Cross-border higher education, who profits?

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Abstract

Emphasis on 'the knowledge economy', the commodification of public services, the massification of HE and decreases in public funding of education are the context for new forms of educational provision. Some nations have led the demand for and provision of cross-national educational services. The largest exporters of Higher Education have been the USA, UK and Australia. While the globalization of the knowledge economy takes its own specific forms, this movement can be seen, instantly, to replicate a structure of subalternity.

While opening a critical question of global cultural politics, scrutiny of this provision has shown significant shortcomings in terms of quality analysis. Quality assurance audits of overseas university programmes[1] indicate that the market has not generally ensured the quality of exported HE. Reductions of duration of study, the use of contingent labour and cultural insensitivity indicate that profit supervenes as the occasion for this form of neo-colonialism. Substantial growth in light of the efforts of the World Trade Organisation's 'liberalisation' programme engenders concerns about possible adverse effects of GATS on national systems as well as on the global knowledge economy. So whilst non-binding international guidelines are haphazardly emerging, the issue of responsibility and regulation remains a significant problem.

Key Words: Cross-Border Education, GATS, Higher Education, Quality Assurance, Quality Assurance Agencies.

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[1] Published audit reports by Quality Assurance agencies or research by Accreditation Commissions have been used in compiling this paper. They are publicly available documents. Where possible the identities of individual institutions are withheld. However, as has been noted elsewhere, the increasing secrecy of universities to protect their business and reputation has significant implications for how the public see them (Bok, 2003; Lieven and Martin, 2006). I can supply a list of the references of the UK documents used. The Australian ones are given as numerical refs.

Introduction

A decade ago Frank Coffield asked where the evidence was that supported the commodification and marketisation of education:

> Despite [the] growing body of empirical research about the adverse effects of market forces in education, … [some] believe that learning opportunities should be marketed and sold ... Learning however, is not a commodity like baked beans, which can be 'branded', 'marketed' and 'delivered' to 'customers'. It is a transaction which takes place between teacher and learner, where learners are guided through interaction with a more skilled partner to use the intellectual tools of their society. Moreover, whether learning can be marketed and what effects markets have on 'customers' are empirical questions which make the disregard for evidence all the more reprehensible' (Coffield, 2000, p.14)

In light of the relatively recent scandal in the Australian international education sector, a $14 billion industry 'riven with corruption' (*The Australian*, 14/06/09) and the closing of colleges with unacceptably low quality provision (*Business Standard*, 26/06/09), a historical examination of neo-colonial HE provision raises questions of both quality and cultural politics.

For-profit institutions (FPI's) have grown significantly in both high and middle income countries, but contrary to claims for increased equity and quality, they have delivered low-cost courses staffed by contingent labour, undermining the status of Higher Education institutions and compromising understandings of the role of Higher Education (McCowan, 2004). This paper focuses on public institutions engaged in significant profit generation and aggressive marketing, the use of contingent labour, the branding of education and cultural insensitivity, following up on work by Leiven and Martin (2004b; 2006). The present analysis has implications for the shifting role and constitution of the university, including the current emphasis on impact, and explores 'neo-colonial' relations between the university and its 'world'.

Frank Coffield's position stated above suggests an opposition between education 'proper' and the current emphasis on its markets, lamenting the lack of and disregard for evidence to support the drive to global marketisation of further and higher education. We begin with evidence in the form of audit reports of some of the large scale 'failures' of the largest exporters (US, UK and Australian universities). The indications are of a far from world class education in the cross-border market and of a comprehensive failure to provide a relevant

service. We also consider the possibility of a governmental analysis of such educational efforts: efforts that seek to export not only an educational product, but that also offer a subordinate place in the global system for subaltern contexts (Peim, 2011).

Higher Education has been represented as ever more central to the flourishing of industrially advanced and developing nations alike. Concern about the quality of HE has become significant in public accountability. This in turn has lead to the appearance of many new governmental quality agencies (QAA) and a quality assurance profession (Lewis, 2003; Hendel and Lewis, 2005). Burgeoning international activity in educational exports has prompted global organisations such as OECD and UNESCO to establish guidelines for quality in the provision of cross-border education. They note the lack of QAA in some contexts and express concern about the low quality of provision in others (OEDC/UNESCO, 2005).

