

A Playful But Also Very Serious Love Letter to Koleka Putuma's Citations

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This text thinks through citations as a technology of “epistepaxis”, an approach that involves studying and analysing practices as sites for theorising, “with the hope of ushering in a realignment of theory, practice, and politics based on the need to create a more just world.”¹

Three sites of reflections are explored: citational politics, citational practice in climate change research and selected works by South African poet Koleka Putuma.²

Throughout, I refer to my own experiences navigating citational practices in climate change research as part of my PhD research project, titled “The Politics and Poetics of Climate Change in South Africa and Nigeria.” While the interdisciplinary field in which my PhD is situated, African Studies, has a long and important tradition of critiquing the impacts of “epistemic violence,”³ caused by imposing Eurocentric systems of knowledge in Africa,⁴ there appears to be little attention to citational practice in the field. I respond to this gap by building on recent attention to citational politics in scholarly debate, calling attention to the need for justice in respect of who benefits from academic research, who it centres and how particular issues or people are studied.⁵

Theoretically and methodologically, pairing an exploratory analysis of a database of climate change researchers with poetics is an opportunity to apply Katherine McKittrick's approach of textual accumulation as “an ongoing method of gathering multifariously textured tales, narratives, fictions, whispers... narratives that push up against and subvert prevailing colonial and imperial knowledge systems by centring and legitimising other (black) ways of knowing.”⁶

1 Swartz, Sharlene, Cooper, Adam, Batan, Clarence M. and Kropff Causa, Laura. Eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Global South Youth Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

2 The title of this essay is adapted from Gqola, Pumla Dineo. “a playful but also very serious love letter to gabrielle goliath”. In *Surfacing*. Edited by Desiree Lewis and Gabeba Baderoon. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2021. As with academic conventions, citations above or below texts often convey specific power dynamics. In this text they therefore appear alongside, an attempt to spatialise and visually respond to citational justice.

3 See Spivak, Gayatri. “Can the subaltern speak?”. In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1988. pp. 271–316.

4 See Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Invention of Africa Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988; Thiongo, Ngugi wa. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House. 1986; Oye`wùmí, Oyèrónké. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

5 See Laher, Sumaya, Fynn, Angelo and Kramer, Sherianne. *Transforming Research Methods in the Social Sciences: Case Studies from South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019; Torres, Rose Ann and Nyaga, Dionisio. *Critical Research Methodologies*. Leiden: Brill. 2021.

6 McKittrick, Katherine. “Dear April: The Aesthetics of Black Miscellanea”. *Antipode*. Vol. 54. No. 1. 2022 p. 5.

As I am interested in expanding conventional understandings of citations in my two areas of research—African Studies and climate change—I adopt a subjective and reflexive approach. These reflections are compartmentalised into three episodes: in the first, I contemplate citational politics, drawing from personal experience and existing literature; in the second, I gather fragments from an exploratory survey investigating the citational practices of climate change researchers in South Africa and Nigeria; finally, I explore how the work of South African poet Koleka Putuma offers new directions for conversations on citations.

Citational Politics

A few months after beginning my PhD at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel, in 2019, I presented on my proposed topic and though the contours of the project have shifted significantly in the four years since, the central interest of my thesis has remained the same: how can we better *know* climate change in Africa, beyond the often inaccessible field of climate science? As a social scientist, scoping the scales of long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns or navigating the myriad implications thereof can be daunting without the scaffolding of climate modelling to lean on. This is even worse when interested in how this plays out in African contexts, given the streetlight effect in climate change research on Africa.⁷ In the presentation, I discussed my reasons for choosing South Africa and Nigeria as case studies: the two countries both have extraction-based economies, simultaneously contribute to and are made vulnerable by anthropogenic climate change, and despite their economic might, are subject to the power imbalances in Africa-focused climate-related research.

