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Autonomy and Accountability in Higher Education: Lessons from Ghana and Mexico

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Summary

The effective delivery of Higher Education policy depends upon good governance, but the very design of governance is itself also a contested concern of Higher Education policy. The principles of good governance, as they relate to university autonomy and accountability, and to academic rights and responsibility, are broadly consistent and might gain ready assent globally. Yet it is clear from the wide spectrum of modes of governance worldwide that there is no consensus as to what, in detail and specifics, good governance looks like, at either national or institutional level. One size does not fit all.

Malaysia derives much of the form and structure of its Higher Education sector from the British example as a result of its colonial history. Even now, many years after independence, Malaysian Higher Education policy still defers to the UK or USA. Malaysian universities are ranked on the 'world stage', according to criteria over which they have no control. Those criteria inherently favour the comprehensive research and teaching institutions of the Global North. Academic achievement is assessed and audited in relation to British and North American norms despite numerous critical differences of context and resource. Quality and excellence are defined in Harvard and Oxbridge, not Kuala Lumpur.

In light of this situation, this paper argues that Malaysian policy must be reoriented away from this damaging hegemony, and that Malaysia's university governance practices must be fundamentally reconceived. There are lessons to be learnt from developing and middle-income postcolonial nations with relevant and robust Higher Education sectors, such as Ghana and Mexico. These lessons require an examination of Higher Education as part of a wider cultural and educational ecosystem. They necessitate fresh and continuing debate about the value and objectives of Higher Education in different environments and historical moments, and about the missions of specific institutions in specific places. Above all, they entail confidence and trust in professionals working within the sector to assess and articulate their own strengths, mission and strategy.

Specifically, attention to Ghana and Mexico as comparators suggests Malaysia should consider the following: devolution of state bureaucratic or administrative control to autonomous or independent statutory bodies; recognition, support and empowerment of diverse stakeholder groups within the sector, in particular academics themselves; design of innovative, relevant and inclusive models for institutional review and Quality Assurance; and the promotion of alternatives to the standardization of institutional missions and structures, either in relation to 'world-class' aspirations, or the 'comprehensive' university.

1.0 Introduction

What can Malaysia learn from other countries about autonomy and accountability in Higher Education? There is much that is distinctive about every national context, perhaps especially the Malaysian one, but in the era of globalization tertiary sectors around the world face many similar challenges. Even the most unlikely comparators reveal common characteristics and determinants, and offer instructive examples of good and failed practice, smart or unsuccessful innovation, patterns and structures of engagement. As Philip Altbach remarks, 'The central realities of higher education in the 21st century – massification, accountability, privatization, and marketization – shape universities everywhere' (Altbach 2003). Globalization, the changing role of the state, demographic and environmental shifts, local or regional conflicts and economic cycles are drivers and inhibitors of university development everywhere. Public services generally have been increasingly pressurized to demonstrate higher 'value for money' in a time of shrinking budgets and resources.

Over the past few decades, in pursuit of this objective, public policy has tended to adopt measures from the corporate or industrial sector. As a major element in public sector activity, Higher Education has been the focus of much attention: 'Higher Education governance is a key policy issue of the 21st Century' (Kennedy 2003). The world of business has provided many practices relating to the delivery of 'efficiency' and 'excellence' and 'quality control' or 'total quality management', with a dominant paradigm emerging which has been characterized as the 'New Public Management' (Henard 2009). These measures have resulted in the bureaucratization of Quality Assurance, the exponential expansion of administration, and the establishment of a lucrative industry concerned with rankings. Such initiatives are of course attractive to politicians precisely because they generate concrete and measurable data. However, the more dominant these measures become, the more evidence is available of unintended consequences, perverse incentives and damaging effects and there is overwhelming evidence of sector-wide concerns about the distortions and degradation of academic missions and freedoms which they entail.

This paper takes examples from Ghana and Mexico, nations which offer many interesting points of comparison with Malaysia in relation to history, culture and development. Their Higher Education sectors have developed in radically different ways, characterized by policy innovation, specifically around governance questions, which indicate sustainable alternatives to the dominant hegemony.

