# Public Scholarship, Democracy and Scholarly Engagement

*Enver Motala*

*Nelson Mandela Institute – Fort Hare University, South Africa*

## Abstract

This article will examine the issue of scholarship resulting from engagements between academics and the communities of the university, and especially such scholarship that is derivable through the possibilities for the co-construction of knowledge between them. Towards this end, it will examine the limitations of conventional approaches to the production and evaluation of scholarship and advance an argument about the impact of such limitations on the broader social purposes and role of science. It will suggest how scholarship that is socially more encompassing might be advanced as intrinsic to the role of universities in their communities, and examines how the concept of community might be conceived for that purpose. It relates such public scholarship to the broader purposes of science as an intellectual and social activity that has affinity with the idea of public reasoning.

Enver Motala is a researcher at the Nelson Mandela Foundation for Education and rural Development at the University of Fort Hare.

## Introduction

The main purpose of this writing is to engage with ideas about, and interpretations of, socially engaged or public scholarship, namely, scholarship that is derived from the co-construction of knowledge out of meaningful engagements between academics and the communities and publics of the university—especially such communities that are outside the university but reliant on the useful roles that can be played by academics engaged in critical thinking in institutions of higher learning. My approach privileges an engagement with those communities of the university that are most socially marginalised and whose access to social, economic, and political power is limited by the social relations in which such communities are implicated because they continue to remain, even in social democratic capitalist states, the most economically exploited and poorly represented politically, and are culturally and sociohistorically marginalised in both urban and rural society all over the globe.

Towards this, I will explore the following issues:

- Conventional academic interpretations of scholarship and their limits.
- Wider dimensions of scholarship—as socially engaged knowledge
- Who is the community for engaged scholarship?
- The wider purposes of science and public reasoning.

## Conventional Academic Interpretations of Scholarship and Their Limits

Ideas about socially engaged and public scholarship might appear self-evident to some academics but it is hardly so amongst academics and intellectuals in general, and interpretations of scholarship, while not wholly conflictual and contradictory, are nonetheless riven by competing emphases and interpretations about its central tenets and characteristics. For our purposes, exclusionary academic approaches to scholarship are not only dominant relative to nonacademic conceptions, but also favour constructions that stress particular attributes of the concept less emphasised by those outside academia—to the extent that those "outsiders" engage in this issue at all.[1]

Conceptions of scholarship have a history. The concept of scholar, as Bitzer (2006) advised us, originates in the 11th century and was interpreted as having a social rather than an individualistic meaning. By the 16th century, it came to attach to "a learned and erudite person; especially one who is learned in the classical (i.e., Greek and Latin) languages and their literature" (p. 374). Bitzer referred (à la Talcott Parsons) to the "competence in mastering knowledge and the techniques of its advancement" and the "obligation of integrity, a commitment to the values of the academic profession" (p. 374), which are qualities that Booth (1988, cited in Bitzer, 2006) called "habits of rationality," and include "courage, persistence, consideration, humility and honesty, virtues of great consequence in shaping the intellectual work of the scholar" (p. 374).

Indeed, what is meant by *intellectual* in this instance is itself a matter for discussion because the term has had many meanings attached to it, historically. In contemporary Western society, it is used ad hoc (see Eyerman, Svensson, & Söderqvist, 1987)—referring to people with university degrees or in specified professions (writers, journalists, and teachers), or by concentrating on their alleged social roles or function, or through their psychological and behavioural traits. Structural, referring to "an

---

[1] It is worth noting that while in academia the discourse about scholarship happens in the context of university life and its forms, the great body of human knowledge (even in the restricted domain of the Western intellectual tradition) does not coincide with the existence and forms of the production of academic knowledge. See also Walden Bello (2008).

observable position in the social structure," and phenomenological approaches, referring to "the self-understanding and perceptions of the individual as shown by his or her particular ways of thinking and acting," have also been used to define intellectuals (Michels, 1966, p. 3). But I do not here delve into this important issue which has significance in its own right, and which has also been written about widely (see Said, 1996).

It remains true that in most approaches,[2] the idea that scholarship through research is the key to how we understand higher learning (Motala, 2011). Such scholarship is critical to the life and work of academics. The production of scholarly writing that is peer reviewed and published in accredited journals has value for reasons that are obvious. Such scholarly activity attracts students into faculties that have renown; it encourages leading scholars in the field to seek employment at the university, improves its standing internationally, inviting greater collaborations with it, and improves its long-term prospects. It brings prestige to the university and, most importantly, attracts increased funding to achieve the planned goals of the institution.

