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White guilt and shame: students' emotional reactions to digital stories of race in a South African classroom

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One is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. We are touched by stories we tell. (Butler 2004:19)

Introduction

Since 1994, South African higher education (HE) has undergone major transformations, driven by the twin imperatives of racial transformation and pressures for efficiency (Department of Education 1997, 2001). However, research into the progress of transformation, such as the 2008 Ministerial Committee into Transformation and Social Cohesion in Higher Education (Soudien *et al.* 2008), draws a dire picture of the state of South African HE, confirming the pervasiveness of race and racism in educators and students' lives. The ongoing protests at South African universities, started in 2015 at the University of Cape Town around the removal of the Rhodes statue – experienced as a symbol of the colonial oppression, the continued legacy of apartheid and lack of transformation – are a powerful reminder of the discontent and alienation black students and staff feel (Hodes 2015).

Authors such as Jansen (2009) and Zembylas (2012) define South Africa as a post-conflict society. Post-conflict societies have to respond simultaneously to the consequences of current conflicts and to the factors which gave rise to these conflicts in the past (Pattman 2010). These authors argue that what keeps students from engaging across difference is 'indirect

knowledge' (Jansen 2009: 52), the 'powerful ideas and constructs about the past, present, and future' (Jansen 2009: 260), passed on from generation to generation. This 'knowledge in the blood' is 'habitual, a knowledge that has long been routinized in how the second generation see the world and themselves, and how they understand others' (Jansen: 171). This knowledge unconsciously impacts on our choice and negotiations of social engagements. It is 'troubled', as it is steeped in discourses of power and privilege and draws out the 'worst racial stereotypes, prejudices and aggressions among students' (Jansen 2004: 121). This indirect knowledge is also a deeply defensive and can evoke strong emotions in both white and black students, such as guilt, defensiveness and anger, further complicating or preventing an engagement across difference.

This chapter is drawn from the first author's PhD study (Gachago 2015), which reflects on a digital storytelling project set in a pre-service teacher education programme at a large University of Technology in South Africa and this project's potential to contribute to a post-conflict pedagogy. Drawing from a growing interest in emotions as a central concern in the context of critical citizenship and social justice education, this chapter explores how in student responses to *difficult knowledges*, such as the legacies of apartheid, the entanglement of knowing, feeling and doing was brought to the surface.

We focus on the process of storytelling and on the audience response to the stories in and beyond the digital storytelling workshop. In particular, we are interested, to use Shuman's words, how 'these stories and the storyteller change when people empathize with each other's experiences' (2005: 4). Stories shared in this space reflect on what Frankish (2009: 89) calls the 'systemic traumas of [South African] contemporary life': students tell stories of gender-based violence, domestic abuse, drugs, gangsterism, poverty and discrimination. What happens to students when these often painful stories are being told? What happens to their engagement across difference? Do these stories help to shift power dynamics in the classroom? What kind of empathy do these stories elicit: empathy that keeps the distance between the storyteller and story listener, or the sort of empathy that troubles any distance between self and the 'Other'¹, what Boler (1999) would call witnessing or Curtin (2014)

¹ We use 'Other' in capital letters and inverted comma, to foreground the socially and discursively constructed nature of the other – a 'distant other' who in this case not only doesn't look like me but to whom I am always in some ways differently positioned in relation to power and privilege. This 'Other' is always positioned as either more or less privileged than I and our relationship is always based on an unequal power distribution.

compassion? These are the questions guiding this chapter. We thus focus on the performative nature of stories, rather than in using the stories as a ‘... portal into the mind of storyteller’ (Frank 2010: 13), the usual focus of narrative inquiry (Kohler Riessman 2008).

While this chapter is set in the context of teacher education, the literature on the role of museums in transformative learning of their audience shares common concerns. Both education and museums aim at changing a learner’s or a visitor’s view or understanding. In both cases however there is a growing understanding that an educational intervention – be it a lecture or a museum visit – can elicit a variety of responses in the learner/visitor. Rather than automatically leading to new understanding, it may more often than not reinforce dominant narratives and discourses (Smith 2015).

Framed by a belief that feelings, implicit prejudices and bodily responses constitute our racialised, gendered, classed subjectivities, we argue that the unlearning, the transformative process also requires work through feelings and bodily reactions, to move towards an active empathy or witnessing which implies taking on responsibility and holding oneself complicit, co-responsible for the other’s plight.

