

Toward Embodying Citations: an ethical obligation

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ABSTRACT: (Academic) citation is a representational practice of hollow, ruined potential professional accumulation of intellectual capital.

FREE THE FILTON-24!

FREE CASEY GOONAN!

FREE MALIK FARRAD MUHAMMAD!

FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS!

FREE, FREE PALESTINE!

GLOBALIZE THE INTIFADA!

KEYWORDS: bullshit, political prisoners, archival silences, citational surveillance, embodied citations



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TOWARD EMBODYING CITATIONS:

an ethical obligation

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Safiya Bukhari
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Safiya_Bukhari.png)

“Today, this minute, this hour (as Malcolm would say), I have come to realize that picking up the gun was/is the easy part. The difficult part is the day-to-day organizing, educating, and showing people by example what needs to be done to create a new society. The hard, painstaking work of changing ourselves into new beings, of loving ourselves and our people, and working with them daily to create a new reality— this is the first revolution, the internal revolution.”

—Safiya Bukhari



We are dismayed by “citation as performance” in the academic institution.

We reject disembodied practices of citation, and meditate on what it would feel like to engage in a liberated citational practice.

We aim to grapple with our contradictions and aspire to be better learners and collaborators in building liberatory systems that serve all of us better.

We stand in militant solidarity with all political prisoners. They are our compass and guide for understanding our present conditions and working towards a liberated future.

From Turtle Island to Palestine, Free Them All!

THE PROJECT

We are interested in baring the messy and iterative nature of grappling with ideas across time, to make connections, to offer critique, and lean into intuitive understandings. What would it look like to treat citations as capturing specific moments, contexts, and forms of ourselves in time? To demonstrate the power in “showing your work” as a process of transforming thought and theory into action— not as stilted, meticulous citations to lean on, but to move beyond the page into liberatory praxis. Rather than attempt to encompass the impossible task of meticulously citing work through parenthetical citations, we ask not only “whose work are we citing?” but how have others’ work fundamentally changed us?

The reality is that our conclusions have been sponged from so many sources and are constantly under critique and (re)assessment, and informed by a whole life experience full of contradictions. In learning from others—how they live, how they think—we have been transformed. The “evidence” of that is in the way that we have grown over time and choose to live in the present. The only way we can represent that patchwork honestly and accurately is through living based on our principles that we owe to so many more people than we can name.

The following pages are what we are calling “fragments” of multiple conversations around citation that were first prompted in April 2025 and evolved into and grounded by our joint Black August study of Black Muslim revolutionary and former political prisoner Safiya Bukhari. We meditate on both the compilation of her writings in *The War Before* as well as Harun Rasiah’s article “Pedagogy of Remembrance: Safiya Asya Bukhari’s Ethics of Solidarity.”

On one hand, these fragments serve as a way to demonstrate the nonlinearity and the iterative nature of building upon each other’s knowledge in real time, and to be honest about the ways in which we come to our conclusions as holistic citational practice. On the other hand, we ask the questions that preoccupy us around revolutionary struggle and have material consequences for movement work, such as,

When are citations harmful to the very people we are trying to support?

How does conventional citational practice facilitate state surveillance?

How do we navigate the dialectic between visibility to the masses and protection from the state?

An informal “personal bibliography” of some of the people that got us here concludes this project.

fragments

g: I want to start by foregrounding Safiya's identity as a Black/New Afrikan Muslim revolutionary and political prisoner. I've been reflecting on the idea of dhikr (remembrance) as a citational practice. Rasiah wrote about "the notion of remembrance discussed here as a spiritual, political, and pedagogical act."

I'm so interested in the idea of dhikr as a pedagogical — and citational — act because it prompts the question: how has this knowledge changed me? How has it made me take account of myself? Heal, rebuild, fortify myself? Helped provide an alternative to carceral systems designed to colonize the mind, body, and soul? As a citational practice, dhikr asks us to look inward. It insists on a reference practice that transcends the gathering of evidence, which can end up feeling like a performative collage of unintegrated voices.

l:

so much to think through here. How vital it is that we remember revolutionaries in revolutionary, non-institutionalized contexts, and to honor them by taking seriously their subversions of our violent conditions.

It's grounding to think about what is appropriate(?) language and vocabulary for not only defining and reflecting upon their struggle in material terms, but also in how we actively keep them in our remembrance long after we've initially encountered them.

How do we keep our teachers alive as we confront our current struggles and revolutionary praxis? And how do we do this in a way that is not extractive or revisionist of their politics? Dhikr is visceral, corporal, and embodied. Exploring citation through the lens of dhikr allows us to draw an explicit connection between citing and remembering as an embodied experience rather than drawing a manufactured thought-line between disembodied (and unintegrated!) voices.

ذکر

I want to cite/remember revolutionaries in the context of their being, rather than attempt to insert them into a context and vocabulary that is not only incompatible with or conducive to the fluidity, flexibility, and iterative existence of their thinking/organizing, but is also directly antithetical to what they stood for.

