

Problems of Citation in the Study of Religion: Who Do We Cite and Why?

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Ingie Hovland* 
University of Georgia, USA

Britt Halvorson* 
Colby College, USA

Abstract

This special issue introduction contributes to emerging discussions on citation in studies of religion. What particular issues of citation arise in cultural, historical, and textual research on religious traditions? What can the study of religion contribute to the study of citation? Weaving together references to the four articles of the special issue, we identify four citational themes that are particularly relevant to the study of religion: the continuing reverberations of colonization; relations to and in canonical traditions; the conjunction of morality and economy in neoliberal academic contexts; and the knowledge that comes from naming and interacting with a wider range of sources, such as ancestors. Finally, in the conclusion we argue for a relational ethics of citation in the study of religion.

Keywords

citation, religion, knowledge production, canonical traditions

Ci·ta·tion [ˌsɑɪˈteɪʃn.] *n.* A summons; a call, an invocation. *Obsolete.* 1640–1853. (Oxford English Dictionary)

*The two authors contributed equally to the introduction and to the editing of the special issue

Corresponding author:

Britt Halvorson, Colby College, 4700 Mayflower Hill Drive, Waterville, ME 04901, USA
Email: bhalvors@colby.edu

Staging a conversation on citation in the study of religion

The politics of citation has garnered substantial recent attention and discussion within the academy (see, e.g., Ahmed, 2013, 2017; Chakravartty et al., 2018; Kim, 2020; McKittrick, 2020; Ray, 2018).¹ While this has not yet prompted a robust conversation within religious studies, related fields such as sociology, anthropology, and communication studies have been particularly inspired by Black feminist scholarship to consider the many issues that surround citational praxis, as formulated by the Cite Black Women Collective (Makhulu and Smith, 2022; Smith, 2021; Smith and Garrett-Scott, 2021). We wish to put these wider conversations in dialogue with studies of religion. What particular issues of citation arise in cultural, historical, and textual research on religious traditions? What can religious studies gain from and contribute to these broader scholarly conversations?

Thinking critically about citational praxis opens up important questions about the politics of academic knowledge production. In an early, influential contribution, legal studies scholar Richard Delgado (1984: 563) found that white scholars of civil rights, in the words of sociologist Victor Ray (2018: 1), “tended to rely upon a closed circle of citation that reinforced the very barriers to racial inclusion that their scholarship was ostensibly designed to undermine.” Other scholars, such as literary critic Annabel Kim (2020: 5), have more recently pointed out that citation is used as a metric of intellectual value and constitutes part of an “intellectual economy.” Only by beginning to draw attention to citation as an academic practice itself, according to Kim, do we create a space for looking into how particular bodies of knowledge, lines of inquiry, and theoretical directions are built and sustained. Indeed, reviews of specific scholarly fields demonstrate a clear tendency to under-reference the work of people of color, including Black and Indigenous scholars, as well as white women (Chakravartty et al., 2018; Mott and Cockayne, 2017; Reno and Halvorson, 2023; Smith and Garrett-Scott, 2021). For instance, when exploring the number of citations of Black women scholars in five leading North American anthropology journals, Christen Smith and Dominique Garrett-Scott (2021: 26–30) found that, despite Black women anthropologists constituting at least 2.6% of United States anthropologists overall, their cited work comprises only 0.87% (or 46 of 5,445 total counted citations) in the authors’ sample.² Moreover, in a review of articles published between 1990 and 2016 in 12 peer-reviewed journals in the field of communications, Paula Chakravartty et al. (2018: 259) found that “non-White first authors are cited significantly fewer times than their White counterparts (16 to 25, respectively)”; this leads the study authors to conclude that work by scholars of color “does not receive equal circulation” or valuation. This disparity is a structural problem with consequences for individual scholars as well as a loss for academic knowledge gathering, as important insights may be overlooked and questions left unasked.

We wish to reflect on how these issues of citation influence our work as we study religion. In this special issue, we focus especially on our sub-field, the anthropology of religion, but we seek to situate this within the broader field of religious studies. We are interested in addressing questions such as: Who do we read and why, and what does that say about canon formation and about who we may perceive as significantly contributing to a topic of interest? How do practices at each step of knowledge production,

from reading to the collection and interpretation of evidence to peer review and publication, contribute to these issues? Who is elided or not imagined as a central source of knowledge in particular conversations and why is that the case? Can we excavate lost or missed directions of knowledge generation through paths not chosen, scholarly routes not taken? What does it mean to engage in an ethical practice of citation in the academic study of religion?