The role of emotions in post-conflict classrooms

Underpinned by a critical pedagogy perspective but also by poststructural thought, a pedagogy of discomfort proposes that for both educators and students to develop a deeper understanding for their own and their shared past and present, it is necessary to move outside their comfort zones (Boler and Zembylas 2003). Boler and Zembylas (2003: 112) explain that experiencing discomforting emotions can help one to challenge dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities, and might ultimately lead to individual and social transformation. Their work draws from Boler’s seminal book on emotions and education (Boler 1999: xii), where she highlights the link of emotions and social justice education: ‘the ‘risky’ business of addressing emotions within our classrooms is a productive and necessary direction for the exploration of social justice and education’. Boler’s aim is to develop a theory of emotions and education that begins from an examination of power relations: ‘how structures and experiences of race, class, and gender, for example, are shaped by the social control of emotion, and how political movements have resisted injustice by drawing on the power of emotions’ (1999: 5).

Throughout her book, she draws attention to how gendered emotional rules have been used to keep women in subordinate roles. She points to the deliberate absence of attention to emotions in the educational literature to demonstrate how they have become an unchallenged site of social control. She argues that ‘culturally patterned, inscribed habits of inattention’ (1999: 17) are accountable for this silence. However, once this silence is challenged and ‘outlaw’ emotions are expressed, they can empower an oppressed group to resist their subordinate status (1999: 12). She notes that Foucault and poststructural thought can help us view emotions not as internal, individualised states, but as shaped by dominant discourses and ideologies, allowing us the possibility to resist these through emotional knowledge and critical inquiry. Challenging these emotional rules and reclaiming emotions ‘as part of our cognitive and ethical inquiry’ could ‘provide the students hope for changing the quality of their lives and taking action towards freedom and social justice’ (Boler 1999: xi).

For transformation that could lead to improved relationships among diverse and differently positioned groups of students, it is crucial that the educator directly confront underlying problems that render relationships among students from different backgrounds difficult – such as issues around historical origins of power and privilege. This can lead to deep unsettlement in learners, a sense of personal loss and highly charged emotions, such as anger, grief, disappointment and, most importantly, resistance. However, Zembylas and Boler (2003) argue that it is exactly these discomforting emotions and the process of critically reflecting on their origins that is so powerful. They insist that only through this process of reflection, can dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities be challenged and possibilities for individual and social transformation be created.

While this process can be deeply unsettling, a critical engagement with the emotions experienced can also lead to critical thinking and inquiry (2003: 128), as well as ‘self-discovery, hope, passion and a sense of community’ (2003: 129). These are hopeful assumptions, since once we acknowledge that we are a product of hegemony, we are better placed to accept the ambiguity and messiness of power relations and for spaces for transformation to open up.

Boler and Zembylas (2003) and other authors warn that a pedagogy of discomfort might not necessarily be successful. More often than not, it might not be transformatory in the way educators intend it to be. Educators who have attempted it (such as Macdonald 2013) remain cautious, arguing that introducing a pedagogy of discomfort to disrupt some of the

discourses, assumptions and beliefs governing our classrooms and engagements with the ‘Other’, is a difficult and messy task. South African authors Leibowitz et al. (2010: 126) suggest that ‘... learning to talk about difference is a *process*, during which students may require sufficient support and a level of explicit enquiry to break through the polite ‘rhetoric’ of the ‘rainbow nation’².

White guilt, shame and other reactions to stories of race

While Boler (1999) engages particularly with gendered emotions, the focus in this chapter is on the emotions following stories of race and in particular the emotions of guilt and shame, often encountered in classrooms struggling with understanding the legacies of systemic historical trauma such as apartheid. The argument throughout this chapter is that emotions such as pity, guilt or shame are learned and that to unlearn these emotions, one needs to critically reflect on these emotions – learn through these emotions. Here we draw from scholars following the affective turn, who are concerned with the entanglement of seeing, being and knowing, the entanglement of ontology and epistemology (Young 1997, Ahmed 2004, Hemmings 2012). As Hemmings explains:

...in order to know differently we have to feel differently. Feeling that something is amiss in how one is recognised, feeling an ill fit with social descriptions, feeling *undervalued*, feeling that same sense in considering others; all these feelings can produce a politicised impetus to change that foregrounds the relationship between ontology and epistemology precisely because of the experience of their dissonance (2012: 150, our emphasis).

