British Journal of Educational Studies
2017, pp. 1–17

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

WILFUL IGNORANCE AND THE EMOTIONAL REGIME OF SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT: This article explores how ignorance of vulnerability – particularly of others' vulnerability – may be produced and maintained in schools, especially in the context of pedagogical engagement with difficult histories. A focus on ignorance forces educators to ask not only about the epistemological presence of 'difficult knowledge' in schools, but also how epistemological absences operate affectively, formulating particular 'emotional regimes' of ignorance. The article shows how the denial of others' vulnerability – in the name of race/racism, nation-state/nationalism and the like – invokes and moulds particular emotional regimes that reproduce the ignorance of vulnerability underlying difficult histories. It is argued that only with a systematic analysis of the production and reproduction of emotional regimes of ignorance can educators conceive of vulnerability as being a pedagogical resource for ethical response and political resistance to regimes of ignorance in schools. The article discusses the implications for critical education.

Keywords: ignorance, epistemology, emotional regime, vulnerability, difficult histories, critical pedagogy

The epistemologies of ignorance have garnered increased interest in the social sciences and humanities in the past decade, generating valuable insights into the various forms that ignorance can take, and especially how ignorance is produced and reproduced in social processes (Dilley and Kirsch, 2015; High *et al*., 2012; Proctor and Schiebinger, 2008; Sullivan and Tuana, 2007). It is noteworthy that much work on epistemologies of ignorance explores issues such as: the conditions under which ignorance is constructed; the social processes and causes that practices of ignorance shape, and the social and political consequences of practices of ignorance. By raising these issues, scholars in the social sciences and humanities question the standard relationship between knowledge and ignorance, viewing ignorance not as a mere lack of knowledge, but rather as a substantive practice and part of a social process in which people actively produce and maintain ignorance; in other words, ignorance is seen as deeply implicated with race, class, gender, ideologies and social structures (Mills, 2007).

In the context of schooling, it has been argued that ignorance is actively produced and maintained through the reinforcement of unknowing about inconvenient and discomforting truths (Malewski and Jaramillo, 2011). This is particularly pertinent to discussions about the pedagogical engagement of 'difficult

ISSN 0007-1005 (print)/ISSN 1467-8527 (online)

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2017.1290785
http://www.tandfonline.com

histories', namely, histories rooted in the trauma, suffering, and violent oppression of groups of people such as racism, nationalism, colonialism, war, genocides and the like (Zembylas, 2016). For example, Tupper (2014), who writes in the context of Canada, argues that there are gaps and exclusions in curriculum and pedagogy about colonial relations and 'settler ignorance is actively maintained through the reinforcement of colonial dispositions' (p. 470). In schools, according to Tupper, 'colonial dispositions are typically perpetuated through "colonial-blind" discourses that deny the continuing harm embedded in settlers' historical and contemporary relationships with Aboriginal people' (ibid.). Difficult histories, then, are 'difficult' because three interrelated components are present (Sheppard, 2010): (a) content centered on traumatic events (e.g. settler colonialism and its consequences); (b) a sense of identification between those studying the history and those represented in history (e.g. the emotional challenges for descendants of those engaged in colonial practices compared to victims of colonialism); and (c) a moral response to these events (e.g. in which ways one responds – or fails to respond – to traumatic events).

In my own long-time ethnographic research on peace education in conflict-affected societies (see Bekerman and Zembylas, 2012; Zembylas, 2008, 2015a; Zembylas *et al*., 2016), I show that race and racism, national identity and nationalism, are affective modes of being embedded in historically specific assemblages, which are practiced in schools and the society (see also, Zembylas, 2015b). For example, national division and hatred in a conflict-affected society is rescaled right down to the school emotional practices and discourses. One of the most powerful discursive practices utilized in schools is the denial of others' vulnerability, namely, the refusal to acknowledge that the 'enemy-other' in a conflict-affected society is also vulnerable, as a human being, and suffers.

The disavowal of others' vulnerability is a stance that enables one's community to ignore those aspects of existence that are inconvenient, disadvantageous and discomforting (Gilson, 2011) – such as, for instance, the pain and suffering inflicted on another group by one's own community, hence the discomfort to also acknowledge 'their' suffering (Bar-Tal, 2007; Bar-Tal and Teichman, 2005). If, like knowledge, ignorance is 'a practice with supporting social causes' (Tuana, 2004, p. 195), then one wonders how ignorance and vulnerability converge in the society more generally, and in schools more specifically; namely, how ignorance as being part of a 'regime' – that is, a constellation of practices and power relations giving rise to forms of ignorance that have generative social effects and consequences (Kirsch and Dilley, 2015) – creates and cultivates certain manifestations of vulnerability: the practices that constitute ignorance of vulnerability, the social causes that may undergird it, its relationship to other forms of ignorance (Gilson, 2011).

