

Online Article

Is the Messenger the Message? Notes on Nicoli Natrass' 'Commentary'

Introduction

In its May/June 2020 issue, the *South African Journal of Science (S Afr J Sc)* published a two-page 'commentary' authored by Nicoli Natrass, a professor of economics and co-Director of the Institute for Communities and Wildlife in Africa at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The 'commentary' is titled "Why are black South African students less likely to consider studying biological sciences?"¹ The piece reported 'the findings' of a survey of students at the University of Cape Town that was conducted in mid-2019. This was supposed to be an exploratory study, intended to offer insights into why Black South African students do not study biological sciences. Below are my initial thoughts on the 'commentary' and a response.

The deeply problematic study design

The study involved non-probability sampling. The study participants, Natrass indicated, were recruited "by approaching students during the lunch break". She referred to this as "opportunistic survey." What is difficult to fathom is why the researchers involved in this study opted for a convenient sampling (a non-probability sampling) when they could have adopted more robust probability sampling techniques.

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Even for an exploratory study, the study intended to offer insights beyond the participants in the study sample. Employing 'opportunistic' or convenience (non-probability) sampling immediately raises a red flag. The choice of sampling technique is puzzling. All the sources that the researchers in the study need to have a robust probability sampling would be readily available to them in the university.

The starting point is a credible sampling frame. This would involve a complete record of all the students at the university. As researchers at the university, they could easily have accessed such sampling frame, from the Office of the Registrar. The frame would have provided the relevant socio-demographic distribution of the student population, their degree options, and other characteristics needed for generating a credible sample. With the sampling frame, the researchers could have employed an appropriate stratified, random sampling procedure. The researchers would have indicated the margin of error used for determining the sample size. The margin of error is essential for interpreting

the results from the survey—even the descriptive statistics. I am not sure if the University's Scientific Committee approved the study. It is at such a committee that these concerns should have been raised. If a scientific committee approved the study at UCT, the committee should bear part of the blame in passing a poorly designed study.

The convenience sampling procedure employed in the study meant the researchers stumbled blindly into the field. While 'black South African' students' (BSA) share of the total population of UCT students was 30 per cent, they are 54 per cent of the study sample. The sample size derived with convenience sampling was 211 students. Properly designed, with a 3 per cent margin of error, we would have expected a sample size of at least 1,030 students.

Even for a study based on non-probability sampling, there is a curious homogenisation of the BSA students at UCT—that they are all from impoverished backgrounds. A background claim to the study is that "obviously... persisting inequalities in the school system make it less likely that they [BSA students] will meet the entrance requirements for science courses." This clearly shows a shocking lack of appreciation for the diversity of the UCT BSA students and their school backgrounds.

The issues raised above immediately undermine the author's capacity to make any credible inferences about the study population, much less the study universe. Similarly, the study cannot make any inferences about BSA students at UCT (beyond those in the study sample), much less BSA students in the country. The title and conclusion of the 'commentary' make claims that cannot be supported by the study design—even the ones that supposedly repudiate race as a critical variable with predictive power (see further discussion below).

A study on why BSA students 'are less likely' to consider studying biological sciences is not the same as 'no BSA student' considered studying biological sciences. If the population of BSA students in UCT is 30 per cent but the share of BSA among those studying Biological Sciences was 35 per cent, the share of BSA students studying Biological Sciences would still be low relative to the other categories of students but would be higher than their overall share of the university student population. The author makes no effort to engage with this scenario.

For a study concerned with explaining why BSA students are less likely to study the Biological Sciences, a researcher would want to consider a sample stratified, at least, along the lines of those studying the Natural Sciences and those who are not. Since an organising assumption is the economic status of the students at the university, one would also have expected a sample stratified by such status. Why would 'materialist values' enter the equation, and a hypothesised reason for not choosing a career in conservation biology other than they choose well-paying professions because 'they are trying to escape poverty.' Financial aid could have been used as a proxy (a dummy variable) for students' economic status.

