

## SCENES FROM THE WANDERINGS OF A SCHOLAR

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*Pervixi: neque enim fortuna malignior unquam  
eripiet nobis quod prior hora dedit.*

(Yes, I have lived thoroughly: nor shall any less benign future fate  
snatch away what an earlier time bestowed)

Petronius Arbiter, 1st century AD.

I have nothing much in common with Petronius – neither gender nor lifestyle (and I've already lived considerably longer than he did). But this poem has appealed to me ever since I met it in Helen Waddell's collection of medieval Latin lyrics to accompany her study of the wandering scholars (and I see that I bought her anthology on the week I became a university undergraduate – I must have seen myself from the beginning as fated to become a wandering scholar too).

Nothing except Alzheimer's can take away memories, experience and accumulated learning; and since the editors have asked me to write on my academic and professional life, this piece will be about all three. It will, naturally, concentrate on educational ideas and practice. I wish I could say more about people, the friends, colleagues, students (with whom one is always a fellow-learner), who have made the whole of life worthwhile. A short space makes that impossible, but I hope it is understood that they are always there. Similarly, the huge political changes against which our work in Africa took place are implicit; it is recognised that environments where concepts of nationhood and identity were boiling up have relevance to Scotland.

I have been involved in *universities*, from student to post-retirement fellow for 58 years, with the basic discipline of *history* and the professional discipline of *adult education*. For 31 years, I worked in Commonwealth Africa and I have undertaken assignments in other continents as well. These wanderings have given me the chance to learn (and enrich my ideas and practice) from many colleagues and students and from a range of cultures. But it has not been about an exercise in eclecticism or random comparison. I have tried to follow threads through and have kept to some principles and ideas throughout, but obviously some ideas have been discarded along the way. It is quite sobering to go back to some of one's earlier publications and see how dated they have become!

Here, I shall pick out a few scenes from different stages of my geographical and intellectual journeyings and hope to follow up connections and developments.

SCENE 1: OXFORD, 1947

I am sitting on the floor of my room with a friend, sorting a great slew of papers. The room is Spartan and very cold – it has been a terrible winter and my college (being a women's college) is not well off. But we are just thankful to be there, at a time when universities are few in Britain and access problematic. Only one in ten Oxford students is a woman and only about that proportion of men and women has come up from school – naturally at that date, the majority are ex-service, mostly British, but some Americans and Poles. We are minority of a minority of a minority. Colleges charge fees and the scholarship scene is very patchy, with variable grants according to local authority.

Ann and I, improbably, constitute the National Union of Students' Hardship

Committee and we are sitting reading the letters from students all over Britain who are in financial difficulties. Complete amateurs, with no help or advice, we have built up a data-base of sources of funds, regulations of local authorities and loop-holes in various institutions. We write (by hand) letters of advice and appeal, we phone the desperate (our small pittances disappear in the telephone slots); and we have the satisfaction of enabling quite a number of people to continue their studies who would otherwise have had to give up. One Welsh professor has written to us about a brilliant student from the Gold Coast, in line for a scholarship but needing money to survive in the meantime. We have been able to help and some years later I am to meet that student, by that time Director of Agriculture in Ghana (he never forgot how nearly his academic career was halted).

That may seem a strange scene to pick on, when all around were the truly wonderful intellectual and cultural excitements of Oxford. But the work we did for the Hardship Committee was critical for me. Granted that universities were enjoyable, but if they had a serious role in society, why were they not accessible to all? The 1944 Education Act in England and the general trend of post-war thinking in Britain was towards greater educational opportunity, but it wasn't until the 1960s that universities were brought into the equation. Yet, I was reading about the idea of a university as a creator of knowledge and as an interpreter of "operative" ideas, especially from the Spanish scholar Ortega y Gasset. Our simple efforts to help a few poor students led inevitably to a wider vision – universities as a recourse and resource for people of all ages and classes, either with the formal status of student or as citizens demanding some share in the knowledge. I read R H Tawney on *Equality* and discussed this with students in British universities, with some British politicians (I did odd jobs for a well known Liverpool MP, Bessie Braddock) and also with students from elsewhere in Europe, as I was involved with various projects for the rebuilding of an international student movement after the disruption of the Second World War.

