  
The southern Tropic of Capricorn,  
Being between it and the Antarctic,  
That least-known region of the world.  
At this, my companions returning,  
I saw a stranger with a black skin  
They had captured, making his sweet harvest  
Of honey from the wild bees in the forest. (Camões 1997: V.27)

In that first encounter described by Camões, in his ‘epic poem of commerce’,<sup>13</sup> he goes on to depict the baffled native as wilder even than the anthropophagous Cyclopes of Homer and, like them, an unfit consumer of the gifts of civilisation. He is shown gold, silver and the culinary objective

that inspired so much of globalisation: 'hot condiment'. He is stupefied by the sailing Europeans and the dazzling *cargo* of global, cosmopolitan, city culture. Camões' native southern African is uncomprehending, undiscerning and thus lacking in any faculties to qualify him as participant in that global network of consumption and exchange, which in the example of this very expedition of intrepid Portuguese, is spreading itself around the planet.

The native of southern African shores can make nothing of the flower of European culture. An early instance of that topos of barbarous non-Europeans as wanting the faculties of aesthetic appreciation. He is bestial, presumably a cannibal, a 'Polyphemus'. If this is any kind of consumer, it is an abject consumer of other humans, that figure of fascinating horror who does literally to the tender flesh of Christian human beings what they do only symbolically in their most sacred of rites:

He looked thunderstruck, like a man  
 Never placed in such an extreme;  
 He could not understand us, nor we him  
 Who seemed wilder than Polyphemus.  
 I began by showing him pure gold  
 The supreme metal of civilisation,  
 Then fine silverware and hot condiment:  
 Nothing stirred in the brute the least excitement.  
 (Camões 1997: V.28)

What kind of consumer can you be, Polyphemus? As recent work in political philosophy has been arguing, the consumer need not be seen simply as a passive victim of a despotic and irresistible capitalist (or, by extension, colonialist) machinery. The consumer in the modern economy can reasonably be understood as, potentially, possessing a powerful agency, determining its world and the choices presented, and not simply overdetermined by its blind forces.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Africans are not simply passive objects of historical, structural or mythical forces. It may sometimes seem that we are overdetermined because so overcommitted to a picture of ourselves as taken or captured or oppressed, the objects acted upon by foreign agents.

In the same period, the early to mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, that Camões was sailing around southern Africa, a different group of Portuguese were encountering another set of *xenoi* – in a productive ambiguity, the word signifies

alternatively ‘strangers’ and ‘hosts’ – in what is today called Brazil. There, members of the Tupinambà tribe, to the dismay of those back in Portugal and Spain who later received the reports, ate a certain Father Sardinha.

The islands where this took place were called the Caribs and, thus, would re-emerge as some form of ‘cannibal’ in various modern, European languages. This is especially noteworthy in providing a connection to that modern archetype of all ‘savage natives’ and most readily mobilised of post-colonial symbols, Shakespeare’s Caliban. For, as Frank Kermode explained in his edition of the play, the ‘only undisputed source for any part of *The Tempest* is Montaigne’s essay “Of Cannibals”; there are unmistakable traces of Florio’s translation [of Montaigne’s French] in the text.’<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare, a testified reader of Montaigne in translation, then, very likely plays on the essayist’s term, derived from this self-same ‘Carib’, to develop his character’s name, all the more effective as a kind of *katachresis*.<sup>16</sup>

Justification through invocation of ancient precedent and pedigree, translation and colonialism – these are, of course, as such Renaissance examples as Camões, Montaigne and Shakespeare demonstrate, inextricable. Caliban and Prospero become archetype, or connect with ancient, established archetypes that are especially significant for postcolonial thinking about relationships between Europe and its seized colonies.<sup>17</sup> The misadventure of Father Sardinha was seized on, more relevantly, as a parable by 20<sup>th</sup>-century Brazilian modernists to yield new, interpretive potentialities.

In the unexpected reception, an unwished for form of hospitality in which reciprocity is all too literal, and in the symbolism of the consumption by natives of the European arrival, who had hoped to proselytise for his text-centred civilisation and the faith on which it reposed, we may identify some of the ingredients for a new cuisine of culture and its interpretation, reception and consumption.<sup>18</sup> And just as the reception of the Portuguese priest by the Tupinambà came to stand emblematically as a foundational myth for a 20<sup>th</sup>-century cultural poetics in Brazil, so may the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Portuguese poet’s narration, with all its distortions and fateful misprisions, helpfully stand as foundational exemplum to an anthropophagous hermeneutics in 21<sup>st</sup>-century South Africa.

In their introduction to *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (1999), Bassnett and Trivedi point out that to eat a missionary is not necessarily quite as unreasonable as it may seem to more fussy, modern palates:

The eating of the priest was not an illogical act on the part of the Tupinambà, and may even be said to have been an act of homage. After all, one does not eat people one does not respect, and in some societies the devouring of the strongest enemies or most worthy elders has been seen as a means of acquiring the powers they had wielded in life. (Bassnett & Trivedi 1999: 1)

In 1920s Brazil, a country having much in common with South Africa but enjoying the good fortune of a much more thoroughgoing creolisation, intellectuals were looking defiantly to assert the indigenous and defy the overpowering dominance of the colonial tradition, with its immense cultural capital and its reflex hierarchisation. In 1928, the early modernist poet Oswald de Andrade published a *Manifesto Antropófago*. Some samples from that manifesto convey the piquant flavour of the thing:

‘Cannibalism alone unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically.’  
 ‘I am only concerned with what is not mine. Law of Man. Law of the cannibal.’ ‘We already had justice, the codification of vengeance. Science, the codification of magic. Cannibalism, the permanent transformation of the Tabu into a totem.’<sup>19</sup>

Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Haroldo de Campos (1986) would further creatively develop and elaborate what is essentially a rich metaphor, the steam rising from the surface of the literal cannibalism. Its richness lies precisely in the opportunities it provides to flesh out the imagery and activity of an art perpetually seeking to body forth the disembodied worlds and irrealia of the imagination and language.

The luckless Father Sardinha, transubstantiated from man into flesh for consumption, later underwent yet another metamorphosis. This time he becomes a metaphor, a symbol of native agency and the consumption by the indigenous subject of the European disseminator of biblical texts, a reversal of the common view of history’s prevailing direction, which is the extraction of native raw materials and its export south to north. As Bassnett and Trivedi recognise:

Only by devouring Europe could the colonised break away from what was imposed upon them. And at the same time, the devouring

could be perceived as both a violation of European codes and an act of homage. (Bassnett & Trivedi 1999: 4–5)<sup>20</sup>

De Andrade was reclaiming Montaigne's own positive view of the cannibal and its rituals (which positive view, in fact, Shakespeare possibly means to satirise through his depiction of Caliban and the ignoble savage).<sup>21</sup> In De Andrade and in the work of the poet and polyglot translator De Campos, translation is seen as nourishment *for the translator*. 'A far cry,' as the editors argue in their introductory essay, from the conventional Western view of the *translator as servant* of the original, a view typically expressed by George Steiner, that specialist on Homer translation, as "penetration" of the source text' (Bassnett & Trivedi 1999: 5).<sup>22</sup> The colonialising imagery of sexual possession (with its reminiscence of the topos of nature represented as female, as goddess whose secret inner truths are brought to light by the male seeker after truth)<sup>23</sup> and domination by 'penetration' is displaced by the imagery of assimilation, consumption and even symbiosis. Instead of reciprocal and retaliatory penetration, between colonialist and colonised, *antropofagia*, a reversal of primitivism, as Cardoso (2019) puts it, offers us egress from a cycle of exchanges which continues only to benefit the former colonists and their penetrative, possessive outlook.

De Campos was a brilliant and original interpreter of the relationship of Brazil and Brazilian literature to Europe, to Portuguese as colonial language and all the canonical prestige of the former imperial master and its diverse but unified and domineering civilisation. South Africa has always been oversubscribed to its taxonomies and intolerant of the originality that would challenge categorical orthodoxies. That applies as much to the left as to the right. Brazil and its poetical *philosophes* like De Campos and Oswald de Andrade represent the possibility of a *creolised thinking*, a joyously miscegenate and critical flamboyance seldom if ever realised or even imagined in the cultural traditions of South Africa.<sup>24</sup>

The anthropophagic theory of cultural consumption advocates the critical cannibalising of canonical culture. It is a creative and constructive expression not of submissiveness or passivity but agency, a transculturation, a transvalorisation. This takes it beyond any question of mere 'decolonising' – where decolonising implies purging. It points instead to the artist's freedom to consume, and metamorphose form, signification and feeling. In the words of De Campos, it means:

A critical devouring of the universal cultural heritage, formulated not from the insipid, resigned perspective of the 'noble savage' ... but from the point of view of the 'bad savage', devourer of whites – the cannibal. The latter view does not involve a submission (an indoctrination), but a transculturation ... a 'transvalorisation.' (De Campos 1986: 44)

The parable of Father Sardinha, and cannibalism itself, then, are picked up and what they denote is transformed and popularised. Where cannibalism once concentrated the fears and anxiety and contemptuousness of the colonialist, it has become the celebrated reclamation by the creole culture of its licence to take possession and enjoy whatever it wishes, without reverence for origins or hierarchies, to feed its own vitality in service of its own desires and needs, disburdened of the responsibility for revenge or aggression irrespective and in full. For De Campos, in the words of Else Vieira, *Antropofagia* is:

a complex metaphor undergoing metamorphoses in different contexts and critical perspectives. *Antropofagia*, which, in Haroldo de Campos' view, is a sign of the polyphonic identity of Brazil, rings not a note of furious aggression but rather one of irreverently amorous devouring ... it ultimately entails a tribute to the other's strength that one wishes to have combined with one's own for greater vitality. While undercutting the plenitude of any origin as the only source of strength, it makes an incision and a conjoining to unite the blood and marrow of the one with the other. (Vieira 1999: 95–96)

Irreverent, amorous, insatiable, a tribute through which, by giving, one receives a greater vitality. De Campos' *Antropofagia* is an inspired reframing, a reclamation of hermeneutic autonomy and agency; in this instance, a seizing of the parameters of interpretation itself. We will reveal ourselves to have matured a great deal in Africa when we can begin to say that there is much in Western, European, colonial cultures that we admire and would wish for ourselves. And when we reach that point, perhaps we will become all the more satisfied connoisseurs of culture, not as a set of moral positions but as an opportunity to nourish ourselves on whatever we please, wherever that originated.

