

Liberation philology: decolonizing Classics in Africa, a native view from the South

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Εἰ δέ εἰσι ὑπερβόρειοί τινες ἄνθρωποι, εἰσὶ καὶ ὑπερνότιοι ἄλλοι.

But if there are people who live in the far North, there are also others who live in the furthest South.

Herodotus 4.36.4–5

1. INTRODUCTORY: LIBERTY

The mind of the African is empty, and he has a great idea of what he calls ‘getting knowledge.’

James Stewart, Missionary and Educationalist¹

If you were a manumitted slave, the child of a slave or descendant of enslaved or dispossessed people or, say, you were a member of your society’s lowest castes and you were given the opportunity to study, and perhaps even to take up scholarship as your life’s work, your vocation, what subject would you, should you elect to learn?

William Sanders Scarborough was born in slavery in the deep South of the United States. His father, Jeremiah, was *libertus*, a freeman. Nonetheless, William De Graffenreid, the owner of Scarborough’s mother Frances, magnanimously allowed Jeremiah to marry her, his property. She gave birth to her son in Macon, Georgia, in 1852. Scarborough would go on to become one of the first Black Hellenists in the United States. Over a productive life he was a schoolteacher, a professor at Wilberforce University in Ohio, an early Black member of the American Philological Association (the first was Richard Greener, his friend and fellow classicist), the first Black member of the Modern Languages Association, the president of Wilberforce, and a founding member of the Negro Academy and of the NAACP. He published a popular primer, *First Lessons in Greek* (New York, 1881), and a study of Aristophanes, *The ‘Birds’ of Aristophanes: A Theory of Interpretation* (Boston, 1886).²

The editor of Scarborough’s autobiography, Michele Ronnick, described Scarborough’s publication of the Greek text as a great advancement for his era and his achievement as “invalidat[ing] commonly held prejudicial opinions such as those evident in John C. Calhoun’s statement that ‘if he could find a Negro who knew the Greek syntax, he would then believe that the negro was a human being

¹ From an undated pamphlet by Stewart, cited in De Kock 1996: 90.

² On Black American classicists, see also Ronnick 2004: 85–102; and note 8 below.

and should be treated as a man”³ In the autobiography, Scarborough recorded his feelings lecturing on Plato at the University of Virginia in 1892, under the staring portraits of Confederate leaders. As Ronnick told it in her Martin Luther King Jr. Symposium lecture, ‘He was reminded of Calhoun’s challenge as he lectured in ‘a place no other Afro-American could enter except as a servant [...] and he felt that Jefferson Davis would be “perplexed, if not horrified” to see him lecturing there.’

Learning, loving, and teaching languages; our illustrious, path-breaking predecessors; how we get up from slavery, colonial exploitation or disappointed liberations; the means and manner in which we freely elect to do so—all of these issues intersect in the exemplary life of Scarborough. And fortunately, in Africa today, we need not waste our energies on White *aporia* (‘perplexity’) and *phobos* (‘horror’) at our presumptuous choices. We do, being humans, have our own aporias and our own forms of phobia, and they represent challenges to our aspirations for social justice and a Classics and Humanities that promote human, social, and historical *dikē*. *Dikē*, ‘justice’, in an early Greek sense was the desirable balance in cosmic and social affairs. Today we would wish to transpose that idea of balance to the social economy we desire and call it *equality*.

It should be said in advance that the ideas of decolonization and of a decolonized Humanities that are operative here are predicated on the conviction that our project and task is positive, not merely to undo the catastrophe of colonialism and neocolonialism—which in any case, in the tragic view we ought to take of things, is not undoable—but to insist that new ideas and forms must be imagined to displace them. We take our lead from thinkers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who, after decades of thinking about postcolonialism and its limitations, wrote in one recent paper:

Listen to me as you would to those who bear what you impose and see if that imaginative shift is possible. For ruling is, in actual practice, enforcement. And those of us who think about these things as having human purchase—teaching in the humanities *beyond the disciplines*—think, perhaps somewhat idealistically, that one must persistently, generation after generation, work towards acceptance of the other as agent rather than victim, so that enforcement is not the main method. The desire for social justice is to want the law—and the goal of the general humanities education is *to work at the impossible task of producing a general will for social justice*, which can be minimally defined as the willingness to turn capital away from capitalism to diversified social good.⁴

In this volume we have set ourselves the challenge of thinking about ways forward for Classics in Africa, for our subject Classics, decolonized or decolonizing. We see Classics as touching all disciplines and therefore, in a special way, already ‘beyond the disciplines’. Classics, and its long-cherished, if usually silently implicit, ideals of a culture of exchange of letters and ideas, of an unobtrusive multilingualism and the close scrutiny of rhetorical strategies, but also of reflection on what is best for the life of the individual and the life of the community, seems well poised, if we wish it to be, to participate in that ‘impossible task of producing a general will for social justice’.

Since, in this volume, our minds have been on possible futures for Classics, we take the opportunity in this introductory prelude to meditate on Classics and the decolonizing or, more exactly, the counter-colonial impulse, as that can be discerned in our past. In this introductory discussion, then, a prelude announcing and developing the theme on which our contributors have offered their variations, we lay out some premises and expose some of the conditions in which we find ourselves thinking about the *decolonization* of education in general and Classical scholarship in particular.

There are at least three dimensions to decolonization, which all merit reflection, and all touch the lines delimited by our philosophical premises: the political, psychological, and pedagogical. Considering all three dimensions may reveal the topic in a perspective with depth, but since we are limited by how much space we have for this prelude, we shall leave the themes of political and psychological decolonization for other occasions.

By pedagogical we mean that dimension of the challenge of decolonization which engages the philosophy of education which is adopted. In general, we ought both to focus very particularly on instances of

³ The reference to John C. Calhoun’s statement is from Crummel 1970: 10–11, cited in Ronnick 2006: 1788.

⁴ Chakravorty Spivak 2021: 24. Italics added.

African attitude and thought, and to take a synoptic view. We must feel free to range temporally and spatially across what we would call *Africa Magna*, Greater Africa. By that we mean continental Africa, from the East to the West—not only a Black Atlantic but also the African East—from the Cape to Cairo and beyond, to Afro-America, south and north, Caribbean and Pacific, and the Eurasian peninsula, in short: wherever Africans and people of African descent have lived and been active. But here, offering one perspective from the southernmost part of Africa, we consider Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s idea of ‘relevancy’ and the debates in post-Liberation Kenya which he discussed in his work, and then those in post-apartheid South Africa. These provide specific instances symptomatic of generally pertinent issues in postcolonial African thinking about Classics, language, and the interpretation of history and literature.

From the start, we must ask if a decolonized Classics is possible in polities that are not decolonized but shaped by and bound to that most colonialist form and instrument for the organization of the lives of Africans not in their own interests: the nation state. And we must reflect on whether Classics decolonized is meaningful in a context that continues to be shaped by the neocolonial tyranny of African elites, who typically and confusingly tend to mobilize the rhetoric of anti-colonialism and Afrocentrism, while subjecting African populations to exploitation or, at best, their culpable indifference. Our response: in a neocolonial context such as ours, we need the Humanities and Classics all the more. We need a Classics that is a *liberation philology*, politically imaginative and responsive to our times, but also protective of the space and nurturing the life of contemplation in Africa.

