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Creating brave spaces at the intersection of womanist biblical scholarship and the pedagogy of digital storytelling

Author’s note/Abstract: This paper is my attempt to stretch beyond white normativity – but I write it conscious of the perils of trying to do so when I am fully situated in the midst of that discourse. I am a middle class white, cisgender, straight, Roman Catholic, tenured professor – and each of these labels signals elements of the intersecting systems of oppression in which I am implicated. I am also a woman, and perhaps because of that situatedness have long been compelled by the writings of womanist scholars, whom I experienced as writing about intersectionality long before Kimberly Crenshaw used that term.

In this paper I argue that reading the bible1 with womanist lenses in the midst of a world dominated by digital media requires at least two kinds of learning stances: strong anchoring in the various traditions which hold these texts as sacred, and flexible “sticky” ways of finding meaning that are life-giving. Womanist approaches to biblical texts can provide both: anchors into the deep wells of meaning Christians find in the bible, as well as flexible frames for sense-making with its texts. I believe that digital storytelling offers a pedagogical approach particularly well suited to inviting this kind of multilayered and agile pivoting of standpoints, and it holds potential for helping even scholars such as myself stretch beyond white normativity. I hope you will read this paper generously, taking in my argument as a possible example, not as a definitive prescription.

A new culture of learning

In order to describe how digital storytelling can be an effective pedagogical process to support learning that seeks to move beyond white normativity, I need to make clear what I take to be the heart of this underlying challenge: crafting an epistemological stance open to such learning.

P. Palmer has offered two contrasting models of thinking about knowing that are relevant here (2007, 100-106, figures 4.1 and 4.2).

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1 For the sake of clarity, I will not be capitalizing the word “bible” but instead ask readers to approach this essay from whatever religious tradition they are rooted in, and try to imagine their own sacred texts when I say “bible.”
The first he labels “the objectivist myth of knowing,” and the second he calls a “community of truth.” In the former model, knowing is mapped as a linear process which proceeds from a static “object” about which information is gathered by experts to be passed along to the amateurs who receive that information passively. Knowing is understood as linear and uni-directional, proceeding only from the object to a knower, and only then through an expert gatekeeper.

By contrast, in the “community of truth” model the center of knowing is a subject – in the multi-layered sense both of the “topic” being studied, but also an entity which has its own agency. With this metaphor for knowing there are multiple knowers, and what constitutes expertise is both more nuanced and more complex. The assertion of the “community of truth” is that the more diverse the knowers, the more robust the knowing. Each knower has a direct experience of a given subject, for instance, but also has to understand that her knowing will be complicated by that of other knowers. P. Hill-Collins makes this point well:

Eventually this approach may get us to a point at which, claims Elsa Barkley Brown, “all people can learn to center in another experience, validate it, and judge it by its own standards without need of comparison or need to adopt that framework as their own” (1989, 922). In such politics, “one has no need to ‘decenter’ anyone in order to center someone else; one has only to constantly, appropriately, ‘pivot the center’” (270)

Using this model for knowing as a base for considering learning design requires teachers to design spaces of study and exploration that hold together diverse perspectives, creating rich, complex engagement with the subject at hand. Palmer may offer the most vivid visual description of these contrasting models, but womanist scholars have long resisted the instrumental, linear model of knowing and sought to embody the relational, communal model.

Too much biblical scholarship, however, continues to lean towards the former model – with experts holding tight reins on the information gathered about the bible as an “object” of study, and controlling how that knowledge is transferred to amateur knowers. It is as if the only knowledge worthy of discovery must be perceived as such by experts. As postmodern scholarship has demonstrated conclusively, however, all forms of knowing come permeated with power, and any epistemological stance which posits exclusive access to – let alone control of — knowing, is dangerous. The community of truth model has its own challenges, not the least of
which is finding ways to design such focused yet open spaces for learning, but this model remains one which requires us to find ways to pivot stances and create more complex embodiments in our teaching and learning spaces.

The advent of digital media has made this latter model much more visible and tangible. Indeed there are now scholars who are describing a “new culture of learning” which is arising in response to the rapidly decentralizing, remarkably participatory, and inherently flexible architectures of digital media (Hess, 2014). D. Thomas (on the faculty at the University of Southern California) and J. SeelyBrown (of Xerox PARC fame) highlight the potentially limitless nature of the current information environment (2011), and argue that in order to support learning in such a space educators must design spaces that are open, while at the same time being appropriately bounded. They stress that this culture is not about:

unchecked access to information and unbridled passion... Left to their own devices, there is no telling what students will do. If you give them a resource like the Internet and ask them to follow their passion, they will probably meander around finding bits and pieces of information that move them from topic to topic – and produce a very haphazard result (81).