De Campos' *Antropofagia* is an interpretive posture from which we in Africa may well benefit.<sup>25</sup> Intrinsic to this hermeneutics of consumption, this transvalorising licence, is the agency of the consumer and the active quality of their selections and choices. For our abiding challenge, as it seems, is how we shall quell our postcolonised wrath and yet preserve the energy with which anger seems to fill us. De Andrade's and De Campos' conception of the cultural experience as an act of choice, ingestion and nourishment is very attractive in this light. It affords a manner of evading the old, unproductive duels and dualities and it contains all the ingredients of what I wish to term a Dionysian poetics of interpretation. Dionysus' festivals, of course, were rumoured to include not only the rituals of masked dramatic performance, music, dance and emancipated gender and ethnic identities but notoriously also to involve the ecstatically joyous practise of *ōmophagia*: the revitalising devouring of raw flesh. As Rafael Cardoso has said of it, although De Andrade's is a call for revolution:

Yet, what is most revealing about the strategies of Anthropophagy is not their confrontational side, typical of much avant-gardist discourse, but their slipperiness. As has been seen, the exponents of the movement often positioned themselves in paradoxical, even contradictory, roles. (Cardoso 2019: 153)

The promise of a cannibalist hermeneutics is not only that it will provide the always rather heavy-handed and dualistic discourses of South African cultural description with a lightness and exuberance of which it is in such need. It offers us also just that Dionysian *creolité* and *slipperiness*, the taste for paradox which may help us escape the maze of dead-ends out of which that founding Theseus of South African democracy, Nelson Mandela, never finally succeeded in leading us. It supplies us with the strategies of literary and historical reception that may be best suited to emancipate us from the self-regard and historical narcissism of much contemporary discourse.<sup>26</sup>

As, previously, cannibalism may have been seen as a morbid and savage practice, to which naïve, self-sacrificing European explorers and missionaries fell prey, but now we invert its meaning and, focalising the indigenous *savage*, we see that eating the foreign is a way to reframe our assimilating of foreign stuffs to our advantage, so may we invert the idea of consumerism and consumption. Not simply a morbid condition,

symptomatic of the existential emptiness of atomised, late capitalism and its cultural logic, consumerism and the consumer may be read as expressing a fundamental human agency. It is potentially the healthy exercise of choice and realisation of desires, by which we determine what makes up our culture. Assuming a consumer identity signifies that we are open to seduction and charm, even as we recognise the rhetorical strategies mobilised to pressure us. A consumerist, cannibalist poetics and its exegetics would see culture as *cargo*, as an opportunity for serving people and not the reverse: people serving ideas of culture.

### Amorous devouring

*Hae tibi erunt artes ... (Verg. Aen. 6. 852)*

These will be your skills ...

I have made two main points here, concerning, first, political and historical emotions, and, second, how we may be best served by a reconceiving of our affective relationship to our political symbols and historical myths. Anger is typically a passive emotion, seductive for the power it seems to promise, but that is deceptive illusion. Anger is a ghostly and haunting emotion which plays into the hands of those who hate us. My interest has been to argue that we the living have all the agency but we cede it if we acquiesce to political emotions that everywhere have failed humans in the long run. Wrath is deceptively energising but will ultimately drain us of our vitality. The wraiths of ancestral enemies, like the wrath of our ancestors, are all bloodless and weightless and need not trouble us when we have a future to prepare.

In the end, in AC Jordan's novel, as in Vergil and in Homer, and in the best moments of South African history, a reflectiveness and not reflex must win through if we are to act in our own interests. Our own interests ought to be projected over a *longue durée* of the future. We may not choose how we feel about our history, but we may and must choose how to handle those feelings. The quelling of passionate anger need not be a neutering of our political or interpretive energies. The Dionysiac poetics of the *polis*, which I have proposed here, is a cannibal's hermeneutics of the symbol, artefact, text and cargo, through which we are the relishing consumers expressing our agency through endless consumption as interpretation, through digesting, recycling and recreation.



Camões styled the indigenous inhabitants of southern Africa as savage Cyclopes and the frenzied, irrational children of Bacchus. Richard Whitaker, in his recent southern African translations of Homer, styles Homeric kings – *basileis* – in the terms of the indigenous inhabitants of the south ‘*amakhosi*’ (Whitaker 2012, 2017). How we reconceptualise ourselves and our encounters and certain paradigmatic moments – whether it be in Brazil and South Africa in the 16<sup>th</sup> century or in the tent of Noah in prehistoric Palestine – will be determining for what is politically and culturally possible in our future together. We will sustain ourselves better and lay a better foundation for the ancestors yet to be born when with *sang froid* we turn history into a nourishing feast of our own amorous, irreverent devouring.

## Notes

- 1 Verg. *Aen.* 6. 847–853. Quotations from Vergil are drawn from Mynors’ Oxford Classical Text edition of 1972; translations from the Latin are my own.
- 2 Verg. *Aen.* 6.852.
- 3 Vaz de Camões (1997: V.28). English quotations from *The Lusiads* are from the 1997 Landeg White translation.
- 4 Recently published in an excellent southern African translation by Richard Whitaker (2012).
- 5 Sikhumbuzo Makandula ‘Ingqumbo: ek hou jou dop!’ at the Race in Humanities Curricula Colloquium of the African Humanities Programme, Makhanda, February 2019.
- 6 On which fundamentally important point, see Castoriadis (1999) and Giddens (1984).
- 7 Dawkins (1976).
- 8 One especially famous example of the contamination of scientific objectivity of vision by *a priori* human ideas – what Daniel T Rodgers (2011), in the context of the science of economics, has called the ‘contagion of metaphors’ – is that of the human sperm and egg. Is the egg the passive object of the most vigorous and competitive sperm’s journey through a woman’s body? It took a female biologist in the 1990s to overturn that picture; see Martin (1991). Images, narratives and myths shape conception of the world, which to some measure is always preconception. On the sway of metaphors, their crossing disciplines and shaping our basic conceptions, and on the pretensions of social sciences to the status of physical sciences, see Philip Mirowski’s *More Heat than Light. Economics as Social Physics: Physics as Nature’s Economics* (1989) and John Dupré’s *Processes of Life: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology* (2012).
- 9 Cf. the remarks popularised by Martin Luther King Jr: ‘The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice,’ coined apparently by one Theodore Parker, a Unitarian minister and abolitionist born in 1810. The words seem to have first been used in the third of his *Ten Sermons of Religion*, Of Justice and the Conscience. The phrase became a meme and recurred increasingly throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 2009, *Time* magazine published an article by Obama in which he again invoked the phrase and attributed it to King Jr, perhaps unaware of its prehistory.

- 10 See Charles Segal's 1982 *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, a post-structuralist interpretation of the classical Dionysus in his study of Euripides' *Bacchae*, a richly rewarding reading of the god as a creative inverter, one transcending ordinary binaries and even binarism in itself.
- 11 Van Wyk Smith (1988: 15).
- 12 For Camões' styling himself on Vergil and producing a work of self-conscious reception of Greek and Roman epic, in the mould of Ariosto and Tasso, see *Lusiads* 2.45; also, Van Wyk Smith (1988: 14–15).
- 13 The description of the English translator William Julius Mickle that 'stuck' (Van Wyk Smith 1988: 10).
- 14 As an example of recent work that makes some of these connections, while explaining consumer motivation in relation to the pursuit of recognition and the exercise of strong evaluation, see Sadian (2018). For an influential reading of consumption as a form of future-oriented behaviour based on 'fictional expectations' in the context of radical uncertainty in modern market societies, see Beckert (2016). Beckert's argument is that people behave on uncertain markets whose future development is necessarily opaque in much the same way as they do when engaged with works of fiction: by willingly suspending disbelief and forming intersubjectively appealing or binding expectations that, in some measure, performatively bring about objective conditions that first exist only as contingently imagined futures.
- 15 Kermode (1958: xxxiv). The voracious Montaigne had been reading Jean de Léry's recent *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre de Brésil* (1578); see Bjaï. et al. (2001: 312–333).
- 16 Kermode (1958: xxxviii): 'Caliban's name is usually regarded as a development of some form of the word "Carib", meaning a savage inhabitant of the New world; "cannibal" derives from this, and "Caliban" is possibly a simple anagram of that word.' Note that, interestingly, there are alternative derivations: from a Romany word for 'blackness'; and from the Chalybes, savage cannibals mentioned twice by Vergil, whom Pliny located near the Coraxi.
- 17 On the possibility that the audience of Shakespeare in 1611 may have been cued to read Caliban not necessarily as a dark-skinned Caribbean or African but as Irish, the first victims of English colonialism, see Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (1995). For a historicised account of blackness as a metaphor and not a scientific description, see Kim Hall's *Things of Darkness* (1995) and Mason Vaughn's *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500–1800* (2005).
- 18 For his views on logocentricism, 'national classicism' and 'ontological nationalism,' see De Campos (2007: 161–164).
- 19 Translations are from the English translation by Leslie Bary (De Andrade 1991: 38, 40).
- 20 See also De Campos (2007: 155–214).
- 21 See footnotes 9–10 in Leslie Bary's translation of De Andrade's 'Cannibalist manifesto' (1991) and Kermode (1958: xxxiv): 'It has been argued, most recently by A Lovejoy, that Shakespeare intends a satirical comment upon Montaigne's apparent acceptance of the primitivistic view that a natural society, without the civilised accretions of law, custom, and other artificial restraints, would be a happy one.'
- 22 See also Steiner and Fagles (1962).
- 23 Such as Giordano Bruno and his reclaimed mythical antecedent Actaeon, this is the tradition in which Camões may be seen to be working. See Yates (1964) and Hadot (2006).
- 24 See especially De Campos' essay 'Reinventing tradition' (2007: 155–214).
- 25 For a recent African perspective on cultural anthropophagy, see Nyamnjoh (2018).
- 26 For *Antropofagia* as an anti-narcissistic tonic, see Vivieros de Castro (2014).

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## Conversation with Nuraan Essop

Amy Daniels (AD): Tell us about yourself, Nuraan. What are you studying? What is your academic history? How does Ancient Cultures, classics, feature in that or fit into it?

Nuraan Essop (NE): I'm working on a Master's degree, on Greek tragedy. When I was in Grade 11 I had to job shadow and I decided to do it at Iziko [South African National Museum in Cape Town] because at the time I wanted to be a historian. I worked in the library that was just next to our high school. I thought I'd take a gap year after school but my dad told me, 'No. You're not taking a gap year.' So, I applied really late to UWC [University of the Western Cape] for a BA and during orientation I had to pick a few subjects other than History. I just knew that I wanted to do History and I tried to take Latin. But unfortunately, it clashed with History. At the time Dr Mark Hermans was the head of the Foreign Languages Department and he gave a brilliant lecture on the Foreign Languages Department and he spoke about Classical Culture and German. I dropped German in first year but I stuck with the Classical Culture and I decided to do a major in History and Classical Culture, like a double major. Then eventually I thought, 'You know what, let's mix some philosophy into this,' so I did Philosophy as well. And then in my third year I applied for an honours in the History Department at UWC because then I wanted to be an African historian, but I went to a tea for prospective postgraduate students and it just – it felt like I wouldn't belong. It just felt very lonely, if that makes sense –

AD: ... it makes perfect sense.

NE: ... and the programme that I tried to get into which was basically investigating what happened to a people after a revolution, they discontinued. So I was very anxious and down for about three months until –

AD: What?

NE: ... until a friend of mine who I'd actually met in high school was a Classical Culture tutor with me in third year, said, 'Why don't you do this? You love it so much. Why don't you just do this?' And then I thought, 'You know what, I'm going to do it' so I applied to UCT [University of Cape Town] and here [Stellenbosch University] and I got in here.

AD: Oh wow, Nuraan. I didn't actually know a lot of that story. I knew some of it, but – that's amazing.

NE: I still remember actually: the day before I was supposed to go to the tea at the History Department, I asked Dr Hermans what I should wear.

AD: [laughter]

NE: I actually asked him. And I didn't tell him what I had decided to do until I had already started here at Stellenbosch and then I emailed him to say thank you for everything you've done. You've made me think and you've made me realise that my purpose in life is to make other people think outside of their own boxes.

AD: Ok. So, you're moving into the next question that I wanted to ask you, because the idea of becoming an African historian, that's really in vogue at the moment, and rightly so, and yet you ended up in a discipline that has sometimes been decried as colonial and elitist and all that stuff. How did that happen?