In some wealthy but still peripheral national contexts, such as Qatar, organizations like RAND have been employed at high cost to modernize the whole education provision, promoting a western model that promotes a western from of subjectivity defined in relation to certain propensities that are promoted, validated and adjudicated through education. Such a transformation promises a new normative governance of population, analogous to19[th] century Britain.

Some Context

Demand for higher education and funding of provision shows two main and related trends in terms of internationalisation. Many countries, in comparison to the leading OECD nations, who define a norm of provision, are deemed to be in a condition of under-provision. The trend in the west (who have near universal provision, 80% increase in the OECD, Vincent-Lancrin, 2006) is for a significant decrease in public funding for HE creating the need to raise money from alternative sources. These pressures have contributed to growth in the export of education, commonly called Cross Border Education (CBE). This has in some cases been claimed to have been fruitful, as in Australia's exports to Malaysia, in analyses that have not addressed the cultural-political dimension (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2001). In other cases, the pursuit of market opportunities have led to ultimately unwelcome university extensions or offshore campuses (Bernstein, 2002; Leiven & Martin, 2006). In a number of countries

complaints raised about the standards of these imports led governments to introduce legislation to regulate this activity (Martin, 2004b; van Der Wende & Westerheijden, 2001).

The press for global liberalisation of service industries – with education now being included in that category – by the World Trade Organisation has led to increased international competition and growth in HE export. Private provision has proliferated (McGowan, 2004). Global markets in HE and training (which includes students, staff, products and services) was 'worth' an estimated $3 trillion in 2003 (Lim). The fast growing e-learning market will be worth $69 billion by 2015. Enrolments have burgeoned, by 2007 over a 100 million students; such that if 'Universities were a country that country would rank twelfth amongst the world's largest' (Hernes and Martin, 2008). Private and corporate universities have sprung up to capitalize on the trend. Traditional universities have formed consortia to provide alternative forms of delivery, often online (examples include Universitas21's Global and U.Next's Cardean University), and often with quite limited curricula, usually comprising business and IT courses, in order to profit (Martin, 2004a). Expensive failures, such as NYU online, Scottish Knowledge, Fathom and UkeU (Garret, 2004) and NSWU Asia (OBHE, 2007), haven't daunted the largest exporters: the USA (education is a top five service export) followed by the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

Clearly national budgets in the HE expanding countries are currently strained by the cost of provision. The cultivation of corporate culture, the promotion of market solutions and private partnerships may subsidise income and growth. But while universities have always had links with commerce and business especially in the US where a large proportion of funding comes from the private sector, in Europe and the Antipodes until recently HE was almost wholly state funded. Some universities historically have been successful at exploiting their research enterprise: for example Oxford has spin-off operations valued at over £2 billion (UKTI, 2003, Smith and Ho, 2006). However, many other universities in Britain have a lamentable track record for business start-ups (THES, 2005).

This disparity in wealth between institutions is important because universities are under greater pressure to show healthy finances, but it is a rigged game: for instance an 'old' university such as Birmingham (UK) had in 2002 reserves (equivalent to a company's accumulated profit) of £267 million, whilst its 'new' neighbour, Wolverhampton, had £0

reserves (THES, 2002). Additionally, Universities in the UK are constrained in the number of students they can enrol by the Higher Education Funding Council. Although institutions can increase their numbers, by doing so the value of the unit of funding[2] per students drops, impacting on league table standing and making senior managers wary of doing so. Indeed some institutions are stripping out non-funded numbers to improve on this indicator (and in one case we know of the student places targeted are for non-traditional students). Universities are forced then to look for alternatively funded students, a major motivation for engaging in cross-border activity.

International trade in education has often thus developed outside of the national boundaries of quality assurance agencies. Quite often external quality assurance processes are not applied to CBE programmes (Daniel & Kanwar, 2005; Davis et al, 2000; OECD, 2005) and where they have been, serious shortcoming have been identified. In addition, questions concerning the geo-cultural politics of such ventures, the nature of market they both assume and construct, the relations of dominance and subalternity they maintain and the meaning of education they purvey are never posed.

