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Challenging the Orthodoxies of Knowledge: Epistemological, Structural, and Political Implications for Higher Education[1]

Hans N. Weiler[2]
Stanford University

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The invocation of the notion of a "knowledge society" has become ubiquitous. Among its many dangers is that it creates the illusion that we know what we are talking about when we talk about "knowledge". This paper claims that, when it comes to knowledge, we do *not* know what we are talking about.

More specifically, this paper argues that the contemporary discourse on knowledge, particularly in Europe and North America, suffers from three major deficits:

Deficit No. 1: It does not take a critical enough view of what "knowledge" means, and of the fundamental changes that the concept of knowledge has undergone in the course of the 20th century.

Deficit No. 2: It fails to address the political conditions and consequences of the production and use of knowledge – in other words, it is oblivious to the politics of knowledge.

[1] The author has addressed this issue on several previous occasions, including more recently the Conference of the International Women's University on "Rethinking University", held in Berlin on 31 May 2002, at the Heinrich Böll Foundation's Congress "Gut zu wissen – Links zur Wissensgesellschaft", held in Berlin in May 2001 (see Weiler 2002), and at the New Europe College at Bucharest on June 12, 2003. Each of these iterations, including this one, has grown several more "rings" around the original tree.

[2] Email: weiler@stanford.edu; Homepage: www.stanford.edu/people/weiler (where most of the author's recent writings can be downloaded).

Deficit No. 3: It does not adequately address what kinds of structural changes in higher education would follow from recognizing both the epistemological and the political transformation of our contemporary knowledge culture.

The purpose of this paper is to address this threefold shortcoming and to help overcome it. This attempt

- begins by looking at the profound changes in our understanding of what "knowledge" means and how it is produced (Part 1)
- then presents (in Part 2) the essential features of a "politics of knowledge" and proceeds to illustrate these features by reference to the discourses on the concept of development, on the meaning of gender roles and on the understanding of democracy, and
- concludes by pointing out (in Part 3) the structural implications that this kind of critical reflection on knowledge has for the future direction of higher education.

As some of my previous writing has addressed in considerable detail the epistemological transformations and, to a slightly lesser extent, the political transformations in our knowledge culture (see Weiler …), these two aspects will be more summarily treated here, with more emphasis on the structural implications of this transformation process for higher education.

1. The changing concept of knowledge

Especially in the second half of the 20th century, the concept of "knowledge" has undergone profound changes and has been at the center of major controversies – so much so that Rajni Kothari from India felt obliged to speak of a "deepening sense of crisis in the modern knowledge system" (1987, 283). These changes have to do with the epistemological foundations of our understanding of knowledge, but also with the way in which we assess different processes and institutional forms of knowledge production.

At issue here are both the criteria for judging the validity and adequacy of knowledge and the structural arrangements under which knowledge is being produced. It is in the debates on these different meanings of knowledge that the political significance of the concept and the intimate relationship between knowledge and power become particularly clear. Altogether, this process presents itself to the observer – as I once put it in an article published some ten years ago – as "a remarkable mixture of uncertainty and liberation, of a loss of dependable standards and an openness towards new ways of knowing, of a profound doubt about established conventions in the production of knowledge and the exhilarating sense of a new beginning". (Weiler 1993, 5)

These changes in the concept of knowledge draw on a wide variety of sources and reflect critical voices from highly diverse cultural traditions: Ali Masrui (1975),

Paulin Hountondji (1983; 1997; 2002) and Andre Kraak (2000) from Africa; Syed Alatas (1976), Rajni Kothari (see also Sheth and Nandy, 1996), Susantha Goonatilake (1984; 1998), Vinay Lal (2000; 2002), Ashis Nandy (1981; 1989; 2000) and Homi Bhabha (1994) from Asia; Clifford Geertz (1983), Stephen Greenblatt (1991), Sandra Harding (1986; 1993; 1998) and Paul Roth (1987) from North America; Pablo González Casanova (1981), Arturo Escobar (1984-85) and Carmen Garcia Guadilla (1987; 1996; 2002) from Latin America; and Michel Foucault (1971; 1972), Zygmunt Bauman (1991; 1992), Helga Nowotny (1994; 2001), Nico Stehr (1992, 2001), Michael Gibbons (1994), Steve Fuller (2000; 2002; 2003) and the Reimers Foundation's "Culturalism" project (Lackner and Werner 1999) from Europe – to name but a few of the diverse voices in this discussion, without claiming that the list is representative, let alone complete.

In substantive terms, this process of transformation is similarly diverse; it involves, among other things:

- both the questioning of the epistemological tradition of a "unified science" and the demonopolization of a concept of knowledge that has its roots in the natural sciences, as well as
- the emergence of new ways of knowing.