Yet, even a brief excursion into some of the views expressed on how it is understood will show that there are criticisms of conventional ideas about scholarship, even in academic circles (Motala, 2014). Although it may be agreed that the idea of scholarship refers conventionally to the activities of teaching, research, and service functions, in practice it is largely about research and publication. Atkinson (2001) took issue with the dominance of this interpretation of scholarship arguing for the important role for the scholarship of teaching.

> *The scholarship of teaching is a concept with multiple ramifications. It is at the core of the current transformation of higher education. The scholarship of teaching challenges the existing stratification system within the academy. The scholarship of teaching and learning is a much larger enterprise, a movement that can transform the nature of academia. (Atkinson, 2001, p. 1)*

Paulsen and Feldman (1995) argued even more fundamentally:

> *Everyone agrees with the contention that creation of new knowledge through research and publication is an essential dimension of scholarship. But this conventional conception of scholarship has been criticized as too narrow and restrictive. . . . Today an increasing number of faculty and administrators support an enlarged view of scholarship that encompasses and encourages the full range of diverse, creative talents of faculty, allows for different disciplinary perspectives and provides a framework for the development of mission statements expressing more distinctive and differential priorities. (p. 615)*

They relied on Boyer's approach for widening the responsibility of scholarship. For Boyer (1990, cited in Bitzer, 2006, p. 374) scholarship has several attributes. The *scholarship of teaching* was about the creation of knowledge through the process of debate and "discourse" and was a "continuous process" of re-examining knowledge associated with the idea of "discovery." The *scholarship of discovery* was the "process of intellectual excitement" and not about the "outcomes of knowledge," while the *scholarship of application* was about "professional activity and service"—subject to the

---

[2] Part of the following text adapted from a Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) research report (Motala, 2011).

same rigorous criteria as teaching and research. The *scholarship of integration* was about connecting various disciplinary knowledges. All scholarly work, though, "could be appraised by qualitative standards that needed to be explicitly articulated." Even these broader characteristics, defined by Boyer (1990, cited in Bitzer, 2006, p. 374) were viewed critically because, we are told, they lacked any orientation to the "socio-economic contexts and historical purposes of universities."

 A wider conceptualisation of scholarship will result, for Paulsen and Feldman (1995) in a clearer understanding of a range of activities germane to universities and avoid them being "lumped together conceptually" and will support a differential approach to the priorities of "various scholarly activities in the university as well as concomitant tensions that arise both within the university and between it and wider society" (p. 637).

## Expanding the Dimensions of Scholarship—As Socially Engaged Knowledge

While these expanding definitions of the concept of scholarship are instructive and reassuring, they continue to be excessively academic and inward looking and contained within the conventions of academic life and activity. Very little is said or understood about how these critically constitutive elements of the life of universities can be fostered together with activities directed at the stimulation of a democratic culture through socially engaged or public scholarship. A wider approach is required for that, and an imagination that conceptualises such scholarship as associated with public reasoning and engagement to generate wider knowledge. Boyer's view that scholarship should encompass not only the scholarship of research (discovery) but also the pursuit of scholarship of integration, application, and teaching should be amplified to include the scholarship of public and democratic engagement in the co-construction of knowledge beyond academic knowledge. This latter approach requires critical reflection on how knowledge is constituted and developed, to what purposes, based on what assumptions and choices and, most pertinently, about whose knowledge is privileged and whose excluded—so that the epistemic exclusion of the perspectives, knowledges, and experiences of outsiders is examined.

 This latter issue is of course the subject of a much wider and more fundamental discussion that is not developed here. It concerns the question of what knowledge is validated, and in whose interests in the context of history. Several important and justifiable criticisms can be made about the sources of knowledge that are privileged in the academic enterprise throughout the world. In the main, this refers to the criticism that too much of academic knowledge is based almost exclusively on the foundations of Western thought. African academics have been rightly accused of being unashamedly European (and American) in their intellectual orientations and their sources for theorisation and knowledge construction. Indeed, even the forms of theorisation itself have been brought into contention because it is often regarded as reductive and essentialising. It has been cogently argued that the nature of many social scientific approaches rely on generalised explanations that are transmitted uncritically across contexts. These exclude other, and particularly local or indigenous, ways of knowing. Ignoring the knowledges of local communities (and whole nations and continents) has been the experience of many peoples, globally. The act of deliberate exclusion and denigration of the forms of knowledge developed by local communities is a direct consequence of colonial violence and conquest, subjugation, and sociocultural oppression. This violence has mostly been written and talked about in relation to its political, economic, and social effects. These have been experienced through economic exploitation and poverty, the denial of political and social rights, and so forth. But what is not often referred to, is the enormity of the impact of Western colonialism in particular, on the knowledge systems, ideas, languages, and traditions of communities and civilisations throughout the world and particularly in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The effect of this epistemic violence, that is, on the systems of knowledge of local communities, has been written about (now) quite