NE: I think it's because of UWC's political history or the fact that, as Dr Hermans would tell me later, that he was one of the only coloured people at UCT in their PhD programme. He wanted to make classics relatable to the people who he'd be teaching and so he tried to incorporate South

Africanisms into classics. So I realised that basically everything we did at UWC was reception studies of some kind. When we did an entire semester on tragedy our aim was to write the final essay based on the final hearing of Oscar Pistorius where the judge wrote that he was a tragic hero and that got Dr Hermans thinking, 'What defines a tragic hero from ancient Greece to now, basically?' so we did an entire semester on that. Every week we had to read a tragedy, talk about how relatable it was, et cetera, and that's where I fell in love with Euripides.

When we did a whole semester on Ovid, we had to think about Ovid as a feminist but not in an 'Ok, "it's this way" feminism. Is he a feminist?' It was more like, 'Does a person from a third world country who is possibly disenfranchised and is possibly female feel like Ovid is attacking me or is he saying something that I can relate to?' But specifically in his *Heroides*, he speaks of heroines and – I mean, there was a girl in our class who had to do Oenone – we called her Ounaan because Dr Hermans never forced us to pronounce things properly. So, we called her Ounaan, 'Ounaan's letter to Paris,' and how Helen is a mistress of the night. So that was fun. It was really just a lot of fun. Our final paper was contrasting women in classical Greek and Roman society to women in 20<sup>th</sup>-century South Africa. Everything that we did was related to South Africa if not Africa.

AD: I think that's so important because that's what a lot of us are trying to do but not getting right. And I think that may have something to do with the institutions we teach at. I think of myself teaching at an institution that is more historically enamoured of the colonial past or whatever, is quite Eurocentric, and then you go to this amazing institution where it's far more diverse but there's also socio-economic diversity and cultural diversity and so Dr Hermans has no choice but to be 'woke'.

NE: I know. But there's potential. I was speaking to another one of your interviewees about our Latin Project that we have running in the department. There we try to teach Latin to high school kids, and we were talking about the culture side of things and how to make it relatable to them. Last year we had a lot of fun teaching them about slavery in Rome but this particular conversation was about teaching [citizens of a former] colony about the colonisation of Italy and how we could actually teach that to undergrads and make them think outside of their own boxes because

when you think of Romanness, you're not thinking of something that had to be consolidated. You're thinking, 'Okay, the Roman region was there,' but actually no; maybe Augustus was just the last man standing.

AD: That's fantastic. One of our former postdocs wanted to present a course on land in ancient Rome or on that period between republic and empire. So, there are so many possibilities. Thank you. You also tutor in our department or you did last year: we're very grateful for that.

NE: Thank you.

AD: ... because you got our students here thinking as well.

NE: Thanks.

AD: What do you think the value or place or function of Ancient Studies, be it languages or classical cultures or Ancient North Africa and West Asian Studies, is in Africa or in South Africa?

NE: I keep going back to my undergrad experience. When I became a tutor we had to have this kind of orientation at UWC about 'Why is this important? What is the point that we are trying to get across to the first years?' And it came back to me two years ago, when I was doing my honours at Stellenbosch, I think, when I was helping out with third-year seminars. I had a group of law students who were taking third-year Ancient Studies because they did Classical Legal Culture in first year and we were speaking about exam questions and one of the students just kept asking me, 'Ok, so what's the right answer?' and I kept telling him, 'If you can give me evidence, if you can provide an argument I can't tell you that you're wrong.' And he kept on telling me, 'No. You sound like a politician!' And then I realised when you're studying anything really in social sciences, you're learning how to think for yourself but – I want to say logically – but logically and rationally doesn't always mean the same thing. And that's what I've learnt very recently. And logic doesn't always mean that you don't need emotion. If that makes sense?

Classes became very emotional because people would feel a certain way about a specific subject that spoke to them in Classical Culture; we learnt,



I think it was in Livy, that things are basically circular. The same things happen over and over and over and over again. And that's why people became so emotional in the subject and I've become emotional here at Stellenbosch with first years. I remember last year with the rape case of the UCT student, I became very emotional and the students responded and one student actually came to me and said thank you for mentioning it because we could also talk about it in the sense of ancient cultures because we were doing Helen and the figure of Helen at the time, and being a female figure in classics that's been objectified but also on the other hand, vilified.

So, I think it's relevant. If there's something that you're thinking of there's probably something related to it in Ancient Studies.

AD: Oh wow. I'm excited because on the one hand, you've spoken about thinking outside the box. On the other hand, you've reminded us that throughout the arts and social sciences, in the humanities, you need people who think in different ways. Who think outside the box and who think outside of different boxes and classics has something to offer in that sphere. I'm trying to mirror back and I hope that I'm accurate.

NE: It's true. The law student wasn't the only time I came across this. I have a family member who's done a Master's degree in business administration and she gave me a book that somebody in her Master's years co-authored and it was about business strategies and how no two things are the same I can't imagine living in a world where every single thing is new and you have to come up with a way to address it anew every time. Why must you throw out the old completely and start something new from scratch?

Why can't you merge two ideas or merge two traditions? I'm not saying that traditions need to go on continuously forever and stay the same. I'm just saying that sometimes ...

AD: ... there is wisdom in the past.

NE: ... sometimes it's ok to throwback. ... Sometimes when you may have to start completely fresh, things can go very wrong ...

AD: Oh yeah. But also – you're in Ancient Studies, you know that there's nothing new under the sun.

NE: Exactly.

AD: It's reinvigorating speaking to someone who is bringing new perspectives to what you're studying. You're just – you're bringing yourself to the texts you're looking at. You're bringing yourself to the classroom, be it in your emotions or your innovation or in the traditions that you're familiar with and someone else may not be familiar with, so I'm super excited.

NE: Thank you.

AD: So, what do you see yourself doing with your ability to think outside the box as perfected, shall we say, in Classical Cultures or in Ancient Cultures?

NE: I was telling the same person earlier that I would love to lecture eventually but right now I prefer the intimacy that comes with tutoring or teaching younger children but in a very specialised way – if that makes sense – so my channel of communication is through classics, that's how I communicate with my younger cousins, for example, is through antiquity –

AD: ... and storytelling.

NE: Yes. That's basically what I'd want to do. I don't see myself as a writer, but I would really love to do research and speak about it.

AD: You could become a public intellectual. Lovely. Thanks, Nuraan. You've given me a lot of food for thought.

## CHAPTER TEN

# Ovid in the time of statues

*Grant Parker*

On 9 April 2015, at the same time as a crane was in the process of removing Cecil John Rhodes' statue from its base on the University of Cape Town (UCT) campus, a piece of performance art was taking place at the same location. Sethembile Msezane later entitled the work 'Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell'.

A Master of Fine Arts student at the same university, born in 1991, Msezane was already a well-known artist-performer. She stood quietly, her face veiled and wearing a black leotard (fig. 1), slowly raising and lowering her arms extended outwards: it countered the fall with a rise (Coetzee 2016: 242; Garb 2019: 31). In this installation as in others by her, a living black female body became the pointed antithesis to standard monumentalising practices of this former Dutch and British colony – practices epitomised by Rhodes' statue, created in 1934 by Marion Walgate. While Msezane's performance in the first instance expressed silent protest against Rhodes, it simultaneously celebrated the Zimbabwe bird, a cultural symbol of Zimbabwe's precolonial heritage. Since Cecil Rhodes' time, one of the handful of these surviving soapstone statues has resided in Groote Schuur Estate, his former home and now an official residential complex of the head of state.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Msezane would later that year perform the same installation north of the Limpopo River at Great Zimbabwe, thus strengthening the connection. Seen in this light, the Zimbabwean reference at the statue removal seems not merely to express dissent against colonialism à la Rhodes but also to protest against South Africa's continued ownership of Zimbabwe's heritage. Msezane's performance thus equated the Zimbabwe bird with the Benin bronzes, the thousand or so statues and plaques from



Figure 1: Sethembile Msezane, 'Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell', 2015  
 [Photo credit: Sethembile Msezane]

precolonial Nigeria: these objects, dating as far back as the 13<sup>th</sup> century and widely diffused among museum and private collections, have become a cause célèbre in debates around cultural property and restitution.

It is easy to view this storied moment as a metamorphosis of the commemorative landscape, which in the case of UCT's upper campus had taken shape in 1934.<sup>2</sup> Both the campus itself and Rhodes Memorial, a short but stiff walk uphill on a different part of what was once Rhodes' own Groote Schuur Estate, reflect two architectural tropes: the concept of the site of prospect and the temple-on-the-hill (Bunn 1999; Shepherd 2020). Throughout South Africa, the old colonial-apartheid order, marked by broadly classicising types of architecture and statuary, was changing into something new, defined now by popular power. A dead man in European costume, racially white but portrayed by the weathered green colour of bronze statuary, had ceded the stage to a living dark-skinned woman in a starkly modified form of traditional outfit. The spoils of Rhodes – *chapungu* is the Shona name of the sacred bateleur eagle – had come to challenge Rhodes himself in the form of his statue. As we shall discuss below, the equivalence is by no means neat: Msezane's intervention was ephemeral by

design, whereas at the time of writing the base that had supported Rhodes' statue remains empty. Nonetheless, the symbolic equivalence was strong.

Yet the event exceeded the limits of the immediate commemorative landscape. Within the politics of visibility, the removal was a clear symbol for all South Africa and all the world to see, via television cameras and social media. That the removal of the statue touched a chord is apparent from the international attention it gained. The event itself was widely publicised and its details do not need to be rehearsed here.<sup>3</sup> It is nonetheless worth emphasising that statues and other artwork were at the forefront of the Rhodes Must Fall movement, and subsequently at the Shackville protests of February 2016, which focused on student housing. In early 2015 the Rhodes Must Fall movement gained national momentum, spreading to other campuses and urban centres, but by October 2015 student activism had morphed into Fees Must Fall, the emphasis shifting from monuments to the accessibility and affordability of university education. The latter issue remained a burning one for at least a year, with related protests causing considerable damage to university campuses throughout the country.

Let us return, however, to statuary and the local resonance of Msezane's performance piece. UCT shares the country's longest institutional memory of classics with Stellenbosch University, a calculation that is complicated by those institutions' evolution from smaller predecessor schools (Smuts 1960: 9, 24). When UCT's direct forebear, the South African College, opened its doors in 1829, Latin was a core of the curriculum. This was a small operation which, in its early years, sometimes had no more than one or two teachers instructing boys from elementary levels of literacy upwards. Latin was nonetheless one of the original subjects. UCT's history of Latin instruction is thus uninterrupted, barring brief staff travels and unavailability in the early decades. Ovid himself is part of this history. In the 1930s two members of the department produced a teaching edition of selections from the *Metamorphoses* (Rollo & Satchel 1933).