1.1 Challenging the tradition of a "unified science"

1.1.1 The erosion of a homogeneous concept of knowledge

Critique of the tradition of "unified science" takes different forms. What all of them have in common is the fact that they question the notion of a homogeneous and uniform concept of knowledge that can be applied equally to every conceivable object. This notion originated in the epistemology of the classical natural sciences and its extension to the social and behavioral sciences – in line with Talcott Parsons' classic statement in his discussion of Max Weber's work: "There is not 'natural' or 'cultural' science; there is only science or non-science and all empirical knowledge is scientific in so far as it is valid." (1977, 61)

1.1.2 Sources of change

Over the past decades, the absolute validity of this notion has been called into question, not only through the epistemological change within the natural sciences themselves but also in the realm of the social and behavioral sciences by a number of developments, including:

- the long-term effects of the "positivism debate" in German sociology (Adorno 1976),
- the growing importance of phenomenological and hermeneutic forms of social inquiry (Gadamer 1981; Habermas 1968; Thompson 1981),

- the growing influence of non-Western (Kothari 1987; Nandy 1981) and feminist epistemological thought (Belenky et al. 1986; Farganis 1986, Harding 1986) and
- the commotions of post-structuralist and post-modernist debates (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Foucault 1971, 1972; Lyotard 1984).

1.1.3 Differentiated and contingent knowledge

Along these fault lines has emerged a conception of knowledge that is at once more differentiated (in the sense that it differs by the objects of knowledge and the circumstances of generating it) and more contingent (in the sense of statements that are valid only under certain conditions).

1.1.4 Casualties of change

As a result of these developments, some elements of classical theories of knowledge have suffered. These include in particular

- the concept of *objectivity* – i.e. the independence of the observed "subject" from the observer,
- the idea of the *certainty* of statements across temporal and other circumstances,
- the possibility of *prediction*, i.e. the dependability of "if-then" statements, and finally
- the belief in the possibility of *quantification*, i.e. of representing reality exhaustively in numerical and quantitative terms.

1.1.5 Nomothetic vs. ideographic knowledge

In addition, there has been a shift of emphasis in the relative "worth" of the general and the specific – or, in the jargon of theoreticians of knowledge, of nomothetic and idiographic knowledge. More concretely, this argument is about what is more "important" in generating knowledge about a given field of social activity:

- to produce generalized statements about, for example, determinants of learning outcomes across a large number of cases and contexts, *or* to capture the full texture of how individual learning takes place in a particular setting?
- to identify national or world-wide patterns in the financial returns to investments in education, *or* to reconstruct and understand the economic calculus that drives individual or group decisions about how much to invest in schooling and how?
- to abstract from a wide variety of institutional settings to arrive at a general theory of organizational behaviour, *or* to understand how a specific organization's tasks interact with its environment and the social identity of its members to produce a particular "institutional culture?"

- to develop and refine models of population growth and movement on a national or international scale, *or* to understand the cultural, social, and economic factors that affect people's decisions in matters of reproduction, health, resource allocation, and migration?

One could and should, of course, emphasize the complementarity of the different bodies of knowledge that each of these options would help create. However, the shift in emphasis between these options is unmistakable, and accounts for a significant change in the pattern of research strategies: in-depth case studies, historical analyses, ethnographic studies, biographical analyses, process, content, and critical incident analyses, and interpretive studies of both literary and social evidence are increasingly competing with the time-honoured approaches of hypothesis-testing on the basis of sampling strategies that permit generalization to a theoretically defined universe with identifiable sampling errors.

1.1.6 Explanation and understanding

The situation is similar with respect to the tension between “explanation“ and “understanding“, on which the work of Karl-Otto Apel (1984) has triggered such an intensive and momentous discussion. Paul Roth underlines how problematic a form of research has proved to be that focuses on “explanations of behavior which allow predictions concerning future behavior“ (1987, 3; cf. also Dallmayr and McCarthy 1977). Indeed, our most sophisticated predictive models for voting, consumption behavior or warfare have provided little protection against surprises, serendipity, unexpected outcomes or, even, banality. Peter Winch gave us a similar warning some decades ago:

“The central concepts which belong to our understanding of social life are incompatible with concepts central to the activity of scientific prediction. When we speak of the possibility of scientific prediction of social developments…, we literally do not understand what we are saying” (1958, 94).

1.1.7 Cognitive, normative, and aesthetic knowledge

Finally, the critique of a tradition of scientific rationality geared to the natural sciences has led us to a situation in which knowledge is no longer seen exclusively in cognitive categories, but increasingly in normative and aesthetic categories as well. As a result, both ethical justification and artistic expression are divested of their stigma of being unscientific, and are becoming a legitimate element in a new system of knowledge (Habermas 1985, 134-137; cf. 1973; see also Putnam 1987, 53-56; Lenk 1986, 349-463; Roth 1987).

This development also takes account of the fact that the “cultural location“, and hence the normative disposition, of the observer is a constitutive element in the process of knowledge creation and has a decisive impact on the results of this process – a conclusion that has found expression in the term “culturality of

knowledge“, with an increasingly rich yield in the literature (Böhme and Scherpe 1996, 9; cf. Vismann 1996, 106; Greenblatt 1994). In this respect, too, the influence of non-Western and feminist ideas should be acknowledged (cf. Alatas 1976; Gonzalez Casanova 1981; Harding 1986) – I shall return to this later on.

1.2 New ways of knowing

1.2.1 Epistemology and institutional structures

The erosion of the canon and legitimacy of a “unified science“ has already been shown to have fundamentally opened up the process of knowledge production, giving forms of knowledge previously considered unscientific or extra scientific a new and more legitimate role. An important observation here – to anticipate my later remarks on the politics of knowledge – is that the hegemony of the tradition of a “unified science“ is not only an epistemological issue existing in a vacuum, but has also produced a complex system of institutional mechanisms for setting the relevant standards at universities, in scientific publications and in the funding of research. Thus one of the consequences of the erosion of the epistemological hegemony of “unified science“ is also the structural opening up of the system of knowledge production.

