

University Report

BBC AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

ACS 4/5/7/2/6

BROADCASTING RIGHTS: FREE FOR USE BY ALL
BROADCASTING ORGANISATIONS OUTSIDE
BRITAIN IN ENGLISH OR TRANSLATION.

PUBLICATION RIGHTS: NOT FREE
FOR PUBLICATION OUTSIDE BRITAIN
IN ENGLISH OR IN ANY OTHER
LANGUAGE.

UNIVERSITY REPORT

No. 160

Broadcast on 8th, 10th & 12th August, 1971

- CCSMO PIETERSE:** Today we hear from West Africa, from Sierra Leone in fact, about the reorganisation of one of the oldest Institutes of African Studies in a University in Africa; but first we go to East Africa, to hear about one of the new schools attached to an African University, namely a School of Journalism. Well, are there journalistic problems peculiar to Africa? Is a School of Journalism relevant to the needs of societies in Africa? These are some of the questions Ahmed Salim put to Mr. Jorgen Petersen, Head of the eighteen-month-old School of Journalism in the University of Nairobi, Kenya. Is there, in African countries, a need for a course in journalism? Well, the school has places for twenty-nine students but:
- JORGEN PETERSEN:** We had seven hundred applicants for the first twenty-eight places. Secondly seven of the students now attending the course have already been promoted.
- AHMED SALIM:** By their respective governments?

JORGEN PETERSEN: Yes, or newspaper editors. Thirdly the fact that the newspaper in Nairobi for instance

AHMED SALIM: This is a Kenyan paper.

JORGEN PETERSEN: Yes this is a Kenyan paper. It costs it about one hundred thousand shillings to keep three men on the course for two years, just in wages. I don't think that a newspaper edited by an African would invest this kind of money if they didn't think it was beneficiary to the paper, to the reporters, etcetera.

AHMED SALIM: What are the problems in some of these countries next door to us? Has there been a shortage, a really serious shortage of local reporters, who could take over local newspapers and really turn out to be the equals of their counterparts in other countries?

JORGEN PETERSEN: There is an enormous shortage of trained journalists in East Africa for instance. You know, as far as I'm informed Britain got its University-based School of Journalism six months after Nairobi got its School of Journalism. I may be wrong, but as far as I am informed this is more or less correct. But what I'm trying to say is that the ex-patriate journalists we have here haven't been trained either. Oh no, there is a tremendous need for trained reporters - ex-patriate and local alike - and I firmly believe that the general background of a journalist is more or less international. The profession, the handwork of the trade is the same whether you work for Radio Greenland or the Daily Nation in Nairobi. You must know certain things about facts, how to check them, how to present them, how to get them over. Then of course you have certain countries where they are afraid of the press, and so you have to be careful what you write, and this sort of thing.

JORGEN PETERSEN:

This is not a problem facing a School of Journalism we try to teach journalists who can work as journalists anywhere in the world, in other words, we try to say journalism, communication, is as important in profession as medicine, and accordingly just as a doctor must be able to perform in Nairobi, in London, in Khartoum, we expect a journalist basically to be able to perform in the same places. But on top of this we have specific problems in East Africa. We have the problems of communication connected with development. In other words, the journalist has an educational role in developing countries, which he doesn't have in a developed country. In other words, if the government here wants to put over a certain agricultural plan, I think this is impossible without well trained journalists. I think a lot of the difficulties we've had in African countries of political and other nature is due to the fact that the regimes have not been able to communicate effectively to the ordinary man. The ordinary man has felt more or less left out, he hasn't been able to understand what was going on in the big city, so trouble starts, and this is where the role of the journalist is different in Africa from Britain say, or Denmark. He must be able to assist his country. Also the journalists here must be a little more careful, it is much easier to stir up an illiterate group of people than a literate group of people that have been used to reading newspapers for fifty years.

In other words he must be more cautious as to the kind of words he uses, because if he, in a specific situation, uses the wrong words, then a whole village may burn down, or somebody may go and think that they should go and murder somebody else - you know these misinterpretations which have happened in East and

JORGEN PETERSEN: Central Africa. You remember the case in Tanzania where a politician had said something to a large gathering of people and then they went away and killed a number of other people whom they said were cattle thieves. In other words they had misunderstood the politician, they had thought that he was telling them to go and do this. And afterwards they, of course, pleaded not guilty, saying well it was the big bwana who said we should do it. The journalist finds himself to a certain extent in the same situation, he has to be more careful here how he addresses the general public.

AHMED SALIM: And the course is geared towards this sort of immediate problem.

JORGEN PETERSEN: Yes. We are trying to say okay, these are the overall problems facing journalists all over the world, and this is what he must know. He must know about printing, machinery, about broadcasting machinery, etc. etc. etc. He must know intelligently how to look at a film and all this sort of thing. Apart from that, each region around the world has its specific problems.

Another problem is adult education as such. A lot of adult education is going on in these countries, and fantastically good people try to educate more and more people.- especially the grown-ups. But I have my personal sort of pet theory: that this cannot be done without the assistance of the professional communicator, and I think a lot of good efforts in the fields of adult education are being wasted around East, Central and other parts of Africa because the teachers who try to put this over think they can be both teachers and communicators. Of course there

JORGEN PETERSEN: are a few gifted individuals who can do this, but I believe that in the whole sphere of adult education in Africa it is necessary to have the communicator the journalist and the teacher working together.

