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Re-Imagining Reproduction: Citation and Chosen Kin

Reproduction is political. Citation is political. In this essay, I link the anthropological concept of reproduction (biological and social), which is closely tied to kin-making, to citation. I suggest that citation can be viewed as "academic" reproduction and kin-making. To make this argument, I describe my professional and intellectual journey as a Black woman anthropologist based in the global South. I show how the amalgamation of the various contexts in which I was immersed brought up questions of race, nationality, colonialism, profession, and gender and influenced the direction my research took, as well as my scholarly position and engagement. In the article, I lay bare the academic stakes of the path that I have chosen. [citation, reproduction, scholarship, politics, anthropology]

We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, we bring with us those who will come after. Most people will have heard some version of these two statements; for me, they are inseparable. Taking up the invitation to join the conversation about "citational work in medical anthropology" allows me to reflect on my journey from an aspiring midwife to a passionate advocate of "supporting, acknowledging, drawing on and finding inspiration in research [and writing] from the South" (Mkhwanazi and Manderson, 2020, v). Along the way, I will explain how I became interested in what I do, describe the challenges that I faced—institutionally, academically, and as a Black woman—and share what support I lacked and where I did find support. Reading, writing, publishing, and citation are for me not just an archive of [the] discipline's past or a map of a course of where the discipline might go in the future. They are, as I will show, acts of forging an identity.

Kamhlaba[1]: My Birth as an Anthropologist

Healing the earth through healing birth was the phrase uttered repeatedly at the Wild Woman Vision Quest. I was one of about 20 people who had come to the three-day event hosted by Jeannine Parvati Baker and her family on a farm just outside Monroe, Utah. I was accompanying Mary Kroeger, a certified nurse-midwife whom I first met in 1991 in Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), where she had worked as a consultant on infant and maternal health for the Ministry of Health. It was 1994. I had taken a gap year from Eswatini and was living in San Diego, California. During my time there, I became interested in the history and craft of midwifery. I read books by Jeannine Parvati Baker, Elizabeth Davis, Ina May Gaskin, Sheila Kitzinger, Federick Leboyer, Michel Odent, Marsden Wagner, and others. The gathering was my introduction to a community of midwives, most of whom, like Mary and I, had traveled many miles to attend the event. People shared their birth stories, spoke openly about childbirth, and celebrated the work of midwives. This gathering

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of middle-class White women on a farm in Utah inspired me to become a midwife, and I began my path to over two decades of anthropological research on reproduction (biological and social).

I was introduced to medical anthropology in my second year of study at the University of Cape Town. In her introductory lecture, Alcinda Honwana spoke about midwives and different birthing rituals around the world. I knew then that I had found the perfect discipline for my aspirations. In my third year, I elected to design my own course of study, which focused on reading up on the anthropology of pregnancy and childbirth. I read the works of Brigitte Jordan, Robbie Davis-Floyd, Emily Martin, Ann Oakley, Adrienne Rich, and Beverley Chalmers, as well as many articles about "traditional birth attendants" in Africa. I conducted a small research project on young women's knowledge about childbirth and birthing options. For my Honours project (in my fourth year of study), I interviewed midwives and obstetrician-gynecologists practicing in South Africa. I was interested in the ideas and values that South African-based maternal health practitioners held about pregnancy and birth, and how they saw their roles in caring for and supporting women.

In 1999, I left South Africa to undertake an MPhil and PhD in anthropology at the University of Cambridge. When I returned in 2005 as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Cape Town, the department was undergoing a transition. In the intervening years, influenced by the postmodernist turn in anthropology in Europe and the United States, and by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings in South Africa that brought to light how the majority of White South Africans were complicit in the entrenchment of apartheid, questions about the creators of anthropological knowledge in South Africa, anthropology's object of study, and issues of representation were being fiercely discussed. A year after the African National Congress (ANC) government came to power, an article by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) was published in *Current Anthropology* in which she accused the anthropology department at the University of Cape Town of being complacent and ignoring the racial atrocities that were unfolding throughout the country. Scheper-Hughes wrote about her experience of being in the department, which included a continued allegiance to Western literature and Eurocentric worldviews, and an unwillingness to teach content that might enable students to make sense of the violence in the country. She wrote about a preoccupation among department members with "falling 'standards' and with diagnoses of the presumed 'lack' and 'deficiencies' of the incoming Black students" (1995, 414–15). The article hit a nerve among South African anthropologists. Their responses to the criticism was defensive, in part a reaction to the uncertainty of the future of a discipline that had previously been entangled with segregationist policies in post-apartheid South Africa (Ramphele, 1996; Robins, 1996).