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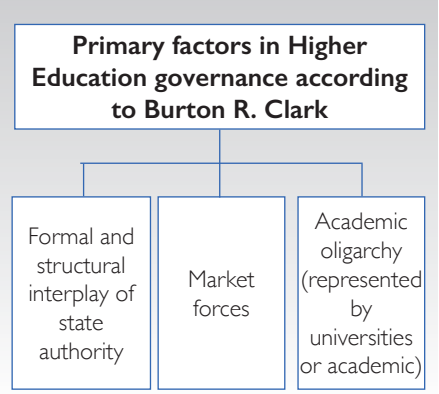
1.1 What is Governance?

Following the influential definition of academic governance developed by Clark (1983), this paper is concerned with examples of the formal and structural interplay of state authority, market forces and academic oligarchy (by which Clark means the various forces representing the universities or the academics). These three elements constitute the primary factors in all Higher Education governance. Most governance arrangements might be arrayed along a spectrum between the most authoritarian – where the state authority has absolute primacy – and those with the most autonomy devolved to the non-state actors – which we might characterize as negotiated or democratic. Malaysia is situated towards the authoritarian end of this spectrum, in that politicians and the state predominate in the fashioning and dissemination of policy: there is little or no effective contribution from the other elements, which results in a radical and damaging disequilibrium in the sector.



Issues in academic governance *are* substantively issues of autonomy and accountability. In order to understand the impact of policy adjustments, it is necessary to examine incidences of the operation of this matrix or triangle of forces where one or more agents seeks to achieve structural or systemic change, for instance to increase some aspect of autonomy or the better to articulate an area of accountability. Such pressures must inevitably result in a modification, formal or informal, explicit or implicit, of governance structures. What are these effects? How far are they in line with the original aspiration? What might be the unexpected or the unintended consequences? For reasons of economy and impact, the following discussion is limited to a small number of examples which offer sharp contrast with Malaysian experience and throw the local situation into useful relief, giving lessons as to alternative emphases, priorities and drivers in strategy and policy.

2.0 The Relevance of Ghana and Mexico

Ghana and Mexico offer intriguing parallels and strong divergences from the Malaysian situation. There are several reasons to look at them more closely. Above all, they embody alternative to the dominant Western models, and suggest much about the necessary conditions for the development of productive, relevant and sustainable Higher Education ecosystems.

The conditions within which globally dominant, hegemonic, 'world-class' institutions and systems have emerged and are sustained, almost exclusively in the global North, are radically different from those prevailing in developing and middle income nations. This is not the place to rehearse issues around academic dependency and the 'Captive Mind' thesis, or the damaging influence of rankings on the education systems of developing and middle-income nations, but it is important for Malaysia – along with many of its peers – to question the ways in which so much of the global agenda for Higher Education has been established by and for the West. There is much to be gained – and learnt – from Harvard, Oxbridge and the Humboldt, but not at the expense of local and regional developmental priorities and intellectual culture. The introduction to the World Bank's report on 'World-class universities' is telling: 'World-class standards may be a reasonable goal for some institutions in many countries, but they are likely not relevant, cost-effective or efficient in many others' (Salmi 2009).

Policy recommendations must attend to the wider ecosystem, the cultural context and conditions in which universities function. Current policy is too dependent upon metrics and quantitative measurement, a technocratic focus on the application of abstractions or reified models, of generalizations predicated on anomalous histories. Thinking about Higher Education objectives and governance in Ghana and Mexico is impossible without sensitivity to complex cultural and historical determinants. It demands a nuanced, qualitative and evaluative approach. Considered more closely, the parallels with the Malaysian case are far more apparent than, say, those between Malaysia and the USA. In this sense, Ghana and Mexico offer an important corrective to tendencies towards simplification or standardization, and recall us to questions and discussions of value. Bill Readings's work on North American and UK universities is instructive in this regard. In The University in Ruins, he identified an explicit shift in university mission and strategy from a concern with broad questions of culture, knowledge and identity to a much more narrow commitment to the pursuit of 'excellence': 'When excellence brackets the question of

value in favour of measurement, replaces questions of accountability or responsibility with accounting solutions […] holding open the question of value is a way of holding open a capacity to imagine the social otherwise' (Readings 1996). The implication is stark for policy formulation in countries where nation building and development remain crucial drivers. The aspiration towards supra-national and abstracted 'excellence', the drive to be included and to rise in the 'global rankings', risks erasing fundamental mission objectives at the national level.

