

## CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS • VOORSITTERSREDE

ON RAINBOWS AND BUTTERFLIES: THE CLASSICS, THE  
HUMANITIES AND AFRICA \*

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of teaching the Humanities and, in particular, the Classics, in a post-colonial African context, has been the subject of intense debate within South African and African universities. In this paper, I contribute to this debate by considering how the University of Ibadan in Nigeria has appropriated the classical tradition in a post-colonial context, and what classicists in South Africa can learn from the Ibadan *exemplum*. A brief discussion of the complex patron-client relationships, which underpin the survival of a strong Department of Classics at Ibadan, is intended to suggest how local cultural politics, inextricably linked to the history of the institution and the department, will affect the transformation of the curricula within African universities. Departments of Classics at South African universities will have to negotiate their *own* paths to transformation as they reflect on why Classical Studies should continue to be taught in their specific South African contexts.

'There's a rainbow outside, sir. Have you seen it? What's the Greek for a rainbow?'

'Something to do with the goddess, Iris, I imagine. Ἴρις, I suspect. Thus *arcoiris* in Spanish.'

'And Latin?'

'The same, surely. Iris.'

'And butterfly?'

'I really don't know. Why are you asking me this?'

'I saw one yesterday for the first time in ages. I know from my Italian course that it's *farfalla* in Italian.'

'And *mariposa* in Spanish. *Borboleta* in Portuguese.'

'And *papillon* in French, sir.'

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'Well, I don't think that the Romance languages are going to help us.  
Mind you, there is *papilio* which is Latin for a moth.'  
'And a butterfly, sir. I've just googled it.'

Mulling over such an exchange, typical in an introductory class in the classical languages, when eyes begin to glaze over at the very mention of the Imperfect Indicative Middle of contract verbs and one of the class chatterboxes, genuinely interested in etymology, attempts a diversionary tactic, I thought that such a conversation could have happened anywhere; there was nothing in this exchange which marked it out as specifically South African or British or American or European. In addition, the use of Google in the classroom simply underlined the universality of this contemporary learning situation: this was globalised education, an instance of the teaching of a classical language transcending national barriers. But if I were to 'problematise' this conversation and were to mention that the teacher is a white male South African, that the student is also a white male, but not South African, that the location is one redolent of class and privilege, evident in the range of languages referred to, then the apparently innocent conversation about rainbows and butterflies is not so innocent after all, but becomes immured in the discourses of race, class, gender and power which haunt us all, and, in particular, the teaching of Classics in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> To rainbows and butterflies I shall return, but I would like to begin by directing your gaze beyond our borders, northwards, for some north-south dialogue.

Mahmood Mamdani, currently Director of the Makerere Institute of Social Research at Makerere University in Uganda, has argued, in a keynote address on the importance of research in a university, that the market-driven model dominant in African universities has nurtured a 'consultancy culture' which has had a negative impact on the quality of postgraduate education and research.<sup>2</sup> Mamdani writes:

Today intellectual life in universities has been reduced to bare-bones classroom activity. Extra-curricular seminars and workshops have migrated to hotels. Workshop attendance goes with transport allowances and per diem. All this is part of a larger process, the NGO-ization of the university. Academic papers have turned into

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<sup>1</sup> See Lambert 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Delivered at a Research and Innovations Dissemination Conference held at Makerere University, Uganda (27 April 2011). Distributed to staff members at UKZN as a Vice-Chancellor's communiqué entitled 'The Importance of Research in a University.'

corporate-style power-point presentations. Academics read less and less. A chorus of buzz words has taken the place of lively debates.

Mamdani goes on to suggest that the most important question confronting higher education in Africa today is 'what it means to teach humanities and social sciences ... in the post-colonial African context.' 'What does it mean,' he asks, 'to teach humanities and social sciences in a location where the dominant intellectual paradigms are products not of Africa's own experience, but of a particular Western experience?'<sup>3</sup> As an antidote to the consultancy culture, which results in information gathering in order to answer pre-packaged research problems, Mamdani makes a plea for the return to what he calls 'basic' research, which, as the above question illustrates, is 'to identify and question assumptions that drive the very process of knowledge production.' Illustrating the fact that Africa, not Europe or North America will have to produce the bulk of Africa's postgraduates, Mamdani cites the case of Nigeria, which had one university with 1 000 students at independence, but thirty years later, in 1991, had 41 universities with 131 000 students. The sheer weight of numbers alone demonstrates that the colonial model of 'first degree in Africa and postgraduate degree overseas' is simply no longer feasible or desirable for the majority of African graduates; Africans must develop their own postgraduate programmes for Africans which may well engage with Western intellectual paradigms, but must ceaselessly interrogate them.