1.2.2 The rehabilitation of “suppressed forms of knowledge”

Michel Foucault uses a particularly appropriate term when he speaks of the rehabilitation of “subjugated knowledges … a whole set of knowledges that once were disqualified as inadequate to their task” and that have now acquired new validity as “people’s knowledge“ (*le savoir des gens*) (1980, 82). In a remarkable article entitled “African Famine: Whose Knowledge Matters?“, Guy Gran makes a case for recognizing African farmers’ grassroots knowledge of what does and does not work in African agricultural development as both more legitimate and more effective than the agrarian remedies imposed on them by international agencies (1986).

Following Habermas' appeal to reconstruct a more holistic notion of knowledge that includes both the normative and the aesthetic domain of knowing, the formerly rigid boundaries between scientific and non-scientific knowledge are increasingly questioned. We have thus learned to derive powerful insights into the nature of social reality from the literary testimony of writers such as Gabriel García Marquéz, Günter Grass, Chinua Achebe, or Andrei Pleşu (2003a; 2003b), from painters and sculptors such as Pablo Picasso, Diego Rivera, Anselm Kiefer, or Joseph Beuys, or from film-makers like Rainer-Werner Fassbinder, Akira Kurosawa, Ousmane Sembene, or Andrzej Wajda.

1.2.3 The “third culture”

Particularly fruitful in this connection is the rediscovery – for which we are principally indebted to Wolf Lepenies – of the relationship between the scientific and literary analysis of social reality, in which sociology has arrived at a new understanding of itself as a “third culture“ (1985). Lepenies finds that, throughout its history, sociology "has oscillated between a scientific orientation which has led it to ape the natural sciences and a hermeneutic attitude which has shifted the discipline towards the realm of literature," (1988, 1) producing "sociology's precarious situation as a kind of `third culture' between the natural sciences on the one hand and literature and the humanities on the other." (ibid., 7)

In a different way, but with a similar result, the late Palestinian humanist Edward Said pleads for a new alliance between literary criticism and the analysis of power, i.e. between – as one of his books is entitled – “The World, the Text, and the Critic“ (1983). This argument already evokes the theme of the “politics of interpretation“, which is reflected again in a variety of ways in one of Said’s last major books, “Reflections on Exile“ (2000, 118ff.), and is indispensable to any discussion on the “politics of knowledge“.

2. The politics of knowledge

The process of transformation that has been summarized in Part 1 of this paper has had a lasting influence on our understanding of knowledge. Bu tit has also confirmed that the linkages between knowledge and power are both very intimate and very consequential, and that arriving at a better understanding of this linkage is crucial to any attempt to formulate a political theory of knowledge and its production.

Recognizing the fact that knowledge and power are closely and symbiotically related is nothing new, of course; it can be found in different guises in the works of Karl Marx and Karl Mannheim as well as in those of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. But it was Michel Foucault (1980) who took up this issue with an acumen that is without peer even in this illustrious company – in his, as Edward Said puts it, “highly wrought presentation of the order, stability, authority, and regulatory power of knowledge“ (2000, 239; cf. Escobar 1984-85; DuBois 1991).

Of the many facets of this close relationship between knowledge and power, I wish to highlight four in particular:

- the paramount importance of *hierarchies* in the existing knowledge order,
- the relationship of *reciprocal legitimation* between knowledge and power,
- the *transnational division of labor* in the contemporary knowledge order, and
- the political economy of the *commercialization of knowledge*.

2.1 The importance of hierarchies in the production of knowledge

Hierarchies are the quintessential manifestation of power. They signify higher and lower ranks in a given order, domination and subordination, greater and lesser value, prestige and influence. Wherever they occur, they reflect structures of authority and power, and thus the essence of politics.

In the world of knowledge, hierarchies are a pervasive structural characteristic that is manifested in different ways:

- Different forms and domains of knowledge are endowed with unequal status, the natural sciences traditionally – and, on a more subtle level, even up to the present day – occupying a leading position, while the less "exact" forms of knowledge are relegated to the lower ranks of academic prestige.
- In the realm of the institutional arrangements for the production of knowledge, there are again clear and more or less recognized hierarchies. Here, the Max Planck Institutes, private American research universities, the *Grands Ecoles* and exclusive *think tanks* form the tip of the hierarchical pyramid; this institutional hierarchy serves to organize the politics of knowledge, at least at the national level; it has, as we shall go on to show, its international variant as well.
- Finally, the hierarchical principle also works within knowledge-related institutions – between professor and student, between institute directors and staff, between senior and junior faculty and, if more subtly, between administrators and faculty.

All of these hierarchical relationships are based on more or less explicit agreements on what constitutes an appropriate basis for status and authority in the world of knowledge. In the traditional version of this world of knowledge, such agreements were reached by a relatively peaceful and harmonious process of consensus seeking, some elements of which have been preserved up to the present day. However, as the ideas on what constitutes knowledge that underlie these agreements are challenged, these hierarchies are coming to be increasingly questioned as well. The increasingly open rivalry between Oxbridge and the redbrick universities in Britain, the breaking down of hierarchical distinctions between traditional universities and "universities of applied sciences" (*Fachhochschulen)* in Germany, the discussion about junior professorships and the abolition of the "Habilitation" in Germany are all signs of an erosion of traditional hierarchies which have been accompanied, not surprisingly, by serious political controversies.