There is much which is representative or exemplary in the Ghanaian and Mexican experience, specifically in terms of policy areas of critical importance to the development of strong forms of autonomy and accountability – levels of autonomy unknown in the Malaysian context. Mexico, for instance, with its high levels of institutional autonomy and constitutional protection for those conditions (see below) is at the other extreme of the governance spectrum discussed earlier. The contrasts to the Malaysian paradigm are dramatic. In what follows, particular attention is given to the devolution of state bureaucratic or administrative control to autonomous or independent statutory bodies; recognition, support and empowerment of diverse stakeholder groups within the sector, in particular academics themselves; design of innovative, relevant and inclusive models for institutional review and Quality Assurance; and the promotion of alternatives to the standardization and homogenization of institutional missions and structures, either in relation to 'world-class' aspirations, or the 'comprehensive' university.

One final characteristic of these two countries which is worthy of mention is the dynamism and urgency of public debate about education. The intensity of concern is a measure of the value of education within the national cultures. In Ghana, for example, a recent high-level seminar bringing together university leaders from across the country was widely reported in the press and was indicative of the high level of policy priority (Weiss 2016; Fritelli 2016). In Mexico, the passion and even violence which characterize controversies relating to the sector are consistently remarked, with universities functioning directly as the locus of the public sphere, above all during long periods of dictatorial and semi-authoritarian rule. Malaysia lacks this level of public engagement with Higher Education policy, just as it lacks vital non-state agents in the dynamic of governance and policy formation. The lack of these elements results in a lack of corrective engagement with state power, with a consequent impoverishment of policy debate and formation.

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2.1 Ghana: Context 

The parallels between the two Commonwealth nations, Ghana and Malaysia, are immediately apparent, and not simply because the African country has also pursued a bold, long-term, multi-faceted national plan entitled 'Vision 2020' (IMF 2000). Most obviously, the nation's history has been dominated by the long process of postcolonial adjustment and decolonization. The country now has a population of some 25 million, but with very significant disparities of development between the main urban centres and large rural areas.

There is ongoing and major concern about under development in large parts of the state. In the 1970s and 1980s there was painful economic and industrial restructuring as a function of an IMF/World Bank 'Structural Adjustment Programme', directed towards the attainment of first middle income and then developed nation status. During the early years of this century, Ghana's natural resources and rapid industrialization made it at one point the fastest growing economy in the world (2011), but fluctuations in commodity prices combined with fiscal indiscipline have resulted in problematic fluctuations of national fortune.

At the point of independence from the British Empire in 1957 the country boasted a single University, which had been established by the British to serve the whole region of West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Gambia), and which functioned primarily to provide administrators to replace the expatriate colonial management elite. In the initial postwar and independence period, notwithstanding the commitment to the 'flagship' role of the University of Ghana, national priority was the building of primary and secondary education, and the country's University Commission was the single body charged with regulation/oversight of HE. It was only in the mid-1980s that, in line with many developing nations, there was significant attention to growing the HE sector (1985-2002 the increase was about 15% per year across Africa, in Ghana from 12000 students in 1987 to 54000 in 2002). However, the hallmarks of the rapid expansion were generally declining quality and inadequate infrastructure. Since 1991, when

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there were only three universities, growth has accelerated dramatically with the explicit objective of producing a well-trained and highly-educated workforce. By 2015 there were over 70 universities in operation. Much of this growth has occurred in the last 15 years as the sector was also opened to private and international providers, although the public sector has also expanded significantly. Even by 2007 private provision amounted to only 5% of total provision, however, and a key current challenge is the apparent dislocation between the institutions and labour market, between the universities and their local or regional communities.

2.2 Mexico: Context

The United States of Mexico provides a radically different point of comparison with the Malaysian case. Mexico consists of 31 states and the federal capital, with significant powers over education vested at local as well as at national level. The country is the second largest in Latin America, with a population of some 115 million (with 62 distinct ethnic groups and over 80 languages and dialects) and a land mass smaller only than Brasil and Argentina. Its Higher Education system has been shaped by highly distinctive cultural and political factors. Indeed, both accounts of the Mexican system express exasperation at the complexities of its multiple, overlapping governance and accreditation processes. External commentators, such as EU or OECD analysts, familiar with the higher levels of standardization and homogeneity of the Western systems, find Mexico difficult because it does not conform to their normative expectations. For this very reason Mexico provides an excellent example of an environment distinct from Western norms, characterized by a hybrid, negotiated approach to the tertiary sector.

Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico or UNAM (Autonomous University of Mexico – 'Autonomy' often features in Mexican university titles).

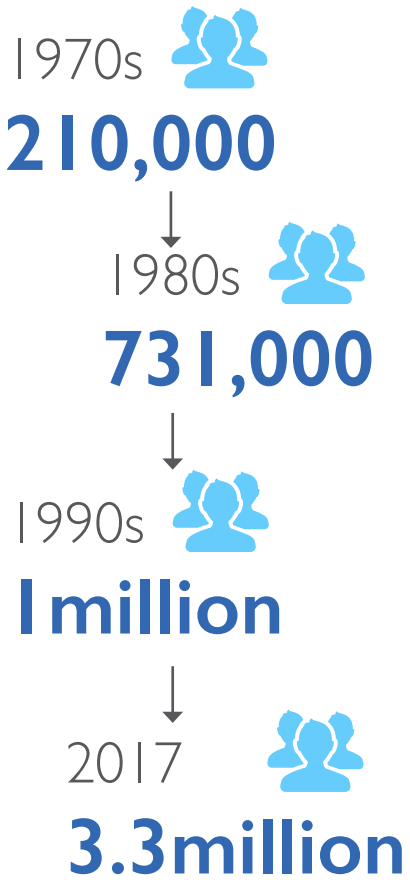
The country's first university dates back to the 16th century, founded by the Spanish colonial power, and modelled as other early Latin American universities on the Univeristy of Salamanca. The successor to this university is now the nation's largest and by many measures most prestigious, the tellingly named Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico or UNAM (Autonomous University of Mexico – 'Autonomy' often features in Mexican university titles). 'Latin American universities,' wrote Luigi Enaudi, 'have surprisingly little in common with universities in the United States. They have their own distinctive traditions, operate in a different environment, and have functions and prerogatives not normally associated with institutions of higher learning in this country [US]' (Enaudi 1963).

Underlying the complexity of the Mexican system is a unique national history. Notwithstanding the authoritarian nature of both the imperial and much post-independence/post-revolutionary government, or perhaps as a reaction and respite from this situation, Mexico's public universities have been characterized by very high degrees of institutional autonomy. They have always enjoyed the right to elect/appoint their own leaders

and councils, manage their own funds, determine their own curricula, and organize their own admissions (with specific periodic exceptions). Until the 1990s, federal and state policies were characterized as 'benign neglect', notwithstanding that almost all funding came from the state. Indeed, some narratives of the trajectory of the system as a whole view Mexico as potentially the only tertiary sector in the world which might benefit from a diminution of institutional autonomy! In part, this situation has developed because there is such a strongly established principle of Higher Education as a public good. The Mexican Constitution of 1917 explicitly enshrines various inalienable and specific rights around education and universities: the autonomy of Higher Education institutions is accorded constitutional protection, and is careful maintained. Even today, some 70% of the nation's students in public Higher Education Institutions enjoying nominally fee-free tuition (there are, however, charges for examinations, transcripts, etc., and funding is a controversial issue).

There is much about the trajectory of Mexican Higher Education which is nonetheless familiar. Provision has expanded exponentially notwithstanding dwindling resources. Quality is continually in question. Demographics and geography are intensely demanding. By 1970, there were some 210000 students, a number which rose to 731000 in the 1980s, over a million in 1990, before jumping to 3.3 million in the most recent figures (30% of the 20-24 age group). Since the financial crisis of 1982, there has also been a rapid growth in the number of private HE providers, now accounting for around 30% of demand. There are now over 3000 HEI spread over 6000 campuses, with 350000 teachers, of whom only 81000 have full time contracts and fewer than 16000 (5%) are part of the National Research System (SNI), which offers special status to research active and more highly qualified academics (see below). The sector is not at all susceptible to centralized control or direction. Despite the dramatic growth, and relatively high net state funding in per capita terms (Brunner, 2008), strategic change is slow and complicated to achieve or direct, which is not to say it is unattainable, rather that it involves the balancing of multiple agencies. It is a bewildering environment to assess or understand given the lack of effective unitary national bodies driving strategy, or familiar landmarks in relation to policy agency – most Mexican universities refuse, for example, to engage with international university ranking organizations on the grounds of what they perceive as fundamental differences of mission, mandate and function, as well as inherent suspicion of external agencies. However, it is precisely Mexico's difference in all these regards which makes it such a revealing example. Analysis of the context reveals the play of multiple determinants in the emergence of the current environment. Attention to various policy initiatives within that context reveals alternative policy approaches to strategy and priorities, and very different governance paradigms.