The field of religious studies has long been open to critiquing its own practices of reproduction. Most notably, discussions about the androcentric focus of the field and its history of patriarchally inflected interpretations have been published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, the flagship journal of the field's largest professional organization in the United States, since the 1970s (e.g. Saiving, 1976; Trible, 1973) [AQ: 1]. A little later, critiques of the assumed universalism of European categories and the role of European imperialism in the formation of the discipline of religious studies were drawn into the field's central conversations (e.g. Asad, 1993; Chidester, 1996; Masuzawa, 2005 [AQ: 2]). Most recently this conversation has been taken in a new direction by work such as that by Girish Daswani (2020), who uses his own experiences completing a PhD in the anthropology of religion to document the institutional whiteness of academia. There have also been some systemic changes in our discipline over the past decades; most notably, women's share of PhDs in religion in the United States has risen from around 25% in 1987 to just under 40% in 2015 (AAAS 2017: Indicator II-26d). On the other hand, the percentage of PhDs in religion in the United States awarded to members of traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic groups has remained fairly flat, usually at just under 10%, from 1995 to 2015 (AAAS 2019: Indicator II-25f). These studies and discussions have fostered important conversations about religious studies as a scholarly field, encouraging scholars of religion to rethink how we structure our undergraduate curricula, whether and how we present the "canon" to first-year PhD students, which forms of knowledge we value as "theory" in our journal articles, and how we frame our research topics in our monographs. Yet until very recently, these discussions did not dwell on one particular scholarly practice that is part and parcel of these processes but is perhaps so habitual that it often fails to draw attention, namely citation.

Although there is still very little work on citation directed specifically at scholarship on religion (see also Kaell, 2022, on this point), we want to highlight two exceptions here, namely the work of Kecia Ali in Islamic studies and Sarah Imhoff in Jewish studies. Ali has reviewed citation patterns in books in Islamic studies as part of her larger research project on gender politics in this academic sub-field. She highlights the methodological challenge of documenting such citation patterns, turning to a mixed approach of hand-counting women's names in the books' main text, in citations and bibliographies, and in indexes. Her early findings suggest that women's scholarship is sometimes simply not cited, even in conversations to which they have contributed substantive work; in other cases, their work may be cited in the notes, but their names are not included in the main text (Ali, 2019: unpaginated). Looking at the field of religious studies as a whole, Ali has also, together with Lolo Serrano, reviewed gender biases in the book reviews published from 2006 to 2020 in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, finding that "reviewers of all genders emphasize male scholars' expertise and esteem and

disproportionately refer to male thinkers and their ideas in reviews, with male reviewers also citing work by men at a much higher rate” (Ali and Serrano, 2022: 554).

Similarly, Imhoff has recently begun research on women and citations in Jewish studies. She has found that while 42% of tenure-track faculty in this sub-field at research-intensive universities in the United States are women, only around a quarter of the citations in peer-reviewed journals go to women authors (Imhoff, 2022). Imhoff’s early data suggest that “women scholars are more likely to cite other women scholars” (Ali et al., 2020: 150). Together with Susannah Heschel, Imhoff has also discussed how the structural nature of citation patterns makes them difficult to document; instead, questions about citation may emerge more often in private conversations in which women scholars whose work is respected in related fields still share experiences of not being “cited, invited or published by men in Jewish studies” (Heschel and Imhoff, 2018: unpaginated). Imhoff argues that the extent of the problem of under-citation indicates that this is a structural issue that cannot be changed simply by altering a single individual’s citational habits (Imhoff, 2022). Rather, she suggests that we need to address the systemic impact of scholarly networks and how these networks reproduce themselves (Ali et al., 2020: 150, 155–156). While Ali and Imhoff focus their research primarily on citation and self-identified women, they note that further work is needed on citation of queer and trans scholars of all gender identities and of racialized minorities in these sub-fields.

We hope our collection will contribute to this early discussion on citation in studies of religion. The recent interdisciplinary work on citation that we have highlighted examines, amongst other issues, the role of power in citational practice, including the power of being able to name experiences and to refer to them as part of our scholarly conversations. In her article in this special issue, Elizabeth Pérez notes that conversations about scholars’ experiences of under-citation tend to happen primarily in “off-stage” spaces, such as around shared meals at conferences, rather than in conference presentations themselves (xx). Bringing the conversation about citation “on stage” involves developing a vocabulary to name what happens in citational practice in the study of religion. As Kim (2020: 5) writes, “citation must be turned away from its usual function as a practice to serve instead as the object of inquiry.” Yet attempting to move the conversation about citation on stage, as we do here, is arguably a complex process itself; the seeming lack of vocabulary to describe citation politics—or even the feeling that talking about it is a private matter or separate from real academic work—is a testament to the obfuscation of the workings of power through citation. The emergence of a language to talk about citation is all the more important for these reasons.

In addition to asking how the study of citation can illuminate our practices in the study of religion, we are also interested in the reverse question, namely how the study of religion can contribute to the study of citation. Interestingly, several recent writers have used religious language to describe citation politics. These mentions range from the idea that lauded earlier theorists may now turn out to be “false Gods” (Burawoy, 2021: 246) through the notion that we need to pay tribute to overlooked intellectual ancestors (Ahmed, 2017) to the presence of “canonical” texts in academic fields and the ongoing canonization or reproduction of key thinkers (Ray, 2018). We suggest these religious terms could be analyzed more critically, using scholarship on religion to shine light on how citation confers and reproduces forms of moral and sacred authority with economic

dimensions. In other words, it is no coincidence that such language has seemed ready-built to illuminate the cultural work of citation. Indeed, appreciating the ceremonial power in citation has been an important theme in recent work (Davis, 2019). In one contribution, anthropologist Savannah Shange (2022), building on work by Deborah Thomas, describes how Black feminists who have organized the #SayHerName and #CiteBlackWomen initiatives recognize the ritual enunciation of names as a powerful affective technology. It seems to us that scholars of religion are well placed to examine such religiously inflected language in the discussion of citation, including references to ritual invocation, ancestors, spiritual knowledge, moral authority, valuing and crediting, sacred presence, canons, and traditions.