Further, what share of the surveyed BSA students (114 out of 211) is in the Humanities or the Natural Sciences, for instance, relative to the category 'Other students' would matter for the question that the author claims she sought to answer? Would a student's degree focus have some bearing on what they think of a question such as whether humans evolved from apes? Suppose a large share of the BSA students in the sample is registered in Theology, and these group of students consider the idea that humans evolved from apes absurd. Would that reflect their race classification or their disciplinary orientation? Would a BSA student studying Medicine or Zoology hold the same position?

For a sample that the author admits has a higher share of BSA students than the population, it is interesting that there is no attempt to allocate weight to the sub-categories of the sample (BSA students and 'Other students') when reporting the findings.

Natgrass notes that the result of her "exploratory regressions" is that attitudes are more important as predictors of the decision to study biological sciences, rather than "the crude indicator of being a black South African" (cf. Table 2 of the 'commentary'). A minor observation is that the failure to have a properly stratified sample becomes even more critical. If the whole sample is drawn predominantly from students outside the Natural Sciences, this would matter.

A more substantive objection arises from the dissonance between the *actual* results of the regression model and the conclusions that the author drew from the study. The regression model shows, *very clearly*, that the predictive power BSA (a race-category) diminished as the attitudinal variables entered

the regression model. By the time the fourth attitudinal variable was entered into the model, the predictive power of BSA race-category had declined from a minus 17 per cent to a minus zero per cent. When the race category variable was dropped entirely from the model, the attitudinal variables retained their predictive power. The pressing question to ask the author is this: if being a BSA student is less or not a predictor of whether one considered studying (zoology or) biological sciences, what is the purpose of the title of the paper? Is the title intended for a shock effect or a pretension to being relevant to the transformation project at the university? Given the low or no predictive power of race-category in the model, "Are black South African students likely to consider studying biological sciences?" would have been a more appropriate title. In such a case, the answer would then have been in the negative: a definite 'No'.

The same diminished predictive power of the race-category of 'black South Africans' is evident in the regression model reported in Table 3 of the commentary: to explain the probability of supporting "wildlife conservation but have no interest in pursuing a career in it." By the time the three other attitudinal variables (including the 'anti-conservation index') were added to the regression, the predictive power of the BSA race-category declined from 16 per cent to 3 per cent; even the 16 per cent was only significant at 5 per cent probability. Interestingly, the regression model suggests that if you like having the starlings around at UCT, you are 28 per cent *less likely* to say that you support "wildlife conservation but have no interest in pursuing a career in it." Either way, attitudinal dispositions not race-category rule the day!

Yet, even with the low predictive power of race-category in the model, lurking under the cover are race explanations. This plays out in two ways. The first concerns the pattern of attitudinal disposition ascribed to the BSA variable. The variable may not be a good predictor, but the attitudes that are the predictors are racially ascribed. The black South African students in the sample are presented as less likely to agree that humans evolved from apes than the 'Other students.' The BSA students are less likely to like having the redwing "starlings around at UCT." They are more likely to agree to the statement that "I support wildlife conservation but have no interest in having a career in it." All these are statistically significant in the Fisher's Exact Test results that the author presents. Race explanation remains; only that they are disguised as attitudes.

Again, here is the rub: as mentioned earlier, the predictive power of race-category disappears as more attitudinal variables are entered into the regression model (Table 2), or it declined precipitously (Table 3). In other words, the correct interpretation of the regression statistics is that **regardless of the race categories of the respondents**, the attitudinal variables are better predictors of whether a student considered studying conservation biology. Here we should provide further comments on the results presented in Table 1 of the 'commentary' that suggests that the correlations of the attitudinal variables and race-category (as a proxy dummy variable) are mostly statistically significant. This is derived from the Fisher's Exact Test results. Again, here is the rub: Fisher's Exact Test results are for descriptive statistics. The results of the regression model that render the author's conclusions absurd are *inferential statistics*. Descriptive

statistics merely describe the distribution of the sample (within a given confidence interval). Predictions are better based on inferential statistics.