Number of university students in Mexico



3.0 He Who Pays the Piper Calls the Tune?

A striking characteristic of the political discourse concerning universities in Malaysia is the conviction on the part of politicians that they should determine the priorities of Higher Education Institutions, because the state is the primary funder of the sector. This conviction is strikingly out of step with practice elsewhere. The trend in both the developed and developing world is, as Daniel argues below, away from state provision and direct management towards modes of indirect regulation and monitoring. According to the World Bank, in the early years of the newly independent, postcolonial nations, there is typically a trend of increasing state intervention in universities as a direct function of the state's role as funder: 'He who pays the piper calls the tune'. An unintended consequence of this increased role of the state is, routinely, a decline in quality. Political control of education even where long-term goals are involved, tends to be short-termist and opportunistic, especially where appointments to management and governing bodies are made largely on political rather than on merit basis. The incidence of corruption, cronyism and nepotism is consistently higher in situations where significant direct control is in the hands of politicians.

3.1 The National Council for Tertiary Education and the National Accreditation Board

Ghana provides a useful corrective to the Malaysian case. Having deliberated between 1987 and 1991, the government-appointed University Rationalisation Committee (URC) made 166 recommendations for Higher Education reform, setting the terms for the expansion of the sector, and preparing the way for the subsequent establishment of the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) and National Accreditation Board (NAB), in 1993. The URC reforms in Ghana were in direct response to the dangers of too close an involvement of politicians in university governance, and are relevant in the way they put certain key (state) functions at arms' length from direct political control. In Daniel's formulation, 'As tertiary education expands, government's role will increasingly be to regulate and monitor, rather than provide' (Daniels 2009). The NCTE and NAB are the primary monitoring, regulatory and reporting agencies for the sector, and are also charged with making recommendations on the disbursement of state funding. The NAB's Quality Assurance roles were confirmed and further extended during the 2000s in response to the body's success (specifically the NAB Act 2007, see Seniwoliba 2015), and it is clear that a reciprocal and collegiate Quality Assurance culture has developed in the sector. It was the NAB, for instance, which drove legislation ensuring each public institutions should each have their own statistical and data audit or reporting units (Internal Quality Assurance Units or IQAU), which work with the NAB in the determination of criteria, and the periodic re-accreditation of the institution. Both the NCTE and the NAB have been instrumental in the assertion of the primacy and autonomy of governing bodies in universities, whilst also promoting the concept of 'trusteeship', a commitment to the involvement of increasing range of stakeholders in institutional governance, alongside the promotion of a more democratic, even parliamentary model of engagement. It is beyond the scope of this paper, but further comparative study of the size, shape, and influence of these university councils and governing bodies would be telling.

National Council for Tertiary Education
Leading Tertiary Education to Greater Heights

NATIONAL ACCREDITATION BOARD
GHANA

3.2 CONACYT and ANUIES

Mexico is an even more valuable example of how state and political agents operate in a mixed or negotiated system. The Higher Education sector, as we have seen, is highly autonomous and not at all amenable to central planning or top-down/hierarchical command. Financial levers offer little or no control. Although some 75-90% of each public university's funding still comes from government sources, and one would expect the importance of the state therefore to be strongly apparent in strategic direction, until relatively recently this funding has been in the form of negotiated block grants, and the state has been unable significantly to influence institutional strategy. There has recently been some movement to recalibrate funding mechanisms towards what are called 'extraordinary subsidies', directed towards producing specific outputs or outcomes, but this only accounts for some 15% of the total Higher Education budget and remains at best a marginal tool, and these subsidies are themselves highly contested and negotiated. By most accounts, the most successful tools for moderating and influencing the sector, for developing relevant programmes and institutional missions, have been through independent Quality Assurance and representation or accreditation bodies, or formal institutional networks, which have emerged from within the sector itself to represent different collective interests. The state, notwithstanding its delivery of funding, must be understood as one participant and agent among many, rather than the dominant, centralizing or unitary force: policy is necessarily a more consensual and negotiated affair.