Whilst Mamdani does not directly refer to the study of the Classics in his paper, I would like to tease out some of the implications of Mamdani's arguments for us, as classicists here in South Africa, by focusing on my experiences in 2012 at the only Department of Classics at a Nigerian university – the University of Ibadan.

The University of Ibadan, situated in the south-west of the country some 120 kilometres from Lagos, is the oldest university in Nigeria (established in 1948) and positions itself in the contending marketplace of Nigerian universities (federal, state and private) as the 'first and the best' and as 'a foremost centre of research in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa'.<sup>4</sup> Although Ibadan is no longer the premier university in Nigeria

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<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Mazrui, more than twenty years ago: '... there is a crisis of identity confronting every modern African university – and the mystique of ancient Greece is at the heart of it' (Goff 2013:190).

<sup>4</sup> For the history of the University of Ibadan, see Goff 2013:187-88. For a detailed account of the history of the Department of Classics at the University of Ibadan, see the *Students Handbook* 2012:1-5, published by the Department.

(international ratings rank the University of Lagos higher) or indeed in sub-Saharan Africa, where it has been eclipsed by some South African universities, it is still the best-known Nigerian university internationally and is proudly conscious of its glory days. Like the University of Zimbabwe, Ibadan had a special relationship with the University of London and between 1950 and 1964 offered four-year Honours degrees which were monitored and awarded by London University. For postgraduate work in these years, students were usually sent to London or other well-known universities in the United Kingdom.

In keeping with the British colonial tradition, the Department of Classics, along with English, History and Religious Studies was one of the foundation departments in the Faculty of Arts. Of the members of staff in the London period (1950-1964), most had degrees from Oxford, Cambridge and London. Important names from this period you may know are Professors J. Ferguson (1956-1966) and L. Thompson (1956-1995), who laid the rigorous foundation for the first generation of Nigerian classicists at the university, beginning with Professor Ilevbare, who, as Professor of Greek Language, was associated with Classics at Ibadan from 1965-2004 and was the first member of staff to have a doctorate from Ibadan (on 'Aspects of cultural assimilation in North Africa in the Carthaginian and Roman periods').<sup>5</sup> With Ibadan, classicists at UKZN share Professor K.D. White (another Cambridge graduate) who, after he left Pietermaritzburg in 1962, spent three years at Ibadan.

What was important during the years of Ferguson and Thompson was that both appreciated that, if the study of the Classics was to survive in post-colonial Nigeria, Africa had to have an important place in the degree programme. As early as 1962, the year in which the University attained its autonomy, a compulsory course on Africa in Classical Antiquity was included in the degree programme. Furthermore, in the sixties, less emphasis was placed on the study of Latin and Greek and more on what we call Classical Civilisation courses, especially on courses which focused on the interaction of the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean basin with Africa and the Near East.<sup>6</sup> A further stimulus to research in this period was the establishment of the journal *Nigeria and the Classics* as early as 1958 (the same year as *Acta Classica*). The journal, which ceased publication in 1971, was resuscitated by the Department at Ibadan in 1994 and has become an interesting and lively forum for comparative studies of ancient Greek/Roman and Nigerian mythologies and literatures, as well as studies of social, political, economic, philosophical and other

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<sup>5</sup> *Students Handbook* 2012:34. See also Ilevbare 1970:80-85; 1973:24-44; 1980.

