

REVIEW OF ALEXANDER ADUM KWAPONG'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY TITLED "A LIFE IN EDUCATION: A MEMOIR"

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed. I want to first thank the Vice Chancellor for the opportunity given to me to do this review. While I probably would have eventually read the book, I would have done it in bits and would probably not have read every line. Being asked to review the book forced me to read the book thoroughly and in one sitting and for that I thank you.

Autobiographies provide insight not only into an individual's life but also the socio political and socio-economic context within which that person lived. They are important for helping us to understand the past without which our understanding of the present is incomplete. Autobiographies of leaders of institutions are incredibly important for understanding how institutions are built and those who lead institutions during times of transition are even more important because their leadership determines whether or not the institution thrives in the midst of change. For post-colonial countries like Ghana, the institutions we have today are a product by and large of the foundations laid by the British and the changes for good or bad made by those who initially took over from the British. If today Legon is ranked as the 7th best university on the continent, the current Vice-Chancellor and his team can take a lot of the credit but not without acknowledging the work that his predecessors did to ensure that there were foundations upon which he could build. One of the key foundation builders of this institution is the late Professor Alexander Adum Kwapong whose memoirs I have been asked to review today. The book is 500 pages long and clearly I cannot do it justice in the time that I have. What I hope to do is to give you enough of an insight that will encourage you to buy and read the book for yourself. The review will be in three parts; his formative years, his life on this campus and his work after retiring from the University.

The first chapter of the book covers his childhood and early adolescent years. Kwapong who was born in 1927 grew up primarily in Akropong but spent holidays in Koforidua and Anyinam where his parents were stationed. His childhood as described was both common and unique. Like most Ghanaian children of the time, he walked back and forth to school, roughly six miles a day barefoot and entertained himself playing gutter to gutter while at it. Unlike many other Ghanaians though, he lived in a UAC bungalow when in Koforidua, had a very well read father who had a gramophone as well as a motorcycle, a grandfather who played an accordion and slept in a mosquito net long before roll back malaria programs were introduced in Ghana. His middle class status begins to make sense once he explains his ancestry. His maternal great grandfather about whom a PhD dissertation has been written was Theophilus Opoku, the first Ghanaian to be ordained as a Presbyterian minister on Ghanaian soil only having been beaten to it by his older cousin who had been ordained in Switzerland. Given his ancestry, it is perhaps not surprising that he rose to become Vice Chancellor, aged 39! An apple does not fall far from the tree, they say.

Kwapong, like a fair number of the other Vice Chancellors this University has had, attended Achimota School where he was classmates with other famous Ghanaians like

Guy Warren, better known as Ghanaba. His secondary school experiences were much like that of many of us in this room: first year students were bullied, there were House rules to be followed, punishment for those who broke them and teachers were given nicknames. At Achimota, he improved his spoken English skills and also begun his life long interest in Latin, to which he was introduced in Form One. His intellectual abilities were such that he was the first student allowed to write the Cambridge School Certificate Examination after four instead of the mandatory five years, which he passed successfully with a top distinction mark in Latin. Kwapong was also nominated as the School Senior Prefect in 1945. He then went on to write the Inter BA Examinations in Greek, Latin, History and English and passed all of them successfully even though he had no Greek teacher in his final year! He taught Latin at Achimota for 2 years after which he went to King's College in Cambridge to study Classics.

The time he spent at Cambridge is the focus of the second chapter of the book. He was helped to adjust by former teachers at Achimota now resident in Cambridge as well as former students of Achimota. He settled in, joined the hockey team and took his studies so seriously that by the end of the first year, he was winning prizes that included stipends and money for books. He took advantage of being in Cambridge to visit not only many other places in that country but also other European countries such as Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany. He saw Shakespearan plays, enjoyed trips in gondolas. He was basically a young man about town! Kwapong spent five years in Cambridge and left in 1953 with fluency in French, English, Latin, Greek, a working knowledge of German and Italian as well as enough data on classical North Africa to complete his dissertation.

