From Innocence to Epistemic Reflexivity:
Critical Researchers and Policy Making in Post-1990 South Africa

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Introduction

Prior to the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, critical scholarship within and outside universities served as a critique of the apartheid social order and the conditions and policies that sustained it. During the transition to democracy in the early 1990s and immediately afterwards, many critical researchers turned to research on the structural and conjunctural conditions under which economic and social transformation would have to occur, or studies that could inform policy formulation by the national liberation organisations and the post-1994 democratic governments. In time, critical scholarship began to also critique the thinking, policies and practices of the African National Congress (ANC) and ANC-led governments in so far as these were seen as diverging from constitutional ideals, failing to address unemployment, poverty and inequality and based on questionable ethical and moral conduct.

The concern of this paper is the relationship between critical researchers, critical scholarship, and policy research on economic and social issues in post-1990 South Africa, and the tensions that can arise to maintain intellectual autonomy while undertaking research to inform policy making.[1] Some critical researchers could claim that there is no tension in undertaking scholarship related to policy; indeed, this is true if research is confined to an analysis *of* policy or the description and analysis of the conditions in which policies must be formulated and implemented. Other critical researchers that undertake research explicitly for informing policy making could claim that they function as "critical reconstructors"; that "in their persons, they have resolved the tension between critique and reconstruction" (Muller, 2002:278). Whether this is so is one of the issues addressed in this paper. Another issue is whether critical researchers can undertake analysis *for* policy that entails advancing economic and social policy proposals and function *simultaneously*, in the same space and time, as critical researchers.

Conceptual Issues

The strength of critical historical sociology is its core concern with the mutual interaction between historical social structure and conjuncture and human agency; how structure and conjuncture condition human agency in setting limits and constraints on social action and outcomes, while simultaneously also providing possibilities and opportunities for human agency. An analysis of the work of critical researchers must therefore necessarily be considered in relation to economic, political and social conditions, continuities and discontinuities in these conditions, specific relations of authority and power and access to resources, even if their work may contribute to changing these aspects of social reality.

By 'critical researchers' I refer to social actors who draw on critical theoretical discourses to frame their production of knowledge and research. Such actors are principally located at universities, but also in scientific and research institutions, political organisations and social and popular movements. While they could differ in terms of ideological and political affiliation, critical researchers are likely to embrace a common concern about or opposition to a number of features of contemporary life. The first is "a world where disparities in wealth, resources and opportunities have grown, where human rights norms and values seem invariably to yield to the dictates of the rich and powerful; which expresses shock and outrage at arbitrary killing but at the same time is complicit in the killing of many more thorough hunger and disease" (Kollapen, 2003:26). The second is the "reality that for millions of people the promise of human rights and the vision of a just and caring world remains an illusion. Intolerance, war and impunity; starvation and greed; power and powerlessness all combine in a conspiracy of the powerful against the weak that invariably deepens the faultlines (of 'race', class, gender, geography, etc.) that exist in the world and within nations" (ibid.). The third common concern is the pursuit by hegemonic conservative and neo-liberal governments and business corporations in the 'developed' countries of the old modernisation project that seeks to create a world in the image of advanced capitalism. Critical researchers are also likely to express disquiet around and opposition

to the dominant ideology of neo-liberalism, and the privatisation and growing marketisation, commodification and commercialisation of increasing arenas of social life.

Concomitantly, although they may have differing political goals, critical researchers are likely to have commitments in common. Prunty suggests that the values and social commitments of critical researchers "would be anchored in the vision of a moral order in which justice, equality and individual freedom are uncompromised by the avarice of the few" (Prunty, 1985:136). They would "endorse political, social and economic arrangements where persons are never treated as means to an end, but as ends in their own right" (ibid.)[2] With respect to knowledge, critical researchers are likely to identify with Held's argument that "the purpose of theory is…to analyze and expose the hiatus between the actual and the possible, between the existing order of contradictions and the potential future state. Theory must be oriented, in short, to the development of consciousness and the promotion of active political involvement" (cited in Motala, 2003:1). They would also embrace the view of knowledge as an intervention in the social world. They may, however, have different views of what should be the nature of this intervention – a 'weak interventionism' that is associated with scholarly critique or 'strong interventionism' that is characterised by some kinds of policy research (see Mouton and Muller, 1995:164-165). Mouton and Muller note that "the distinction between weak and strong interventionism coincides, to a large extent, with Zygmunt Bauman's distinction between intellectuals as interpreters and intellectuals as legislators" (ibid: 166).

Turning to 'policy making', it is necessary to clarify the term 'policy'. It is understood that
- 'Policy' has a wide variety of meanings - authoritative allocation of values, framework, discourse, text, strategies, practice, etc. - that are embedded in differing problematics (Ball, 1990; Ball, 1994; Dale, and Ozga, ed.1991; Ham and Hill, 1984; (Henry, 1993; Kogan, 1985; Ozga, 1990; Prunty, 1984, 1985; Taylor et al, 1997)
- Far from being neutral, policy embodies values and principles (Prunty, 1984, 1985)
- Policy is tightly connected with social goals and objectives
- Policy is the product of multiple determinations (is 'over-determined') – of goals and values, but also economic and social discourses and paradigms, structural and conjunctural conditions, available personnel and financial resources (Lankshear, 1987)
- There are different kinds of policies - substantive, symbolic, material, procedural, distributive, redistributive, etc. (de Clerq, 1997)
- There are different types of policies in terms of scope, complexity, range of choices, arena of decision-making, and criteria involved in decision-making - strategic, multi-programme, programme, issue-specific, etc. (Haddad, 1995)
- Policy has a wide variety of objects - social equity, social redress, the modalities, effectiveness and efficiency of institutional provision, governance, financing, etc.
- Policy focuses on different levels, singly or concomitantly (international, national, regional, provincial, local, institutional, etc.)
- Policy is pertinent to diverse institutional and organisational settings.[3]

'Policy making' is defined as an ensemble of inter-related activities in time and space through which social actors engage in the making of policy choices and decisions. The different moments of policy making include but are not limited to agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policy, and further agenda setting. They encompass structural and procedural arrangements that may be relatively public or hidden, transparent or opaque, and open or closed. Policy choices and decisions involve 'trade-offs', and social actors make such trade-offs with different degrees of consciousness that they are doing so, and of their implications. As will be noted, there is a wide array of social actors – governments, political parties, social movements, organisations and individuals. Social actors engage in policy making in co-operation and/or conflict, with varying degrees of consensus on values, principles and social goals, on what are the social problems, and what constitutes social reality. Finally, social actors participate in policy making having differential access to knowledge, information and resources.

Figure 1 below provides a highly idealised picture of what are often identified as the key formal moments of policy making.