Because of all this, I applied for (and gained) a postgraduate scholarship with what was then the Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy and moved into adult education from a university base – seeing this provision as related to social justice. My training then gave me a more focused theory of the relation of adult education to social and academic change, but deepened my conviction that universities had a responsibility to offer their facilities to the public at large. The training, jointly with the Workers' Educational Association, gave me a salutary grounding in methods of teaching adults to learn – it would be short-changing people and disrespecting them if the tutor did not start from their own experience and interests.

SCENE 2: ACCRA, GOLD COAST (NOW GHANA), 1951

The country has gone through an exciting election (and although I'm a foreigner I have had a vote) and I have come down to Accra from the village where I live, as a university "resident tutor", to listen to a debate in the new Legislative Assembly. I'm sitting in the front row of the gallery and looking down at the 84 members. Not greatly to my surprise, I find I know most of them. Many look up and wave, including the great Kwame Nkrumah himself (he is later to promote a good deal of thinking on the rationale for the African university and to start major academic projects, such as the *Encyclopaedia Africana*).

How have I come here? My Oxford tutor, Thomas Hodgkin, was asked to advise the Colonial Office on the possibility of extra-mural departments in the new university institutions being established in the Caribbean and Africa and encouraged me to apply for a job in the new University College of the Gold Coast. I know that there were some doubts about appointing a young woman and some of the

interviewing committee were quite hostile. But here I am, one of the network of full and part-time university tutors, teaching and organising classes in an area the size of Wales, in subjects such as the Politics of Self-Government, The Future of Chiefs, The Economics of Self-Government. Incidentally, teaching politics has made me very conscious of the changes in the Gold Coast as part of wider evolution in the Commonwealth; I am taking examples of constitutions from Ceylon/Sri Lanka and India, as well as Canada and New Zealand.

We also run, every year, a New Year School, an institution to become embedded in the public life of the country—40 years later I will meet some people who have attended every year until that time—which attracts people from all walks of life (and also includes a parallel seminar for graduates wishing to become part-time tutors).

This Ghana experience dramatised the potential role of adult education in political change. Fourteen of the 84 Assembly members had no formal education qualification but had attended our extra-mural classes. Most other members had taken part in one or other of the activities which we organised (which included community service as well). We believed that we were equipping citizens with the knowledge that would help them to power and help their country to regain independence. The notion of adult education as a tool of empowerment was one which I have carried ever since.

Reared as I was on stories of the “suffragettes” in Britain, it was inspiring to me to work alongside a number of lively-minded and enterprising Ghanaian women. But I thought that we in the University should do more and I was glad that I succeeded in persuading the authorities that we should employ a women’s education organiser. We weren’t wholly successful and from that time on I began to confront issues of gender equality in adult education work and also in higher education.

#### INTERLUDE: UGANDA, 1955–60

East Africa was in a political ferment, but even Uganda was not as close to independence as Ghana at the time. Rightly or wrongly, we applied a very similar formula at Makerere University College to the one which had seemed relevant in Ghana; and at first we had little time to develop new ideas because we became entangled in two sorts of controversy. First, the colonial authorities were deeply suspicious when, on the Ghana pattern, we organised a “Study Vacation” and invited trade unionists, journalists and politicians (including Tom Mboya of Kenya and Julius Nyerere of Tanganyika – as it then was). They nearly banned the whole enterprise, but fortunately the Principal of Makerere held out for the autonomy of the university college. Secondly, many well-meaning people thought we should not be dealing with social and political issues at all, but should be providing coaching for secondary examinations (one such person was the very thoughtful Guy Hunter). But I believed and still do that a university must share its own knowledge, especially in countries where only a tiny percentage of men and women can become full-time students and cannot use its very limited resources to do the work of the government education service. It should of course be ready to work with governments in developing curricula for all levels of the system and in training the teachers needed.

In spite of being embroiled in contention, we could nurture shoots of new thinking. One was a result of discussion with the university’s economists, as well as friends in the Buganda government – a perception that adult education should be linked not just to change, but to *development*. I began to read the work of the West Indian economist Arthur Lewis and had a chance to study briefly with Ursula Hicks back at Oxford. The welter of new thinking internationally about development was exciting and led to the question of what adult education’s various roles should be, both university based and in its other forms. There began to emerge ideas of adult education as a set of principles and practices to be shared across various development-related professions.

The high point of these was probably in 1979, when the Commonwealth called a major conference on the theme of non formal education and development in New Delhi. The problem was how to avoid any training programmes concentrating merely on shared techniques rather than starting from grounding in ideas of development.