Most scholars who are attentive to the challenges of teaching and learning with digital tools argue that we cannot work effectively in digital spaces if our approaches are teaching-centered, instead they must be learning-centered. This distinction is increasingly common not only in the world of digital technologies, but also within a variety of accrediting organizations and other institutions dedicated to assessing and supporting learning. A teaching-centered approach assumes a stable base of information to be shared about the world, whereas a learning-centered approach is focused on learning through engagement with the world (Hess, 2015, 141).

Much recent research has observed how learning is taking place in game structures, particularly those with social and participatory elements to their design. In online multi-user game environments, for instance, people do not learn in order to belong but rather participate in order to learn (Hess, 2013, 176). This is a mode quite unlike the most common trajectories of university and church institutional structures.

As people “learn how to learn” in ways that stress their own passion, interest, and agency, tacit knowing comes more to the fore. Whereas explicit knowing tends to be that which has become stable and fixed over time, tacit forms of knowing are more embodied, contingent and improvisational. To return to my opening metaphor, explicit knowing forms the strong anchoring threads of a web of knowledge, while tacit knowing forms the “sticky threads” which filter meaning. From the perspective of explicit knowledge, for instance, the Hebrew bible is generally considered to consist of a distinct number of specific texts, and these texts are held sacred in both Jewish and Christian traditions. Further, these texts are generally composed in biblical Hebrew, with some in biblical Aramaic. One can learn “about” this canon, but doing so in ways which

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3 find direct citation for Polanyi
invite biblical texts to shape one’s life in community is a much more difficult and fraught process requiring tacit forms of knowledge.

Shifts in meaning-making brought about by the advent of digital technologies have caused religious communities to struggle with this shift from “teaching about” the bible, to finding ways to ignite curiosity about it. We now have to find ways in which biblical texts can be bound up with living in the world, learning not so much by collecting information about the texts (although that might be a place from which to begin), but through engagement with hearing, watching, and experiencing them.

Thinking through others

Womanist biblical scholars have been leading the way in this work, even before the shifts in learning culture that became so apparent with digital tools. These scholars assert that the study of biblical texts is crucial — they argue for strong “anchoring threads,” if you will — and yet they also pay careful attention to the diverse ways in which these texts are heard, embodied, lived through: a sticky set of filtering strands.

Womanists recognize that much biblical scholarship in the last millennia has been performed from the dominant perspective of men and white women. They begin, instead, from a strong stance of “otherness” — that is, their scholarship centers on the perspectives of women of color who have been held as “other” by the primary tradition. As R. Weems notes, “reading the bible for liberation is grounded in the acknowledgement and respect for otherness of those whose otherness is silenced and marginalized by those in power” (Weems, 2015, 45).

Thinking through others

How does one come to “think through others”? Here R. Shweder’s heuristic is useful, offering a framework for noticing specific ways in which this combination of “anchoring” and “sticky filtering” threads can function. Shweder works from within the fields of cultural anthropology and cultural psychology, a grounding which resonates with womanist and feminist engagement with biblical texts because it asserts the value of studying that which is perceived as “other” while yet positing at least the possibility of shared meaning. Womanist biblical scholars recognize that biblical canons exist, for example, but are not bound a priori by the established boundaries of those canons. These scholars choose instead to explore the margins as well as the interstitial spaces the articulation of a canon creates.

Shweder’s heuristic suggests that we “think through others” in at least four ways.

First we “recognize the other as a specialist or expert on some aspect of human experience, whose reflective consciousness and system of representations and discourse can be used to reveal hidden dimensions of ourselves” (108-109). This most basic engagement with an “other” of some sort acknowledges that there is value in learning from the other, that there are captured in the stories of the “other,” valuable insights into human being. The opportunity here is one of expressing, lifting to consciousness and the light, elements of experience which might otherwise be inaccessible, or at least hidden and difficult to voice. When we “think through others” in this
way we are essentially looking for ourselves in the text, but inviting the text to help us articulate something we might not otherwise be able to voice. We see ourselves in a new light by looking at the text. As M. Smith notes, “womanist biblical hermeneutics prioritizes the communal and particular lived experiences of women of color as a point of departure, a focal point, and an overarching interpretative lens for critical analysis of the bible” (Smith, 2015, 8).