Figure 1: POLICY MAKING
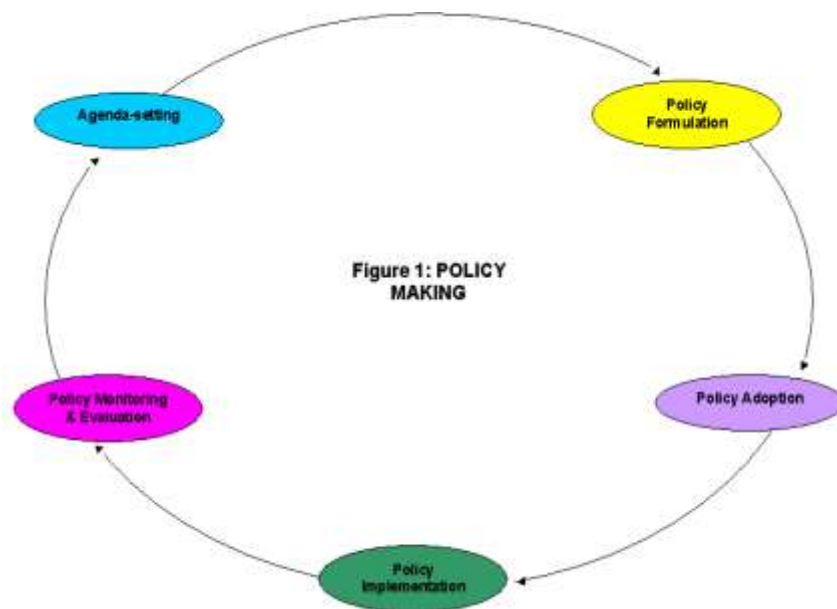
Depicting the formal moments of policy making, and abstracted from a consideration of the multiple determinations that constitute policy, Figure 1 conveys the impression of policy as a smooth, sequential and linear process. This is misleading; in reality, social policy making is a complex, multi-layered, iterative and convoluted activity, with often multiple policy initiatives underway simultaneously, which may be of different kinds and types, may be undertaken at different levels, and could be at different moments in the policy cycle, and yet still connected to greater or lesser extent. Policy making and its constituent different moments are not neutral, purely technical exercises, but are deeply implicated with values and related to social goals and concerns. With respect to the process of policy making, Weiler has made the important point that "given the nature of policy choices and the question of their legitimacy, the process by which they are arrived at may be as important as, if not more important than, the directional criteria which define (and delimit) the options to be taken" (1978:190). In similar vein, Wright Mills has written that "the problem of freedom is the problem of how decisions about the future of human affairs are to be made and who is to make them. Organizationally, it is the problem of a just machinery of decision. Morally, it is the problem of political responsibility. Intellectually, it is the problem of what are now the possible futures of human affairs" (1959:174).

On the substance of policy making and policies, Lankshear has noted that these are concerned fundamentally with the "politics of daily life – with issues of power, control, legitimacy, privilege, equity, justice and the dimensions of values generally" (1987: 231-232). Policy making is therefore characterised by social conflict and struggles, and over-determined by politics. Scoufe has observed that "the assumption that education policy could be the result of simply identifying and choosing the alternative that is 'best', that is relevant, or not wasteful, ignores the obvious political fact that the 'best' has to be determined in the political crucible of competing interests" (1985:116). It should be noted that social conflict may not be confined to only the moments of policy formulation, adoption and implementation. It could be present at the very outset of policy making, in contestation around what count as policy 'problems' and 'issues' and even how the social structure and contemporary social conditions should be characterised. These propositions raise two issues for critical researchers involved in social policy making. One is the extent to which there is congruence between the goals, values and principles of the critical researcher and those of the policy makers. The other is that the reality of social conflict in policy making means the research of critical researchers could also be the object of conflict.

Policy making is not a single event but an ensemble of activities (agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, etc.). Assuming that social policy making is a relatively open, accessible and public process, critical researchers that seek to participate in policy making through their research are confronted with two key questions: to which activity or activities do they seek to contribute, and for which activities do they have the capabilities to contribute. The answers depend, of course, on the institutional location of the particular critical researcher, his/her field or disciplinary expertise, research interests and inclinations, and personal and/or political preferences. Policy making occurs in many different sites and spaces (state, government, civil society, business, public and private institutions and organisations). Too frequently, critical researchers confine themselves to seeking to influence through their research the state and government (in their various forms), political parties, and statutory policy advisory bodies. No or little thought is given to contributing to the policy thinking and policy making of other important social actors such as labour unions, social movements and other civil society formations). The tendency to address research largely to governments, political parties and authorised bodies assumes that are the only policy makers or the key policy makers. However, this is not self-evident; the assumption also rests on narrow notions of 'policy makers' and 'policy making'.

Who are considered to be 'policy makers' depends on conceptions of 'policy' and 'policy making'. Here, it is vital to distinguish between policy formulation and adoption as specific moments of policy making, and the making of policy in its entirety. The making of policy and policy outcomes are not reducible to policy formulation and adoption, for two very important reasons. First, not infrequently, the policies that are implemented or that come to exist in practice are different from those that have been formulated and adopted and which come to exist as text. Second, although legally authorised policy formulators and adopters may well be the key actors in so far as decision making is concerned, to regard them as the sole actors in policy making under all certain circumstances may be to grossly overstate their importance. How key and influential they are in the making of policy and in policy outcomes is dependent on structural and conjunctural conditions and is a matter for empirical analysis. To put it differently, in practice a wide range of social actors – individual social institutions, representative bodies of actors, popular organisations and movements of professionals, residents, youth, women and workers, business organisations, political organisations - are involved in the making of policy and in the shaping of policy outcomes. On occasions these social actors, acting individually or in strategic and tactical coalitions, may constitute themselves as key policy making actors, instead of those who are legally authorised decision makers.