During my postdoctoral fellowship, I wrote my first two articles, published in *Anthropology Southern Africa* (Mkhwanazi 2005; 2006). Although I had been invited to take up the postdoctoral fellowship, only one of the staff members showed interest in my work. As a Black African anthropologist, I had the sense that my focus on teenage pregnancy in a Xhosa-speaking community was regarded as not "cutting edge" enough or that the topic would not make any meaningful contribution to anthropological theory. After giving my inaugural seminar, one colleague congratulated me and commented that at least the postdoctoral fellowship wasn't awarded to me only on the basis of my skin color.

In 2007 I moved to the University of Fort Hare, one of the historically Black (read: under-resourced) universities in South Africa. Many in the academy considered this to be "academic suicide." However, this bold move brought me to the attention of a network of Black, feminist, queer scholars who were creating spaces for people who wanted to challenge the status quo or who chose to deliberately locate themselves on the margins of mainstream academia. While I was at the University of Fort Hare, I became aware of the politics of writing, publishing, and citation, and the potential of using these activities to carve out one's own space and community.

In anthropology, only Eleanor Preston-Whyte (1991) had worked on teenage pregnancy and childbirth as a subject worthy of focus on its own, even though some had considered early childbearing in relation to marriage i.e premarital pregnancy (see Pauw, 1964; Schapera, 1933) or in descriptions of the life course of an ethnic group (see Hunter, 1936; Mayer, 1971). With the growth of research on sexual and reproductive health in the era of HIV/AIDS, however, young women increasingly became a research focus in South Africa and in sub-Saharan Africa more broadly. The findings of these studies were mainly published in public health or sexual and reproductive health journals, and very few anthropologists engaged in these discussions. The majority of the authors publishing this work were based in the global North, although the empirical research was largely conducted by local researchers. I was only exposed to the work being done by Southern-based scholars through attending conferences, not through published articles nor by my anthropology colleagues.[2]

Due to the absence of studies on pregnancy and childbirth in South African anthropology at the time—although teenage pregnancy had been (and continues to be) an issue that made headlines—I found myself engaging with academics from other scholarly disciplines, including psychology, demography and public health, and with policymakers and researchers working outside of the academy. I wore two hats, one as an anthropologist and the other as a sexual and reproductive health researcher. This interdisciplinary position, which I gravitated toward because of the circumstances, has been a critical stepping stone in my subsequent education, the work that I do, the collaborative projects I have been involved in, and the transdisciplinary projects I now lead.

The seed of how I came to understand the link between citation (academic reproduction) and kinship (biological and social reproduction) was planted in 2009, when I was invited to participate in a course on writing and publishing for international peer-reviewed journals.[3] The course was specifically aimed at researchers from the global South working on sexual and reproductive health, sexuality, and gender. We came from diverse countries: Argentina, Chile, China, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Kenya, Lesotho, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. I realized that my frustration at not finding the published work of my South African (and other African) colleagues had been identified as a long-standing concern with the lack of publications of global Southern scholars (Cole et al., 2016; Falabella, 2009). The course confirmed my suspicion of the existence of "an unequal distribution of power in dissemination of scientific knowledge" (Falabella, 2009, 1) and made me more determined to publish my research and to not shy away from acknowledging the insightful arguments of my colleagues who for a variety of institutional, economic, and linguistic reasons were struggling to get published in international journals.

Make the Circle Bigger, The Entanglement of Writing, Publication, and Citation

Writing is important. It enriches the global thoughtscape. Publication is critical. It allows ideas to reach a wider audience through reading and citation. Publishing work is not the only way to disseminate ideas, but at present it is the most favored way in anthropology. This should not be seen as limiting because ideas birthed on paper can morph into other forms. When nurtured, listened to, and engaged with, they can bind people into networks of care based on epistemic generosity.[4] Writing is more than putting words on paper; it is deeply complex, nuanced, political, powerful, and tricky. While publication is often focused on imparting a message, the reception of the written text is unpredictable, subjective, and outside the author's control. We are often at our most vulnerable when we write.