Ironically, perhaps, questions concerning international trade in HE may be pursued by examining the quality dimension in relation to the QA systems by of the largest providers. Primary, ontological questions, though, also arise concerning the extent that 'the market' can deliver high quality provision. These questions can't be raised without addressing fundamental conditions concerning geo-political international relations involving the human, social and cultural developmental needs of the receiving country – and the forces that decree what these are (Castells, 1996; Apadurai, 1996). Where discourses of quality foreclose such geo-cultural political questions, they nevertheless reveal interesting data about the nature of cross-national HE.

Quality Assurance

Universal agreement on the importance of quality accompanies little agreement on how to define quality (Watty, 2003, 2006). Lack of consensus and absence of agreed criteria are significant in the global market. At the national level, even when the recipient country is

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[2] Put simply this is the amount awarded to a university on enrolment of a full-time student, over enrol and the money has to be spread to cover those 'non-funded' students. Large numbers of non-funded students are argued to impact on the quality of the service.

wealthy, the logic of 'modernization' tends towards an insensitive one-way traffic of ideas and the imposition of a 'modernized' – i.e., western governmental – model (Peim, 2011). Large advisory bodies such as the RAND Corporation provide reform advisory services that suppress cultural sensitivity in the name of modernization. Such national contexts are often keen to buy in services that have no established quality assurance systems attached.

Where quality assurance definitions exist these are often contested (Harvey and Green, 1993; Watty, 2001) and cannot be not universally accepted.[3] While the The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education claims global authority as a world-wide association of 200 organisations active in the theory and practice of quality assurance in higher education, it is very far from carrying universal authority. Meanwhile, variations in the development of systems means that quality issues get displaced by status. Even where quality assurance systems do operate the nature and value of what is being assured remains, in the global market fundamentally in question (Giertz, 2001),.

Concern with quality, then, can't be disentangled from concern with the wider 'purpose' of HE. Questions of power are at stake in the definition of quality, in the management of quality and in the ends that quality is mobilized to sustain. It seems that an ideological struggle is underway about the 'proper' purpose of HE and various stakeholders are making claims to define this purpose (in the UK, AUT, 2004, now UCU and UCU, 2007).

Who benefits from quality?

The three main stakeholders in HE are often identified as the academic community, the state and the market (after Clarke 1983, in Jongbloed, 2003). Others include parents, the public and the media. These more or less nebulous bodies have often conflicting interests and the balance of power between them shifts. In the academy, university staff were historically powerful and set the agenda often claiming the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake as the core value or in the words of the Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies 'the unfettered search for truth' (Watty, 2002). The academic community decided what a good education should comprise, and controlled the curriculum, assessment strategies and promoted the

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[3] A number of regional and global organisations exist to promote dialogue and development of international quality assurance including: the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (inqaahe.org), the Centre for Quality in International Education (cqaie.org).

necessary skills for achievement. This model of academic primacy clearly no longer holds as business and industry increasingly define valued knowledge and relevant skills. A new emphasis on employability has lead to a more vocationally oriented curriculum and more pragmatically-minded students. The effect has been felt on Humanities degrees with a significant rise in business-oriented studies (Bok, 2003). One UK university dealt with a fall in student numbers by terminating all degrees in Humanities. Overnight History, English, Politics, and Modern Languages disappeared. Provision was then expanded in the more fashionable areas of computing and sports science (*The Independent*, 2004). And from 2012 only science and maths based degrees will be publicly funded in England leading to the possible closure of a third of Universities (UCU, 08/12/10).

In the Anglo-Saxon nations, political rhetoric stresses the economic imperative to embrace the market, leading necessarily to increasing commodification of education (see extensive Hillcole publications @ www.ieps.org; & van Wende, 2001). Increasing divergence exists between i. the perception of teachers and students and ii. institutional heads and state/business leaders as to what is needed from HE (Campbell, 1999; DfEE 2004). It has been argued that university leaders are ignoring collegial consultation and prioritizing business opportunities (Marginson & Considine, 2000). In this context, the management of quality is closely tied to a business ethic over and above 'purely' educational objectives.