This is a crucial point, which has implications for the orientation and nature of the social policy research of critical researchers. It means that critical researchers have to think very carefully about the targets (institutional location/s and subject audience/s) of their research. There is not always a single and most important audience for critical researchers. Instead, there is a multiplicity and diversity of audiences that can range from the well-defined individual to the indistinct general 'public'. The policy maker may not be an individual but a collective characterised by lesser or greater homogeneity and diversity of interests. This has implications for policy communication and dissemination - multiple and diverse audiences require a wide range of communication and dissemination strategies. There are also implications for writing; critical researchers tend to be proficient in only scholarly writing with no or limited ability to write in other genres[4].
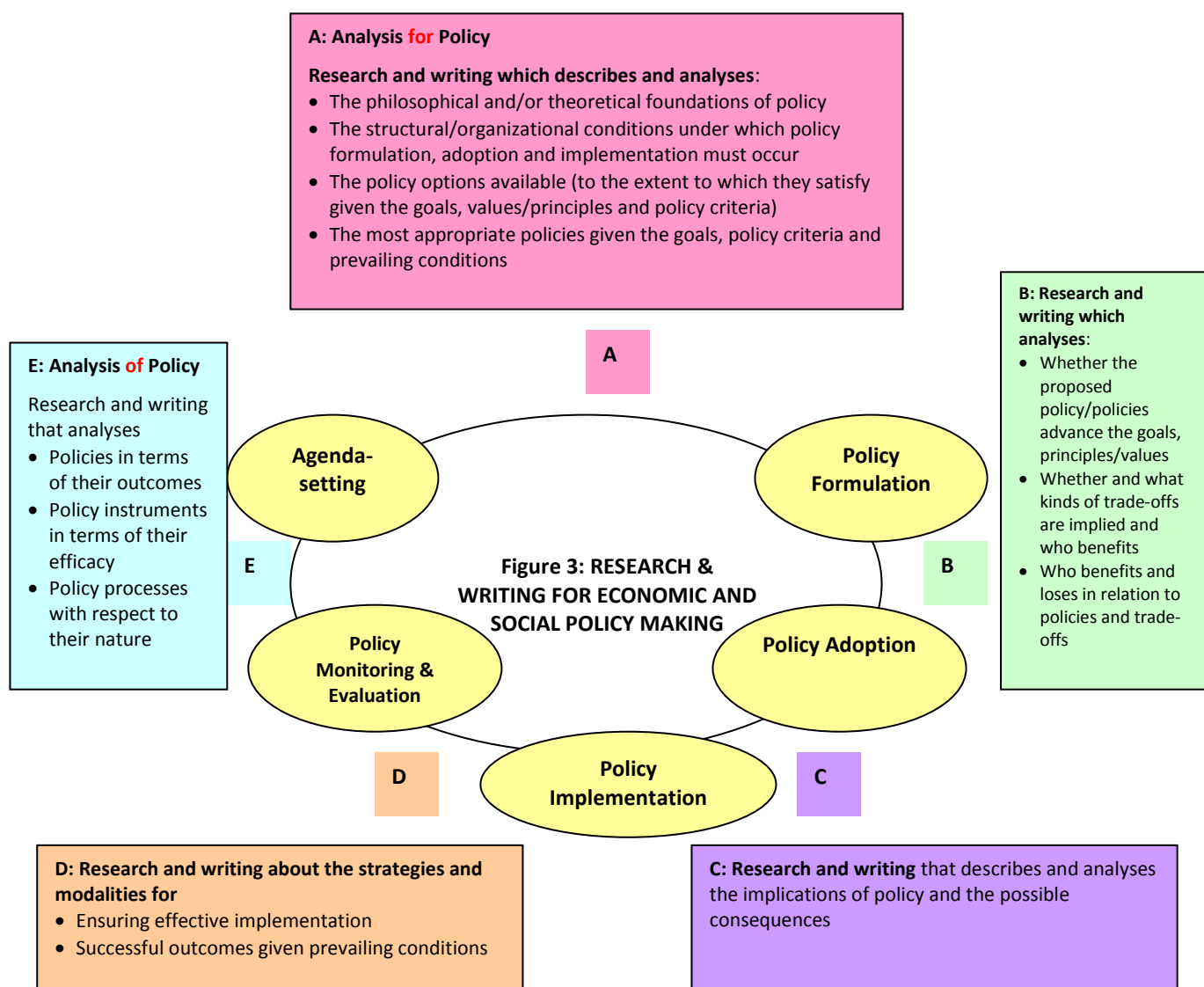
Popular struggles can shape policy making and policy outcomes, and can undermine and modify policy as contained in official texts. Crucial to the analysis of the policy outcomes is to ask "under what conditions do these struggles occur; what are the conditions which structure them and affect their outcome. Of particular importance in this regard is the question of the form or structure of the political terrain in addition to the question of the form of the state…" (Wolpe, 1988:23). In a democracy, the different moments of policy making may be relatively public, open, and accessible to citizens, and the law and political conditions may facilitate social actors participating in policy making. Such participation may occur through various mechanisms and assume various forms, which include

formal and informal requests by key policy actors for advice, provision of advice by legislatively empowered bodies, formal and informal consultation initiated by legislatively authorised policy actors, submissions at public hearings, lobbying, petitions, demonstrations, and dissemination of public information (National Education Policy Investigation, 1993). However, even in generally authoritarian and repressive contexts, the state and its apparatuses and institutions are seldom omnipotent, monolithic and impermeable to political and policy contestation. Of course, it is important to not overstate the access and possibilities for participation in policy making that are available to different social actors, and especially socially disadvantaged and marginalized social groups. In both democratic and authoritarian contexts, social actors possess very different and often highly unequal resources (specialist expertise, financial resources, strength of membership and organisation, access to key social actors, organisations and public officials), which inevitably condition their capabilities and capacities to participate in and shape policy making and policy outcomes[5]. Figure 2 below exemplifies the argument that policy making and its constituent moments are distributed over a range of institutional locations and subject to shaping by a wide array of social actors and influences.

Figure 2: POLICY MAKERS IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY MAKING: LOCATIONS AND ACTORS
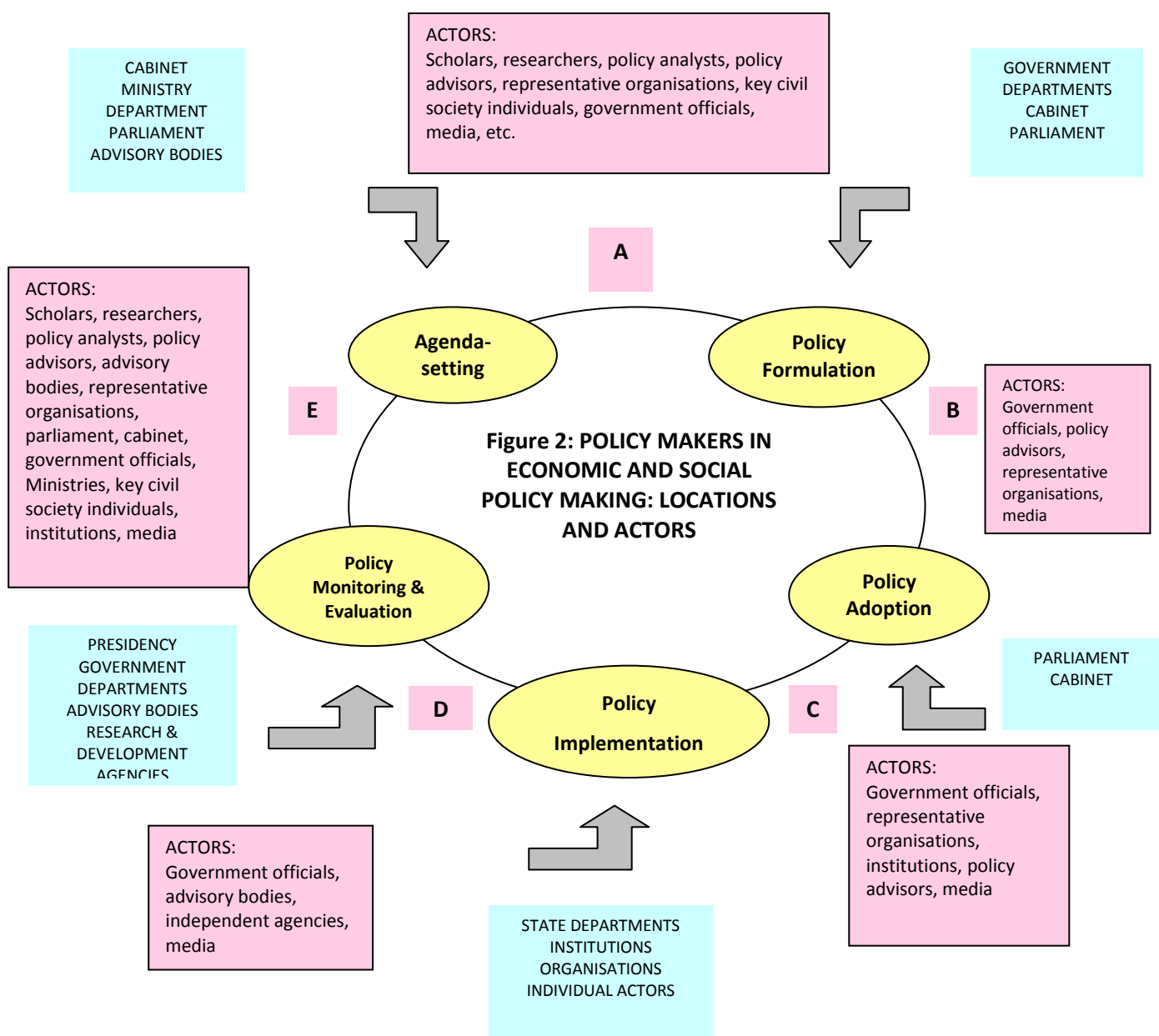
2. Research and Writing for Social Policy Making

Figure 3 below exemplifies the place of research in policy making.