2.2 Knowledge and power: A relationship of reciprocal legitimation

My basic thesis here has two objectives. First, to demonstrate that the concept of legitimation can also be usefully applied to objects outside the sphere of state

authority in the narrow sense – i.e. to the realm knowledge and science as well. Second, to show that a problem central to the understanding of modern statehood, namely the relationship between knowledge and power, acquires a particularly sharp focus by being interpreted as a relationship of reciprocal legitimation.

On the first point, I assume that not only power requires legitimation (which we have known since Max Weber, if not before), but that knowledge is in need of legitimation as well. Knowledge too must have a claim to credibility; knowledge too requires recognition, of which it must be "worthy". This notion of the recognition-worthiness of knowledge would indeed provide the basis for a splendid sociology of knowledge. Such a sociology of knowledge would deal with the different foundations for the recognition of knowledge in the course of history – from the revelation of mystical experience to the deductive logic of scholasticism to the epistemologies of scientific proof. It should be noted that none of these foundations exclusively inheres in conceptions of knowledge itself; they derive their respective validity from social and cultural circumstances as well. The knowledge of Hildegard von Bingen was accorded, in the cultural circumstances of her lifetime, the same degree of legitimation as, in their respective lifetimes, the knowledge of Paracelsus and Albert Einstein. In other words: The legitimation of knowledge, like that of political power, is subject to changes in their respective criteria, and these changes cannot be explained – at least not exclusively – in terms of the content of knowledge itself.

And this is where my second point comes in: that knowledge and power are connected by a relationship of reciprocal legitimation – i.e. knowledge legitimates power and, conversely, knowledge is legitimated by power. There is ample evidence for this symbiotic relationship between knowledge and power.

We need only consider the ever-increasing degree to which political decisions are justified by reference to a particular body of knowledge – from environmental policies to the location of new industries and from the redistribution of wealth to decisions on the investment of public funds. In our complex societies, knowledge and science have virtually become the currency of choice in legitimizing state power (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 102; cf. Gouldner 1970, 50; Marcuse 1964, 158-159). In his interpretation, Ashis Nandy of India takes this line of reasoning yet a step further to its implications for the role of the university:

“As more and more areas of life are ‘scientized’ and taken out of the reach of participatory politics to be handed over to experts, the universities as the final depository of expertise have become a major global political actor of our times. In addition to their other tasks, they legitimize the ‘expertization’ of public affairs and the reign of the professionals.” (2000, 116)

But the relationship is far from being a one-way street. Just as knowledge legitimizes power, it also derives a great deal of its own legitimation from

decisions of the state – decisions on, for example, what is to be learned and taught at schools, what sort of knowledge is required to qualify candidates for specific public offices and careers, what sort of research should enjoy public funding, etc. In all these and many other decisions that are subject to state authority, *one* type of knowledge is typically given priority over *another* and is accorded special standing and legitimation. What becomes manifest here is not only the close and often intricate relationship between knowledge and power, but also and most particularly the capacity of this relationship to serve as an instrument of reciprocal legitimation (cf. Weiler 2001).

The relationship between knowledge and power is also, and not surprisingly, the subject of many a literary account. One of my favorite examples is Stefan Heym's so finely drawn figure of the valiant historian Ethan, who, for the sake of the integrity of his discipline, attempts to refuse King Solomon's request of writing the official and politically correct "King David Report" (1972) and in so doing becomes the tragic centerpiece of a memorable literary monument to the symbiotic relationship between knowledge and power.

Another literary jewel on this topic is T.S. Eliot's ironic masterpiece on the role of the intellectual in politics, which can be found in „The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1982):

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous -
Almost, at times, the Fool.

2.3 The transnational knowledge system and the international division of labor

The frame of reference for a political theory of knowledge is, however, by no means confined to the institutional and national level; it would not be complete unless the international dimension is taken into account as well (see Drori et al., 2003). This international dimension is characterized not only by a worldwide information flow that is increasingly facilitated by technology, but also by its own kind of politics. For the apparent openness of the international knowledge system tends to obscure the fact that there are extreme global disparities in the distribution of both knowledge production and consumption. Indeed, one of the salient features of the international knowledge system is its peculiar division of labor, in which key intellectual tasks, such as setting theoretical agendas and methodological standards, are the prerogative of a relatively small number of

societies and institutions that play a disproportionately important role in this system – societies and institutions which are, almost without exception, located in the economically privileged regions of the world.

This particular type of hierarchy in our contemporary international knowledge system is by no means concerned only with knowledge, but reflects quite faithfully the international hierarchies of economic influence and political power with which the international knowledge system maintains a thoroughly symbiotic relationship. This relationship in turn has parallels to the relationship of reciprocal legitimation between knowledge and power that I have described earlier. This is particularly evident in the case of institutions such as the World Bank, whose role in the international system is by no means confined to exercising influence on economic activity and policy. Less well-known, but extremely effective is the influence the World Bank wields by imposing an orthodoxy of knowledge to which all countries and institutions that wish to enter into negotiations on financing and support with the World Bank must subscribe (Weiler 1991; cf. 1988; 1992b).