We propose that it is an expression of our freedom that we attend to whatever we elect to do, wherever that originated. With Scarborough and with J. T. Jabavu, his son D. D. T. Jabavu, and with W. E. B. Du Bois, African readers and leaders committed to Greek and Roman Classics as valuable for emancipated Africans, we see our educational and our reading choices in general as expressions of our ‘free will’. The exercise of our own ‘free will’ or elective decisions on our own behalf, that is the basis on which the original hero of South African Classics, J. T. Jabavu, argued for Greek and Latin for African students and against the racist, colonialist missionary James Stewart in the 1870s Eastern Cape.⁵ However ultimately constrained human free will may be, it must not be any more so for Africans than for anyone else. If we value African persons and wish to make the richest possible contributions to the intellectual, cultural, and political lives of one another and all our fellows in Greater Africa, then, effortlessly but only then, will our Classics and everything we do have the opposite effect of that desired by colonialists and their rapacious, neocolonialist epigones today.

1.1 Classics: Education for Rulers, Guardians or Sub-Alterns

τῆς γὰρ ἐς τοὺς ὑπηκόους ἀδικίας ἐπιθυμία ...

From the desire to do their political subjects wrong.

Procopius, *De bellis* 5.2.8

In his explanations of the outbreak of the Gothic Wars in the sixth century CE, Procopius was reproducing received ethnographic ideas about civilized and uncivilized peoples. To him, Roman, classical culture and Barbarian competencies were simply irreconcilable: Barbarians should not be in positions of authority in the Empire. In his reasoning, Procopius makes a struggle over education emblematic, and he sets this out in the story of Athalaric, grandson of Theoderic the Great, king of the Ostrogoths, a kind of ancient late colonial ‘big man’. Theoderic had died, and Athalaric’s mother, Amalasuintha, herself educated in Roman letters, was taking charge of her son’s education. The events of this paradigmatic story would have taken place in the years up to 534 CE.

Amalasuintha wished for Athalaric to be trained as the Roman princes were, inculcated with their manners. Already being sent to a *grammatistēs*, he was also entrusted to three old Goths: ἡ μὲν οὖν Ἀμαλασοῦνθα τὸν παῖδα ἐβούλετο τοῖς Ῥωμαίων ἄρχουσι τὰ ἐς τὴν διαίταν ὁμότροπον καταστήσασθαι καὶ φοιτᾶν ἐς γραμματιστοῦ ἤδη ἠνάγκαζε (Procopius, *De bellis* 5.2.6.1–7.1). Other Goths, however, were unhappy, for they wished, so says Procopius, to be in a position to ‘wrong their subjects’, to which end,

⁵ Jabavu wrote, for example, in his newspaper *Imvo Zabantsundu* (‘Native Opinion’), that ‘preventing the students from studying the Classics at Lovedale’ was an ‘interference with the principle of free will’, De Kock 1996: 74.

then, to be ruled by him *barbarikōteron*, in a ‘more Barbarian fashion’: Γότθοις δὲ ταῦτα οὐδαμῆ ἤρεσκε. τῆς γὰρ ἐς τοὺς ὑπηκόους ἀδικίας ἐπιθυμία βαρβαρικώτερον πρὸς αὐτοῦ ἄρχεσθαι ἤθελον (5.2.8.1–9.1). Literary education in the classical, Roman fashion and taught by old men could only diminish courage and debase the Germanic prince, they reasoned: γράμματά τε γὰρ παρὰ πολὺ κεχωρίσθαι ἀνδρίας, καὶ διδασκαλίας γερόντων ἀνθρώπων ἔς τε τὸ δειλὸν καὶ ταπεινὸν ἀποκρίνεσθαι ἐκ τοῦ ἐπὶ πλείστον (5.2.12.2–13.1). Athalaric, decidedly, must be brought up to learn to fight and use weapons like his father: τὰς ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις μελέτας ποιείσθαι (5.2.13.3–14.1). He must study to become *virtuous by Gothic standards*: ἐς τὴν ἀρετὴν κατὰ ‘γε τὸν βάρβαρον νόμον ὀρμήσουσι’ (5.2.17.4–5).

Amalasuintha yielded, but when those Goths, so actively concerned with the principles of educating a German prince at the court of Ravenna, used their influence over Athalaric to draw him into conspiracy against his own mother, she had them banished. This episode of early mediaeval or late antique history, and what Patrick Amory called Procopius’ ‘explanatory opposition between classical education and barbarian soldierly virtue’,⁶ comes to mind when reflecting on the role and function of Classics and classical education in Africa. We are confronted here in Africa by the different uses to which the ‘Barbarian’, the African rather than Gothic, Celtic, or Batavian Barbarians, will put classical learning, and the different ways in which a rhetorical opposition between Classical education and practical, political *aretē* can be mobilized or collapsed. But we also face the chronic problem of leadership misconceived: Africa has been afflicted by people and classes interested only in power for rule. We are desperate for a new kind of *guardian* in a place where no one has ever lastingly protected the interests of the vulnerable. We look to the future for leaders who themselves reflect on the nature of leadership and on the ends of the African polity and of the best life for African citizens. We are desperate for custodians of the African *polis* not consumed ‘with a desire to do their political subjects wrong’ (τῆς γὰρ ἐς τοὺς ὑπηκόους ἀδικίας ἐπιθυμία).

For people inclined to structure their curricula by ‘great books’ (and there is nothing inherently wrong with doing so, with certain instructive qualifications about the arbitrariness of all human judgements or how aesthetic judgements are produced by and reproduce contingent structures of social and political power), Plato would doubtless be well represented. And perhaps the greatest of his great books is *The Republic*. This is a work that takes up education as a central interest, and only logically so, because it is a dialogue chiefly concerned with how to constitute the best kind of polity. In book 2 Plato introduces the term *phylakē* (‘custody’, ‘guarding’, ‘watching’, first at Pl. *Resp.* 375a3) and continues in the course of the dialogue to explore what the *polis* should wish for in its ‘guardians’, *phylakes*.

Plato’s work has naturally generated many responses and imitations over the generations. The dialogue is a fine thing to pore over, to think with and think against. For every generation in Africa should be recreating new versions of myriad *Republics*, that would both reflect and realize the most consummate form of political freedom and civic creativity. Our great catastrophe in Africa is our failed leadership; what will thwart our future is not the ghosts of English mining magnates, but the absolutely disastrous class of leaders that Africa continues to reproduce: historically uninformed, incompetent, unimaginative. Africa is in desperate need of visionary, elected guardians, who *want the law*. We are suffering not from England, France, and Belgium (who will always try profitably to get away with whatever depredations they can; it is time we stop being scandalized by that fact and impassively incorporate it into the challenge that faces us), but from the absence of leadership and guardians subject to the accountability which the Athenians maintained as a political ideal and protected through the practice of *euthyna*, the public examination of the conduct of their officials as they completed their terms.

What we have instead of *phylakes* are rulers and tyrants, oligarchies and gerontocracies, standing on their dignity in the face of ghosts like Cecil John Rhodes but utterly subservient, slavish to the unaccountable Russian and Chinese despotisms of the present. African Humanities needs to be smashing the ‘mirrors for princes’ and articulating its constitutional ideals for fully liberated African polities: reinterpreting and rewriting *mirrors for the African city* instead, those still unwritten *African Republics*. Greek and Roman traditions represent only some, but potentially very fruitful sets of ideas from the

⁶ Amory 1997: 157.

inheritance of the common human past, from which we can draw for the African project, and it is that project that decolonization is really about.