extensively by writers such as Nabudere (2006), Odora-Hoppers (2002), Shiv Visvanath (2014), Howard Richards (2004), V. Y. Mudimbe (1988), and many others.

This epistemic violence is compounded by the continued marginalisation by many post-colonial/apartheid academics of some critically important communities in which the university is situated—defined broadly, that is beyond the confines of the ivory tower and its particularistic or academic interests—to the exclusion of other claims. Such communities (especially of the poor and working classes) are treated largely as the subjects of research without serious consideration being given to how such communities are engaged about the substantive issues, methods, and strategies employed in scholarly research. As McClellan and Powers (2012) have argued:

> *Simply put, we do not generally write for an audience beyond our academic associations and academic peers. We, and rightfully so, pursue what will help us keep our jobs. . . . [However] scholars among us as well as our professional academic associations have repeatedly called for making our research more accessible to the field. Yet, critics within our ranks have argued that doing so lessens the quality of our scholarship. Believing that our legitimacy is predicated on a new knowledge advancement platform akin to that of the natural sciences, we simply have not been able to break from Newtonian stasis. (n. p.)*

Writing in a similarly critical vein Jean Dreze (2002), a regular collaborator with Amartya Sen on works dealing with public action by community groups in India, had this to say (p. 817):

> *Social scientists are chiefly engaged in arguing with each other about issues and theories that often bear little relation to the world. . . . The proliferation of fanciful theories and artificial controversies in academia arises partly from the fact that social scientists thrive on this confusion (nothing like an esoteric thesis to keep them busy and set them apart from lesser mortals). . . . To illustrate, an article in defence of rationality (vis-à-vis, say, postmodern critiques) would fit well in a distinguished academic journal, but it is of little use to people for whom rational thinking is a self-evident necessity—indeed a matter of survival. . . . It is no wonder that 'academic' has become a bit of a synonym for 'irrelevant' (as in 'this point is purely academic').*

In effect, the measure of academic outputs (such as by a fixed annual number of accredited journal publications) is inadequate to evaluate or understand the work of academics who are often engaged in a wider array of scholarly activities beyond the publication of accredited research (Academy of Science South Africa, [ASSAf], 2006[3]), post graduate supervision, and university teaching. Some of these other activities can be viewed on a continuum between research to dialogue and public engagement activities, intellectual debate, and social critique—together with teaching and the publication of a wide variety of writings associated with this work.

Dreze (2002) was not at all dismissive of the value of academically rigorous study but insisted that scientific pursuits can be enhanced even further if grounded in "real-world involvement and action" (p. 818). This implies the need for wider conceptions of scholarship in social settings and the use of scientific knowledge to address the seemingly intractable issues facing democratic societies. It

---

[3] The issue of journal accreditation is itself contentious. It has importance because the selection of journals has effects on the formula for research funding and, indeed, according to the ASSAf report, "on the development of local journals, the behaviour of individuals, the financial sustainability of learned societies that produced the journals and the institutions that received the 'output' subsidy" (ASSAF, 2006).

requires academics to reach beyond the responsibilities of conventional scholarship associated with the production of peer-reviewed articles, teaching, and postgraduate supervision. Academics can amplify their roles by making their intellectual outputs more widely available to the university's publics, engaging with its many challenges, building the relationship between the university and its community, relating academic knowledge to its application, and producing new conceptualisations and theories by engaging with the critical issues that face society. They can support the production of scientific knowledge that is anchored in a deep and enduring approach to the public good while it simultaneously interrogates commonly held ways of knowing by engaging with the wider range of the sources of knowledge and its epistemologies. This approach would enrich the university's capacity to engage with the direct experiences of society because in these experiences too, lie deep reservoirs of understanding—local ways of knowing and acting that can often be relied upon to solve some of the difficult dilemmas facing society and the quest for understanding social and other phenomena better. By doing this the university can avoid the pitfalls of knowledge that ignores the possibilities of learning from social experience, relying on academic knowledge as the "only" and "objective" basis of scientific understanding. As Susan Haack (2007) said in her book, *Defending Science: Within Reason,* the idea that there is a universal and singular approach to science is not tenable because:

> *science . . . is a thoroughly human enterprise, messy, fallible, and fumbling: and rather than using a uniquely rational method unavailable to other inquirers, it is continuous with the most ordinary of empirical enquiry, 'nothing more than a refinement of our everyday thinking,' as Einstein once put it. (p. 7)*

## Who Is the Community for Engaged Scholarship?[4]

Given its conflictual history there is a much wider range of bodies, institutions, organisations, and individuals that constitute the community of interests relevant to the work of academics in South Africa. These represent a range of bodies such as rights-based interests groups, civic bodies, student organisations, social movements, worker's unions, local community groups, and even individuals interested in engaged scholarship for a variety of reasons, academic, political, or organisational. The question about who its community is, raises a more fundamental issue relating to the intellectual and practical choices made by academic institutions in engaging with particular communities more than with others. The proclivities assumed in particular choices are not neutral and, although they may be justified on the grounds especially of third-stream income or pragmatism, they nevertheless speak to the deliberate or coincidental exclusion of some communities relative to others. In reality, these excluded communities are likely to be the very communities that suffer social and economic marginalisation, political indifference, and cultural deprivation for as long as academics and the institutions they habit remain indifferent about the choices they make.

The manner of engagement with such communities can differ quite considerably one from the other. For instance, engaging with a community of academic peers is very different from the practices of social analysts working in or outside the legislative bodies of the country. And of course both these are quite different from the mode, purposes, and forms of engagement with local communities—themselves having differences based on geographic location, levels of organisation, languages of communication, levels of literacy, local histories, traditions and practices, issues of particular relevance to social science research—largely avoided in conventional academic research.

---

[4] I do not deal here with the debates about the concept of community that has been dealt with elsewhere. Here, it is limited to those communities traditionally excluded from the discourses of academia and, more particularly, to those members of society who are most socially marginalised in every way.

A discussion about scholarship and community also raises important questions about the relationship between research and its methodologies because of the dangers of objectifying communities in research, an issue dealt with by other scholars too (Vally, Motala, & Ramadiro, 2009). Increasingly, scholarship must engage with the possibilities and value of ethnographic approaches to research to satisfy the criteria of non-objectification, to understand subjectivities, and to integrate the methodologies of enquiry in mutually enriching ways.

Such an approach recognises the conflicting research traditions in the sciences in general and in the social sciences in particular. Popkewitz (1985) referred to this conflict of traditions requiring:

> *an inquiry into the social, political and epistemological assumptions that shape and fashion the activities and outcomes of research. One of the ironies of contemporary social science is that a particular and narrow conception of science has come to dominate social research. That conception gives emphasis to the procedural logic of research by making statistical and procedural problems paramount to the conduct of research. This view eliminates from scrutiny the social movements and values that underlie research methods and which give definition to the researcher as a particular social type. As a result, the possibilities of social sciences are at best limited, and at worst mystifying of the very human conditions that the methods of science were invented to illuminate. (p. 2)*

The necessity to engage and to construct methodologies for such engagement also leads to many questions about the dissemination of scholarly knowledge compounded by the overt and other relations of power that pervade the publication of research more generally. Academics need to engage more fully with the forms of publication and writing that could result from such research. These modes are demanded by the very process of engagement. In addition to the production of written work for the research process itself, there can be a diverse array of writings emanating directly from research. These could include reports and policy briefings for decision makers, media, and popular writings, monographs and advocacy materials, discussion documents, conference presentations and the like, augmented by the many ways of disseminating writing through the social media and Internet.[5] The failure to recognise the intellectual commitments of academics whose work transcends the boundaries of conventional research and who seek to bring into reckoning intellectual work of theoretical *and* applicative value, together with social critique, lends credence to the idea that such scholarship has no value. Consequently, academics and others who seek to open spaces for nonacademics to make claims about contributing to the body of scholarly knowledge—by implication seeking also to widen the definition of scholarship in relation to intellectual work—are marginalised.