<sup>6</sup> *Students Handbook* 2012:2-3.

issues in antiquity which resonate in some way with the complexities of modern Nigerian society.<sup>7</sup>

In the late sixties and early seventies, the Department of Classics concentrated on developing its own post-graduate programme and producing a brace of home-grown doctoral graduates, who have shaped the current generation of classicists at Ibadan. By 1998, the staff complement had grown to eight, the highest since 1963 – it now stands at eleven. Of these, ten have degrees from Ibadan, mostly doctorates, and many externally examined by the two universities in Ghana which offer Classics (Legon and Cape Coast). The topics of most theses (both masters and doctorates) reveal the extent of the comparative emphasis at Ibadan: 'Portraits of women in Roman and Nigerian drama' (MPhil 1997); 'Fear of women's beauty in Classical and African/Yoruba literature' (PhD 2001); 'Superstition in Classical and Yoruba thoughts' (PhD 2007); 'Socio-political and moral issues in Roman and Nigerian satires' (PhD 2007); 'Economic motives in Roman Imperialism in Africa' (PhD 2010); 'Social mobility in Roman Tripolitania' (MA 2003); and 'The patron-client relationship in the late Roman republic and "godfatherism" in contemporary Nigerian politics' (current PhD registration).<sup>8</sup>

Although much of this research has found its way into courses currently offered at Ibadan, courses such as 'Greek Civilisation in Africa and the Near-East'; 'Ancient History and Archaeology of North-East Africa'; 'Ancient History and Archaeology of the Maghreb' and 'Roman Law and International Relations', traditional courses in Greek and Latin language and literature, as well as Greek and Latin Epigraphy and Historiography, are offered at various levels. Basic degrees are still four-year degrees and, in the teaching of the classical languages, typically two years would be spent on acquiring the basics of the language, before proceeding to study of the literatures in context in the final two years. The MA is a taught course with a number of compulsory courses aimed at improving the candidates' knowledge of Greek and Latin before they proceed to the MPhil and the PhD which require dissertations. MPhil candidates have to have a reading knowledge of either French or German

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<sup>7</sup> As some of the titles of articles in a recent edition (2009) of the journal illustrate: 'The philosophical significance of Roman and Igbo marriage rites', 'Transculturalism in the choral songs of Euripides' *Trojan Women* and Osofisan's *Women of Owu*', 'Re-enacting Oedipus Rex with Yoruba witticism'. Monographs by a member of the department also reveal the comparative nature of classical research at Ibadan: see Onayemi 2004, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> *Student Handbook* 2012:34-38.

and doctoral candidates have to be familiar with French, German and/or Italian.

With eleven members of staff and a plethora of courses on offer which would be the envy of many a European or American university (let alone a South African one), one would imagine that the student enrolment is very high.<sup>9</sup> This is not the case. Of the 20 000 students at Ibadan, about 2 500 are enrolled for degrees offered in the Arts Faculty (12.5%).<sup>10</sup> About 100 students *in toto* are enrolled for courses in Classical Civilisation and Classical Languages. However, this number is more than trebled by students from outside the Department of Classics and the Arts Faculty (e.g. Law), who enroll for courses in Latin for Lawyers, two courses in Roman Law, a course on the Historical background to the New Testament and courses on the Classical tradition in English and French literature.<sup>11</sup>

When I commented on the relatively small number of students in relation to the staff complement, some of the staff members responded that Ibadan was not interested in 'massification' and that they strongly believed that the smaller the class, the better the quality of education.

So how has Ibadan done it? As in South Africa, the teaching of Latin has disappeared from Nigerian schools. The University of Ibadan is the only university in Nigeria which has retained its Classics Department. Why?

Firstly, the Department promotes itself very well and has an enviable public profile which extends way beyond the university gates. In the marketing brochures publicising the work of the department, the classicists argue that the study of Greek and Latin, as well as the study of Greek and Roman cultures in their complex totalities, 'are excellent tools for work, further learning, insight into oneself and the development of skills'; the study of the Classics, argues the author of the departmental brochure, equips 'the student, through comparative Classical education with better appreciation of the values of his/her socio-cultural, political and economic environment'; the objective of the department is 'to produce competent and meticulous graduates with the capacity to carry out critical analysis for relevant careers which require sound and balanced

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<sup>9</sup> The *Students Handbook* 2012:9-10 lists 60 courses.

<sup>10</sup> Enrolments in Education, Science and the Social Sciences are higher. For these statistics, I am indebted to a pamphlet issued by the Planning Unit at the University of Ibadan, given to me by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, during an interview between the principal, a senior member of the Department of Classics and myself at the University of Ibadan (Friday 9th November 2012).