In Spivak's 2021 paper earlier referred to, she offers a solution for those of us wrestling with the burdensome inheritance of postcoloniality. Her notion of a 'holistic education' is just what may have drawn many of us to Classics in the first place, which seemed to offer to a certain kind of mind, one that longed for the civic exuberance and stimulations of the *cosmopolis*, a centrally located habitation 'nestled within the humanities beyond the disciplines':

In order to come to grips with the heritage of postcoloniality, the only solution that I have so far proposed has been a holistic education—from elite to subaltern, primary to post-tertiary, *everything nestled within the humanities beyond the disciplines*—that can only be a dream. By subaltern I mean Gramsci's minimal definition: 'social groups in the margins of history'.⁷

The excitement of the cosmopolis is that all its inhabitants are strangers, and all are natives. The thinking, interpretive life is the life at once indigenous and exilic, the creole life: always both attentive to the specific instance, to the local and particular, on one hand, and an outsider, compelled to survey and describe from the peripheries, on the other. Our great challenge, as metics in the African cosmopolis we wish to help create, is to imagine and define the laws and institutions by which we are protected and nurtured, not ruled and tyrannized ('desire for social justice is to want the law'). Africa and Africans have been perennially 'in the margins of history'. Africa itself has been seen as an empty place of people with empty minds, a margin to the Mediterranean and Eurasian text. It does not matter so much that we are chronically marginal elsewhere; we have not the time to waste trying to get Westerners to be more humane or see us as equal humans. We ought to be re-examining what we want 'human' to mean, what kind of future *humanities* will best serve our politics and our natural environment, brought into such peril by a now self-evidently catastrophic Western system. What matters is that in Africa Magna we annotate and illuminate our own manuscripts, our own new constitutions, our own selected great books and their endless reinterpretation.

The ideal would not be merely to assert our non-marginality, but to support, defend, and guard all subalterns everywhere. This ought to come naturally to African classicists. Many of them will know how, in the *Politics*, Aristotle makes the striking characterization of the life of contemplation, the *bios theorētikos*, as a *bios xenikos*, 'the life of an outsider' or living 'like an alien' (Arist. *Pol.* 1324a13–19). Perhaps the *phylax* we require, like the Classics and Humanities we look for, both practical and intellectual, is hard to imagine because it must sustain oppositions in a way that has been difficult to conceive. The guardians Plato's Socrates wants his interlocutor to begin imagining are of such a composite, paradoxical nature:

Οὐκ ἐννεοήκαμεν ὅτι εἰσὶν ἄρα φύσεις οἷας ἡμεῖς οὐκ ᾤθημεν, ἔχουσαι τάναντία ταῦτα.

We have not considered that there are such natures as we did not conceive, which contain these opposites.

Pl. *Resp.* 375d6–7

A decolonized Classics for Africans will not be the indignant assumption of the rights of the native and the new insider, so magnanimously admitted, but a delighted reconciliation to the life of the permanent metic, the life that is marginal because it is contemplative, but also somehow—in fashions we still need to imagine before we ever realize—also engaged for the *polis*, a thinking life that is also an active life, of a 'nature such as we had not conceived, containing opposite properties'.

⁷ Chakravorty Spivak 2021: 23, italics added.

1.2 Classics in Post-Liberation Africa: Undoing or Entrenching Colonialist Education?

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's relevance: the great Kenyan literature debate

In the late nineteenth century, there was what was called a 'craze' for Classics, for learning Greek and Latin, amongst African peoples.⁸ Leon De Kock records the missionary educationalist James Stewart's dismissive remarks on this enthusiasm for what may have seemed the most prestigious form of education, but also something inherently equalizing, since other than doing their learning in English, White students are no more apt to be better than Black ones at learning such foreign languages and cultures as Greek and Latin, which are equidistant from all of us:

Educational equality is looked at as a step to further equality. There is such an idea existing among a small and not very satisfactory class. Hence there is a strong desire, almost amounting to a craze, for Latin and Greek among a few, though the amount of knowledge gained of such subjects is, of course, useless.⁹

Strikingly, Booker T. Washington, on the other side of the world, wrote something very similar in the same period:

During the whole of the Reconstruction period two ideas were constantly agitating in the minds of the coloured people, or, at least, in the minds of a large part of the race. One of these was the craze for Greek and Latin learning, and the other was a desire to hold office.¹⁰

For different reasons Washington came to similar conclusions about this 'craze' and its limited usefulness for Africans. We have been fortunate in our thinkers and writers in twentieth-century Africa. Nothing has seemed more natural to us, notwithstanding the Western person's bizarre idea that *they* are the most naturally 'freedom-loving' of peoples, than that we seek emancipation at all costs and that we determine our own political destinies and assert our right to the destinies of our minds and their education.

William Govan was the founding principal of Lovedale College, one of South Africa's first high schools for Black and White students. He unsuccessfully disputed against James Stewart, arguing for a broad education for African leaders, including both the practical—carpentry, wagon-making, agriculture—and the study of Classical Latin and Greek. Stewart's racist views prevailed; in a proto form of Bantu Education he wished to prescribe lower levels of education and no Greek or Latin for Blacks, and Govan resigned.¹¹ About 130 years after, and far away in East Africa, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o took a view about the study of literature in Africa permissive as the rather original Govan's had been: African education should be unlimited. For Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o it was not that Africans ought not to study foreign books but that we should not *only* study Greek and Latin, Jane Austen, and William Shakespeare to the exclusion of African oral literature and poetry and novels by Africans. In someone like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o we encounter the twentieth-century embodiment of these feelings. He asserted the dignity and worth of African literature and languages without denying the value of ancient literature from beyond our own continental shores. He did not suffer from that common affliction of lesser minds that only see things in zero-sum.

In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, he describes 'what has been called "the great Nairobi literature debate" on the teaching of literature in universities and schools.'¹² He uses this controversy to unfold some of the issues that to him are central in thinking about decolonizing the Humanities in Africa. He understood this in terms of *relevance*. To the Kenyan novelist and activist, it means 'what immediately underlies the politics of language in African literature; that is the

⁸ On Afro-American and Classics see Malamud 2019.

⁹ De Kock 1996: 90.

¹⁰ Washington 1901: 97.

¹¹ On William Govan see Govan 1875; Shepherd 1940; Quarrie 1958; Brock 1974. On this dispute with Stewart, see Lambert 2011: 99–100; Stewart 1903: 179.

¹² Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986: 89.

search for a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe. I shall call this a quest for “relevance.”¹³

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o wanted to ascertain what cultural material a liberated and decolonizing Africa ought to be reading, teaching, and engaging with, and what attitude to take towards that material. He was concerned that we reflect on the order in which things were presented to African minds, and how that ordering might alternatively reinforce or undermine imperialist assumptions about African knowledge and European knowledge. As a Marxist, but also simply as a sensible thinker committed to the irrefutably economic and social basis of systems of knowledge and assertions of value, he argued that those choices of material, and our interpretations of material, ‘will affect and be affected by the national and class bases of the choice and attitude [...] the national and class bases of our choice and perspective will affect and be affected by the philosophic base from which we look at reality, a matter over which there can never be any legislation.’¹⁴

Even if, to many today, the Marxist terms of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s critiques seem obsolete and his moral patterning of wicked bourgeois versus noble peasantry a simplification, these *are* the terms in which we must think of decolonization of Classics and the African Humanities: nation and class. The ‘great Nairobi debates’ were essentially about decolonizing education in Kenya, dismantling the idea that Kenya and Africa were an immature ‘extension of the West.’¹⁵ One James Stewart, head of the university English Department at the time, had put forth proposals to the faculty, which he introduced with words of special resonance to the African classicist. His department’s syllabus ‘*by its study of the historic continuity of a single culture throughout the period of the emergence of the west* makes it an important companion to History and to Philosophy and to Religious Studies.’¹⁶ The purported continuity and unity of the West and its emergence narrated as if an inevitability are all features of modern myth *passing* as history. Classics has played a major role in underwriting that performance.

