

10.

IBADAN AND NEWFOUNDLAND: A FRUITFUL COLLABORATION

The Department of Classics at the University of Ibadan (Nigeria) and the Department of Classics at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada) have been engaged in a fruitful transatlantic collaboration for the past three years. This note outlines the objectives of that collaboration, provides an update on what we have done so far, and surveys our plans for the future.

Students are often the first ones to see the potential for new adventures and new connections. In the fall of 2015, I received an email from Ologbonde Gabriel Olayiwola, a student in Classics at Ibadan, expressing interest in our MA program in Classics at Memorial University. Ologbonde was accepted into our program, received an MA in Classics, and afterward entered the PhD program in Classical Studies at the University of Western Ontario, where he currently studies. More students from Ibadan subsequently came to study at Memorial University. Meanwhile, the Head of the Department of Classics at Ibadan, Professor Folake Onayemi, and I began to correspond by email about possible future collaborations between our two Departments.

These conversations resulted in a conference at Memorial University in March 2019 entitled "Classical Antiquity and Local Identities: from Newfoundland to Nigeria and Ghana." The conference included classicists from Nigeria, Ghana, Canada, and the UK, and was funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada Connection Grant ("The Place of the Classics: Reception of Greco-Roman Antiquity from Newfoundland to Nigeria," 2018-2020). This event marked the beginnings of our transatlantic partnership. The core aim of the conference was dialogue: to listen to scholars working in different places (Ibadan, Ghana, Newfoundland), to achieve a better understanding of the challenges faced by classicists across the world, and to share ideas for overcoming obstacles.

Scholars from different continents exchanged viewpoints on the field, its future developments, and how specific places inform the disciplinary praxis of Classics.

This collaboration continued in October 2019 when Dr Gill Adekannbi, Head of Department, and his colleagues in Classics at the University of Ibadan invited me to deliver the seventh biennial Constantine Leventis Memorial Lecture. The visit included a colloquium, a departmental seminar on the state of the field of Classics in Canada and Nigeria, and meetings with Classics students at the University of Ibadan. This extension of our collaboration allowed me to gain a deeper familiarity with what it means to practice Classics in an African and specifically Nigerian context. I will never forget the generous spirit of hospitality shown by the members of the Department of Classics in Ibadan and their inspiring words.

The trip further convinced me that more work needs to be done to build lasting ties among classicists in different continents and foster a transcultural discipline of Classics. The demographics of conference attendance, scholarly collaborations, and the mobility of students are all too often determined by existing habits of association and regional networks. While classicists in North America, the UK, and Europe consistently interact and collaborate, attending the same conferences and reciprocally accepting students into graduate programs, they only occasionally extend their interactions beyond this limited geographical sphere. Despite some notable attempts to promote “global Classics,” scholarly networks remain largely constrained by regional and national boundaries. Much recent work in Classics has rightly focused on critiquing the Eurocentric ideologies that underlie misleading narratives of Greco-Roman antiquity as the exclusive, foundational legacy of so-called “Western Civilization.” Yet without a corresponding transformation of the geographical coordinates of our disciplinary praxis, this vitally important critical project risks remaining disconnected from a fuller range of cultural perspectives, thereby falling short of the globalism it seeks to achieve.

One major focus of our collaboration is thus to generate dialogue around ways of confronting boundaries to inclusion and connectivity through the interchange of ideas and the mobility of students and researchers. True discursive advances in the configuration of the field of Classics must emerge out of concretely established and consistently maintained habits of transcultural dialogue. We have had these goals in

mind when planning our future collaborative projects, which include a series of scholarly, pedagogical, and artistic interactions. In September 2022, the renowned Nigerian playwright Femi Osofisan and Professor Olakunbi Olosope of the Department of Classics at the University of Ibadan will visit Memorial University's St. John's campus for a reading and colloquium on Osofisan's works (originally scheduled for September 2020 but deferred due to the pandemic). The same visit will feature a lecture on the diversification of petroleum-based economies by Professor Adenike Osofisan (University of Ibadan), a distinguished expert in computer science and economics.

We plan to apply for a Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada Partnership Development Grant to further support our ongoing collaboration. Through this grant we aim, first, to promote student exchange at the MA level, allowing MA students from Canada and from African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana to conduct a portion of their studies in another country, developing research topics related to global or transcultural Classics. Second, we plan to organize two conferences: 1. a conference at a major centre for the study of Classics in Africa, such as the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, to explore approaches to building international networks; 2. a conference at another international hub, such as London, England, that will be accessible to scholars from Nigeria, Ghana, and Canada, to disseminate work related to the core themes of our collaboration. Finally, we aim to build an Africa-Canada research network in Classics by establishing international research residencies. Classicists from Nigeria, Ghana, and other African countries will spend two- to three-month research residencies at the Nexus Centre at Memorial University in St. John's, Canada. These residences will culminate in an interdisciplinary panel devoted to the topic of the resident scholar's research. These plans, while still tentative, constitute a helpful blueprint for our future work together.

On December 12, 1901, the Italian engineer and scientist Guglielmo Marconi sent the first transatlantic wireless transmission in Morse code from Signal Hill in St. John's, Newfoundland—the site of the second day of our 2019 conference. This location augured well for the series of future dialogues and communications that would constitute the transatlantic collaboration between classicists at the University of Ibadan and classicists at Memorial University. I eagerly await the next opportunity for us to share

ideas and deepen our ties of friendship.



Participants in the conference on “Classical Antiquity and Local Identities” enjoy the view from the top of Signal Hill on a cold, windy day in March 2019

—**Luke Roman**
Memorial University,
Newfound land.