<sup>11</sup> There is, at the University of Ibadan, a Department of European Studies, which teaches French, German and Russian.

judgment, such as administration, journalism, banking, teaching, law and the diplomatic service.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, the Department keeps track of its alumni and lists the graduates in Classics who have distinguished themselves in many different fields: educational administrators, top civil servants, foreign service personnel, leaders of commerce, banking and industry, lawyers, creative writers, journalists, radio and television executives. At the Leventis Memorial Lecture which I gave, the chairman of the session was the pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Council of the University of Lagos, Dr. G. Onosode, himself a graduate in Classics in the 1950s, who also happens to be one of the richest men in Nigeria. To commemorate the golden jubilee of his graduation at Ibadan with his first degree, one of his companies donated ten million naira for each of the fifty years. The well-kept public gardens at the university are named after him and members of the Classics department told me that he is their patron, often donating sums of money for books for the departmental library, as well as for trips to conferences and workshops abroad.

It is clear that Dr Onosode's patronage of the Classics Department and his prestige in Nigerian society at large reflect one of the features of Nigerian politics – the network of patron-client relationships which seem to underpin and oil (I suspect that this is the most appropriate word) the functioning (and in some cases the dysfunctioning) of Nigerian society. Certainly, in his impassioned address to the audience, largely composed of delegations of schoolchildren, at the Leventis lecture, his defence of his classical education resonated at times with what British colonials claimed about the value of a classical education in their pursuit and administration of their empire. This extraordinary alliance of the Classics and big industry underpins the Leventis Lecture itself; Constantine Leventis (1938-2002), who read Classics at Clare College, Cambridge, made his millions in Nigeria and Ghana establishing factories which manufacture bottle tops and make beer ('Continental Breweries'). The Leventis Memorial lecture is held in his honour; representatives from the Leventis Foundation were present at the lecture and this foundation has supported staff development in Classics at the university and provided money for books and prizes for the best Classics student in each undergraduate year, as well as a prize for the best postgraduate student.

Thirdly, apart from this productive marriage with the captains of industry (dead and alive), the Department maintains a healthy link with

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<sup>12</sup> See the *Students Handbook* 2012:5; the programme for the 4th biennial Constantine Leventis Memorial Lecture 2012:12.

local schools which could provide the university with students. Schoolchildren were bussed in for the lecture in their droves; they were encouraged to ask questions (by Dr Onosode) after the lecture (and some did) and I had to have my photograph taken with each school in turn after the lecture. Leaflets about the Classics and the department's work were handed out after the lecture and there were trestle tables piled high with publications by members of the department, including volumes of verse in English, which drew attention to the link made between Classics and Nigerian literary life. The journal *Nigeria and the Classics* also constantly features articles of an inter-disciplinary nature from colleagues in the English, European Languages and Religious Studies departments. In fact, members of the Department of Classics ensure that they have a high profile in Nigerian social and cultural life generally; the former Head of the Department had attended a Gender Studies conference in Ethiopia and had returned to write two poems on female genital mutilation which have become well-known in human rights activist circles.<sup>13</sup>

Fourthly, the Department not only maintains links with schools, but also fosters a lively student Classical Association called 'Hoi Phrontistai', which is run by the students who elect their own executive. This association presides over the Classics Press Club, the members of which write articles, poems, songs and jokes usually about campus life, which are published every week on the departmental notice-board. In addition, the students run an orientation programme for first years, an oratory competition and an interdepartmental debating competition. In addition, Classics students have their own football team which, apparently, is a force to be reckoned with. The session I had with the students was very ably chaired by the head of 'Hoi Phrontistai'.

So far I have answered the question 'How?' but not the question 'Why?'. Any classicist worth his or her salt has been so grounded in the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that we never take anything at face value. Consequently, I set about trying to find out whether there were any noticeable fault lines in the very public discourse about the success of Classics at Ibadan. Was there any dissonance between the public rhetoric in brochures, booklets, journals (and in what members of the Department told me) and what was really happening in the lecture halls and examinations? I looked forward to my talk with the students.