If a single, historically continuous culture was going to be studied in Africa, ‘why can’t this be African?’, the Kenyan scholars reasonably asked. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o was critical of African institutions of higher education set up as ‘overseas extensions of the University of London in Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Kenya and Tanzania.’ They all taught the same story of English and the development of its literature from the sixteenth century to

Matthew Arnold’s quest for the sweetness and light of a hellenized English middle class; [...] T. S. Eliot’s high culture of an Anglo-Catholic feudal tradition, suspiciously close to the culture of the ‘high table’ and to the racial doctrines of those born to rule; the Leavisite selected ‘Great Tradition of English Literature’ and his insistence on the moral significance of literature; these great three dominated our daily essays.¹⁷

We who wish to characterize our Classics in Africa today and for a new age, to decolonize Classics, which for others has served as the cultural *ancilla* to the pretensions and snobberies of, for instance, ‘the hellenized English middle-class values’ that held sway in the colonial period, need to prepare responses to the ghosts of ancestors like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and the difficult questions that he and his fellow liberated Kenyan scholars put to their faculties. Raising his questions in a serious spirit goes much of the way to taking hold of a fuller kind of intellectual and pedagogical autonomy.

It is important to note that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o never demonized English and its literature, and never argued against the study and teaching of Classical literature in Africa. He only asked, and sensibly so, why African literatures and languages should not be studied as a priority. But he also argued against the parochialism and nativism that by now we have come to identify with the rapacious, anti-intellectual, neocolonial elites (they imprisoned Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o just as they harassed Fela Kuti and murdered Ken Saro-Wiwa), for whom Africa and Africanism are only Potemkin facades

¹³ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 87.

¹⁴ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 88.

¹⁵ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 89.

¹⁶ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 89, italics original.

¹⁷ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 90.

suborned opportunistically to manipulate, only ornamental devices, decoys, or crude rhetorical weapons with which to bang opportunistically against whatever they need to represent as hostile at any given moment.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o seemed to have nursed a fairly conventional view of the Classics. It was great literature, but not necessarily suitable because ‘unfamiliar’ to an African child and her immediate experience. In his *Writers in Politics*, he described three categories into which the literature taught in Africa may be seen to fall, first of which ‘was the great humanist and democratic tradition of European literature: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare ...’¹⁸ By now, we may hope, there are not many who understand and teach ancient poets as simply great geniuses in some unfolding of the human spirit and its triumphant, inevitable attainment of democratic and humanist values.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o rightly undermined the pretensions to universalism of Western criticism and put it memorably when he wrote of a ‘critical tradition that often presented these writers, Shakespeare included, as if they were *mindless geniuses*’.¹⁹ It is an underappreciated fact that Europeans themselves had to ‘decolonize’ Classics in the second half of the twentieth century, if that can mean that the descendants of Germanic, Celtic, and non-Metropolitan Barbarians had to learn to take a critical, a more maturely historical and less idealistic and unscientific attitude towards the cultures of Rome and Athens than they had done up until the decisive break with the anti-modern spirit of fascism after 1945. Philhellenism and recycled *Romanitas* were useful mortar and plaster in the construction of the modern nation-state idea. European philology itself had to learn to overcome the habitual condescension that humans take towards the past and earlier people, and its simplistic heroizing and mystification of Greek and Roman ‘genius’ as ‘miraculous’ and ‘glorious’, primal versions of the modern. The simplifications and enthusiasm of philhellenism and Romanism are facets of a colonialist or dominating disposition to talented but supposedly less developed forebears, whose accomplishments could only naturally be plundered for the museums of London, Berlin, Munich, and Paris and the nostalgic amusement of the ‘hellenized middle class’ of modernity.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o was arguing forcefully against Eurocentrism in Africa, against artificially exclusive curricula and supposedly universal values that displaced the local and African ones that had never received their due recognition. He correctly challenged the assumption of the primacy of the written word and affirmed the value of the oral, and what he called ‘orature’. That is a critical attitude that no student of Homeric and Pindaric poetry could fail to appreciate. He stood with his colleagues in Nairobi who argued that ‘the teaching of non-African literature in schools should aim to introduce the Kenyan student to *the world context of the black experience* [...] Given the nature of Kenyan society, we recommend that attention be paid to literature expressing the experience of a changing society, and that the variety of experience of different classes in society be covered.’²⁰ He saw literature as embodying our ‘struggle for a cultural identity’.²¹

The programme and vision of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and his bold colleagues, in that debate that unfolded from 1968 to 1974, represent not only just the kind of impulse that was required to seize intellectual agency and constitute a university syllabus designed to *culturally* decolonize, just as Africa was *politically* decolonizing. They also represent an earlier generation’s insights into what is at stake, and what kind of audacious and broad-minded thinking we need to transform Classics. But as much as we admire our predecessors and wish ourselves not to be condescending towards the past, we do enjoy certain advantages over them. We certainly do not live amongst many people who think of Aeschylus and Sophocles or Euripides and Vergil as ‘mindless geniuses’. And perhaps at our boldest we will not even think of them as narrowly European, and certainly not ‘White’. As Africans we understand the haughty colonial attitude modern Europeans used to take to ancient peoples as ‘mindless geniuses’ outside of history, for it is the idealizing obverse of the view they have taken of us: mindless children, outside of history, empty heads inhabiting empty country, *terra nullius*.

¹⁸ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 91.

¹⁹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 91, my italics.

²⁰ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 98–9.

²¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 98.

Terra nullius, it turns out, is inhabited by the cunning African Odysseus, a pioneer and survivor, 'Nobody' (*Outis*), in what is *terra Nullius* 'the country that belongs to Nobody'. To him antiquity may stand for something neither utopian and unhistorical, nor anything distorted and warped by recent historical biases, by the enslavement and colonization of African peoples, and our classification at the bottom of a spurious scale of cultural worth designed to justify that violence and sustain White economic and social-psychological advantage. Greeks and Romans can represent a circumvention, alternative possibilities, hospitable Phaeacians instead of those cannibalistic Laestrygonians of actual history, the English, Belgians, French, Arabs, and Germans.

Cultural and intellectual decolonization: that is not something ultimately possible, not in any literal sense. If we would take a tragic view of our history, there is no point in denying the absolute, overwhelming effect of the waves of colonization or trying to reconstitute the waves that have broken over our heads over the last centuries. As Abiola Irele put this, invoking Peter Ekeh's notion of 'the epochal character of colonialism', with a similar metaphor:

The colonial experience was not an interlude in our history, a storm that broke upon us, causing damage here and there but leaving us the possibility, after its passing, to pick up the pieces. It marked a sea-change of the historical process in Africa; it effected a qualitative re-ordering of life. It has rendered the traditional way of life no longer a viable option for our continued existence and apprehension of the world.²²

We are the products of centuries of violent globalization and disparities, for good and ill. As African and Afrophile classicists we might well offer in place of *decolonization* something no less *impossible* but more productively aporetic: *precolonization*. And this does not mean the retreat into supposedly traditional, authentic forms and idylls ('refusing history'), but a diverting of our energies from the futilities of any resistance that only takes on the terms of the colonialist project. And it is Greece most especially that may initially provide an imaginary *poros* or 'affordance' out of the aporetic confusions of colonialist and neocolonialist discourses that do not serve us, even to refute.