CONACYT

The Consejo Nacional de Ciencas y Tecnologia

ANUIES

The Mexican case thus demands a reappraisal of arguments for the primacy of the state within tertiary sector governance and direction. Two specific bodies further illustrate this point: CONACYT and ANUIES. *The Consejo Nacional de Ciencas y Tecnologia,* or CONACYT (National Council for Science and Technology), was founded in 1970 by the Ministry of Education, and tasked with the delivering research and technology

transfer, the articulation of a national research strategy and recognition and accreditation for qualified and active researchers. It runs a range of initiatives such as validating and reviewing postgraduate programmes, disbursing grants for research schemes and, importantly, directly registering individual researchers on the basis of their work and qualifications (the SNI mentioned earlier is a CONACYT initiative). It is a measure of the success of this body that a differential salary scale was developed in the 1990s in response to CONACYT's advocacy on behalf of the research community as a whole, resulting in consolidation of the SNI as a further body.

The Asociacion Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educacion Superior de la Republica Mexicana or ANUIES (National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutes), is a network of some 180 of the major public universities with the addition in recent years of a few of the more significant private institutions. Established in the 1950s, it emerged as a significant body in the 1970s, powerfully articulating the interests and concerns of its members to the extent that it became, to some extent, the dominant voice of the sector. Its development of membership credentials and criteria for joining the network mean that membership is in itself a 'credible substitute for institutional accreditation'. It is 'the main discussion partner for governmental policy makers: it has been closely involved in policy shaping and runs a series of specialized networks and scholarship schemes in cooperation with or on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education' (EU 2012). ANUIES articulates strategy and policy priorities for and on behalf of the sector, and drives much of the core tertiary agenda in relation to access, innovation, academic career progression, mobility, and funding: tellingly, 'security' of workers and students is a key current priority.

What the emergence of CONACYT and ANUIES reveals is that even within semi-authoritarian state contexts, policy consensus and direction can be achieved through empowerment of stakeholder bodies, and that devolving authority to, for instance, networks of institutional agents is not necessarily to abdicate responsibility or invite systemic chaos. In terms of Clark's governance typology, strengthening all three elements benefits the system as a whole.

> *Policymakers should be striving to set tax rates at the "growth-maximising" level. That is the point when government has collected the modest amount of money necessary to fund the legitimate (and limited) functions of government.*

4.0 From Accountability to Accounting: When the Measure becomes the Target

There is a growing literature addressing the perils of the prevailing statutory review processes for Higher Education. This is a major current area of concern in relation to governance. Paul Greatrix, discussing the UK Quality Assurance regimes, draws attention to the fact that 'the real danger here is that others round the world are adapting variants of the UK QA framework' (Greatrix 2005) even while that framework was subject to major reform and scrutiny due to high profile failures of its mechanisms. 'It is the Quality Assurance medicine which has been administered since the early 1990s,' Greatrix continues, 'which is contributing to the malaise rather than curing it.' Recent work goes further, emphasizing the unintended consequences of predominantly quantitative metrics-based system on faculty hiring, promotion and tenure, awards and funding, not to mention institutional appraisal and ranking. In accordance with Goodhart's Law, 'When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure' (Edwards and Roy 2017). Thus there is widespread evidence of egregious 'gaming' of the rankings systems, of researchers spending more time applying for grants than gathering data, of the inflation of citation indeces: once an area is subject to measurement, there is an incentive to maximize performance in that area either at the expense of other areas, or at the expense of good ethics. 'Audit shapes perception of the problem or data to which is offers a solution or measure' (Greatrix 2005). Nonetheless, there are other ways of assuring quality and undertaking review: one such example is the Daniel Review of the University of Ghana.