I also shared concerns that arose during my preliminary literature review during which I discovered that most of the research on climate change in Africa appeared to be conducted by scholars and scientists from or based in the Global North. Eyob Balcha Gebremariam summarises the

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The streetlight effect, also referred to as “the drunkard’s search”, refers to instances where the research focus is shaped by convenience or data availability rather than relevance or policy import. See Hendrix, Cullen S. “The Streetlight Effect in Climate Change Research in Africa”. *Global Environmental Change*. Vol. 34. 2017. pp. 137–47.

causes and implications of this well:

The power imbalances in the Africa-focused climate-related research are manifestations of the overarching epistemic injustice. The epistemic injustice is then translated into structural and institutional inequalities in the allocation of resources, the extractive research partnerships, the dominance and imposition of research agenda, the use of academic research to pursue the economic and political interests of the global-north, the perpetuation of the unfair and exploitative relations between the global-north and Africa.⁸

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Gebremariam, Eyob Balcha. "The Primacy of Epistemic Justice". Perivoli Africa Research Centre, University of Bristol. Available at <https://parc.bristol.ac.uk/the-primacy-of-epistemic-justice/> (accessed 2023-01-25).

Before I could develop this line of thought during my presentation further, a colleague interjected with the dreaded "this is more of a comment than a question" and proceeded to recommend that I read the work of Bruno Latour before pursuing any further research into either climate science or knowledge about climate change. I was rankled by the implicit assumption that I had not read Latour or ascribed to the belief that "it is expected to cite Latour when working in or with climate scholarship" as my colleague succinctly put it. This is not in any way a qualm with Latour.⁹ I was annoyed that pointing out the dominance of white men from the Western countries in climate change research resulted in one white male directing me to another. This early unsolicited citation advice has been a repeated occurrence over the years, not always pointing towards Latour but a bevy of similar behemoths. Unfortunately, I am sure this personal anecdote has been experienced by many others. McKittrick muses:

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It is almost impossible to avoid Latour's influence in recent theoretical and social scientific work on nature and ecology; his reinvention as a climate scholar in the last two decades of his life came at the tail end of a long career that proved formative to the development of Science and Technology Studies.

I have noticed that each year our graduate students present their thesis proposals, during the question and

answer period, only the black students are asked if they have read x or y or z. The nonblack students are asked about their research and the black students are given reading lists. This happens to me, this happens to us, too. Have you read [insert name of theorist] on animals? Oh! You must. You need this. Your project on black things will suffer if you have not read what I have read. Here is a list of what I have read and what I *know* you have not read. Here is a list of what you do not know. Here is a list of what I am reading for you and your book on black things. Look! Look!... Citations are economized.

Some citations are unfreeing.¹⁰

Rather than become resentful of reference recommendations, I started to observe my own citation practices—who I was reading and referencing and why—a starting point for ingraining a justice orientation into my own citations. Attention to citational politics has tended to focus on race and gender: for example, Carrie Mott and Daniel Cockayne conceive of citations as a problematic technology that contributes to the reproduction of the white heteromascularity of thought and scholarship.¹¹ Citational justice collectives tend to be similarly organised.¹² I started to think about other concerns relative to my own research, for example in the context of Africa-related climate change, citing according to geography. Additionally, my own status as an emerging scholar meant that I wanted to think about aspirational citing, for example by ensuring that the foundational work of key scholars is not ignored while still trying to promote citational justice by making a conscious effort to find and cite other emerging scholars.

In this regard, McKittrick briefly acknowledges critiques of citation metrics and impact factors, but instead focuses on the functions of

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McKittrick, Katherine. *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2021. p. 15.

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Mott, Carrie and Cockayne, Daniel. "Citation matters: mobilizing the politics of citation toward a practice of "conscientious engagement"". *Gender, Place & Culture*. Vol. 24. No. 7. 2017. pp. 954–73.