In the third chapter of the book, Kwapong introduces us to his life in academia first as a faculty member in the Department of Classics for a 12 year period and then as Vice Chancellor for a 9 year period. When he joined the University College of Ghana in 1953, which he reminds us was started with a 2 million pound gift from Ghanaian cocoa farmers, it was 5 years old and located at what we now know as Achimota School. He was one of only 12 Ghanaian senior members. He joined five other faculty, one of whom was a Ghanaian L. H. Ofori Appiah, to teach a subject that was required of all students at the time reading Arts and Social Studies as well as those planning to read law in Britain. In the first part of this chapter which focuses on his life as an academic, we are exposed to some of the taxing questions of the time: who should be a member of Convocation – academics and administrators or only academics; to expel or not to expel Albert Adu Boahen for being outspoken and rude to a Senior Tutor; the indigenization or otherwise of faculty.

During this period also, he married a former student of his Ms. Evelyn Caesar (1956), finished his PhD (1957), became the youngest founding member of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Learning (1959), provided pro bono teaching services to Achimota students including Samuel Date-Bah, former member of the Supreme Court as well as Chairman of Council (1961) and took a visiting professorship at Princeton (1961-1962) where he also had speaking engagements at other prestigious universities such as Cornell and Harvard and attended many conferences across the country. Towards the end of his stay, he took a road trip literally right across the United States with his wife visiting many

universities and relatives along the way including his cousin Kofi Asare Opoku. He returned to Ghana in September 1962 having been promoted to the rank of full professor.

While he was at Princeton, the university transitioned from the University College of Ghana to the University of Ghana and in the transition, 6 of the faculty (5 expatriates and Modjabeng Dowuona, the Registrar) of the University College of Ghana who had reapplied for their jobs lost them. This sparked discontent and calls for en masse resignations of expatriates with Dr. Stoughton, the then Vice Chancellor leading by example. When the University of Ghana was thus inaugurated in October 1961, Kwame Nkrumah was the Chancellor and Nana Kobina Nketsia, as the interim Vice Chancellor who was replaced a year later by Conor Cruise O'Brien just as Alex Kwapong returned to Legon.

Soon made Dean of the Faculty of Arts, he was closely involved in the development of the structures and statutes of the early years of the independent university. By January 1963, he stood for and was appointed the second Pro Vice Chancellor of the university. In his time as Pro-Vice Chancellor, Kwapong and the Vice-Chancellor had to preside over many contentious issues: the extent to which the university logo designed by Albert Mawere Opoku of the School of Performing Arts which signified the university's autonomy was appropriate when the Chancellor of the University was also the President of the country; whether or not what Ghana needed was a medical school to train doctors or one to train medical assistants (even as arrangements for a loan from USAID to construct the school was terminated); whether Nkrumahism should be a required course for all university students and generally dealing with the increasing demands of the CPP state on the "largely non-CPPified institution (p. 153) including on campus "invasions" (pg 156) by CPP stalwarts, media attacks, dismissals of faculty incidentally including my PhD supervisor's father Robert Seidman of the Law School and debates about the meaning of academic freedom which resulted in the lack of locally written journals and public lectures.

The relationship between the Chancellor/President and the Vice-Chancellor was anything but cordial; two major events led to this. First, Nkrumah unilaterally abrogated a rather far advanced agreement with the US government to support the medical school (pg 224), the fallout of which the Vice-Chancellor had to bear responsibility. Secondly, the Vice Chancellor had publicly criticized Nkrumah while in Geneva for overturning the not guilty ruling against the three people accused of planning his assassination and summarily dismissing the three judges (one of whom was the Chief Justice Sir Arku Korsah) who had presided over the case. This action met with Nkrumah's displeasure and worsened the already strained relations between them. For two years, face to face meetings between the two were replaced with letter writing and it was generally understood that they were simply tolerating each other. O'Brien after all, had a three year term that would eventually come to an end. In the meantime, due to the standoff between these two, Kwapong often had to represent the Vice Chancellor at international events including the inauguration of Sussex University, the planning meeting for the establishment of the Association of African Universities and staff recruitment trips.

The end of O'Brien's term of office in 1965 coincided with that of the Pro-Vice Chancellor. Kwapong, who was not a CPP member, chose not to stand for a second term and instead returned to life as Head of the Department of Classics and Dean of the Faculty of Arts. The university was run without a Vice Chancellor until March 1966 when the new government, the National Liberation Council, appointed Kwapong as the first indigenous Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana less than a month after his 39th birthday.