For current purposes, Msezane's performance art may be considered a critique of existing power structures, including classically based monumentality and by extension the classical tradition itself. The aim of the present chapter is to use the well-publicised moment to tease out the dynamics of social change and cultural memory, in a word to offer an Ovidian reading of recent events. It addresses the question: What is the role, both historical and potential, of classics within cultural memory? Fundamental

questions underlie the undertaking, beyond the politics of the moment: How could anyone hope to comment on contemporary history via ancient pasts? What is the role of indigenous knowledge systems in all this, if any? My working assumption is that the literature and other cultural productions of the Graeco-Roman world suggest some unexpected but telling lines of analysis. The approach of this chapter is doubly reflective: in the first instance to consider the events of 2015/2016 through the lens of ancient Greece and Rome, with Ovid's help,<sup>4</sup> and conversely, by way of a coda, to consider some implications of the Rhodes Must Fall moment for classics in South Africa. If there are inherent risks in undertaking contemporary history (Kelly & Rose 2018), there is something additionally uncanny and even paradoxical about the connection thus set up by this comparison. As Zoltán Simon put it in a different context: 'How can we conceive of the world and ourselves as "historical" in times when both future prospects and past affairs are perceived in terms of unprecedented change?' (2019: 27). It will therefore be necessary, by way of conclusion, to consider classics in particular and change and precedence more generally within broader parameters.

### Ovid's bodies

*In noua fert animus mutatas dicere formas  
 corpora: di coeptis (nam uos mutastis et illa)<sup>5</sup>  
 adspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi  
 ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen.*  
 (*Metamorphoses* 1.1–4)

My mind hastens to tell of bodies changed into new forms. Gods, breathe on my undertakings, for you yourselves have made the changes, and bring down a continuous song from the beginning of the world until my own times.

A few lines from the very end of the work a *sphragis* or 'seal' foretells the everlasting fame Ovid expects for his literary production:

*Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iouis ira nec ignis  
 nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere uetustas.*  
 (15.871–872)

And now I've completed my work, which neither Jupiter's anger,  
nor fire, nor sword, nor the gnawing tooth of time will ever be able  
to destroy.

In this vein the coda continues until a final, resolute '*uiuam*' ('I shall live', 15.879), that is, in fame. While these opening and closing lines cannot begin to suggest the richness of the intervening nearly 12 000 lines recounting some 250 mythical narrations, they provide this chapter with an evocative frame. The lines quoted suggest that the poem can help us focus on form itself; on physical bodies; on beginnings; on historical duration; on the media of commemoration and the threats it faces. With this vivid imagery Ovid nudges his reader's memory in the direction of the poem with which Horace concluded the first three books of his lyric poems (*Odes* 3.30), to which we shall return.

Beyond South Africa, the poetic recognition of the dangers facing commemoration resonates also in a United States context following the deaths of George Floyd and other black persons at the hands of the police in 2020. Protests for civil rights have in many cases gravitated towards monuments, particularly in the Southern states. Richmond, Virginia, appears to be an extreme case: whereas the towering Robert E Lee Monument with its bronze equestrian statue was inaugurated in 1890, most of the other bronze statues of Confederate leaders date to the 1920s; anomalously, Arthur Ashe, the black tennis champion, was added in 1996. At the time of writing, only the Lee and Ashe statues remain, the former having been subjected to graffiti since Floyd's death. The future of the Lee statue, which stands an imposing 18 metres tall including its base, has been subject to legal dispute.<sup>6</sup> The Southern Poverty Law Center, in an update of its 2016 report, *Whose Heritage?*, noted that in the two months following the death of George Floyd, 17 monuments had been removed and five relocated.<sup>7</sup> Richmond is emblematic of chronological patterns presented by the report: sharp upticks in Confederate monument making can be observed around 1900 into the 1920s and again in the 1950s and 1960s, periods coinciding with the Jim Crow and civil rights eras respectively. There can be no stronger indication of the presence of the past. The key issue, for current purposes, is that collective memory has been in so many such cases expressed in figurative statuary.

Without doubt classical antiquity has enabled the articulation of virtues such as justice, equity and reasonableness, for dialogue to take place, for

critique to be made, and has provided key vocabulary on such lines. Justice Deon van Zyl (2017) notes traces of Ciceronian thought in the Bill of Rights with which the South African Constitution of 1996 begins. But it is also true that ancient Greece and Rome bring baggage with them, including the effective exclusion of persons whose schooling did not give them ready access to Latin (Dominik 2013; Lambert 2011). It is also true, and this is more immediately relevant, that the classics have a close association to European colonialism and particularly to Cecil Rhodes. By a series of connections and connotations, the link is a strong one, nor is such a link unique to South Africa (cf. Greenwood [2010] on the Caribbean; Vasunia [2013] on India).

In light of such a world historical focus, and indeed of the rich afterlife of the *Metamorphoses*, it is hard to appreciate the playfulness of Ovid's literary style. This has been pointed out at the level of language (Ahl 1985); critics of post-structuralist inclination have detected in the narrations evidence of the instability of language itself (Henderson 1999). Beyond that, it is important to emphasise that the myths would in most cases have already been well known to Ovid's readers, so that his artistic role may have focused more on the manner and nuances of his retelling than the narrative per se. This is ironic, given the extent to which many ancient myths would in later ages become known via the Ovidian rather than the earlier Greek versions.

Most of the 250 or so metamorphoses involve human bodies. Following the extended creation narrative, the story of the nymph Daphne is emblematic in this regard. Pursued by the lustful Apollo, she appeals to her father Peneus, a river-god, for help, whereupon she is turned into a laurel tree:

*Vix prece finite torpor grauis occupant artus,  
mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro,  
in frondem crines, in ramos bracchia crescent,  
pes modo tam uelox pigris radicibus haeret,  
ora cacumen habet: remanet nitor unus in illa.* (1.548–552)

Her prayer [to her father] had hardly ended when heavy numbness took possession of her limbs, and her delicate breast was covered with thin bark. Her hair turned into leaves, her arms into branches. Her feet, which had a moment ago been so swift, became stuck



in dense roots, and her face was caught in the treetop: only her splendid beauty remained.

In this metamorphosis, converted into material form and made famous by Bernini's statue of 1622–1625, Apollo's action would by modern sensibilities be considered rape (Richlin 1992). Indeed, violence against women is commonplace to the point of banality in the *Metamorphoses* and other ancient texts and this has until fairly recently been a scholarly blind spot (Zuckerberg 2018); Ovid is no exception (McCarter & Tolentino 2019). A paradox inheres in all of this. On the one hand the *Metamorphoses* has had a considerable cultural imprint over many centuries; on the other the politics around sex and gender in particular has changed sharply in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Less easy to pinpoint are the politics of the poem, and the same is true of Ovid's other major work of explicit public significance, the *Fasti*, a poem published in 8 CE recounting the stories behind Rome's festivals (Barchiesi 1997). While references to Julius Caesar and Augustus in the *Metamorphoses* would at face value suggest support for the new regime, Ovid's seemingly playful approach might suggest otherwise. Then there is the mystery of Ovid's exile, to which he obliquely refers elsewhere: while it seems unlikely that the *Metamorphoses* itself should have triggered his banishment, the question of resistance remains troublingly open. At the same time, it is true that Ovid is writing in the aftermath of an extended period of civil strife, both Caesar's Civil War (49–45 BCE) and a struggle for the succession (44–30 BCE). In fact, the civil conflict that characterised the first century BCE can be traced back to disputes over land reform that came to a head with the Gracchi brothers in 133 BCE. Does the metamorphosis express Ovid's sense of the fluidity and instability of the Roman world into which he had been born in the year before Caesar's assassination? This suggestion is tempting yet has received only limited support; on the whole, the politics of the *Metamorphoses* have tended to be a topic of scholarly caution (e.g. Habinek 2002).

It is not till the 15<sup>th</sup> and final book that a detailed characterisation of the metamorphosis is forthcoming, and then it comes via a speech of Pythagoras:

*Omnia mutantur, nihil interit: errat et illinc huc uenit, hinc illuc, et quoslibet occupat artus spiritus eque feris humana in corpora transit*

*inque feras noster, nec tempore deperit ullo, utque nouis facilis  
signatur cera figuris nec manet ut fuerat nec formam seruat eandem,  
sed tamen ipsa eadem est, animam sic semper eandem esse, sed in  
uarias doceo migrare figuras.*

Everything changes, nothing dies: the spirit wanders, arriving here or there, and occupying whatever body it pleases, passing from a wild beast into a human being, from our body into a beast, but is never destroyed. As pliable as wax, stamped with new designs, it is no longer what it was; does not keep the same form; but is still one and the same; I teach that the soul is always the same, but migrates into different forms. (15.165–172, tr. AS Kline)

This is an account of metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls. The teachings of Pythagoras take up the majority of this final book of the poem (1.60–478).

Changes of form are by no means unique to Ovid. Within Hindu tradition, *rakshasas* are demons that have the capacity to change their form, as for example Ravana in the epic *Ramayana*, the origins of which go back to perhaps the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Within the Graeco-Roman canon, one text that would have been known to Ovid was the *Heteroioumena* of Nicander from the second century BCE. But this text and others like it survive only in insubstantial fragments. It is rather with Ovid that the metamorphosis has become synonymous in Western tradition. Following the lead of Imraan Coovadia (2012), I use the trope to make sense of developments in South Africa: transformations represented in bodies. Though the base where the statue stood on UCT campus is still empty, and public art remains a challenge for that university's administration, public history did not end on 9 April 2015: it underwent metamorphosis.

My appeal to Ovid here comes in part from personal experience. Just a few hundred metres from the statue I made my first acquaintance with this intriguing but elusive poem. In what is now the AC Jordan Building I encountered Ovid's alluring and sometimes frustrating narrative technique in a Latin class and, in English literature classes, also the richness of his modern reception. This was in the mid-1980s, at a time of the State of Emergency declared by President PW Botha, a time when university campuses were sites of protest against the apartheid state in its

death throes. Though I could not articulate it at the time, Ovid's poem (like other Graeco-Roman writings) held considerable appeal as the glimpse and promise of a world beyond, of a broader horizon of experience, even as English literature courses as well as student politics kept me actively engaged in the here and now.

I am also motivated by the distinctive language attending South Africa's momentous changes of the 1990s. As one of my former teachers privately commented at the time, 'transformation' meant that more needed to be done with fewer resources. The term 'transformation' has been used not only euphemistically but also aspirationally, signalling the desire for the African National Congress (ANC) government to install black leadership in universities, government, business and sport sectors. It is in this political sense which Coovadia focuses. As he notes, transformation represents a compromise between reform and revolution; its attraction to the ANC-in-power in the later 1990s is that it could mask a neoliberal, market-friendly agenda that differed more sharply than its leadership cared to acknowledge from its policies while in exile as a liberation movement. This metamorphosis of the ANC itself led to splintering off into different groups, and to ongoing tensions within its ranks between labour union and free-market factions, tensions that are sometimes masked by personality-based support for different leaders. Against such a background, the message of Msezane's performance seems multilayered, including use of the female body to criticise the gender dynamics of the Fallist movement at the time.

Gender is another part of the metamorphosis of Rhodes: an established male figure has given way to a female challenger. On this note one might compare the drastic 'transformation' of UCT's leadership. Whereas in the late 1980s its senior management consisted only of white men, at the time of writing in 2020 most of the key roles – vice-chancellor, three deputies, the chancellor and chair of the university council – are held by women. This scenario is in keeping with UCT's strategic initiatives and continues to be characterised by the institution itself as transformation.<sup>8</sup> Such changes in the overall institutional structures are not necessarily matched at the level of individual departments. Classics, perhaps more than most in the humanities, is a field that has struggled to attract, nurture and promote black talent.

