Social Justice, Democratic Education and the Silencing of Words that Wound

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ABSTRACT   *Classrooms and schools represent a "culture of power" to the extent that they mirror unjust social relations that exist in the larger society. Progressive educators committed to social justice seek to disrupt those social relations in the classroom that function to silence marginalised students, but neutralising those who attempt to reassert power is problematic. This paper investigates the questions: is it ever justified to use power to interrupt power? Does all silencing subjugate? Arguments for and against the censorship of teachers who believe that portraying homosexual lifestyles in a positive light undermines their integrity are outlined. I highlight and explain two crucial considerations absent in the aforementioned debate. Finally, the implications of the debate for social justice educators are explicated.*

I. Introduction

Classrooms and schools represent a "culture of power" to the extent that they mirror unjust social relations existing in the larger society. Profoundly aware of the mechanisms by which power has functioned historically to silence and marginalise certain social groups through the schooling process, progressive educators committed to social justice seek to disrupt and problematise such social relations in the classroom and in their schools, but neutralising those who attempt to reassert power engenders many problems. Is it justified to use power to interrupt power? Does all silencing subjugate?

A classroom encounter illustrates the dilemma that is at the heart of this essay. Early on in one of my graduate classes, a student "came out" to me in private but admitted to me that he does not feel safe disclosing to the rest of the predominantly white, Christian students in our class that he is gay. This was a course on democratic education and diversity and at one point in the curriculum I assigned some readings about the lives of gays, lesbians and bisexuals in public schools. One of the white, Christian, heterosexual students in the class, a prospective assistant principal, declared that she would have no problem with homosexual students in her school because she has learned to "love the sinner but hate the sin". When I challenged her remark by asking how she thinks gay or lesbian students would feel having been

referred to, by her, as "sinners", her defensive response was to claim adamantly her right to express her religious belief.

Astonished at her brazenness and the confidence with which she spoke, I continued to query her. "As an assistant principal, how would you respond to a gay adolescent in your school who confides to you that he was contemplating suicide? What would you tell a student who asks you whether all gays are abomination in the eyes of God and will go to hell? Would you support the inclusion of books that include discussion of children with same-sexed parents in your First Grade curriculum when you know that the aim of these books is to convey a positive message about these families to your students?" Rather than respond directly to my questions, my student accused me of trying to silence her and anyone who holds the view that homosexuality is morally wrong. She claimed that she certainly does not discriminate against anyone, nor does she have any hateful feelings against homosexuals. Moreover, she was incensed that schools, in the name of "tolerance", silence all objections to open homosexuality. The biggest insult, according to my student, was the hypocrisy demonstrated. "Where is the 'respect' demanded by homosexuals for those who are 'different' from them?" she contended. While my religious student felt entitled to voice her view in our classroom, I could not help but notice that the student who told me he was gay remained silent.

In this paper I will be defending what Megan Boler (2001) refers to as an "affirmative action pedagogy". According to Boler, educators are obligated to critically analyse any utterance made in the university classroom that has the potential to foreclose marginalised voices, "*even at the minor cost of limiting dominant voices*" (p. 321, italics mine). In order to explicate the justification for such silencing of dominant voices, in the first part of this paper, I will examine the arguments for and against the censorship of teachers who believe that portraying homosexuality in a positive light undermines their moral integrity. In the second part of this article, I highlight two crucial considerations that the aforementioned debate overlooks. Finally, I outline the implications of this debate for the justification of an "affirmative action pedagogy".

II. For and Against Censorship

In a number of provocative articles, John Petrovic (1998, 1999, 2002) presents a compelling argument for the censorship of teachers whose religious views preclude their ability to give positive recognition to the "worldview" of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students based on the democratic principles of recognition and non-oppression. By summoning Charles Taylor's powerful defence for a "politics of recognition", Petrovic contends that *justice* demands the recognition of the value of different cultures. As Taylor puts it,

> … our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.

> Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being, (Taylor, 1992, p. 25).

Petrovic maintains that because our identity is formed by the recognition of others, the absence of such recognition as well as misrecognition can cause real harm. Justice, therefore, demands the positive recognition of different cultures, and Petrovic broadens this notion of culture so that it includes race, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexual orientation, referring to these as different "worldviews" (Petrovic, 1999, p. 203).