Conventional approaches reliant on peer-reviewed publications are simply inadequate for making scholarship more widely accessible, especially because of the compelling grip on peer review on the determination of what succeeds or fails in the scholarly enterprise outside the realm of master's and doctoral studies, and now, increasingly even in that regard.[6]

It may be that academics have largely resolved the intellectual roles and the demands on it through the requirement of the peer review system, the "publish or perish" imperative, and through the expert supervision of academic dissertations. There is, for instance, no requirement that the work be

---

[5] For an example of popular writings, see booklets produced by the Education Rights Project of the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation [CERT] at the University of Johannesburg.
[6] The University of Pretoria, for instance, requires some categories of doctoral candidates to publish their work as it progresses.

widely read and disseminated or be accessible to those not in the academic community. The constant refrain against such research that it "lies on the shelf to gather dust" is to that extent, naïve and seemingly unreasonable because widespread dissemination is never a criterion for such research. The rationale for a selective and privileging disposition about the availability of academic research lies in the view that the demands of scholarly rigour preclude such inclusivity. But such a view is disingenuous from the perspective of the public purposes of knowledge and the responsibility of universities to engage with its communities.

## Wider Purposes of Science and Public Reasoning

It can also be argued that scientific knowledge (Dunbar, 1995) without a wider social purpose—as is sometimes implied in the reductive way that the idea of the third mission of universities is conceived—does not orient itself sufficiently to the broader aims of enquiry and the production of knowledge as envisaged by many of the greatest thinkers through the ages. They have pronounced unequivocally on the social moral, spiritual, cultural, and other purposes of knowledge essential for the resolution of social and human issues (even if these relate to the physical and cosmological environmental inhabited by humans) and as inextricable from the purpose of addressing the lives of humans as conscious beings.

One of the purposes of civic science is to address the distance between science and society, to find ways of relating to the questions of science in more socially engaging ways so as to enhance democratic social processes for resolving the complex problems faced by societies globally. This can be done by respectful engagements between scientists who are conscious of their social location and roles as a part of the democratic citizenry. It requires interconnected ways of producing scientific understanding between the laboratory and citizen-initiated scientific endeavour, for instance, research related to clean water sources, food security, sanitation, power supply, and the environment. It implies a commitment by academics to engage with scientific issues in ways that engage with the framing conditions for much of science—as it arises in the context of the lived realities of the citizenry—especially those who have least access to the modes of academic enquiry and have little impact on both the choices implied in the process of enquiry or its outcomes. It seeks collaborations between "experts" and the socially useful knowledge and the understanding inherent in community experience and implies a collective approach based on a willingness to recognise differing—and sometimes contradictory—emphases about the uses of science as a social activity. It requires scientists and the citizenry to engage with each other about the underlying assumptions and choices that inform scientific practice, the use of public resources together with the requirements of rigorous science and its ethical boundaries, limits, and possibilities.

It is not concerned to "interfere" with scientific endeavour but to engage with and understand its methodological premises from the perspective of its civic value. It implies an openness to accept that systematic enquiry can be enhanced by employing a wider variety of sources of data and enjoins us to think about the aphorism attributed to Einstein that information alone is inadequate as knowledge, since experience is the real source of knowledge (Seelig, 1995). Such experience lies not only in the experience of scientists but in the wider array of social experiences impacted on by scientific endeavour and the processes informing scientific choices. For instance, in regard to the research about hydrofracking in the Karoo there can be no simple answers provided by experts alone because a variety of social and ecological systems—reinforcing one another—are brought into contention by purposeful research into hydrofracking, raising fundamental questions about the methodological and social assumptions about such research. Developing diverse ways of understanding reality requires us to rethink the assumption that only those who have the benefit of academic credentials can make valuable scientific judgements even when these judgements have pervasive social and ecological effects. It calls for a deliberative commitment to collaboration

between scientists and the citizenry to legitimise scientific endeavour beyond the academy by accepting the ability of all human beings to engage with each other in the development of shared ways of knowing and for democratic practice. This is best illustrated and embodied in the work of environmental scientist Jane Lubchenco's (1998) view that:

> *As the magnitude of human impacts on the ecological systems of the planet becomes apparent, there is increased realisation of the intimate connections between these systems and human health, the economy, social justice, and national security. The concept of what constitutes "the environment" is changing rapidly. Urgent and unprecedented environmental and social changes challenge scientists to define a new social contract. This contract represents a commitment on the part of all scientists to devote their energies and talents to the most pressing problems of the day, in proportion to their importance, in exchange for public funding. The new and unmet needs of society include more comprehensive information, understanding, and technologies for society to move toward a more sustainable biosphere—one which is ecologically sound, economically feasible, and socially just. New fundamental research, faster and more effective transmission of new and existing knowledge to policy- and decision makers, and better communication of this knowledge to the public will all be required to meet this challenge. (p. 491)*

Indeed as the Wikipedia insert on her work states:

> *Throughout her career, Lubchenco has emphasized the responsibilities scientists have to society and the importance of effective communication between scientists and society. In her 1997 address as President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, she focused on scientists' "social contract" with society, i.e. their obligation to not only create new knowledge that is helpful to society but also to share that knowledge widely, not just with other scientists. (n. p.)*

Such approaches to science imply recognition of the potential ways of knowing that lie with nonscientists, especially in regard to phenomena impacting directly on their lives. It affirms the value of civic agency in the development of scientific knowledge for democratic societies through the cocreation of their ecological and social environment and enhances the possibilities for the democratising knowledge—including scientific knowledge, its practices, and culture.

This means that wider conceptions of scholarship are necessary in social settings where scientific knowledge is used to address the issues facing democratic societies and requires public reasoning and other mechanisms to advance social awareness together with a wider intellectual and social orientation reaching beyond the responsibilities of conventional academic work, teaching, and postgraduate supervision. In fact, this conception of scholarship raises important definitional and practical issues[7] which speak to the conditions for scholarship and raise more than a few important— some might say fundamental—questions about the intellectual demands of such scholarship.

---

[7] The Concise Oxford Dictionary's definition of *scholarship* (2005) refers to "the quality of having attained learning" and somewhat tautologically it refers to "methods and achievements characteristic of scholars." We view it more as denoting the activity of producing new ideas, new interpretations of old ideas, adding to the body of human understanding, expanding the horizons of such understanding and taking understanding to a higher level of clarity *and* the modes and methods of doing so through the process of engagement in the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Associated with such a wider conception of scholarship is the idea of public reasoning. Amartya Sen (2005), Nobel Laureate, has written widely about the importance of reasoning and public reasoning in particular. Public reasoning is intrinsic, in his view, to any conception of democracy. As he has argued, "democracy is intimately connected with public discussion and interactive reasoning" (p. 14) and, as he has said, it is "government by discussion." For him public reasoning has three attributes: it involves "respect for pluralism and an attitude of tolerance for different points of view and lifestyles"; "an open discussion of issues of common concern"; and "*political commitment and participation of people in public action for the transformation of society* [emphasis added]" (pp. 2–3).

Academics can amplify their roles by participating in scholarship through such public reasoning, making their intellectual outputs more widely available to the university's publics—engaging with its many challenges intellectually and practically to build on the relationship between the university and its community. In this way, academic knowledge is also related to its application, producing new conceptualisations and theorisation. It can support the production of scientific knowledge that is anchored in a deep and enduring approach to the public good.

In effect, discussions about scholarship need to be extended beyond the limits of the conventions of academic accreditation and the criteria presently in use for the validation of academic knowledge. It needs to examine the intellectual commitments of academics whose work transcends the boundaries of conventional accreditation and who seek to bring into reckoning intellectual work of civic and public science, policy-related and applicative research, social critique and community orientation, and the methods that inform such work. These commitments seek to validate intellectual effort beyond the prohibitive conventions that are prevalent. They seek also to open spaces for nonacademics who have a role in contributing to the body of scholarly knowledge—by implication seeking also to widen the definition of scholarship in relation to intellectual work and advancing the idea of the inseparability of intellectual work from thoughtful, critically oriented, and dialogically committed social activism and citizenship.

The role of academics needs to be problematised to deal with the ostensible separation between the scholarly attributes of intellectual and academic, activist and advocate, analyst and critic. A wider and socially relevant interpretation of scholarship should emphasise the importance of the space for thoughtful disputation, enquiry, and dialogue in ways that go beyond rhetoric, provides content and support to such a role, and recognises its contribution to democratic citizenship and social change. Its quest, to reiterate it, is to contribute responsibly to the social goal of a democratic, informed, and thinking citizenry. This means that for such scholarship, engaging through public reasoning on a range of matters affecting development (however that is conceptualised) is important. Such engagements open up the dialogic possibilities for the university and its communities—urban and rural communities, the powerful and the powerless—with social movements, trade unions, student bodies, rights lobbies, decision makers, and a range of other groups and interests. It assumes the stimulation of public dialogue and enquiry, public accountability and knowledge, disputation and debate.[8] Socially engaged research raises a different set of questions beyond the confining boundaries of academic communities. Indeed, it raises questions about who exactly is its community besides its academic peers, postgraduate students, and the recipients of its "knowledge products."