Quality has become, then, an essential and a problematic issue in HE, given the self-promoting needs of institutions (Winston, 1999). 'Consumers' cannot rely on guarantees that may pertain in other business contexts. Some 'export and import' institutions have been severely criticised for the accuracy and quality of the information they provide (Martin, 2004a).

Conflicts of interest

Where the academy may see itself as concerned with knowledge development and student learning, holding to the core values of truth and autonomy, the state is concerned that HE is affordable and meets such political imperatives as public protection, cultural reproduction and economic fitness. In the UK, for instance, government arguments often conflate economic imperatives as educational values, and vice versa. The UK is one of the largest exporters of education and is an aggressive lobbyer for trade liberation in education services.

UK governments have promoted market solutions to funding HE expansion. Academics and students in the UK have engaged in protests and industrial action to resist this incursion of the market. In the US there appears to be a rising backlash to the corporate model of the university as unionised labour and academic staff question the increasing commercialisation of their service (Bok, 2003; Johnson, et al. 2003) whilst Australia has in the past witnessed similar upheavals (Campbell and Slaughter, 1999). Nonetheless, the market's grip is increasing.

Students

In a context of increased emphasis on students as stakeholders (Hill et al, 2003), student organisations have turned their attention to cross border education. Its promise of increased opportunities and choice are raising questions about the quality of education on offer (ESIB, 2002) and challenging that it is a commodity (ESIB,2006). 'The student community holds that Higher Education is a public good and a public responsibility' (Global Student Declaration Jan 2010), for some, quality can be assured by the behaviour of consumers: a former Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University stated 'let the market rule' (Broers, 2000). The argument here assumes that these stakeholders are sophisticated consumers and that the quality assurance infrastructure can assist in directing choice. So it is claimed that when the quality of education is poor students let 'their feet do the talking' (ibid). However, this implicit view of all students and student populations as equally – or amorphously – confident, sophisticated, empowered 'consumers' is questionable (Lieven & Martin, 2006).

Quality assurance processes for CBE are less well established in terms of engaging student feedback. Students' unions are traditionally organised as collectives within national systems. The European Union of students (ESIB) has expressed concern about lack of information and research on CBE. They are clear, however, that education is not a commodity and that students are not 'mere' consumers (see http://www.esib.org/policies/Commodification Education.pdf). There is little research on teaching quality in CBE and little evidence of development and support for teachers not directly employed by exporting institution who may be responsible for much of the delivery of exported programmes.

Who does assure quality in CBE and for what reasons?

Quality assurance for CBE is patchy. Sustainable development contrasts here with speedy expansion. Relatively poor-in-HE-capital nations seek to construct their own HE infrastructure, in order to effectively join the global game, while exporting institutions are generally less concerned with the strategic development of an importing nation's HE system than with profitability. QA is likely to be displaced in this symbiosis. The US, the UK and Australia share a powerful incentive to promote exports in education as a significant segment of foreign trade. Government trade departments in these nations encourage and even co-ordinate CBE activities.

CBE QA procedures and practices have been undertaken, until recently, by the universities themselves (van Der Wende, 2001). Policy development in this area has now devolved to external quality bodies such as in the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), in Australia by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and in the US the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). In all cases the QA remit for CBE is more ambiguous than for home HE.

The UK example, characterized by expansion to a mass HE system of with compulsory quality assurance, is instructive. The UK's QAA is one of the most developed agencies in the world and by its own assertion 'has a greater depth of experience and expertise in a wider range of activity than probably any other' (http://www.qaa.org). UK HEIs are inspected on a cyclical basis – normally every 5 years – with quality being measured against a formal set of standards. The UK considers its HE system 'world class' (UKTI 2003). There is, however, wide variation in the status or quality of institutions. Former 'polytechnics', made universities in 1992, are generally less wealthy, less selective and less prestigious. League tables confirm the different wealth, status and 'symbolic capital' of institutions, all of these dimensions translating into resources. Staff/student ratios, for example, of the top and bottom universities diverge significantly in the UK - 7:1 and 30:1 respectively (THES league tables 2003). In this HE 'market' HEIs may feel pressure to seek additional funding, an overwhelming motive for universities to engage in CBE.