This paradigmatic hegemony of knowledge norms, which has its origins in Western societies and their scientific institutions, has, however, not gone unchallenged. Indeed, the increasingly intense controversy over a new international system of knowledge is one of the most interesting and significant political phenomena of the last twenty-five years. Instrumental in this “redrawing of the map of world culture“ (Böhme and Scherpe1996, 18-19) were many of the voices from the countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Arab world that I have already mentioned – e.g., Hountondji, Kothari, Garcia Guadilla, and many others, including very prominently Ashis Nandy with his call for “a new, plural, political ecology of knowledge“ (1989, 267).

2.4 The political economy of commercialized knowledge

A final aspect of the contemporary political economy of knowledge production has to do with the growing commercialization of knowledge in the modern world. To be sure, certain kinds of knowledge have always had their economic utility, but it is an important part of our times that the creation of knowledge has come to be regarded and treated so pervasively in economic and commercial terms. This has something to do with the increasing cost of knowledge production and, hence, the dependence of knowledge producers on external financial sponsorship; such sponsorship very often does have an economic and political agenda of its own under which the support and the production of new knowledge is being subsumed. More importantly, however, the very nature of modern economic activity has become so massively dependent on up-to-date knowledge of constantly increasing scope and complexity that the linkage between knowledge and both productivity and profitability has become virtually inescapable. This is true not only for the "hard" sciences and their utility for industrial and other forms of engineering, but also for the knowledge of social

and psychological processes and its significance for dealing with labor problems, enhancing productivity, and other forms of "social engineering." It is this dependency that has become enshrined in the notion of the “knowledge society” as an extraordinarily important paradigm of contemporary analysis (see, inter alia, Braunerhjelm 2000).

As a result, a whole new set of power relationships has emerged around the world of knowledge. These relationships are dictated by both the interests and the resources of the commercial user of knowledge, and take a variety of forms -- from outright research contracts between industry and universities to more subtle influences on research programs by philanthropic foundations, and from industry-sponsored research institutions inside universities to the setting up of industry-owned research centers in more or less direct competition with other producers of knowledge in the academic realm. The story of Silicon Valley over the last forty years offers a particularly instructive lesson on both the advantages and disadvantages of this new symbiotic relationship between knowledge and commerce in the context of high-tech development (Weiler 2003).

Whatever the specific institutional arrangements, however, the overall growth in the commercialization of knowledge production has added a further layer of politically constituted interests to the contemporary system of knowledge production: the discourse about the notion of the “knowledge society” reveals upon closer inspection that the politics of knowledge become less and less separable from the politics of production and profit, which are arguably the most powerful political dynamics in today's world. The international dimension of this kind of dynamic in the politics of knowledge is the growing debate about including higher education and research in the “General Agreement on Trade in Services” (GATS), designed to guarantee access to national markets by foreign suppliers of knowledge (Clift 1999; Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft 2002; World Trade Organization 2001).

2.5 The politics of knowledge: Three discourses

Among the many manifestations of change in the realm of knowledge, three discourses highlight particularly clearly both the direction and extent of change as well as its political dimension: the discourses on the notion of development, on the role of gender and on the meaning of democracy.

2.5.1 Development

It is surely no coincidence that the discussion on the relationship between knowledge and development has been at the center of the extraordinarily rich debate conducted over the past two decades on the concept and political significance of “development“. Gran sees the total failure of development policy

in Africa as principally due to an externally imposed knowledge system that has summarily ignored the legitimacy of local, grassroots knowledge (1986). A new discourse on development looms large among the “counterdiscourses“ that Escobar has identified in many Third World countries (1984-85) and that appear to be closely connected with a new discourse on global peace (Hettne 1985; Blomstrom and Hettne 1984; Bosse 1978, 37ff.). In his writings, Jinadu emphasizes the parallels between the prevailing incrementalist ideas of development and an instrumentalized role of the social sciences in Africa; he speaks of a

“… view of development as incremental change in technological skills and efficiency and the consequent instrumentalist view of the social sciences that it encourages, [which] has tended to encourage the neglect of critical normative issues in development and in development theories.“ (1985, 19; cf. Bosse 1978, 191 und 198)

Ashis Nandy carries this debate farthest in his critique of a development policy that he considers the modern world’s fondest – and at the same time cleverest – form of charity (1989, 269). He is even skeptical about the many *alternative* conceptions of development – sustainable development, ecodevelopment, indigenous development – suspecting them of being “products of the same worldview which has produced the mainstream concept of science, liberation, and development“. For him, the real challenge is to radically reject the unholy alliance between traditional science and traditional development and construct a “post-modern science“ and a “post-development world“ (1989, 270).

My old friend Majid Rahnema must take credit not only for constantly promoting, and making valuable contributions to, this critical discourse but also for publishing his “Post-Development Reader“ (1997), in which he has collected and made available to a wider public some of the most important texts on this subject, including the writings of Arturo Escobar (ibid., 85-93), Rajni Kothari (143-151), Ashis Nandy (168-178), D.L. Sheth (329-335) and – an interesting European voice in this chorus – Vaclav Havel (336-353).

The common denominator in the work of all these authors – different though they may be in many respects – is the close connection they see between the discourse on development and the debate on the politics of knowledge. To quote Guy Gran once more:

"… the heart of both generating and applying authentically developmental knowledge is the reduction of power differentials ... Power differentials both within a locale and between levels ... fundamentally determine how knowledge is perceived, whose knowledge matters, and the ensuing effectiveness of policies on which it is based" (1986, 287).

