Donna Haraway and Banu Subramaniam in Conversation (April 22, 2021—excerpt)

Full conversation available [here](#).

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Banu Subramaniam (BS): I'm struck again and again about the kind of erasures that happen in academic discourse. I think it was several years ago when the field of genetics “discovered” gender! I remember reading a piece, about this, I think it was in *Nature*—and there was no mention of feminist work at all. Below, Anne Fausto-Sterling had a comment pointing out that feminists have been making this point for almost 30 years! Yet, the insight was absorbed but no credit given. And it's not just within the sciences, this happens across different disciplines. We repeatedly find that achievements of feminists, indigenous, queer, and other scholars of color get erased, but the knowledge project moves on in a slightly different form. Ultimately the work gets completely cut off from those activists and the political project that feminist technosciences. I wonder how you see your own work and how it has been taken up within feminist technosciences versus in the sciences. Do you see these tensions in how your work gets taken up?

Donna Haraway (DH): Oh yes, absolutely. Before I address that in more detail, I want to affirm that sense of repeated erasure, repeated disappearing. And I think that the folks who have been most eloquent on this are Indigenous scholars, who have been disappeared in terms of their grappling with health and science and land and food, in terms of grappling with these issues that I think are feminist science studies issues. I'm thinking, of the current generation, people like Zoe

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Todd and a slightly older generation but really the same generation, Kim TallBear and others who, in my view, are, among other things, feminist science scholars. And that they are disappeared, really, amazingly easily. But they also have an astonishing ability to refuse to disappear. Both as peoples and as strong women. And I take heart from that.

In my own work, I am acutely aware that women scholars, trans scholars, queer scholars, scholars of color, scholars who do not fit the ongoing ferocity of the individual within human exceptionalism, however critiqued that approach has been, can be disappeared. Scholars that don't fit that, disappear from citation networks really quickly. They are there for a while and then they drop off. And I watched a biologist, Margaret McFall-Ngai, give a talk that itself was complaining about the erasure of women in development and cell and marine biology. She was eloquent about it and she was talking about all kinds of important women, especially Lynn Margulis. And almost her entire citation apparatus in the talk was to white men. So, I laughed and I said Margaret did you realize what you did in that talk? And she was shocked. And I think I've done some of the same—I think the ease with which we disappear each other, and ourselves, and are disappeared by others is a force. And that's why I take things like citation networks or a kind of ongoing willingness to occupy prestige hierarchies with a kind of absurdist laugh, but nonetheless, and foregrounding the earned prestige of others. I mentioned Kim and Zoe. Those are two, yourself, Tania, others, affirming the earned place in achieved knowledge practices. Out loud and forcefully. And using whatever skills, in propaganda, in media, in performance art, in I think humor is an incredible tool. I am really intent that feminist science studies as a project and its people not be disappeared.

[...]

BS: There have been several questions about the question of citations. Amanda Parmer wants to hear more about how you see the effects of your citational practice shaping the work that grows out of your work methodologically. There's another question from Sheiva Rezvani asking, "I would like to hear more elaboration of the rebuilding networks as antidiscriminatory practice specifically within a transdisciplinary, inter-disciplinary world, especially when these newer areas of academia don't necessarily have an established canon."

DH: Citation practice is something I've been interested in for 50-odd years or more. Partly because I am a teacher I am aware that many of my ideas come in discussions with students in tutoring sessions or in office hours or walking across campus. A whole lot of things that I ended up working and publishing were initiated by people who will never have a name in that apparatus. Far from thinking that I or we should only publish peer reviewed articles or books and that our citation apparatus ought to be thin, or professional, I have erred on the side of

citing anybody who's conversation I took and ran with. Including unpublished conversations. And I'm still doing it. And I also have a little set of orthopedic exercises around citations and those orthopedic exercises change. And when I look back at what I've done and indeed what I still do, I see the multiple ways in which I fail. These are recommendations. I like my practice and I'm kind of recommending it. I think it's not a bad way to deal with this. It's not the only way. My little orthopedic exercises—are all of my citations to white people? Are they all to people who are conventionally able? Are they all to people who have gotten their degrees in western universities? Are they all North American even though they're talking about what's going on in Mexico? Is my citation apparatus actually engaging with the kind of issues being talked about in this lecture or this publication or this interview? The answer is always no. But I have a little checklist. And this really sounds—this sounds ridiculous. But if I find there's exactly zero of a category, let's say in a reading list for a course, by the time that course is taught, there are a couple of entries in that category that was zero. Like I didn't have any—I know, for example, that the scholarship on the disappeared, by Argentinian or Mexican or other writers, is really thick. Am I citing only English language papers? Do I—I have the ability now, at least in my late 70s, actually to read Spanish scholarship. I didn't before that, that really wasn't okay. I think citation apparatuses are also about language. I actually think it's a good thing to have a checklist that keeps changing and to take citation seriously because it makes work show, it makes people show, and it makes categories show. And they are always, not only imperfect, but sometimes actually hurtful.

I have had my feelings hurt by critique but I've also been ashamed. For example, I did not at all adequately cite Black scholarship around plantations when I coined the term Plantationocene and its meanings in past and present. I said the scholarship was there but did not name the authors and activists. These were conversations and not formal papers, but if oral conversation omitted citations, the citations should have been there in the revisions when the conversations were published. I think being ashamed is an okay thing. It's not the same as guilt and you try again. But you can only try again if we work with each other. I think citation is really important.

Author Bios

Donna Haraway has written extensively about sciences, technologies, feminisms, and both human and more-than-human beings in inheriting, making, and sustaining diverse worlds. Story telling is one of her principal foci.

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