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GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Hello again Gwyneth Henderson here and in this week's 'University Report' news from Kenya of how to improve the housing situation without destroying and uprooting the communities concerned, and from Zambia the new Director of the Institute of African Studies there talks about its future. Actually the Institute's new Director is not exactly a stranger to Zambia University - Professor Jaap Van Velsen had been in the chair of Sociology there for sometime, before his now one year old new appointment. Now Zambia's Institute has rather an unusual history - although the University itself is only seven years old the Institute started life back in 1937 as the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. In the beginning basically two kinds of sociological research studies were done - one on the new aspects of Zambia (or Northern Rhodesia as it then was) that is mining and industry and the other on the traditional sector - namely the rural areas. Well thirty-four years ago the situation, the role and the Institute's ideas must have been very different, to put it mildly - and so in Lusaka Graham Mytton asked Professor Van Velsen how all the work done during this period relates to the Institute's work now in an independent Zambia.

PROFESSOR JAAP VAN
VELSEN

Well the time span means that the kind of material that was expected from your research fellows in the 30's and 40's was somewhat different from what it is now. My interpretation would be that in those days even the rulers of the country didn't really quite know what was the impact of an industrial and urban economy with rule by foreigners, with the system of racialism and so I think what they expected was something rather basic mainly, and that's why there were a fair number of tribal studies. What happens to these tribes when they are suddenly pitch-forked into mines or working on railways or in shops or in transport? And I think the work that was done has come up very well to these expectations. The first major study was not a study which was wallowing in the beautiful past, but rather a study of the new town, Kabwe, then called Broken Hill.

I think that now, as a result of that work, I think we know a great deal more, and it's partly the sign of the excellence of the work that we now can take that for granted, that we now really know what happens on the ground floor so to say. And we can now go on from there and assume, and I think we must assume, that Zambia is now an industrial nation. It is not, as it is sometimes patronizingly called, an emerging nation - it is a nation. It may be a nation with difficulties, but then a lot of much older nations have difficulties. In Belgium the Walloons and the Flemish find it still extremely difficult to get on with each other. So I think we must start from the assumption that this is an industrialised nation with problems which one finds in industrialised nations - problems of urban overcrowding, of the rural/urban drift, problems of localisation of industry, problems of migratory labour. In Europe many millions of migrant labourers come from within Europe, so this is nothing unusual and this has got nothing to do with a nation that is, so-called, modernising. So I reckon our research project we are going to formulate for the near future will be the kind of problems one would find in a research institute in Britain or in North America, or in any other European country, and not the kind of problems which we think are peculiar to countries like Zambia, the third world, newly independent countries. These are the problems. Obviously there are some specific aspects to it, but then every country has got its own specific history.

GRAHAM MYTTON

It seems to me that the Institute has widened its scope of research since the days of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute when I suppose it was mostly social anthropology. Now we seem to have research fellows doing a wider range of things. Do you want to encourage this trend?

PROFESSOR JAAP VAN
VELSEN

Very much so. I think the reason why it looked as though it was mainly social anthropology is partly related to the time span we talked about earlier, because in those days sociology that was carried out in black countries was generally considered social anthropology, and sociology was for white countries. And the other thing is that if one looks at the old research programmes you will find provisions there for psychologists, economists, geographers and the like, but they simply could not be got and these projects were never carried out unfortunately. We hope to be more fortunate this time.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

And we hope to hear about their work too as they go on - Jaap Van Velsen, Director of the Institute of African Studies University of Zambia was talking there to Graham Lytton in Lusaka.

And now to a subject that I was pretty well brought up on - and whose many facets - social, economic and technical - I've been interested in since I was about eleven! No I'm not exaggerating either, it's simply that my Father spent nine years in Lagos, and is now in Botswana working on it, - Housing. Well, of course, the major problem facing all those concerned with housing, town planning and so-on is the phenomenally rapid growth of towns and cities in West Africa, Central, Southern and in East Africa.

MR. SAAD YAHYA:

The towns of East Africa are growing at a very fast rate, at the rate of six to eight per cent per annum and this is twice the rate of growth of the rural areas which means that we can't provide enough facilities in the way of housing, schools, shops, libraries and so on and so forth for the urban population. Now this, of course, is beginning to show you have squatter settlements and you have even uprising and unrest in the urban areas. Now in future, unless we do something very drastic, it is going to get worse.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Mr. Saad Yahya stating the problem facing East Africa - if reasonable housing and facilities are not provided for the exploding urban population enormous social problems result. So what's the answer? Even low cost modern houses are very expensive to put up in the numbers required - so what about traditional housing? Well in Kenya Mr. Yahya, a lecturer in the Department of Land Development at the University of Nairobi, has been working on just this. His specific interest is in Swahili housing - that is the homes of the Swahili speaking peoples who live along the coast of Kenya and Tanzania - in Nairobi Mr. Yahya explained his work to Ahmed Salim.