This introduction is divided into four sections. In each section, we discuss some of the ways that religious studies scholars may build a more robust conversation around citation. We focus on four citational themes that are particularly relevant to the study of religion: the continuing reverberations of colonization; relations to and in canonical traditions; the conjunction of morality and economy in neoliberal academic contexts; and the knowledge that comes from naming and interacting with a wider range of theoretical sources, such as ancestors. As we discuss each of these themes, we weave in references to the four articles of the special issue: “Sorry Cites” by Elizabeth Pérez, “Feminist Cites” by Ingie Hovland, “Ancestral Cites” by Britt Halvorson, and “Sacred Cites” by N. Fadeke Castor. Finally, in the conclusion we argue for a relational ethics of citation in the study of religion.

The presence and negotiation of colonizing relations in citations

We think it is no accident that all four articles in our special issue touch on colonization. In many ways, colonizing histories and their ongoing reverberations continue to shape the scholarly world in which the structural inequalities of citation patterns are enacted today. Many scholars of religion are especially attuned to colonizing processes, such as those scholars writing about colonialism and religious missions or those examining the colonial contexts in which comparative religious studies was conceptualized as a university discipline. However, we have not yet established a conversation on how colonization has shaped our field’s citation patterns.

In the first article in our special issue, “Sorry Cites,” Pérez carefully teases out the ongoing reverberations of colonial legacies and relations in our practices of citation. Taking the anthropology of religion as her primary example, Pérez reflects candidly on the under-citation of Black and Latinx scholars, especially those in religious studies, in anthropological work. She shows that the burden of proof for lack of citations must be assembled from “off-stage” conversations and recollections in an effort to give name to such experiences (xx). Moreover, Pérez depicts the harm produced by this situation: citational erasure is “petty swindle or fraud,” as she puts it, and, even more importantly, constitutes a form of “spirit-murdering” in the lives of the scholars affected, with long-lasting effects (xx; in conversation with Garcia, 2020). The politics of citation, Pérez argues, is a “(necro)politics” (xx; citing Mbembe, 2003 [AQ: 3]). In the face of this “matter of life and death,” Pérez turns to concrete acts in her conclusion: she calls on us

all to diversify our scholarship and syllabi, to aid and acknowledge and teach each other, and to cite with care (xx).

Pérez' work can also help us draw out a broader tension in the conversation on citation and colonialism. On the one hand, this conversation can enable us to more clearly notice actions such as "plagning," a term that Pérez borrows from legal scholar Lolita Buckner Inniss to describe the situation in which an author's work has been clearly drawn upon but the author themselves has been ignored and left uncited (xx). "Plagning" functions as the grift, theft, and tragedy of colonial extraction. A scholar's ideas are simply appropriated, as if someone else has the right to take them without proportional payment. This action may be bolstered by perceptions that we know well from the colonial frontier, such as the presumption that some people more rightfully "own" certain words than others, or the assumption that some people are more likely to be "original thinkers" and "authors" while others' ideas are more easily framed as derivative. As Pérez recounts, scholars of color may accumulate difficult experiences of being perceived as unable to use certain words or, when they use them, of not rightfully owning those words.

On the other hand, the conversation on citation also illuminates colonial legacies from a different angle, pointing out that the way our current citation systems are constructed seems to echo practices of modern imperialism. Modern European imperial claims have been made through a politics of discovery, a social and political order hinging on the assumption that the "first" person (from Europe) who "discovered" some "new" tract of land, or "conquered" it, should "own" it. Our citation systems mirror this logic. We try, if we are conscientious, to find out which author "first" voiced an idea, either through "discovering" it or "conquering" an especially useful formulation of it, and we credit their "ownership" of the idea by citing them. Through our citation systems, we continuously recreate citations as "property" (Tierney, 2020: 95) and "territory" (Nash, 2020: 79).

These issues surrounding the notion of originality and the ownership and crediting of ideas, which have problematic historical and ongoing colonial dimensions, raise several dilemmas. On the one hand, it is important in the short term that authors are given credit in the form of citations for ideas that they have expressed "first" and that in this sense is their "private property." Racialized systems of colonial power have long structured academic knowledge-making and continue to influence how the value of ideas is perceived, as Pérez (this collection) and other writers have argued (Cite Black Women Collective, 2021). Therefore, fostering greater citation and naming of academic contributions by Black women, Indigenous writers, and other scholars of color is critically important to appropriately credit intellectual insights and innovations. On the other hand, it seems important in the long term to shift toward understandings of scholarship that do not encourage scholars to engage in "firsting" (Liboiron, 2021) and that do not consider ideas to be the private property of individuals. These are some of the contradictory ramifications of historical and current colonizing practices that we live with in the academy and that we think conversations on citation can help place "on stage." One question raised by these conversations, for example, is whether "decolonizing citation" means to acknowledge a particular idea as an author's property or to do the opposite. It is precisely by exploring these contradictions more carefully that we hope our scholarly communities may over time move toward more robust discussions of the ethics of citation as well as the ethics of scholarship in religious studies more broadly.