## Metamorphic leaders

Long before the removal of his statue, Cecil John Rhodes (1853–1902), mining entrepreneur, politician and agent extraordinaire of the British Empire, has been variously a source of fascination and revulsion. His biographies, at least 25 in number, are sharply divided in term of praise and blame (Garb 2019: 26; Maylam 2005: 1–30). Both kinds report drastic changes and contradictions in his life: Bunn irreverently describes him as a ‘cross between Caesar and PT Barnum’ (1999). Certainly, Rhodes started from undistinguished origins to amass huge power and wealth in a short period by capitalising on and to some degree steering the mineral revolution of the 1860s–1880s. If Rhodes’ biography is too familiar to require repetition here, two points bear emphasis. First, he eagerly promoted classical architecture, via his architect Sir Herbert Baker (1862–1946), and was also a keen reader of classical texts (Claassen 2009; Freschi 2017; Hilton 2017). In 1893, after reading Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Rhodes commissioned Hatchard’s Bookstore in London to produce new translations of each ancient and Byzantine work cited in Gibbon’s footnotes. The elaborate venture, the eventual scale of which surprised Rhodes, survives in the unique copies still housed in his former residence, Groote Schuur, which is situated less than one kilometre as the crow flies from the site of the 2015 protest. Among the 440 volumes, numbers 226–233 are devoted to Ovid, including the *Metamorphoses* (Wardle 2017: 349).<sup>9</sup> Rhodes’ greatest attachment was to the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, a text which he annotated in his Hatchard’s translation; he had another copy, now lost, on his deathbed. The *Meditations*, adhering to the stoic tradition of Graeco-Roman philosophy, adumbrates Rhodes’ idea of leadership on the part of a philosopher-emperor. Within stoicism the emphasis is on the cosmos and the harmonic adherence of individuals thereto, even in adversity.

Second, Rhodes’ classical leanings continued in his posthumous commemoration. Under Baker’s leadership, the classicising building programme that Rhodes had begun continued in a different capacity after his death in 1902. The most prominent example is Rhodes Memorial, designed by Baker and completed in 1912, located immediately adjacent to UCT campus. At the very back of the monument, looking eastwards towards the Hottentots Holland Mountain, was a bronze bust of Rhodes

designed by JM Swan (fig. 2), who was also responsible for the eight bronze lions, pairs of which frame the staircase leading up to the monument proper. In September 2015 the bust was vandalised, its nose removed and graffiti added; following repeated repairs to the nose, the entire head was cut away in June 2020.<sup>10</sup> The secret nature of this act, undertaken at night by an unknown person or persons using an angle grinder, contrasts with the highly public and much photographed removal of the statue a mere kilometre's walk downhill on Rhodes' former estate. The fact that it happened at night suggests that the act itself was intended to evade photography.



*Figure 2: JM Swan, bronze bust of Cecil John Rhodes, Rhodes Memorial, 1912  
[Photo credit: CC-BY-SA 3.0 Mwguelink]*



The events at UCT in 2015 were by no means Cecil Rhodes' first metamorphosis. In 1892, in an eminently Ovidian gesture, the satirical publication *Punch* turned Rhodes, arms outstretched, into a telegraph pole spanning the continent.<sup>11</sup> At issue were his pan-continental 'Cape-to-Cairo' ambitions, which had both physical and symbolic dimensions of geographical control (Merrington 2001, 2017). His funeral procession, by train from Cape Town to his burial site at World's View in what is now the Matobo National Park in Zimbabwe, enacted the southern stages of this 'Cape-to-Cairo' dream (Maylam 2005: 32–34). By 1913 Britain came close to controlling contiguous land between those two edges of the continent, lacking only German East Africa in modern-day Tanzania: the dream was never realised in the physical terms envisaged by Rhodes.

Linley Sambourne's cartoon would gain wide familiarity, becoming even the 'archetypal image of British imperial power' (Kramer 2002: 1333). Replicated in countless school history textbooks, it draws its humour on a classical reference that may or may not have been familiar to generations of learners and instructors: the Colossus of Rhodes (293 BCE), a monumental statue of the sun-god Helios that counted as one of the wonders of the world. It stood for 67 years before being toppled by an earthquake in 226 BCE (Clayton & Price 1988; Jordan 2014: 22–36). Ancient evidence concerning the Colossus of Rhodes is limited, hyperbolic and unreliable. The idea that the statue stood with its feet astride, straddling the harbour, is a modern fantasy. Sambourne was not the first to make a pun on the name of Rhodes: Joseph Keppler had dubbed William Henry Vanderbilt 'the modern colossus of (rail) roads' in a *Puck* cartoon of 1879.<sup>12</sup> In later variants around the Monroe Doctrine, Louis Dalrymple would portray Uncle Sam as 'Colossus of the Pacific' (1905), straddling the Americas.<sup>13</sup> These cartoons, taken together, suggest that physical size has a political dimension, and consequently that colossality expresses power in popular discourse and image-making.<sup>14</sup>

Nor is Rhodes South Africa's only metamorphic leader. The implied comparison of Nelson Mandela with Rhodes here may seem like sacrilege, yet it is one consciously brought on by the prisoner-turned-president himself. For Mandela, to combine his name with that of Rhodes in the establishment of the Rhodes-Mandela Trust was an investment in the future of South Africa, undertaken as a bold but canny political calculus. It is hard to imagine that any other hero of the liberation struggle would

have had the credibility to do so, just a few years after the official end of apartheid (Maylam 2005: 134–137). It is platitudinous to say that Mandela, in the course of a momentous political career, took on different roles at different times, starting in rural Transkei, moving into law and activism and prison on the way to world celebrity status. This evolution made arguably the embodiment of modernity (Chapman 1995). Of relevance here is the multiplicity of ways in which Mandela has been represented, in which his commemoration has taken material form in dozens of statues of enormous variety, the largest some nine metres tall. Among the many dozens of Mandela statues, one changes shape in front of its viewers' eyes. *Release* by Marco Cianfanelli, designed in collaboration with architect Jeremy Rose, was unveiled in 2012 at the Nelson Mandela Capture Site at Howick in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands (fig. 3).

The 50 jagged steel rods of 'Release' mark the place where the 'black Pimpernel' had been arrested five decades previously. Access to the installation is carefully controlled via an extended narrow pathway and the view blocked by hill-like structures on either side: it is only once viewers have entered via a preordained path that the rods align to recreate a wistful portrait of the older Mandela subsequent to his 1990 release. The design deploys an award-winning photograph taken in 1994 by Jürgen Schadeberg, with Mandela looking through the window of his former prison cell on Robben Island,<sup>15</sup> which thus evokes contemplative retrospect on his 27-year imprisonment and potentially much more besides. This virtuoso work of *tromp l'oeil* is all the more remarkable given that Mandela is in most cases otherwise commemorated in naturalistic bronze statues of limited artistic ambition (Parker 2020). At Howick, by contrast, viewers do not merely encounter a conventional classicising statue in passing, as they might at Sandton City Mall or Cape Town City Hall: they have to choose to visit the remote site, covering the last few hundred metres on foot so as to symbolically recreate the 'long walk to freedom'. The promised view of Mandela is thus available only to those who have made the physical effort. His contemplative expression further stimulates reflection on the part of viewers.<sup>16</sup>

The transition from Rhodes to Mandela is itself emblematic of the country's political metamorphosis, and it is a transition that is not over. The ANC, the political group most closely linked to Mandela, has changed from liberation movement to ruling party, and latterly descended to a



*Figure 3: Marco Cianfanelli, 'Release', 2012 [Photo credit: Pat Cullen]*

kleptocracy in the Zuma years (2009–2018), to judge from evidence brought before the Zondo Commission (Myburgh 2019). If classicising figurative representation has been used for both Rhodes and Mandela, then it is in the latter case that the need to rethink commemorative art has grown. The political transitions marked by the two lifetimes discussed are thus paralleled by changes in visual representation, to say nothing of technological changes in which latterly digital media facilitate the instantaneous diffusion of images, and hyperreality is commonplace. Seen in this larger context, classical antiquity seems less the assumed or natural



template for commemoration but rather one set of possibilities among many, something that is tied to histories of taste.

### Memory spaces

*Gentibus est aliis tellus data limite certo:*

*Romanae spatium est urbis et orbis idem (Fasti 2.684–685)*

For other nations, territory is set by a fixed boundary; Rome's extent is that of the world.

In his calendar poem, the *Fasti*, Ovid plays on a duality within the name Rome as used in his own time, as both the city founded on the Tiber and of the empire it conquered. This untranslatable wordplay of 'urbis'/'orbis' ('city'/'world') contrasts the scale of the humble hill-bound settlement on the Tiber with the expansive empire embracing the Mediterranean and beyond. The paronomasia is typical of Ovid's highly wrought and ludic use of language (Ahl 1985). The extent of Rome's empire is the setting for the lasting fame that Ovid predicts for himself in the closing lines of the poem:

*Quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,*

*ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,*

*siquid habent ueri uatum praesagia, uiuam.*

*(Metamorphoses 15.877–879)*

Wherever Rome's power extends over the conquered world, I shall have mention on men's lips, and, if the prophecies of bards have any truth, through all the ages shall I live in fame.

This is the imperial chronotope: in this discourse, the empire, in its universality, has neither temporal nor spatial boundary. How does this compare with the spatialities of Rhodes Must Fall and Msezane? To be sure, the incident of April 2015 was, in one sense, an intensely local matter. A particular statue was contested, in so far as it stood on a particular location, one which had enormous significance because of the importance of universities (including UCT) in South African society and particularly in the lives of young people. In this light, Msezane's intervention was part

of a hard-hitting challenge to a particular university, its history and power structures, the last of these symbolised by the statue. Yet her performance may have been born digital in the sense that it would have been unthinkable without the participation of certain media, namely the multitude of cell phone cameras present and thereby social media, as well as cable and other news media enabling its diffusion (Glenn 2016).

The UCT protest received international coverage both in news networks and in social media; by 2016, protests would focus on Oriel College, recipient of Rhodes' bequest and location of his statue, as well as the Rhodes Scholarship. By 2018, the Oxford network of the Rhodes Must Fall movement would publish a substantial book. Comprising 382 pages and 32 chapters, it mentions the UCT incident in the introduction but does not discuss it until halfway through, and then relegated to the status of 'sister movement' (Chantiluke et al. 2018: 147). It is clear that the focus of the book is on race relations in the UK, as is reflected in the list of contributors. Yet there is irony in the fact that the book, in promoting 'the struggle to decolonise the racist heart of empire' (to quote the subtitle), subjugates South African interests to British, in an unfortunate and surely unintended replication of the earlier imbalance between colony and metropolis.

It may be useful here to think of such spatialities in relation to maps. Firstly, in the most concrete sense, Cecil Rhodes had several statues erected in his memory in the cities most closely associated with his life: Cape Town, Kimberley and Oxford. Beyond these, the Rhodes Scholarship has since 1902 brought hundreds of students from Commonwealth countries, Germany and the United States to Oxford University: by virtue of its prestige and scope it has done much to internationalise the memory of Rhodes. Its global impact is considerable, far exceeding Rhodes' own travels. It was not until the 1890s that Rhodes ventured beyond Britain and southern Africa, visiting Egypt in 1892 and 1893 (Rotberg 1988: 657–658); via his architect, Baker, he drew inspiration from the Mediterranean core of Greek and Roman histories (Hilton 2017).

