ago) and Daniel Bell (a quarter century ago). And, in a more material sense, many of the phenomena he discusses in the second volume concerning personal identities, social movements, and political interdependencies were already well established in the 20th and even the 19th centuries. At times, like so many others, Castells falls into the trap of attributing to postmodernity (or, in his case, the Information Age) some of the defining characteristics of modernity.

This overestimation of novelty would not be so serious if it did not lead him, occasionally, to exaggerate how much things have changed or are likely to change. After all, the G7 nations in 2000 are almost the same as the Great Powers of 1900, which may raise some doubts about the alleged fragility of nation-states. Even in the much more volatile commercial arena the list of top multinational companies reveals remarkable continuities. Patriarchy has been in retreat for more than a century—although, paradoxically, the growing social inequalities of the Information Age may actually obstruct the advance of social egalitarianism. Politics have only been "voided of power" in terms of grand social-democratic programs of reform; they have merely reverted to their predemocratic forms of interest and influence (what Cobbett, of course, rather bluntly called "Old Corruption.")

The second issue is that Castells is a relentless optimist—and, as such, tends to underestimate the darker aspects of the social change he describes. No place in his analysis for notions of "Risk Society," popularized by Ulrich Beck (no reference in the extensive bibliography); no sense that "bads" are as significant as "good"; no acknowledgment that risks (or, at any rate, uncertainties) are accumulating at a faster rate than solutions (and that this is inherent in the success of science and dynamism of technology he elsewhere celebrates.) Castells is also a relentless empiricist who is careful not to predict the future, referring disparagingly at the end of the trilogy to philosophers who tried to change the world and insisting that people must be allowed to free themselves from "uncritical adherence to theoretical or ideological schemes" and to construct their practice on "the basis of their own experience." No acknowledgment that empircism is itself an ideological position; no acknowledgment that "experience" is itself culturally constructed—a conclusion offered weighty support by his own analysis.

Finally, what implications does Castells' analysis have for our understanding of the possibilities for higher education? Ambiguous ones, I am afraid. On the one hand, he draws a clear distinction between "programmable" and "generic" labor, which can be read as an endorsement of the university's traditional mission to develop reflective critical skills in its students (but also leads on to the disturbing conclusion that modern higher education systems have inevitably become mass producers of "generic" labor as well). On the other hand, his analysis of the Information Age emphasizes the significance of multiple networks that demand not only technological sophistication but also cultural elaboration—skills that are more readily associated with technical expertise than reflective values, whether Arnoldian or "informational."

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The South African National Plan for Higher Education

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In February 2001, minister of education Kadar Asmal announced the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE), without first officially passing it through his own "expert" advisory Council on Higher Education (CHE), which had made some significantly different proposals in its own discussion document in 2000. Interestingly, instead he sought, and obtained, prior approval from internal African National Congress (ANC—the ruling party) committees and the cabinet, and other "alliance" structures linked to the ANC such as the leading trade union federation and the South African Communist Party (both of which had raised political questions about his recent reforms in school education). Clearly, new processes were under way in South African higher education. Moreover, the content of the NPHE differed from a whole series of earlier policy discussion documents leading up to the higher education white paper of 1997, the definitive document prior to the NPHE.

Was the NPHE a shift in direction in terms of policy substance and process? And was it what it asserted—a real plan to transform the Apartheid-based system of higher education into a new system fulfilling the white paper goals of equity, efficiency, and social development?

Core Elements of the NPHE

The white paper of 1997 had initiated the setting up of a Branch of Higher Education within one new Department of Education, putting an end to Apartheid-fragmented governance consisting of separate branches and departments to administer universities and technikons (polytechnics) for

various urban-based "race groups" and so-called black homelands in the rural areas. However, after what might be termed a few years of policy "implementation vacuum," the NPHE in 2001 confronted much more openly than previous documents the crises facing higher education in South Africa.

The NPHE listed massive problems of inefficiency and dislocation resulting largely (but not solely) from the Apartheid era.

The NPHE listed massive problems of inefficiency and dislocation resulting largely (but not solely) from the Apartheid era. It confronted a higher education system with unnecessary duplication among historically separate institutions for "African," "white," "coloured," and "Indian," Apartheid-designated race groups—21 universities and 15 technikons, a total of 36 higher education institutions. The NPHE document spoke openly about the inefficiencies of student graduation rates and staff research output levels of most universities and technikons. It viewed with alarm the high drop-out rates of students, due in large part to lack of student financial aid, and the falling annual numbers of first-year student university enrollments, due partly to problems in the high school system. Furthermore, the uncontrolled proliferation of private higher education institutions; the fragile governing structures and even mismanagement at a few historically black, publicly funded institutions; the skewed enrollment patterns, whereby many black and female students were underrepresented in science, technology, and business fields; and the opportunistic spread of distance learning and other modes of program development by some historically white universities—all these the NPHE viewed as having the potential to undermine the whole higher education system.

In its 100-page report, the NPHE addresses issues of access (to increase the student participation rate from 15 to 20 percent over the next 10 to 15 years); equity (with a stress on race and gender, but not class, and on inequities in the student body and especially in the academic staff); and research output (particularly for national economic development, with capacity building via master's and doctoral degree program increases). But I would argue the thrust is located in two areas. First, there is an overarching concern by the NPHE with efficiency—particularly with respect to student outputs for the economy. For the first time, the focus is not just on student enrollments but on graduation rates as well, with financial incentives proposed to improve these. Moreover, a shift in the "shape" of the system is proposed, to change the balance of student enrollments in humanities:business-commerce:science and technology from the current ratio of 49:26:25 to 40:30:30 over the next decade.