This article explores how ignorance of vulnerability – particularly of others' vulnerability – may be produced and maintained in schools, especially in the context of pedagogical engagement with difficult histories. By 'ignorance of

others' vulnerability' I refer to the wilful ignorance of others' trauma and human vulnerability, namely, the ignorance of how others (who may often be deemed as our 'enemies') also suffer as human beings. This article asks then: What is the intersection between difficult histories and ignorance of vulnerability? How and when is ignorance invoked in difficult histories and with what consequences? A focus on ignorance forces educators to ask not only about the epistemological presence of 'difficult knowledge' in schools (see Britzman, 1998; Simon, 2005, 2014; Tarc, 2013; Zembylas, 2014), but also about how epistemological absences operate affectively, formulating particular 'emotional regimes' of ignorance. 'Emotional regimes' refer to the discursive practices and power relations prescribing specific 'emotional rules', ideals, rituals and vocabularies (Plamber, 2010; Reddy, 2001). This article, then, shows how the denial of others' vulnerability – in the name of race/racism, nation-state/nationalism and the like – invokes and moulds particular emotional regimes that reproduce the ignorance of vulnerability underlying difficult histories. If this is the case, the article suggests that the focus of pedagogues should be on how to un-make the emotional regimes of ignorance of vulnerability in classrooms – an admittedly difficult task, yet one that requires developing an analytical approach that allows educators to grasp the reproduction of non-knowledge through everyday pedagogical practices and discourses. The article does not outline specific practices how to un-make the emotional regimes of ignorance of vulnerability in classrooms, but rather suggests some insights that might be valuable to keep into consideration for the design of curriculum and pedagogical practices.

The article is divided into the following sections. In the first section, it examines briefly the concept of ignorance through the literature on epistemologies of ignorance; the argument here is that ignorance is a social, political and historical practice rather than a mere absence of knowledge. Then the article looks at the relationship between ignorance and vulnerability and discusses the production of ignorance of vulnerability. The next section of the article contends that ignorance of others' vulnerability and suffering in the context of difficult histories is a substantive social and political phenomenon that incorporates certain logics, ethics, emotions and social practices – in essence, ignorance of vulnerability constitutes an emotional regime with harmful consequences for teachers and students who engage with difficult histories. The final section of the article discusses the implications of considering the affective dimensions of ignorance of vulnerability in critical education and how ignorance may not be viewed as a purely negative phenomenon, but also as a starting point for capturing its productive potential.

1. EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE

Epistemologies of ignorance are noteworthy for their feminist inspirations, invoked largely by feminist work on epistemology in the 1990s (e.g. Haraway, 1991; Longino, 2002), exposing the extent to which knowing – and therefore,

un-knowing or ignorance – is a political activity rather than a 'purely' cognitive one. The recognition that ignorance is not simply a lack or absence of knowledge but rather a social, political and historical phenomenon has been forcefully put forward by Charles Mills in his well-known text *The Racial Contract* (1997), in which he offers an extensive analysis of white ignorance. In a frequently cited quote, Mills states:

> On matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made. (1997, p. 18)

Mills emphasizes that white ignorance is not accidental but rather a *knowing* ignorance of whiteness and its racist impacts. The epistemological dimensions of this ignorance involves '*white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion and self-deception on matters related to race*' (ibid., p. 19; original emphasis). According to Mills, whites are motivated to remain ignorant of the social injustices that produce and perpetuate white privilege; thus, white ignorance is much more devious and malign than a product of mere gap of knowledge. 'Imagine', Mills suggests, 'an ignorance militant, aggressive, not to be intimidated, an ignorance that it active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly – not at all defined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as *knowledge*' (2007, p. 13; original emphasis).