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4.1 The Daniel Review of the University of Ghana

When Clifford Tagoe became Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana, in 2007, he joined an institution in disarray. The small, liberal arts institution envisaged at the point of foundation, primarily tasked with the molding of an administrative elite, had metamorphosed by the 1990s into a comprehensive modern university with world-class aspirations, but without the requisite policy attention to planning, resources, strategy. Growth had been dramatic, and underfunded: even just from 2000 to 2007 numbers jumped from 10000 students 28000. As recently as 1971 there had been only 2525 students. Faculty to student ratio decreased from 1:5.5 to over 1:30. In the same period, the government budget allocation to the University dropped from around US$2,200 per student to under US$600. Tagoe's predecessor had resigned over unresolved assessment malpractices; teaching, learning and research were at a low ebb; the institution's governance was chaotic; buildings and estates were in poor condition; and the financial situation was dire. Confidence and trust in the University, as well as morale, had evaporated.

University of Ghana

Tagoe took the unusual step of commissioning, and then publishing, a major review and self-assessment of the university, led by Sir John Daniel. The significance of the review is twofold. First, it is important that it took place at all. It is hardly common practice, faced with such a situation, to open the doors to a highly critical team of local international academic peers and encourage them to leave no stone unturned. Second, the way in which it was conducted, because the openness, engagement and sheer extent of the process make for a remarkable record, and permitted a series of recommendations ranging from suggestions relating to high level governance to advice about the maintenance of dormitories. The detail of the panel visitation and review is fascinating, precisely because it was unprecedented, and because its objectives and terms of reference – in effect, to make the university better – were so transparent. It is a model as much for the process of review, as for its specific outcomes and recommendations. It is a world away from the generic, bureaucratic modes of self-review and self-assessment which so characterize our

contemporary machinery of surveillance and audit. The primary recommendations were in many ways familiar, although they related to all aspects of university life. One pillar of the review was, needless to say the University's governance structures. There is detailed engagement with everything from the composition of Council, to Academic board structures, to the organization of management and administration; student representation; strengthening of faculty qualifications; curriculum review; overhaul of QA processes; and a complete overhaul of financial processes including the proposal of a new funding model (Daniel 2007).

Institutional Review processes tend to be formulaic, easily gamed and widely disdained. Attention to the University of Ghana 2007 review gives an indication of how these processes might be reformed, in all areas of provision, in order to make them productive – properly fulfilling audit and accountability functions, responding to the reality of the individual institution, its specific mission, location and history. Such open processes enhance and legitimate institutions, and function to restore public trust. In order to prevent accountability and quality assurance exercises becoming formulaic, policy-makers must explore mixed modes of open and discursive reporting which better enable formative as much as summative assessment of institutional quality. It is a nice and encouraging coda to this story to note that Clifford Tagoe was subsequently appointed Head of the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE).

5.0 What are Universities For?

One further area of policy which merits attention involves the very foundation of Higher Education institutions, and the formulation of their missions and objectives.

5.1 The University for Development Studies

In Ghana, the University for Development Studies was established by an Act of Parliament, in 1992, with a mission 'blend the academic world with that of the community in order to provide constructive interaction between the two for the development of Northern Ghana' (Abonyi 2016). It was, in fact, a further initiative signaled in the recommendations of the URC. A significant feature of the University's constitution was the principle that the Vice Chancellor should be appointed by the University Council not by the Head of State, a convention which is now a common to the other public universities. Full degree awarding powers were also granted from the start, a break with the earlier convention by which degrees were initially conferred by one of an older, existing university. Both these factors indicate the high level of autonomy granted to the new institution (in keeping with the URC's recommendation to strengthen the autonomy of all universities), along with an acknowledgement that its mission made it in many ways a unique experiment. Applied knowledge and a regional role are often identified as key functions of Higher Education institutions, but as they are rarely incentivized or rewarded – indeed can negatively impact ranking metrics – such objectives are often considered secondary, or overlooked. For UDS, its very mission and constitution, its mandate, is a commitment to its regional role.