The wealthiest universities in the UK import significant numbers of well-qualified, well-funded students. Exported programmes present a different narrative. A disturbing feature of

some of the CBE programmes considered below was simply their size, some institutions enrolling large numbers in short periods of time where tutor support was attenuated.

UK guidelines are available for institutions developing cross border provision (QAA, 1999b). A central obligation is that the standards of awards be equivalent to those in the exporting nation. Nevertheless, in its assessments of CBE provision the QAA audit reports are produced separately, under different conditions, from reports for exporting HEIs. There is no evidence, either that these reports, constituting a unique research data-set, are put to any reflective, developmental use.

During the past decade a number of CBE programmes were distinct 'market failures' prompting importing governments to legislate to protect their citizens from second-rate provision). For some countries the accumulative affect has deemed to have been decisively harmful (ibid). Hong Kong, Israel, Malaysia, Romania, UAE, and South Africa have complained about the activities of providers (ibid; Van der Wende, 2001). Reasons for these failures include: i. rapid expansion, including in some cases the recruitment of double the number of 'home' students (Martin, 2004a); ii. Poor programme development (QAA, 2000c; Martin, 2004b); iii. lack of sensitivity to cultural context, in spite of QAA guidelines and implications for effective teaching and learning (Li, 2002); iv. absence of quality infrastructure including ready-to-hand systems and procedures for 'the approval of programmes, enrolments, student support, assessment procedures and quality assurance' (Lieven & Martin 2006, p. 31); v. choice of partner, including some seriously 'unwise' and potentially scandalous liaisons (Baty, 2000, *The Times Jan*, 2005).

Similar problems have characterized Australian HE export development. Many Australian HEIs have been actively engaged in CBE, dominating the pacific market. The AUQA oversees quality assurance in HE 'at home' where registered institutions undergo a cyclic audit. The agency publishes reports on HEIs that include a separate section for international activity. These subsections are sufficiently comprehensive to communicate an idea of the quality of provision.

The scale of some Australian CBE operations is large, generating valuable revenue for parent institutions, HE being a major national export. Examination of QA reports, however, reveals

shortcomings similar to the UK audits, including: non equivalence of standards in progress review, inadequate moderation procedures and poor staff induction and support, no student evaluations and too few staff involved in decision making, review and quality control and compressed courses that allow 'insufficient time for intellectual development, mature reflection on the topic or adequate independent study' (Dixon & Scott, 2003; AUQA reports no.'s 5, 6, 7, 11, 27 & 29; Lieven & Martin, 2006, p. 29).

The US HE system, comprising of 6500 public and private institutions spending $230 billion, enrolling 15 million students on more than 20000 programmes, has a more market oriented character and a complex system of HE quality assurance (Eaton, 2002). US universities increasingly engage in commercial activities partly due to the fact that 'federal policies provide student and research support to individuals rather than to institutions' (Dill 2003, p.137). QA is achieved through a tradition of self-evaluation and scrutiny supported by regional and national accreditation agencies, known as 'Accreditors', themselves recognised by two main national bodies, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation(CHEA) and the United States Department of Education (USDE). It is difficult to track the operations of US HEI's and offer data on the extent of CBE operations. In 2002, CHEA found their organisations involved in HE accreditation in 65 countries (CHEA 2002). Fifteen of the 55 accreditors had developed separate guidelines for quality but 'did not describe them' and others were using the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation's (COPA) *Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals* (1990). Others simply did not reveal the locations of their CBE operations.

While CHEA guidelines include significant protocols for 'Ethics and Public Disclosure', CHEA does not require reports on the quality of the programme (Bear, 2001), in spite of The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education's recommendations concerning the public availability of QA audit information (available @ www.inqaahe.org; ESIB, 2004). HE national commission reports in the USA remain confidential; QA reports and data for CBE are bound to be hard to find.

A world-class service?

