

# Legitimate agents of knowledge, who are they?

Knowledge construction and knowledge translation are buzz words in academia. But who should be regarded as legitimate agents of knowledge? Whose beliefs should hold the status of being legitimate knowledge, and what kinds of truths count as legitimate knowledge? These are questions that went through my mind as I scanned through old copies of *Curationis*. What I found made me realise that as Black women, we have not fully affirmed our status as legitimate agents of knowledge in this country.

In post-colonialism the knowledge agents are defined as those persons who experienced subjugation, domination and displacement and exclusion from knowledge production about their own experiences (Anderson, 2002: 7; Collins, 1990: 221). The prerequisite for recognition as a legitimate agent of knowledge production about black women is living as a black woman and sharing the black woman's historical and cultural conditions (Collins, 1990: 221). In other words, only a black woman researcher is in a position to construct historically and culturally accurate and sensitive knowledge about black women's experiences. But that is not necessarily the case in the copies of this journal that I went through. Almost anyone, but the Black women claimed to know something about Black women. This is evidenced by the titles about Black women by authors of different races or culture.

Post-colonial black feminism has its origins from the African-American scholars who started questioning the status of African-American scholars in the construction of knowledge about black women in the United States of America (USA) after colonialism. Post-colonialism is extended to the historical period long after colonialism during which blacks and women in particular were excluded from all knowledge production processes and research.

Post-apartheid black feminist epistemology is the term that I invented in order to acknowledge the similarities and differences in the post-colonial period and the post-apartheid period in terms of the marginalisation of Black women in knowledge production. When black women from the USA and elsewhere received recognition and legitimate status in knowledge production in the post-colonial era, this was not the case for the black women in South Africa. The black South African woman continued to be marginalised and oppressed under the apartheid system long after her sisters from the North experienced liberation to produce knowledge about themselves.

South Africa was under the apartheid system from 1948 after hundreds of years of colonialism. The apartheid system was

only abolished in the early 1990s. That system created racial inequalities under a strict legally enforced racial system. Races were divided socially, economically and politically. The races viewed as 'inferior', particularly blacks, were given inferior education, known as Bantu education (Gass, 2004). With that type of education and the racist barriers it was difficult for even the most intelligent Black man or woman to engage in any research and knowledge construction. But that is over now or is it?

During both periods, i.e. colonialism and apartheid, black women could not partake in knowledge construction about their own experiences due to various obstacles. Firstly, the inferior education system offered to them by the apartheid system prevented black women from pursuing academic and scholarly work. Secondly, there was a common African culture that promoted educating boys rather than girls.

Thirdly, those few black women who managed to get education and were enlightened both educationally and politically became actively involved in politics rather than women's issues per se. Political issues such as the struggle against the oppression of the apartheid system were more important for the whole country and took priority against women's issues (Hassim, 1991: 95).

Fourthly, the white feminists began to engage in research and knowledge production activities, which indirectly further marginalised black women. The white feminists began to speak on behalf of black women and to write about black women's experiences from their own (white) perspectives. Lack of cultural insight and little or no understanding of some basic black women's social behaviours resulted in failure of the white feminists to appreciate or interpret the black women's issues truthfully or accurately. The inaccurate interpretations resulted in the production of inaccurate and therefore illegitimate knowledge about black women. By definition and criteria set out by the post-colonial black feminists, the white feminists were not and are still not the legitimate agents of knowledge production about black women's experiences (Hassim, 1991: 95). However the articles in the most of the copies of this journal give another picture.

The few black women who managed to be admitted for education at universities were further prevented from becoming agents of knowledge development about black women's issues. These black women scholars were forced to comply with the prescribed Eurocentric, masculine epistemologies and research methods, which promoted positivist knowledge at the expense of transformational knowledge development. The

black women scholars were also forced to replace their individual and cultural ways of knowing with Western specialised thoughts (Collins, 1990: 221).

It is almost two decades since apartheid was abolished and hundreds of years after colonialism, but information or knowledge about black women's experiences is still produced by the "other". This has a potential for misrepresentation of information or knowledge about black women's experiences.

In inventing the post-apartheid black feminist epistemology, I pose the same epistemological questions about knowledge production, legitimacy of the agents of knowledge production, and what should be regarded as legitimate knowledge about black women in the post-apartheid period. I propose the acknowledgement of black women as the legitimate agents of knowledge production about black women and their experiences. These include ordinary black women and black women scholars and researchers. I further propose the acknowledgement and recognition of the experiences of black women as legitimate knowledge, because that knowledge is based on black women's cultural ways of knowing. I further propose that only knowledge that has been validated by ordinary black women as a true reflection or interpretation of their experiences should be regarded as legitimate knowledge about black women's experiences. As a black woman and nurse scholar and researcher in South Africa, I therefore call upon all black nurse researchers to take their responsibility of knowledge construction seriously and take the lead in knowledge translation and publication.

I further propose that in the post-apartheid era, black and white women post-apartheid feminists conduct research collaboratively and in mutual partnerships. In that way, both black and white feminist scholars can be recognised as legitimate agents of knowledge production. I hope to see this in all future publications of this journal.

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# This Issue

There are many challenges which midwives are facing today. The article that describes the experiences of midwives managing women during labour at a tertiary care hospital in the Limpopo Province would be important to understand how those challenges can be addressed.

Lay Counselors have a major role to play in ensuring provision of Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) services for the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV and AIDS. It would be interesting to read the article on experiences of the lay counsellors who provide VCT for the PMTCT of HIV and AIDS in the Capricorn District, Limpopo Province.

Child headed families have now become the order of the day in the advent of HIV and AIDS. An article on a situational analysis of child-headed households in South Africa would be important to understand the aftermath of HIV and AIDS.

How do we ensure Sexual Health Dialogue between parents and teenagers? This would be an interesting article to read. Another article that I would like to encourage you read is on the factors contributing to poor Glycaemic control in Diabetic patients at Mopani District.

The last article deals with cultural knowledge of Non-Muslim nurses working in Saudi Arabian obstetric units.

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