Msezane's performance art gained worldwide acclaim, as we have seen, via images transmitted through digital media, and in the latter part of the decade she made multiple appearances in Africa, the Americas, Australia and Europe.<sup>17</sup> Her 'Public Holiday Series' began in 2013 with a performance staged outside Parliament at the equestrian bronze statue of General Louis Botha (prime minister from 1910–1919). In this work, 'Untitled (Heritage

Day)', the base on which she stood elevated her position into greater equality with Botha's statue which, by virtue of the camera angle, was relegated into the background in the proportions of a child's toy (fig. 4).

The photograph emanating therefrom suggests that the gaze itself is at play: while the subject in the foreground looks to the right of the frame, Botha's head in the background is turned sharply in the direction of both the subject and the camera. Msezane's 'Public Holiday Series' continued the following year with several public performances: 'Human Rights Day', 'Workers' Day', 'Freedom Day', 'Women's Day' (all in Cape Town), 'Youth Day' and 'Day of Reconciliation' (both in Johannesburg). These performances offered commemorative alternatives, emphasising perspectives of oppressed people.

Throughout the series, as later with 'Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell',



Figure 4: Sthembile Msezane, 'Untitled (Heritage Day)', 2013  
[Photo credit: Sthembile Msezane]

the subject's face is covered in a beaded mask. This appears to reference Nguni tradition in a way that is at once generic – in the sense that beadwork is inexpensive airport art, heritage at its most commercialised – and beguiling, in that its traditional use has encoded subtle and elaborate insider messages about social status. The covering of the face is gender-specific.

In such ways Msezane's work integrates African knowledge systems that invite but defy the gaze of colonial ethnography. In her artist's statement she has described her work as 'examin[ing] the processes of mythmaking which are used to construct history, calling attention to the absence of the black female body in both the narratives and physical spaces of historical commemoration' (Msezane n.d.). Paradoxically, the site-specificity of her work is directly connected to its global diffusion. The use of the mask de-individuates the artist, and the resulting facelessness makes it possible for her to represent all black women.

While the object biographies around the Zimbabwe bird bespeak widespread debates around cultural property and restitution (Matenga 1998), Msezane's performative monuments are transformed into the visual field via digital images and social media. In this particular metamorphosis, it would be no exaggeration to say that the spatial logic of monuments – if that is the right word – is changing before our eyes.

### Curating identities

Metamorphic bodies are found in Ovid's other poetry as well. In the *Heroides*, verse letters composed in the voice of deserted mythological heroines, Phyllis makes an angry reference to the Minotaur as the 'blended form of bull and man' ('*tauri mixtaque forma uiri*', *Heroides* 2.70). At the level of syntax, the displacement of the enclitic *-que* ('and') from a more obvious position at the end of the phrase adds to a sense of taboo: the creature resulting from the coupling of Minos' wife Pasiphaë with a beautiful bull, which Poseidon had sent as a gift in expectation of sacrifice, which Minos refused to perform. The labyrinth was created by the master craftsman Daedalus in order to hide the shameful Minotaur, which was nonetheless a dire threat until put to death by the hero Theseus. In Ovid the context is suitably menacing, and Phyllis uses the myth to convey her own indignation at having been abandoned by her husband Demophoon.

The Minotaur is one of two figures (along with Shakespeare's Ophelia)

upon which the award-winning artist Nandipha Mntambo draws in her exhibition *Metamorphoses* (2015), itself a direct link with Ovid's poem. This is how she explains the link in her artist's statement:

I take on another identity, I get in and out of my skin combining my traits with the ones of the character I am impersonating. It is an open-ended process, and a third figure emerges that is not me nor the original character, but rather an entity that borrows elements from both, and in doing so acquires its own profile.<sup>18</sup>

The figure of the Minotaur has been used by Mntambo frequently over several years (fig. 5). In her response to the Ovidian narrative, she turns the figure into a woman, combining rounded womanly features and a soft gaze on the one hand with a menacing stance, horns pointed forward as if about to charge. Its eyes half-closed and fixed on the distance, 'this ambiguous figure expresses a femininity that is fighting to emerge or symbolises the last moments in the life of the Minotaur, relieved to be delivered from a surreal and lonely existence' (Stevenson Gallery 2015).

The figure of the Minotaur allows Mntambo to return multiple times to the theme of sexual violence but it is not the only classical myth that addresses the topic. Mntambo was born in Swaziland in 1982 and, like Msezane, studied at UCT's Michaelis School of Fine Art. In her photographic image adapting a different classical myth, her 'Rape of Europa' (2009) reinterprets Titian (ca. 1560–1562) via Picasso to portray the Minotaur sexually embracing a young woman, with the distinctive feature that the artist occupies both roles. By the same token she inserts herself into a photographic image of Narcissus, her adaptation of Caravaggio's painting. In each case the mythical narrative associated with Ovid is sifted through modern or early modern visual filters. The 'Rape of Europa' gained notoriety when Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana, walked out after taking offence at the explicit nature of the work, a response which led to accusations of homophobia against the minister.<sup>19</sup> This response shares an important element with so many debates around statues: the phenomenon of taking offence. This emergence of new perspectives and voices in the public sphere (certainly in comparison to 1934, the unveiling of Walgate's statue) is an inevitable and necessary feature of political change, but it is also unfortunate if it constrains the range of possible responses to art. Power is transferred within this dynamic to the viewer, not



*Figure 5: Nandipha Mntambo, 'Minotaurus', 2015  
[Photo credit: Stevenson Gallery; used with the permission of Nandipha Mntambo]*

incrementally but as a pendulum swing in contrast to earlier conventions, including colonial classicism. The goals of polysemy and multivocality are much more easily realised with museum displays, given their fuller opportunity to juxtapose artefacts and to add interpretive comment, than with figurative statuary.

In a different work, 'Beginning of the Empire' (2007), Mntambo created a sculptural installation made of 11 partial figures suspended from the ceiling by transparent wires. The cowhides used in the installation were obtained fresh from a slaughterhouse; after being treated, they were placed while still wet onto body casts of Mntambo and her mother. Once dried, she shaped the cowhides with polyester mesh and resin. According to Lipschitz, the human/animal distinction is fundamental to the resulting work:

Both quietly menacing and submissively tragic, each figure quotes both human and animal form but does not resolve into either; each contains presence but also evokes absence; hovers but is secured;

appears fragile yet is surprisingly resistant; is sensuous and tactile, yet at the same time slightly repellent. (Lipschitz 2012: 554)

The role of the body is different in the case of Msezane's installations such as 'Chapungu' and the 'Public Holiday Series': in those cases the locally specific element turns corporeal presence into a political statement. In a later example of the same phenomenon, Msezane was a member of the iQhiya collective: a group of women, clad in diaphanous white robes, stood on milk crates directly opposite the four (male) Nobel prize winners one evening in Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, as if in silent confrontation. No location more clearly bespeaks South Africa's neoliberal metamorphosis. Construction of the working dock was inaugurated by Prince Alfred, Queen Victoria's second son, during his visit in 1860. The initiative to repurpose it undertaken in the late 1980s received fresh impetus in the 1990s, which saw the promotion of both international tourism post-sanctions and the domestic consumer economy post-apartheid. At the time of the pandemic lockdown, the Waterfront claimed a staggering 24 million visitors annually,<sup>20</sup> having become prime real estate for elite accommodation, commerce and entertainment. In this environment iQhiya's installation connects the bronze statues with the ephemeral human traffic. Here the body has not merely become an object (Bielfeldt 2018): it is a weapon.

How might such bodily metamorphoses relate to South African identities? Human proximity and similarity to animals is a point of comparison with other colonial histories. Instructive on this point is Tzvetan Todorov's (1984) study of the earliest cross-cultural encounters in the Americas. In his analysis of the ethics and semiotics involved, Todorov considers how relations and mutual understanding are shaped by the possibilities of love, equality and their opposites. Whereas Columbus' diary focused on natural history, showing him a kind of Adam in the Garden of Eden, his interest in the Amerindian indigenes was limited to their place in an exotic landscape. If the question is how to engage the Other, Mntambo's answer focuses not on race, the usual South African preoccupation, but rather on the human/animal distinction in the first instance. Challenging any 'speciesist' distinction, she generates a 'transgressive animality that stalks the "origins" of "the human" and troubles its carnivorous and colonial relations of "eating the other"' (Lipschitz 2012: 546). This is a

radical alternative to the usual social distinctions around race.<sup>21</sup>

Ovid's help on the matter of race is oblique and limited. His four 'races' are a diachronic succession of ages: golden, silver, bronze and iron. After the effortless perfection and plenty under the reign of Saturn, the reign of Jove brought deepening social decay (1.89–150). By contrast, in his exile poetry, the *Tristia* and *Letters from Pontus*, Ovid is scathing in his references to the Getae, inhabitants of the Black Sea region around Tomis, modern-day Contanta in Romania. The place he describes as an unwelcoming and dangerous 'barbara terra' (*Tristia* 3.1.18). In terms of humanistic geography Ovid sketches a 'landscape of fear' (Tuan 1979). Uncouth Tomis, on which he expatiates in *Tristia* 3.9, contrasts with his intense longing for the city of Rome, a predominant theme in the poems. In a place where warfare and enslavement are rife, people destroy whatever they cannot take from others (3.10.65). This social distinction, spatialised by Ovid as the distance between Rome-on-the-Tiber and the Black Sea, might in modern terms be considered racial, though classicists have tended to sugar-coat the pill by instead preferring ethnicity as the lens (McCoskey 2012). Ancient Greeks and Romans certainly had social distinctions that we might call racial or ethnic; but the modern use of these terms is historically specific, with the result that their applicability to ancient societies is difficult. Indeed the question of the nature of race and racism in antiquity is itself a political one (Parker 2021).

The role of classics in framing South Africa may be traced back to early modern cartography, with its initial reliance on Claudius Ptolemy followed by the emergence, in the early 1500s, of new paradigms in cartographers such as Martin Waldseemüller (Van Duzer 2020). Luís de Camões' *Lusiads* (1572), the Portuguese language epic poem celebrating Vasco da Gama's sea voyage to India, drew heavily on classical intertexts such as Vergil's *Aeneid* (Barletta 2020: 80–81). A noteworthy new arrival in this period of colonial encounter is the myth of Adamastor, the baleful giant guarding the southern point of Africa. As an adaptation of and addition to classical mythology, Adamastor functions as the perfect supplement in a Derridean sense: marking Portugal's relation of this distant Cape of its seaborne empire, the figure of Adamastor is strictly external to classical myth, yet it gives meaning to classical myth itself. Here is Camões' 16<sup>th</sup>-century addition to ancient myth, narrating the Portuguese rounding of the Cape. The myth of Adamastor was Camões' invention, which was destined to



have considerable later resonance in literature and art, works such as André Brink's novella, 'The First Life of Adamastor' (1993), which would itself inspire Cyril Coetzee's massive mural (fig. 6) at the University of the Witwatersrand, 'T'kama Adamastor' (1999), containing bizarre semi-human forms (Vladislavić 2000).

At the centre a male and a female figure flank a crocodile standing on its hind legs, all underneath a shady thorn tree. The human figures invoke the Garden of Eden, except that Adam has changed into the KhoiSan figure of Adamastor. An ostrich, whose upright neck aligns with Adamastor's groin and whose head points towards the woman, adds a sexual charge. In fact, the mural contains several suggestions of sexual violence: on the left, in the middle distance, four KhoiSan men carry a European woman from a swan-like ship in daylight, and this is matched by two European men carrying presumably the same woman towards the shore. In the foreground, a conquistador-type character with a bird's head appears to fondle a bare-breasted African maiden undergoing baptism, while a second, winged conquistador figure preaches the Christian message. Coetzee's mural thus contains many vignettes of coercion, violence and uncannily hybrid forms. As in Ovid's epic itself, a well-established mythical narrative is projected onto the grand scale of nationhood or empire.

