

University Report

BBC AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

ALS 4/27 7/2/72

'UNIVERSITY REPORT'

No. 194

Broadcast 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th April, 1972

GWYNETH HENDERSON: In this weeks 'University Report' African Studies in America - American Africanists in Africa and African Africanists in America! The African talked to us in London and the American in Botswana - and it's southwards we go first. Dr. Gwendolen Carter - a political science specialist in Southern Africa - is the Head of the African Studies programme at Northwestern University in America - and while she was on a recent trip to her area Alan Macartney spoke to her for us. Now Northwestern is, of course, one of the biggest and best known African Studies programmes in the States. It started in 1948 as a postgraduate programme, now it has 150 postgraduate students and about 7,000 undergraduate students taking courses. Well given the change that has been going on in America for blacks including their demands for equal academic coverage amongst other things - one might assume a high proportion of blacks would be amongst that 1,150 total - including of course, some Africans. So in Gaborone Alan Macartney asked Dr. Carter what proportion of their students come from where.

DR. G. CARTER: I would say that perhaps one tenth come from Africa, a smaller percentage are Afro-Americans. The bulk of the graduate students and probably the bulk of the undergraduates in our university who are concerned with African studies are young Americans who have been very fascinated by the kinds of developments that have been taking place on this continent and particularly since Independence. You recognise the very great need which education in the United States is generally recognising for much better understanding that the heritage is a major part of our population

ALAN MACARTNEY: Well in fact your programme was obviously set up long before there came to be strong pressures from Afro-Americans for this kind of teaching.

DR. G. CARTER: Yes, that's quite true. We were set up really in order to fill this major gap of lack of knowledge, lack of experience, lack of understanding of what was the characteristics of the people of this vast area of the African continent, and this remains our major focus scholarly work, research work, teaching exchanges between those faculty members and graduate students who are concerned in different disciplines in an effort first to understand the African experience of the past and then to try to keep up with the rapidly changing mobile society of Africa.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Dr. Gwendolen Carter, Head of the African Studies programme at Northwestern University. Now it is of course logical for an American university to have a Specialist Insitute or programmes of African Studies. But it is also an almost perennial question as to whether an African university should have one or not. In America, of course, now it's been thought necessary to have Black or Afro-American programmes or Insitutes as well as American Studies purse. Well does an American from her experience think it a good idea for an African university to have a seperate department for their National Studies? Alan asked Dr. Carter.

DR. G. CARTER: Well my feeling about this is that any university in a country has a primary responsibility to know about the history and development characteristics of that country, that all the students have this particular committment as well as the staff, and also to know about the general area in which they find themselves. For instance, what's on in Southern African but also as a part of Africa as a whole. But I look on a programme of African Studies or a Institute of African Studies as having a more specific scholarly focus on a particular body of material and not every Botswanan is going to want to know about the ethnography of every group in Botswana or to be expected to any more than any American knows about American urban problems. We have American Studies inside American universities but lots of people witness those who are particularly concerned with our programmes for African Studies, they are not concentrating on American problems at all, though they are aware of them in a general way, but they are concentrating their scholarly interests on Africa or maybe on Europe, and I think that an Institute of African Studies or a programme in an African university is simply a much more highly specialised body or group of people who are concerned with particular aspects of Africa.

ALLAN MACARTNEY: Nowyou mentioned research and post-graduate students coming from the United States to Africa. I know this has caused problems sometimes in some African countries, for instance in Botswana you've had two or three people arriving almost at the same time to do almost the same project, and one problem that confronts the university is in Africa or the governments, whoever deals with it. It's hard to co-ordinate this. Have you any idea then how this could be done or could you say how you select projects for your students for instance?

DR. G. CARTER: Well we try to keep as closely in touch with members of university faculties in the particular countries to which our students would be going so that we know what kind of issues they are most interested in. It's perfectly true that this kind of communication works better when you have had a fairly long personal connection with a particular institution. Now it does seem to me extremely useful to have somebody in a country, whether its connected with the university, which we prefer, or with the government, through which research permission is granted. It helps us back home, because when our students say we want to go and work on such and such a project it is a great help for us to be able

DR. G. CARTER:
(CONT'D.)

to write out and say we have a very able student whose interests are along this line, what would be most useful for you, and to get that word back is much better to have it come from the host country than to come from us. We feel very very strongly that our students should be affiliated with whatever university they're most hopefully aligned to and that they should also perform whatever services might be useful, like giving Seminars, reporting on new research material and on all accounts sending back materials and reports. It is never very easy to follow them up once they've left our immediate direction so we appreciate help from the host countries in doing this.

