

Morsy, Z., & Altbach, P. (Eds.). *Higher education in international perspective: Toward the 21st Century*. New York: UNESCO/Advent Books, 1993, pp. xvi, 218. Reviewed by David M. Cameron, Dalhousie University.

This book is essentially the by-product of a collaborative project undertaken by the two editors and first published in 1991 as a series of articles in UNESCO's journal, *Prospects*. Elegantly rebound under the current title, it contains a remarkably broad range of views from scholars and practitioners around the world on the problems and prospects of the contemporary university. The fact that all of the material is readily available in journal form begs the question of why a separate monograph was thought necessary. No answer is forthcoming from the editors. Besides, the elegance of the book's cover quickly gives way to serious problems with the physical text. Perhaps the most glaring example of the many typographical errors is the last line of the text in the book, on page 210 which, remarkably, is incomplete, trailing off into mystery. The binding that started off looking so elegant survived one reading, and then quickly deteriorated with pages falling out repeatedly, suggesting that perhaps the original journal may have been a more secure repository.

In terms of substance, the publication suffers the common fate of comparative studies compiled by selecting or inviting contributions from disparate authors. The book not only lacks an integrating theoretical perspective, but is full of contradictions.

Despite all of these weaknesses, this collection contains several excellent contributions, and these, along with the sheer scope of the enterprise, provide what justification there is for the publication of this volume. The theoretical ambiguity of the underlying analysis is evident from the outset in Zaghoul Morsy's introduction. He argues, for example, that the extraordinary enrolment growth which occurred through the 1960s in virtually all industrialized countries, and later elsewhere, has unquestionably devalued the university degree. Moreover, the transition from higher to postsecondary education has marked a further deterioration in quality. Then, he goes on, universities have for far too long hidden behind the sacrosanct principle of autonomy, when a more evident contribution to their host societies is clearly called for, especially in developing countries. Closely related to this is the pervasive problem of research priorities, driven by norms and personal ambitions largely untouched by social and economic need. All in all, it is a pessimistic outlook. So how does one explain Morsy's conclusion that "...the university is not in crisis nor is it ailing. It is only in transition and is under close observation" (p. xiv)? Puzzling to say the least.

The seventeen essays which make up the body of the book are organized into two sections. The first is titled, "Situation, Challenges and Prospects," and contains eight essays on a variety of themes. The first of these, by Torsten Husén, addresses the idea of the university in the contemporary era and turns out to be a well-informed summary of the many problems and adjustments that attend the transformation of universities from elite to multifaceted institutions. An article by Philip Altbach follows, in which he offers a comprehensive but understandably superficial survey of emergent patterns in higher education. The third piece in this section by Orlando Albornoz contains an excellent discussion of the inherent tension between the traditional notion of university autonomy and the current demand for enhanced accountability. The article is all the more intriguing because it is written from a Latin American perspective, wherein institutional gridlock has achieved seemingly unparalleled success. Albornoz's humorous, but ultimately tragic comment on the impotence of university administrators warrants quotation: "...there is no position of greater importance in Venezuela from which it is possible to do absolutely nothing than that of a rector" (p. 44).

A pair of essays follows, surveying the state of the world with respect to open and private universities respectively. This is followed by another pair addressing questions related to universities and development. The latter are both significant for the bitterness with which they denounce the failure of universities to nurse a spirit of innovation and to contribute directly to national development.

The first section concludes with a consideration of the optimum means of financing post-compulsory education by Jean-Claude Eicher and Thierry Chevaillier. They explicitly contradict at least one aspect of Morsy's puzzling introduction, arguing that "...there is a financial crisis in education in most countries..." (p. 92). They then canvass alternative instruments currently available for financing higher education and, perhaps not surprisingly, opt for a balanced approach, combining institutional and student support, the latter preferably incorporating the income-contingent repayment principle. What is at least mildly surprising is the author's willingness to generalize about the applicability of their prescriptions, allowing that each country will have to make its own decisions, but insisting that "...the logic of the present situation should lead them all to broadly similar choices" (p. 107).

The second set of essays (nine in all) is titled "Case Studies," but might more accurately have been styled area studies. What follow are not case studies in any analytical sense, but rather assessments of the current state and future

prospects of universities in various parts of the world. The scope is certainly impressive, including discussion of French-speaking universities in sub-Saharan Africa, and universities in Latin America, Arab states, new industrialized countries in Asia, eastern and central Europe, the Soviet Union (still in existence at the time this piece was written), "western" countries, the U.S. itself, and the European community.

These essays do not test or apply ideas generated in part one, but are rather free-standing accounts, and mostly descriptive. The quality varies enormously, some of it perhaps reflecting difficulties in translation. Particularly troubling is the highly opinionated and very personal critique of Arab universities by Raji Abou-Chacra. At one point he reveals his own preference for centralized state control by noting that "Arab universities lack the central apparatus needed to lay down curricula, to ensure that they are applied and to develop them in the light of government policy..." (p. 132). Later, he faults university hiring policies for a situation in which "...all sorts of people are finding their way into higher education" (p. 135). A particularly impressive contribution, on the other hand, is contained in Jasbir Sarjit Singh's analysis of the role of higher education in the development of newly industrialized countries, in which he concludes: "While little conclusive evidence has been adduced by research proving that higher education is a sufficient condition for development, the evidence from the NICs points to the need for higher education as a necessary condition" (p. 155). The other seven essays are interesting summary accounts, containing considerable information, but not sufficient analysis.

The volume is eclectic in the extreme, connected more by the network of international scholars from whom contributions were solicited, one suspects, than by any consistency or even comparability of approaches or analyses. As a study in comparative higher education, it is deeply disappointing. As a compilation of essays on contemporary higher education in different parts of the globe, it has its strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, the strengths are altogether too few in number.