This talk took place in the Departmental library lined with books and journals, some recently donated by the Leventis Foundation and Dr Onosode. There were no staff members present. I thought that I would give a talk on how to read Greek and Latin verse and make this fun. The

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<sup>13</sup> See Onayemi 2006:73, 76-78.

purpose of this was really to assess how much or how little Greek or Latin the serious Classics students knew. Rapidly I realised that this was not working, so I changed gear, so to speak, and began placing the Sappho and Catullus I had chosen in the raciest context imaginable. Within minutes I noticed that mobile phones were surreptitiously produced and the audience, which was initially small, almost doubled. Sex sells. I then abandoned the talk and asked them questions about their courses. Uppermost in their minds was the following question: was the departmental propaganda, which claimed that a study of the Classics could result in employment in all sorts of professions ranging from banking to law, true? What did our Classics graduates do? I was then in a difficult position – as a guest of the department, I did not want to subvert the departmental propaganda. Neither, however, did I want to give the impression that a study of the Classics *per se* provided some sort of universal entrée into a host of professions. So I tried to be as diplomatic as possible and made it clear that it all depended on the kind of Classics studied and what skills were acquired during the course.

Let me give you an example. I nosed around for some exam papers (as exams were being written at the time) and selected two Classics courses – one a course on legal maxims in Latin, the other a course on Roman Republican political history. The legal maxims course consisted of lists of maxims (such as *acerrima proximorum odia* – the hatred of one's nearest relations is the most bitter – or *caveat emptor* and *lis pendens*) which had to be translated and placed in legal context, followed by some very elementary Latin grammar. The memorisation of long lists of Latin legal tags with which to pepper one's conversation seemed to me to be particularly pointless and of little real educational value, but it was clearly considered valuable training, if one wanted to be part of the Nigerian intellectual élite. The course on Republican history, on the other hand, forced the students to compare aspects of Nigeria's colonial history with the struggle of the orders in the Roman Republic and the rise of Roman imperialism in Italy. From the exam paper, this course looked as if it required more than memorisation and did equip the students with the analytical skills the department claimed to impart.

I then had a discussion with some postgraduate students and there were serious complaints about the library's inadequacies, despite the Leventis donations and Dr Onosode's patronage. Furthermore, a doctoral student, who teaches in the department, mentioned that she was having problems with research methodologies as no-one in Classics knew anything about them and there had been pressure from the Social Sciences, in particular, for Classics students to frame their research proposals within broader epistemologies. I was also informed that she had disagreed with her super-

visor over questions of methodology and that he had summoned her and her husband to his office after hours to prostrate themselves before him in apology. As she commented, 'How can we be independent, critical thinkers in such an environment?'

There was one member of the department whom I did not meet until my last evening there. He had been on the staff since 1975 and had taught every member of the current department. Initially he seemed very wary of me, but he responded honestly to my questions. There was no departmental propaganda from him, but a cynical stream of Afro-pessimism, which was somewhat depressing, but (I suspect) a necessary corrective to the Utopian propaganda I had been fed. Apart from his criticism of the university as such,<sup>14</sup> he did not think that the standards at Ibadan were as high as they used to be, although he was clearly proud of what the department had achieved. He had taught the Greek major class that year and the students had read 200 lines of Hesiod and some of Sappho's poems that term. I explained what we would ordinarily do with our students in a semester and he remarked that he did not think that Greek graduates from Ibadan could cope with reading a book of Homer in the original. On the wider question of why study the Classics at all, he did suggest that he suspected that an education in the Classics simply helped to perpetuate the intellectual and political élite which dominate all features of Nigerian society.

I was still not entirely convinced that I had received convincing answers to the question 'Why study the Classics in modern Nigeria?'. In response to this question, another doctoral student who is working on Roman patron-client relationships and godfatherism in contemporary Nigeria (this is very typical of Nigerian dissertations in the Classics), argued as follows: the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome are universally admired – that is why we call them 'Classics'; in comparing African problems with those confronted by the Greeks and Romans and the solutions they offered, he was suggesting that African problems are also worthy of respect and analysis. Perhaps the Greeks and Romans can help us as we look back at the past and see what experiments they made and how they failed or succeeded. As a corollary to this, he commented on the fact that the top universities in Africa and in the world all have Classics departments. Ibadan is the top university in Nigeria; Ibadan must keep Classics. In many ways, his discourse meshed with that of some members of the department who had been to conferences abroad or had taken up postdoctoral fellowships at distinguished universities such as Brown, Austin (Texas) and

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<sup>14</sup> The surrender to managerialism, the cynical 'numbers game' – many of his criticisms can be applied to universities in contemporary South Africa.

Oxford, and had worked at the British School at Athens. Discourses about the study of the Classics in Nigeria clearly connected with similar exclusivist discourses about the value of a classical education at elite institutions like Brown and Oxford.