Antiquity offers Greater Africa the most effective circumventions, a way around the trivializations and distortions of modern racist historiographies and their premises of 'development', a route out of colonialist oppositions and dialectics, which can trap us into arguing on their own obstructive terms. Greece and Rome, appreciated as 'changing societies' shaped by class tensions and a world context, embody precolonial possibilities, alternatives, with emancipatory potential for the thinking African person and the community looking for ideas on how to reconstitute itself for a more fully realized emancipation. A postcolonial African, mental landscape may be very profitably irrigated by a Humanities and a Classics which is *preraced* and *precolonized*. Classics is uniquely well placed to contribute to that *precolonizing* of the African mind.

2. ENCLAVES: CULTURE WARS, CLASSICS AND THE PROMISE OF THE PRECOLONIZED MIND

In South Africa, the years following the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC (1990), and the negotiations for a transition to democracy (1992–94), were a time of great excitement, cathartic relief, and hopefulness. For a privileged minority it was a moment of terror at the prospect of democracy, a humane constitution, and the spectre of reprisals for three hundred and fifty years of colonial barbarity and impunity. The 1990s was a time of *transformation*, as we used to call *decolonization*. It was a period determining for the formation of new social and legal dispensations, a time of 'nation building', of founding a new republic reposed on a new liberal constitutionalism. Education and Classics have been grappling ever since with what it is they ought to be in this new world, or is that more precisely, this peninsular extension of the older world.

²² Irele 1987: 15.

In 1997 Richard Whitaker, as serving chairman of the Classical Association of South Africa (CASA), gave a speech in which he discussed the earlier example of T. J. Haarhoff, the racist founder of CASA, Classicist, and apartheid apologist, to approach the challenges facing a discipline that would not survive if it remained a ‘White enclave’:

Finally, to revert to the larger political question of the place of Classics in contemporary and future South Africa. It is, I think, obvious that one of our primary goals now must be to attract Black students to our subject and ensure that some of these students go on to postgraduate study and eventually become professional Classicists. If we cannot do this, if Classics remains the preserve of a White enclave, then it is hard to see a future for the subject in South Africa.²³

Twenty-five years later, people may well ask if Classics in South Africa, historically the country in Africa with the most extensive network of university Classics departments, and the most international, but almost wholly White, Classics ecosystem, still remains that ‘White enclave’. It remains as hard as ever to see not any future but the future, not only for Classics in Africa, but for the Humanities and for all kinds of ideas in Africa. African elites are anti-intellectualist, provincial, and petty-minded. And not many White classicists (Whitaker himself is a rare exception) have appreciated that young Africans are impatient to recreate the African world and its institutions, not merely run extensions and versions of the English university, as a machine of prestige for the reproduction of privilege.

As professional scrutinizers of the distant past, the problem of visualizing our future is what we take on when we think about decolonizing Classics. What is an African Classics to be in the larger African *polis*? It is a question that necessarily entails also thinking about the meanings of Classics, institutionally and culturally. In meditating on the answer, it should be noted, firstly, that the fundamental changes both so hoped for and so feared from our political liberation have in many important ways never transpired in South Africa, just as is true in other ways across the continent. Africa has not blossomed as we had hoped it would after liberation from the colonial powers. Structures of power, intellectual, social, and economic, remain largely in place as before. People in power have switched chairs and put on new hats and masks, but institutions, the vessels of the state, remain in many ways what they always were before: political power is centralized, organizational incompetence thwarts the possibilities of citizens with the same effects as racist exclusion once did, the fiction of the nation organizes political life and, in South Africa, is mobilized against metic Africans in ongoing xenophobic violence. Race and a racialized economy determine the social world. South Africa has the highest Gini coefficient in the world: it is the most economically disparate place on earth.²⁴ More broadly, we are very far from creating the well-organized polities required to realize freedom as something positive and not merely the absence of White colonial oppression.

Fifteen years after Whitaker worried about Classics in South Africa remaining a ‘White enclave’, Michael Lambert returned to the problem in concluding his 2011 *The Classics and South African Identities*.²⁵ Lambert pleaded for the setting aside of theory, the mire of the ‘the various -isms’, in the interests of what he called (referring to his discussion of J. M. Coetzee’s 2003 novel *Elizabeth Costello*) the *studia humanitatis*.²⁶ Interesting questions about what the Humanities will look like, how the human ought to be reconceived in Africa in the twenty-first-century Anthropocene, remain to be answered. It is not completely clear that the genteel *studia humanitatis* and its ideals will survive if they do not participate in that work of reconceiving, and why they ought to. Idealizing elite English institutions as models or what they may once have represented, repudiating theory, and regarding Classics as an element of some less sublunary education—*studia humanitatis*—may make it seem only the more an enclave of Whiteness, of unmerited privilege, its articulation and its reproduction as ‘culture’.

In his 2017 paper ‘The Classics, African Literature, and the Critics’, Roger Field did not eschew theoretical reflection in the interests of a noble-sounding notion of *studia humanitatis*.²⁷ Lambert’s ideal

²³ Whitaker 1997: 13.

²⁴ Access the World Bank Report, March 2022, for South Africa’s place in the rankings on the Gini Index. Available from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=ZA> accessed: 5 April 2022.

²⁵ Lambert 2011: 132.

²⁶ Lambert 2011: 126–9, 132.

²⁷ Field 2017: 73–95.

of the Humanities may have much that does it credit, but it can also bring to mind Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's remarks about Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, and F. R. Leavis. Field, by contrast, discussed the challenges of a teacher of Greek and Roman antiquity in a transforming African university, and reflected on African thinking about Greece in Abiola Irele, V. Y. Mudimbe, and Richard Whitaker's own 'Southern African translations' of Homer. Irele's critique of 'cultural nationalism' and the 'mystique of traditional forms of life' to which it leads, of 'the refusal of history', and his conception of Humanities and Classics as representing, by their very nature, a challenge to the parochialism of African cultural nationalism, offers us one exemplary path out of our intellectual impasses.²⁸ Mudimbe's engagements with, for instance, Sophocles, picking up the thread of Fanon's Oedipus, and with Herodotus—although we may disagree with his conclusions—represent a rich resource for Africans in developing and extending our own traditions of reinterpretation of Greek ideas.²⁹ And Whitaker's Homer represents a very hopeful step towards taking possession of Hellenic culture by Africans, in place of the surrendering to Fanonian anxieties about becoming 'possessed' by it or over its 'authenticity'.³⁰ Field offers the kind of discussion informed by African theory rather than the repudiation of theory that ought to stand as a model for serious decolonizing projects in Classics and African Humanities.

In their edited volume *South Africa, Greece, Rome: Classical Confrontations* (Cambridge, 2018), Grant Parker and his contributors reckoned with the legacies of Classics and its political meanings in the context of an African country still organized by colonial configurations of power and riven not only by deep corruption, xenophobia, and inequality, but by the most recent permutation of the 'culture wars': fallism.³¹ In the age in which an outgoing US president would pass an executive order titled 'Promoting Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture' mandating that henceforth all federal buildings be constructed on the model of 'Classical' architecture and not to 'ugly and inconsistent' modernist criteria, political life is evidently preoccupied with the gesture and symbol. It has become conspicuous that we live in a time of prevailing Potemkinism, of contests over facades and, in turn, activism that is often iconoclasm.