COSMO PIETERSE: Mr. Jorgen Petersen, Head of the School of Journalism at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, talking to Ahmed Salim. Next week we shall report on the school and the course, but now we turn to the University of Sierra Leone and in fact to its Fourah Bay College. There the long-established Institute of African Studies was recently examined by a committee of three. They were an economist who is a senior lecturer at the University, a research fellow of the Institute, and Professor John Petersen, acting director of the Institute of African Studies, and it is Professor Petersen who spoke to our reporter, Dwight Neale, about the reorientation of the Institute.

The Committee had been asked to examine the place and function of the African Studies Institute inside the University, and its role on the life of the country, Sierra Leone. The Committee recommended that the Institute should play an active and vital part in both spheres by means of its programme of lectures and seminars, by means of collecting and processing documents, items of material culture, items of oral tradition, and by means of running integrated or inter-disciplinary courses and providing facilities for research.

In actual form and structure, the research will fall into two types. There will be limited, or less comprehensive, short-term research on the one hand, and on the other, programmes of medium to long-term

COSMO PIETERSE: research continuing all the time. It is the scope and methods, and the aims of this long-term research that Dwight Neale and Professor Petersen first deal with.

DWIGHT NEALE: How much scope do you think you could conveniently work in terms of medium- or long-term programmes of research?

PROFESSOR PETERSEN: A good deal of western literature on the social, economic, political and cultural institutions of traditional, pre-capitalist, non-western societies begins explicitly or implicitly from the premise that their institutions, their value systems, their behavioural characteristics are somehow incompatible with the requirements of development, and thus they need to be modernised. The extended family and kinship systems, African family enterprise, traditional structures of local government and administration are often so regarded. Non-indigenous or imported institutions in practice have frequently been proclaimed as inappropriate or unworkable such things as western, that is Westminster-style, democracy. There is something to be said for developing African societies on a basis however remote of primarily African institutions. Research is needed to re-evaluate traditional institutions from a perspective of African identity, needs and resources through exploration in depth to see if a basis exists in them on which to build modern institutions, modern value systems, systems that would reinforce development. Against this background research would be undertaken, for instance, on the contribution of family institutions and kinship relations to processes of economic, political and cultural change.

DWIGHT NEALE: How does the institute propose to undertake such a programme?

PROFESSOR PETERSEN: The research is going to be undertaken by a team comprising of, for example, sociologists, an economist, a political scientist, a historian and a human geographer. These men would together develop working concepts and methodologies for investigating among other things, the family, entrepreneurship, an economic organisation in both rural and urban areas, the role of families in the political development of Sierra Leone, families in pre-contact and a pre-colonial Sierra Leone, and the impact of colonialism on family institutions and their contribution to processes of change. Other possible programmes under this general title could investigate for example, the utility in a development context of traditional systems of African government and administration, and of the basis of their functioning, such as the methods of achieving consensus in African communal organisation and the extent of their applicability in parties in politics at local and national levels.

DWIGHT NEALE: In a closer perspective, Professor Petersen, how do Sierra Leone's aspirations stand to benefit from this exercise?

PROFESSOR PETERSEN: Although politically independent for ten years Sierra Leone, in common with many other developing countries of Africa, remains a dependent nation in many spheres of its activity. Assuming that it is desirable that Sierra Leone should further liberate itself, it seems necessary as a pre-condition that we must understand the key mechanisms of dependence and inter-dependence during the colonial period as well as the

PROFESSOR PETERSEN: ways in which both dependence and interdependence have been restructured following independence, and the inner nationalisation of the economy, government, society and external relations. In the political field an interesting phenomenon is contained in the fact that as political dependence on the United Kingdom - the former colonial power - has diminished, dependence on Europe, North America and Asia has been strengthened by elements of ideology, political necessity and a measure of drift, and in some cases just accident. In the economic field there is need to investigate the nature and significance of Sierra Leone's external economic relationships, particularly our trade, aid, investment, monetary and banking relationships with the United Kingdom. In the domestic economy, relationships of dependence and interdependence on foreign capital, enterprise and entrepreneurship, underlies several of the problems of limitation of authority and leadership of the central government in economic and political affairs and of the private Sierra Leonean business sector. There are hosts of problems in the social and cultural field, all conditioned in varying forms and degrees via historical antecedence and traditions. Problems of national control and assertion are clearly finally interwoven and are evidently best tackled by interdisciplinary research.

DWIGHT NEALE: The people of course cannot be left out of such research programmes. What in fact do you do to make the people part of such a programme?

PROFESSOR PETERSEN: Well, we have, in history, spent a good deal of time instilling in the students a kind of national ethos, the fact that the history of Sierra Leone in the past has been written by people from outside Sierra Leone, the one exception being Arthur Porter's excellent

PROFESSOR PETERSEN: book, has been used intensively when doing the training of these students so that they can feel some national need, they can feel part of the national project to collect these traditions, indeed to write the definitive history of Sierra Leone. The problems that I outlined earlier in regard, really in essence, to national development can be approached in a similar fashion. People have come from the outside, ex-patriates have come, people from other parts of Africa have come to study some of the problems, one or two dimensions of the problems of development in Sierra Leone. We have had very little work done here in this country by Sierra Leoneans and this is what we are hoping to do in the Institute now.

COSMO PIETERSE: Professor John Petersen, acting director of the Institute of African Studies at the Fourah Bay College of the University of Sierra Leone, talking to Dwight Neale. "University Report" will follow keenly how the now established principles of African Studies operate in the circumstances of Sierra Leone, and of course, next week we shall hear more from Mr. Jorgen Petersen on journalism.