A third of the book is devoted to describing the major tasks he performed during this period and I will highlight a few of these here. First, he had to restore the university to a vibrant intellectual environment where academic freedom was well and truly maintained. Luckily for him, the university community resolved "not to remain silent any longer in the face of creeping dictatorship in the country but to exercise their newly regained freedom of speech by actively writing and commenting directly on national affairs and making sure that their voices were effectively heard on all important national issues." (Pg 179) Thus the Legon Observer, which the current Vice-Chancellor resuscitated unsuccessfully as the New Legon Observer was born with the likes of Prof. C. G. Baeta, the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Prof. K.A.B. Jones-Quartey, Prof. Adu Boahen, Dr. Yaw Twumasi and Dr. Paul Ansah at its helm. And Kwapong was determined to ensure that the paper, which represented academic freedom at the university, was published without interference. He details the extent to which he ensured as Vice-Chancellor that faculty members were not gagged so they could express their views in the Legon Observer freely. Over his decade long tenure as Vice Chancellor, he had to remind almost every head of state that his writ as Vice Chancellor did not extend over the paper. The paper eventually met its demise when General Acheampong threatened the publisher of the paper with the loss of government contracts if he continued to publish the paper. Faculty also presented a series of papers on the theme "what went wrong", a series that would be repeated to assess the Busia government.

Secondly, he had to restaff the Faculty of Law since a fair number of its staff had been summarily dismissed during the Nkrumah regime. This he resolved by entering into a long term agreement with the Law Faculty of Oxford. The indigenization question was also a major one to resolve; at the time he took office, Ghanaians and other Africans comprised only 47% of faculty. Then there was the matter of whether or not the School of Music and Drama, now Performing Arts was a proper subject. Kwapong found himself having to defend the importance of 'dondology'. He also devoted considerable energy to integrating the Medical School into the University of Ghana and expanding the programmes of the Faculty of Agriculture. Another task he undertook was to enhance the financial management of the university in terms of auditing and also to seek funding both internally and externally for various programmes. It was during his tenure that funding from Ford Foundation for the Guest Centre and from CIDA for ten bungalows in Little Legon as well as from the Ford Foundation for ISSER and Carnegie for the Language Centre and School of Journalism were secured. Then there was staff development which he guaranteed through various twinning programmes as well as the expansion of accommodation facilities with the Legon and Akafo annexes. Internationalisation of the student population was also strengthened during his tenure with the first 10 students from

UCLA through the Education Abroad Program. Towards the end of his term (in 1972), he also supervised the implementation of a new degree structure.

While at post as Vice Chancellor, he offered services to the nation including presiding over the Education Review Committee, a committee made up of 31 members tasked with the responsibility of reviewing the educational systems of the country from primary through tertiary level and offering recommendations (285 in all). Internationally, he was on the inaugural executive board of the African Association of Universities and as a member of the board, he was instrumental in the selection of the first Secretary General, securing a home for the Association in Ghana and organizing its first major conference at Legon on the theme “The contribution of African universities to the economic and social development of the African continent.” (pg. 206). He also ended up on the boards of the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the International Association of Universities as well as several others (Aspen Institute, International Association for Cultural Freedom, the International Council for Educational Development etc).

Three years into his term, the university experienced its first aluta over the nature of punishment meted out to a number of offending students and Kwapong earned the nickname “Obscene and Scurrilous”, drawn from some of the language he had used in addressing the students when they returned from the Kwapong imposed holidays. The punishments were revised to the satisfaction of everybody. In the second aluta held on the day of congregation in March 1971, student demands included their participation in the governance of the university and the removal of Kwapong from office. Victor Owusu, then Chairman of Council to whom these demands were made, granted the first but told them categorically that the second could not be done for in his words, ‘Three firsts from Cambridge was not something one could find at Makola market or anywhere he had looked.’ (Page 233). Overall, his relationship with students was cordial, made evident by the fact that although he lost his father during a period when the university was closed, bus loads of students went to Akropong to mourn with him.