There is much that we here can learn from the Classics Department at Ibadan, especially about how to market the discipline within a complex web of relationships between academic staff and the university administration, between the staff and alumni, between the staff and classics students, between the classics students and 'others', between the department and local schools. What impressed me was that not once did I hear the Eurocentric/Afrocentric debate or 'indigenous knowledge systems' mentioned. No student, for instance, had heard of the Bernal 'Black Athena' hypothesis. When I outlined the contours of the Eurocentric/Afrocentric debate here, the former head of department muttered: 'Oh please, we went through that in the sixties.' Nigerian classicists at Ibadan have truly made the Classics their own; when they point to leading industrialists or distinguished administrators who have had classical training, they are pointing to fellow Nigerians who are worth emulating, not British colonials or their clones. I am not saying that Nigerians have depoliticised the Classics – teaching the Classics is obviously embedded in the power relations between hierarchies which control Nigerian society – but they have decolonised the Classics and appropriated what they find meaningful.

Now how does Mamdani's critique of the 'consultancy culture' in African universities bear up in the light of my experiences at Ibadan? Let us begin with some of the more straight-forward issues. Clearly Ibadan has moved beyond Makerere in Uganda; as I have indicated, most doctorates in Classics at Ibadan are home-grown. About 'massification' of education in Nigeria, I think that he is right, and the Classics staff members wrong. My brief interview with the Principal and Vice-Chancellor suggested that the 'numbers game' was very important to him; the very fact that the Department of Classics has mounted a course in Latin tags in Roman law, is really about increasing the numbers of Classics students, and extending the reach of Classics into other Faculties. I think many of us have been party to this ruse: entangle Classics as much as possible with other disciplines, so it becomes almost impossible to disentangle it. The very favourable student-staff ratio at Ibadan has to do with local university politics as well as relations with Dr. Onosode and the Leventis Foundation; the Classics departments in Ghana, for example, are not so well staffed and Legon and Cape Coast have to share lecturers.

As for the 'consultancy culture', Mamdani, as a director of an Institute of Social Research, has obviously foregrounded his experience of foreign-

based agencies, think-tanks and foundations which use Africa as a reservoir of invaluable 'data'. As he himself comments 'the global market tends to relegate Africa to providing raw material ("data") to outside academics who process it and then re-export their theories back to Africa.' You may think that this is clearly the domain of the Social Sciences which has little to do with the study of the Classics, rooted as it is in text-based research which does not involve the kind of empirical information-gathering Mamdani has in mind. However, it was precisely over methodologies, many of them imported from the Social Sciences, that the doctoral student in Classics at Ibadan clashed with her supervisor. As many of you will know, most postgraduate research proposals in the Humanities in South African universities now require some acquaintance with research methodologies and the dreaded literature review.<sup>15</sup> Our students, whether they are working on the epics of Homer or the speeches of Cicero, have to know what qualitative and quantitative research methodologies are, what epistemologies underpin them, and how the methodology they choose situates them within a specific intellectual tradition which is by no means the only one. A Masters student of mine working on comparative ancient Greco-Roman and Zulu magic had to learn about interview techniques, constructing questionnaires and data-processing in the same way as a student in Anthropology, Sociology or Psychology. In fact, if our students embark on the kind of comparative projects Nigerian students undertake, then the kinds of research techniques social or political scientists use have to be mastered as well. Whether we like it or not, the boundaries between the Humanities and the Social Sciences have become so porous that it is difficult to define our disciplinary turf. In addition, some Departments of Classics here in South Africa have become embedded in wider inter-disciplinary groupings, such as Schools of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, or Schools of Languages and Literatures, which have already resulted in the kinds of inter-disciplinary thinking extolled by Mamdani. Furthermore, we as classicists are ideally placed for this kind of research as we have been doing it for generations; how many of us find ourselves teaching classical literature, mythology, philosophy, religion, history, politics, art, architecture, not to speak of gender, sexuality, medicine, film studies, Greek and Latin, sometimes all in one week? We are used to working within an inter-disciplinary paradigm, but Mamdani's challenge, that we should constantly ask ourselves, what intellectual paradigm shapes our research questions and whether these are appropriate in Africa, is one to which we should respond.

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<sup>15</sup> In fact, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, a paper on research methodologies is now compulsory for all Classics (and other) honours students.