Shotwell’s work (2011) is helpful in understanding the entanglement of feeling and knowing: she argues that if feelings, implicit prejudices and bodily responses constitute our racialized, gendered, classed subjectivities, then the unlearning and transformation also has to work through feelings and bodily reactions. She classifies affective knowing as what she calls ‘non-presentational knowledge’ (Shotwell 2011: xix), i.e. the type of knowledge that is not immediately accessible to us. Her example of an emotional outbreak around white guilt in a lecture, leaving the class and the professor under an ‘affective shock’ is useful in understanding the role of affect to block or unblock understanding:

² The concept of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ was introduced by Nelson Mandela, who envisioned a non-racial South Africa where people of all colours could live peacefully and respectfully with each other. This vision has been deconstructed in the recent student protests, highlighting the ongoing institutional and systemic racism and lack of transformation and redress previously disadvantaged population groups are experiencing.

These feelings don't themselves constitute understanding. Seen in the context of a matrix of implicit understanding shot through with propositional knowledge, though, we can see how affect might be important to the epistemic situation. If the purpose of the class was as it was titled 'Theorizing Whiteness', it matters if having a feeling, like guilt about whiteness, attaches to panic about discussing the topic evoking this feeling. Depending on one's political perspective, the feelings, including the ways they might show up through embodied understanding and including the previously unspeakable knowledge they might disclose, can enable or block the process of coming to a conceptual understanding.

An analysis of guilt and shame in particular highlights the way that these emotions can be seen to be relational and performative (Ahmed 2004). Shotwell (2011: 75) argues that while guilt and shame are interlinked, guilt is backward-looking, making us defensive and paralyzed, without an opportunity to connect. She describes shame, on the contrary as 'an active, transitive practice', (2011: 79) relational and one that connects people: 'Shame turns on an inter- and intra-subjective hinge, which is to say that I see myself in relation to others' (2011: 79). Once participants in difficult dialogues manage to move from guilt to shame, which we understand as actively taking responsibility for systemic injustices, they may in a further step, take action. This echoes Young's more recent work (2011: xv) on social justice, where she calls for a detachment of guilt and responsibility. In similar fashion to Shotwell, she describes guilt as backward-looking and individualised:

The function of guilt is to locate fault, to single out for either moral or legal blame. It is usually not appropriate to ascribe guilt to a group as such, unless we have some reason to conceive of the group as a collective agent (as in the case of guilt ascribed to corporations, for example).

In the context of Germans' engagement with their past, instead of feeling guilty for crimes previous generations have committed, she calls for them to take up responsibility (*ibid.*):

Responsibility, by contrast, is a forward-looking concept. To ascribe responsibility to a person is to say that they have a job to do. We can hold either individuals or groups responsible, and responsibility for social ills is typically shared among many agents. People can be responsible without being guilty.

This is of crucial importance in our particular context where students often get stuck within white guilt, but where some manage to transform this guilt into shame which in turn allows them to open up and recognise their responsibility and complicity in past injustices.

Context and methodology

This study is set within the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences at a large university of technology in South Africa. The digital storytelling project was introduced in order to allow students to reflect on their diverse backgrounds and to develop a heightened understanding of their own and their peers' social positioning vis-à-vis personal, institutional and systemic structures. A digital story as defined in this study is a personal narrative that documents a wide range of culturally and historically embedded lived experiences combining voice, sound and images into a short video, developed by non-professionals with non-professional tools within the context of a digital storytelling workshop (Lambert 2010; Reed and Hill 2012). For more information on the project and the pedagogical intervention including the structure of the workshop see for example Gachago (2015); Gachago et al. (2014); Gachago et al. (2013).

The demographic composition of the class was diverse in terms of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion and language. The three students introduced in this chapter were part of a five-day, digital storytelling workshop in August 2013, in which they were guided in the development of their digital stories. The brief for the digital story encouraged students to tell a counterstory (Solorzano and Yosso 2002) about one critical incident they encountered in their teaching practice and which related to an issue of social justice in education. For this study, we have adapted the term 'counterstorytelling' slightly to encourage both the sharing of stories of privileged and less privileged students to challenge hegemonic discourses within a pedagogy of discomfort framework, where it is assumed that *no one* can escape hegemony.

