CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Colloquy

CITATION AS CEREMONY: #SayHerName, #CiteBlackWomen, and the Practice of Reparative Enunciation

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Rem'mie Fells.
Breonna Taylor.
Nina Pop.
Korryn Gaines.
Aiyana Stanley-Peterson.
Layleen Xtravaganza Cubilette Polanco.
Sandra Bland.

Wells-Barnett (1895).
Hurston (1935).
Primus (1966).
Mullings (1984).
Bolles (1996).
Thomas (2004).
Reese (2019).

"Audre Lorde."
"Ashé," we murmured in reply. An Ozarka bottle crinkled affirmatively as the facilitator sprinkled a bit of water onto a potted pothos plant.

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"Nanny of the Maroons!"

"Ashé!" Resounding this time, swelled by the pride of resistance.

"My great grandmother Ida Bowles," I offered quietly, adding my own lineage to the collective.

"Ashé."

"Miss Penny Proud."

"Ashé, ashé!" We replied emphatically this time, pinched by the grief for a Black transwoman slain just up the block from Tremé's Community Book Center where we were gathered for the evening's panel about labor organizing. After each name was peppered in, the water bottle crinkled and the three dozen of us voiced affirmation. The libations ceremony ended with a thick moment of silence honoring those ancestors whose names we will never know. The plant was tucked back onto its windowsill home and the facilitator went over the agenda, handwritten in multicolor markers on chart paper.

Life and death went on.

While these libations were offered on Bayou Road, one of New Orleans's last Black cultural corridors, they form part of a wide topography of secular-spiritual naming practices that stretch across the Americas and into a digitally mediated diaspora. There we find #SayHerName, a protest hashtag that resists the invisibilization of violence against Black women amid the swell of activism against spectacular murders of Black boys and men by the state. Coined in hashtag form in 2014 by the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS),[1] #SayHerName draws on longer histories of transfeminist of color organizing like Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson's leadership in STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries). Rather than an additive politic—*the police kill us too!*—the hashtag #SayHerName is a fractal intervention that radically alters the terrain of Black struggle.

The list of names that opens this essay, each circulated with the demand to #SayHerName, refuses several commonsense binaries that subtend liberal politics: state vs. interpersonal violence; trans vs. non-trans women; armed vs. innocent victims. Rem'mie Fells was murdered and dismembered by a boy I grew up with blocks from my adolescent stomping grounds—her sacred, gender-defiant body torn asunder by the lethal force of trans-antagonism and misogyny. Korryn Gaines was a sovereign Black mama who dared defend her child against the armed forces entering her Baltimore home. If she had been able to make $500 bail, maybe Layleen Xtravaganza Cubilette Polanco would still be twirling on her haters, but instead, corrections staff prevented her from taking her epilepsy

medication, and she was left to seize uncontrollably and die in solitary confinement on Rikers Island. The deaths of these women are parenthetical to the mainstream narrative of Black Lives Matter, one that reduces a century of political activism to the archetype of an unarmed Black boy murdered on camera by the police. In that narrow frame, deaths like those of Fells, Gaines, and Polanco are by turns private, justified, and accidental. Tragic? Of course. Political? No.

#SayHerName refuses the lie that these Black women's deaths lie outside the realm of politics. From vigils to protests to literal Twitter threads, the hashtag stitches together a Black feminist resistance to patriarchal violence that weaves through the Combahee River Collective organizing against murders in Boston in the 1970s and Black women organizing against the Grim Sleeper serial killer in Los Angeles a decade later (Grigsby 2014).[2] The ritual listing of these names is a fundamentally *citational* technology, one that simultaneously calls in our newest ancestors and calls out the structures of violence that stole them from us.

In this sense, both #SayHerName and the Bayou Road libations ceremony are legible as archives of affect (Thomas 2019). Following Deborah Thomas (2019, 7), archives of affect are "technologies of deep recognition" that "can cultivate a sense of mutuality that not only exposes complicity but also demands collective accountability." The mutuality produced by these modes of public citation grounds a Black feminist political ethic that materially organizes for accountability—this is one way that we "tend to the Black dead and dying: to tend to the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death" (Sharpe 2016, 10). How, though, does this embodied mode of citation intersect with textual genres of citation, such as those invoked by the #CiteBlackWomen hashtag?

These impulses—*say her name, cite Black women*—intersect at the site of erasure that renders Black women alternately invisible, incidental, and illegible. The two hashtags bridge digital communities and material politics, syncopated rhythms that insist on presencing Black women in spaces we were never meant to survive (Lorde 1978). A two-strand twist of invitation and indictment, #SayHerName calls in a capacious vision of Black womanhood while calling out liberal respectability. Styled the same way, #CiteBlackWomen invites academics and the broader digital public to engage with Black women's scholarship while it indicts the systemic erasure of Black women's names from the literal and figurative indexes of our disciplines.

Citation is ceremony, and a bibliography is an altar—a literary libation invoking the ancestors of the word, honoring those who make it possible for the text to emerge. Textual citation calls forth the names of both the living and the dead, crafting a horizontal genealogy of those with whom we share mitochondrial markers of meaning. Just like in the family trees of Black folks in the Americas, malignant names are listed in our bibliographies, those rotten apples we hate-cite and read against themselves.[3]

For anthropologists, citation is also a methodological concern. When our interlocutors appear in the text, do they arrive only for the purpose of illustration? Beyond a catchy chapter title, are we honoring the words of those whose stories put lines on our CV and food in our refrigerators? Careful, ethical ethnography *cites* our research participants as thought and theory partners in the effort to speak back to the silences and violences of extant social science. Citation, then, can function as a mode of Black relation, in which the writer releases the Enlightenment lie of sole authorship to embrace the polyphonous nature of the ethnographic text.

