

OPEN ACCESS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Resisting Technology Privatization and Surveillance: Roles for Scholar-Activists
Left Forum | John Jay College of Criminal Justice | New York | May 31, 2015

Making Knowledge Public

I am here to introduce you open-access publishing and why it should be important to you as scholar-activists. I am going to start by telling you a story. It's a familiar story that I suspect many of you can relate to ...



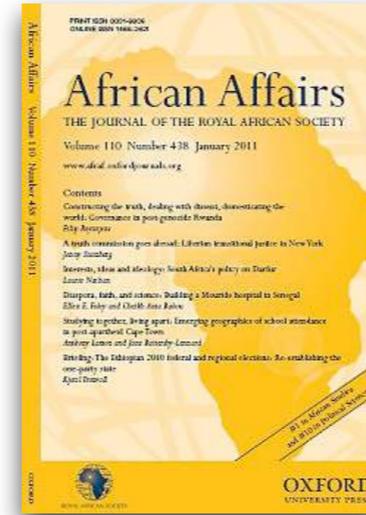
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There once was an assistant professor of political science in a small liberal arts college. Prior to becoming an academic, she was a humanitarian aid worker with Doctors Without Borders. She became an academic so she could devote time to exploring the social and political problems that stymied peacekeeping and aid work in the country where she worked – the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Promotion & Tenure

African Affairs is published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Royal African Society and is the top-rated journal in African studies.



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As a tenure-track academic, she knew she needed to publish her research in the most prestigious journals she could. And she did.

Paywalls



Full Text (PDF)
Peacekeeping abroad, trouble making at home: Mutinies in West Africa
Afr Aff (Lond) (2015) 114 (455): 206-225 first published online February 17, 2015

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However, what she quickly discovered was that the research she had conducted to help her former colleagues, to inform the Congolese policymakers, and to improve the lives of the people of Congo – was behind a paywall.

Gold (“Hybrid”) Open Access

\$ 3,795 APC

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She could pay the publisher \$3,795 in an article-processing charge (commonly called an APC) to make her article freely accessible to everyone, but the meager budget she had for research expenses was spent on travel to the Congo.

Library Subscriptions

 Institutional	GBP	USD	EUR
Online-only access	£281.00	\$563.00	€421.00
Print	£324.00	\$650.00	€486.00
Print and online	£353.00	\$706.00	€528.00

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She turned to her librarian. The librarian could use her budget to cover the hybrid APC, but her paying for a single article wouldn't mean the librarian could simply cancel the college's subscription to the journal. And what about all the researcher's other colleagues, not just in that department but in other departments as well? If many or all of them wanted their articles to be made available through paying an additional fee, clearly the library could not afford to support all of them!

Scholarly Society Dependence

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Royal African Society. At the top left is the logo, a globe with the text "Royal African Society Promoting Africa". To the right are two search boxes: "FIND A COUNTRY" and "SEARCH". Below the logo is a navigation menu with links: Home, About us, Parliament, Blogs, Business, Research, Events, Analysis, and Membership. The main content area features a large image of people in a community setting with the text "Gateway for Africa - Media & Culture". To the right of the image is a sidebar with three entries: "From African Arguments: Nigeria", "From African Arguments: Rwanda", and "From African Arguments: Book Series". Further right is a "Join the RAS" section with a list of membership benefits: "Taking part in our meetings, launches and receptions;", "Receiving quarterly issues of African Affairs;", and "Support the work of the society." Below this list is a "Read more" link. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the text "OPEN ACCESS NETWORK" and "Making Knowledge Public".

Moreover, if the librarian did cancel her subscription, and 500 of her colleagues did the same, the Royal African Society itself might struggle to keep membership fees low, fund their annual conference, and give research awards to graduate students.



<http://knconsultants.org/toward-a-sustainable-approach-to-open-access-publishing-and-archiving/>

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Some radical approaches to address this problem have been proposed, including the one my colleague Lisa Norberg (the librarian in this story) and I have proposed ... but implementing systemic change takes time.

Four Simple Steps ...

So what can be done now – today?

Four Simple Steps ...

... you can take right now!

I'd like to propose four simple steps you as scholar-activists can take ... right now.

1. Read your author agreements. Retain your rights.

- To post on your departmental or personal Web site.
- To deposit into your institutional repository.
- To include in another repository (e.g., Academia, ResearchGate, SSRN).
- To use in your class.
- To reuse images (etc.) in another publication.
- Etc.

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This panel is looking at Internet freedom and access to knowledge and the limits placed upon that freedom and access. The #1 limit to access to what you have produced as an output of your research and to your academic freedom to share that work with others is the author agreements you sign that mean someone else — the publisher — now often owns all or most of the rights to your work.

Your author agreement is a contract. Treat it like you would any other contract. Don't just think, "Oh, I know it's wrong to post my work on my Web site, but they'll never come after me." Whether true or not, it doesn't help to change the system. Instead, negotiate your agreement while you still own the rights to the work. Keep those rights you most value.

And if the publisher says no? Then perhaps that's not a publisher that has your best interest and the interest of your community at heart. You should decide for yourself what kind of a world you want to inhabit — and work, one agreement at a time, to make that happen.

2. Publish in a reputable open-access journal.

- Many OA journals charge nothing to publish with them.
- Most funders pay for publication costs if those are written into grant.
- Many institutions have open access publication funds. (Check with your subject librarian.)
- If you follow Step 1, no need to pay for “hybrid.”

The [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) is a great starting place to find journals that publish in your field. Many do not charge anything to publish with them. For the many others that do charge APCs, those charges can often be paid via grants or institutional open access funds. Some funders and funds, however, do not cover publication charges for “hybrid” journals. But if you retain your rights to do with your work what you wish, there’s no need to pay for that fee.

3. Ensure your work is communicable to others.

- Have clear narrative. Avoid jargon.
- Engage in interdisciplinary conversations.
- Understand what your department, school, institution require for tenure and promotion, but work to change system from within.

In whatever venue you work, look in everything you do to share your work broadly: write so that you can communicate outside your field, talk regularly with others who work at a tangent to you, look to change the system at your university by communicating your work clearly to everyone — including why you value openness and access.

4. Participate regularly in scholarly conversation.

- Educate yourself about issues concerning access.
- Advocate and organize.
- Reach out to your colleagues and campus administrators to help them better understand and take action on these issues.
- Attend conferences.
- Be active on social media (esp. Twitter).

Learn, advocate, organize, teach. Be active in the conversation, wherever it is happening.

“We may not be capable of changing the world in one fell swoop on our own, but when we swim together in the same good direction, we become an unstoppable force.”

— Bryan Stevenson



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The goal of all these steps? To enable you to meet your professional obligations and to engage with your peers and others by making your work open and available ...



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... so it reaches people and makes a difference.

Knowledge Made Public

Rebecca Kennison

Principal, K|N Consultants

Open Access Network

openaccessnetwork.org

[@OA_Network](https://twitter.com/OA_Network)

Contact us at the Open Access Network at [oan@knconsultants.org](mailto: oan@knconsultants.org) or me personally at [rrkennison@knconsultants.org](mailto: rrkennison@knconsultants.org) or follow us on Twitter at [@OA_Network](https://twitter.com/OA_Network).