

The Maiden Speech in the House of Lords of the Patron of the Achimota Trust, Lord Ribeiro of Achimota and Ovington, reproduced from *Hansard* of 10 March 2011

Lord Ribeiro: My Lords, I rise with all due humility and pride to give my maiden speech in your Lordships' House. I have learnt much in the weeks since my introduction in December, and I owe a debt of gratitude to my supporters, the noble Lords, Lord McColl of Dulwich and Lord Patel, and to my mentor, the noble Baroness, Lady Sharples, for guiding me through what can only be described as a minefield of parliamentary procedure and protocol. The personal attention of the staff has been remarkable, particularly given the heavy workload that they have experienced in the past two months.

My territorial title, Achimota, denotes my birthplace and is also home to a boarding school in Ghana, then the Gold Coast, where my late father taught history and Latin. It was founded in 1924 by three visionaries: the governor, Sir Frederick Guggisberg; the first principal, the Reverend Alexander Fraser; and the assistant to the principal, Dr James Kwegyir Aggrey. They founded the first co-educational school in West Africa and, in doing so, spawned the architects of Ghana's independence movement, which saw the introduction of self-rule in 1951 and independence in 1957.

The motto of the school, *Ut Omnes Unum Sint*, meaning "That all may be the same", is a reference to the abiding philosophy of the founders that, starting in the context of school life, black and white, male and female, should integrate and combine synergistically for the good of all. This is also graphically represented by the symbolised black and white piano keys—the emblem of the school. Dr Aggrey observed that:

"You can play a tune of sorts on the white keys and a tune of sorts on the black keys, but for perfect harmony you must use both".

This defining principle of harmony has guided me throughout my career and has emboldened me to achieve my aims in life. Such an attitude was uncommon in the British Empire as a whole and yet my father experienced nothing but friendship and support during his degree course at London University before the last war. One of his pupils at Achimota, Major Seth Anthony, became the first native-born African in British military history to be commissioned from Sandhurst in April 1942. Serving with the 81st Division of the Royal West African Frontier Force, he was promoted in the field and awarded an MBE after the Battle of Myohaung in Burma, in January 1945.

Some 374,000 Africans volunteered to serve in the British Army in theatres such as Ethiopia, Somaliland and Burma during World War II and it was a pleasure to discover that the noble Viscount, Lord Slim, had presented Major Anthony with his Burma Star badge, three months before he died in 2008.

My father, like Seth Anthony, was able to serve his country as an ambassador in Africa, Europe and America and, as a young student, I observed how effectively British diplomacy had translated to its newly independent states. Following the "wind of change" which passed across Africa, Britain is now left with 14 overseas territories which, as we have heard, fall roughly into three categories: military bases, areas of biodiversity and financial interests. Within the military context, the strategic defence and security review appropriately entitled, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*, gives an undertaking to defend the UK and its overseas territories. It goes further, stating that Britain requires,

"an independent ability to defend the Overseas Territories militarily".

I hope events over the past few weeks in North Africa have not reduced our resolve to defend these territories from opportunistic attack.

In the 1850s, Herman Melville, in his book *Moby Dick*, described a real event of a giant sperm whale which attacked and capsized the whale-ship "Essex". Some of the survivors landed on Henderson Island in the Pitcairn group of islands in the Pacific, no doubt accompanied by a cargo of rats. This Government are to be congratulated on meeting the challenge of eradicating the rats from Henderson Island in order to protect the eggs and the chicks of the native birds, in particular the petrel bird, some 25,000 of whose eggs are eaten each year by

the rats, representing 95 per cent of their population. Protecting the bird life of these and other islands in the overseas territories is essential to maintain biodiversity, and despite cuts in the public sector, the UK Government have found £413,000 to support a £1.7 million project by the RSPB to remove Polynesian rats from the island.

We have heard mention of financial services. It is interesting to note that the legacy of a tax-free zone, promised by King George III to the Cayman Islanders, has provided a tax haven in the Caribbean, which has benefited many, but not always the indigenous islanders, many of whom came originally from Africa. As a child of the empire and an African, I have some sympathy for the citizens of the Turks and Caicos Islands, the majority of whose population are of African decent, and who, having tasted a period of self-rule, find that elections promised for July 2011 are now postponed, with no date set for further elections. What steps will the UK Government take to ensure that the loan guarantees made to the islands will lead to the announcement of elections in the foreseeable future?

In his Ministerial Statement of 9 December 2010, my noble friend Lord Howell of Guildford referred to the milestones that had to be met before progress could be made. One of these was the reform of the public services. If any lessons are to be learnt from the transition from self-rule to independence experienced by Ghana and other former colonies, it is that time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted. Similarly a sound educational base is needed to provide the infrastructure to support a transition to self-governance. My father used to say to us as children that the most important gift that an African child could have was a good education, and ensuring that this is in place across the islands will encourage the next generation of leaders.

A Pathé News clip-I am sure noble Lords remember them-of the Gold Coast elections in 1951 said of Dr Nkrumah's party:

"They have caused trouble in the past; will power breed in them a sense of responsibility?"

Sixty years on, one may ask the same question of the Turks and Caicos Islands, although in slightly more diplomatic language.

I very much hope that the UK Government will continue to meet their obligations to the overseas territories and support self-governance and independence for those who wish it. I look forward to making further contributions to this House and thank the noble Baroness, Lady Hooper, for initiating this debate.

1.26 pm

The Earl of Selborne: My Lords, I know I speak for the whole House when I say what an enormous privilege it is to be the first to congratulate my noble friend Lord Ribeiro on a very distinguished maiden speech. He describes himself as a child of the empire and he brings to this debate what my noble friend Lady Hooper called the remnants of the empire, a unique perspective. It must be unusual, to say the least, to have in his territorial designation a title which includes both his birthplace in Ghana and Hampshire. As someone who comes from Hampshire, I am delighted to welcome a neighbour.

After qualifying at Middlesex Hospital Medical School, my noble friend embarked on his career in surgery and he culminated as an outstanding president of the Royal College of Surgeons from 2005 to 2008. He has been a major participant in the restructuring and modernisation of surgical training and he has overseen the introduction of a new surgical curriculum. He brings with him a great deal of expertise and I hope he will speak frequently. I look forward to further interventions from my noble friend.