Petrovic, however, limits which cultures are entitled to such recognition. On one hand, Petrovic argues that the principle of non-oppression must augment the principle of recognition. Invoking Iris Marion Young's (1990) five forms of oppression, Petrovic contends that groups that are victims of exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and/or violence deserve recognition. Most significant for Petrovic is cultural imperialism that involves the imposition of one culture upon another and whose only antidote is the portrayal of the marginalised culture in a positive light. With regard to education, therefore, justice demands countering the cultural imperialism sustained through schooling with the positive recognition of oppressed groups.

On the other hand, not all oppressed groups merit such recognition, according to Petrovic. Only oppressed groups whose views are democratic themselves—that is, those oppressed groups that are committed to the democratic principles of recognition and non-oppression deserve recognition (1999, p. 204). From this Petrovic concludes that teachers whose religious beliefs preclude them from engaging in the recognition and non-oppression of gays, lesbians and bisexuals should not be allowed to express their views in the school or in the classroom. Anticipating the charge of reverse cultural imperialism, Petrovic quotes from Isaiah Berlin, "The freedom of some must at times be curtailed to secure the freedom of others" (cited in Petrovic, 1998, p. 47, from Gutmann, 1980, p. 7).

John Beck (2001), however, is not persuaded by Petrovic's argument. Beck charges Petrovic with self-contradiction. According to Beck, one cannot make the recognition of the worth of different worldviews central to one's conception of democracy and, then, prohibit the expression of some of these views and the endorsement of competing views by schools and teachers all in the name of democracy. Beck's argument is particularly notable because he accuses Petrovic of assuming that all religious individuals committed to the immorality of homosexuality are unreasonable, dogmatic and moralistic.

That unreasonable and dogmatic utterances opposing homosexuality should not be allowed expression seems irrefutable. Yet, according to Beck, Petrovic's position would unjustly silence those religious individuals who are prepared to discuss and defend their views but who also respect reasoned argument, evidential teaching, non-indoctrinatory practices and other normal cannons of liberal educational discourse. Beck believes this *is* an instance of reverse cultural imposition. By culturally silencing the reasonable religious person's views on homosexuality, "*They*

would be the unreasonably oppressed minority" (Beck, 2001, p. 237). Beck insists that although public schools should present homosexuality as a morally acceptable lifestyle, schools should also be sites of open democratic debate. Students and, even teachers, who believe that homosexuality is repugnant, indeed sinful, should be allowed to openly, publicly express their views.

In his 1998 article Petrovic acknowledges the reasonable religious student and does not intend to silence them. Yet in his 2002 rejoinder to Beck, Petrovic challenges Beck to clarify what, for him, would be a reasonable assertion of the putative wrongfulness of homosexuality. Any reasoned defence of the wrongness of homosexuality on the part of the religious person, Petrovic argues, may respect the normal canons of liberal educational discourse but in the end would reduce to references to biblical texts or biblical scholars. Because Beck fails to define the distinction between reasonably and unreasonably held religious stands regarding the wrongfulness of homosexuality, according to Petrovic, he begs his own question.

In this interesting interchange, Petrovic implies that references to the Bible can have no *legitimacy in the normal canons of liberal educational discourse*. Yet is not this the position that some religious groups rally against *in the name of recognition and inclusion* when they demand that creationism be taught alongside evolutionary theory by appealing to cultural imposition? In order to strengthen Petrovic's arguments in a way that limits the counterclaim of cultural imposition, I emphasise two ideas that seem to follow from the principle of non-oppression that Petrovic overlooks. The first idea involves the power of discourse to perpetuate ideological subordination. The second concerns the meaning of oppression and the problem of conflating "difference".

III. The Power of Discourse

To introduce the first point, I want to share with you something that was prominent in my mind during the days that I was agonising over what my religious student said in class—actually this involved something she did not say. I am an Orthodox Jew and to my Christian student I, too, am a "sinner". Why would my student, who knew my religious commitments, not affirm publicly that I was a "sinner" in the same way that she so safely classified gays and lesbians? It occurred to me that perhaps she saw me as a *religious* person, as opposed to a *Jewish religious* person, in this instance and, therefore, she felt safe to speak out against homosexuality assuming that I would uphold her position. Yet I immediately and clearly demonstrated that if this was her assumption she was mistaken. Nevertheless, my challenges to her position did not silence her and she continued to feel safe referring to gays and lesbians as sinners (but not Jews). What provides her with this safety and are her utterances merely an expression of her religious beliefs? Given the silence of my gay student, it seems clear to me that my religious student's utterance does more than merely communicate a power-neutral message of her particular belief.