12

See Smith, Christen et al. "Cite Black Women: A Critical Praxis (A Statement)". *Feminist Anthropology*. Vol. 2. No. 1. 2021. pp. 10–17.

referencing in black studies and how this “uncover a lesson that cannot be contained within the main text.”¹³ This sentiment is echoed by Legacy Russell who asks, “what happens when the footnotes become the text?”¹⁴ These considerations found their way into an MA course that I taught at the University of Basel, titled “Understanding Injustice in Knowledge”, which used *Epistemic Injustice* (2007) by Miranda Fricker as a touchstone for engaging with knowledge politics.¹⁵ Each student was expected to develop a case study so that together we had a range of topics to use as sites for analysing issues related to knowledge production. These included artificial intelligence in Brazil, how endometriosis and severe menstrual pain are researched, homelessness in Switzerland and more. My own “case study” referred to throughout the course was knowledge politics in climate change research in and about African countries.

During one of the seminars, we focused on citational politics and discussed Sarah Ahmed’s decision not to cite white men in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017). Some students were antagonised by what they felt was a politics of exclusion until I proposed the reverse: instead of excluding one dominant group, what if they elected to only cite another, under-cited group? They were more amenable to this, despite it confirming Ahmed’s caution that “a fantasy of inclusion is a technique of exclusion.”¹⁶ Her blunt citational policy stuck with me long after the semester’s end, not necessarily something I wanted to emulate but nonetheless a lodestar for breaking the habit of heedless referencing.

For McKittrick however, while Ahmed’s citation project to decentre “the citations, and thus the experiences, of white men unmakes a scholarly system that champions and normalizes white patriarchal scholarly traditions”, it is simultaneously tricky to pose the following questions:

Do we unlearn whom we do not cite? And what of our

13
McKittrick, *Dear Science*, p. 19.

14
Russell, Legacy. “On Footnotes”. 29 November 2021. AICA-USA Distinguished Critic Lecture. Available at <https://www.veralistcenter.org/events/aica-usa-distinguished-critic-lecture-legacy-russell/> (accessed 2023-02-02).

15
Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2007.

16
Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press. 2017. p. 112.

teaching practice? Do we teach refusal? Can we not teach our students to engage with various authors and narratives, critically, while also asking them to raise up the work of black women and other scholars, writers, artists, interviewees, teachers, who go unrecognized? How do we teach each other to read (disapprove, evaluate, critique, use, forget, abandon, remember) “white men” or other powerful scholars?¹⁷

Soon after teaching this course, the “Reuters Hot List” (henceforth “the list”) was published and I was forced to reckon with the questions posed by McKittrick, this time in direct relation to my own research area. The list identifies and ranks the top 1,000 climate experts according to the combination of three criteria: how many research papers published on topics related to climate change; how often those papers are cited by other scientists in similar fields of study; and how often those papers are referenced in the press, social media, policy papers and other outlets.¹⁸ I provide this detail not to affirm the power of the list or to reify the criteria on which it is based but illustrate how the roots of citational injustice run deep in the field of climate change research. Of the 1,000 climate experts listed, 122 are female, 5 are from Africa. The survey does not include any race statistics. The implications for who gets cited (and thus amplified) as a result of this list are manifold.

The list left me conflicted: on the one hand, I wanted to move away from ingrained expectations of citing-for-legitimacy; on the other, I felt compelled to address the problematics of citational visibility in climate change research and the two imperatives felt incongruent. After all, before the academic footnote came into existence, the authority of the author, their moral and intellectual stature, were inherent in what they said, not in their sources.¹⁹ And yet, citations are treated as persuasive

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Tamman, Maurice. “The Reuters Hot List”. *Reuters*. 20 April 2021. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/climate-change-scientists-list/> (accessed 2023-01-25).