2.5.2 Gender

As in the case of development, the critical discourse on gender is also much more than an exercise in redefining a concept. In terms of content, the discourse on gender itself is closely linked to both the political agenda of the feminist movement and its epistemological claims about "Women's ways of knowing", as one of the early contributions to this debate is entitled (Belenky et al., 1986; cf. Farganis 1986; Harding 1993; 1998; Figueroa and Harding 2003).

This convergence of both a political and an epistemological agenda has yielded a wealth of contributions to our understanding of the role of gender in the construction of social reality and of the many ways in which elements of patriarchy have pervaded our conception of such issues as performance, achievement, success, competition and, indeed, knowledge (Pateman 1988). But beyond shedding light on how our conceptions have been shaped historically and sociologically, there is an ongoing debate combining a fundamental rethinking of gender roles in knowledge production – as, for instance, in the five "research programs" described by Sandra Harding (1986, 20-24) – with the political struggle to involve women in, and bring their influence to bear on, the institutions of knowledge production – universities, academies and research institutions (Conway et al., 1987).

Here, too, the international and intercultural dimension of the discussion has long since attained considerable importance, especially in the feminist debate of post-colonial discourses on knowledge and development (Charlton 1984; Sangari und Vaid 1989; Mohanty 1984).

2.5.3 Democracy

It would be worth a more extended discussion than is possible here to review the many-faceted changes in the way democracy is understood in different cultures and political circles. They range from a new theoretical interest in the conception of democracy (Pateman 1970) to critical treatments of Western democracies' lack of legitimation (Crozier et al. 1975; Habermas 1973) to the discussion of the transformation processes in Latin America, Africa and Eastern and Central Europe (O'Donnell et al. 1986).

Of more direct relevance for our purposes, however, is the observation that this discourse, like that on development and gender, also has a dual dimension. On the one hand, it addresses fundamental questions about the nature of democracy in modern societies, especially in terms of the relative importance of representative and participatory elements (Pateman 1970; Barber 1984). At the same time, however, this discourse on democracy is also a discourse on the politics of knowledge and, more specifically, on the democratization of the process of knowledge production and consumption. This aspect of the discourse

on democracy is reflected, for instance, in a heightened recognition of the rights of the research "subject", in the growing importance and acceptance of "participatory research" (Gran 1986), in the funding – especially by Canadian and Scandinavian institutions – of autonomous research projects in Third World countries, and finally – in an interestingly unfamiliar guise – in Ashis Nandy's image of the "shaman" as "the ultimate symbol of non-cooptable dissent" (1989, 266).

A debate with far-reaching implications in this connection is that on the "governance of science", which – as, for example, in Steve Fuller's book – deals with the remarkable paradox that scholarship, while in the course of history significantly contributing to the democratization of societies, has at the same time steadfastly refused to subject itself to democratic norms of procedure (Fuller 2000, 135).

3. The politics of knowledge and the structures of higher education

The transformation of the traditional system of knowledge that this paper has traced thus far cannot but have major implications for the future orientation of higher education in terms of its organizational and institutional arrangements. These implications range from a rethinking of the role of traditional disciplines to the development of new criteria for assessing scholarship, and from the issue of autonomy in setting research agendas to a new understanding of professionalism (Weiler 1992a). This process will confront institutions of higher education with some major challenges, including the following:

- the need to acknowledge the fact that the production and mediation of knowledge is a genuinely political process requiring systematic and critical inquiry, and a process in which both the culturality of knowledge and the role of knowledge in legitimizing political power play an important part;
- the critical examination of the role of traditional disciplines as the dominant matrix for organizing scholarly activity and for the domination and subordination structures that are based on it;
- the critical review of the criteria and methods for evaluating scholarship, taking into account the power structures inherent in these procedures; and
- a frank reassessment of the role of institutions of higher education in the international politics of knowledge.

3.1 The politics of knowledge in teaching and research

Knowledge and the political conditions of both its production and consumption still remain – despite many commendable efforts of individual scholars – at best a peripheral subject of serious and critical inquiry, generally relegated to disciplinary niches such as the sociology of knowledge, the history of science,

etc. Attempts to transcend these niches – by people like Lepenies or Homi Bhabha or Helga Nowotny or Steve Fuller – are, given the importance of this issue, a remarkably rare exception. Ashis Nandy has eloquently described the power of definition, of establishing categories and concepts as the key to understanding the new relationship between knowledge and power :

„The old, clichéd saying, ‚knowledge is power,' has acquired a new potency in recent years. For nearly a century it was fashionable to study how interests and material forces of history shaped knowledge. The world that has come into being in the aftermath of World War II seems to have reversed the relationship. It has forced us to recognize that dominance is now exercised less and less through familiar organized interests, such as class relations, colonialism, military-industrial complexes, multinational corporations, and the nation-states. Dominance is now exercised mainly through categories, embedded in systems of knowledge. … The war cry of our times is now: 'define or be defined.' … Universities have come to share this new power, for they specialize in handling categories." (2000, 115-116)

This very central challenge to inquiry is and remains very much a secondary subject of study in our hierarchies of research priorities.