The processes of public and democratic reasoning are an essential instrument for the stimulation of open engagement and rational decision making about important national issues and the potential for mediating conflicting interests—especially where these are not easily reconcilable.

---

[8] I do not engage with the critique about the possibilities and restrictions endured by scholarship within neoliberal regimes although we recognise the force of that view today. See Bronwyn Davies (2005).

## Conclusion

The time for a rethink of the prevailing conventions of scholarship, and the asphyxiating grip on it of peer review, has arrived. Approaches to scholarship that disregard its relation to public good and social purpose—confusing these with dirigisme—should be the subject of critical scrutiny and attentive debate amongst all those who are affected by the scientific undertaking. Such debate could, moreover, have practical value in defining the criteria for the allocation and use of public resources in the development of scholarship.

A broader definition of scholarship can be posited relating to its value in symbolising the activity of conceiving important ideas for creative thought, research, the production of new ways of thinking and explanations: new interpretations of old ideas, adding to the body of human understanding, expanding the horizons of such understanding and explaining phenomena more clearly. It includes the modes and methods of doing so through the process of conscientious and careful study, not unrelated to practice and experiment depending on the issue at hand (Capra, 1983[9]). It refers more broadly to the activities of intellectuals both in and outside research institutions and should speak to the value, purposes, and modes of scientific enquiry as these relate to social choice—whether they arise from enquiries about natural phenomena or social questions.

We are enjoined by the very nature of our roles in academia to reflect on the social value and uses of knowledge, on the responsibility of public bodies and its academic faculty, about the relationship between knowledge and the power of the unexamined dominant ideas that hold sway in society. As scientists (social or otherwise), we are obliged to engage self-critically with questions about the nature of our undertaking, its definitions, axioms, and assumptions, and with its underlying values. For example, it would be difficult for social scientists to avoid questions about the effects of global corporate capitalism on developing societies and the range of factors that present many intersecting challenges as the background to social analysis. For such analysis it would be necessary, for example, to recognise how the emerging democratic state is reconfigured at this time, whose interests are served by it, the orientation of the state to issues of race, class, and gender, urban-ness and rurality, to social rights and individual choice, questions of social, economic, and cultural power and the social relations engendered by these as intrinsic to useful scholarship.

We need to think of how the university might properly support such socially responsive scholarship, augmenting the value of academic and publishable work. More discussion and complex and nuanced criteria are required to include the various forms of scholarly engagement. If all research was judged only by its academic merit then we would be deprived of the great body of human knowledge acquired over many millennia in the great exchange of ideas throughout human history because very little of it was produced within the conventions of academia.[10]

We should strive to search collectively for a more encompassing approach to scholarship untrammelled by the heavy hand of academic peer review and the idea that scientific endeavour is best expressed solely through the processes that privilege an academic caste alone—engrossed in its

---

9 Newton, for instance, attempted to reconcile the demands of two opposing trends in the 17th century: the empirical, inductive method of Bacon and the rational, deductive method of Descartes. Newton emphasised that "neither experiments without systematic interpretation nor deduction from first principles without experimental evidence will lead to a reliable theory." This went beyond both Bacon's and Descartes' systematic experimentation and mathematical analysis, respectively, and advanced the methodology on which the natural sciences have been based since then (see Capra, 1983, p. 64).

10 Of the great natural philosophers and scientists of the past, it would be surprising to find any who produced scholarship by the conventions of academic research. See also Conner's (2005) A People's History of Science in which it was argued that nearly every significant advance in science was attributable to the prior experience gained from artisanal, seafaring, navigational, midwifery, mechanical, blacksmithing, craft-related, and other "ordinary" endeavour.

private ruminations. We are called upon to transcend the limits of the internally self-referential approaches for validating scientific knowledge and to problematise the present systems of its authority. This requires an intellectual activism that includes critical scholarship beyond the limits of academic writing and teaching, knowledge, discovery, and integration. Ultimately, a wider than academic interpretation of scholarship attesting to the importance of the public spaces for thoughtful disputation, critical enquiry, and dialogue—engagements important to the goal of a democratic, informed, and thinking citizenry, seem obligatory and unavoidable.