Up to this point I had been constantly in the field. From 1960 onwards, I moved into policy-making positions, as deputy head of department in Ibadan, Nigeria and as head in Zambia, two more Nigerian universities and then, back in Britain, at Glasgow. This meant thirty years of arguing the adult education case in University Senates and of engaging directly with government officials and voluntary agency members to work out appropriate programmes.

#### SCENE 3: IBADAN, NIGERIA, 1965

It is the cool of the evening (relatively – temperature about 30°) and we are sitting at a well-scrubbed table in a little Lebanese restaurant, eating pitta bread with humous and fried brains. It's in the heart of this rumbustious, roaring city, with music around from the nightclubs and flickering lights from the night-markets. "We" are mainly a group of artists, writers and musicians and we rent the rather bleak courtyard next to the restaurant as an artists' club, called *Mbari*. Here, we have witnessed an early performance of the musician Fela Kuti, the premiere of John Pepper Clarke's *Song of A Goat*, poetry readings by Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka (none of us dream that he will one day win a Nobel prize).

Independence in 1960 has brought a flowering of talent, a lot of it connected to the University of Ibadan; and my boss, Ayo Ogunshye, with an international staff, see a new mission here for adult education, to encourage creativity, including the building of a sense of national identity. Hence our support for *Mbari*. Empowerment must be accompanied by confidence. This is not quite "The Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle", because there is less cynicism and already more national pride in Nigeria; but the whole education system needs decolonising. Tonight we are celebrating my winning of a bet. Earlier in the year I had a lively argument with an English Literature tutor, who said it was impossible to relate literature in English to Africa because there were no African texts before the mid 20th century. I bet him a bottle of beer that I could make an anthology of African texts for a teachers' literature seminar six weeks' ahead; I have produced (with the help of my historian's training and the first-class university library) a collection called *Two Centuries of African English* and the seminar have used it with enthusiasm. It will be published in 1969 and used all over Africa for twenty years after. Tonight, I am simply collecting my bet and discussing with another colleague whether we have enough theory on adult education and cultural identity to include it in our proposed diploma in adult education.

From economic and social development we had moved into fields of culture and identity in our extra-mural policy. With literature colleagues and the cooperation of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation we started experimenting with radio listening groups, using texts in Black Literature, plays by Soyinka and others and my anthology and with artists' workshops and popular drama.

With all that experience, and with continuing development-related work (courses, for instance for trade unionists) we decided that we had evolved enough theory to start a university qualification, the first adult education diploma in Black Africa. We were fortified by international connections and hosted a small UNESCO adult literacy institute. This pushed our thinking into ways of relating our adult education theory to literacy work, at that time almost wholly pragmatic, except in Latin America.

#### INTERLUDE: ZAMBIA, 1966–70

Zambia had only 106 Africans with university degrees (only 6 of them women) at

independence in 1964. The university was in a fledgling stage and most of the public didn't know what a university was. The Council and the Vice-Chancellor saw an adult education department as having a PR function, so were keen to get it moving. I was invited to set it up from scratch: an incredible opportunity for someone not yet 40. Thanks to earlier experience, I had clear ideas about adult education's relation to development, gender issues and cultural identity, but this was a country scarred by racism. With such a small pool of Zambian graduates, I had to recruit outside the country, and to start I wanted to show that programmes were in the hands of Black people. Thanks to Commonwealth grape-vines, my first departmental team included one Jamaican (who went on to become the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Commission), three Ghanaians, a Nigerian and a Ugandan; later, I recruited a Zimbabwean graduate assistant.

We had university offices around the country, which was quite large but with a very scattered population. From the Nigerian radio experience, I suggested we should use radio and television. The young Zambians revitalising the media jumped at the idea. We were responsible for a gamut of programmes from a quiz show with Africa-related questions to a five minutes current affairs commentary after the news. I had prevailed on the university to write a commitment to extra-mural work in all staff contracts, which reinforced our resources. Out of these programmes came, for example, the first research-based Zambian history textbook.

Besides making the university available to the general public, we offered its services to decision-making groups, running occasional seminars for permanent secretaries and ministers and current affairs promotion courses for the army. Such was the confidence we built up that when Zambia hosted the Non-Aligned Conference, the Foreign Minister asked the University to prepare all the background papers.