Words that Wound: One Level of Harm

Certain speech acts have been shown to be more than mere pronouncement of beliefs. Hate speech and particularly fighting words, for example, are prohibited legally because they do more than express a belief; they incite violence. Yet my student's declarations do not fall easily under such categories because they are not spoken as a slur or form of hateful invective (indeed, she claims to *love* the "sinner"). Perhaps my student's utterances fall under the classification of offensive speech which foregrounds the suffering of the particular victim rather than the intentions of the speaker. Along with Catharine MacKinnon (1993), I hesitate to use the term "offensive" to describe such speech acts as this trivialises the harms that such speech gives rise to by reducing the speech and its concomitant harms to mere rudeness or of being insulted or offended. As Charles Lawrence III explains,

> There is a great difference between the offensiveness of words that you would rather not hear because they are labeled dirty, impolite, or person-ally demeaning and the *injury* inflicted by words that remind the world that you are fair game for physical attack, that evoke in you all of the millions of cultural lessons regarding your inferiority that you have so painstakingly repressed, and that imprint upon you a badge of servitude and subservience for all the world to see (Lawrence, 1993, p. 74).

With MacKinnon, I use the term assaultive speech or words that wound to describe these speech acts because I want to highlight the type of harms these utterances occasion.

In her discussion of racist words that wound, Maria Matsuda explains how these words "all hit the gut of those in the target group" (Matsuda, 1993, p. 23). The physiological consequences for the victim include symptoms of emotional distress such as rapid pulse rate, difficulty breathing, nightmares, hypertension, psychosis and even suicide (Masuda, 1993, p. 24). One of my pre-service teachers recently told me that during her practicum at a Toronto high school, a student in her class made a derogatory comment about Chinese businessmen. Although my student is Korean, she told me she was psychologically stunned and could not continue with her lesson with equanimity.

In addition, such speech has the ability to restrict the victim's personal freedom by placing the victim in double binds where the exercise of the right of speech may result in the loss of one's job, one's opportunity for an education, or even one's life. As the student who came out to me explained later, even if he had the courage to respond to my religious student's comment in class, while he may not necessarily "out" himself, at a minimum he puts himself under the risk of being suspected as gay. (An assumption often made by the heterosexist is that anyone supporting gay and lesbian rights is automatically gay, lesbian or bisexual—why else would someone take the risk to put up a strong defence?) If he does speak, he may also feel that he must mendaciously make some kind of reference to his supposed heterosexuality. At the same time, if my gay student remains silent—his freedom to be who he is has been forfeited. My religious student unintentionally (let us assume) uses language

that forces a choice and puts my gay student in a double bind. Her freedom of expression constrains his; her freedom to speak silences him and, perhaps, others like him. Her integrity compels him to waive his.

Words that Wound: A Deeper Level of Harm

Words that wound, I contend, do more than this. In order to see what such discourse does and how, one must look beyond the isolated speech act and look at the broader social context in which such speech is uttered. In order to expose this context, it is helpful to bring the type of speech act into sharper focus.

In an important and oft-quoted book, *How to Do Things With Words*, J. L. Austin (1962) distinguishes between perlocutionary and illocutionary speech acts. Perlocutionary speech consists of words that produce certain (often unintended) effects such as screaming "Fire!" in a crowded cinema. The intention may be to call for help; the effect is that people become scared and run to the nearest exit. In contrast, illocutionary speech acts *do what they say the moment they are uttered.* Austin's famous example is of the utterance "I promise," in which the speech act and the deed are one.

"Words that wound" can be illocutionary speech acts that do things discursively at the moment of their utterance. Such illocutionary speech is implied when Lawrence asks us to consider the concept of "race" as a verb, not as a noun.

> … the cultural meaning of race is promulgated through millions of ongoing contemporaneous speech/acts. Thus … "We are raced". The social construction of race is an ongoing process (Lawrence, 1993, p. 61).