As a critical part of what I do as an anthropologist, there are two guidelines that I use in my own writing, which I hope guard against the misreading of what I want to convey. The first concerns motivation—knowing why I am writing and, consequently, who my audience is. I find it important to be clear and unapologetic about where I are coming from in terms of (1) my geographical location (an African scholar based in and writing about and with people on the continent), (2) my specific motivation (why I am adding my voice to the discussion/debate), and (3) citation (whose work I am using to make my point). Let me give an example of how all three of these themes unfolded in a writing project that resulted in the book *Young Families: Gender, Sexuality and Care* (Mkhwanazi and Bhana, 2017).

In an article about South African literature on teen-aged pregnancy and motherhood (Mkhwanazi, 2006), I showed that the majority of the studies at the time had been quantitative, survey-based, or rapid ethnographies. They simply sought to identify the causes, or to reiterate the deleterious social, economic, demographic and biological consequences, that had been identified in studies based in Europe, the United States, and the United Kingdom. They did not take seriously either how the historical, social, and political context in South Africa influenced the occurrence and management of teen-aged pregnancy and parenthood or the social relationships that were created and maintained as a result. Consequently, I made a plea for research that paid more attention to the local and social contexts of teen-aged pregnancy and parenting *in* South Africa.

At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, I began noticing a different approach to the study of teen-aged pregnancy and parenthood emerging in the scholarship of young Black graduate students. This approach did not uphold the dominant (Eurocentric) narrative of pathologizing early childbearing, nor did it try to reiterate previous findings. Instead, it showed the various ways in which families responded to the advent of a teen-aged pregnancy. What was distinctive about the work of these young Black researchers was that in their representation of teen-aged pregnancy and parenthood, they were able to shed light on their interlocutors' local, social, and cultural ideas of the world and how the world should be lived in. The importance of this scholarship and the realization that these students would most likely never have the opportunity to publish was the seed that led to the book *Young Families*, which I co-edited with Deevia Bhana. The rationale behind a co-edited book rather than a series of articles was that a book would be best positioned to make the case for the novelty in this understanding of teen-aged pregnancy. Additionally, we wanted it to be accessible as a single document that encapsulated different voices from different angles on the topic of teen-aged pregnancy and parenthood, which could easily be accessible to other South African researchers and policymakers. We consciously chose to publish the edited volume with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press, a government research agency whose books are widely read by policymakers and are open access. From the beginning, we made it clear that our location *was* South Africa. Our audience was *in* South Africa—researchers, policymakers, students, and academics. Our motivation (and end goal) was to nurture researchers *from* South Africa through mentoring, writing, and creating a platform for them to publish and hence increase the likelihood that their work will reach wider audiences and be cited.

The second guideline I use in my writing is to remember that writing is a political act and that publishing, if consciously considered, can be a powerful platform to affect change. In writing, I as the author have the power to determine the argument, the evidence I bring to bear, and, importantly, whose authority I invoke and who I cite. I can therefore choose who to bring with me into my story or who to leave behind. Influence, authority, and power lie in citations. Citation is not only a way to show familiarity with someone's work but, in most instances, it serves as a form of allegiance, which in turn can create networks of care and support—academia can after all be a brutal world. As an African academic who was educated in Southern Africa and England, I am aware of my privilege, which allows me this choice, and I am aware that the barriers that we face as Southern-based scholars and researchers in being heard, read, and cited are complex, nuanced, and can be divisive. Our experiences are not the same, and attempts to ameliorate publishing and citation (and funding and hiring) inequality, for Black scholars and/or scholars from the global South, are not simple or without shortcomings. This is why I feel it is important to describe my experience with citation and its politics in South Africa.

The production and reproduction of scholarship: the case of South Africa

After the ANC came to power in 1994, transformation was the mandate for higher education across South Africa. At the most general level, this meant addressing the race and gender inequalities in tertiary institutions, which could be done through massification accompanied by affirmative action: admitting more (mainly Black) students, hiring more Black academics and administrative staff, and hiring more women. Initially, the new hires did not need to be South African citizens. Anjuli Webster (2018) writes that the massification schemes were not interested in changing the university structure and space but simply including more Black people in a colonial and alienating space with the hopes of creating subjects who would reproduce its power structures. Those who regarded the policy of "affirmative action" as detrimental to maintaining a high quality of scholarship got around this by hiring people who had been trained in universities in the global North or, failing this, those trained in one of the top two anthropology departments in the country at the time (University of Cape Town and University of the Witwatersrand[5]). Consequently, many of the women who were hired were White and the Black academics had degrees from universities based in the global North.