A: Analysis for Policy

Research and writing which describes and analyses:
- The philosophical and/or theoretical foundations of policy
- The structural/organizational conditions under which policy formulation, adoption and implementation must occur
- The policy options available (to the extent to which they satisfy given the goals, values/principles and policy criteria)
- The most appropriate policies given the goals, policy criteria and prevailing conditions

E: Analysis of Policy

Research and writing that analyses
- Policies in terms of their outcomes
- Policy instruments in terms of their efficacy
- Policy processes with respect to their nature

B: Research and writing which analyses:
- Whether the proposed policy/policies advance the goals, principles/values
- Whether and what kinds of trade-offs are implied and who benefits
- Who benefits and loses in relation to policies and trade-offs

D: Research and writing about the strategies and modalities for
- Ensuring effective implementation
- Successful outcomes given prevailing conditions

C: Research and writing that describes and analyses the implications of policy and the possible consequences

A
B
C
D
E

Agenda-setting

Policy Formulation

Policy Adoption

Policy Implementation

Policy Monitoring & Evaluation

Figure 3: RESEARCH & WRITING FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY MAKING

Research can enter into policy making in numerous ways and can seek to shape the policy thinking of social actors at different moments of policy making. It can vary considerably in nature, from theoretical and conceptual work to concrete empirical analysis, and from description and analysis *of* policy, to that concerned with description and analysis *for* policy. Research related to description and analysis *for* policy can in turn encompass only the consideration of the philosophical and/or theoretical underpinnings of policy; or the contextual conditions under which policy making must take place and within which policies must be implemented; or it can extend to include the construction of policy options, and the elaboration of actual policies. In addition, research can draw on a range of methodologies, and methods (quantitative, qualitative) and techniques (documentary research, interviews, surveys, and collection and processing of statistical data using frequencies, cross-tabulations, regression analysis, etc.).[6] Research can have as its objects any of the moments of policy making exemplified above, engage with the concerns of all, or different, or specific social actors, and potentially impact on and shape the dynamics and outcomes of some or all these moments.

There are two issues related to the nature of research that I wish to explore. The first is the policy relatedness and relevance of research; the second is the distinction between analysis *of* policy and analysis *for* policy and its implications. I will at the same time engage with questions that were raised earlier: the policy making activity or activities to which critical researchers seek to, and have the capability to, contribute; and the congruence between their goals, values and principles and those of policy makers.

2.1.   The Policy Relatedness and Relevance of Research

The nature and content of the research of critical scholars will be shaped by various factors - their philosophical and theoretical orientations; research interests and inclinations; the theoretical, analytical and empirical questions that concern them, and the context of knowledge production, including the institutional location of production, the time frame of production, and whether the research is self-defined and self-initiated or undertaken on commission or consultancy. Some critical researchers purposely pursue policy-oriented research because of a preference for strategic, applied or developmental research, or it being a corollary of their institutional location or the basis of their economic livelihood. Other critical researchers, especially those located in universities, may deliberately confine themselves to 'basic' scholarly research, either on the ground that scholars should confine themselves to basic research, or because they themselves have no affinity for strategic or applied research, including policy-oriented research. Of course, these scholars could have policy and policy making as the *objects* of their research; their purpose, however, is the disinterested pursuit of knowledge rather than a contribution to policy making. This is an entirely legitimate standpoint that must be respected, and research of this kind must be supported and funded. It is vital that the value of knowledge production and research is not judged solely in instrumental and utilitarian terms, and that basic scholarly research is not sacrificed at the altar of 'relevance', defined often in the most parochial manner and reduced, ultimately, to market or economic relevance.

I want to argue on the basis of the meanings of policy and policy making that I have advanced that how critical researchers conceive of their knowledge production on economic and social issues, the purposes that they define for their research, the nature and accessibility of their research, and their inclinations and motivations are all immaterial in so far as the potential policy relatedness and policy relevance of their research are concerned. Put in another way, all research on social and economic issues undertaken by critical researchers is *potentially* policy related and relevant; the only condition is that such research is rigorous and of high quality.[7] This argument can be well exemplified with reference to Harold Wolpe's *Race, Class and Apartheid State* (1998). In this text, Wolpe's intellectual adventure centred on investigating, through an impersonal, detached, yet unquestionably moral, scholarship the mutual interpenetration of past and present, events and processes, actions and agents, and social structure and conjuncture. His concern was the hidden social structures and conditions that frustrate human aspirations to social justice, yet also make possible social contestation and struggles and the triumph of justice and democracy - a search, if you like, for the mechanisms of social reproduction and transformation through which societies change or reproduce themselves. Wolpe was *not* immediately concerned with *policy* issues. Nonetheless, the rigorous theorising, high quality description and penetrating analysis of social structure and conjuncture was highly policy related and relevant for actors concerned with policy making, and could be extensively inform such policy making.

To take another example: an imaginative, theorised and rigorously researched political economy or historical sociology of South African higher education under colonialism and apartheid undertaken for no other reason than the disinterested scholarly pursuit of knowledge could help to illuminate various historical issues questions that continue to be the objects of policy contestation. Such a text remains to be written, yet could profoundly shape policy thinking and enjoy a high degree of policy relatedness and relevance. If all high quality research on economic and social issues is potentially policy related

and relevant, it can be the case that research that is explicitly undertaken to inform policy may have no or little policy relevance or impact, for reasons of poor quality, a change in the policy agenda, an unreceptive political environment, untimely completion of the research and ineffective communication and/or dissemination. In summary, the policy relatedness, relevance and value of research on social policy issues is not guaranteed by its explicit policy purposes, aims, nature and orientation. Critical scholarship on economic and social issues that is unconcerned with policy making can be as invaluable and have as great an impact, if not greater value and impact, than that which deliberately sets out to inform policy making.

2.2 Analysis *of* Policy and Analysis *for* Policy

There is a considerable difference between research on social issues that is concerned with the analysis *of policy*, and that concerned with analysis *for* policy. Analysis *of* policy encompasses objects such as the description and analysis of existing or emerging policies, their impacts and outcomes or possible or likely consequences, and processes and dynamics of past or current policy making. Such scholarship could represent a deliberate pursuit of policy-oriented research or constitute scholarly 'basic' research that is entirely uninterested in policy-oriented scholarship. Analysis *for* policy covers a wide spectrum characterised by weak to strong involvement in policy making. In the case of weak participation, critical researchers restrict analysis to considerations of the philosophical or theoretical underpinnings of policy or of context - the structure and conjuncture within which policy making must occur and policies must be implemented. Such analysis may be undertaken by critical researchers who confine themselves to scholarly basic research or those who, whether they undertake self-initiated or/and commissioned policy-oriented research, restrict themselves to analysis *of* policy. In the case of strong involvement in policy making, critical researchers undertake analysis *for* policy that spans a continuum from developing policy options and analysing their implications for particular principles, values and social goals, to the concrete design of policies or policy making instruments and processes.