## References

Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf). (2006). *Report on a strategic approach to research publishing in South Africa* (Preface). Pretoria, RSA: ASSAf.

Atkinson, M. P. (2001). The scholarship of teaching and learning: Reconceptualizing scholarship and transforming the academy. *Social Forces*, *79*(4), 1217–1229.

Bello, W. (2008, April 11). Challenges and dilemmas of the public intellectual. *BanglaPraxis*. Retrieved from http://banglapraxis.wordpress.com/2008/04/12/challenges-and-dilemmas-of-the-public-intellectual/

Bitzer, E. M. (2006). Restoring the status of teaching scholarship at a research-orientated university. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 20*(4), 372–390. Retrieved from http://reference.sabinet.co.za/webx/access/electronic_journals/high/high_v20_n4_a2.pdf

Capra, F. (1983). The turning point: Science, society, and the rising culture. New York, USA: Bantam.

Conner, C. C. (2005). *A people's history of science.* New York, USA: Nation Books.

Davies, B. (2005). The (im)possibility of intellectual work in neoliberal regimes. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, *26*(1), 1–14.

Dreze, J. (2002). On research and action. *Economic and Political Weekly, 37*(9), 817–819.

Dunbar, R. (1995). *The trouble with science*. London, UK: Faber & Faber.

Eyerman, R., Svennson, L. G., & Söderqvist, T. (Eds.). (1987). *Intellectuals, universities, and the state in Western modern societies*. Berkeley, USA: University of California Press.

Haack, S. (2007). *Defending science—within reason.* New York, USA: Prometheus.

Lubchenco, J. (1998). Entering the century of the environment: A new social contract for science. *Science*, *279*(5350), 491–497. doi:10.1126/science.279.5350.491

McClellan, R., & Powers, J. (2012, May 4). Open letter to higher ed scholars. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/05/04/essay-how-scholars-higher-education-can-be-more-relevant#ixzz1ttc4i4wt

Michels, R. (1966). Political parties: A sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy. New York, USA: Free Press.

Motala, E. (2011). NMMU and socially engaged research. In *NMMU research and innovation report 2011.* Port Elizabeth, RSA: NMMU.

Motala, E. (2014). Academic knowledge production and scholarship: Hostage to peer review. East London, RSA: Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development.

Mudimbe, V. Y. (1988). The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy and the order of knowledge. Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press.

Nabudere, D. W. (2006). Towards an Afrokology of knowledge production and African regeneration. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*, *1*(1), 7–32.

doi:10.1080/18186870608529704

Odora-Hoppers, C. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and the integration of knowledge systems: Towards a conceptual and methodological framework. In C. Odora-Hoppers (Ed.), *Indigenous knowledge and the integration of knowledge systems: Towards a philosophy of articulation* (pp. 2–22)*.* Claremont, RSA: New Africa Books.

Paulsen, M. B., & Feldman, K. A. (1995). *Taking teaching seriously: Meeting the challenge of instructional improvement. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 2, 1995*. Washington, USA: George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development.

Popkewitz, T. S. (1985). Ideology and social formation in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *1*(2), 91–107.

Richards, H. (2004). *On the concept of peacemaking.* The Danish Peace Academy. Retrieved from http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/peacemaking.htm

Said, E. (1996). Representation of the intellectual: The 1993 Reith lectures. London, UK: Vintage.

Scholarship. (2005). In *Concise Oxford dictionary* (11th ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

Seelig, C. (Ed.). (1995). *Ideas and opinions: Albert Einstein*. New York, USA: Three Rivers Press.

Sen, A. (2005). The argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian history, culture and identity. New Delhi, India: Penguin.

Vally, S., Motala E., & Ramadiro, B. (2009). From "abjectivity" to subjectivity: Education research and resistance in South Africa. In D. Hill & E. Rosskam (Eds.), *The developing world and state education* (pp. 179–196). New York, USA: Routledge.

Visvanathan S. (2014). A moment of forgiveness. *Deccan Chronicle*. Retrieved from

http://www.deccanchronicle.com/140306/commentary-op-ed/commentary/moment-forgiveness

Wikipedia (2014). Jane Lubchenco. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Lubchenco