In our discipline, the citation of Black women can mirror the worst tendencies of ethnography. Black women's work is trotted out in a list of regional exemplars or lifted as an illustration of a systemic pattern illuminated by Michel Foucault or Pierre Bourdieu or Bruno Latour or, or, or. What would it mean to teach governmentality through Deborah Thomas or kinship through Zora Neale Hurston? Reframing our approach to theory in this way would help us further dislodge empire's tenterhooks from our ways of teaching the social world, a project already begun in earnest by formations like the Applied Anthropology program at Oregon State University, where a collective of graduate students created the Decanonization Syllabus (Buell et al. 2019). In this model, canonical man-cestors like Marcel Mauss and Franz Boas are swapped out one for one by the likes of Makareti Papakura and Anténor Firmin, sweet turbinado in the place of Splenda. Moving from the register of legibility to the deeper lexicon of mutuality, #CiteBlackWomen invites *all* of us to grow beyond the transactional mode re-placing Black women's work in a slot originally carved out by and for white thought, and instead becoming fluent in Black women's scholarship, so that we begin to think, write, and yes, *speak* in Black feminist grammars in the first instance.

Conventional metrics of academic citation attend to frequency as an analytic and involve computational queries like: How many Black women are cited in this paper? How many times was each one cited? Parenthetically or quoted? If quoted, was it an in-line citation or a block quote? If it was a block quote, was

it an epigraph or used as a segue between sections of a chapter? These questions are crucial to assaying the material valuation of Black women's intellectual labor within the academic economy and provide a starting point for a just appraisal. They emerge from a market logic in which citations are receipts for a debt owed to those whose ideas we build on; we "give credit where credit is due," because we have inherited a transactional framework for citation. In a context where power, privilege, and publishing are unevenly distributed across axes of race, gender, ability, sexuality, and nation, it is imperative for those who have accrued such resources to use the citational market to redistribute them.

By contrast, when we engage citation as a practice of *relation*, we shift away from market-based approaches to attend to the quotidian suite of academic, political, and spiritual "creative *practices of refusal*—nimble and strategic practices that undermine the categories of the dominant" (Campt 2017, 32). In her work on photographic practice in the Black diaspora, Tina Campt (2017, 4) pushes us to understand the quotidian "as a practice, rather than an act/ion. It is a practice honed by the dispossessed in the struggle to create possibility within the constraints of everyday life." These everyday citational practices are recursive and reparative—in the forging of relation, they "sound an ordinary note of care" (Sharpe 2016, 132). #SayHerName and #CiteBlackWomen are congruent repertoires of reparative enunciation, operating in different octaves in the dissonant symphony of Black life and death.

Atatiana Jefferson.
Monika Diamond.
Rekia Boyd.
Latasha Harlins.
Riah Milton.
Pearlie Golden.
Kayla Moore.
Nia Wilson.

Day (1932).
Dunham (1947).
Gonzalez (1988).
Harrison (1991).
Cox (2015).
Smith (2016).
Mariner (2019).

I sing these names as a junior scholar whose campus is under a mandatory evacuation order for fear of a wildfire raging less than a mile away. My students log into class from the cars that they lived in long before the pandemic, desperately gambling on the economic promise of a college degree even in a moment when dozens of prestigious universities are predicted to "perish" in the coming years (Galloway 2020). I am acutely aware that the academic infrastructure I will leave behind is not the one I entered, and that armed white supremacists gallivant on streets painted with "BLACK LIVES MATTER." At the moment, discrete acts of citation trapped within the academic text do little to defend Black life. The practice of relational citation demands more—don't cite Black women in JSTOR if you do nothing to protect and defend Black women in your department, on your campus, and in your city. At the moment, I don't want to know if you cited my book or articles—I want to know if there is space to lay out an altar here, because the ceremony must go on.

ABSTRACT

Liberal politics are subtended by several fatal, commonsense binaries: state vs. interpersonal violence; trans vs. non-trans women; armed vs. innocent victims. Each of these binaries render Black women alternately invisible, incidental, and illegible. In this essay, I examine the hashtags #SayHerName and #CiteBlackWomen as citational practices of reparative enunciation that refuse these binaries. When citation is practiced as a form of relation, it offers a model for an ethical ethnographic practice in which we cite our research participants as thought and theory partners in an effort to speak back to the silences and violences of extant social science. [citational politics; Black feminism; grief; digital activism; social media]

NOTES

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1. For more on the #SayHerName campaign, see African American Policy Forum | Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies 2015.
2. The Grim Sleeper is a moniker given to Lonnie Franklin Jr., a serial killer who murdered at least sixteen Black women in South Central Los Angeles between 1984 and 2010. His reign of terror was met with fierce and organized resistance from Black women activists, particularly those invested in reproductive justice. This nexus of Black feminist praxis, Black geographies, and Black terror is theorized by Juli Grigsby (2014).
3. We see you, Hegel.

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