Commenting on social theory, Schatzki writes that "one point of doing social theory is that it may be intrinsically valuable. Humans arguably seek general answers and pictures of things" (2009:40). Social theory "serves ends of two types"; one is 'cognitive ends' - "description, explanation, interpretation and evaluation or criticism"; the other is 'practical ends' - "control…, mutual understanding among humans, the achievement of the good society along with the amelioration of social ills, and ethical education" (Schatzki, 2009:40; 41). In so far as research is concerned, there is in practice a continuum. On the one pole, there is scholarly research that is unconcerned with policy and policy making, and has neither as its purpose nor object policy or policy making. Instead, the concern is, to borrow from Schatzki, 'cognitive ends'. On the other pole, there is analysis *for* policy that includes the design of policies and policy making instruments and processes. Here, to borrow again from Schatzki, the concern is, 'practical ends'. The figure below provides a graphic representation of the continuum of research in relation to policy making.

Figure 4: Nature of critical research and writing in relation to policy making

Non-interest-------Policy as *object* -------Analysis *of policy*------Analysis *for policy*------**Analysis *for policy***
in policy   but not purpose   (content, context)   (Policy options)   (Policy proposals)

Between the two poles is scholarly research that has as its *object* though not its *purpose* policy and policy making (a concern with 'cognitive ends' rather than 'practical ends'); analysis *of* policy *(*whose concern could be 'cognitive ends' or 'practical ends'), and certain kinds of analysis *for* policy (a concern with 'practical ends'). Critical researchers are the products of biography and history, and their concerns are not static. They may, and do, oscillate between different kinds of research. In the process they take on different identities and must confront various social and political dilemmas.

The ability of critical researchers to produce high quality research that is unconcerned with policy issues or related to the analysis *of* policy does not mean that they possess an automatic capability to generate high quality analysis *for* policy, and particularly to construct policy options or design policies. Similarly, the ability to produce high quality research related to a certain kind of analysis *for* policy – such as the description and analysis of structural and conjunctural conditions – is not a guarantee of the capability to undertake other kinds of analysis *for* policy, such as producing imaginative policy options and policies, or elaborating innovative policy making instruments, mechanisms and procedures. Appel (1993) advanced much the same argument when South African critical researchers began to undertake education policy research and reconstruction work linked to the national liberation organisations that were preparing to govern: critical researchers with a tradition of producing critical theory and scholarly critique should not assume an ability to undertake analysis *for* policy that involved designing policies. Muller has observed that "Appel's point is that mastery in the discourse of critique does not necessarily transfer to mastery in the discourse of reconstruction. Appel is...valuably reminding us that each discourse has its own grammar, its own language game" (Muller, 2002: 265). This is an issue to which I will return later.

The education and training and institutional context of most critical researchers mean that they may generally be most comfortable with analysis *of* policy and certain kinds of analysis *for* policy. Research linked to generating policy options and policies could require critical researchers to embrace value frameworks and social goals that may be at odds with their own. It may entail critical researchers adopting as given and unquestionable necessities policies and conditions that should be problematised - and which in other contexts of knowledge production would be problematised. Analysis *for* policy may require critical researchers to possess insights of a political and strategic nature which they lack, and become involved in politico-strategic calculations and institutional and organisational design issues for which they may be poorly equipped. Of course, capabilities are not innate or immutable, and can over time be learnt and developed.

2.3   Political and Social Dilemmas

Analysis *for* policy and even analysis *of* policy which has as its objects the policies of government's, political parties and social movements with whom critical researchers share common ideals can present particular difficulties and challenges. On the one hand, social actors could view the role of critical researchers as principally to justify and confirm particular organisational policies or to give pre-conceived and priorities and policies scientific respectability. Here, critical scholarship is reduced to an instrument of politics and critical researchers reduced to policy appendages. On the other hand, critical researchers can unwittingly turn themselves into policy propagandists, when they fail to distinguish between the vocations of science and politics and the different requirements of scientific endeavour and political needs (Weber in Gerth and Wright Mills, 1964). However, analysis *of* policy and even analysis *for* policy undertaken for social actors do not need to reduce critical researchers to policy appendages and propagandists. It depends on the terms of engagement, and critical researchers ensuring that there is no unacceptable or significant compromise of scholarly values and intellectual autonomy.

There are a number of necessary conditions to avoid any compromise of intellectual autonomy and defend, sustain and promote socially engaged intellectual work. First, there must be the guarantee, through constitutional, legislative and other institutional mechanisms, of academic freedom and intellectual autonomy. Second, critical researchers must themselves vigorously advance, protect and nurture such freedom and autonomy, and intellectual work in general. The defence of these values as important public goods has to be directed not only at states, governments, political parties and social movements. The intrusion of the market into higher education and the concomitant commodification and commercialisation of knowledge means that such defence has to be focused equally on universities that have embraced forms of entrepreneurialism and management ('managerialism') that

corrode the idea of a university. Third, basic scholarly research that has policy as its object and policy-oriented analysis *of* policy and weak versions of analysis *for* policy has to be publicly supported and funded, freed from the strictures of commissioned and consultancy research and parochial notions of 'relevance'.

The upholding of the autonomy of intellectual work has to insist that critical scholarship should be able to interrogate all aspects of the thinking, policies and priorities of governments, political parties and other social actors. Policies and priorities are the products of theory and analysis, and "neither the theory nor the analysis …can ever be regarded as settled but are continuously open to theoretical and empirical testing" (Wolpe, 1985:75). Critical research has the task of investigating the philosophical and theoretical foundations and the empirical analyses that ground the definition of priorities and formulation of policies. Investigation could demonstrate that the priorities and policies of social actors rest on shaky foundations with critical implications for policy implementation and possibly profound social consequences. Further, as a "fundamental point which cannot be overemphasised", critical researchers have to treat the priorities and policies of key social actors "not as conclusions but as starting points for investigation" (Wolpe, 1985:75). That is to say, the perspectives of governments, political parties and other social actors cannot place any limits on the research undertaken by critical researchers. For, "if the role of research and writing is to be restricted entirely to providing the materials for and confirmation of already defined policies, then this is to reduce research to a purely ideological function and to deny any autonomy or value to intellectual work and hence to the critical yet essential function of such work" (Wolpe, 1985:74). If critical researchers are not to become the ideological and political functionaries of key social actors, they must be able to challenge the cherished notions and positions of social actors. It is through critique and contribution to public debate that autonomous critical intellectual work manifests its value as a public good. If research is not approached in this way, critical researchers risk becoming trapped in a situation in which, as in the case of Stalinism, research "becomes a mere political instrument, never producing any knowledge …since it is already a political ideology" (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980:15). However, as Gramsci insisted, research "must produce knowledge for politics, without cutting itself off from the objective and scientific investigation of the world" (ibid:15).

In principle, and under certain conditions, critical researchers that restrict themselves to basic scholarly research or the analysis *of* social policy can conduct research without compromising either their values or the autonomy of intellectual work. In cases, where there is a strong congruence between critical researchers and social actors with respect to values, goals, priorities and general strategies related to economic and social development, this also entails no or little surrender of the autonomy of intellectual work on the part of critical researchers. On the other hand, critical researchers who undertake analysis *for* social policy that includes the design of policies and policy making instruments and processes, whether by choice or as a function of their institutional location, occupations and contractual obligations, could experience particular dilemmas. A frequent predicament is that often the rhythms, horizons and time frames of actors that formulate and adopt policy or seek to impact on policy, and those of critical researchers are at odds with one another. This confronts critical researchers with the challenge of retaining the integrity and rigour of research but contributing in a timely way to policy making. Critical scholars located at universities who are committed to policy-oriented analysis *for* policy but also have responsibilities associated with the diverse core purposes of universities may experience especial challenges in this regard. More generally, universities committed to being socially responsive and engaging with economic and social issues could also experience various institutional challenges in responding effectively and timeously and maintaining the quality and autonomy of intellectual work.