Even so, all these are moot. A poorly designed study will, in all probability, produce bad data. No amount of regression or other inferential statistics can fix that foundational problem. The aphorism, in statistical analysis, of "garbage in, garbage out" would apply.

What is particularly troubling is that despite the evidence in the model, that the race-category variable has little or zero predictive power, Natrass draws entirely race-based conclusions. I address this further in the section below: *Presuppositions and Prejudice*. Is the dissonance between the conclusions Natrass draws and the results of the regression a question of misreading the science or prejudice? Natrass is too senior a scholar for the former to hold. Is the messenger the message?

A further concern is that the study reduced 'biological sciences' to conservation biology. "Biological sciences is the study of life and living organisms, their life cycles, adaptations and environment. There are many different areas of study under the umbrella of biological sciences, including biochemistry, microbiology and evolutionary biology."² Biological Sciences, it seems, is not reducible to conservation biology! How many BSA students at the university and other universities in South Africa are studying other biological sciences other than conservation biology and wildlife? The author fails to allude to this in the study. The author's lack of self-reflexivity is glaring. She is a professor of economics. She moved into the field of conservation well after she became an economics professor. She is interested in conservation but did not make a career

in it. Would that biographical detail not have prompted a more nuanced approach to the suppositions that underpin the study, the framing of the questions in the survey instrument (questionnaire), and how the findings are reported?

The precise definition of 'black South African students' is unclear from the study. There are two distinct uses to the idea of 'Black'. The first is the contemporary (official) use in South Africa (post-1994). This harks back to the use within the Black Consciousness Movement. It refers to all those who would have been considered 'non-White' under apartheid. Black would be a composite descriptor for Black-Africans, Coloured, and Indians/Asians. There is a second, more restrictive use of 'Black South Africans'; it harks back to those who under apartheid were classified as 'Black' or 'Bantu.' From the statement of the share of the BSA student in the total UCT student population, one gets the impression that Natrass' definition of 'Black South Africans' is the same as those previously referred to as 'Bantu.' That may matter, it may not; but the choice may indicate specific proclivities.

For a poorly designed non-probability survey, based on a sample of UCT students, claims about the population parameters from the survey sample statistic is something to avoid. Yet, Natrass goes ahead to make generalisations that ignore the non-probability design of the study. A simple rule of quantitative research is this: "if you did not design your study such that each element in the population had an equal chance of being selected, do not generalise from the study's findings." Do not make claims about a population parameter (within the range of the confidence interval) from a sample statistic. Put differently, never make

claims about your study that it was never designed to carry. Natrass' 'commentary' breached these simple rules of sample survey studies. She generalised from the sample not only to the study population (about BSA students at UCT) but to the study universe (about BSAs in South Africa beyond UCT).

There is a final concern with the reporting of the data from the study; it concerns aggregation. From the reporting of the regressions for the composite index used in Table 3 of the 'commentary', one gets the impression that the questions in the survey instrument were in the form of a Likert scale. However, the reporting on Table 1 involves a binary or categorical 'Agree' or 'Disagree' rather than the fuzzy set disposition of a Likert scale. Otherwise, it is difficult to see why Natrass reports Fisher's Exact Test results. This is not a minor concern since what it does is to elide the more nuanced differences between someone who indicates a preference for 'disagree' as against 'agree', compared to others who expressed a preference for 'strongly disagree' against those who chose 'strongly agree.' The 'distance' between the former respondents is much less than the distance between the latter respondents. That precisely is the value of a Likert scale. Further, what happened to the respondents who selected 'Neutral' as their preferred answer? Keeping the data in the original Likert scale form in which it was collected would not prevent getting a robust descriptive statistics result; that is what Exact Tests modules are intended to do, beyond the Fisher's Exact Test. The Exact Tests modules are available in the major statistical packages: SAS, Stata or SPSS.