19

Stevens, Anne H. and Williams, Jay. “The Footnote, in Theory”. *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 32. No. 2. Winter 2006. p. 211.

proof that the author has sufficiently covered the field, that enough evidence has been marshalled, that the status of that evidence has been sufficiently questioned. In *The Footnote: A Curious History*, Anthony Grafton points out that citations in scientific works do far more than identify the originators of ideas and the sources of data:

They reflect the intellectual styles of different national scientific communities, the pedagogical methods of different graduate programs, and the literary preferences of different journal editors. They regularly refer not only to the precise sources of scientists' data, but also to larger theories and theoretical schools with which the authors wish or hope to be associated.²⁰

Mott and Cockayne observe at least two interrelated aspects to this: who is citing whom—here, citation is an acknowledgement of the scholarship informing research and how often articles or other works are cited—citation as an academic performance metric. Both the citations within an individual article and how many times an article is cited by others have complex politics.²¹ Relatedly, Natasha Jones observes four interesting patterns in citational practice:

- (1) absence, or the un/intentional exclusion of scholarship from marginalized scholars²²;
- (2) cursory mentions, or performatively name-dropping a prominent marginalized scholar²³;
- (3) listing, or naming scholars in list form either to bolster the number of marginalized scholars included (without really engaging with their work) or listing to amplify marginalized scholars by calling attention to the existence of the work, or tracing the development of concepts and ideas that have gone unacknowledged in mainstream scholarship; and finally

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Grafton, Anthony. *The Footnote: A Curious History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1997. p. 13.

21

Mott and Cockayne, "Citation matters", p. 961

22

This was an initial motivator for the citational justice movement which is concerned with *distributive justice* (the idea that the goods that flow from being cited should be apportioned equably among people of different ethnicities, genders and sexualities); *citational justice as citational fairness* (that scholars who have done good work get cited as much as they deserve, even in the face of possible biases); and *retributive justice* (individuals who've done wrong shouldn't continue to have a major presence in citations). For more see Anonymous Scholar. "Citational Justice and the Growth of Knowledge". *Aero*. 19 December 2019. Available at: <https://areomagazine.com/2019/12/19/citational-justice-and-the-growth-of-knowledge/> (accessed 2023-02-02).

23

"Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger through them for quotations which you thought might valuably support an already conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us?" Lorde, Audre. "Letter to Mary Daly" [1984]. In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. 2007. p. 68. Cited in McKittrick, *Dear Science*, p. 26.

(4) citational practices that focus on coalitional engagement, using examples of the Cite Black Women movement.²⁴

This scholarship on citational politics confirms Constantine Nakassis's assertion that the citation is an interdiscursive act that represents some other event of discourse, weaving together different events into one complex act.²⁵ And so, rather than quantitatively evaluating citational practice through impact in either climate change or African Studies, I wanted to learn more about these interdiscursive aspects of citational practice.

Researching Citational Practice

Following Ayesha Tandon's analysis of its biases, one positive outcome of the "Reuters Hot List" is a new "Global South Climate Database", developed by Carbon Brief, supported by the Oxford Climate Journalism Network.²⁶ This publicly available, searchable database of climate scientists and experts lists each person's nationality, area of expertise, institutional affiliation and contact details. At the time of writing, 911 experts from 103 countries were on the list, verified as a national of at least one country in the Global South and as having relevant expertise in climate science, energy or policy.

As this database offered an opportunity to dig deeper into the experiences of climate change researchers from the two case studies from my PhD project, I developed an exploratory online survey. Rather than empirically quantifying their citation metrics, my aim was to work with a modest sample that could be used to explore research questions related to citational practices. I filtered the "Global South Climate Database" for experts from Nigeria and South Africa, and shared the survey with 69 people on 15 January 2023. By 5 February 2023, 16 people had responded (23%). In addition to self-identified researchers (6) and

24
Jones, Natasha N. "Citation Practices: Shifting Paradigms". *OPEN WORDS: ACCESS AND ENGLISH STUDIES*. Vol. 13. No. 1. December 2021. pp. 144–49.