Relations to and in canonical traditions

In some religious traditions, relational possibilities may be tied quite closely (though not inescapably so) to the history of canon formation. While the term “canon” refers to religious collections (such as the Hebrew Bible or New Testament), it is also used to refer to authoritative bodies of knowledge or text more broadly (such as in arguments over what constitutes the English literary canon), or to a set of laws or principles. The concept bears some similarity to lineages of knowledge that may be spoken rather than written; for example, in her article in this special issue, Pérez describes the Lucumí *moyuba* prayer, used before important ceremonies, which lists lineage founders and ancestors. In scholarly conversations, reference to a scholarly “canon” or a theoretical “lineage” can be used more loosely to refer to the central works of a discipline or tradition. In both religious and academic communities, then, such canons and lineages, often formed historically in patriarchal contexts, impact the relations of present-day communities that continue to refer to them.

Needless to say, scholars do not agree on a single canonical body of work in the academic study of religion. Yet we think the concepts of canon and lineage are useful to think with in our conversations on citation because of their capacity to denote an available collection of common touchpoints with a certain moral claim, even when that commonality is not interpreted in the same way. The common touchpoints might be topics and questions that recur in academic studies of religion, or names and texts that have been cited widely, or patterns of argumentation that are repeated because they have proved to be convincing. Even as we critique canonized authors and terms—Marx, Derrida, “religion,” “ritual”—we gain a readership among religious studies scholars precisely by relating to common touchpoints (even if this is sometimes a relation of rejection). As one humanities scholar has put it in her advice to graduate students and early career scholars: “research articles get published because they say something new about something old” (Belcher, 2019: 62). Conversely, an article that says something “new” that is perceived to be unrelated to any common touchpoints—that is, unrelated to any of the ongoing questions, themes, and texts of our sub-disciplines—will likely be perceived to fall outside our scholarly conversations.

The impact of such unofficial canons and lineages in religious studies is pervasive enough that we take it for granted; it is difficult to imagine, for example, an anthropologist of religion who has never heard the name “Geertz.” Similarly, conference presenters at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion do not stop to explain to whom they are referring when they invoke the names “Freud” or “Foucault.” Canonical names provide a certain common language, perhaps especially in an interdisciplinary field such as religious studies (Kaell, 2022). The act of citing such recognizable names may also function as a measuring rod, subtly indicating which authors, questions, and terms are assumed to belong in the field because they require no explanation, or setting a standard against which lesser-known work is evaluated. Canon formations may also guide our reproduction of the discipline, for example when we present the study of religion to students in “theory and methods” seminars as a line of canonical authors with subsequent critiques. In this way we invite students into what we perceive to be a common citational language.

While canons and lineages in religious traditions may be experienced as identity-affirming points of stability, canonical formations have given rise to the opposite experience in conversations on scholarly citation. Canonical lineages in the study of religion and in our specific sub-disciplines necessarily shape our citational relations—who we cite, how, and why. This also shapes some of our citational difficulties because our Western academic canons are predominated by white Euro-American men and represent a particular line of knowledge generation while making invisible many other writers and knowledges. Hovland's and Halvorson's articles in this special issue address this problem from different perspectives.

Hovland's article, "Feminist Cites," tackles the tangled gendered relations of citation, asking what a feminist praxis of citation might look like when relating to a historically male-dominated tradition of theory in the study of religion. Taking the example of her own citation of Ludwig Wittgenstein when writing about a Protestant first-wave feminist woman, Henny Dons, she reviews a variety of possible feminist paths. Some feminist writers have argued, for example, that we should not cite the patriarchally inflected canon; Hovland argues instead for a feminist citation of the canon that asks both who the canonical theorists were in their historical contexts and how we might extend their use today, even in ways that they might not have agreed with. This moves toward a view of citation as a multi-stranded social operation incorporating multiple relations, "defense lines" (Latour, 1987: 48), "desire lines" (Ahmed, 2017: 15), and "a circuit of connections" (Strathern, [1991] 2004: 54).

On the other hand, Halvorson's article, "Ancestral Cites," considers the problem of canon from a different angle, asking how we might decolonize our canons by reincorporating previously elided ancestors. She experiments with "re-canonizing" a historical figure in Malagasy Christianity, Eugene Rateaver, to show how "ancestors are actively made" (xx). However, she argues that previously overlooked ancestors should not simply be added into the canon but should rather be engaged thoughtfully to allow them to transform how we think of canonical knowledge in the first place.

These articles invite us to reflect on larger questions: How, then, are canons reproduced? How do they become reified? And how can they be changed—whether to be repurposed, expanded, or more thoroughly transformed—over time? Though relations in the present are shaped by relations in the past, and while our citational relations today are shaped by the gendered and racialized relations that have led to our history of canon formation, this does not mean that the same relations must be reproduced in future scholarship. We think it is possible to balance two observations here. On the one hand, our citational praxis is culturally located, and we cannot step "outside" our institutional positioning and lineages. On the other hand, the historical work of religious studies scholars has offered some understanding of how "canons" work, including the knowledge that communities' relations with their canons do shift over time, sometimes in surprising ways. This leaves us, we think, with several options as we continue to relate to our scholarly canons and lineages. The articles in our collection consider canonical relations in a variety of settings, leading to a range of practical suggestions regarding canonical citations, from considering how graduate students might be taught to review the literature with care (Pérez), through a reclaiming of past canonical authors for present purposes (Hovland) or reincorporating and ancestralizing figures who have previously only

appeared as hauntings (Halvorson), to transforming what we understand as “canonical” knowledge by interacting with spiritual beings in one’s scholarship today (Castor).

