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A history of the modern Australian university, by Hannah Forsyth, Sydney, NewSouth Publishing, 2014, viii + 279 pp., A$34.99 (paperback), ISBN 97817422334120

The modern university is now a busy place. It is characterised by bureaucracy, internationalisation, a profit orientation and specialisation in terms of the disciplines it is prepared to support. Universities have undergone momentous changes over the past 30–40 years, changes accompanied by a plethora of commentary and analysis. *A History of the Modern Australian University* stands out as a valuable contribution to this literature. The book is a reflective and intelligently-written account of change in the Australian university sector, focussing mainly on the period since World War II. While the book has a decidedly Australian focus, the lessons drawn from this history will be of interest to readers from other countries as well. The author, Hannah Forsyth, is well qualified to write this history, with degrees in history, archaeology and educational design. She teaches history at the Australian Catholic University in Sydney and describes herself as an educator with more than 15 years' experience in higher education.

This is not a bricks and mortar history of Australian universities (the first of which were established in the 1850s). It is more than that. Forsyth states in the first chapter that it is a book about knowledge, via the history of the university in Australia (p.4). She observes that knowledge can assert power, but not under all circumstances. Power is not her main focus, however. Significantly, she states that:

> … knowledge operates a bit like money. Knowledge does not *have* to work like money; indeed money does not have to work like money. But just as the flow of money and the institutions that regulate it, the systems that lead people to desire it, the imperatives that compel business owners to pursue it, all structure the conditions in which society functions, so too with knowledge. Who has access to knowledge? Who decides on the value of knowledge, or its price? How do universities (which have grown to such proportions that we might point to their functions as loosely analogous to the task banks perform in relation to money) work? What compels them to work in the strange and alien way that they seem, in recent decades, to have adopted? (p.5)

Boldly, Forsyth states that her book shows '… how the things that are wonderful about collecting clever people together to study, research, think and teach *and* the dreadful, corrupted, ridiculous and wasteful aspects of higher education are wrought by history' (p.5).

Forsyth acknowledges that the literature about universities over the past 20 years is rather gloomy. She describes that as 'Jeremiad' literature – a literature that argues

something is wrong with universities and there is a need to identify it and make things right again. While Forsyth is sympathetic to many of the claims made in this genre, she chooses to chart a moderate course between doom and gloom, and blind optimism. It is this balance that gives the book strength and presents an essentially grounded quality – in other words, this is the way things are and have evolved and it is up to the individual to make sense of it. Interestingly, while the book is well referenced and displays all the touches of an inquisitive and thorough historian, Forsyth is keen not to burden the reader with too many theoretical concepts. She has a general audience in mind and is not out to prove one theory rather than another. This more popular approach makes the book accessible to the generalist reader, naturally broadening its appeal. One could imagine, for instance, neuroscientists, accountants and geologists not getting very far with this book if it were out to make a point about cultural studies or media and communication theory. As it stands, Forsyth does draw on theory to make a point where necessary, but this is done in moderation and is always instructive.

While *A History of the Modern Australian University* is predominantly organised around a chronological theme, Forsyth does not bore us with facts and events. Rather, she tackles the contemporary issues facing Australian universities. These issues are not too different from those confronting universities in other countries. This makes the book appealing beyond the narrow Australian context. Forsyth has an engaging writing style and will often attempt to include a personal perspective, which makes change very real for the reader. For example, on occasions, Forsyth will draw on her first-hand experience from working in universities. At other times, she will introduce comments from historical figures (some powerful and some less so) to make the narrative more engaging. The technique draws the reader in. Many, like this reviewer, with recollections of the university stretching back some decades, will feel that they are part of the story.

A History of the Modern Australian University comprises 10 chapters and concludes with a short Afterword with the title 'What sort of university do we want?'. Broadly speaking, the book is balanced between a history in the more conventional sense (the first five chapters) and a commentary of contemporary issues centred around knowledge confronting the modern Australian university (the last five chapters). In the first five chapters, Forsyth outlines the argument for her book and describes the political and cultural shifts that have occurred in Australian universities. Chapter 1, entitled 'A history of Australian universities', presents a brief overview of the key developments before 1939. As might be expected, the first Australian universities drew their inspiration from Britain, but the designers of these first institutions took ideas from other countries as well. Over time, innovation occurred, with ideas seeping in from Europe and America. By 1911, each of the six Australian states had a university, with around 3000 university students in the country. The Great War had an impact on Australian universities: political controversy became more important on campus; more egalitarian attitudes were accepted as a consequence of the changes wrought by the war; and research started to be seen as important. The role of universities as custodians of 'universal knowledge' became an important rationale for their existence and support during this period.