Several important anthologies that explore epistemologies of ignorance in relation to race (e.g. Sullivan and Tuana, 2007) and other social, anthropological and political matters (e.g. Dilley and Kirsch, 2015; High *et al*., 2012; Proctor and Schiebinger, 2008) have appeared in recent years. *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (Sullivan and Tuana, 2007) examines 'the complex phenomena of ignorance, which has as its aim identifying different forms of ignorance, examining how they are produced and sustained, and what role they play in knowledge practices' (p. 1). The purpose of *Agnotology: The Making and Un-Making of Ignorance* (Proctor and Schiebinger, 2008) is 'to promote the study of ignorance, by developing tools for understanding how and why various forms of knowing have "not come to be," or disappeared, or have been delayed or long neglected, for better or for worse, at various points in history' (p. vii). In *The Anthropology of Ignorance* (High *et al*., 2012), the editors write that the argument that underlies their anthology is that 'anthropologists have too easily attributed to the people they study the same unambiguous desire for knowledge, and the same aversion to ignorance … with the result that situations in which ignorance is viewed neutrally – or even positively – have been misunderstood and overlooked' (p. 1). Finally, in *Regimes of Ignorance: Anthropological Perspectives on the Production and Re-production of Non-knowledge* Dilley and Kirsch (2015) state that their volume wants to 'tackle questions about the

production and reproduction of ignorance within specific socio-cultural regimes of non-knowledge and power' (pp. 1–2).

Although these anthologies represent only a small part of the growing literature being published on the phenomenon of ignorance and how it relates to knowledge and epistemology, they highlight some important themes informing our understandings about ignorance. This literature shows that the study of the epistemology of ignorance has become a social and political project in the academy, because ignorance is examined as a product of deliberate practices and a social accomplishment rather than a failure in knowledge acquisition (Michaels, 2008). The study of ignorance then reveals the multiple aspects of power relations involved in practices of (un)knowing and how those practices are linked to and often support phenomena such as racism, nationalism, extremism and xenophobia. In other words, the literature on epistemologies of ignorance has brought to the surface that there are vested interests in producing and maintaining ignorance, and thus the politics of such ignorance is an important element of social and political analysis of ignorance in different socio-political settings (Tuana, 2004).

For example, several writers point out that ignorance is systematic and results from the denial of relationality and the deliberate motivation of some groups (e.g. whites) to maintain their positions of power. Alcoff (2007), who discusses racial ignorance, argues that epistemologists have begun to view ignorance not simply as a matter of neglect in epistemic practices, but rather as 'a substantive epistemic practice in itself' (p. 39) that is historically generated in relation to group identities and social structures. Similarly, Hoagland (2007) sees the denial of relationality as central to practices of ignorance; as a result, privilege (e.g. whiteness) becomes invisible to oneself because it is the norm. This 'blindness' is understood then as active techniques of denial that perpetuate white privilege. As Cohen (2001), whose work is followed by Mills (2007), points out:

> turning a blind eye – keeping facts conveniently out of sight, allow[s] something to be both known and not known. Such methods can be highly pathological but nevertheless 'reflect a respect and fear of the truth and it is this fear which leads to the collusion and cover-up.' Turning a blind eye is a social motion. We have access to enough facts about human suffering, but avoid drawing their disquieting implications. We cannot face them all the time. (2001, p. 34)

To emphasize the deliberate aspect of this phenomenon, Spelman (2007) talks about 'wilful ignorance' – a phenomenon in which individuals are forced to manage their ignorance when faced with unpleasant truths they are unwilling to admit. As Spelman puts it, this form of ignorance is 'an appalling achievement' that requires 'grotesquely prodigious effort' (p. 120).

All in all, Mills and other writers who write about epistemologies of ignorance make an important contribution to showing how ignorance is actually based on a deeply seated epistemic resistance to know. Although there are different forms of ignorance, the persistence of this practice shows that ignorance is not

always a mere neglect, not self-deception or simply an unwillingness to know, but rather a carefully sustained and managed form of not-knowing that is supported by an entire range of practices, habits and institutions. It is an ignorance of one's positionality and responsibility, constituting a social and political mechanism for safeguarding privilege and domination. This analytical angle on ignorance has important theoretical implications, because it highlights 'that "non-knowledge" is thought and experienced by people throughout the world to be more than just a residual category of "knowledge" but something that has palpable effects in the world' (Kirsch and Dilley, 2015, p. 4). Recent ethnographic studies of ignorance (High *et al*., 2012), in fact, show very clearly the ontological dimensions of this phenomenon, namely, how ignorance is the product of specific practices, with effects that are distinct from the effects of the lack of knowledge. The practice of ignorance is actively produced, acquiring an emotional as well as a cognitive content, and it sustains a specific set of power relations within particular socio-political settings. It is with these ideas in mind that Kirsch and Dilley (2015) speak of a 'regime of ignorance' and Steyn (2012) calls it 'The Ignorance Contract' in order to acknowledge the wider social and political field in which the production of ignorance takes place. The next part of the article explores how these ideas on ignorance provide valuable insights in conceptualizing its entanglement with vulnerability.