MR. SAAD YAHYA:

Originally my intention was just to recommend the existing information and to do a full survey which I did to try to point out to the authorities and also to planners, architects and other people involved in housing development that this type of housing is not what we used to think it was. That is formerly during the colonial days the administrators used to look upon this type of housing as 'huts' they never called it a house they called it a hut, they also called it

a slum. Now what I've been trying to do is to impress on the authorities and on the academics that this is a valid real house which has a great deal of meaning to the people, it reflects their cultural values and it is also, which is most important, economically viable. Now to some extent this has succeeded because since then there has been a change of heart as it were. Formerly there were proposals to demolish large parts of our coastal towns, simply because they consisted of this type of 'slum' housing as it was called. But at the moment everybody is having a rethink about it, and we are beginning to realise that we cannot demolish these houses but we will have to find other alternatives, probably we can even utilise the basic concepts of the Swahili house towards the development of new designs for new housing.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Well it all sounds a most attractive proposition - in particular socially - if traditional patterns can be kept. But of course no government anywhere is going to put that first as a consideration when taking planning decisions. Mr. Yahya said that Swahili housing is economically viable in the long term - but what's its major advantage now?

MR. SAAD YAHYA:

Well the most important thing is that this type of house is cheap you see, whereas you can build a Swahili type of house for a thousand shillings, probably it would take you between forty and fifty thousand shillings to produce a modern house with the same amenities or, with the same space, so that is the main thing. Also when you come to the life of the building, although the Swahili type of house is supposed to have a shorter life, it is built of what we used to call 'temporary material' but in fact it's not a temporary house because its life can be prolonged by proper maintenance and proper repairs so these houses can live for a long time - even a hundred years or so. Also when you come to the question of plots, modern houses usually require a lot of land whereas these Swahili houses it is possible with them to build them in such a way that they don't consume much land and therefore are saving the land.

G WYNETH HENDERSON:

I suppose your report has gone to say, local authorities and government authorities?

MR. SAAD YAHYA:

Yes, I have written several papers and these have gone to appear in journals, they have gone to local authorities and overseas, and there has

been a great deal of interest expressed, not only by local people but also by people in Addis, this is the economic commission for Africa, and also last year we had a number of students and staff from two universities in Scandinavia, - the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and the University of Technology at Lund. For we had a party of about thirty/ forty students and they came here and we went to Mombasa, and we stayed there for about eight weeks, and we did several projects on the Swahili type of housing. For example, one project was interested in looking at the environmental improvements or the improvement of existing settlements in the middle of Mombasa islands - Kaloleni and Likongo - and we have prepared a scheme for putting in sewers, water supplies, street lighting, proper roads and so-on, we produced estimates on how this work can be done. Now I am sure this has been a great help to the local authority in Mombasa. Another project looked at the construction technology of the Swahili type of housing, that is how the houses are built, what tools are used, what materials are used, where these materials are obtained, what they cost, how is the labour obtained and so on and so forth and that was world recommended. Now all these things are published.

GYNETH HENDERSON:

It's good to hear of reports that are so quickly available! You know it all sounds too good to be true - for instance is it possible to put modern sanitation facilities into the houses - and if, as Ahmed asked Mr. Yahya, you are going to replan new urban areas, surely you must demolish existing houses anyway.

MR. SAAD YAHYA:

No - that is what we are against - that is, we are against demolition. What we want to do is have improvement of existing houses, existing facilities, necessarily a few houses will have to be demolished in order to provide space for new roads, play areas for children, public gardens and so on, but mass demolition is uneconomical and it is also socially undesirable, because it uproots the community and these people have to be located somewhere else. As you know most of the Swahili communities in Mombasa have a very viable, you know socially, self-maintaining communities, and they are very cohesive and even if you go there as a visitor you can feel this, and they are much more exciting than say, the communities living in the suburbs in Nyali and so on.

AHMED SALIM:

What would you say were the effects for example of destroying the Swahili type of housing here in Nairobi in Pumwani, and their replacement by the so called modern houses and modern blocks of flats. Has that, do you think, broken this cohesion of the Swahili communities there?

MR. SAAD YAHYA:

Oh yes definitely it has broken this cohesion and also economically you know these houses are expensive. But of course there are advantages for example, advantages of modernisation and innovation and bringing new value to the local people, so we have got to access these costs against the benefits. We cannot say that the scheme is successful or unsuccessful.

AHMED SALIM:

But one can say for example in Mombasa the same sort of thing ought to happen or should happen, namely that the Swahili type of housing should also be demolished there, and the so called modern type of blocks of flats like these in Pumwani should replace them.

MR. SAAD YAHYA:

Well it is inevitable that it will happen in sections in some places, but I am against wholesale redevelopment, or wholesale demolition, probably there are certain pockets where land values are such that they are so high that they have to modernise, they have to build modern houses and shops and so on, and there are certain areas where this would not be worthwhile it won't be economically viable.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Mr. Saad Yahya, lecturer in the Department of Land Development, University of Nairobi, was talking to Ahmed Salim. And that's it for another week I'm afraid, I'll be back next week, so join me then, but until then from me Gwyneth Henderson it's goodbye for now.

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