Presuppositions and Prejudice: when is the messenger the message?

A scientific study cannot (and should not) be rejected purely on the ground that the result offends a segment of the population, even one with a population share of 80 per cent. A predictable response to such rejection (on the ground that it offends) is "Don't shoot the messenger." But what if the messenger is the message?

A study may be rejected based on the prejudiced presuppositions that underpin it. You reject such a study because it breaches the fundamental ethics of research. A researcher whose research is driven by prejudice undermines any claim to the protection of the defence of academic freedom. As Chinua Achebe notes concerning Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, "travellers with closed minds can tell us little except about themselves."³ The Natrass paper is shot through with presuppositions that are products of prejudice rather than science.

Beyond the disadvantage imposed by relatively weak schools, Natrass suggests that BSA students' choice of degree subjects is "likely to be [for] other reasons too, notably materialist values and aspirations." This underlining assumption is made without any evidence, and no authority cited. The presupposition—something previously enunciated by Natrass⁴—is that "crass materialism" characterises black South Africans in the post-apartheid South Africa. By Black South Africans, of course, one gets the impression that Natrass means '(Black) Africans' in contemporary South African parlance or the 'Bantu' in the old apartheid-era classification.

Despite the diminished (or non-existing) explanatory power of race-category in the model, which Natrass conceded, nonetheless, she insists that:

In short, the survey results suggest that black South African students are less likely to consider studying biological sciences than other students, and that this stance was linked primarily with career aspirations... and these were associated with materialist values and attitudes to local wildlife (p.13).

No, they do not. Such 'result' is a thumb-suck. She suggests that BSA students are more likely to opt for degrees in accountancy and law because these are better paying. This is intended to underpin the claim of a materialist disposition among black South Africans. No evidence exists in the study to support this claim; no authority offered, and the study offers no such insight. Evidence external to the study would suggest something entirely different, when we consider the two professions, whose choice, are supposed to be the signifiers of materialist disposition among BSA students.

As of January 2019, there were 27 223 attorneys in South Africa. Fifty-six per cent are "White attorneys", and 44 per cent are "Black attorneys (African, Coloured and Indian)."⁵ That is against a national population share of 7.9 per cent White, and 92.1 per cent Blacks (Black African: 80.7, Coloured: 8.8 per cent, Indian/Asian: 2.6 per cent).⁶ The distribution of Chartered Accountants in South Africa is even more skewed. As of May 2020, 46,841 Chartered Accountants were on the register of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants. Of these, 68.63 per cent were White (32,151), and 31.37 per cent Black

(14,306). There were 6,670 Black Africans CAs or 14.23 per cent of the total number of CAs in South Africa; 1,904 or 4.06 per cent were Coloured; and 5,732 or 12.23 per cent were Indian/Asians.⁷

Given the distributions in the legal and accounting professions, how is the decision of a Black (African) student to study law or accountancy considered ‘materialistic’? Would a White student who decides to study law or accountancy have been labelled ‘materialistic’? I once heard a dean at a Faculty Board meeting say that as far as transformation is concerned, he is “a minimum compliance person.” Is labelling Black (African) students going into the legal and accountancy profession materialistic driven by the same disposition? Is this the subversion, by other means, of a country’s effort to overcome the prevailing legacy of its racist past? Consider a hypothetical situation where ALL ‘black South African’ students take to heart Natrass’ subliminal injunction not to be ‘materialistic’—by not going into law and accountancy—would that not render permanent the apartheid footprint on the professions? As the saying goes, there are many ways to skin a cat—the cat of transformation here.

In reporting the survey results, Natrass’ analysis takes a curious turn. She constructs what she calls ‘an anti-conservation index’ or a *Fal-list* index! (More about this below). The ‘anti-conservation index’ is a composite measure drawn from three questions, using the Likert scale (1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree). The questions include whether national parks should be scrapped, to whether disciplines like conservation biology are colonial and should be scrapped, and whether the respondents like having the redwing starlings on the UCT campus.