If we left the statues of slavers and colonialists like Rhodes to stand as reminders to ourselves of our past inequalities but militated as vociferously for an end today to xenophobia, inequality, and the impunity of the venal and incompetent ruling elites of Africa, we might come a lot closer to a truly and not merely symbolically or gesturally decolonized polity than we are. Classics decolonizing must be aware of these different possibilities, between tussles over representation and identity, on the one hand, and commitment to philosophizing, historicizing, and meaningfully participating in the kind of African *polis* we have been wishing to see arise, on the other. With its inherently *precolonizing* potentials, Classics has a great deal to contribute in this if it does not betray its own possibilities.

2.1 Urgentibus imperii fatis: Tribe, Nation, Race, Civilization

What's wrong with racism? Racism is the basis of a nationality. Nations are, upon the whole, united by identity with one another, the self-identification of our citizens, and that's normally due to similarities which are regarded as racial differences.

Classicist, teacher, and politician Enoch Powell³²

It was once said somewhere that, amongst the many things that Hitler destroyed, he robbed the Germans of their freedom to express political passion and to create political mythologies (which need not be in themselves inherently negative). After that very emotional, hysterical German despot, the intrusion of strong emotions into politics in Germany was not merely an acute embarrassment but invoked the catastrophic emotionalism that everyone would rather wish to forget. Similarly, one may argue that one of the things that colonialism robbed us of in Africa was the tribe and its intimacies as a legitimate or worthy unit of the political imaginary. The intimacies of the local and the linguistic

²⁸ Cf. Irele 1987: 'mystique' 22; 'refusal of history' 14.

²⁹ See Mudimbe 2016, esp. 89–182.

³⁰ Whitaker 2012, 2017.

³¹ See also Masters et al. 2022; and for a critique of 'fallism' see in that volume Van Schoor 2022.

³² For these remarks made in an interview when asked about his famous 'Rivers of Blood' speech, see Shepherd 1998: 365.

commons have had to be forfeited because the obverse of local fellow feeling, parochialism and xenophobia, can so easily be turned to the advantage of the imperial and colonial and now neocolonial project to divide and conquer. We have had to create a new identity, operative at a higher, overarching, universalizing level—Blackness. But it should be possible to acknowledge that we may lose certain valuable things when we submit to certain counter-colonial exigencies.

For the colonists liked to see Africans senselessly inimical to each other, for outwardly trivial reasons. And strategically, emphasizing our tribal differences from one another was good politics to keep us divided and docile. The Romans in antiquity recognized the same strategic opportunity in what seemed to them the infantile inter-tribal conflicts of the Germanic peoples they wished to conquer and colonize. Hence, Tacitus in his *Germania* wrote of the spectacle of northern European barbarians killing one another, a lesson and an opportunity for Rome:

The Bructeri were driven out and utterly cut to pieces by a coalition of neighbouring peoples, who either hated their arrogance or were attracted by the prospect of booty—unless it was through some special favour of the gods towards us, for they did not even begrudge us being spectators of the battle. Over sixty thousand were killed, *not by Roman swords or spears, but, what was far more splendid, to gladden Roman eyes*. Long may the barbarians continue, I pray, if not to love us, at least to hate one another, seeing that, *as fate bears remorselessly on the empire (urgentibus imperii fatis)*, fortune can offer no greater boon now than discord among our enemies.

Tac. *Ger.* 33

African thinkers have rightly rejected both tribalism and the accusation that we are especially susceptible to tribalism.³³ It took a truly original thinker like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o at once to refute the tribalist narrative and to affirm the local, as for instance the indigenous language and its value, as a vehicle for literary expression. But what would Tacitus make of us today? Will we seem ‘to love’ the Romans, some of them surely? Judging by the flourishing xenophobia in a country like South Africa today, the new form of discordant tribalism in Africa is nationalist chauvinism. Fate still bears remorselessly on the imperialist imperatives, even after the withdrawal of the Empire.

In 2011, as we have seen above, the classicist Michael Lambert published a work which places the idea of identity at the centre of its focus, as an illuminating device for telling the story of Classics in South Africa. But he sectioned that history using the very categories of colonialism and apartheid: English Whites, Afrikaans Whites, and various Blacks. In so doing he effectively reinscribed those particular tribalisms into an intellectual history, which may more persuasively have worked against and denatured those willed, cultural, and political categories.

In *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), by contrast, the Ugandan thinker Mahmood Mamdani argues against the ‘politicization of cultural identity’. In his chapter ‘Decolonizing the Political Community’, he offers insights into the political ideas we have inherited, and which continue to organize our polities, and suggests what it will take to undo them. Mamdani insightfully observes that when ‘writers on African affairs often bemoan the artificial boundaries drawn by colonial powers—artificial in that they cut across cultural communities’, they are in fact reinforcing ‘colonial modernist ideologies’. That ‘modernist ideology’ preserves the idea of the nation state at its very core. It is an essential feature of colonialism and the neocolonialist context of Africa today. If Classics only participates in or works to underwrite *the politicization of cultural identity* rather than the historicizing and philosophizing of the *polis* and *polis* culture, then it will remain only a flywheel in the machinery of a chronically *colonialist* economy of institutions and knowledge.

The great challenge facing Africa today is to rid our polities of inequality, xenophobia, tribalism, nationalism, nativism, and the chaos in which corruption is thriving. Mamdani’s work is a call to *reimagine and reconstitute* our political world in order to meet these emergencies:

³³ See, for example, Biko 1978: 29–30. Cf. Irele 1987: 22.

Ethnic political communities were created by colonizers drawing lines between culturally distinct peoples and subjecting them to law said to be customary. The tribal governance that activists seek to protect reflects the politicization of cultural identity. These are not the political communities of precolonial times. *The challenge facing anti-colonialists, then, is to reimagine political community without colonial categories and reform polities on this basis.*

This is the challenge of decolonizing the political: stripping away the nation, or the tribe as nation, as a locus of political identification and commitment [...] In place of the nation, I have argued, we might imagine a new political community, one that would acknowledge changes that marked the colonial period and engage these productively.³⁴

The African classicist, the close reader of some of the most original traditions of philosophizing political life, the historian of the constant and often thwarted human effort to forge and hold together communities, has important contributions to make to this project. Its fundamental task defines real and not specious decolonizing: imagining and constituting a new political community. Just as the Greek dreamt of pan-Hellenic commonwealth, so we have long dreamt of a pan-African commonwealth, and while we lament Berlin 1884–85, we still have not succeeded in realizing an African polity that transcends the meaningless and deleterious national boundaries that only serve political elites today, as once they served colonial powers. Making such contributions will be the way in which the decolonizing imperative will be most meaningfully met by philologists. We might dispense with ‘civilization’ as an undertheorized, received set of values and counter-values and related political emotions, and instead commit ourselves to the civic and Classics as one resource in the formulation of a new African civility. As often in the past, it will be to scholars outside of Classics, thinkers like Mahmood Mamdani, Achille Mbembe, Édouard Glissant, Paul Gilroy, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that we will turn most helpfully to understand what will be involved and required in more substantially contributing to the common project of decolonizing.

We ought also to keep in mind today that there will be different forms of decolonization to meet the different experiences and phases of colonialism that afflict different parts of Greater Africa. In Africa, what we *can* say generally is that we all need positive ideas with which to recreate and make a new world, not the exported grievances and monetized polemics of Western conservatism or its liberal adversaries. In Africa we need thought and contemplation and space for lives committed to dialogue and understanding nature and the human *polis*. The culture-wars model may provide material in the economy of the northern academy and its southern imitators, but for us in Africa what is at issue is the substantial transformation of the political community and the social economy that needs to be recreated. This will entail transforming political emotions into new political visions and visions into a new reality of equality for a place that has never known liberation in its fullness.