The current attention to citation, then, offers an opportunity to question and reorient the representational economy of academic citation practice and, especially, its moral authority. This is an important moment of looking deeply into the social reproduction of academic knowledge, of slowing down and taking stock of how knowledge-making happens. In this process, we suggest that a more complex appreciation of citation itself, as well as a shift in who we cite, becomes possible: citation’s historical lineage formations and current moral conventions can be laid bare. There is also an opportunity in this conversation on citational politics to shine light on the valuations that go into textual production writ large. Who or what has historically been cited and included in a text and who has not been? What has been regarded as a legitimate or illegitimate source and why? How does scholarship get done and what is an ethical practice of scholarly work in one’s specific sub-field? Just as religious canons may be repositioned in different historical periods, or the invocation of lineages may be adjusted over time within a community, we may consider which relations we wish to enact to the scholarly canons that have been handed down to us and how we wish to pass them on.

The moral economy of credit and credibility

Another theme touched on by the articles in this collection concerns the economic and moral dimensions of citation. Even as citation is increasingly understood to be a capitalist metric of value, measuring the impact of one’s scholarship (as seen below), citation can also be viewed as a ritualistic activity, a textual form of tribute and relationship-building with mentors and influential ancestors and interlocutors. Though scholars of religion are already familiar with approaches that theorize the relations of ritual and economy, capital, and gift, we suggest that these analytic frameworks have not yet been put in the service of examining the moral economic complexity of citation.

Citation has been described—and may be experienced by the citing author—as a “complicated gift” (Souleles, 2020: unpaginated; see also Weiss, 2018). At one level, citation is a giving of credit, contributing to a gift economy of acknowledgment for the influence on one’s ideas. It is a gift of recognition. This gift relation can secure a meaningful connection between one author and another, or between an author and a genealogy of ideas or a community of thinkers. It can constitute an important—though partial—record of indebtedness to mentors or intellectual ancestors who may have shaped one’s education and intellectual journey in far greater ways than a single citation can communicate. At the same time, these references can participate in what Pérez calls “citing upwards,” an aspirational move to align oneself with a more powerful or widely recognized circle of writers (xx). Sometimes this practice becomes most apparent when troubling allegations come to light about prestigious authors and the previous positive value of their citation is thrown into question (Souleles, 2020).

However, we recognize that the gift dimensions of citation we have described do not exist outside the marketplace of ideas. In other words, citation is a gift, while at the same time having qualities of a commodity relation. These two different forms of exchange coexist within the act of citation, even when one occupies a more prominent role than the

other. Each citation can concretize a relational tie, taking part in mentorship, intellectual genealogies, and other ritual forms of relationship- and community-building. But citations are simultaneously engaging in exchange and building forms of social capital, as well as commodity-like forms, such as the h-index and Google Scholar “cited by” numbers.

The capitalist politics of citation have arguably become more prominent in academic institutions in recent years. For example, contingent labor and adjuncting in academia contribute to a competitive neoliberal environment in which people feel considerable pressure to claim ideas and be cited. In addition, citational metrics, such as Google Scholar numbers, are being used more commonly in institutional promotion and tenure review cases (Goldenfein and Griffin, 2022; Konkiel et al., 2016; Smith and Garrett-Scott, 2021: 27). Such numbers are, of course, unlikely to be the only factor committees consult, but their increased role in higher education attests to the spread of academic audit cultures over the past few decades (Strathern, 2000). The numbers’ heightened significance may be self-reinforcing over time, such as when early career researchers use journals’ “impact factor” to decide where to submit their articles. In addition, the numbers’ interpretive value seems to also be growing in academic spaces, even as critiques of their “dubious nature” (Gingras and Khelifaoui, 2020: unpaginated) continue to be raised, including from the inventor of the h-index, physicist Jorge Hirsch (Conroy, 2020). In spite of these concerns, administrators or colleagues reviewing a job application or promotion dossier at a birds-eye view may turn to citation numbers as one measure of how well read and influential someone is within their own scholarly community. Of course, such numbers provide only a limited snapshot of these criteria, shaped as they are by the inequalities of citation itself; for a fuller picture, the numbers would need to be paired with substantial contextualizing information, such as the candidate’s earlier scholarly opportunities, graduate school resources, mentorship networks, experiences of collegial support, experiences of micro-aggressions and stereotyping, or the extent to which the candidate’s work has been used without being cited at all (or “plaggnored”).