This further allows us to think about citational praxis (even in all of its academic-ness and institutional rigidity and standards) as a kind of memory work.

g: In the introduction to *The War Before*, Laura Whitehorn wrote, "Safiya was not particularly interested in telling her story; she's interested in helping others see that a struggle for justice is necessary - and worth joining." Safiya's absence in the archival record is parallel to her participation in the struggle to birth new worlds. This gives a different read of 'archival absences', which are generally thought of as losses.

We may not have records of all the ways Safiya 'made it plain' (in the spirit of Malcolm X, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz), and I think that's okay. Our material actions and commitments are the best way to cite her.

l: Returning to this question now several months after you posed it: your mention of archival silences and absences as typically read as a loss makes me think about how we interact with liberalism in the archives. In this field it's commonplace now to agree that archives are never neutral. Of course. But have we really considered that absences are sometimes intentional, even necessary?

I'm thinking about traditions of closed knowledge practices and the importance of gatekeeping information as a protection measure. In LIS and archives spaces greater accessibility to materials means that the information will become networked. There's a point where this urgency to know everything becomes extractive, even colonial. It can allow for surveillance, cooptation, and harmful, revisionist interpretations and politics. This can include sanitizing revolutionary movement work through false representation, framed within a jerry-rigged liberal explanation for how inclusion is the solution when

↳ (thinking about Jalil Muntakim's "illusion of inclusion")

many people harmed by the system are NOT INTERESTED IN BEING INCLUDED!

Not all knowledge is for everyone. And it's also a security practice to redact or dis-include people from the historical record, even if that process has a residual "archival silence" impact... it's always dialectics: How do we navigate the dialectic between visibility to the masses and protection from the state?

written, recorded material is useful — in many cases it's important that knowledge is easily replicable and reproducible, and easy to cite (ha!). But the accessible record doubly betrays itself: The "final product" can be damning to the individuals who produced it as well as the movements; citations can betray a whole movement if we are not careful. Sharing information is dangerous work.

g: Thinking of James Yaki Sayles here. On p. 119 of meditations on wretched of the earth, he reflects on Victor Serge's writing and warns us: "the immediate aim of all repressive forces is more to know, than to repress. to know, in order to repress at the appointed hour, to the extent desired — if not all together. They can't repress what they don't know about."



Puerto Rico Military Map (Public Domain: <https://www.rawpixel.com/image/8908205/image-faces-vintage-public-domain>)

g:

I read this history of Puerto Rico by Jorell Meléndez-Badillo and in it he wrote about early examples of resistance and rebellion by indigenous and Afro-descendent people in the archipelago. He wrote, "many indigenous peoples took to the mountains to live outside the limits of the state and are thus absent from the historical archive. Such silences pose challenges to historians. But if we take an indigenous perspective, absences could also provide a motive for celebration. Disappearing from the archive and from history may have meant surviving the conquest's genocidal thrust." Later,

Meléndez-Badillo wrote about how "maroon communities also existed at this time in places like Jamaica, Haiti, and elsewhere in the Caribbean. In all these cases, the struggle for liberation eluded archives and history books." Perhaps Safiya achieved a citational maroonage of sorts, a citational absence not to be mourned but to be celebrated for all the ways that the state — and the academy — was not able to citationally capture her.

g:

your word choice here is poignant!



Maybe embodied citation is just a more complicated way of describing how we already live. "We are what we consume" (where does that come from?) in the least capitalistic way possible. Everything we interact with informs the way we live, who we are.

Safiya's advocacy work around political prisoners reminds me that while her words are powerful to read, it's important to frame her writings in the direct context of her organizing — she was responding to the moment.

Reading the War Before also struck me because I realize, that as a retrospective compilation, that the book is a kind of dhikr practice that Safiya's friends, family, and comrades engaged with after her death. They continued her lineage, and further invites us to continue her lineage by committing to this work in real life and by committing to the ritual of it.



It's been a few months since I wrote this. I want to offer a self-critique.

In our review session, Jaime said something along the lines of, "I'm trying to avoid using revolutionary language as a metaphor." Suddenly, something clicked for me. It made me self-aware of the ~~incomparable~~ incomparability of absence in the archival record and escaping the bondage of chattel slavery and surviving in the heart of empire. It brought me back to the first time I read Decolonization is not a Metaphor, and the acute self-awareness of how many times I have used the word 'decolonization' metaphorically. I self-critique my metaphorization of maroonage as an opportunist error. It was an error rooted in my desire to coin a phrase that would increase my academic clout and my own investment in petit bourgeois aspirations at the expense of the collective movements that struggle for liberation, both historically and in the present day.

