

THE ENDURING LEGACY OF HERB ADDO

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Herbert Christian Addo or Kwasi Atta, as he called himself sometimes, was born in Ghana on September 10, 1940 and died on November 17, 1996. After leaving Ghana, or to be more specific, Aseseeso Village, in the mid-1960s he went to Britain to register as a student at Reading University where he read politics, philosophy and economics. After graduating at Reading, he travelled to Canada enrolled at MacMaster University where he read for his Masters. He then went to Carleton University in Ottawa and there obtained his Ph.D.

This serves as a brief introduction of the early life of Herb. However, ladies and gentlemen, you should be warned that no tribute to our esteemed colleague could be brief, simply because he himself paid great attention to details in giving an account of anything. His sentences tended to be long, and not infrequently, his paragraphs comprised only one sentence. One may be inclined to think that he had an aversion to first stops but he explained to me that he wrote according to a particular rhythm and the wrong punctuation mark could disturb that rhythm. He had friends who did not accept this explanation and even volunteered to provide assistance with editing. Given his ready sense of humour, that provoked loud laughter from Herb.

He was fond of telling stories and they were equally long. It is said that brevity is the soul of wit but that was not applicable to Herb's stories. Notwithstanding their length, they invariably commanded the rapt attention of their listeners. Obviously, Herb was a raconteur par excellence. What I found most interesting was that he made himself the centre of most of his stories. On a visit to India he thought that he could have lectured the restaurant employees on curry; instead, they had to teach him that curry came in different colours. We also heard of the surprise which he caused immigration officers around the world when he presented what, for him, was his travel document, but for them, were sheets of paper stapled together. In spite of that, he always escaped being placed in a detention centre.

Many of you present might have heard Herb relate these stories, therefore, it should hardly be necessary to continue in this vein. You also know that we were very close friends. What you may not know is that a price was paid for his friendship. It was his wont to make promises to me, but their fulfilment was contingent on my good conduct – or as he put it, “if you behave yourself.” I choose not to bore you with details of the promises. Suffice it to say that I never had the good fortune of having any of the promises fulfilled even though I remain convinced that there were occasions on which

I behaved properly – measured, of course, with my own yard-stick.

Eventually, I learnt that Herb's failure or refusal to keep any the promises was not to be attributed to any bad faith or malevolence on his part. He saw me as his close friend and in his view the bar necessarily had to be raised high. I also observed his insistence on high standard with respect to his supervision of theses. Students who were supervised by him knew that he did not accept work of poor quality. That encompassed thorough research, proper structure and adequate footnoting. Above all, the student was required to demonstrate that the position adopted in the thesis was clearly thought out.

For some supervisors, their most important role is to point their students to important source material and ensuring that the empirical data are provided. Although Herb recognised these aspects of the thesis as being important, he saw them as the more mundane part of his task as supervisor. He always impressed upon his students the importance of methodology, distinguishing it from research methods. Admittedly, he taught the course in methodology but that is too facile an explanation for his passion for methodology. He had a very logical mind which forced him to the conclusion that a proper methodology was what determined the validity of the position taken in the thesis.

Herb was an extraordinary teacher with a unique style. When he was lecturing he hardly felt the need to refer to notes. His philosophy on teaching was that he should stimulate thought, rather than provide a lot of information for note taking. He contented that someone who was capable of indepen-

dent thinking would have the confidence to challenge the very basis on which any argument is advanced.

It should be said that the students who benefitted most from his lectures were those who listened carefully because he had his own idiom. Students were introduced in terms, phrases and concepts for which Herb could have claimed ownership. The dictionary would have provided assistance with terms such as epistemology, ontology and eschatology, but six years after Herb's death I am certain that some students are still trying to come to terms with concepts such as creative pessimism, grand culture and trialectics.

His influence on the intellectual development of those whom he taught may be gleaned from the theses which have come out of the Institute. It is no exaggeration to state that ninety per cent of the theses were written from the world-system perspective. In other words, he pioneered the development of a school of thought at the Institute. I should add that Herb did not have to be the supervisor of a thesis for it to bear his stamp.

It is recalled with a sense of admiration the many students who appeared before our academic staff to present their thesis proposals, nervous and unsure of themselves at first, but growing in confidence when Herb started to show ways in which the quality of the thesis could have been enhanced. He liked to begin by asking, "What is the provocation?" He then went on to get the student to focus on the methodology and to try to understand world-system theory more fully if a preference for that theory was indicated.

Although he had a domineering personality, he was sensitive to the fact that the student should be left free to express deeply held convictions in the thesis. He always made it absolutely clear that he was not the person writing the thesis, but was merely trying to make the student aware of the pitfalls which may be encountered if a particular line of argument was pursued. He bore no culpability for the fact that some students felt intimidated by the power of his mind and the logic of his argument. Fortunately, for most students these attributes were sources of motivation and inspiration.

He always expressed concern about the lack of a sense of community on the St. Augustine Campus and devoted some of his time in remedying this deficiency. In his capacity as Chairman of the Bar of the Senior Common Room (SCR), he organised cultural and social activities for the purpose of bringing members of staff together, at best, he met with only limited success. He needed more than one term in office to change the culture which was already deeply rooted, and if anyone understood culture it was Herb Addo.

One often heard adverse comments made on the amount of time Herb spent at the SCR I am happy to state that I was in his company for the greater part of the time that he was there. We saw the SCR as our club and a place where we met other colleagues. I think that it is fair to say that many of Herb's brilliant ideas were first tested there. For those who cared to listen they were novel ideas and as a result questions were thrown at Herb from every direction. In such circumstances, he had to dig deep to explain his position because there were colleagues whose intellect was very sharp. However, he had the confidence to be equal to any challenge. He

often told me that he was from a culture whose members "took wisdom as they drank."

