

Ajayi, J.F. Ade, Goma, Lameck K.H., & Johnson, G. Ampah. *The African Experience with Higher Education* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996).

*The African Experience with Higher Education* is an thorough and detailed overview of many of the issues with which the universities of Africa have struggled over the past decades. The authors clearly and engagingly describe the struggles of government officials and university administrators in dealing with colonial powers, funding and resource constraints, and the pursuit of the university mission. In so doing, they create a strong case for African universities to come together towards development and progress for Africa.

The text begins with an historical overview of pre-1900 higher education in Africa. Although this section presents this history in a somewhat cursory manner, it is nevertheless informative and useful in providing a context for the discussion which follows. The remainder of the text presents a carefully researched description of key events in the past century, with a particular focus on the last fifty years, which the authors characterize as a period of tremendous growth for African universities.

Although 1945 is considered the beginning of decolonization in Africa, the priorities and missions of institutions of higher learning continued to reflect the interests and goals of colonial powers. Hence, at that time, the replacement of Europeans serving in key university administrative positions with Africans became a top priority. The "colonial legacy," however, extended beyond this more visible issue. Beliefs about the value of an African education, the superiority of higher education overseas, an appropriate curriculum, and the purpose of higher education in general were all shaped during the colonial era. As a result, popular opinion of African universities has presented challenges and obstacles to their own growth.

As African countries acquired political independence in the 1960s, universities came to represent sources of national pride. Simultaneously, a growth in "internationalism" facilitated the procurement of development aid. The authors note that "African countries sought ways of exploiting this international rivalry to help finance the expansion and reform of their higher education and, if possible, to minimize dependence on any one country (p. 78). The

1960s brought tremendous growth to African higher education, as well as the inauguration of the Association of African Universities (AAU) in 1967. This organization — with goals ranging from improved cooperation between universities to increased focus on African culture and languages — is reported to be “more and more recognized as the mouthpiece for higher education on the continent” (p. 108).

Soon after its inception, the authors argue, the activities of the AAU set the tone for African universities for the decades which followed. More precisely, the notion that universities are necessary for and integral to African development — in the form of “modernization of the social, economic and political institutions and processes” (p. 113) — gained credence, particularly with the government. Growing economies allowed generous government support through the 1980s. Now, faced with shrinking resources and high enrollment levels, African universities have been forced to re-think their priorities in the 1990s.

The authors outline several concrete recommendations for African universities in the coming years. They argue that these institutions must “take up the task of finding ways of pushing aside the obstacles in order to make room for academic innovation and creativeness, despite the constraints on resources” (p. 155). Such a plan must account for both long- and short-term goals, and include attention to finance and equitable access, as well as the vulnerability of African universities to the interests of international donors.

In general, *The African Experience with Higher Education* is an informative and useful overview of key issues in the development of African universities. One of the most interesting — but underdeveloped — aspects of the discussion is role of ideology in the growth of these institutions. For example, the authors note the importance of reconsidering the university goal of development, which has historically been based on external influences: “African thinking on African development has been marginal and that is why African countries have found themselves easily influenced by the outside world, and often coerced into programmes not really their own” (p. 202). Given their acknowledgment of the importance of the colonial era in shaping the missions of African universities, it is troubling that the authors abandon this ideological issue in their recommendations for the future.

In a similar vein, the work would also be strengthened by increased attention to the perspectives of relevant individuals other than university administrators or government officials. For example, women's access to and success in African universities is addressed only briefly in isolated sections of the text; the student perspective on university issues is merely touched upon, and even then is portrayed as a problem (related to student protests); the popular perspective is entirely absent. As is too often the case, the discussion is framed in terms of the views of those already included in conversations about what the university is and should be.

As a contribution to the field of African Studies, this text describes the importance of higher education to African society from a particular perspective. It is a useful addition to the study of higher education, as many of the issues of coping with resource constraints, access, and university goals are relevant to universities beyond African borders. Finally, the profound impact of the colonial era on the development of African universities make this history an important contribution to colonial studies. The potential for this book to contribute to any of these fields is limited, however, because of the particular way in which the issues are framed, and because of the perspective from which higher education's purposes and goals are understood.

Karen McClafferty