With workers, he discusses one major episode; agitation for increases in wages. He had met with one group of workers and listened to their demands and then gone into Accra to deal with other matters only to discover that in his absence a second group of workers had been rioting on campus. The police attempted to quell the tension with live ammunitions and in the process, a young graduate student from Sudan studying at the Institute of African Studies, Mr. Mekki Abbas was shot and killed instantly. This obviously was a quite unpleasant episode during his tenure.

Over his ten year tenure as Vice Chancellor, there were three changes in government. While he had mostly cordial relations with the first two governments, he had problems with the third, the National Redemption Council. The Commissioner of Education, Paul Nkegbe, first wanted sabbaticals suspended. Next, he wanted the Vice Chancellor to report to him each time he was going to travel outside. Then there was the matter of the secondment of a faculty member of this university who had not been promoted to Senior Lecturer to the University of Cape Coast as a senior lecturer. On each of these, Kwapong

would not budge. The relationship with the government was put on an even keel only when the Commissioner of Education was changed in January 1974.

Kwapong also presided over the university's celebration of its silver jubilee by which point the university had grown from its initial intake of 92 students to roughly 3000 students. In discussing this, he makes the point that plans had been far advanced to build a modern library between Balme and Volta Hall to mark this milestone in the life of the university, one that obviously never materialized. The Aggrey-Fraser-Guggisberg memorial lectures for that celebration were given by none other than Dr. Saburo Okita, largely credited as the architect of Japan's post second world war economic miracle.

Very little is said about his family since obviously this is a book about his life as an administrator but in the little he does say, you see him describe a very loving family. I was particularly taken by the description of a family vacation to Aspen when his two oldest daughters were 15 and 14 which had them visiting Copenhagen, London, Washington as well as New York City. I am sure that trip is firmly etched in their memories even now and if it is not, I bet they were the right envy of many an Achimotan when they returned from that trip. They had gotten, not one, not two, but about five holidays all rolled into one. Lucky them.

While at post, Kwapong was offered the position of Vice-Rector for Planning and Development for the newly established United Nations University based in Tokyo. He thus resigned from his post in December 1975, but not before concluding discussions with the Japanese for what eventually became the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, named for the Japanese scientist who died in the then Gold Coast while doing research on yellow fever. His successor, he advised should have "strength of character, the courage of one's convictions and the ability to stand up and be counted when it mattered" (pg. 279).

In the epilogue, Kwapong details his 12 years of service at the United Nations University in Japan where his main responsibilities were fundraising and institutional development. His numerous contacts gained over his decade as Vice Chancellor at Legon proved very useful in this regard. This was followed by a five year stint in Canada as the first Chair of Development Studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Here, he taught a course titled "The Management of Sustainable Development" a course to which he invited several of the colleagues he had worked with at the United Nations University as speakers. He also organized a well received Roundtable on Capacity Building on the Challenges of African Capacity building and Human Resource Development in Africa. He ended his international duties as the Commonwealth of Learning's Director of Africa Programmes, Teacher Education and Research where the seeds of our distance learning programmes were sown. He finally returned to Ghana in 1993 where he engaged in several consultancies. His final bit of public service was as Chairman of the Council of State during Former President Kufour's first term of office.

The final 200 pages of the book provide over 20 speeches given over his entire career (including extracts of convocations, congregations, welcome addresses, speeches at

various events and so on) and gives us an opportunity to reflect on the many tasks he had to perform as well as how well he executed them. There are also many gems of information to be gleaned from that section. I learnt for example that Fort George which overlooks Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad was in fact designed in 1888 by Kofi Nti the son of King Karikari of Ashanti. How he knew all of this in an age when google did not exist beats my imagination. Clearly, he was a very well read and informed man whose breadth of knowledge will put many of us in this room to shame.

Simply put, this book is a rare gift from Prof. Kwapong to all Ghanaians. It is an easy read that provides deep insight into the foundations of the oldest university in this country, the courage it took to ensure that principles such as academic freedom were upheld at this institution and gives us cause to pause and ponder what each of us is doing in his or her corner to uphold the virtues he believed were important in each Vice Chancellor and I dare say each Ghanaian – I quote him again “strength of character, the courage of one’s convictions and the ability to stand up and be counted when it mattered” (pg. 279). I urge each and every one of you to avail yourselves of this gift. Thank you.