The hybridity of human/animal forms à la Hieronymus Bosch (ca. 1450–1516) had an impact on 20<sup>th</sup>-century surrealism, and South Africa is no exception to the recurrence of the theme. Well known is Jane Alexander's 'Butcher Boys' (1985–1986),<sup>22</sup> 'probably the most iconic image of the sinister and apocalyptic brutalisations of apartheid' (Powell 2007: 35): the horns of the three whitened figures suggest a note of menace and violence, as do the apparent wounds and hints of bleeding on their torsos (fig. 7). In an apartheid context, the colour white takes a defamiliarising turn as a representation of black African bodies.

In the 1980s, such a creation might have been critically inflecting the National Party government's censorship practices, which under Prime Minister DF Malan began to clamp down on what it described as racial intermingling and miscegenation (McDonald 2009: 22). More recently, Minnette Vári's video 'Chimera' (2001) introduces a naked female with the head of a lion, body of a goat and tail of a snake, juxtaposed with images from the Voortrekker Monument frieze (Rankin & Schneider 2020: 455). Vári's technique of editing out the background of individual figures from

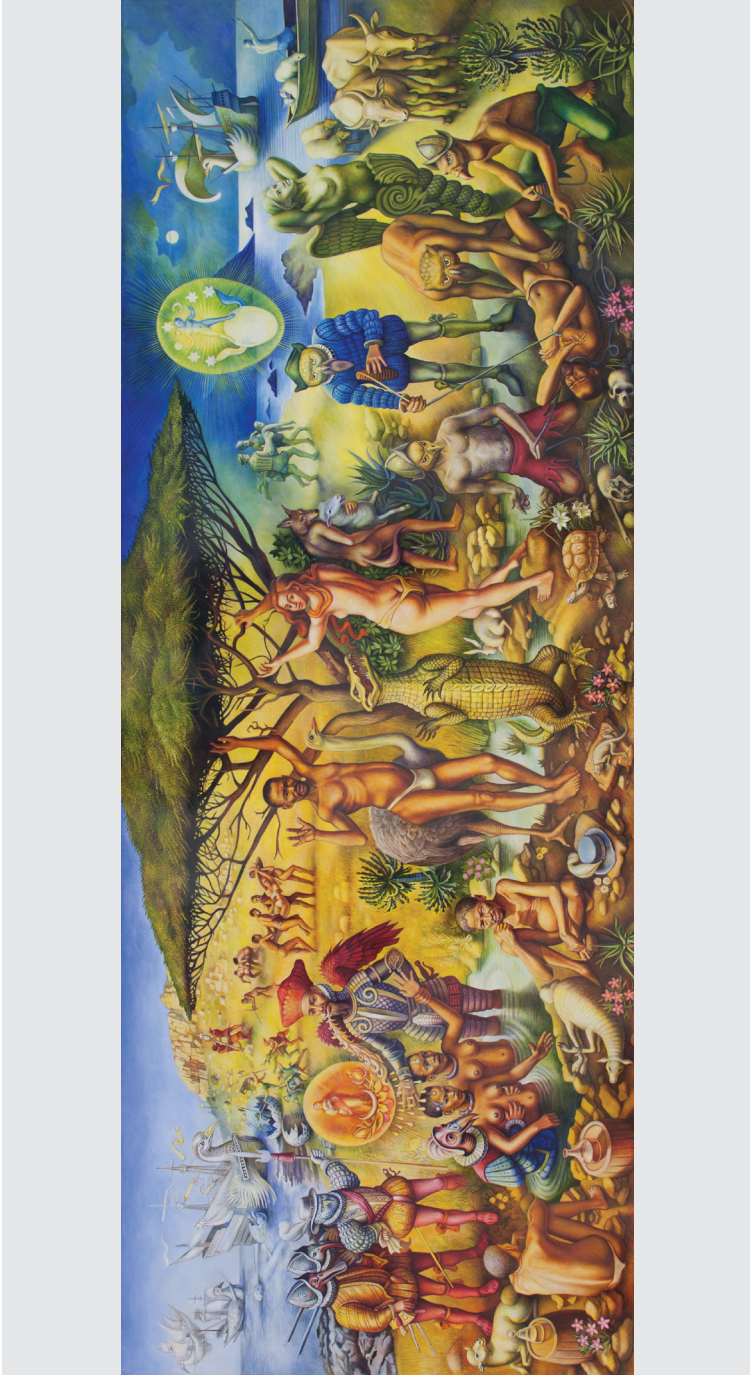


Figure 6: Cyril Coetzee, 'T'kama Adamastor', 1999 [Photo credit: University of the Witwatersrand]



Figure 7: Jane Alexander, 'Butcher Boys', 1985–1986  
[Photo credit: CC- BY-NC-ND 2.0 Goggins World ]

the monument, leaving them isolated and occasionally reversed, is a play on the word 'frieze', and thus an especially Ovidian touch. Such artworks, taken together, suggest metamorphosis many times over.

The theme of intergroup relations in Greece and Rome are a phenomenon that was studied as early as the late 1920s by Theodore Johannes Haarhoff (1892–1971), long-time professor of classics at the University of the Witwatersrand. His publications, including *Vergil in the Experience of South Africa* (1931), follow the line of JC Smuts in promoting the 'fusion' of Afrikaans- and English-speaking white South Africans (Parker 2010). It was not until much later that classicists addressed the power of classics to exclude people and negotiate differences of class (Hall & Stead 2020); this is not so much an Ovidian theme per se but a point about pragmatics and reception history. In a South African setting this has been seen most visibly in institutional contexts, for example schools and legal training. It is no coincidence that, when the ANC-led government came to power in 1994, its first legislation was to abolish the Latin requirement in legal training. Among the enormous challenges the new government faced, such a step must have seemed like low-hanging fruit. Even if it was not specifically the intention, the

effect of the previous apartheid-era legal studies requirement was to exclude blacks from legal practice, given that so few black high schools offered Latin. Access was thus highly discrepant, in keeping with apartheid education.

Nor does this story begin with apartheid. As Michael Lambert recounts in the first chapter of his book, *The Classics and South African Identities*, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century white Afrikaners were excluded from Latin studies: the reforms of Sir John Herschel (1834–1838) stipulated that Latin teaching would be restricted to the medium of English. The re-establishment of the Classical Association in 1956, with the National Party now in the ascendancy, reflects this history of Afrikaner exclusion.

Paradoxically, this exclusionary background has also made classics a source of inclusion, and an enabler par excellence. The phenomenon is by no means unique to South Africa. Certainly, antiquity was a source of social elevation for black students at Lovedale College and later Fort Hare in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: men such as John Tengo Jabavu, Davidson Don Tengo Jabavu and Robert Grendon, author of *Paul Kruger's Dream* (Claassen 2017; Nagy 2012). But the extent of this elevation would prove limited in every case. By the same token, in South Africa as in other modern countries, classical antiquity has been a major source of bling, as is visible in some elaborate architectural projects. This seems to have been especially a nouveau riche phenomenon of Johannesburg, the city of gold (Freschi 2017), but it is by no means limited to that metropolis. For the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, as for the Randlords a century or more earlier, classicising architecture has promised a usable and prestigious past.

### Universalism and unprecedent<sup>23</sup>

*Omnia mutantur, nil interit.* (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.165)

Everything changes, nothing dies.

As both a sound bite and a timeless truth of adaptable context, Ovid offers ostensible consolation in a time of unfolding crisis. It is no surprise that the saying above has been much quoted over the centuries. It has also been creatively misquoted: since the 16<sup>th</sup> century it has been expanded so that ‘everything is changed and we are changed therein’ (*omnia mutantur nos et mutamur in illis*). This supplemented form, completing the dactylic hexameter line, is evidence of Ovid’s quotability. As if in self-caricature, the

Conservative British politician, Jacob Rees-Mogg, opened his Twitter account in July 2017 with this expanded 16<sup>th</sup>-century Latin line.<sup>24</sup> The irony here rests on the combination of the High Tory use of Latin on the one hand and the populist use of social media on the other. Indeed, classical antiquity has a role in the self-definition of Boris Johnson's inner circle of government. Both Johnson and Rees-Mogg studied Latin at Eton before 'going up' to Oxford, where Johnson continued with classics whereas Rees-Mogg read History. Once in politics, Johnson associated himself with Rome: his admiration for the empire, spelled out in his book (Johnson 2006), could just as easily have motivated support for the European Union as a mega-state whereas in fact Brexit would later frame his eventual rise to power. Rees-Mogg indicated regret at not having kept with Latin.<sup>25</sup> While classical antiquity is thus framed by conservative politics, in the UK and beyond (Zuckerberg 2018), it has had subversive and liberatory potential that has emerged in several contexts, often via mythology (Morales 2020; Parker 2017).

From one point of view an ancient aphorism, whether accurately quoted or not, confers prestige on those wielding it and suggests that Graeco-Roman antiquity itself contains an aura of universalism, the notion that an overall logic prevails, unlimited by time and place. Several empires have developed their own versions of universalism (Bang & Kołodziejczyk 2012): ancient Romans themselves developed a rich and resonant repertoire of universal symbols, some of which would last a considerable time (Schneider 1997).

In political terms the contrast between the implicit versions of antiquity could not be harsher: on the one hand a bulwark against change on the part of UK and US conservatives; on the other hand a radical and strident call for the decolonisation of universities and even of epistemologies (Jansen 2019). Some parts of the South African drive to decolonisation are strangely belated, not only in relation to the 1950s and 1960s around the writings of Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Ngûgî wa Thiong'o and others but also in relation to the end of apartheid. It is in one sense remarkable that UCT's anti-Rhodes protest did not come earlier than it did. Yet the contrast should not be exaggerated, given that classics as a field has long harboured liberating elements amidst its more obvious conservative ones. The Rhodes Must Fall moment and the decolonisation push would suggest that more remains to be done to change the public image of classics, so that it is associated less with old-style statues and more with broader-reaching



celebrations of humanity, such as those the creative artists, both visual and performative, have been producing.

Three observations will round out this discussion, taking us back to Ovid. First, the speed of historical time is a matter much larger than the Rhodes statue itself. Whereas the *Metamorphoses* present four ages of humankind (1.89–150), about the *khronos* of evolving change – metamorphosis in slow motion perhaps – the Rhodes Must Fall and subsequent Fees Must Fall movements have been about the heat of the moment, *kairos*, or time as a cutting edge. Intergenerational differences appear to play a role here, as is seen for example in the degree to which the Born Free generation revere the Mandela generation of struggle leaders. The death of Andrew Mlangeni (1925–2020), the last surviving Rivonia trialist, at the time of writing this chapter marked the end of an era of historical memory, as did that of one of the Rivonia trial lawyers, George Bizos (1927–2020). Towards the end of his life, Mlangeni was critical of ANC corruption under President Zuma, and Bizos continued to pursue human rights causes throughout his lengthy career. It appears that ostensible struggle credentials have been a prerequisite for leadership positions of the ANC in government. How long will this last? The Union of South Africa was ruled from its beginning to 1948 by generals of the Anglo-Boer War. Even if that comparison is complicated by the changing loyalties of Prime Minister JC Smuts, it is valid to compare the nature and force of historical memory around these two landmarks, the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and the anti-apartheid struggle of the 1960s–1980s.