Racist speech, therefore, has illocutionary force because it racialises people; it discursively brings certain types of identities into being.

Another important aspect of illocutionary speech and what exposes the social context upon which such speech depends is that illocutionary speech acts only gain their power from the linguistic and social conventions they invoke at the moment of their utterance by authoritative speakers. Austin contends that such speech acts are ritual or ceremonial and that they "work" only because they have been and continue to be repeated over time. In this sense illocutionary utterances not only depend on certain social structures, but they also sustain and perpetuate them at the same time. In terms of racist speech, such utterances, through their interpellative power (what they call forth), perpetuate unjust social structures that subordinate entire social groups.

Moreover, these utterances are never a single moment for, as Judith Butler (1997) explains poignantly, they are a moment of condensed historicity and a continued reproduction of power. By power, Butler is referring to the revolutionary theoretical understanding of the term introduced by Michel Foucault.

> Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (Foucault, 1980, p. 93).

When power is no longer considered fixed and possessed but rather understood to circulate through people, places, histories and even language, then speech can be an important mode of address in which power can be reproduced through restaging and resignification. As linguistic beings, we are interpellated or called into existence by socially sanctioned forms of address. Thus, such forms of address as "girl", "delinquent", "sinner", cause grave harm not only because they constitute people and bodies, but also because they enable or foreclose agency.

> According to this illocutionary model, hate speech *constitutes* its addressee at the moment of its utterance; it does not describe an injury or produce one as a consequence; it is, in the very speaking of such speech, the performance of the injury itself, where the injury is understood as social subordination (Butler, p. 18).

Speech that supports and is supported by dominant ideology becomes, at the moment of its utterance, the reproduction of power.

If we perceive the vocalised expression of my religious student's belief as an illustration of a speech act that supports and is supported by dominant systems of heterosexist ideology, it becomes exceedingly clear why, for example, she can in comfort say that homosexuals, but not Jews, are "sinners". The norm of heterosexism is still deeply ingrained in western society in ways that anti-Semitism is not (and that is not to imply that anti-Semitism has become extinct). A perceptive comment that one of my undergraduate students made seems to provide anecdotal support for the claim of the entrenchment of the norm of heterosexism. Maria told me that when I posed the question "Are you racist?" to the class, she found it very difficult to answer. Yet she noticed that a few weeks later when I asked, "Who is homophobic?" she, without shame, did not hesitate to immediately raise her hand affirmatively. Maria realised, she said, that in today's society, it is a greater taboo to be a racist than it is to be homophobic. She explained that the norm of heterosexism is so deeply established in our society that homophobia is endemic. Maria knew that most of her classmates would not be embarrassed to admit that they are in some way homophobic.

Similarly, I submit that part of the reason that my religious student felt free to refer to gays and lesbians as "sinners" was because on some level she recognises that this belief is supported by and supports the dominant ideology. My student's speech, I am arguing, is an instrument of subordination as much as it is an expression of her viewpoint. Not only does such speech harm gay, lesbian or bisexual students who may be present in my class, but it also leaves a remnant on all the heterosexual students as well. Such utterances legitimise particular interpretations concerning what it means to be homosexual and strengthen we/they boundaries.

IV. The Conflation of Culture: Who is Oppressed?

Elucidating the power of discourse requires understanding the social and political context in which such discourse occurs. This is difficult to do when sexual orientation is reduced to just another form of cultural diversity. The conflation of sexual

orientation, race, religion and ethnicity into the category of "culture" or "different worldviews", I submit, camouflages the political and social dynamics of oppression and allows one to ignore the invisible norm against which "difference" is created.

While an ethnic or religious group may suffer discrimination, not all suffering is oppression. As Marilyn Frye (1983) contends, the word "oppression" is much misused. Human beings can be discriminated against and suffer without being oppressed. Oppression, according to Frye, involves being caught between systemic forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they immobilise groups of people. Not all people who suffer discrimination experience oppression.