Based on the belief that rather than a unified, solid subjectivity, subjectivities are fluid and performed according to the context into which they are embedded, we have chosen a methodological approach to narrative inquiry that recognises that the role of the audience is crucial in the construction and performance of a narrative: performance analysis (Kohler Riessman 2008). As Salmon explains (2008: 80):

All narratives are, in a fundamental sense, co-constructed. The audience, whether physically present or not, exerts a crucial influence on what can and cannot be said, how things should be expressed, what can be taken for granted, what needs

explaining, and so on. We now recognize that the personal account, in research interviews, which has traditionally been seen as the expression of a single subjectivity, is in fact always a co-construction.

Performance analysis is useful in this study as it explores how identities are situated and constructed within specific contexts for a specific audience. As Kohler Riessman (2008: 105) explains, performance analysis ‘interrogates how talk among speakers is interactively (dialogically) produced and performed as narrative’. In this project, the notion of audience is complex and multi-layered. The audience does not only consist of the researcher. It includes fellow students in the digital storytelling workshop; parents, family members, and former teachers invited to the public screening of the stories; an audience as imagined by a storyteller when he/she develops the digital story; and finally the anonymous audience - what Berlant (2008) calls ‘an intimate public’ - that may access the digital story once published or presented in workshops, conference presentations or research publications. Storytelling thus becomes a relational practice, in which a story is co-created between the storyteller and a physical, virtual and imagined audience (Kohler Riessman 2008: 113, calls it the ‘ghostly’ audience).

This chapter focuses on one story in particular, created by Noni³, one of the black students in the class and how two of her white peers reacted to her story, their audience response collected in narrative interviews, to exemplify the kind of affective engagements that were enacted in this project.

Noni’s story - You might get uncomfortable ... but will you please listen to me?⁴

We have been together for a week now. A week full of uncomfortable, awkward moments where I had to share personal stuff about my life with you and be and feel with you although we have never talked before. In these moments I realized how little I knew about you, although I have been with you for four years. I became conscious of how for four years we have been avoiding interacting with each other on a personal level; we only spoke to each other when we needed to, like for group work.

³ Because of the narrative focus of this study, and the use of digital stories as part of the data collection methods, granting complete confidentiality to students proved difficult. In this case Noni and Lauren gave permission for their real names to be used, as their digital stories were analysed multimodally and their images formed an integral part of the data. All other participants’ names are pseudonyms. Their written permission to do so was obtained before the start of the study and this was discussed at various stages of the project. This involved negotiating the terms of publishing their images, such as not showing or blurring images of friends and family in the write-up of the study.

⁴ See Noni’s story on <https://vimeo.com/130008975>

This 'uncomfortable safe space' made me aware of how we are trying so hard to run away from our truth, running away from the fact that our past still has effects on our present, our today, how we do not want to admit that there is still an advantage to being you in this country and there is a disadvantage in being me in this country ... like how the best schools in the country are your schools, like how being you gets you first preference for a job over people like me. It got me thinking about how we are turning a deaf ear on the fact that you and I in this country still do not have the same opportunities. Do not get me wrong I am not focusing on who is more privileged and who is less privileged or whose fault it is. I am not accusing you

This got me thinking about how we can laugh and joke together, but are not making real friendships ... you may say 'oh I have friends that look like you' ... but really ... how often have you invited me into your home to come and dine with you?

We are running away from admitting that we have unfinished business with each other; we have stuff to admit to each other, stuff we need to talk about to each other.

When are we going to create spaces where we can talk about the truth, where I can be honest and admit that I feel inferior to you and you can admit that you sometimes feel superior to me ...? When are we going to admit that South Africa has a standard that everyone has to meet, and that standard is your standard? Look at how I needed to learn to speak English so I can speak with you, whilst you cannot even speak a few sentences of my language.

We need to start creating these uncomfortable spaces wherever we go; in social groups, at work, in schools, at home with our children. I mean everyone has to be part of this, in this South Africa of today ... So that we can talk about these kinds of things, and find a way forward and a way to forgive each other. A space where we can be as honest and brutal as we can about how all of this makes you and me feel, without the fear of hurting mine and your feelings. We are both wounded! Will you come to this place with me?