ALLAN MACARTNEY:

Well this is something U.B.L.S. is certainly thinking about at the moment. One of my hobby horses is that perhaps the African universities could act together on this, through the conference of Vice-Chancellors for example, or some kind of Secretary or an academic OAU if you like. I don't know if this has been talked about anywhere but it seems to me that this could be very useful particularly when you've got regional research being done covering more than one university area.

DR. G. CARTER:

I think that it is a very useful idea except that I think Africa is such an enormously large place that you can't have it centralised too much, so I would like to think of local centres, regional centres, national co-ordination, rather than trying to focus everything through some national agency, such as I respect the new organisation that has been established for the African universities. But I would urge from my side, and I have been urging this in Lesotho and Swaziland and I would like to do it here, that it's not a bit too early for the universities to begin to draw up lists of what kind of research they want done, and I think as it has been done in Tanzania this should really be designed from the university then our problems would really be solved as well as yours because we would know what would be more suitable.

ALLAN MACARTNEY:

I wonder if I could close with a question which is sometimes raised by professionals who are not interested in regional studies, they tend to look down their noses a bit. Do you think that regional studies in let's say Political Science, the discipline we are interest in, do contribute something towards the discipline as a whole?

DR. G. CARTER:

Yes, you mean area studies. Well we feel that it can contribute, I think it can contribute by stimulating inter-disciplinary interaction, this I think is the key feature of the area studies while they recognise the discipline and respect it and want to work within it, at the same time it is natural for people from other disciplines to work together when they are concerned with a particular geographical area. Then I think in the warmest possible terms of development studies that area studies do probably have a special contribution to make, so my experience, and I think my colleagues would feel this, is that area studies have tended to

DR. G. CARTER:
(CONT'D.)

broaden the base of data from which the conclusions in the discipline have been drawn. We were very colloquial in the past in joining our data from the United States and Europe. But we have learned about Africa and in some degrees Asia and Latin America has given us a much sounder base and a much more general perspective on some of these conclusions that we thought we had made. We've challenged our own suppositions and I think that this is very healthy, I think this is what area studies can do, but I don't think they can stand by themselves, I'm completely against the notion of degrees in area studies because this is not a coherent discipline, this is a body of material from which certain data can be drawn which can be used by the discipline, but I think the interaction of the two can be very healthy on both sides.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Dr. Gwendolen Carter - Head of the Northwestern University's African Studies programme talking to Allan Macartney in Gaborone. Well that's how an American sees African Studies in Africa and America's contribution to them. But how does an African Africanist see the situation in America. As you know Cosmo Pieterse left London and 'University Report' to take up a job at Ohio University - in African literature. It's six months since he left and now he's back for a brief ten day holiday, so I dragged him into the 'University Report' studio and first I asked him for his impressions after six months of America.

COSMO PIETERSE:

One of the tremendous complexity in the United States situation Gwyneth. It's an involved thing where one had the notion of the melting pot, now the melting pot is just about to break it seems. The whole direction now is this ethnic one. One had heard of black power, now it red power, the American Indians are expressing themselves, they want to have much more autonomy than they've had before. There is the Chicano development, that is Spanish speaking people coming from Mexico and towards the South/South-West. There's this development of the groups like the Puerto Ricans asking for a kind of autonomy. Now I was in the mid-west, this is in Ohio, where things are relatively quiet. But even there one had the feel that things are developing at a tremendous rate and that there is a kind of explosive situation building up.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

This point you've made about the different ethnic groups becoming more separate if you like, asking for more autonomy, more decision-making power I suppose as well. Is this because the blacks in fact have forged ahead, created a path, and so now everybody else is saying we smaller minorities demand a right too. I mean is this going into the academic world as well?

COSMO PIETERSE:

In many ways you've raised two questions. To the first one yes, I think it is mainly as a result of black power, the black is beautiful, the insistence on black studies, the whole movement from about the mid-sixties say especially gaining its apex round about the late 68/69. It's mainly because of that kind of climax that now one finds the other groups coming to the fore also. Now the area to what extent in the academic field things are developing along this almost autonomous direction. It is not autonomous in the sense that the black community wants a separate black community or that it says that nobody but blacks should study black studies. It only says that black studies should be there in the curriculum, that the history of slavery should be looked at from every point of view. Up to now its been looked at from the point of view of the superior, the established ethologist, the superior community, and it wants now the whole area to be as thoroughly academically studied as possible, and I think this is something that is likely to apply to other areas too. One has not had much study of Indian culture for instance, American Indian culture. At the moment it is something peripheral, but I think it is something developing. There is a lot of interests in all these ethnic cultures and the interest is likely to grow to the extent to where one would have them enplanted in the universities too, but this is something which is developing now.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Well that's all we have time for now, but Cosmo will be back with us next week when amongst other things he'll be talking about the relationship between Black or Afro-American Studies and African Studies.

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 ANY OTHER LANGUAGE.