The major exporters briefly outlined above all make claims regarding the superior quality of their education systems. US commentators describe their system as the 'best in the world' or

the 'gold standard'; the UK and Australia describe theirs as 'world class' (Bok, 2003; Brittigham 2003: AUQA, 2002; UKTI, 2003). However, like the concept of quality there is no agreement on what 'world-class' means nor how to measure it across a system. Nonetheless, Philip Altbach, for example, argues that world-class institutions may be distinct from 'national' or 'regional ones' and are characterised by excellence in research and teaching, academic freedom, relative autonomy in governance and substantial public funding. Attracting and retaining the best researchers/teachers requires security (tenure); academic freedom demands the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and well as freedom of communication and dissemination; good governance requires faculty and student voice in the internal procedures around access, curriculum, assessment and promotion; whilst support through funding provided by the public implies open access to specialist knowledge and activities relating to the production of knowledge (Altbach, 2003). Very few of these features would be considered important characteristics of business institutions and indeed may be detrimental. Co-operation in academic communities in terms of reporting research in peer reviewed journals is essential. Peer review is regarded as an essential, constructive, critical process, impartial and disinterested. It is difficult to imagine many businesses sending out 'product prototypes' or service plans to other businesses for improvement! Indeed private businesses attempt to 'gag' university researchers for a sufficient time (by introducing clauses around publication timescales) to get a head start on competitors (Bok, 2003). Indeed, Altbach identifies ideals and values in direct contradiction to business imperatives. The best academics, it's claimed, see their work as a 'calling' and are rarely primarily motivated by monetary gain. The academic world contrasts in a quite fundamental way with the market ethics of leading business corporations.

Few institutions may fully live up to the ideals Altbach expresses. It's easy to conclude that very few 'world-class' universities exist and that they are very expensive. National or regional class institutions may have some of the characteristics of the elite but do not share the same resources or have the same research-intensive mission. The world's higher status universities are not engaged in any substantial way in CBE in terms of selling their courses, and are not chasing students: their symbolic gravity draws in the best qualified students in the world. Some elite universities do sell courses but they are very expensive and often not accredited. Less prestigious HE institutions pursue CBE business to increase revenue to compete or even survive, trading on the symbolic capital of their national HE system,

generally meaning that the experience of students on CBE programmes is not comparable to the experience of home students.

Quality Costs

As noted the HE market is expanding and diversifying. It has become a potentially lucrative industry attracting new investors and as traditional HEIs cash in on this business, core values and behaviours are being sacrificed. A market ethic promises greater value for money and effectiveness, but is not a vehicle for sustaining quality. Elite universities of the world spend vast amounts of money, sustaining world-class facilities, faculties and resources.

Some exporters of CBE have been providing programmes that do not meet the quality standards established for their own institutions. Such programmes may be seen as analogous to those schemes designed to send cast-off books and other discarded academic materials from the education wealthy nations to the education poor. Building sustainable, mutually valuable, locally sensitive and relevant educational experiences takes time and requires relations of mutuality. The rationale for exporting cannot simply be subsidies and the 'brand' of a nation state. CBE programmes are most often business, computing or language courses – that may appear 'neutral' or neutrally utilitarian, thus avoiding questions concerning the cultural politics of HE import / export. But education in this form cannot be seen either in terms of a politically culturally neutral, mutually beneficial engagement, nor can it be seen as a 'gift' from the education-wealthy sectors of the globe to the educationally impoverished. Serious questions of quality – where, to take an extreme, courses have been delivered from the 'back of a petrol station' (*Times*, 2004) – reflect not only an imbalance in the wealth of exporting and importing national contexts: they also signify the reproduction of such inequalities by HE means.

CBE poses serious questions for quality assurance; as CBE has proliferated so have accreditation agencies, frequently outside the jurisdiction of national quality assurance governance. Due to the absence of transnational accreditation and regulation bodies, some international HE organisations are taking an unusual approach to accreditation. The consortium Universitas21's 'Global University' is accredited by its own agency, Pedagogia. Its constituent institutions, however, continue to be quality assured by their home national systems.

The future of CBE is likely to be one of exponential expansion as trade liberalisation increases and new providers recognise the opportunities offered by the market (Daniel & Kanwar, 2005). The efforts of the World Trade Organisation are driving these global efforts and it is worth briefly considering this before concluding.

