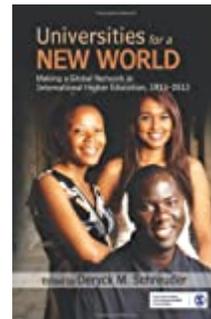




**Deryck M. Schreuder.** *Universities for a New World: Making a Global Network in International Higher Education, 1913-2013.* London: Sage Publications, 2013. 425 S. ISBN 978-81-321-1339-3.



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### **D. M. Schreuder: Universities for a New World**

Deryck M. Schreuder is an international historian and educationalist at the University of Sydney and the third editor to publish a volume about the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) following Hugh W. Springer in 1988 and Eric Ashby in 1963. Hugh W. Springer, *The Commonwealth of Universities. The Story of the Association of Commonwealth Universities 1963-1988*, London 1988; Eric Ashby, *Community of Universities. An Informal Portrait of the Association of Universities of the British Commonwealth 1913-1963*, Cambridge 1963. The first volume was written for the "Jubilee Congress" celebrating 50 years of ACU and is a "personal and unofficial commentary" (Ashby: p. vii) while the Springer's volume published for the 75th anniversary understands itself as a "companion" (Springer: p. 15) of Ashby's account. The centenary of the ACU called for a publication of a special character bringing 21 authors together to write about the "totality of higher education changes" (xxix) rather than institutional history only. Reading *Universities for a New World* while bearing Ashby's and Springer's treatises in mind is a juxtaposition that allows for insights that might otherwise not be immediately apparent. This juxtaposition does not

include a review of Ashby's and Springer's accounts. The mention of their work merely serves to contextualize Schreuder's volume.

The first of five sections of the book provide an overview of the association's inception and first 25 years, a period characterized by largely informal modes of operation. Up until the Second World War, a focus on settler colonies combined with the universities' fierce reluctance to sacrifice their autonomy conditioned the activities of the (as it was then known) Universities' Bureau of the British Empire. Even still, there was great interest within the "Commonwealth of Learning" (p. 16) to cooperate which resulted in the production and circulation of reports, booklets, surveys, programmes and circulars. Links between universities were not borne from an impetus to act on behalf of universities through an umbrella organization, but rather by the practical necessity of informing each about the other. This rather unofficial mode of coordination was helpful in supporting the "expansive definition of the British nation" (p. 13).

Clarity as to the origins of the organization is hard to come by. Tamson Pietsch states that the Bureau was

founded in 1913, but its gestation began 10 years earlier in the 'Edwardian movement for [a] closer imperial union' (p. 12). In his volume, Ashby traced its origins back to Scotland, where representatives of four Scottish universities decided to consult about changes in their institutions as early as 1858. The constitutive element of Scottish universities does not feature any further neither in Ashby's, Springer's or Schreuder's account despite their significant role in shaping global higher education.

Another realm from which this desire for connectedness may have emerged is the 'London Model' detailed in the second chapter. The University of London was founded in 1836 to act as an examining body for its colleges and other approved institutions. From 1858 onwards it began to award so-called 'external degrees' to students across the world able to fulfill entry requirements and pay the fees. The first colonial government taking advantage of this 'enabling permission' was Mauritius in 1865. Examination centres also appeared outside the Commonwealth for example in China, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, Thailand, Argentina, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

Noticeable in the work is the interpretive narrative of this external program's linear advancement, described as 'active in many spheres, both in the UK and abroad, throughout the time from its fledgling beginnings in Mauritius in 1865 through the 1960s to the present day' (p. 39). Equally salient is the influence of today's higher education jargon: the London model is seen as 'the essence of what is now widely known as distance learning' (p. 29), as having contributed to what is now known as the 'knowledge society' and as a quality assurance system exported along with education. Ostensibly aware of the danger inherent in a strictly chronological history, the chapter titled 1913-2013: Capacity-building in a Global Era addresses change more than continuity. The ACU's role is described as an advocate in introducing the doctorate for example, or as funding the provision of grants for student and faculty mobility. While this chapter functions as a counterbalance to an otherwise rather teleological narrative in the first half of the book, it is yet not able to elevate the 'balance of change and continuity' (p. 61) to a more even-handed piece of historical writing. While the achievements of the ACU understandably dominate the book in general, a critical reflection on what the ACU was not able to avoid is absent – it lingers in between the lines, neglected and awaiting inquiry.

Unlike Ashby's and Springer's accounts which examine the short 20th century, *Universities for a New*

*World* spans 100 years of history. It covers a time in which study fields such as remembrance culture and remembrance politics have assisted elsewhere in developing a self-critical approach of history writing. An explanation for the character of this volume is provided by Peter Williams in the chapter 'Developing Policy Priorities: Commonwealth Agendas for Tertiary Change'. The ACU's centenary coincides, as he states, with a new Commonwealth-wide interest in tertiary education driven by the intensifying interconnectedness of education systems. It also coincides with a review of the role and future of the Commonwealth in 2011, a process undertaken on behalf of governments which 'appeared largely oblivious [to] the depth and breadth of connections in education' (p. 206) and the ACU's reputation as the 'most capable of all the Commonwealth's independent civil-society organizations' (p. 206). As Williams himself calls for higher education and the ACU to return to the forefront of the Commonwealth's priorities, it is only natural, then, that a positively connoted publication rather than a troublesome window to colonial history or other seminal catastrophes of the 20th century is produced.

Of great benefit are the regional insights in the second half of the book, which add to the global imperative that the volume strives for. Michael Omolewa develops an African perspective by distinguishing between missionary, colonial and settlers' factors, including the role of South Africa and Apartheid as well as the inter-regional relationship between the Association of African Universities and the ACU. By comparison he notes that 'to some extent, the hoisting of the colonial flag in Africa had a positive impact on the emergence and sustenance of the Western university model in the region' (p. 236) while 'those territories that were administered by the French, Belgian, Portuguese, and Spanish had no local universities' (p. 242). In his chapter on higher education in India and Pakistan, Pawan Agarwal reminds the reader that universities played a key role in the struggle for freedom, a feature that shaped the foundations of the two nation states. Disputing the notion of imagined development trajectory in higher education, he adds that in India universities were at the forefront of social movements for equality while in England they lagged behind. This idea of equality is particularly present in the chapter 'Dominion Legacies: The Australian Experience', where it is argued that universities 'were crucial in establishing Australia as a meritocratic society within a broader national imagining of egalitarianism' (p. 286) and a 'people's university' (p. 288) – a model that found admirers throughout the world and is notably mentioned for ex-

ample, in the founding documents of Jawaharlal Nehru University.

The great contribution of this book lies in its depiction of higher education as a history of networks with individual institutions bypassing national frameworks. Schreuder, Springer and Ashby's histories of the ACU contradict the assumption that the frenetic nationalism of the 20th century led to isolation in academia, portraying instead a complex relationship with intensifying

global interconnectivity. In *Universities for a New World* 100 years of history in higher education is interpreted anew, during which transnational and global aspects are occasionally retroactively added. At a time when competition in higher education becomes increasingly stiff, reinforcing cohesion among the Commonwealth universities seems to have become a strategy. Appealing to history as a source of legitimation through the tale of the oldest of global university associations and networks (p. 61) appears to be a pillar of this process.

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