2. IGNORANCE OF VULNERABILITY

In order to understand the meaning and significance of 'ignorance of vulnerability', we need first to begin with a discussion of the notion of vulnerability itself. The 'conventional and tacitly assumed understanding of vulnerability', writes Gilson (2011), 'holds that to be vulnerable is simply to be susceptible, exposed, at risk, in danger' (p. 309). In this way, vulnerability is constructed in a negative manner, as a generalizable weakness. However, as Gilson argues, there is a more fundamental understanding of vulnerability as a 'primary human vulnerability' to which Butler (2004, 2009) refers, that gets lost in the solely negative definition.

In her work over the last decade or so, Butler (2004, 2009) offers a political understanding of vulnerability that focuses on the notion of vulnerability as a primary and fundamental human condition that is common for all human beings and is conceived in more ambivalent terms rather than as a merely negative phenomenon; this understanding of vulnerability, as it is suggested by various scholars in education and beyond (Gilson, 2011; Taylor, 2011; Zembylas, 2014), creates important openings for friendship, responsibility and solidarity. As Butler writes, 'each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies …. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure' (2004, p. 20). Butler argues that 'we cannot … will away this vulnerability. We

must attend to it' (ibid., p. 29) and poses new questions about the relationship of grief, violence, and vulnerability:

> Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavoring to seek resolution for grief through violence? … If we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some might fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? … To foreclose that vulnerability, to banish it, to make ourselves secure at the expense of every other human consideration is to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way. (ibid., p. 30)

Importantly, according to Butler's analysis, vulnerability is not just a condition that limits us, a negative phenomenon, but rather one that can also enable us. As Gilson (2011) explains, 'Being vulnerable makes it possible for us to suffer, to fall prey to violence and to be harmed, but also to fall in love, to learn, to take pleasure and find comfort in the presence of others, and to experience the simultaneity of these feelings' (p. 310). Vulnerability, then, 'is a condition of openness, openness to being affected and affecting in turn' (ibid.). As Butler (2009) writes elsewhere,

> [R]esponsiveness [to the world] may include a wide range of affects: pleasure, rage, suffering, hope, to name a few. Such affects, I would argue, become not just the basis, but the very stuff of ideation and of critique. […] Hence, precariousness as a generalized condition relies on a conception of the body as fundamentally dependent on, and conditioned by, a sustained and sustainable world; responsiveness-and thus, ultimately, responsibility-is located in the affective responses to a sustaining and impinging world. (p. 34)

Butler complicates further the conventional and tacitly assumed understanding of vulnerability by suggesting that vulnerability is established and maintained on the basis of certain 'domains of the knowable' (p. 6) that 'produce norms of recognizability' (ibid.). These norms, as she argues, are socially and politically construed; however, Butler leaves the door open to acknowledging the complex relationship between vulnerability and ignorance, because these norms are not just about 'knowledge' but also about 'non-knowledge'. In other words, it could be argued that for every 'regime of knowledge' that recognizes vulnerabilities of some people there is simultaneously a 'regime of ignorance' that fails to recognize others' vulnerabilities.

One of the effects of this relationship between vulnerability and ignorance, particularly in the context of difficult histories, is the identification with 'our' vulnerability and the disidentification with vulnerable others. The denial of others' vulnerability, contends Gilson (2011), is a form of 'cultivated ignorance', that is, a regime that rejects vulnerability as a common human condition in favour of an understanding of vulnerability that propagates the others' *invulnerability* – namely, the assumption that others are incapable of being wounded.

Gilson makes an important contribution in the analysis of vulnerability by showing how the assumption of invulnerability essentially constitutes a form of ignorance. The denial of others' vulnerability in the context of difficult histories and the sole recognition of one's own suffering can be understood to be motivated by the desire 'to maintain a certain kind of subjectivity' (Gilson, 2011, p. 312) – for example, cultural and national identity as 'noble' or 'good' compared to the 'enemy-other' who is 'evil'.