I offer this self-critique because I urgently believe that we need to be clear about what we're up against. We can't afford to obfuscate actual material demands (of decolonization, for example) in metaphors. Maroonage is a historical phenomenon rooted in the very real material life circumstances of Afro-descendent/Black/New Afrikans escaping genocide.

We have to be precise. One of my favorite poets, Darius Simpson, makes it plain:



darius.

@_dariussimpson

we need to get serious. move our analysis away from sectarian identity theatrics. identify what Toni Cade Bambara called "the big enemy". commit ourselves to lives of struggle, rather than these moral positions where we do "the best we can" in isolation from organized strategy.



From what we read about and of Safiya — in the ways in which she chooses to contextualize herself through writing to the public and the way others choose to contextualize Safiya within history — how do we most ethically consider, talk about, and reference Safiya's (and others') movement work in public?

g: I've been thinking about this question in the aftermath of our conversation yesterday. How something didn't sit right with us ~~about~~ that we were reading *The War Before for Black August*, without having committed ourselves to material, organized action.

Jaine and Jorge asked us what our stake in this project is. I think this is the right moment to state it clearly. Our project uplifts the life of Safiya Bukhari because she is one example of how prisoners are the compass of our struggle against capitalist imperialism in both its manifestations of fascism and liberalism. From Palestine to New Afrika, prisoners are our compass in navigating the inevitability of state repression and criminalization.

When we talk about citation as embodied practice, we imagine citation as study, citation as ~~the~~ understanding the demands, conditions, and tactics of political prisoners, because their liberation is inextricably intertwined with our own.



And not only study, but how study manifests itself in the body. There are still a lot of people who are convinced by cartesian understandings of the body and mind being separate. I know at one point in my life I moved through the world that way, by resisting the sensitivity (and knowledge) of my body to listen louder to abstractions that are conjured in the mind. And that's not surprising that those understandings permeate our western, colonial culture... anyway, it is urgent to me that we must return to the body and allow our study, ritual, and discipline to change us materially.

Returning to these fragments several months later, I know that my life has materially changed. I have allowed my thinking to inform my body and vice versa. And this process could not have been as meaningful without community. I have learned so much from active participation in these spaces, so much more than what I could've learned in a book. As you say somewhere else, "the academy is where revolutionary ideas go to die."



I think about citations as bi-directional. It's a dynamic relationship. We have an ethical obligation to Safiya when we cite her. It feels especially important ~~at~~ ^{during} a time when so many concepts (decolonization, maroonage) are weaponized, liberalized, hollowed of ~~and~~ their meaning and correlating ethical obligations to our martyrs and our ancestors.



I appreciate that you name this as an "ethical obligation" because it demands accountability when we cite. We owe it to all of us to trace our lineages and learn from our histories, to understand where we came from and how we got here. So that we can be better equipped to confront our present, material conditions and to maintain our real life, non-metaphorical connections with those who have been imprisoned by the state. It's an ethical obligation to cite political prisoners in a way that honors their very real sacrifices, through continuing to fight for them from the outside.

ADDENDUM

This offering was a practice in political education. We sought to illuminate the mutual obligations between knowing, citing, and acting. We move towards a citational practice that builds community and leads to personal transformation in service of collective liberation.

We rooted our study of embodied citations around the lives and struggles of political prisoners. We center political prisoners in our study because they are most directly impacted by the state's imprisonment and criminalization. Studying, citing, and embodying the tactics and analyses of political prisoners is an essential part in supporting the fight for their liberation and undergoing our own self transformation.

We specifically want to uplift the heroic hunger strike of T. Hoxha, who withheld from eating for 28 days in protest of losing her job at HMP Peterborough prison library due to her political beliefs and association with Palestine Action. After ending her hunger strike demanding a reinstatement of her library job (unsuccessfully), she joined another collective hunger strike with fellow Palestine Action political prisoners. The hunger strikers are demanding the right to a free trial, an end to prison censorship, the deproscription of Palestine Action as a terrorist organization, an end to British taxpayer money to fund the machinery of genocide, and the shut down of Elbit system' sites and subsidiaries in the UK. We stand in militant solidarity with T. Hoxha, the seven other Palestine Action hunger strikers, and all political prisoners.

We return to Safiya: "There is no question that support for political prisoners and prisoners of war should and must be an integral part of any movement for liberation. There is no question, that is, for people who have dedicated their lives to the struggle for freedom in this country. Such people realize that it is not possible to talk about a movement for liberation if you fail to liberate people who are incarcerated as a result of that liberation struggle. What is called into question, therefore, is whether or not we are serious about revolution and liberation."

We encourage all who resonate in some way with this project to learn from and act upon the resources below. Time to get busy.

Political Prisoner Support Resources

<https://www.thejerichomovement.com/>

<https://filtonactionists.com/>

<https://alahrartoronto.org/solidarity-with-t-hoxha-all-hunger-strikers/>

@freemaliknow

@freecaseynow

@prisoners4palestine

personal bibliography



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