Increasingly, there could be a lack of interest among key social and policy actors in critical research. It is contended with respect to South Africa that

from the point of view of the intellectual project of radical transformative change, of theory and practice, it signalled the end of reflection and theorizing and the commencement of an era of policy impelled by the demands of immediacy and pragmatism. It signalled, at least for the time being, the end of frank and open ideological contestation and the beginning of steady subsumption of the ends politics to the means of administration (Motala, 2003:3-4).

It is also argued that the "separation of politics and administration explains the rise of consultancy and the weakness of consultancy research and report writing", and that "consultancy report writing is of necessity the pre-eminent form and inevitable consequence of the separation of politics and administration" (Motala, 2003:6). In these regards, critical researchers face the challenge of both asserting the value of critical research and contesting the rise of 'tourists of reconstruction' (Muller, 2002: 273) and their frequently dubious prescriptions and 'solutions'.

As with all domains in South Africa the economic and social transformation agenda confronts major paradoxes and intractable tensions. In the higher education arena, for example, in the context of limited financial resources and declining public subsidies these tensions include those between enrolment growth and quality, social equality and quality, equality and economic development needs, social equity and institutional equity, pursuit of public good and the mobilisation of new sources of non-public funding that could undermine the public good. Morrow has pointed out that when confronted with an intractable tension between dearly held values and goals, various 'simplifying manoeuvres' are possible. One simplifying manoeuvre is to refuse to accept the existence of a dilemma, which is a kind of moral blindness. A second simplifying manoeuvre is to elevate one value or goal above all others and make this the sole value or goal in terms of which all choices and policies are made. A third simplifying manoeuvre is to rank values in advance so that if there is a conflict between them one will take precedence. In the latter two cases, the effect is to privilege one value/goal above another (Morrow, 1997).

A fourth path is for critical researchers to reject simplifying manoeuvres and accept that for good political and social reasons values, goals and strategies that may be in tension have to be pursued simultaneously. Paradoxes must be creatively addressed and policies and strategies devised that can satisfy multiple imperatives, balance competing goals and enable the pursuit of equally desirable values and goals. This means confronting difficult social dilemmas and choices, and making unenviable decisions. Trade-offs become inevitable, which have to be made transparently and with consciousness of the implications for values and goals. This opens up 'public space' for intellectual and policy debate and contestation between social actors, including critical researchers. The importance of this is the possibility of a "*public space* whose function is not to institutionalise" social movements or critical researchers "nor to transform them into parties" or ideological functionaries "but to make society hear their messages and translate these messages into political decision making" while the social movements and critical researchers "maintain their autonomy" (Melucci, 1985:815).

Motala makes the vital argument that ostensibly consensual and unifying radical visionary policy statements that promise social equity, redress, social justice

> often obfuscate…the reality of power and historically entrenched privilege. In reality, many of the articles relating to equity are not achievable without purposeful [even aggressive] and directed strategies, which set out deliberately to dismantle the core of historical privilege, disparities in wealth, incomes and capital stock, critical to unlock the possibilities for social justice and fairness (2003:7).[8]

This brings well to the fore the dilemmas that are bound to arise for critical researchers in the face of "the reality of power and historically entrenched privilege", and the requirement to advance policy proposals in a context of macro-political and economic orthodoxies and policies that could leave the structural bases of such power and privilege largely untouched.

There are no simple or easy formulas for addressing and resolving the political and social dilemmas that confront critical researchers, since they involve choices, decisions and trade-offs related to matters of principle, values, social commitments, complex strategic and tactical considerations, and economic livelihood. How critical researchers experience the dilemmas and how they mediate the differing configurations of constraints and opportunities will also be conditioned in part by their institutional locations or occupations. Notwithstanding the challenges, involvement in analysis *for* policy does not mean that critical researchers become automatically the policy appendages of powerful social actors, or that they necessarily compromise their social justice commitments.
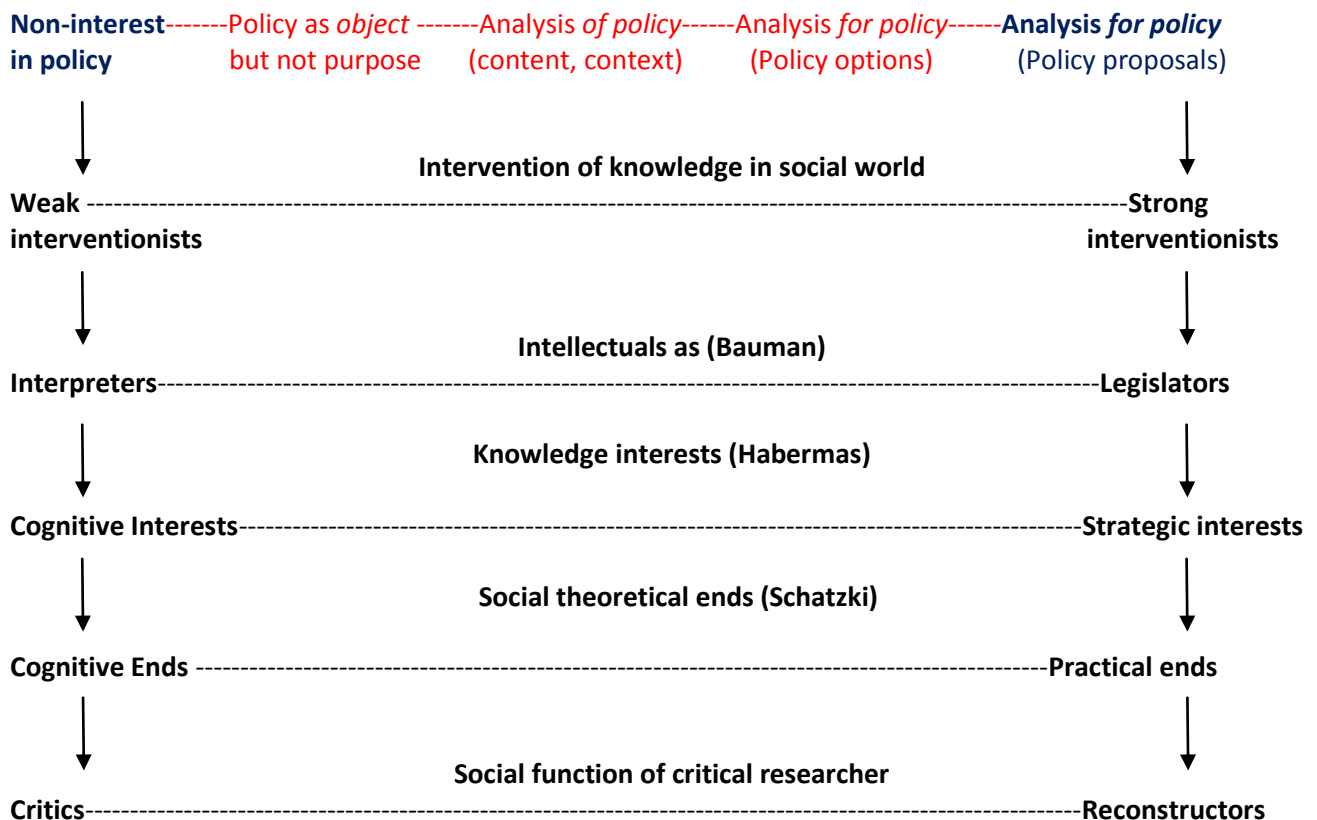
Abrams makes the important point that "what we choose to do and what we have to do are shaped by the historically given possibilities among which we find ourselves" (1982:3). Between social reproduction and social transformation there may be considerable scope and opportunities for reforms and improvements, which can advance social justice and also create a new terrain for the pursuit of social justice. It would be infantile not to struggle for reforms, especially in contexts of authoritarian political systems and entrenched and pervasive economic and social inequalities.[9] Critical researchers have to, however, recognise the challenge to the autonomy of intellectual work of their embracing the assumptions and frameworks of specific social actors in situations where other starting points and alternative frameworks are possible; it is also vital that they do not make a virtue of the necessities and constraints that may confront them. It is necessary within the bounds of possibility to explore different frameworks and their implications for economic and social policy, which could be of great value to other progressive social and policy actors.