White students' reactions to Noni's story

Noni's story is a reflection on the digital storytelling workshop process and her engagements with her white peers. Noni's story is written in poetic form. It has a certain rhythm and poetic elements, such as repetition of words and phrases, i.e. her addressing an imaginary 'you' or repeatedly using the phrase, 'This got me thinking.' In her movie, there is a series of images from life in the township that she has taken herself: scenes of children and women, literally on her doorstep, depicting the inhuman, brutal conditions that people experience in these areas, but also the innocence of children playing in the street and the care these children display for each other. She first showed these pictures during the workshop while trying to find a focus for her story, to emphasise a life maybe not often enough seen in her classroom and to counter what she perceived as an inability or unwillingness of her peers to recognise on-going systemic inequalities in today's South Africa.

Noni's story is an uncomfortable one, and prompted differing responses from her peers. In this chapter we will focus on two of these peers' reactions, two white women, differently positioned in class and age, whose affective reactions are useful in understanding the role of emotions in difficult conversations.

Lauren is a young female white student. She comes from a privileged middle-class and rather conservative family background. In the interview below, Lauren reflected on the guilt she experienced and the anger at what she perceived as her peers' reaction to Noni's story: both the belittling of and the pity expressed in relation to Noni's story and experience.

Daniela: Ok emm so what were the most uncomfortable moments for you in that process?

Lauren: Emm, when Noni showed those photos of where she comes from. I felt not guilty but in a sense guilty, because I mean, I can't help that am white. But I don't know, the way that they have lived, it's not their fault either but that's just how they live ... so it was this kind of confusion of 'how has this happened? How do some people have to live like that and I lived so comfortably?' And it made me made guilty in a sense, even though I am not in control of the fact that I was born as I am, you know? And I just felt angrier as well because it was like, I could see that the other black people in the room were going: 'That's where we live too, you know, it's not a big deal!' And the white people were going: 'Ooooh shame!' Like that it's horrible you know? And it made me feel so uncomfortable in that moment.

(Interview with Lauren)

Lauren's reaction to the everyday trauma of living in South Africa mirrors students' reactions to what Britzman calls 'difficult knowledge': the encounter with traumatic experiences and the coming to terms '... with various kinds of trauma, both individual and collective' (Britzman 2000: 202). This encounter with past and present trauma leaves students with feelings of helplessness, loss, '... a sense that no other person or group will intervene' (*ibid*). The interview, continued below, shows the powerful emotions that circulated between Noni and Lauren, and Lauren's overwhelming feeling of helplessness in the light of black students' stories.

Daniela: Why were you angry?

Lauren: Because I just don't think that it's going away. I don't know how it is gonna go away. Like it's happening around us all the time. I mean the townships are growing – growing and growing – and nothing is

happening. So it's just like this, it's an anger, I can't do anything about it and that people have to live like that.

Daniela: So you don't feel that you have a personal responsibility to change this?

Lauren: Yes, I think in a sense there's a personal responsibility to make people aware ... because some people aren't aware of it still. Even though it's out there, like right in front of their eyes. They are just so closed in their own bubble and everyone is so busy with their own little life. I think it's good to, you know, to tell people that they need to start reacting. Otherwise nothing is gonna change and I mean, I do my bit, like I will go out and help the poor people and go and take food to shelters and things like that. [...]. And it's like, I think like, if I took it on and said: I need to do something about this, it will actually stress me out more because I wouldn't even know where to start, you know? It's such a big problem and people have been trying to change for years. So that immediately puts you in a position where you are like: what can I do, you know?

(Interview with Lauren)

Lauren's account shows the entanglement of thinking, feeling and doing - what Watkins (2015) calls a 'moment of pedagogic affect'. We see a student struggling with difficult knowledge; and the confusion, helplessness and despondency experienced by young white people born into a life of privilege. Lauren's use of the third person plural both for the 'Other' who is distant to her ('This is how they live...') and the 'other' who is close, but whom she doesn't want to be associated with ('They are just so closed in their own bubble ...') allows her to distance herself from all of these 'Others'. Although she sees the need to take action, to take responsibility for what changing deeply unfair systems, she struggles to see *how*.