What we also need to respond to is the kind of assertion of patriarchal authority and social hierarchies attendant upon the supervisor-student relationship in an African context. As I mentioned earlier, the doctoral student was required, together with her husband, to prostrate herself before her supervisor as a form of apology. Now this form of traditional Yoruba courtesy is frequently practiced by students at the University of Ibadan, when they greet staff members in their offices, even for something as familiar as asking for a letter of reference. Prostration of younger before older (irrespective of sex) has nothing to do with post-Enlightenment Western intellectual paradigms, but is an African cultural practice which, as the student herself expressed, is inimical to the kind of independent, critical thinking a university education should be nurturing. Even if prostration persists because of a kind of post-independence cultural nationalism, reclaiming aspects of Yoruba culture from being lost in a multi-ethnic Nigeria, its practice in a university situation needs to be interrogated. Not only Western intellectual paradigms, but African cultural practices, attitudes and traditions, need to be subjected to the same searchlight if a truly African university with an independent research ethos is to be fostered.

Interrogating the post-Enlightenment paradigms which underpin our research projects is all very well, but how can we, as an association of classicists, foster the kind of interest and commitment which ensures that we have a steady stream of students equipped to ask these questions? What can we do to create interest in the Classics outside the academy to ensure that our survival is not confined to the university ghetto where, in some cases, Damocles' sword, which may have gathered some rust during the past few years, seems to have acquired a new sheen?

In order to attempt an answer to this, I would like to take issue with Mamdani and draw on the work of the contemporary German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, in particular his well-known *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. In interrogating the dominant intellectual paradigms influencing research in Africa, Mamdani specifically refers to the Enlightenment with this question: 'if the Enlightenment is said to be an exclusively European phenomenon, then the story of the Enlightenment is one that excludes Africa as it does most of the world. Can it then be the foundation on which we can build university education in Africa?' Mamdani's conditional clause is especially important.

In Habermas's work, he analyses the processes which resulted in intellectual, political and social changes in Europe, marked by the French Revolution and the move to republicanism and democracy, and focuses on what may seem to us trivial – eighteenth-century coffee-houses in London in which the openness to ideas and critical engagement, characteristic of

the Enlightenment, took root amongst the people, in particular the bourgeoisie, where the 'public sphere', as we now know it, was forged. At no point, however, does Habermas conceive of the Enlightenment as a fixed event, as Mamdani seems to, but as a 'project' which is still in process, and not necessarily confined to European shores. I have already mentioned how classicists in Nigeria distribute their publications to schoolchildren, thus contributing to the shaping of a consciousness about Classics amongst the educated Nigerian middle classes, but not simply about Classics. Some of the poems by a classicist at Ibadan tackle contemporary Nigerian politics with a savage anger and so make some contribution, however infinitesimal, to the possible transformation of the public sphere and the furtherance of the Enlightenment 'project'. What Habermas's coffee-shop example illustrates is how transformation of intellectual paradigms begins not at the top, but at the bottom, or rather somewhere in the middle. In the Classical Association of South Africa, we need to resuscitate our local branches, if dormant, our talks at museums and associations such as the University of the Third Age, and focus once more on the schools, which since the demise of Latin, we have more or less abandoned. The suggestion that we should investigate the introduction of Classical Civilisation (on the Antipodean model) into our schools is a very good one – you may recall our efforts to do this in the early nineties, which resulted in the publication of two booklets which I edited. Latin was still being taught then and this course was used to augment the Latin syllabus. It was difficult to conceive of Classical Civilisation then as anything but a lowly *ancilla* to the teaching of the languages, but, in this post-language era, I think that the time is now ripe to draw up a proposal, syllabus and consult the necessary authorities in the Department of Education. In this way we can contribute to the formation of a new generation of students who may arrive in our universities with some knowledge of what we do, and how transformative it can be.

Ring-structure, as we constantly teach our students, is important in any classical composition, so to the questions about rainbows and butterflies I now return. 'Rainbow-nation' discourse has become somewhat tired and *passé* in South Africa, chiefly because the obvious dissonance between political rhetoric and lived experience has become too hard to bear. However, imagine what it could be like if, twenty years hence, a classicist did not feel the need to 'problematise' an apparently innocent question in a Greek I class in a South African university, and butterflies, which are now extremely rare, did not have to serve as a metaphor for classicists, impaled on boards in dusty museums.

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