For example, to go back to my own research with Zvi Bekerman in the conflict-affected societies of Cyprus and Israel (Bekerman and Zembylas, 2012), we show to be misleading the essentialist binaries and usual assumptions that the (vulnerable) 'victim' is always powerless, while the (invulnerable) 'perpetrator' is all too powerful. Our thick description of difficult dialogues among teachers and students from conflicting communities allows us to argue that being a victim can be immensely powerful and can be used advantageously by the (nation) state apparatus which by 'nature' is involved in the production of selective memory and forgetting, for the successful indoctrination of its population. The recognition of the victim's vulnerability is accompanied by the complete disavowal of the perpetrator's own vulnerability and suffering, when there is historical evidence that conflicting sides have consistently exchanged their roles as both victims and perpetrators.

Discursive practices that sustain the others' vulnerability enable teachers and students in the context of difficult histories to ignore those aspects of history that are inconvenient, disadvantageous, or uncomfortable for one's own community. The disavowal of the others as worthy of being recognized as 'victims' – namely, the recognition of their human vulnerability and suffering – is an instance in which ignorance is actively produced and reproduced as a pedagogical practice. Because it pertains centrally to the formation of national subjectivity in the context of difficult histories, ignorance of vulnerability in this case seems to be best understood as a paradigmatic instance of what Spelman (2007) calls 'wilful ignorance'. As Gilson notes: 'Wilful ignorance is actively cultivated, an ignorance that must be continually maintained and is maintained because it appears to be in one's interests to remain ignorant' (2011, p. 313). As Mills (1997, 2007) shows in relation to race, white ignorance that ensures the perpetuation of privilege and racism is a form of wilful ignorance. Similarly, ignorance of the other's vulnerability in the context of difficult histories is a social and political accomplishment; if social and political institutions (e.g. schools) give the message that some groups are ungrievable, to use Butler's (2004, 2009) term, then this is a function of (public) pedagogical practices that aim at preserving the interests of a particular group. For this group, it is not as much about knowledge as about how they would like the world to be so that their interests are secured (Steyn, 2012).

3. EMOTIONAL REGIMES OF IGNORANCE IN SCHOOLS

The analysis so far suggests that habits of ignorance of others' vulnerability are learned through discourses and practices that fail to recognize what is not known

about others. Hence, for example, ignorance of others' vulnerability is produced because students are taught to experience a self-centered vulnerability, while disavowing vulnerability as a common human experience. As this wilful ignorance is established through a 'regime' by withholding knowledge from certain groups, it is through the un-making of this regime – rather than through processes of conscious reflection and argumentation – that ignorance is going to be corrected. But before I discuss a few insights regarding the un-making of ignorance in schools, we need first to delve deeper into how ignorance becomes part of a regime that gives rise to certain logics, ethics, emotions and pedagogical practices. Conceptualizing the notion of a 'regime of ignorance' allows us to grasp the reproduction of what is not-known through everyday practices in various institutions, including schools.

As Kirsch and Dilley (2015) have recently pointed out, 'much anthropological and sociological work has for a long time almost exclusively addressed genealogies of knowledge' (p. 22). However, as Foucault's analyses of the reorganization of knowledge and its interconnectedness with power show 'these processes are not just about "knowledge" but also about "non-knowledge"' (ibid., pp. 22–23). Consequently, Kirsch and Dilley argue that for every 'regime of knowledge' there is simultaneously what they call a 'regime of ignorance', as certain types, modes and objects of knowing are legitimated, while others are delegitimized; these illegitimate forms determine (more or less implicitly) the space of non-knowing. A regime of ignorance then is defined as 'the total set of relations that unite, in a given period or cultural context, the discursive practices and power relations that give rise to epistemological gaps and forms of unknowing that have generative social effects and consequences' (Kirsch and Dilley, 2015, p. 23).

What is missing from this definition, however, is the acknowledgment of recent work in the history and sociology of emotions, emphasizing that the norms which specify the emotions to be felt and expressed under certain circumstances are important elements of a regime (Flam, 2013; Plamber, 2010; Reddy, 2001; Rosenwein, 2002). Thus, the concept of 'emotional regime' has been suggested (Reddy, 2001) to refer to the normative emotions that are interwoven in rituals, practices, and expressions underpinning a political regime – at the micro- or macro-level – on the basis of a set of (explicit or implicit) 'emotional rules'. Simply put, emotional rules are the rules or norms by which people are supposed to shape their emotional expressions and respond to the expressions of others (Plamber, 2010). Rosenwein (2002) says that feeling rules are fundamental in the formation of 'emotional communities'; emotional communities 'define and assess', explains Rosenwein, what is 'valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore' (p. 842).