Conflating, for example, ethnic and racial discrimination can obscure significant differences between the types of suffering experienced by these different social groups. Indeed, in some sense this demarcation is spurious because, often, ethnic groups are racialised. Theoretically, however, this distinction is illuminating. Ethnicity relates to an individual's geographic place of family origin. In terms of personal identity, ethnicity may or may not give us an indication of one's individual affiliations with a historical or cultural background because how one personally identifies with one's ethnoculture is to a significant extent an issue of personal choice. Race, in contrast, is different. Racial identity is not entirely voluntaristic and how one is treated in society cannot be detached from how one is seen by others. To understand this, it is important to turn to how race is socially constructed.

"Race", unlike ethnicity, is a social construction that divides people *artificially* into distinct groups based on the *arbitrary* physical characteristic of skin colour. As many scholars who inquire into the meaning of race (Appiah, 1985; Omi & Winant, 1993; Alcoff, 1997) contend, any scientific connection between visible differences like skin colour and psychological attributes is a delusion. Race is first and foremost a political concept brought into existence and made salient by social, economic and political forces. The binary groupings that are produced by this artificial category sustain institutionalised systems of power and privilege by the creation of oppressed social groups, on one hand, and privileged social groups on the otherhand.

In that same article, "The Five Faces of Oppression", referenced earlier by Petrovic, Young underscores what she means by an oppressed social group. According to Young, social groups are not merely demographic or biological categories of identification but, rather, are forms of social relations in which one group exists *in relation* to another. The *difference* that characterise social groups are not intrinsic but involve a comparison that is based on an implicit norm of reference that is so powerful and well established, indeed the norm appears natural and can be taken for granted. Peter McLaren (1998) captures articulately this meaning of *created difference*. McLaren argues that it is not that people discriminate against (social) groups because they are really different, but rather:

> … the act of discrimination itself constructs categories of difference that hierarchically locate people as "superior" or "inferior" and then universalizes and naturalizes such difference … Of course, the "them" is always located within the "us" … The excluded … establish the condition of existence of the included (McLaren, 1998, p. 64).

Such constructed difference results in one group always being considered "normal" and delineating what is "other" or deviant.

This constructed difference is not inconsequential. As Linda Alcoff (1997) writes, although:

> … today race has no semantic respectability, biological basis or philosophical legitimacy … (yet, it is) a compelling social reality that race or racialized identities have as much political, sociological, and economic salience as they ever had. Race opens or shuts doors to job prospects, career possibilities, available places to live, potential friends and lovers, reactions from police, credence from jurors and presumptions by one's students … (Alcoff, 1997, p. 68).

Social oppression, understood through the framework of Young's notion of social groups and McLaren's understanding of "difference", is systemic and involves the unjust limitation of the prospects of self-development, realisation of goals and material success of one group of people for the unmerited benefit of other groups of people. The institutional and cultural barriers that are created by such social dynamics are more complicated than can be articulated fully here; however, suffice it to say that the type of social categorisation that is race differs from what is understood to be ethnicity. To conflate the two allows one to ignore the social dynamics involved in systems of oppression and privilege, and also hides the norm from which all social difference is determined unjustly.

In the debate around the censorship of religious teachers who oppose homosexuality, all categories of difference are subsumed under the rubric of "culture" or "worldview". Oppressed social groups, such as gays, lesbians and bisexuals, become just one more difference on the multi-cultural rainbow coalition. However, because the norm, at least in most western societies, is still heterosexism, gays, lesbians and bisexuals are an oppressed social group marginalised by this norm. The religious are not oppressed or discriminated against *because* they believe that homosexual behaviour is a sin but rather, in this one aspect, they concur with the heterosexist norm prevalent in western secular society. Thus, the charge of reverse cultural imperialism on the part of religious teachers does not hold at least when the focus is the curtailing of the expression of heterosexist beliefs.

V. Implications and Conclusion

The liberal belief in freedom of expression and a market-place of ideas is compelling only if all viewpoints have an equal opportunity to have their voices matter. In her discussion of the problems with majority vote, Lani Guinier (1994) illustrates how institutional practices that seem fair can obscure and perpetuate social injustice. A few years ago, Brother Rice High School in Chicago held two senior proms—one for the white students and one for the black students. The prom committee intended originally to have only one prom and by consulting the students body democratically; that is, one student, one vote. The committee members felt they were determining the selection of the music fairly and the band that would perform at the

prom. As Guinier remarks, it all seemed so democratic. Brother Rice, however, is a predominantly white school and the prom committee was all white. The black seniors felt so discriminated by this supposedly "democratic process" that they organised their own prom. One black student astutely challenged the value of democratic voting by noting that for every vote the black students had the white students had eight. For the black students, this student argued, majority rule equates to the message that "you don't count". When the minority is *always* outvoted, democracy is not fair.