Natrass links the ‘materialist index’ to the World Values Survey. There is a claim that the twelve questions used in the World Values Survey as composites for the materialist index were included in the UCT survey. The distribution for the variables was not presented in the table that reports the descriptive statistics. Most significantly, the materialist index drawn from the World Values Survey has nothing to do with whether a respondent was studying accountancy or law. There is no evidence that the survey included a question of whether a student was studying accountancy or law. The ‘anti-conservation index’ and the ‘materialist index’ are attitudinal measures. ***These attitudes are held by BSA and OS respondents in the study.*** Yet, in the conclusion, Natrass reverts to a student’s choice of professions (law or accountancy?). “Materialist values” are presented as “a key determinant of not desiring a career in conservation” (p.13). The conclusions drawn concerning ‘materialist values of the BSA students is neither consistent nor derived from the study; it would seem that they derive from the author’s predisposition rather than science.

Here is a further problem: the regression analysis suggests that the predictive power of the ‘materialist index’ is only 5 per cent (Regression 3.3 and 3.4), same as the ‘anti-conservation index’. This is against a 28 per cent predictive power a respondent saying they liked having the redwing starlings around the UCT campus. The predictive power of the BSA race-category dropped from 16 per cent to 3 per cent. One imagines that this was a dummy variable. The question that follows would be: Why emphasise the ‘anti-conservation’ and ‘materialist’ values and whether one likes having redwing starlings on the campus? Why resort to the claim

that the career aspiration of BSA students hinders their preference for studying biological sciences, when the attitudinal variables, ***regardless of race-categories***, have higher predictive powers?

Concerning the index based on the World Values Survey, citing Inglehart (1990) Held et al. (2009: 57) distinguished materialists from post-materialists thus: “materialists [are mostly concerned] with physiological needs and stress physical and economic security... Postmaterialists, by contrast, strive for self-actualisation, stress the aesthetic and the intellectual, and cherish belonging and esteem.”⁸ How does taking up a career in conservation translate into being post-materialist? Conservation is big business in South(ern) Africa. In 2015 alone, the value of wildlife hunting value chain was R10.1 billion. The hunting component of the value chain was valued at R5.1 billion. Trophy hunting of kudu alone was valued at R1.2 million, at R13,000 per head of the animal killed for trophy. In the same year, a lion was sold for R230,000; the average price of a buffalo was R334,841—eighty-four buffaloes were sold that year.⁹ There no halos waiting to be placed, ipso facto, on the heads of people in the industry. There are decent people concerned with protecting animals, habitats, and fauna. But there are those operating the canned hunting business; some breed lions to be slaughtered. You could argue that those involved in the business are more concerned with economic security needs than ‘self-actualisation.’ What more, trophy hunting involves the needless slaughter of wildlife for the hunter’s self-amusement.

What would have happened if Natrass took into consideration the fact that her data shows that 89.4

per cent of the BSA students in the survey disagree with the statement “that many of South Africa’s national parks should be scrapped and the land given to the poor” (against 94.7 per cent of ‘Other students’)? Other than a problematic hook on which the author seeks to hang prejudice, it is difficult to see how not wanting to pursue a career in conservation translates into being ‘materialist’, and then proceeding to hang this on the neck of the BSA students. The issue of absent self-reflexivity raised earlier apply. Does Achebe’s aphorism offer some insight?