In other words, for some scholars (and in some moments during a scholarly career) much is at stake in the increased academic use of citation and other evaluative metrics, from a permanent job and health insurance to salary raises, even if individual scholars do not want to subscribe to the individualistic model of intellectual credit or the colonialist “discovery” hypothesis. Citational metrics, as Pierre Bourdieu (1986: 16) would have noted, are thus partly “convertible” into economic capital or what Matt Tierney (2020: 95) calls “propertarian relations.” If a scholar is regarded as “frequently cited” in their field, they may be more eligible for various career benefits. Yet structural inequalities concerning the visibility of scholars’ work, such as their varying access to high-prestige professional networks at an early career stage, can further impact the perceived value of the work and consequently the number of citations it receives. As Chakravartty et al. (2018: 259) write, “This has negative professional implications both for non-White scholars, in terms of contract renewals, tenure, and promotion, and for the field in general, in terms of the visibility of and attention to the knowledge produced.”

As we have suggested, being cited can confer a certain type of moral authority or credibility, in that greater numbers of citations suggest heightened import, whether or not individual scholars subscribe to those assumptions. Ideas of credit can help illuminate

this situation. As Bill Maurer (2010: 146) has noted, the term “credit” comes from the Latin “credere,” meaning “to believe.” When we cite someone, we are inscribing them into our text, stitching a connection to their ideas and name and giving them a certain kind of credence. This makes our text multi-vocal and cross-temporal, as all texts are, but it also gives value in an ongoing way to cited authors’ names and their ideas or, more precisely, to the author–work relation. If money is usable, at some level, because of a belief in the value relation it represents, a citation can possibly be seen as a promissory note that says that we believe the cited author’s ideas are citable, that is, they have continued relevance and value (even if of a negative sort).³ Citation also attempts to bridge a connection between the value (or status, as it may be) of those ideas and one’s own; it puts the names of the citing and cited authors in relation to each other. We may seek to build our own credibility through confirming or rejecting others’ ideas in our text, or we may perhaps wish to credit the influential gift of a prior learning moment or conversation. Credibility and credit, then, are structurally related through the act of citation, even when citation is turned into a critique of an idea’s value.

In sum, it is impossible to cleanly separate the gift and commodity relations that are put into play when we cite. Scholarly gift economies and ritual worlds conjoin with the reductive neoliberal metrics of current higher education. Gift and capital, economic value and moral value, credit and credibility merge. While there is no easy resolution to this entanglement, each of the articles in this collection touches on these morally complex dimensions of credit and credibility and considers possible paths that individual scholars might take. For example, as part of a broader historical ethnography of early twentieth-century Norwegian Protestant feminist Henny Dons, Hovland’s article explores what it means to give the “complicated gift” of citation to Ludwig Wittgenstein (xx). Though Wittgenstein is certainly a canonical figure with considerable credibility, he was also someone who occupied academic spaces at the same time as Dons and openly disliked women scholars. Hovland traces the tension of whether there is a way to cite and credit him without reenacting these exclusions. She examines how to reread his ideas in a feminist key, arguing for the importance of “claim[ing] the value of canonical figures for feminist purposes” (xx). Pérez discusses how a gift of citation within a text can simultaneously remind us that the opposite also occurs: the gift of lifting, appropriating, and leaving uncredited someone else’s ideas. As a theft of intellectual property, such elisions, which disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and other scholars of color, bear emotional and financial consequences, from “salary stagnation to increased precarity for adjunct and contingent faculty” (xx). Similarly, drawing on the Cite Black Women Collective statement (Smith et al., 2021), Castor asks how—in a neoliberal academic environment where citations can be “monetized” and contribute to “hyper-individualistic hierarchies of knowledge”—it is possible to develop a relational, collaborative, and sacred citational praxis (xx). She advocates working against forms of dispossession by embracing citation as a dialogue, extending credit to a broad range of contributors to one’s academic work.

Finally, in her article, Halvorson turns questions of credit and credibility to the reclaiming of controversial or troubling ancestors in Christian communities. She studies the contemporary haunting among former white American missionaries in Minnesota of a Malagasy Christian pastor, Eugene Rateaver, who was controversially excommunicated

from the American-controlled mission church in Madagascar in 1936. Looking in parallel at recent efforts to reclaim ancestors in academic and religious institutions, Halvorson explores whether the moral credibility denied to Rateaver in the past—when he was actively marginalized for anti-colonial activism—is being re-accorded to him and his Christian teachings, as he has become a more visible figure in the present day. What is entailed in culturally “citing” lost or forgotten ancestors and what does it mean to institutionally reclaim them? Halvorson ultimately argues for distinguishing among different kinds of ancestors in institutional efforts to reclaim past figures, suggesting that references to Rateaver are more of a haunting or spectral presence among white Americans that speaks to unresolved spiritual and political questions about colonial missions. On the other hand, she also describes the “citing” of Rateaver among his descendants in the United States as a process that more closely resembles a gift relationship.

What counts as knowledge? Exploring epistemological questions in citation

Our fourth and final theme is epistemology. We suggest that scholarship on religion enables us to deepen our understanding of citation as a naming practice while expanding what counts as knowledge in the first place. We know from religious engagements with language and materiality that invoking a name can be a manifestation of a sacred relationship, a conjuring force not to be taken lightly. Citations give weight and material heft to a person’s or agent’s ideas and carry their name forward in time and space. Indeed, the recitation of names of ancestors are “ancestor veneration practices,” as Pérez (xx) points out. What would be involved in fully appreciating the multiple genres engaged with and incorporated in academic knowledge production, including the idea that naming can be a practice of ancestor veneration? Put differently, how can we recognize our own and our interlocutors’ complex recitation practices within our own texts, in a way that takes seriously their formative role in shaping the production of knowledge in religious communities? Academic discussions about citation have thus far presumed a certain kind of secularity in the production of knowledge, creating an important space for intervention by scholars of religion.