By the same token, freedom of expression is democratic only on the grounds of an equal playing field. Today the playing field must be levelled for gay, lesbian and bisexual students. Like affirmative action programmes that give preferential treatment to racial minorities and women to correct current injustices, "affirmative action pedagogy" seeks to disable the system of privileges and deprivations created and sustained by the norm of heterosexuality. As in both cases, those who stand to lose their traditional privilege will feel mistreated, will feel as if they are being silenced; but not all cases of suffering are experiences of oppression; not all silencing is morally unjustified.

Finally, while unreasonable and dogmatic religious opposition should never be sanctioned in the public school, Petrovic points to an intriguing question when he asks what is "reasonable" in terms of religious opposition to homosexuality. While Petrovic (1998) presents a case study which makes evident the possibility of such a reasonable religious student, my point is to emphasise that it is not because a religious person's viewpoint will in the end reduce to references to the Bible, that religious person cannot be reasonable.

The *reasonable* religious student can be reasonable but not because he/she no longer relies on biblical authority. Rather, the reasonable religious student is one who is willing to listen and be open to learning and understanding worlds that are different from the one he/she knows to be true. Moreover, the reasonable religious will be honest when they are hiding their homophobia behind religious beliefs. Some of my religious students admit that their fierce opposition to homosexuality is more than a product of religious conviction and may also stem from fear, although not hatred. In addition, reasonable religious students can appreciate the institutional and cultural barriers that gay, lesbian and bisexual people encounter because of the norm of heterosexism. They understand that more than "love" between individuals will be necessary for social justice to become a reality. Similarly, reasonable religious students can acknowledge the benefits and advantages that heterosexuals enjoy and take for granted in a heterosexist culture. My religious students are often stunned when they begin to acknowledge how their heterosexual assumptions blind them.

My reasonable religious students are genuinely troubled to hear of the Christian high school principal in a small town in Ohio who refused to include discussions about homosexuality in his school because, as he said, "There are no homosexual students here." It took a young gay teen who hung himself in the bathroom in that same school to make this principal acknowledge his heterosexist neglect. Perhaps, the heterosexist presumption that everyone is heterosexual unless one is told otherwise could have contributed to part of my religious student's comfort to proclaim

her love for the "sinner". Could she have assumed that there were no gays, lesbians or bisexuals in our class, and therefore she would not be offending anyone?

The reasonable religious teacher, therefore, can understand why the expression of his/her opposition to homosexuality is not only inappropriate in a public school setting, but also can acknowledge how such expressions contribute to the continued insidious harms suffered by many of his/her students. They will not need to be censored because they will self-censor.

I have been focused primarily on justifying the censorship of certain voices in the classroom, and particularly, in courses within a teacher education programme. My argument, however, also implies that the reasonable religious person should be allowed to teach in public schools. I want to underscore that I agree with Petrovic when he questions whether and how such teachers will be able to give *positive* recognition to their gay, lesbian and bisexual students (Petrovic, 1998). The principle of non-oppression requires more of schools and teachers than the mere prevention of violence. As Petrovic argues so compellingly, the public school must demand such recognition by taking a strong stand on the positive inclusion of gay, lesbian and bisexual issues into the curriculum. The reasonably religious can then decide whether the public school system is indeed a system within which they want to teach. In addition, I want to continue to work with my reasonable religious students to help them struggle with this issue because their struggle is, in my opinion, a positive sign.

As for my religious student whose inflexible proclamations introduced this essay, this incident reinforced for me how precarious a teacher's role is. How and when does one silence? There is no formula. Whether or not I encourage open debate on this issue in my classroom remains contingent on what I know about my marginalised students and subject to what they have been able to convey to me. In the meanwhile, I will challenge my religious students forcefully when it comes to issues of social injustice *but*, as Boler asserts, silence these dominant voices when necessary. Until I am convinced that my classroom can become a safe zone for everyone, I will simply invite my religious student to my office, where I will be glad to discuss her concerns more extensively.

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