#### SCENE 4: LAGOS, NIGERIA, LATE 1970S

We are in a sombre funeral procession, almost all the staff and all the students with black armbands, marching from the Students' Union down the long palm-lined avenue to the chapel near the main gate. We are following the coffin of a young architecture student, gratuitously shot by the armed police who have besieged the campus in one of the many disputes between the university sector and the military regime. We have had helicopters flying over constantly (but today they have gone quiet), and hails of teargas. One of the canisters landed in my office and set fire to some chair cushions.

The student's death has caused great shock. The military immediately closed down all the universities (I have had to plead for our 200 foreign students, mainly South African refugees, to be allowed to stay on campus, as they have nowhere else to go), but our Vice-Chancellor, Prof Jacob Ade-Ajayi, has courageously been to the Head of State and asked for everyone to be allowed back for one day, for the funeral, since as he says the student is "one of our own" and we owe him that respect. He has been humiliatingly treated, but won permission, so we are all here and will stand in a crowd of over 4,000 people outside the chapel with the service relayed through loud-speakers (the policemen with their guns will be watching at the gate).

I am walking with the Dean of Science and as we go, he says fervently "These people must learn that a university is not negotiable". I think back to the Makerere Principal tangling with the colonial government. A university's mission may be to serve and empower people, but its project may be seriously at odds with that of the régime. I will think more about this when we sit in the Glasgow Senate and struggle to come to terms with the Thatcher government's degradation of British universities

I went back to Nigeria in January 1970 and worked for five years at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and then for five years at Lagos. This was a country coming out of civil war, with a military regime and with constant under-currents of dissidence. At first, the economy was booming and this enabled us in universities to continue work with relative ease, but economic decline was apparent when I left at the end of 1979. These brute realities are salutary when interacting with society from a university platform. More than ever, one takes refuge in the international nature of scholarship and universities (relying on relations within the Commonwealth and through UNESCO, for example), as a safeguard of non-negotiability.

We were able to do useful things, I believe. At ABU we established a working relationship with several powerful extension institutes and we set up a “University of the Air”. Within a well-established Faculty of Education at ABU and later at Lagos, we were able to begin to undertake serious research – on the nature of literacy in various scripts and languages, on the impact of adult education through the media and on informal education of roadside car mechanics. Constraints of space stop me from further description.

#### SCENE 5: GLASGOW, SCOTLAND, MID-1980S

I am standing in the drizzle at a bus stop in one of the famous “schemes”, and begin talking with a young woman, who tells me how she feels trapped and alienated. In the end, we neither of us get a bus. She invites me in out of the rain, and the outcome is she organises a small class in her tenement flat. They “never knew” that the uni was for them. I take along the Dean of Social Sciences and even he “never knew” how the university would be enriched by their knowledge and insight.

Many academics, whatever the rhetoric, have never really seen academia as having a need to be directly engaged with the wider community. My African learning helped me to promote that engagement during my eleven years as Director of Adult and Continuing Education at Glasgow. The context was favourable, owing to the evolution at that time of community education.

In 1974, when I was a Commonwealth Visiting Professor in Edinburgh, the office I was lent was full of documents. They were the raw material of the Alexander Report of 1975, and I was immediately converted to the concept of *community education* as defined there. The application had flaws and we now need new ideas. A foundation for those new ideas might be the new set of concepts associated with Human Development, which since 1990 has been elaborated by the UNDP. For educationists, one of its most significant aspects is that it postulates education as an essential *ingredient* of development, not just an instrument for it.

To reflect on my 11 years in Glasgow would take another article. In one sense, once there I was no longer “wandering”, but ideas still move. While at Glasgow and after, I have been further drawn into international perspectives – on gender, which had been dominated by “Western” feminists whose paradigms didn’t fit; and on globalisation, with international students transformed from wanderers to commodities. In the international arena, I have done work for and in the Commonwealth and believe it can provide a good framework for all kinds of international activity. It is not dominated by questions of force and power and it covers countries at all stages of human development.

Finally, in this somewhat spasmodic memoir, certain elements are missing – I’ve hardly mentioned my own publications, although I find writing in a people-friendly style an enjoyable task (but have indicated some of my research interests). And as I said at the beginning, I have not been able to pay tribute to the people who have filled all the scenes. I can only say an all-embracing Thank you.