3. Core Propositions

The analysis of the preceding pages can be distilled into eight core propositions

1. The research and writing of critical researchers constitutes a continuum that ranges from, on the one pole, scholarly basic research which is unconcerned with policy and policy making, to scholarly basic research, which has as its object though not its purpose policy and policy making; to analysis *of* policy; and to analysis *for* policy that is confined to advancing policy options and their implications and, at the other pole, to analysis *for* policy that includes the design of policies and policy making instruments and processes. Figure 5 below exemplifies the continuum, and makes links with various conceptions of the purposes of knowledge production and the role of scholarship and research.

Figure 5: Continuum of research and writing and link with knowledge production and functions of critical researchers

Non-interest-------Policy as *object* -------Analysis *of policy*------Analysis *for policy*------**Analysis *for policy***
in policy   but not purpose   (content, context)   (Policy options)   (Policy proposals)

Intervention of knowledge in social world

Weak --Strong
interventionists   interventionists

Intellectuals as (Bauman)

Interpreters--Legislators

Knowledge interests (Habermas)

Cognitive Interests--Strategic interests

Social theoretical ends (Schatzki)

Cognitive Ends --Practical ends

Social function of critical researcher

Critics---Reconstructors

The distinction between critical scholarship that is not concerned with policy and that which is geared to policy development parallels that of knowledge as 'weak interventionism' or 'strong interventionism' in the social world respectively. It also coincides with Bauman's distinction between intellectuals as 'interpreters' and intellectuals as 'legislators', Habermas' categories of 'cognitive interests' and 'strategic interests' and Schatzki's distinction between social theory concerned with either 'cognitive ends' or 'practical ends'. The different purposes of scholarship mark critical researchers as generally 'critics' or 'reconstructors' (Mouton and Muller, 1995:164-165; Muller, 2002).

It is tempting for critical researchers to "claim that, in their persons, they have resolved the tension between critique and reconstruction, and that they are now critical reconstructors" (Muller, 2002:278). However, I agree with Muller's contention that it is

> not that these individuals are not doing both critique and reconstruction work, but that in their critiques and their reconstruction work respectively, the tension between the two modes is not held in dynamic balance, except perhaps where policy work if of a very general nature, or in exceptional cases. The more the policy work drives towards planning and implementation, the less can it entertain doubts about its constitutive grounds. Or, in Weberian terms, ends have to be accepted for means to be technically elaborated (Weber, 1949). And yet, just as planning must be practical and strategic, so critique is only coherent when it undertakes a systematic interrogation of those constitutive grounds.

Muller goes on to add that "the argument is not about conceptual incompatibility so much as it is one about the social conditions that enable or constrain specific forms of intellectual work", and concludes that "critics and reconstructors can only…comport themselves in separate and separated fields of endeavour", an issue which I will address below (Muller, 2002:278, 279).

2. More extensive and varied conceptions of *policy* and *policy making* open up avenues for more fertile, complex and nuanced thinking about critical research and its connection to social policy making. It permits us to characterise *all* rigorous, high quality critical scholarship on social policy as *policy relevant* and *policy related*. This is in contrast with the limitation of 'policy research' to only that which is consciously and deliberately policy-oriented. In these terms, research undertaken with no thought of shaping policy making is potentially as policy relevant and policy related as purposive policy-oriented research. Indeed, critical research on social policy that is unconcerned with policy may be as valuable, if sometimes not more valuable, than that which is policy-oriented.

3. With respect to research related to economic and social issues, critical researchers have a number of options. They can confine themselves to research unconcerned with policy (even if their objects may be social policy and policy making); if inclined to policy research, they can restrict themselves to analysis *of* policy; confine themselves to only some kinds of analysis *for* policy; undertake the full spectrum of research related to analysis *for* policy; undertake only certain kinds of research or all kinds of research. It is, of course, possible to move between the different kinds of research and even master the different genres of writing this may entail. Critical researchers should ideally make conscious choices regarding the purposes of their research and fully grasp the implications of some kinds of research for the autonomy of intellectual work.

4. Critical researchers that are involved analysis *for* policy geared towards policy development have to be conscious of the challenges, difficulties and pitfalls. It is critical to guard against making a *virtue* of the constraints and necessities that commissioned research or institutional location and roles may entail with regard to policy research undertaken for government, political parties and other social and policy actors.

5. Is it possible to undertake analysis *for* policy that includes formulating explicit policy proposals on economic and social development and function *simultaneously*, in the same space and time, as critical researchers? The analysis suggests that critical researchers *can* do so under the following conditions: where the policy proposals are unsolicited and advanced with no especial concern whether they are taken up by social actors; where the policy proposals are commissioned without any conditions (no pre-given inalienable principles, values, goals, criteria, existing approaches and strategies) and critical researchers are indifferent whether their policy proposals are taken up by commissioning actors, and where there is a total identity between the values, goals and strategies of the critical researcher and the actor to whom the policy proposals are being addressed.

6. There are conditions where critical researchers cannot undertake social and economic analysis *for* policy and function concurrently as critical researchers. One clear instance is where the policy research is commissioned with specified criteria (principles, values, goals, priorities and strategies) that the policy proposals must satisfy, and there is dissonance between these criteria and those of the critical researcher. This example of certain conditions having to be taken as givens and inalienable points of departure is precisely what Wolpe cautions against - the priorities and policies of social actors treated "as conclusions" rather than "as starting points for investigation" (1985:75). Another instance is where critical researchers undertake policy research specifically to confirm the views of social actors on the efficacy (or lack of efficacy) of certain policy proposals or modes of policy making. This would be a case of "research and writing… (being) restricted entirely to providing the materials for and confirmation of already defined policies, (which) is to reduce research to a purely ideological function and to deny any autonomy or value to intellectual work and hence to the critical yet essential function of such work" (Wolpe, 1985:74). The institutional locations, occupations and contractual obligations of critical researchers may also affect the possibility of undertaking certain kinds of policy research and functioning *simultaneously* as critical researchers.

7. It is, of course, quite possible for critical researchers to undertake policy research on economic and social issues that result in different policy conclusions depending on the assumptions and frameworks used, and to conduct policy research for different social and policy actors that advance different policy proposals. This alludes to the possibility of being a critical researcher *in different space and time*; the argument remains that it is not possible to undertake analysis *for* policy development and be a critical researcher *concurrently*.