As a penultimate issue in this section, let us return to the so-called Fallist index. Regressions 3.3 and 3.4 in the ‘commentary’ involve what the author refers to as the “‘anti-conservation’ (or ‘Fallist’)” index. Nattrass’ claim that “disciplines like conservation biology are colonial and should be scrapped from UCT” are Fallist positions or opinions. She offers no evidence that this is the case or that there is such an opinion that was issued by the ‘Fallist movement.’ Indeed, is there a Fallist opinion, in the singular, that ‘conservation biology’ is colonial and should be scrapped from UCT? If there is something about the Fallist movement, it is the absence of a central authority that would purport to speak for everyone involved in the protests. Indeed, you could argue that while the Rhodes Must Fall phase of the movement was driven by the poor record of transformation (epistemic and cultural Eurocentricism) of their respective universities, the prohibitively high university fees served as the driving force behind the Fees Must Fall phase. One phase highlighted epistemic and cultural barriers: the other the economic barrier.

One gets the impression of a researcher with a deep-seated antipa-

thy towards the Fallist movement, manufacturing claims and attributing these to the people making the demands for overcoming the existing epistemic, cultural, and economic barriers to higher education. The troubling part of this is that Nattrass renders as irrational important conversations that the South African education system (not just the higher education sector) needs to have, and act upon. Is the rendering of a purported Fallist position as irrational part of the effort to delegitimise the demands for transformation? It is legitimate to object to some of the methods employed in the campaigns that defined the protest movements without demonising the demands or rendering them as irrational. The Fallist index would seem more a product of prejudice than a legitimate effort in pursuing a scientific inquiry. Finally, one must wonder if the reason for contriving the ‘Fallist position’, and reporting it, is not to suggest that Fallism has very low traction among [UCT] students; even among BSA students.

Further, one suspects a second layer of presupposition in the author’s argument (possibly in the research instrument, as well): the false belief that ‘Africans don’t do conservation’; that conservation is alien to Africa. The larger argument is not so much about conservation, per se, but the modality of conservation. If you dispossess people of their lands and sources of livelihood to create a wildlife reserve for (European and American) tourists, those dispossessed have a right to question your idea of conservation. Thandika Mkandawire once referred to the ‘eco-fascism’ of those who demand nature reserves at the expense of the welfare of African people.¹⁰ If you have no ontological link to such land dispossession, you would see the conservation area but not its origin and persisting consequences. This is

a classic case of *ontological disconnect*—a disconnection from, and a lack of empathy for, the bearers of a collective memory of dispossession and who inhabit its aftermath. It is legitimate to argue that mass extinction of biological species, wanton depletion of wildlife, trophy hunting, and canned hunting are as colonial as one can imagine, and a marker of racial capitalism.

Ethics of Journals and Peer-review criteria

Given the very poor study design, the problematic presuppositions underpinning the paper (‘commentary’), and the dissonance between the actual study results, on the one hand, and the conclusion and the title of the ‘commentary’, on the other hand, the question is how did this article get through the oversight process of the *South African Journal of Science*? One assumes that as a ‘commentary’ the paper would not have been subjected to peer-review, which would still not explain how the article got through the editors of the journal. Did it pass because of a shared community of prejudice with the author or lack of basic due diligence? The former is a problematic assumption that does not avail itself, easily, to confirmation. However, the latter is easily established. Even for a material that is not subject to the standard peer-review process, due diligence is still expected on the part of the editor(s). It took under five minutes for me to determine that the conclusions Nattrass drew in the ‘commentary’ had nothing to do with the results of the regression analyses she reported in the paper. Did the commentary slip through the due diligence expected of a leading journal of the premier academy in South Africa because of ‘the halo effect’? Did a submission from a top scholar—without a doubt a brilliant academic—evade due diligence

because of her academic standing? The problem is that human history is suffused with examples that make it obvious being brilliant and prejudiced is not antonymous.

Postscript: When is the defence of 'academic freedom' a danger to academia?

In the period since the firestorm of controversy erupted around the publication of Professor Natrass' 'commentary', the right to academic freedom has been deployed as a defence.¹¹ The statement by the ASSAf Council is formally correct but misses the bigger picture. Natrass herself has argued that her critics in the Black Academic Caucus at UCT are 'thought police.'¹² The Democratic Alliance (DA), an opposition political party, has charged that, in announcing an investigation into Natrass' piece, "UCT is on a slippery slope to censoring its own academics."¹³ A group purporting to be "veterans of the 1968 Mafeje protest" decried "the treatment of Prof Natrass" by invoking the defence of academic freedom.¹⁴ It is unclear if either the DA or the "veterans" *actually* read Natrass' 'commentary'.