For example, Flam (2013) refers to a *therapeutic* emotional regime in the context of a recent human rights movement for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation.

This emotional regime, according to Flam, imposes many more feeling rules on the victims than on the perpetrators, telling the victims how to reframe their victimhood in the name of reconciliation, what to remember and tell, how to heal and forget. In particular, the victims are told that they should engage in emotional management, and get rid of their 'destructive' emotions such as rage, hatred and resentment, for the sake of reconciliation. This therapeutic discourse calls for sensitivity and for a giving a chance to the perpetrators, while telling victims and perpetrators alike they can achieve reconciliation when they remember, tell and forgive. This emotional regime then imposes certain emotions on the victims and discourages other emotions in the name of reconciliation. In other words, I would argue that simultaneously to the therapeutic discourse of reconciliation there is also a regime of ignorance that encourages unknowing, rather than mere forgetting – all in the name of reconciliation.

While scholars of memory and forgetting have paid considerable attention to the role knowledge transmission plays in forming collective identities and memories, they tend not to explore different types of absences (Gershon and Raj, 2000). More often than not, memory is understood as the presence of knowledge, while forgetting is an erasure of that knowledge. Ignorance, however, as Raj (2000) argued, 'is the state of not knowing, the absence of knowledge' (p. 31). Consequently, forgetting is not the same as non-knowledge. Following Gershon and Raj's (2000) recommendation, I also suggest that an analytical framework that includes ignorance needs to highlight ethnographic experiences in classrooms that reveal how complex knowledge transmission can be for teachers and students, especially in the context of difficult histories, so that the distinction between unknowing and forgetting is not erased.

For example, in my own ethnographic work on the prospects of peace and reconciliation in schools of divided societies (Bekerman and Zembylas, 2012; Zembylas, 2008, 2015a; Zembylas *et al*., 2016), I found out that many absences occur in classrooms when teachers handle inconvenient and discomforting events from the past. If the pedagogical aim is to promote peace and reconciliation within a particular context, then the discursive practices utilized in the classroom seem to promote therapeutic discourses along the lines described by Flam (2013). These discursive practices give rise to gaps and forms of unknowing that acknowledge emotions of 'victims' and 'perpetrators' as long as they do not threaten the prospects of reconciliation. There is, in other words, the production of an emotional regime of ignorance that prioritizes compassion and empathy, even if this implies that particular difficult histories will not receive acknowledgement in the classroom.

On the other hand, if the pedagogical aim is to merely recognize the vulnerability of one's own community while ignoring the vulnerability of an adversary community, it is not unlikely that an emotional regime of resentment is produced in the classroom (see Zembylas, 2016). According to this regime, resentment organizes the social, emotional, and pedagogical spaces in the context of difficult histories, creating powerful emotional boundaries between 'victims' and

'perpetrators'. Perpetrators, for example, are resented by victims through emotion discourses that assume *they* (perpetrators) cause pain and injury to *us* (victims) (Ahmed, 2004; Zembylas, 2016). The regime of ignorance in this case concerns the ignorance of others' vulnerability and suffering in the name of perpetuating conflict and animosity for political or moral purposes.

In both of the above possible scenarios – there are clearly many other possibilities – the emotional regime produced is one of wilful ignorance. Wilful ignorance is actively cultivated in the classroom, either in the name of reconciliation or in the name of perpetuating resentment towards the 'enemy-other'. This ignorance must be continually maintained and is maintained because it appears to serve a particular aim. Both aims, however, entail a form of self-deception and exploitation (Tuana, 2006); their common ground is that they fail to acknowledge vulnerability as a common human condition, either by silencing the pain of victims or by highlighting only the suffering of one side. Ignorance of vulnerability is produced in both cases precisely because students are taught to pay attention only to certain manifestations of vulnerability. Importantly, as Gilson (2011) argues, reiterating what ethnographic research tells us in this case, 'This ignorance is established not by refraining from investigating certain questions or by directly withholding knowledge from certain groups of people, but through *social practices* and *habits*' (p. 315, added emphasis).