As a mature white - self defined as working class - student who had lived through apartheid, Beatrice, the second student we focus on in this chapter, was also deeply affected by and voiced her respect for Noni's story. In her interview, she mentioned that she had to remove herself by leaving the room to go to the bathroom and have a 'good cry'. The story made her recognise what white privilege means - made it 'real'. Unlike Lauren, who distanced herself from 'racist others', Beatrice positioned herself as one of those whites who consciously or unconsciously mistreat blacks, saying: 'What do we do as whites to make people feel like they're nothing?'

Beatrice: When we had that discussions in the circle with Noni, when she started talking about how she had to learn the English language in order to

communicate with white people, she had to learn to be white in order to... to relate to white people and to mix with them and to be seen as one of them. Oh my goodness gracious me, I was so uncomfortable I wanted to cry myself out.

Daniela: Why?

Beatrice: Because I am comfortable being white and I am comfortable speaking English. I am comfortable with my whiteness and I only realised when Noni was talking about it how white people unconsciously make black people feel. I had to leave the room to go to the bathroom had a good cry in the bathroom and then splash my face with cold water and then come back to class. And that's why my nose was blocked when I did my recording because that was the day I did my recording. But at the same time I was thinking about Noni's discomfort. I was thinking about my father who was a poor white who was not welcome in wealthy people's homes. Even in his own extended family, as a boy he was given a chocolate wrapper and was thinking there was a piece of chocolate in it. He found nothing, only little strips of melted chocolates which he still licked in the street and afterwards he realised what he had done. He was: It's like, I don't know how to explain it, it's like such total rejection ... and that's what went through my mind for the whole of that day. I was out of it for the whole of that day. I was just thinking about the things we do to reject other people. Some people do it explicitly and some people don't What do we do as whites to make people feel like they're nothing?

Daniela: And you've never thought about this before?

Beatrice: No! I've never thought of the black/white issues, never!

(Interview with Beatrice)

To allow herself to understand Noni's experience, Beatrice needed to normalise Noni's story by constructing a connection to her own life, in this case represented by her father's sense of isolation as 'poor white'. She ultimately connected to Noni's story through what she perceived as *shared* emotional experiences: she connected to what she knew. In this moment, Noni stopped being the 'Other' for her. Noni, in becoming the same, became 'human', someone who has 'feelings' and that one can 'be intimate with on ... very close terms'.

Beatrice: I would actually almost want to give Noni the credit, she made me realise that we are all the same, we are all the same, we all feel the same. And again, in my mind, I was thinking: But you can make the difference! You can be the one to take the first step! Because this workshop showed us, that article actually showed me, where my weakness is. And it's noted, I am not hesitant. It's not that I don't trust black people. It's just that I have never thought of them as being intimate, somebody to be intimate with on a very close terms. That's,

that's about it. I can't say, I can't say, that I don't want black people in my life. But the workshop made me more aware that they have feelings. And then maybe there's something that stops them from approaching me. But maybe they can see something in me that stops them from approaching me and making the first contact. It should come from me - you know? I can make it happen.

(Interview with Beatrice)

Why was it easier for Beatrice to connect to Noni's story than for Lauren? Lugones' (1987) concepts of 'world-travelling' is useful in unpacking questions the complexity of privilege and responsibility. Lugones writes from an experience of an outsider, a black Latino woman among a White/Anglo organisation of life in the US. She argues that for engaging emotionally with the other, learning to love the 'other', *it is necessary to travel into her world*.

What is of particular interest for this chapter is her suggestion that such travelling might be more difficult for those who are most at ease and comfortable in their lives. Lugones here offers an explanation for the relative ease with which Beatrice can open herself up and travel to somebody else's world. She links ease and comfort to: 1. being a fluent speaker in a 'world', knowing all the words and moves, and being confident; 2. being normatively happy, agreeing with all norms; 3. being humanly bonded and being with those one loves; and 4. having a shared daily history. This ease and comfort is attributed to those who are positioned within normative standards. Looking at Beatrice one could argue, that her being a mature, working class student and thus positioned slightly on the margins of the normative space of this classroom might make it easier for her to accept responsibility, to open herself up for the other stories and the other world, a prerequisite for the travelling into somebody else's.

Conclusions

The power of digital storytelling lies in connecting the personal to broader structural, social and political inequalities, as Poletti argues (2011). We introduced Noni's story above, told out of a deep-seated wish for change: to be seen differently by their peers on a personal level, and to promote social and cultural change on a political level. Noni's story about race relationships in South Africa divided her class, making it uncomfortable for both black and white students to engage with.