25
Nakassis, Constantine V. "Citation and Citationality". *Signs and Society*. Vol. 1. No. 1. Spring 2013.

26
Tandon, Ayesha. "Analysis: The lack of diversity in climate-science research". *Carbon Brief*. 6 October 2021. Available at <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-the-lack-of-diversity-in-climate-science-research/> (accessed 2023-0205).

professors (3), respondents also included those who identify as climate change experts and work in industries or fields other than academia: directors, consultants, analysts, policymakers (7). Together, respondents' research expertise included climate change modelling, public international law, carbon capture, quantum physics and more.²⁷

The survey questions were grouped according to the following themes: challenges experienced working in climate change research, citational practices and preferences, and knowledge about climate change. Accessing resources was answered as the biggest difficulty personally experienced, followed by getting published and being cited. Specific to citation-related difficulties, the following anecdotes are of interest:

A considerable amount of research work happens outside of the academy, especially in developing countries and as a soft-funded research centre. Since most research work we do is to inform policy-making or support other social actors, we seldom have the time—or funding—to turn our work into peer-reviewed literature. Often, international researchers need our time and expertise to undertake their research, for which they have time and funding to do so in an academic fashion. Peer-reviewed literature reviews often leave out “grey” literature and hence cites overwhelmingly other international research on (not from) South Africa—so local experts are often left out of this process.

My upcoming publication looks at the human rights implication of climate finance policies. Almost all literature in this field was from the Global North, and those from Global South were outside Africa. Those from African authors are not in the research database

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While most included their personal details for further engagement on this subject, the survey results were anonymised. Responses from the survey included here have been lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

managed by Global North institutions.

*On one occasion where both authors were female, and it was a single-blind review, we received a review indicating that we (mentioned by first names) should return to the kitchen and learn how to cook. This was followed by a page-long cooking metaphor on each component of the paper. We have also had work presenting new methods rejected because it was *only* tested in Africa—when papers that *only* test their data on the USA, or a single country in Europe are totally fine. There are also many papers that claim that no work has been done elsewhere on XYZ when we have indeed done that here in Africa.*

Most researchers indicated that they do pay attention to who they cite in their own research, but some did not. One answered that this depends on the audience as

One will not “make it” in journals without certain cross-references—even if that research is not helpful or relevant to local policy processes and knowledge (or simply codifies what local experts already know...)

When asked to indicate certain groups or categories of researchers believed to be consistently under-cited or unacknowledged in climate research, numerous people suggested African scholars, indigenous peoples, Global South scholars, particularly women, developing country experts, social scientists and poor and vulnerable communities. Most found it extremely important to cite African researchers, but more than half did not find it important to cite according to either race and gender considerations. For the majority, the main basis for deciding to cite somebody in their research was indicated as “to advance my argument”,

followed by “it is important to show that I have read research by experts.” Additional answers provided included:

It is also important to start becoming a part of your own research community. Camaraderie and collective thinking also breeds the solutions we need to solve an existential crisis. I also cite people because their work facilitates the growth of a body of knowledge.

Responses to the questions about what constitutes climate change knowledge and who respondents believe is in control of producing and sharing this knowledge will be used to inform further studies. For now, I am interested in the above statement: “I also cite people because their work facilitates the growth of a body of knowledge.” Where the other anecdotes relate to the particularities of the climate knowledge infrastructure, this fragment speaks directly to my aforementioned aspirational citing: instances where the act of citing is approached as simultaneously knowledge-seeking and episteme-building, revealing the potential for citations to be thought of as a technology of epistepaxis. And more than a mere technical function of referencing within a text, intentionally building a body of knowledge with and through that citation suggests that knowledge too can be thought of as embodied citational practice. For Adam Cooper et al.,

This kind of knowledge-seeking forms part of a sensibility that is constantly in dialogue with those most affected by Global inequalities and social injustices, aspiring to validate—as knowledge—people’s strategies to cope with oppressive realities, while simultaneously taking theory seriously.²⁸

28

Cooper, Adam, Swartz, Sharlene, Batan, Clarence M., Krop Causa, Laura. “Realigning Theory, Practice, and Justice in Global South Youth Studies”. In *The Oxford Handbook of Global South Youth Studies*. p. 5.