4. THE UN-MAKING OF WILFUL IGNORANCE IN SCHOOL PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES: SOME INSIGHTS

An obvious question, as we approach the end of this article, is then: if the view of ignorance of vulnerability as being wilful and active is right, then how can scholars and educators engage with it critically and most importantly, in which ways can they dismantle wilful ignorance and its consequences? The answer, of course, depends on where one grounds ignorance, epistemologically and ontologically. If, for example, we follow Mills (2007) in understanding ignorance 'as a cognitive tendency – an inclination, a doxastic disposition – which is not insuperable' (p. 23), then it is more likely to expect that ignorance is best corrected through processes of conscious (critical) reflection and argumentation in the classroom. However, in light of recent developments in various disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, including education (e.g. Steyn, 2012; Sullivan, 2014; Tate, 2014; Zembylas, 2015b) that ignorance is not primarily a cognitive difficulty, but also affective and ontological – namely, a practice and a habit – it would be a mistake to view the un-making of ignorance as purely a function of cognition.

Ignorance, according to Sullivan (2006), has primarily an ontological status in which habit plays a central role. 'Habits', writes Sullivan, 'are dispositions for transacting with the world, and they make up the very being that humans are' (p. 2). For instance, white privilege manifests itself as a habit in the world, whereby white people are habituated to 'ontological expansiveness', recognizing

only their own interests and ignoring the interests of others (p. 25). Habits and practices perpetuate ignorance by actively ignoring one's complicity in difficult histories, 'because to admit such *complicity* is to open oneself to features of one's social world and one's way of inhabiting that world that are discomfiting' (Gilson, 2011, p. 319; added emphasis).

Consequently, one of the pedagogies that could begin to challenge the habits and practices of ignorance in classrooms would be to develop counter-practices that highlight Butler's notion of common human vulnerability in combination with the concept of 'shared complicities' (Keet, 2011). The notion of 'shared complicities', according to Keet, suggests that there is the potential of evil in all of us which already makes us complicit in the wrongdoing of others (see also Zembylas, 2016). This conceptualization does not imply that we are all vulnerable or complicit in their same way; the recognition of asymmetries is important in challenging regimes of ignorance, however, this is not to claim that all eschewals of vulnerability operate in an identical manner. So what are some insights that might be valuable to keep into consideration for the design of curriculum and pedagogical practices in the context of engagement with difficult histories?

First and foremost, a whole new set of questions are raised – questions that are not refrained and their possible 'answers' are not withheld from certain groups in the name of ignorance: Whose difficult histories are being recognized? Are there any difficult histories that are ignored? How are vulnerabilities symmetrical or asymmetrical for different individuals or groups featured in difficult histories? In what ways could individuals or groups be complicit to others' suffering and trauma without knowing it? What can be done to understand oneself as *both* vulnerable *and* complicit? (Zembylas, 2016) Without this double realization – that is, how all human beings are vulnerable, yet not in the same manner, and that all of us have shared, yet asymmetrical complicities in others' suffering and vulnerability – our pedagogical engagement with difficult histories will fail to even begin to challenge regimes of ignorance in classrooms. The issue is not simply to bring to the surface 'forgotten' aspects of the past, but rather to face our unknowing productively in order to imagine altered relations with the other – such as those found in friendship, empathy and trust.

Needless to say, it is not easy to make specific this conception of shared complicity, even if asymmetries of vulnerability are acknowledged. To support the dismantling of ignorant epistemologies and ontologies, 'appropriate affective organization and ethical orientations have to be acquired' (Steyn, 2012, p. 22). As ignorance is 'quite a complex state of being' (ibid.) rather than a cognitive dysfunction, pedagogues need to develop pedagogies that actively promote new affective communities in the classroom such as, for example, 'critical pedagogies of friendship' (Zembylas, 2015c). The meaning of critical pedagogies of friendship is essentially constituted in their aim to transform students and teachers as well as the schools and the communities in which they are enacted, by identifying and highlighting practices of friendship that

generate compassion and responsibility towards the other. Yet, these practices are not idealist or uncritical to the emotional regimes produced as well as their consequences. The value of interventions such as critical pedagogies of friendship or critical pedagogies of compassion (Zembylas, 2013) lies in interrupting normative emotional rules and habits of relationality with others, without establishing new naive regimes.

For example, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, white and black students may be traumatized for different reasons and in different ways (Jansen, 2009). Both black and white students carry difficult knowledge that is manifested affectively in various ways, yet these ways are not always acknowledged and so there are missed opportunities to bring together individuals who are implicated in each other's traumas (Zembylas, 2014). Difficult histories become a platform on which the conversation is kept going between interlocutors who remain unsettled, exposed and discomforted. Unless student and teacher subjectivities change through pedagogies – such as critical pedagogies of friendship – different groups will remain prone to recycling ignorance-making (Steyn, 2012). Importantly though, as Steyn (2012) points out, corrective knowledge 'is not sufficient to stem the circulation of ignorances' (ibid., p. 22). New relationalities will be needed to combat the ignorance of relationality and interdependence (Hoagland, 2007).