In the interview extracts shown above, students reflect on their engagement with 'difficult knowledges' (Britzman 1998, 2000): the social and historical trauma of apartheid and how its

legacies play out in today's South Africa. During these difficult conversations, they experience a range of explosive emotions: anger, sadness, defensiveness, resentment, relief, sorrow, guilt and shame. The reactions shown above exemplify the difference between guilt and shame as backward and forward looking emotions (Shotwell 2011). Both students struggled with Noni's story, both reacted with strong emotions. However, there was a difference in their responses: while Lauren positioned herself outside the problem, Beatrice saw herself as part of the problem. In their answers we saw both the opportunities and limitations for empathy and storytelling and they exemplified how emotions are both relational and performative. These emotions *do* something to both the storyteller and her audience.

The excerpts above also showed that when telling personal stories, it is difficult to move beyond the personal. When sharing their often painful stories, students get seemingly stuck in emotional moments of engaging with their own and the other's story, and might lose sight of the larger socio-economic and cultural context, the power relationships that impact on their relationships across difference. This is dangerous, as Boler (1999: 162) warns: 'Passive empathy absolves the reader through the denial of power relations. The confessional relationship relies on a suffering that is not referred beyond the individual to the social'.

Shuman warns that personal stories can elicit empathy, but that this empathy is steeped in power relationships between storyteller and story listener, maintaining a safe distance for the story listener often characterised by pity. On the contrary, witnessing troubles this distance, changes power dynamics between storyteller and story listener. Active empathy or witnessing assumes taking on responsibility and holding oneself co-responsible for the other's plight (Boler 1999). It also assumes acknowledging and recognising the 'Other' from a position of 'asymmetrical reciprocity' (Young, 1997), based on different experiences and from being differently positioned in life, but also valuing these differences, seeing them as affirmative, rather than being 'less than'.

How could this critical reflection on emotions been taken further? What would need to happen for Lauren to reflect on her own role in this unjust system beyond the feeling of guilt towards a feeling of shame, and to establish an affective engagement or investment – a strong enough interest for the 'Other' (Probyn 2005) – outside firmly established roles and power differentials (such as bringing food and shelter to the poor)? What would make it easier for her to travel into somebody else's world?

The conversations with students that happened in and outside the workshop space, the reflection on these ‘moments of pedagogic affect’ (Watkins 2015), were a crucial start for us to reflect on the emotions experienced by the students and unpack the socio-historic roots of such emotions. Through this unpacking an understanding of how their social positioning affect their emotions may emerge and allow students a grasp of how the legacy of apartheid still plays itself out in today’s classrooms. Introducing critical literature around subjects such as empathy and witnessing could further deepen students’ understanding of how their own emotional responses are historically and socially situated. If we see compassion, as Curtin (2014) argues, as a cultivated practice, reflecting on one’s emotions is a lifetime process, that can start in the classroom but needs to eventually move beyond the classroom into students’ social and professional lives.

What does this mean for museum practice? While in the recent years more emphasis has been put on drawing on visitors’ emotions to elicit empathy, such as designing multimodal, multisensory experiences to allow visitors to identify and establish a closer emotional engagement with the exhibits (Watson 2015), not enough work is done to critically engage with the registers of this engagement (Smith 2016). As Smith argues, emotional engagement does not equate to transformative learning. How would active empathy or witnessing look like in a museums visit? How could one use emotional responses during a museum’s visit to critically reflect on one’s emotions and use this as a moment of pedagogic affect? How can one facilitate dialogue and self-reflection? These are questions that need further research.

We end this chapter with Butler’s (2004) quote, which started our thinking about why and how we are either affected by other people’s stories: ‘one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. We are touched by stories we tell’. While we believe in her statement, the analysis of students’ responses to Noni’s story has revealed the complexities of an affective engagement with other people’s stories. A reflection on the emotions experienced allowed us insights into how these students’ emotions and affects are ‘individually experienced but historically situated’ (Zembylas 2014: 397), as well as insight into the ways their relationships were ‘compromised’ (Shuman 2005). This reflection served as a powerful reminder of the entanglement of feeling, thinking and doing.

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