Trying to find examples of climate change research, both in climate

science or the social sciences, that demonstrates this kind of aspirational citational practice, these instances of epistepaxis, proved to be frustrating. Instead, I turned to what Pumla Dineo Gqola describes as “new ways in which meaning might be further harnessed by placing the creative and the explicitly critical alongside one another.”²⁹ In the next section I discuss how poet Koleka Putuma’s use of citations as part of her poetic form dissolves what Sharlene Swartz identifies as “long-standing divisions between esoteric critical theory that remains in ivory towers and dusty tomes, and empirical research that showcases but does not change the lives of those about whom it writes.”³⁰

Koleka Putuma’s Citations as Epistepaxis

Writing about the genre of eighteenth-century women’s poetry heavily annotated with editorialising commentary, Ruth Knezevich uses the term “scholarly verse” to describe the prevalence of footnotes in their poetry and studies their engagement with intellectual exploration and scholarly discourse by way of these footnotes.³¹ Knezevich explains that during that period, annotations offered the writer a greater range of authorising manoeuvres, for instance by establishing authority for the poet’s voice or managing the reading experience, and thus creating room for the poet to educate her readers by

filling in the gaps left within the verse by providing records of names, dates, and lists of events alluded to in the poetry. Such uses of annotation indicate women writers’ engagement with forms of intellectual discourse typically reserved for men.³²

Knezevich literally takes the notion of marginal occupation, arguing that the literal literary margins offered women writing in the eighteenth century space to engage in gendered critical conversations. Putuma’s scholarly verse does this too, and more. The first poem in her debut

31

Knezevich, Ruth. “Females and Footnotes: Excavating the Genre of Eighteenth-Century Women’s Scholarly Verse.” *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts*. Vol. 6. Issue 2. 2016. pp. 1640–830.

32

Ibid., p. 4.

33

“How my people remember. How my people archive. How we inherit the world.” Emphasis added. Putuma, Koleka. “STORYTELLING”. In *Collective Amnesia*. Cape Town: Manyano Media. 2017. p. 14.

collection *Collective Amnesia* (2017) is one word with an accompanying footnote: “STORYTELLING”.³³ The collection includes four more poems that follow this form, including: “FOOTNOTE”.³⁴

Other than these experiments with form, references are not especially prominent in *Collective Amnesia*, but they are a powerful harbinger of her future footnotes. Consider for example this excerpt from “REFERENCE LIST/BIBLIOGRAPHY”:

- X-Mas gathering
- Patriarchs
- Uncle so-and-so
- Boyfriend #6³⁵

The list continues, including “Black Solidarity”, “campus”, “Apologists, “sjamboks” and more.³⁶ There is no further explanation or editorial commentary, she does not need extra space to engage in gendered critical conversations because these loaded cultural references are more than just prompts; they successfully replace the traditional text-based bibliography. In her second collection, titled *Hullo, Bu-Bye, Koko, Come In* (2021), Putuma’s citational practice is no longer confined to experiments with form—the single-word and footnote combination or the bibliography list. Instead, this collection expands to also include poems that directly address citational politics:

antonyms for citation

when applied to said black woman:

- not enough research.
- said researcher has not gone through enough annals.
- said researcher has just learned about said invisible black woman.
- said researcher’s education was limited to Eurocentric readings of black women.
- said women’s education was committed to making men hypervisible.

34

“Some poems show up to undo your silence.” Emphasis added. Putuma, Koleka “FOOTNOTES”. In *Collective Amnesia*. p. 36.