Therefore, critical pedagogies of friendship and compassion are needed not only to acknowledge the singularity of one's vulnerability and complicity, but also to challenge the ignorance of relationality, which is a fundamental feature of ignoring others' vulnerability. Such pedagogies may undo ignorance by cultivating actions and attitudes of students and teachers that reject emotional ideologies which invest in reductionist distinctions between friend/enemy and oppressor/oppressed (Zembylas, 2015c). Also, these pedagogical practices expose the asymmetrical vulnerabilities and complicities, while promoting emotional communities that do not tolerate the circulation of ignorances. Finally, these critical pedagogies have the potential to generate spaces in which wilful ignorance is not immune and begin to truly interrogate the conditions (structural inequalities, poverty, globalization, etc.) that give rise to different manifestations of vulnerability and complicity, while acknowledging relationality between ourselves and others (see Olson and Gillman, 2013).

All in all, this discussion suggests the need to engage in a critical analysis of the complex nature of emotional regimes of ignorance and their consequences in the context of engaging with difficult histories. My analysis shows that the unmaking of wilful ignorance in classroom is a complicated task that involves a critical examination of how power relations are linked to regimes of ignorance and habits of relationality. Pedagogies that wish to make a valuable intervention in undoing regimes of ignorance need to identify and challenge the affective investments and emotion-informed ideologies that underlie possible responses toward the other on the basis of fixed binary terms (i.e. 'friend' versus 'enemy'). The efforts that stem ignorance of vulnerability call for building new

relationalities, alliances, and affections with others that cross traditional borders, social norms and expectations.

5. CONCLUSION

Increasing work on the epistemologies of ignorance in recent years shows that ignorance is a social and political accomplishment and a function of discourses and practices that are produced and maintained in the context of contested relations between groups with different interests. The context of difficult histories in schools is no immune from regimes of ignorance. This article has brought to the surface some of the tensions involved when ignorance is constructed through pedagogical practices that deny others' vulnerability. It has been argued that only with a systematic analysis of the production and reproduction of emotional regimes of ignorance can educators conceive of vulnerability as being a pedagogical resource for ethical response and political resistance to regimes of ignorance in schools.

Making ignorance a pedagogical resource for ethical response and political resistance in the context of difficult histories implies asking and investigating a set of provocative questions. To paraphrase the questions posed by Mair *et al.* (2012, p. 23), this means not focusing simply on why there are things we don't know about difficult histories and the others' vulnerability, but rather: How can teachers and students become aware of their ignorance of vulnerability and relationality? How are forms of ignorance transmitted or taught through pedagogical practices? How are they regulated? What kinds of roles or relationships does ignorance produce in the context of difficult histories? Why do teachers and students engage in the production of various forms of ignorance? What are the teaching and learning effects and consequences of the emotional regimes of ignorance that are established? How are they maintained? How can they be interrupted?

So, in conclusion, I want to summarize three points that I consider important in reconceptualizing the production and reproduction of emotional regimes of ignorance in the context of difficult histories. First and foremost, teachers and students need to be open to not-knowing, a precondition of learning about/from difficult histories. This is 'an openness to being wrong and venturing one's ideas, beliefs, and feelings nonetheless' (Gilson, 2011, p. 325). To refrain from investigating questions such as the ones raised above, because of fears of discomfort would amount to a kind of closure that eventually perpetuates regimes of ignorance in schools. Yet, this openness is not incompatible with a strategic approach in undoing ignorance of vulnerability, namely, a pedagogical approach that provides the protective mechanisms and creates the conditions that allow for greater recognition of ignorance. Second, teachers and students need opportunities to put themselves in and learn from situations in which one is the unknowing and discomforting party (cf. Gilson, 2011). As I have argued elsewhere (Zembylas, 2014, 2015a, 2016) without an acceptance of the value of discomfort, teaching and learning will miss important productive openings for transformation. Finally, my analysis calls attention to the

affective and ontological dimensions of knowledge, and therefore, as Gilson also argues, 'If the ignorance one seeks to dispel is often a deeply rooted, wilful form of ignorance that entails not just beliefs but unconscious commitments, then it must be destabilized at this level' (2011, p. 325). Further work needs to explore the emotional regimes of ignorance, within the context of difficult histories, and other contexts.

6. DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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