3. CONCLUSION: LIBERATION PHILOLOGY OR NEW SUBALTERN S GETTING KNOWLEDGE

We should avoid overstating the political value of what we do, as scholars of ancient literature and history. Nonetheless, we ought not to act as if our tasks were merely to improve minds in a vacuum. Classics is political and the Humanities is political. How they are so, or ought to be, is a question that deserves ongoing reflection and fuller treatment. Amalasuintha understood it as did her enemies; Plato, Aristotle, J. T. Jabavu and James Stewart, Du Bois, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and T. J. Haarhoff, Fanon and Hani, Valentin Mudimbe and Whitaker all appreciated that education, the syllabus, its priorities, and the attitude it inculcates will be determining for our polities and they must be all the more imaginatively determined by ourselves.

In concluding, we turn one last time to Chakravorty Spivak and her exemplary association of ‘deep language learning’ (an excellent formulation of what Classics at its best will be) with a ‘practical humanities model’:

³⁴ Mamdani 2020: 328, italics added.

I realized through this novel that the model of deep language learning is not just the institutional humanities model of comparative literature, but the practical humanities model of these so-called illegal immigrants—a global phenomenon, a group that I have described as ‘the new subaltern.’ I believe that the sensibility trained in the humanities as I have been describing them, can also begin to see that the border between the new subaltern and disciplinized humanities teachers and students is an unstable border.³⁵

Decolonizing and decolonized classicists may well consider ourselves as ‘so-called illegal immigrants’ of the virtual *polis* of intellectual life in the twenty-first century, as elective ‘new subalterns’ engaging or developing Classics as some kind of ‘practical humanities model.’ We may be at our most decolonized and decolonizing when traversing and commuting between the unstable borders of the disciplines and when extending those forms of intellectual and actual hospitality—*euxenia*—to our fellow Africans. That will stand as the most complete antithesis of colonialism, the most consummate recent permutation of which has been that hideous betrayal of the pan-African ideal: xenophobia.

Ridding Classics of the colonial could be the work of a pioneering effort to transform the Humanities and reimagine the future university as a node in a web of letters and their lively exchange. Our precolonized Classics, if it strives to become such a model of knowledge-gathering, engagement, and rediffusion, would be a strong tonic, a muti or *pharmakon* against the zombie of colonialism that has refused to die. In 1911 D. T. Jabavu, a Latin teacher who inspired generations of students at Fort Hare, the son of John Tengu Jabavu and the father of the novelist Noni Jabavu, attended the first ‘Universal Races Congress’ in London.³⁶ That was a kind of predecessor to the first Pan-African Congress in London in 1921, organized by the educationalist and vocal promoter of Classics education for Black students W. E. B. Du Bois.

The Hellenist William Scarborough, who was born into slavery and who elected to raise himself up by participating in the long, global tradition of interpreting Greek utterances, also participated in that first congress. In the persons and experiences of these outstanding figures of the African diaspora, of *Africa Magna* or Greater Africa as we have been calling it, come together the different lines that we have discerned in the challenge of a decolonized Classics and a decolonized Humanities for Africans. The African Classicists Network (ACN), recently constituted by Samantha Masters at Stellenbosch University in the very south of continental Africa, in a small but important way, reanimates that spirit of Pan-African congresses, in our context as educationalists in Classics of Africa. We may hope that the ACN represents a step towards closer and more intimate, intellectual relations, without borders between persons in Africa who care about ideas, Greece and Rome, and Africa.

This volume represents another one of such small steps that scholarship in Africa is taking towards that future. The five papers here are all case studies, and they divide into three sections. Section One consists of two papers on Ghana, which highlight the global value of the classical tradition, Africa’s place in this tradition, and the relevance of the tradition to Africans. Section Two comprises two papers which attempt a deconstruction of colonial and postcolonial Eurocentric readings which tend to appropriate the Classical tradition through racial subtones and hegemonic tropes. The sole paper of Section Three provides a study of how Classics syllabi may be diversified, democratized, and decolonized. All five papers draw or converge on a common theme: that the classical tradition has a global scope and Africa is an integral part of it; consequently, Africa and African scholars have a legitimate right to draw upon and share in this tradition to serve their specific needs and interests.

Section One

In his paper, ‘Classics and the politics of Africanization in Ghana,’ **Michael K. Okyere Asante** provides a historical overview of Ghana’s version of (a) the ideological crusade of African leaders, upon the attainment of political independence, to decolonize and Africanize the education system as a whole and (b) the responses to this ideological crusade by classicists and the Department of Classics at the University of Ghana—the entire narrative illuminated and enriched by similar responses at the

³⁵ Chakravorty Spivak 2021: 26.

³⁶ On D. D. T. Jabavu, see Claasen 2018: 353–75.

Department of Classics, University of Ibadan, which has faced the same ideological pressure since Nigeria attained political independence.

In respect of (a), Kwame Nkrumah saw the project of decolonizing the education system as a 'means of emancipating the people both in thought and action.' Institutions of higher learning, which are to play a vanguard role in this project, have to be fully fledged universities of national and African character—in terms of curriculum design, personnel, pedagogy, and research—in order to build capacity for the solution of African problems through African perspectives.

In respect of (b), responses to the decolonization and Africanization project have ranged from occasional seminal or revealing remarks by individual classicists to scholarship, and to curriculum revisions at the institutional level. The immediate postcolonial era (both in Ghana and Nigeria) witnessed the (re)conception of the Classics as part of human history or world civilization in which all have a right to share; the centring of Africa in classical antiquity through scholarship; and in Ghana the promotion of curricula and programme diversity by allowing Classics and Classical Studies to be paired with other subjects in degree programmes. In 1969 D. J. O. H. Macqueen, then a Canadian faculty member of the Department of Classics, University of Ghana, reflected these shifts in orientation as constituting 'the trans-valuation of Classical studies in Ghana', in the light of the contemporary African scene. Current scholarly responses to this transvaluation enterprise in Ghana and Nigeria have been predominantly comparative and interdisciplinary studies of Greco-Roman and African cultures and the production of textbooks in Classical Studies that purport to resonate with the needs and experiences of African students.

Responding to the Humanities crisis, the University of Ghana Faculty of Arts in 2003 attempted a five-year strategic restructuring 'to boost confidence in and grow the Humanities' in general. The strategic elements of the plan included emphasis on interdisciplinarity, developing and committing to cross-listed courses, redesigning curricula and courses for the industrial market, merging and/or reclassifying faculties, staff training, research, knowledge dissemination, and, where required, change of nomenclature. In constructing its own strategic plan to fit, the Department of Classics contemplated the adaptation of the Faculty Strategic Plan, including adopting a new curriculum, which included African civilizations, to match a new name, which emphasized the classical foundation of the Humanities. However, these strategic efforts collapsed in 2010 when the University of Ghana took a decision to merge Classics and Philosophy into a single department with a single programme space, thereby limiting both the number of courses that can be offered per semester and the potential for diversifying the curriculum.

For Classics to survive the threats of growing Pan-Africanism, the Humanities crisis, and the nagging question of relevance, Okyere Asante advocates a return to the immediate postcolonial responses to the decolonization and Africanization project—responses which include the (re)conception of Classics as part of 'a world civilization' in which African and other civilizations are integral components of comparative weight. In this (re)conception, the appeal and value of comparative and reception studies in scholarship will have little impact unless they are incorporated into curriculum design, because it is at the level of teaching that students first get their misconceptions about Classics or their first perceptions of its relevance and progressive nature.