8. Earlier, I noted Muller's conclusion that "critics and reconstructors can only…comport themselves in separate and separated fields of endeavour" (Muller, 2002:279). There are, indeed, different kinds of research, with different conditions of production (and reproduction), purposes, approaches and social functions, all which must be acknowledged. In an age of extreme utilitarianism and the tendency to reduce scholarship to "liberal practicality", it is vital that basic critical scholarship is valued, promoted and defended (Wright Mills, 1959:88).[10] Yet, critical researchers can and do oscillate between critical scholarship that is unconcerned with policy and analysis of and for policy, and between the social functions of 'critics' and 'reconstructors'. Beyond being a matter of personal choice, there may be conditions in which critical researchers find themselves impelled to undertake research for which they are largely unpractised or that they would usually avoid: periods of rapid and sweeping social changes; transitions from colonialism to national independence and authoritarian rule to political liberalisation and democracy; the existence of relatively small 'communities' of critical intellectuals and researchers; social pressures to demonstrate allegiance to ascendant new political forces, and a history of collaboration between critical researchers and social and political forces aspiring to rule. O'Donnel and Schmitter write of transitions in terms of the "numerous surprises and difficult dilemmas", of "elements of accident and unpredictability, of crucial decisions taken in a hurry…", of actors "facing insolvable ethical dilemmas and ideological confusions, of dramatic turning points reached and passed without an understanding of their future significance" (1986:3-4). They could well be describing the circumstances that critical researchers find themselves in some situations. If "freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them - and then, the opportunity to choose…(and) freedom cannot exist without an enlarged role of human reason in human affairs", perhaps in certain situations critical researchers operate in conditions of circumscribed freedom (Wright Mills, 1959:174).

While particular conditions may cause critical researchers to oscillate between critical scholarship that is unconcerned with policy and analysis *of* and *for* policy, there may be some value in such movement symbiotic. Critical scholarship on economic and social issues that is unconcerned with policy could derive greater access to information, insights and rigour through the experience of high quality analysis *of* policy and analysis *for* policy. Analysis *of* policy and especially analysis *for* policy could, in turn, benefit greatly from high quality critical theoretical and empirical scholarship on economic and social issues. If critical researchers have the affinity and capability to oscillate between different kinds of research, and do so with full comprehension of the dilemmas and implications of certain kinds of policy research for the autonomy of intellectual work, legitimating claims of 'critical reconstructor' (or reconstructive critic) are unnecessary. Even if for the reasons that Muller provides critical researchers must necessarily "comport themselves in separate and separated fields of endeavour", there are good grounds to pursue continuous and vigorous engagement between those who undertake research for different purposes and are located in different institutional settings (see Watson, 2002:7-8).

Through high quality research of different kinds and within the bounds of possibilities, critical researchers can contribute immensely to reforming and transforming society in the interest of social justice. There is a need, however, for cognizance of the tensions that can arise to maintain intellectual autonomy while undertaking research to inform policy making. Concomitantly, a measure of intellectual modesty regarding the extent to which the policy-oriented research of critical researchers

provides effective frameworks, approaches and strategies for addressing critical economic and social challenges would not be amiss. To borrow a phrase from Weiler (1978), it is necessary for critical researchers to move from 'innocence' to greater critical reflexivity with respect to their roles, functions and contributions to social policy making and progressive social change.

Notes

[1] My thanks to Mahmood Mamdani for being a catalyst for this paper through a stimulating exchange at Abuja airport on the possibility of being a 'critical reconstructor'; to Mala Singh for her usual critical and incisive comments; to Joe Muller of the University of Cape Town for the loan of relevant literature, and to Chantal Dwyer for assistance with the various figures in the paper. Of course, I alone am responsible for the weaknesses and shortcomings of the paper.

[2] The Italian theorist of democracy Bobbio contends that "(n)owdays, if an indicator of democratic progress is needed it cannot be provided by the number of people who have the right to vote, but the number of contexts outside politics where the right to vote is exercised"; that is to say, "the criterion for judging the state of democratization achieved in a given country should no longer be to establish 'who' votes, but 'where' they can vote;....how many more spaces there are where citizens can exercise the right to vote". Of course, Bobbio uses 'vote' here to refer to "the most typical and common way of participating" and certainly does not reduce or "limit participation to casting a vote" (Bobbio, 1987:56).

[3] Cerych has noted that "many languages have no distinct term for 'politics' and 'policy'" (1984:234). In French, for example, the word *politique* means both, as does the German *politik* or *politika* in most Slavic languages. the way in which Burawoy has defined 'politics' - as "struggles within a specific arena aimed at specific sets of relations,…struggles that take as their *objective* the quantitative or qualitative change of those relations" could usefully be a definition of 'policy' (Burawoy: 253-54).

[4] On the theme of critical researchers writing for policy actors and makers, a number of additional points can be made. First, the form of writing in terms of precision, tone, specificity and so forth will necessarily be shaped by particular concerns. These may be with substantive policies, or symbolic, material, procedural, distributive or redistributive policies; or they could be with policy change because an existing policy is not achieving its intended goals; or with motivating specific policies in relation to goals, conditions and resources. Second, the form of writing will also be shaped by the extent of compunction about the policy analysis being advanced, or policy changes being proposed, or policies that are being advocated. No or little compunction may tend towards a style and tone of exuberant, confident certainty. Conversely, considerable compunction could result in a more circumspect, restrained and cautious style and tone. Third, the status of the policy text will be another determinant of form – policy discussion documents tend to be more 'readerly' texts, while final policy documents tend to be more 'writerly' texts. Finally, writing on its own may have limited efficacy in influencing and shaping policy making. Verbal communication through a variety of fora has numerous advantages, including the opportunity to adapt communication according to milieu and mood and to clarify the inevitable different readings of texts that were assumed to be 'writerly' in nature.

[5] On the need for and the value and critical roles of public policy dialogue, see Odora Hoppers (1997)

[6] The issue of critical research and researchers and methodology, methods and techniques is a separate but important issue. See Muller (1994), Samoff (1995), Odora Hoppers (1997) and Motala (2003).

[7] To avoid conveying the relationship between research and policy making in over-rationalistic terms and to not overstate the role and importance of research in policy making, the following points are in order. I readily concede that the reasons why the research was undertaken, the purposes that the critical researchers are pursuing and the accessibility of the research and writing will affect the *extent* to which the research is policy related and relevant. I grant that the nature of social actors and the degrees to which they are intellectually and politically receptive to the research and writing of critical researchers will condition their policy relevance. For various reasons, critical scholarship that is of poor quality sometimes unfortunately enjoys prestige among some social actors. Still, ultimately, the policy relatedness and relevance of research is not determined solely by critical researchers themselves, but also by the take-up of their research, their impact and the uses to which they are put, and the effects that have on the policy making terrain.

[8] He goes on to posit that in the South African case, "these imply a directive, coordinating and interventionist role for the state – requiring positive discriminatory measures in favour of the poor, expecting political courage in the face of administrative challenges and the will to defy public discontent from highly articulate and organized interests" (Motala, 2003:7).

[9] A century ago, Rosa Luxemburg posed: "can the social democracy be against reforms? Can we counterpose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reform"? (1970:8) Her answer was an unambiguous "certainly not….The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the conditions of workers within the framework of the existing social order" is a means of working towards the "final goal"…"Between social reforms and revolution there exists for the social democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is the means; the social revolution, its aim" (ibid.: 8).

[10] That is an "a-political…kind of democratic opportunism" in which 'the political' is "identified with the proper functioning of the political *status quo*", and the "political order itself is seldom examined; it is merely assumed as a quite fixed and distant framework" (Wright Mills, 1959:88).

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