Second, and even more importantly, the problem of institutions in the same region with overlapping programs and functions is addressed head-on. The NPHE accepts that for at least the next five years the university/technikon divide will be retained. However, a multistage process has been set up to establish institutional program concentrations in each region. Some institutional mergers and forms of regional cooperation will be required. The NPHE document does outline a few specific mergers, but the document also calls for the setting up of a National Working Group that will report to the minister by the end of the year on the recommended forms of mergers and cooperation by region (with the only NPHE proviso that there are to be no closures of sites of learning, although sites may be restructured).

The Nature of the NPHE

The NPHE must be understood alongside the proposed new National Funding Framework and the Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education, which emerged in 2001 and are aimed at steering the system according to plan. However, it is debatable whether the specific method laid out will lead to appropriate academic niche developments and whether the ministry and the institutions themselves have the internal capacity to plan and effect changes in these ways.

The NPHE must be understood alongside the proposed new National Funding Framework and the Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education.

The NPHE document of 2001 has put itself forward as a far more nuanced policy strategy with respect to the 36 higher education institutions—involving what it terms a "planned differentiation of higher education institutions through negotiation and consensus"—compared to the proposals submitted by the Council on Higher Education to the minister in 2000. The council had put forward a restructuring proposal for a hierarchical system of three types: I) research institutions (extensive programs up to the Ph.D. level); II) institutions mainly up to master's level, with some niche area doctoral programs permitted; III) "bedrock" institutions, with a focus on undergraduate education, and some programs permitted up to the master's level. The council's proposal unleashed a massive outcry in

2000—not least the accusation that it was a "return to Apartheid" because most of the historically black higher education institutions (universities and technikons) would fall under type III and most of the historically white universities (but not technikons) would fall under type I. Because of this controversy, the NPHE of 2001 came out with its interactive processes via program niches and three-year plans. However, the National Working Group, now going round the country suggesting in some regions quite significant mergers and forms of cooperation, could end up proposing far-reaching changes to the minister. Perhaps the major thrust of change will come from this working group rather than from the NPHE's "plans, negotiations and consensus." We shall know the results soon after the end of 2001.

The NPHE document of 2001 and the Council on Higher Education document of 2000 signify an end to what might be termed the period of "symbolic policymaking." Prior to 2000, the new democratic government's most important policy document on higher education, the white paper of 1997, as well as key advisory documents before this, were involved primarily in symbolic policy—outlining the values, missions, and broad frameworks required to transform the higher education system but without any specifics on policy choices, implementation, or evaluation of results. In contrast, Council on Higher Education 2000 and NPHE 2001 signal a shift toward what can be termed "substantive, procedural, and material policy" approaches, incorporating concrete actions, implementation procedures, and resource allocation mechanisms.

For the first time, the new approaches stress efficiency and globalization and the knowledge economy. The earlier stress found in policy documents between 1992 and 1997 on equity and redress (especially in terms of "earmarked funds" for historically black institutions) has been greatly downplayed. In this sense, South African higher education policy is coming more into line with the international higher education discourses about the "market university"—like our post-1996 national economic policies, which emphasize growth and foreign investment over economic reconstruction and basic socioeconomic needs.

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University Reform in El Salvador: A New Chapter

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The reform of Salvadoran higher education, initiated in 1996, has a new set of challenges to address. Aided by the integration of education with the peace process, beginning in 1992, the reform is now approaching the end of a decade aimed at alleviating the poverty and extremes of wealth that fueled the civil war. The reform, which linked education research with public policy and created a law implementing the proposed changes, currently faces new circumstances and must adapt in order to maintain the support of the government and private sector. A real danger exists of the reform movement's falling from favor and losing ground in the advancing democratization, modernization, and globalization of the country.

The Crisis of Higher Education

Higher education in El Salvador endured a long cycle of protest and repression. The crisis of higher education in El Salvador deepened during the 1980s. The military's closing of the national University of El Salvador (UES) between 1980 and 1984 led to a sudden surge in the number of private universities and other postsecondary institutions. The four existing private universities were unable to meet the demand. Faculty at the UES founded alternative institutions to meet the needs of their students. The success of these small, specialized institutions spawned an entrepreneurial growth spurt in higher education.

The closing of the national university came at a time of rising demand for postsecondary education. El Salvador had been the Central American nation most committed to economic modernization. Its burgeoning middle class and growing need for an educated workforce put the education system under increasing scrutiny and stress. During the 1970s student enrollments grew to about 30,000 students at the UES and another 10–12,000 at the four privates. By 1996 this number expanded to over 108,000 students.

By the end of the 1980s there were more than 40 universities licensed to operate in El Salvador. The national university remained the principal public institution, although the military created the Military University in 1988 to compete with the UES. The remaining institutions were private universities of varying sponsorship—churches, professional organizations, or academic faculties. Their facilities varied, but the upper tier consisted of well-established, full-service academic institutions. Some of the lower tier were accused of profiteering, despite a law prohibiting such practices.

The number of postsecondary *tecnologicos* (one- and two-year programs) also grew. By 1996 there were 29 of these schools, 16 public and 13 private. As with some newly