Castor’s article, “Sacred Cites,” presents a rich and innovative reflection on this issue. Prompted by her ongoing dialogue with a great aunt and ancestor in the Caribbean, as well as her interaction with the orisha Oluorogbo, Castor explores how the academic study of religion is embedded in a Eurocentric field of citation that gravitates toward certain kinds of knowledge and agents and toward telling certain kinds of stories. Employing a Black feminist analysis, Castor challenges scholars of religion to consider how “immaterial subjectivity and agential presences and communications are important and foundational elements of knowledge production” (xx). Expanding the category of beings that can be named in academic texts and whose contributions, whether of sacred wisdom or inspiration, can be cited is important in shaping what Castor calls, building on Katherine McKittrick (2021), an “epistemology of liberation” (xx). Castor’s work explores how some of the most important “thought and theory partners” (xx; citing Shange, 2022: 194) exist within spiritual communities. She argues that our scholarship would be enriched if we accord value to these forms of expertise, which may come from

“divine presences, ancestors, or even whispers from our dreams” (xx). Castor’s work invites scholars of religion to think more deeply about authorship. How does a collaborative practice shift what authorship is or becomes? What particular steps might we take to recognize more-than-human and nonhuman forces as influential interlocutors in our texts? How can citation be put toward a liberatory practice in studies of religion?

Scholars of religion are well placed to engage this tension between the conjuring effects of citations, as discussed by Castor, and the secularizing effects of citations, as cited works travel through neoliberal and algorithmic circuits. One possible response is to consider how our texts could become capacious enough to recognize and name a wide variety of textual and non-textual sources as theoretical partners, extending forms of credit and credibility while casting a critical eye on the increased application of academic audit cultures. This could mean recognizing a collaborator as an expert, to be considered a theoretical influence on par with a scholarly piece. This is arguably already an ethical ideal in ethnographic work, but here we are suggesting that some scholars may be able to move toward a more creative and rigorous application of this ideal through their engagement with a wider range of “thought partners,” as Castor vividly shows.

Moreover, engaging in a deeper way with epistemological issues of knowledge production, as suggested by Castor’s work, can foster awareness of the need to move beyond a limited view of citation itself. Citations are arguably a restricted representation that can conceal the important work that goes into producing scholarship: years of messy, complex interactions and conversations; layers of translation across languages, genres, and drafts of writing; ever-present ambiguities and uncertainties in interpersonal spaces of learning; different forms of interpretation; and ongoing dialogues with many different people—in academic and non-academic spaces—over time.⁴ These acts of working across contexts, bridging many kinds of differences while highlighting irreducible gaps of knowledge, come to be represented, awkwardly and in some highly specific fashion, within a single text. Each text is, in itself, a condensation of all the voices and snippets of conversations, quoted written and spoken words and so forth, that permeated its creation; it is not necessarily the product of a single author, as citation would lead us to believe. The text may in turn be taken up in the knowledge-generation processes of many other scholars, exchanges, and texts in similar ways. We see citation as a partial representation of these much more far-reaching and ethically salient aspects of scholarly production. Finding ways to use citation as a practice that gestures toward these more complex aspects of knowledge production is therefore an important and interesting next step.

Finally, broadening the scope of who or what is cited significantly expands the category of “theory” to challenge a Western-centric, commonly recognized or “canonical” set of theoretical sources. As Dána-Ain Davis and Sameena Mulla (2023: 2) note in a recent discussion of citational practice and whiteness in medical anthropology, rethinking the narrowness of canonical theoretical citations is “not simply . . . a feel-good exercise in diversity and inclusion” but an important way of “overcoming theoretical deficits” that characterize the over-use of white Western philosophical concepts. In religious studies, we suggest this work is equally important as a way of tailoring epistemological approaches to the varying religious traditions, imperial and colonial histories, bodies of text, and field sites with which scholars of religion are working. Who or what can be cited to engage with what religious experience is or can be within this particular regional

area or community of practice? Taking inspiration from Castor's work, we can potentially also consider a broader range of other influences on our theoretical concepts, such as storytelling, theological discussion, song, textile production, food practices, engagements with the land, the curation of material objects, and other ritual art. Making more elastic who or what can be cited as a theoretical interlocutor (and not simply as a piece of empirical evidence) can therefore be part of the work of addressing colonizing relations in knowledge production more broadly. This entails doing historical and cultural research to identify religious tradition-, linguistic-, and regionally specific contributors and theorists that can be included in academic conversations. As Akhil Gupta and Jessie Stoolman (2022) have pointed out, this is labor-intensive research that deserves credit as intellectual work, as it expands the field of theory and potentially sensitizes scholars to theorists they may otherwise not know.