The ideal location on the academic map to properly address the politics of knowledge would seem to be the field of cultural studies (*Kulturwissenschaft*), as postulated by Böhme and Scherpe:

"That today crucial cultural renewals originate in cultures previously considered peripheral, in syncretistic cultures, post-colonial countries and ethnic minorities in the industrialized societies, is a process whose segregating and polymorphous structure can no longer be understood in terms of the humanities; it can only be dealt with by a cultural studies discipline capable of moving flexibly between world culture and regionalism on both an empirical and theoretical level." (1996, 18-19)

Viadrina European University at Frankfurt/Oder in Eastern Germany (as whose first president I had the honor to serve) is one of the places where, in a bold experiment in cultural studies, this challenge is being taken up. It is too early to assess its success; there are still too many problems with the experiment – problems that would themselves provide an interesting case study on the politics of knowledge. And yet, in one of the better analyses of this experiment – not written by me, I should add, but by Cornelia Vismann – it is quite convincingly reasoned that a modern cultural studies program simply cannot avoid focusing on the production and mediation of knowledge as one of its principal subjects:

"The founding of a Faculty of Cultural Studies at the university corresponds, at the institutional level, to what has been happening on the discursive level over the past twenty or so years: the transition from a closed system of the humanities

and social sciences to a new, open knowledge system, which in its turn should now assume the form of a teachable and learnable 'discipline'. The transition – or, to put it another way, the blurring of boundaries between disciplines – has itself become significant, namely to the extent to which one of the most prominent fields of cultural studies concerns *knowledge*: its conditions of production, its rhetorical manifestations and its forms of transmission." (Vismann 1996, 106)

This reappraisal of the need for a comprehensive understanding of knowledge and the cultural and political conditions of its production is one of the major challenges facing modern institutions of higher education in terms of critical self-reflection. Such a critical reflection must also take into account the fact that science – and thus universities, too – are part of a powerful arrangement for the purposes of reciprocal legitimation.

3.2 Disciplines and the structures of academic power

There is something quite remarkable about the tenacity with which the traditional disciplines have retained their dominance of academic structures, despite the considerable evidence of their obsolescence or, at the very least, their limitations in adequately dealing with human and social reality. Boundaries between disciplines have been blurred considerably – between economics and political science, between sociology and psychology, and even between the social sciences and the humanities. Theoretical and methodological variation within disciplines is now often greater than between disciplines. Just as importantly, vast new domains of knowledge and systematic inquiry have emerged that transcend disciplinary boundaries and have become the source of important insights into such phenomena as biogenetics, symbolic systems, organizational behavior, and social engineering.

One of the reasons why, in spite of all this, disciplines persist so tenaciously is, of course, the fact that the organization of science in terms of disciplines is not just a question of academic classification. It also is a question of discipline-based power structures in which decisions are made on personnel matters, resources, buildings and equipment. Disciplines provide the rationale for professional associations and the organized representation of their interests; they form the framework in which decisions on the funding of research are made; and they secure the succession of academic dignitaries. But Wolf Lepenies is, of course, right in pointing out the profound limitations in discipline-based discourses: "The strict invocation of disciplinary identities may be useful in distributing scarce resources and cheering on old-fashioned academic cockfights. ... but it is no longer suitable as a stimulus for intellectual ideas." (1997, 93-94)

3.3 Higher education and the changing role of the state

One of the key parameters for the politics of knowledge is the changing relationship between higher education and the state in many parts of the world. This is, once again, a multi-faceted phenomenon with a considerable degree of regional variation, ranging from the stark consequences of fiscal crisis in many countries and a corresponding retraction of the state's fiscal responsibilities for higher education to ideologically-based transitions in higher education governance from state sponsorship to greater exposure to the dynamics of the market (Weiler 2000).

The net effect of these transitions, whatever their root cause, is an increase in the degree of the university's self-determination or autonomy, at least from the state. This proves to be an ambivalent situation in at least two respects. On the one hand, especially where the university's greater autonomy is a result of the state's fiscal crisis, the university is likely to enter into sponsoring relationships (with tuition-paying students from certain segments of the society, with business interests or with international agencies) that are likely to establish new and different kinds of dependency. Even where this is not the case, however, greater institutional autonomy for the university tends to be resisted by faculty who have traditionally enjoyed a considerable degree of *individual* autonomy even in situations where state control kept the university's *institutional* autonomy rather strictly limited.

In this respect as in others, the modern university reveals one of its most intriguing traits: that of profound ambivalence about its own identity and purposes. One can argue, as I have done elsewhere (Weiler 2005, in press), that this ambivalence is at once a defense mechanism against overly powerful accountability pressures upon the university (an institution that is ambivalent about its purposes cannot very well be held accountable for whether or not it has achieved those purposes), and the result of a profoundly ambivalent attitude of society about the nature of the university (as between the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the satisfaction of societal and economic needs). The relationship between higher education and the state under these conditions of ambivalence will remain one of the key issues for both policy and research.

3.4 The politics of knowledge and the assessment of academic quality

It is not surprising that the evaluation and assessment of scholarship is one of the most contested domains in the politics of knowledge; after all, it is the evaluation of scholars, students, research proposals, manuscripts, and publications that determines the principal rewards of academic life: peer recognition, institutional standing and influence, research grants and, most importantly, publication. This is where academic laurels are awarded and where scholarly effort is rewarded. This is where power is exercised.