Barbara Goff's paper focuses on the late Prof. A. A. Kwapong, a Ghanaian practitioner of Classics in postcolonial modernity and the first African Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana (1966–71). It is significant that Kwapong's academic career straddled colonial and postcolonial times, as this casts some light on the reception of Classics in Africa in both times. In colonial times, Classics competed with vocational subjects like Medicine, Law, and Engineering. Besides, Classics was idealized by the colonizers; it was the staple of the educated elite; and it was seen to prepare the individual for a variety of possible professional careers. This glorifying attitude towards Classics changed dramatically following the attainment of political independence in Ghana: for political purposes of national development, government policy on Higher Education saw Classics as a colonial subject that needed to be decolonized and Africanized.

This paper indicates that Kwapong's response to the policy of decolonization and Africanization is reflected in his academic works and was, to an extent, rooted in his personality. This latter view is

suggested by Goff's portrait of the young Kwapong as one who had a broad or global sense of humanity and did not feel his identity and agency diminished or threatened by European culture and civilization. In this respect, his academic distinctions in Classics at Achimota School and at Cambridge are as important a reflection of his agency and identity as were his travel adventures in Europe. As Goff puts it: 'Kwapong's account of his life in England, and his holiday travels in Europe, are impervious to any note of colonial or racial prejudice'; and 'when any attention is drawn to his racial identity or skin colour, it is represented as friendly and unthreatening'. This embracing attitude to humanity is, however, more explicitly expressed in Kwapong's scholarship: rather than moralize about the Greco-Roman and Punic colonization of North Africa, he 'puts Africa at the centre' of those accounts, seeking 'to retrieve African agency' and identity 'from readings of African history, so that the classical texts are seen to be resources for African self-understanding and identity'.

Because Kwapong saw humanity rather than racial identities, he did not see Classics as 'an elegant foreign tradition' and as a colonial heritage, but as part of a global culture, of which Africa is an integral component. To decolonize in his sense is, first of all, to reject or ignore Western claims about the Classics as 'the origins of [their] own society' or 'the fountainhead of Western civilization in order to clear the way for seeing the Classics as 'a vital part of human history' and for stressing both its civilizational contents—its philosophical, literary, linguistic, and culture insights—and the relevance of these contents to modern life.

Section Two

This section comprises the papers of Katherine Blouin and David van Schoor. In her paper, titled 'Storying early Alexandria: occluded histories, colonial fantasies', **Katherine Blouin** argues that most of the European(ized) narratives on the foundations and early history of Alexandria are not only Eurocentric and colonial but also binary in structure, involving a racialized othering in which Europe and Europeans are superior while the Other, Egypt and Egyptians, are inferior.

Blouin provides a chronological survey of the European(ized) historiographical tradition, dating from classical antiquity, regarding the landscape and occupation of the site of Alexandria prior to and at the time of the city's foundation—to indicate the hegemonistic narratives, and what she calls the 'enduring aggregate of Eurocentric tropes and colonial occlusions' in those accounts. Blouin then refers to pre-Hellenic written evidence which attests to pre-Alexandrian Egyptian settlements, and to recent georchaological data of 'presumably' (Blouin's word) pre-Hellenistic Egyptian urban and harbour settlements in the vicinity of Alexandria—data that, Blouin laments, have attracted little or no attention in classical scholarship.

David van Schoor's paper, 'For an African elenchus: colonial and post-colonial misprisions and Classics in Africa', attempts a refutation (hence, an elenchus) of two prevalent errors of interpretation—Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism—to point the way forward for future Humanities and Classics in Africa. He sees the way forward in the symbolism of Dionysus—not the misprised, static Nietzschean opposite to Apollo—but Dionysus in his/its 'true' Protean and centrifugal character, which translates politically into the presence and/or celebration of diversity and egalitarianism, and epistemically into the pluralism of perspectives.

Van Schoor refers to the classicizing UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson (2006, 2015) and Edward Said (1978)—to exemplify the occluded and binary structure of their European(ized) readings of the classical canon. On Johnson's celebration of humanism in Greek art and drama and the denigration of theriomorphism in Egyptian art, Van Schoor argues that it is proleptic and colonial, in that Greek drama in general does not have Johnson's unqualified and progressive view of human capacities; rather, it is structured by a 'dark irony' whose default setting is the metaphysical belief that the highest human potential is also the source of its most tragic failings. Besides, Van Schoor seeks to expose the racial undertones of Johnson's comparison of Greek and Egyptian art by invoking Aescyhlus' *Persians* and *Suppliants*, in which 'lines of kinship and ethnicity are blurred', while the Dionysus at Thebes symbolizes 'the complication if not the subversion of the polarities Greek and non-Greek'.

Van Schoor also considers as rigid and proleptic Edward Said's pseudo-Homeric distinction between the West and the East in his *Orientalism*: there is no evidence in Homer of ethnic determinism

or a rigid East–West binary; Trojans and foreigners are often depicted with humane sympathy in Homer and Greek literature as a whole; and Greek reception of numerous Eastern mythic traditions is attested. Van Schoor indicates that Said’s interpretation of Greek drama (Aeschylus’ *Persians* and Euripides’ *Bacchae*) is infected with the same rigid and proleptic East–West binary, in which the West symbolizes rationality and the East, by implication, the contrary.

Van Schoor calls upon future African classicists and humanists to resist the centrists’ interpretive appropriation of the classical canon through reliance on the original sources and the practice of close rereadings, in search of insights that are historical and often unexpected and that dynamize our relations with them and their always new, never absolutely final meanings.

Section Three

In this section, **Elena Giusti**’s paper, ‘Africa and the making of classical literature: on decolonizing Greco-Roman literature syllabi’, shares the experience of her effort in designing a curricular module intended as a response to ‘the global calls to diversify, democratize, and decolonize the Classics’. The module divides into two sections, each covering a semester. The first is dedicated to ‘centring Africa in Greco-Roman texts’, showing how a curricular module on the African presence in and reception of Greco-Roman literature may be designed to scrutinize ‘what is at stake when a culture or a language has the power to objectify others through specific linguistic and narrative choices’, and ‘ways in which colonial structures of thinking have informed the history of the discipline as well as the making of classical literature’. These complementary approaches give breadth, depth, and diachronic relevance to the Classical canon, as they are harnessed to focus reflection on interrelated issues of contemporary personal and social experience—issues of racism, xenophobia, colonialism, identity, origins, hybridity, empire, ethnic stereotyping, and the construction of the other.

The second section of Giusti’s module deals with how to centre Africa through postcolonial literature, and it is structured to exemplify how to attempt a recovery of subaltern identities (local Egyptian or Berber audience) from relevant literary texts of the Greco-Roman tradition, through modern literary frameworks, concepts borrowed from postcolonial theories, and/or through the reception of the classical tradition by Romanized North African authors (Apuleius, Tertullian, and Augustine). According to Giusti, the application of postcolonial concepts and theories creates opportunities for reflecting on the continuities or discontinuities between ancient and modern imperialism, on decolonization, on how these connect to the Classics, on the extent to which the Classics are implicated in European colonization, cultural imperialism, and anti-colonial resistance.

The papers in this volume do not in any way exhaust the conversations on decolonizing Classics in Africa; while the volume was originally planned to include eleven papers, the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic affected the lives and daily activities of our contributors. But for what we have been able to produce, we hope that this attempt will lead to a more sustained and serious conversation on decolonizing Classics in Africa, including what we can learn from the history of Classics in Africa and what strategies, challenges, and prospects there are for us to navigate.