It remains to be seen, in light of the anti-Mandela sentiments that emerged in the protests, to what extent the student protests mark an end to a particular political generation, especially since the protests have coincided with the emergence of the Economic Freedom Fighters, with its strong focus on urban youth, both on university campuses and in the legislature. These hints of intergenerational change have brought with them a loss of civility, or at least an agreed code of political conduct. The larger political changes are not limited to South Africa and have sometimes been linked to the role of social media, which encourage or at least enable ‘piling on’ behaviour.

In such a context it is easy to see that different levels of time coexist, perhaps following Fernand Braudel to make the distinction between short-term event, medium-term trend and structures of the *longue durée*. Equally, one might argue that Ovidian classicism and statues represent particular experiences of time for those involved, where time and history are not

the same thing but are mutually constitutive (Koselleck 2002). History as expressed in statues is no longer ‘one damned thing after another’, as Arnold Toynbee quipped (1987: 267), but has rather become a time-space compression that entertains no *khronos*. Indeed, history, in its archivally informed ‘guild’ form, has faced radical challenges on several fronts, and the kind of ‘monumental history’ expressed in statues and favouring elite white colonial men has shared many of them: from postcolonialism and other branches of cultural studies that are critical of its Eurocentric constitution; from postmodernism, questioning working assumptions about change over time and its perceptibility (Lyotard 1984); from the heritage sector, seeking enhanced public connection and responding directly to political imperatives. Between the oral genesis of this chapter in mid-2018 and its rewriting two years later, the question of change has been rendered moot by the scale and severity, as yet unknown, of the impact of the pandemic.

Second, the politics of spectacle deserves note. Msezane’s performance, like the removal of the statue itself, might have taken place physically yet its fame is unthinkable without the use of digital photography and the diffusion of social media. Its fame is unthinkable, further, without the ever-expanding role of images, of the visual in contemporary life. Readers of the *Metamorphoses* have detected theatrical and metatheatrical elements in the narrative (Curley 2013; Fondermann 2008). In South Africa, spectacle has become part of political practice, in the past decades amplified by live transmission. Examples already mentioned are parliamentary rituals, into which the Economic Freedom Fighters has injected radical protest since its entry into the national legislature in 2014;<sup>26</sup> another involves the widespread student protests on campuses throughout the country in this decade (Habib 2019). The Ovidian desire for everlasting fame throughout the world, expressed in the coda to the *Metamorphoses*, has morphed into a new kind of diffusion via the internet, partly independent of political boundaries, with less of a claim on Ovidian eternity (*‘per ... omnia saecula’*, 15.878) than an assumption about digital timelessness.

Spectacle in this sense rests solidly on photography, content for Instagram and the like. The doyen of South African photography, David Goldblatt (1930–2018), tellingly reflected on the occasion. Though himself a photographer, he was taken aback by the role of digital cameras in the unfolding event:

There was a moment when the statue was lifted and thousands of arms went up into the air. At first I thought this was some kind of ritual that was taking place, but in fact it was everyone holding a camera or a cellphone to photograph the event. I found it so strange that so few people who were there actually looked at the event itself. They needed to photograph the moment. This is a contemporary phenomenon – an urge that people have. I suppose I was doing the same thing. Still, I found it very strange. (Goldblatt & Kent 2018: 37)

His description reads like a defamiliarisation of photography itself. The ‘ritual’ he refers to is in keeping with contemporary tourism, and a reminder of the predominance of the visual. Initially supportive of the protests, his sympathies seem to have changed around the event itself. In an image-saturated, media-driven world, photography appears to be at the intersection of timeliness and timelessness. Certainly several photographs gained iconic status during the struggle and its aftermath, perhaps none more so than Schadeberg’s image mentioned earlier, ‘Nelson Mandela’s return to his cell on Robben Island IV’ (1994), which was recognised by the Photographers’



*Figure 8: David Goldblatt, The removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at UCT, 2015  
[Photo credit: © Almayuda Foundation]*



Gallery of London as one of the century's 50 most memorable images. As we have seen, Cianfanelli's Howick monument directly adapts the photograph. In its evocative way, Schadeberg's work shows that an image can move beyond immediate spectacle to a more timeless quality.

Third and finally, I hope I have made a case that both Walgate's Rhodes statue and Msezane's critique thereof may be considered the indirect legacy of ancient Greece and Rome. Statues and quasi-statuary performances are thus about classicism written on the body, subject to the possibility of violence; classical dialogue forgotten, which is a problem for the functioning of democracy. The bodies involved here are individual, not in a direct or obvious sense about the body politic nor about the state as a salient unit. Though nation-building was a big part of political rhetoric of the 1990s, its time seems to have passed, eclipsed by unsavoury realities such as chronic corruption, inequality and state dysfunction. The current pandemic crisis has only added to this situation. Ovid's changes of form bring unexpected aspects of the body to the fore. In classical mythology, bodies may veer wildly between violence and intimacy, as subjects and sources of power. The body can be the site of protest, as in the iQhiya installation and before that the 1956 Women's March in Pretoria, to take merely two examples from South African history. It can also be the site of violence, as many recent protests over violence against women have highlighted; and likewise, as so much of Mntambo's and Msezane's work suggests, it is also a site of intimacy, whether of nurturing motherhood or of sexuality. The body is at the intersection of modernity and tradition, which comes to the fore when Msezane covers her face with a beaded mask throughout the 'Public Holiday Series' and in 'Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell'. The body becomes a contact zone between different epistemologies, between colonial versions of universalism on the one hand and African tradition on the other. In this sense, it can be race-defyingly universalist while simultaneously invoking an old ethnographic repertoire of racial identities. Such dynamics are most directly true in Mntambo's work, with her evocation of the Minotaur, Narcissus and other mythological creatures, and more indirectly in Msezane's connection with classicising statuary.

Statues can become proxies for the body itself: a proposition that seems innocent enough, though it alarmingly suggests the threat of physical violence as a quasi-accepted medium of political expression. While a world of symbols, visual and verbal, can signify identities and thus be

used for either affirmative or offensive purposes, statues function as direct indexes. Statuary surrogacy was on display at the removal of the statue of Edward Colston (1636–1721), public figure and philanthropist but also entrepreneur in the Atlantic slave trade, in Bristol. After two years of controversy, the statue was removed during a Black Lives Matter protest and thrown into the harbour. Once the statue lay on the ground, a protester was photographed kneeling on his neck for 8 minutes 46 seconds, a gesture intended to evoke the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. At Floyd's funeral two days later, reference was made to the statue and the gesture around its toppling. As in other British cities (Malik 2020), much of the public discussion centred on whether the site and statue 'belong' to a narrowly defined group or some sense of the community at large. In all the examples of this kind, bodies are at the intersection of private and public. The past as it occurs in such a setting is not history in an earlier sense (e.g. Schorske 1998) but rather a matter of selective and even traumatic flashbacks of unresolved grievance.

Belonging is perhaps the matter of greatest fluidity, though seldom articulated explicitly. Is it possible that, despite its generally exclusive and often oppressive histories, classics could be available to everybody? That despite its gatekeeping reputation it may offer unique possibilities of bridge-building? There is no denying the idealism of these hopes, given historical inequities that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic. Yet the aim may be worth cherishing after all, if Greece and Rome can yet take a vivid place within a range of pasts, if they can yet play an enriching role within the historical imagination of South Africans. If change seems like the one certainty in these turbulent times, then the concept of metamorphosis may continue to engender more inclusive and diverse vernacular classicisms.

## Notes

- 1 Four soapstone birds were removed from Great Zimbabwe by Rhodes' agent, Theodore Bent, and divided between the British Museum in London and the South African Museum in Cape Town. These were returned to Zimbabwe upon independence in 1981 (Matenga 1998). Groote Schuur Estate is located a few hundred metres downhill from the University of Cape Town upper campus but is inaccessible to the public, barring a small number of pre-arranged group tours.
- 2 1934 was the year Marion Walgate's statue was unveiled, though at a different location on the other side of the rugby field, before the widening of the road caused the statue to be moved closer to the upper campus. See Schmahmann (2017).
- 3 Miller and Schmahmann (2017: vii–ix) and elsewhere in their volume.

- 4 Here I follow the lead of Imraan Coovadia (2012), writing a few years before Rhodes Must Fall.
- 5 Manuscripts also transmit the variant, *illas*, with little impact on the overall gist.
- 6 Governor Ralph Northam announced its removal on 5 June 2020, but up to the time of writing court challenges have postponed or prevented any such action.
- 7 <https://www.splcenter.org/presscenter/splc-whose-heritage-dataset-updates-june-29-2020>
- 8 <https://www.uct.ac.za/main/explore-uct/transformation>
- 9 Ovid's substantial corpus became part of the translation project even though Gibbon's interest in it was merely tangential, namely eight references in the first volume linked to festivals (*Fasti*) and to the historical Ovid (*Ex Ponto* and *Tristia*). In addition, Gibbon makes reference to the darkness that fell upon the earth immediately following Julius Caesar's assassination (for which he cites *Metamorphoses* 15.781, among other texts); see Gibbon (1781: 619).
- 10 <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-07-15-the-day-cecil-john-rhodes-lost-his-head/>
- 11 10 December 1892.
- 12 *Puck*, volume 5, 10 December 1879, p. 605; Popple (2001).
- 13 <https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/dalrymple-monroe>. See also *Chicago Tribune* 24 August 1898.
- 14 Ovid's reference to the Giants within his extended creation narrative likely directly links power and size. The Giants hubristically seek to reach heaven by piling stones, only to be dashed by Jupiter's thunderbolt. Revived in human form by Mother Earth, they again challenge the gods (1.156–162).
- 15 [http://www.jurgenschadeberg.com/galleries/NelsonMandela\\_1951\\_2007/Nelson\\_16.htm](http://www.jurgenschadeberg.com/galleries/NelsonMandela_1951_2007/Nelson_16.htm)
- 16 <https://www.marcocianfanelli.com/release>
- 17 <http://www.sethembile-msezane.com/>
- 18 <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/mntambo/index2015.html>
- 19 <https://mg.co.za/article/2010-03-04-xingwana-but-is-it-art/>
- 20 <https://www.waterfront.co.za/the-va/the-company/our-history/>
- 21 South African race relations have tended to be considered exceptional, a position critiqued by Mamdani (2018: 27–32, 90–112).
- 22 Iziko South African National Gallery, 129 x 213 x 88cm, plaster, bone, horn, oil paint, wood.
- 23 At the time of writing, the word 'unprecedented' was not recognised by either the *Oxford English Dictionary* or Merriam-Webster but surely this will change, a (parting?) gift of the Trump administration and Covid-19.
- 24 [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/jacob-rees-mogg-twitter\\_uk\\_596c5c50e4b017418628a0f7](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/jacob-rees-mogg-twitter_uk_596c5c50e4b017418628a0f7)
- 25 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rees-mogg-an-english-trump-but-better-at-latin-mdm82q87j>
- 26 Needless to say, political spectacle did not begin at that point. Another example of political spectacle was President FW de Klerk's speech at the opening of Parliament ceremony on 2 February 1990. Always a prominent event in the public eye, this one brought expectations that De Klerk would announce the freeing of Mandela, rather than anything more substantial. See <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/fw-de-klerks-speech-parliament-2-february-1990>

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