Here, I write as someone who was once sued, unsuccessfully, for writing an open letter, demanding that the authorities of a South African university respect the academic freedom of its staff members. The official of the university who brought the suit failed at the Magistrate Court¹⁵ level, and on appeal at the High Court.¹⁶

Academic freedom is at the heart of the functioning of the academic and the broader research community. Its defence is central to the viability and survival of the academe. Without it, scholars(hip) cannot 'breathe.' Scholars must be able to teach, undertake their research, and report their find-

ings without fear or let. To repeat an earlier statement, you do not reject the results of a study because it offends a segment of the population. You cannot and should not attack a researcher purely because some find the result offensive. Nonetheless, a proviso applies. Academic freedom cannot be a defence for bad science, especially where the reported 'findings' are prejudice-laden and driven by subterfuge rather than science. A scientist who cooks up data, make scurrilous claims not based on the alleged research can legitimately be subject to disciplinary action by his/her institution. Journals have retracted the publications of 'research papers' purely on the grounds of unethical conduct and invented data. Institutions can, legitimately, terminate the employment of an academic found guilty of misconduct, including fiddling the results of his/her research. In other words, the academe is framed by academic freedom as it is by the commitment of its members to conduct themselves in an ethical manner.

In November 1990, Africa's premier social science research council (CODESRIA) organised a conference on academic freedom in Kampala, Uganda. The conference was attended by the luminaries of the African social sciences: from Ali Mazrui to Archie Mafeje, Wangari Maathai, Claude Ake, Mahmood Mamdani, and Micere Githae Mugo. Out of the conference emerged *The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility*.¹⁷ It remains Africa's most definitive statement on academic freedom. But it is one that acknowledges that academic freedom is only one wing by which the academe flies; the other is the duty of scholars to act ethically and responsibly. Article 19 of the Kampala Declaration was explicit in stating that: "Members of the in-

tellectual community are obliged to discharge their roles and functions with competence, integrity and to the best of their abilities. They should perform their duties in accordance with ethical and highest scientific standards." The first eighteen articles of the Declaration set out the contents of the rights to academic freedom, and the duty of parties that should guarantee those rights.

A poorly designed study can be condoned on the grounds of inadequate proficiency in research methodology or how to conduct research. Scholars who misrepresent their data and deploy racially charged tropes (that their data does not support) would have acted in an egregiously unethical manner. In subverting the responsibility of the intellectual, they open themselves to repudiation and legitimate sanctions. Scholars, groups, and institutions that pull up the shield of academic freedom to protect themselves against scrutiny and reckoning that a scholar ought to face for unethical behaviour imperil *the collective integrity of the scholarly community*. They would undermine (inadvertently) a critical compact that the academe has with the rest of society: that when we pull up the defence of academic freedom, we are not merely trying to shield an offending party in the academe from scrutiny and accountability. Such a compact exists within our community as well. Mobilising the whole of the academe for the defence of academic freedom requires that we demonstrate, transparently, to *everyone within the academe* that academic freedom is not being deployed to protect those whose conduct violates the social responsibility of scholars/intellectuals.

Appeals to the state to intervene in the affairs of the academe often arise because many in the community feel that we deploy the defence of academic freedom to shield the

privileged one in our midst, with immense cultural and procedural power, from scrutiny. Such misuse of the defence of academic freedom undermines the social compact *within* the academe itself. In the long run, such abuse of academic freedom threatens everyone's academic freedom. This is why the controversy playing out at UCT is not just about the people in that university; it is about ALL OF US in the (South) African scholarly community.

It is why silence is not an option.

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Notes

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