35

Putuma, Koleka. “REFERENCE LIST/BIBLIOGRAPHY”. In *Collective Amnesia*. p. 94.

36

A sjambok is a heavy leather whip, traditionally made from hippopotamus or rhinoceros hide.

- said researcher’s education only allowed for one exceptional black woman at a time.³⁷

37
Putuma, Koleka. “antonyms for citation”.
In *Hullo, Bu-bye, Koko, Come in*. Cape
Town: Manyano Media. 2021.

Bulleted this way, and like a good poem is wont to do, the work surfaces more questions than answers, while another offers a tactical experience of citational erasure:

the draft begins with a
black woman
backspace
the draft begins with
a citation credited by a
black woman
credited to someone
nonblack
backspace
the draft begins with
an emerging
backspace
a black woman
with potential
backspace
with a feminist
backspace
the draft begins with a feminist white woman
backspacebackspacebackspace
the draft begins with a citation written by a
black woman
credited to a feminist white woman
backspace
the draft begins.³⁸

38
Putuma, Koleka “the draft begins with
a”. In *Hullo, Bu-bye, Koko, Come In*. p. 16.

In her “playful letter” to the artist Gabrielle Goliath from which this essay’s title is drawn, Pumla Dineo Gqola similarly invites readers into an active sensory engagement as she journeys through Goliath’s art. According to Desiree Lewis and Gabeba Baderoon, Gqola presents “an opportunity (rare in a world of knowledge-making where readers are expected to prioritise rational understanding) to sense, gasp and cry.”³⁹ Likewise, “the draft begins with a” offers a journey into knowledge-making, one that actively requests prioritisation of the sensory.

39
Lewis, Desiree and Baderoon, Gabeba.
Eds. “Introduction: Being Black and
Feminist. In *Surfacing*. Johannesburg:
Wits University Press. 2021. p. 13.

I read that poem and imagined Reuters pressing backspace, backspace, backspace when editing their list of climate experts. And countless other institutions doing same across sciences and disciplines, races, genders and geographies.

Putuma explains that in writing *Hullo, Bu-bye, Koko, Come In* she wanted to reflect on personal experiences of travelling and performing outside of South Africa, and more specifically Europe, and to understand different aesthetics and forms of memory, documentation, performance, hyper-visibility and erasure.⁴⁰ The book is divided into four chapters dealing with subjects related to history, the erasure of black women from the archive and more personal poems where she resuscitates the stories of women in her lineage who have had an influence on her life. Peppered between the chapters are quotes from inspirations as diverse as popular South African singer Makhadzi to politician Winnie Madikizela Mandela, constant reminders of Putuma's varied sources of inspiration. She explains,

I wanted these excerpts to serve as a conversation between the poems and an archive of sorts—an archive of black women (living and dead) who are looked at, celebrated, uncited, erased and exploited. I wanted to make visible the words of black women who have had to navigate the complexities of a constant gaze that often renders the “looked at” invisible. In my quest, I wanted to further understand and challenge my own methods of citation, documentation and seeing—and in doing that—invite others to do the same.⁴¹

Throughout the collection, she juxtaposes the materiality of her research with metered verse. “you built this country with your movements too”,

40

Manyano Media. “Product Details: *Hullo, Bu-bye, Koko, Come In*”. Available at <https://www.manyanomedia.com/online-store/HULLO-BU-BYE-KOKO-COME-IN-p302907643> (accessed 2023-02-05).

41

Ibid.

for example, brings much-needed visibility to the role of women in the anti-apartheid struggle and features tight tributes via identifying citations, as seen in this excerpt:

kept in solitary confinement for a year without visitors
or reading matter, charged and sentenced for 5 years
for belonging to a party that only served you⁴² because
you served it in return⁴³

42
Frances Baard. Part of poem, emphasis added.

43
Putuma, Koleka. "you built this country with your movements too". In *Hullo, Bu-bye, Koko, Come In*. p. 70.

Where this poem (and a few others) uses footnotes to cite erased stories or offer additional commentary, the majority of the collection employs endnotes. Not only does this technique create a routine disruption from the extensively researched and often intense subject matter, but it gathers the endnotes together as a standalone poem. This was a risky move and could easily have been frustrating (sending readers to the back of the book to search for references) or fallen flat as a gimmick. Instead, this demonstrates two characteristics that I believe are key for epistepaxis: intentionality and inventiveness.