GATS[4] and HE

It is well established that the leading exporters of HE support a 'market perspective' and 'trade approach'; they are powerful lobbyists in debates on the General Agreements on Trade in Services (Rikowski, 2000; Van der Wende & Westerheijden 2001). Educational GATS are controversial and are seen to represent a significant threat to the future of HE public service within national boundaries with a public service ethic. Significant sectors the HE community is deeply suspicious of the potential consequences of GATS (Nyborg, 2002. ESIB, 2006).

Although countries like New Zealand are strong supporters of liberalisation they may not have fully considered the long term implications:

> 'What's more, by leaving their markets wide open, small countries such as New Zealand run the risk of cutting their own throats. The loss of control over their education systems in favour of large transnational corporations is a very real possibility. How indeed can one compete with these commercial giants who benefit from all the advantages that access to a vast market can provide and who make no bones about using them?' (EI/PSI, 2002)

The abiding rationale for GATS is trade liberalisation. The role of regulatory mechanisms or good practice codes such as UNESCO's may turn out to be incompatible with this overriding ethic (EISB, 2002).

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[4] The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is the first ever set of multilateral, legally-enforceable rules covering international trade in services. GATS operates on three levels: the main text containing general principles and obligations; annexes dealing with rules for specific sectors; individual countries' specific commitments to provide access to their markets.
Source: WTO

Conclusion

The development of a global HE system, holding to the core values of the academy, assisting others to aspire to standards that ensure public trust, sensitive to local conditions, interests and needs, is clearly incompatible with the short-term desire for profit. To fulfil – or at least to work towards – this ideal, HE institutions, national systems and global accountability mechanisms would need to positively promote the autonomy and freedom that are enabling conditions for the production and dissemination of disinterested knowledge and know-how. UNESCO identifies some salient and essential features for the development of CBE in *Perils and Promises* including autonomy, diversity, co-operation and openness. The report goes on to state that:

> On its own, the market will certainly not devise this kind of system. Markets require profit and this can crowd-out important educational duties and opportunities. Basic sciences and the humanities, for example, are essential for national development. They are likely to be under-provided, unless actively encouraged by leaders in education who have the resources to realize their vision.
> Governments need to develop a new role as supervisors of higher education, rather than directors. They should concentrate on establishing the parameters within which success can be achieved, while allowing specific solutions to emerge from the creativity of higher education professionals (UNESCO, 2000).

It is difficult to see how the neoliberal governments of the US, UK and AUS are acknowledging these concerns, when they do not have a track record of sufficient regulation of CBE from their public HE institutions.

The problems and dangers associated with the export of cultural products are well known. Potential for exploitation and for ever new forms of colonialism is a function of the very market that gives rise to differentiated educational capital. In the activities of CBE in HE, it is obvious that what is being purveyed is a cultural product within a cultural process shaped by geo-political forces. Universities and others engaging in CBE, according to both informal and formal versions of their proper mission, have a responsibility to ensure that their actions are sensitive to both cultural issues and power inequalities. It's clear that at present this is not the case.

According to OECD/UNESCO guidelines:

> Higher education institutions are responsible for the quality as well as the social, cultural and linguistic relevance of education and the standards of qualifications provided in their name, no matter where or how it is delivered' (p.4). The mistakes made in the pursuit of profit suggests that this is the least of the concerns of some institutions and that they are happy to pursue a policy of cultural imperialism.

Is it possible to imagine that institutions engaging in CBE adopt an ethic of co-operation and support sustained, locally-informed, strategic educational development of high quality to all who can benefit? The alternative is to consider an educational world characterstised by ever more uneven development of educational capital, by exploitative relations between the symbolically wealthy and the symbolically disenfranchised, by the imposition of inappropriate models of knowledge and systems of delivery. The dangers are not exclusive to economically poorer countries. Even in those national contexts where wealth enables high-cost consultancy and expensive resourcing, the cultural issues remain. There is a significant, further danger that CBE becomes another, more pervasive, more subtle and more difficult to identify form of governance or, rather, of governmentality. Adopting curricula and pedagogic relations and institutional structures from external, more powerful sources, either reproduces or exacerbates relations of domination and subordination by educational means. A resounding question concerns the willingness of national QAAs to address CBE issues, and in the absence of a powerful international body it remains difficult to see how CBE can be governed in a direction that is positively responsive to global educational cultural politics.

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