Chapter 2, 'Universities make a grab for power', highlights the changes brought about by World War II and the Cold War. Forsyth draws on Lyotard to note that universities were accepted as important because they were able to define what knowledge meant and this in turn defined the nature of society. University

knowledge was objective and authoritative and it served society because of its universal character. However, the war brought change and with it came the idea of applied knowledge. Increasingly, applied knowledge was seen as contributing to a new technological society. The demand for skilled labour after the war also permitted universities to move into the area of professional education (which had previously been the preserve of professional associations). By the 1950s, universities were consolidating their position in society, not so much as custodians of universal knowledge, but for the possibility of facilitating the development of applied knowledge to meet the needs of society.

Chapter 3, 'Universities and national priorities', tracks some of the tensions evident during the late 1950s and 1960s as universities started to become more enmeshed with the state. Robert Menzies, the Australian prime minister, had a certain policy soft spot for universities as a bastion of British culture and Western democracy, but underpinning this was an inevitable alignment with national priorities, such as training professionals and promoting research. Chapter 4, 'God-professors and student ratbags', reflects on the late 1960s and 1970s, when radical ideas became prominent in Australian universities. It was during these years that knowledge related to class, gender and power, for example, effectively challenged 'establishment knowledge'. Forsyth argues that the conditions that saw governments align universities with the aims of Western democracies effectively created a revolution by changing ways of thinking about knowledge. By the 1970s, the claim that university knowledge was truly independent and objective had been undermined. Universities faced a problem: having long drawn on the notion of truth and objectivity of knowledge to justify the privileges granted to them by society, relevance to society was becoming more important. From the 1980s, this relevance became indentified not with social change, but with the economy. Chapter 5, 'The end of the golden age (if there was one)', reflects on the global economic conditions of the late 1970s, which in turn brought about fundamental changes in thinking about how universities should be managed. Forsyth notes that 'Determining how it was that managing universities became an intrinsic part of managing the national economy at this point is key to understanding the contemporary university' (p.89). She is correct, of course, and this is the departure point for the remaining five chapters of the book, each of which deals with a contemporary theme in the modern Australian university.

In the second half of the book, Forsyth tackles some weighty themes, while at the same time maintaining her historical focus. Chapter 6, 'A clever country', reviews the reforms of the late 1980s introduced by the ruling Labor government, which expanded the scope of the Australian university system to incorporate colleges of advanced education. It is this mass system that characterises the modern Australian university landscape today – there is a focus on generating income from international students, pressure for scarce resources has intensified, and university staff are no longer treated as they once were. Chapter 7, 'The DVC epidemic', is perhaps one of the most revealing chapters of the book. Forsyth explores the impact that bureaucratisation has had on the university – why it is expensive to administer a university, divisions between university managers and 'the rest', and the growth of an audit society in the university sector. This chapter is not over-burdened with statistics, but it does point to some interesting ideas about why bureaucratisation is so extensive. Forsyth makes the insightful observation that an 'economy of esteem' had once been adequate to provide motivation for scholars, but this has been

overtaken by an economy of money, and with this has come a culture of accountability. While this may not explain everything that has happened in universities, it raises the worrying conclusion that the road back to the non-economic values associated with knowledge production may be long and hard.

Chapter 8, 'Knowledge factories', is appropriately titled as it deals with the contested nature of intellectual property in universities. Forsyth uses a long-running intellectual property dispute between the University of Western Australia and a former professor and medical researcher at the university, Bruce Gray, as a framework for this chapter. This chapter is one of the relatively few instances where Forsyth draws lightly on the ideas of Foucault and Barthes to show how a political issue (such as intellectual property rights) can be understood in the context of seeing the university as more like an industry than an institution that fosters knowledge. Chapter 9, 'Knowledge in the age of digital reproduction', reviews how teaching and learning have been transformed in Australian universities in the face of technological and market changes. Forsyth draws on the work of communications scholar Walter Benjamin to reflect on the pros and cons of new ways of delivering education. Forsyth's ability to apply cultural theory to a complex issue comes to the fore in this chapter. 'Winners and losers in Australian universities' is the final substantive chapter in the book, reflecting on who has benefitted from the changes that have occurred in the Australian university system – who gets to go to university and who controls access to the professions.

In an Afterword, Forsyth asks one of the most pertinent questions of all: 'What sort of university do we want?'. Her response is succinct and carries conviction. Forsyth is not prescriptive at this point and rightly prefers to leave the answer to the question to others. The challenge is for everyone to reflect on this history and then enter into a debate of what the future of universities should look like. This is no cop-out, but rather a scholar placing a boundary on her work.

The value of a book like this lies in Forsyth's ability to assemble the fragments (namely the particularised and disparate impressions we now have of universities) and present these as a whole which has overall meaning. She is to be congratulated for her contribution.

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Routledge international handbook of ignorance studies, edited by Matthias Gross and Linsey McGoey, London, Routledge, 408 pp., £125 (hardback), ISBN-978-0-415-71896-7

We live in societies in which it is common to witness the considerable attention, appreciation and reverence dedicated to the notion of knowledge. Knowledge management has become a very popular and prominent sub-discipline in its own right in the field of management and organization. There is less interest in ignorance. In fact, admitting to ignorance may appear unwise, a weakness that the prudent should