Putuma's citational strategies in her individual poems (thematic content and form) and in her collections in their totality suggest that not only has careful attention gone into her selection of footnotes and endnotes, but a wilfulness has guided the decisions around who she cites (black women that have been formative to her work, whether seminal scholar, pop star or grandmother), how she cites (strategically and aesthetically) and, most importantly, why she cites (to vent, to praise, to educate, to create elbow room for herself and her readers, to have fun). This intentionality is what facilitates how she harnesses her citations as tools to direct the reader, sometimes steering them deeper into the poem as the main text or towards the reference as the hidden script that becomes the main script.

Hullo, Bu-bye, Koko, Come In draws from myriad sources; the

inventiveness of the collection lies in how diverse poetic metrics, rhetorical registers and source materials—interviews with music icons Brenda Fassie and Miriam Makeba, Netflix documentaries, placards at 2015 Fees Must Fall protests—are braided together. Gathered in concert, the footnotes and endnotes become the text, illustrating Shari Benstock’s claim that “to read a footnote is to be reminded of the inherent multitextuality of all texts.”⁴⁴ To read Putuma’s scholarly verse is to read back along a long lineages of ideas, literature and lives that made her work possible, as well as forwards towards an open-ended path of lyric potential. Or, in Tina Campt’s words, to read “a grammar of possibility.”⁴⁵

Grounded in black feminist and critical race theory, Putuma’s practice of textual accumulation gathers citations as textual fragments to unfold narratives both retrieved from and occupying the margins. Not only do these citations offer clues to erased histories, they also hint at strategies to counter erasure. Her work thus reveals the potential of citations; as technologies of epistepaxis, to usher in a re-alignment of theory, practice and politics based on the need to create a more just world.⁴⁶

McKittrick asks:

What if the practice of referencing, sourcing, and crediting is always bursting with intellectual life and takes us outside ourselves? What if we read outside ourselves not for ourselves but to actively unknow ourselves, to unhinge, and thus come to know each other, intellectually, inside and outside the academy, as collaborators of collective and generous and capacious stories. *Unknowing ourselves...*

Not focusing on reparation of the self, alone, but instead sharing information and stories and resources to build

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Swartz, “A Southern Charter for a Global Youth Studies to Benefit the World”, p. 167.

the capacity for social change. *Alternative outcomes*. The unhinging, unknowing ourselves, opens up learning processes that are uninterested in a self that is economized by citations.”⁴⁷

McKittrick, *Dear Science*, p. 16.

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For me, one outcome of contemplating citational politics has been realising that many of the concerns I have as an emerging scholar—Is my ORCID up to date? How many times have my publications been downloaded? What does my Google Scholar profile look like?—are neuroses foisted upon me by the ways in which academia economises through citations. Another has been learning more about the citational experiences and aspirations of climate change researchers in South and Nigeria, and through this coming to understand the importance of deliberate citing to facilitate the growth of the climate knowledge infrastructure. And finally, analysing Putuma’s scholarly verse has expanded my understanding of the promise of a citation: it can be a way of bringing together intentionality and inventiveness, thus standing meaningfully on its own as a technology of epistepaxis. Together these three accumulative episodes of reflection—contemplating citational politics and the importance of aspiration therein, gathering fragments from peers in recognition that knowledge-seeking and episteme-building is necessarily collaborative, and turning to poetics to expand the margins of scholarly practices—simultaneously *unknow* citations and reify their radical potential.