His participation in the life of the Institute was very active. He was always alert to the changes in the discipline of International Relations and recognised that they should be reflected in the curriculum. He was also very instrumental in the introduction of the M.Phil and Ph.D programmes. Indeed, the first two students to graduate with Ph.D degrees from the Institute were supervised by him. They are Dr. Taimoom Stewart who is attached to the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES), and Dr. Keith Nurse who succeeded him as the lecturer in the Theory and Methodology of International Relations course. Incidentally, the fusion of Theory and Methodology was his idea.

I should stay a while longer with Keith and Taimoon because I was almost always present when he was providing them with feedback on their chapters. His supervision of their theses was a revelation to me. Often, discussions would begin in his office and continue at the SCR. He allowed them to talk more than he did but whenever he made an intervention, their body language suggested to me that issues lost their complexities and waters previously uncharted became clearly marked. To put it in Herb's own colourful way, "the penny had dropped. Once that happened, they could not be stopped."

As in many other areas, his approach was unconventional and he might have paid a heavy price for it. For example, he remained a Reader for many years without being promoted to Professor. This is a high price for any scholar or academic but he was never prepared to wear any mask. Instead, he

preferred to be true to himself. He and Pidge Permell whom he regarded as his big brother had lengthy discussions on such matters and Pidge succeeded in getting him to change his mode of dress. Pidge was able to persuade him to stop wearing 'tank tops' and slippers to the Campus. I am not aware of compromise on Herb's part in any other area.

As a young man Herb had muscular arms and broad chest and he was proud of that physique. He recounted many stories of his driving around Ottawa in his red sports car and recalled his days as a drummer – I think that he played the drums while he was in England. What should emerge from this account is that he was "hip," a term that was in vogue in the late sixties and early seventies. In today's parlance, "he was on."

In a tribute to Herb one does not have to apologise for being anecdotal because he loved telling stories and mastered the art of telling them. However, he was first and foremost an academic and a scholar. He was a prolific writer, a great thinker and an active participant in academic conferences. In this context, we may begin to think immediately about world-system theory – and the world-system guru is with us today. It is time to say that until his death, Herb continued to believe in world-system theory because the centre/periphery dichotomy made sense to him. Moreover, it seemed logical to him that global capital should accumulate under the control of the centre of the system, and away from its periphery.

Given its finality, death is often referred to as being untimely. In Herb's case this is not merely a cliché because it has robbed us of his *magnum opus*. In 1995/1996 he went through a period of serious introspection as far as his writings were concerned and that

forced him to revisit and to begin refining early major works of his.

His starting point was a review of the Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development Project (GPID). This was a five-year research project launched by the United Nations University (UNU) and co-ordinated by Johan Galtung. The problem to be investigated was the disturbing turn which development had taken by the mid-1970s. By then, the focus shifted from human welfare to an obsession about things. Herb's concern with the GPID project was that it stopped short of a radical critique of Eurocentric Developmentalism. His mission was to deconstruct this phenomenon. He was cautious to point out that he did not contemplate acting like an iconoclast, but that he intended to reconstruct the idea of development from a newly-shaped Radical Third World Perspective.

The Neo-Radical Perspective which he adopted put him on a collision course with many radical Third World scholars. He was critical of them for thinking that Euroculture's world-view which manifested itself in gluttonous consumption and unbridled individualism was feasible, or even desirable.

He contended that development was feasible in different cultural settings and that the dignity of the human being could be sustained without the need to resort to developmentalism and Euro-culture. For him culture is a critical factor in the development process but he pointed out that it meant more than cultural art forms – song, dance and cuisine. Indeed, he qualified it by referring to it as grand culture. What mattered most was the way in which one viewed the world – and that should be done from one's own vantage point. In adopting this position, he

was not bashing European cultural art forms because those of us who knew him well are aware that he enjoyed classical music and good red wine. In point of fact, he studied best when he was listening to classical music.

Given the enormity of the task which he set himself, he recognised that he had to collaborate and network with others, and for this reason, he was going to establish the St. Augustine School. Its research agenda was already finalised; only the formal launching was left to be done. That is why I said earlier that his death was untimely. In the last year of his life the St. Augustine School absorbed all his mental energy because he had set the middle of 1997 as the period when its publications should begin seeing the light of day.

Herb always advised his students that serious research involved networking and discussions with one's peers. Following his own advice, he identified a few international scholars – most of them, scholars with whom he previously collaborated – as Associate Fellows. That was important because the perspective of the St. Augustine School was not merely Caribbean, but Third World. To give it its full title, a “Neo-Radical Third World Perspective.”

We may be inclined to agonise over the fact that Herb's great mission was unfulfilled, but it should be acknowledged that his accomplishments were considerable and that his legacy is a rich one. His publications were voluminous and of high quality, products of a fine intellect and great mind. Most importantly, he has bequeathed to us, speaking metaphorically of course, scholars of the calibre of Dr. Taimoon Stewart and Dr. Keith Nurse who have already created their own niches in the world of scholarship and academia. May I, therefore, in conclusion say that we should not spend too much time bemoaning the fact that the great enterprise on which he embarked has remained incomplete, rather we should celebrate his outstanding achievements.

In any event, in life's long journey Herb did not have to run the entire race. He himself recognised that at some point he had to be succeeded and did plan for his succession. He did so by generously sharing his ideas and encouraging others to consider seriously the Caribbean problematique. Fortunately, this is being done.