It is no accident that this assessment process tends to be fundamentally conservative in the sense that it is guided by what has proved its worth, and duly skeptical about what has not yet been tried and tested. Disciplinary identities, methodological orthodoxies, and the continuity of research traditions are tried and proven; interdisciplinary research and the addressing of new questions with new methods mean discontinuity, treading new ground, and taking risks.

Beyond being a reasonable safeguard for preserving valuable scientific legacies, this caution has, however, increasingly become a determining feature of everyday academic life and the reality of our academic institutions; it puts a strain and acts as a brake on the necessary process of constant renewal of our concepts of knowledge. It is here that the traditional hierarchies of knowledge manifest their power most clearly and effectively; it is here that the difference between powerful and powerless knowledge becomes tangible. And it is here that the serious lack of democracy in our scientific culture becomes apparent.

Hierarchies become compatible with democracy and capable of innovation by being accountable. Hierarchies – and this is also true of the hierarchies of knowledge – are not intrinsically incompatible with democracy and innovation; they become so by failing to comply with the requirements of transparency and accountability. Unlike some of my German colleagues with whom I interact on questions of university reform in Germany, I am not troubled by strong university presidents, an academic system based on quality control or a system of research funding governed by intense competition – as long as the decision processes and criteria are transparent and open to critical dialogue with those concerned and affected. This applies equally to the grading of written examinations and to the decisions of research funding, to academic appointments and to university admissions.

Creating this very transparency and accountability is a political challenge of the highest order. The current academic climate in many countries, notably in Europe, has in recent years fostered some astounding changes – changes in governance, in the status of professors, in programs of study, and in university financing. Creating transparency and accountability is an issue, however, on which there is still room for further progress.

3.5 Transnational knowledge and national universities

It has always been difficult to reconcile the national origins and frames of reference of universities with the fundamental internationality and universality of scholarship. Given an international and transnational knowledge system that is characterized by increasingly problematic conditions of domination and subordination, of inclusion and exclusion, of privileged and underprivileged knowledge, this issue is acquiring special urgency, confronting institutions of

higher education – and not only them – with a momentous challenge (cf. Inayatullah and Gidley 2000; Weiler 1995).

This has something to do with issues such as foreign-language study programs, internationally comparable degrees, the acceptance of credits obtained while studying abroad, etc. Given the real problems of an international system of knowledge, however, these issues are – important though they may be in specific cases – of a superficial nature. Of course it is important that university graduates have the cognitive skills, the knowledge of foreign languages and cultures that enable them to function in globalized systems of action.

But it is even more important to equip them with the skills they need to critically monitor the process of globalization and to assess its conditions and consequences. This, however, is only possible if the Western world's largely monocultural institutions of higher education become, in scholarly and intellectual – and not only in extracurricular and folkloristic – terms, real centers of cultural encounter and multicultural discourse – veritable cultural bridges in much the same sense in which Andrei Pleşu speaks of the building of bridges between the different traditions of Europe – bridges that "often symbolize mended rifts and provide the missing pieces to vital jigsaws" and that provide "proof that something seemingly impossible to cross can be crossed" (2003a; cf. 2003b). At such centers, debates on the question of whose knowledge matters would be a normal and integral part of teaching and research, where what Rajni Kothari once called the transnational knowledge system's "homogenizing monoculture of the mind" (1987, 284) would be consciously subjected to critical and self-critical reflection. And where it would be the rule rather than the exception that someone like Homi Bhabha teaches in Chicago or Harvard or Berlin – or Bucharest.

This critical role of academic institutions with respect to the transnational knowledge system has – let us be honest – something subversive about it. Ashis Nandy, whom I cite here for the last time, sees some institutions of higher education in the Third World making courageous and imaginative efforts to "begin to act as sources of skepticism toward the victorious systems of knowledge, and as the means of recovering and transmitting knowledge that has been cornered, marginalized or even defeated." (2000, 118)

For us Western and Northern scholars, it would be doubly inexcusable to ignore this process. For one thing, we owe it to our colleagues in the less privileged regions of the world to support as strongly as we possibly can their efforts at "re-appropriating" (Hountondji) the kind of knowledge that the hegemons of the international knowledge system have marginalized.

Even more importantly, however: we ourselves urgently need to participate in this process of rebellion because it helps us to question and to subvert our ties to our own traditions of knowledge – and thus to constantly redefine ourselves as scholars. I am sure that this is what Wolf Lepenies has in mind when he says: "It

is high time that Western societies change from being cultures of lecturing to being cultures of learning." (1997, 40)

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1.6 Changing students, changing markets for higher education. 1.7 From the periphery to the center: how technology is changing the way we teach. 1.8 Navigating new developments in technology and online learning.Â recognize your own epistemological/philosophical position that determines the way you are currently teaching; reflect on the similarities or differences between academic and everyday knowledge; decide whether technology changes the nature of knowledge, and consider the implications for teaching; describe in broad terms the main theories of learning and discuss their implications for teaching; identify different levels and types of learning and decide which is most appropriate for your subject area/students This challenge of epistemology as education commends epistemology to heed the Delphic maxim: know thyself. It is to these efforts that the following essay is directed. Full article.Â Against this understanding of knowledge, and its educational implications, it has been contended that indigenous knowledge places no special emphasis on â€œbeliefâ€, â€œevidenceâ€ or â€œtruthâ€, but that, according to indigenous practitioners, it is rather â€œthe wayâ€ that constitutes knowledge, harmonious interaction and appropriate models of conduct.