By expanding the range of voices that are recognized and named, we broaden what constitutes a meaningful intellectual contribution. As Castor's work shows, thinking carefully about citation is a profound epistemological exercise for scholars of religion, evoking important questions about what counts as theoretical knowledge and illuminating issues concerning the presumed secularity (or sacrality) of theoretical sources.

Conclusion: Moving toward a relational ethics of citation in the study of religion

In conclusion, we would like to sketch some preliminary thoughts about what the four contributions to this special issue collectively suggest about a relational ethics of citation (see also Kim, 2020: 7, on a "relational economy of knowledge"). "Relations" surfaces and resurfaces as a broad theme across all four articles. Just as religious communities may juggle multiple types of relations between humans and other-than-humans and more-than-humans, between present and past and future humans, sometimes disagreeing about the relations involved, scholarly communities too consist of a mess of relations between past, present, and future figures that are not easily disentangled. While it may at times be tempting to flatten out our understanding of citation by thinking of it simply as the individual action of a lone reader-scholar in their solitary study, it is more realistic (even if also more difficult) to acknowledge that our citation is an action shot through with the guiding influence of such communal relations within a tradition. Our citations, in turn, can have an impact on these relations.

What could it mean, then, to develop a relational approach to citation or to do citation relationally? We recognize that the term "relations" is highly flexible, running the risk of saying too little because it says too much. However, we suggest that in the emerging conversation on citation in the study of religion, the term has the capacity to point quite clearly at the core problems before us, including the issues raised here: Which colonizing relations are replicated in our perceptions of different authors and in the citations we include or exclude? Can the imperial resonances in our citation systems, such as practices of "firsting," be redirected over time? Do we wish to reclaim and repurpose our canonical lineages or, alternatively, to reject them? How can these desires be enacted as we consider who and why to cite? Are citations more like gift relations or commodity relations, and what implications does our understanding of these moral-economic

questions have for how we use citations? Which citations do we relate to as legitimate theoretical contributions, and in which situations might our collective conversation become richer if we relate to a wider range of agents and sources as theoretical conversation partners? Considering these questions through the lens of a relational ethics does not mean that it would be desirable for all scholars to enact the same relations or that relations in themselves are automatically beneficial (Viveiros de Castro, Fausto, and Strathern, 2017: 55). Rather, a relational ethics invites us to invest time and effort into considering both the relations that shape the citations we use in our texts as well as the relations that we shape through those citations.

We recognize that such a practice of citation presents potentially conflicting orientations to authorship. On the one hand, a relational approach unsettles the conceit of the individual author, fostering a greater emphasis on the author as situated amid a network of theoretical influences. On the other hand, if we cultivate a growing skepticism regarding whether ideas are the “property” of individual authors and whether those individuals alone deserve to be “credited,” how can we mitigate the harm such skepticism may inflict on individual scholars? And how can we pair this skepticism with a call to thoughtfully attend to the cultural identities of individual authors, such as their gender and race, in order to address ongoing citational disparities? Even as these conflicting orientations to authorship remain, however, we still think it is possible to consider both short-term and long-term steps.

To us, it is important in the short term to, whenever possible, engage in over-citing rather than under-citing, using a practice of care and conscientiousness around giving credit. Being named and naming in academic work can be an act of supporting life (as Pérez shows in her article) and valuing intellectual contributions. In practical terms, this may potentially involve forming sensitivities around intellectual labor, citing non-traditional academic sources, tracing genealogies of ideas to give credit, forming awareness of and questioning the efficacy of reproductive mechanisms that produce repeated citations of the same figures, and more. This is difficult and time-consuming work. Moreover, there is no single, perfect recipe for a conscientious citation practice. Where does one draw a line to stop citing people whose ideas have influenced other writers? What constitutes an over-extension of citational credit for a train of thought? A careful practice of over-citing also has the effect of embedding us more deeply in the neoliberal economy of citation metrics. We are admittedly not able to resolve those questions here but suggest it is important to explore precisely these issues in an ongoing way, continually applying a spirit of questioning and care regarding where ideas may have traveled and what significant influences they bear.

At the same time, in the long term we think it will be fruitful to develop a critical perspective on the individualistic intellectual property models we have inherited. What kinds of property models can be retooled to better represent the relational ethics of academic knowledge production as we write about or with religious communities? How do we more thoughtfully show the co-production of knowledge within texts, in a way that reveals a broader range of influences on our work? And how do we do so while seeking to navigate ethically in the neoliberal environment of individualistic credit or the problematic reification of citational metrics in academia? These are critical questions of citational practice that face all scholars of religion, as we work toward transforming academic spaces.

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ORCID iDs

Ingie Hovland  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2926-6326>

Britt Halvorson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1114-4280>

Notes

1. We focus primarily on conversations about citation unfolding over the last decade. However, other academic conversations about the reproduction of knowledge, most notably the “citation wars” of the 1980s (Smith and Garrett-Scott, 2021: 22, citing Bolles [AQ: 4], 2013: 66–67), have also engaged with the politics of citation.
2. The authors point out that, while 1.48% (or 82 of 5,445 cited works) cite Black women scholars, only this smaller percentage, 0.87%, cites the work of Black women anthropologists (Smith and Garrett-Scott, 2021: 29).
3. This formulation owes a debt to comments by an anonymous reviewer.
4. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for insightful remarks on this subject.

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