The University for Development Studies

In recent years, attention to the 'relationship between knowledge production institutions within a region and a region's socio-economic development has increased significantly' (OECD 2007), but in many ways the UDS was a ground-breaking initiative. It is acknowledged as a 'key player and instrument for development in economically disadvantaged region' (Abonyi 2016). There are a number of studies of its activities, and amongst the demonstrable benefits to its region have been: specific policies of local recruitment (40% of student places are reserved for candidates from its specific catchment area); design of community-based Field Practical Programmes embedded in all degrees; responsiveness to local labour market needs (ie., teaching). In relation to our project the significance of UDS is apparent at several levels. The unique terms of its foundation, and its fundamental level of autonomy, are clearly in direct proportion to the complexity and specificity of its mission. It is also important at a systemic level in what it reveals about the potential to explore models of the university outside those conditioned by the 'world class' model (Douglas 2016). In this regard, the report to the World Bank cited earlier is worth repeating: 'World-class standards may be a reasonable goal for some institutions in many countries, but they are likely not relevant, cost-effective or efficient in many others' (Salmi 2009).

6.0 The Ecosystem

Political debate around education policy in Mexico is, as we have noted, intense and highly charged, with recurrent episodes of violent disruption. But it is necessary to contextualize this disruption. The universities are not only the subject of controversy, they provide one of the most important public fora for much wider dissent and debate.

Further, at different times, the professoriate, Higher Education teachers, and the student movement have themselves been dynamic agents collectively in Mexico's turbulent political history. As Enaudi remarked in relation to the tertiary sector in many parts of Latin America, 'Autonomy was a prerequisite for reform of the university, and the reform of the university was in turn the first step toward the reform of the entire society' (Enaudi 1963). Or, again, 'The key element is the respect for political and civil liberties in the country at large.

When these are respected, the immunity of the university takes on little importance. But when they are not, the university becomes a haven for the opposition, which uses it as a guarantee against persecution.'

It would be difficult to imagine a more striking contrast to Malaysia, which is characterized by low contemporary levels of collectivization and unionization, weak professional bodies, and small, fragmented and largely repressed student movement. This relative underdevelopment of the political or institutional power of crucial stakeholder groups – as a result of specific historical, cultural or political factors – means that Malaysia lacks any energetic and effective lobbying groups within the tertiary sector, and universities as a whole are often appear peripheral to the dominant political agenda and elite.

In successfully evacuating politics or collective agency from the universities, for clear political and social reasons, the Malaysian state has in fact largely eliminated two elements which in other contexts are shown to be essential to their creative functioning.

7.0 Lessons and Conclusion

The lessons from Ghana and Mexico are clear. The development of a Higher Education ecosystem with strong forms of autonomy and accountability, and sustainable good governance, is characterized by the convergence of several factors within the scope of policy. One size does not fit all, but policy responses in the following areas are critical to the future success of Malaysian tertiary education:

Devolution of state bureaucratic or administrative control to autonomous or independent statutory bodies at arm's length from government.

Both Mexico and Ghana have benefited from the establishment of such entities. In Mexico, the traditions of autonomy have led to the organic emergence of many such bodies; in Ghana the government established and nurtured them. In both cases the regulation and monitoring of universities was significantly enhanced.

Recognition, support and empowerment of diverse stakeholder groups within the sector, in particular academics themselves but also students, professional bodies and local business and community representatives.

In Ghana, the statutory involvement of regional stakeholders in the University of Development Studies transformed the institution's strategic direction. In Mexico, governance is a process of negotiation and compromise, a balancing of relevant forces which ensures proper articulating of multiple viewpoints: the success of CONACYT, as an organization and as a body influencing policy, is one indicator how appropriate bodies gain and exercise authority.

Design of innovative, relevant and inclusive models for institutional review and Quality Assurance deriving from local conditions and negotiated amongst stakeholders.

The transformation of the University of Ghana was predicated on a comprehensive but relevant review. Mexico continues to develop a range of quality and evaluation methods, sensitive to institutional local or regional requirements, as opposed to federal or external standards.

Promotion of alternatives to the standardization and homogenization of institutional missions and structures associated with the aspiration towards 'world-class' status and the submission to externally-conceived ranking criteria.

The varying missions and structures of Mexican universities drive and legitimize resistance to the rankings agencies: diversification is a feature of the Higher Education landscape. Ghana's successful commitment to regional priorities is similarly evident in the establishment of institutions tailored to local needs.

The development of governance is highly context-dependent. In this review, there has been an insistence on the importance of reintegrating questions of value and relevance into discussions of policy. The other category which seems fundamental to the proper functioning of autonomy and accountability, and which runs through all of the successful relationships and initiatives documented is, of course, trust.

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