What this meant for the reproduction of anthropology in South Africa only became clear to me in 2009, when two colleagues and I embarked on a book project to document the work of anthropologists who had received their PhD degrees after South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 and who were hired as anthropologists in South African anthropology departments.[6] Of the 14 contributors who fit the criteria that we invited, only one (White, male) anthropologist declined our invitation to be part of the book. Of the remainder who accepted, 11 of the 13 contributors had been trained (either as an undergraduate or graduate student) at the University of Cape Town, and only three contributors were Black (two female and one male). All of the contributors except four (one Black male and three White females) had PhD degrees from universities in the global North, and the institution in the global North that many had spent time as a visiting fellow or received a PhD from was the University of Chicago, where Jean and John Comaroff, also graduates of the University of Cape Town, were based at the time. The slow pace at which anthropology departments in South Africa were embracing transformation is evident in these patriarchal structures of patronage and power.

2015 and 2016 saw student protests in tertiary institutions, led primarily by Black students, in response to the increase of fees and the slow pace of transformation in higher education. Some of the demands of the #FeesMustFall movement included the insourcing of workers, a transformation of the university, the decolonization of the curriculum, and free education for all. The call from the protesters to decolonize the curriculum and include more scholars from the global South, particularly Africa, in what was being taught has since led to processes of introspection in many departments. As outright supporters of the student movement, most anthropology departments across the country began rethinking their curriculum, and some have been trying to recruit Black academic staff who they hope will bring more Black scholarship and voices into the academy. Unfortunately, few of these new adjustments that bring diversity to the curriculum represent the work of South African scholars or scholars based in Africa. As Lenore Manderson and Susan Levine write, "how medical anthropologists think and write, in South Africa as elsewhere, is tethered to the Euro-American canon" (2018, 566). This is true for most anthropologists in South Africa, especially the older generation, who see themselves as the gatekeepers of the anthropological tradition, for whom producers of theory and cutting-edge scholarship are to be found in the global North.

When I look back on my education in anthropology, I know more about work of anthropologists based in the United States than I do about the work of African or South African anthropologists. The same holds true for most of my contemporaries. In the concluding paragraph of his book on the history of the study of anthropology in South Africa from 1920 to 1990, David Hammond-Tooke writes, "the future of anthropology in South Africa will undoubtedly depend to a large extent on the degree to which Black scholars are drawn into the discipline" (1997, 190). He goes on to name the Black scholars who have made important contributions—Seetsele Modiri Molema, Solomon T. Plaatje, John Henderson Soga, Z. K. Matthews, Archie Mafeje, Absolom Vilakazi, Harriet Ngubane, and Cecil Manona. While I recognize some of these names, I did not learn about them in any of the undergraduate or graduate anthropology courses I took. The graduate students I encountered at the University of the Witwatersrand a decade and a half later were also not aware of the work of these anthropologists. To guard against the continued omission of the work of Black anthropologists, in 2015 and 2016 I was able to design and teach a course on ethnographic writing and analysis. I deliberately began the course with readings from or about Black women anthropologists. I wanted to remind the students (more than half of whom were Black and the majority of whom were women) that there were many anthropologists who looked just like them who had made powerful and important contributions in shaping how the world sees a particular place, group of people or individual. I tried (and continue to try) to impress upon them what I learned from those whose shoulders I stand on: that through reading and citing (if the work is relevant to the issue), they have the power to bring attention to the work of people on the margins. They can actively "bring with them" other scholars; citation gives them the power to reproduce a world of chosen kin whose writings speak to the socio-economic and political realities that they can identify with.

Notes

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1. Meaning "of the earth" (Siswati).

2. I acknowledge that what drives this North/South divide are economic pressures and funding norms that shape publishing. Scholars from the global North have access to grants and funds that allow them to travel to the global South to conduct research. Consequently, research agendas are largely set in the global North.

3. This was a pilot course designed and facilitated by E:SEO, a Chilean organization.

4. For me, epistemic generosity is about acknowledging that my collaborators and I are differently positioned in terms of our access to resources (academic and otherwise) and to networks. It stems from being conscious of how existing hierarchies, power dynamics and practices came to be and how they are perpetuated. Practices of epistemic generosity require disrupting these processes. See Tsampiras and Muller (2018, 14) and Tsampiras, Mkhwanazi, and Hume (2018, 219) for examples of what practices of epistemic generosity may look like.

5. Both of these universities are historically White, English-speaking universities.

6. The intention behind the book was to continue to document a history of anthropology in South Africa taken from Hammond-Tooke's *Imperfect Interpreters: South Africa's Anthropologists, 1920–1990* (1997).

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