A second way of “thinking through others” Shweder has labelled “getting the other straight.” That is, “providing a systematic account of the internal logic, of the intentional world constructed by the other… . The process of ‘thinking through others’ in [this] second sense is a process of representing (and defending) the other’s evaluations of and involvements with the world – such as a taboo against eating meat or a prohibition against remarriage – by tracing those evaluations and modes of involvement to some plausible alternative intentional world and conception of reality…” (109). When womanist biblical scholars discuss texts which have been used in our current contexts to oppress and silence women, they often detail at length what is being discovered about the specific cultural modalities present at times when these texts were canonized. K. D. Russaw, for instance, interrogates the “wise individuals” found in literature of the ancient Near East to offer a different perspective on the woman of Genesis 3 (2015, 222-234).

Womanist scholars use some of the tools of historical critical biblical scholarship in this second mode, because it provides a way for them to continue to assert that there is meaning worth engaging within these texts, even if their “plain” or “literal” meaning contradicts current understandings. Such a stance reconciles the damage done by people using these texts against women, with a strong desire to continue to find them authoritative. These scholars are creating ways to anchor the larger commitment to finding biblical texts revelatory and compelling by helping to situate them contextually.

A third way to “think through others” Shweder labels “thinking one’s way out of or beyond the other.” This stance is a very situated form of interpretation which may in some cases even lead to particular biblical texts being removed from consideration all together, as being too oppressive to be revelatory. Shweder cautions that this stance “properly comes … after we have already appreciated what the intentional world of the other powerfully reveals and illuminates, from its special point of view. ‘Thinking through others’ is, in its totality, an act of criticism and liberation, as well as of discovery” (109-110). That is, this modality of moving beyond requires, first, a deep engagement with a text and its thought-world.

As Weems notes:

Part of rereading androcentric texts can entail choosing not to read them at all. Breaking the hold these texts have involves breaking the cycle of uncritically retelling and passing down from one generation to the next violent, androcentric, culturally chauvinistic texts and resisting where necessary the moral vision of such texts… the bible can and has been used to promote a vision of the world that silences and further overlooks the oppressed. Its multiple ideological layers and the multiple roles it has played in both silencing and liberating generations of readers forces readers to read the bible with different eyes, from multiple positions, and with a multi-layered approach. (51)
Finally Shweder describes a fourth way in which we “think through others” as “the process of representing the other … hand in hand with a process of portraying one’s own self as part of the process of representing the other, thereby encouraging an open-ended self-reflexive dialogic turn of mind” (110). This fourth sense has been at the heart of much recent biblical study, and it holds tremendous power within womanist frames. But it is also a very difficult move to support pedagogically. How can we invite this more nuanced and complex interpretive stance into our pedagogies? Womanist scholars have been pointing the way for some time.

K. Cannon’s “dance of redemption,” for instance (which was built upon Beverly Harrison’s earlier work), describes a circle of learning that moves through conscientization, emancipatory historiography, theological resources, norm clarification, strategic options, annunciation and celebration, and then a return through reflection and strategic action to conscientization (Cannon, 1995, 130 and Townes 2006, 1171). Each step in that circle dance moves in collaborative and shared ways. You cannot do conscientization alone or in isolation, for instance, and emancipatory historiography by definition builds the counter memory and counter narratives of which E. Townes writes.

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\text{conscientization} \rightarrow \text{emancipatory historiography} \rightarrow \text{theological resources} \rightarrow \text{norm clarification} \rightarrow \text{strategic options} \rightarrow \text{annunciation / celebration} \rightarrow \text{re-reflection and strategic action} \rightarrow \text{conscientization}
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**Digital storytelling in four modes**

Digital storytelling enters into these challenges of thinking through others with distinctive affordances for supporting learning based within a community of truth epistemological model. Here I am writing about digital storytelling when that term is understood as a “workshop-based participatory media practice focused on self-representation” (Vivienne, 2016, 1). While there are many ways to engage digital media – consider just a few of the recent plethora of studies doing theological work with popular culture – in this chapter I am specifically exploring a form of learning which is shaped by particular practices that grow out of work originally pioneered by the Center for Digital Storytelling. Their work, in turn, was born out of improvisationally structured community theater that was focused on helping communities to voice and share their
self-understandings. Such work is intentionally transformative and resonates deeply with the pedagogical imagination of womanist scholars.

At its most basic, this kind of digital storytelling begins with intensive collaborative storytelling exercises which help a person to come to a sense of the story they want to tell, by working through various elements of it in story circles. Story circles, in turn, composed of 4 to 6 people, use specific practices to attune listeners to nuances of a story, and help them to lift such nuances into the awareness of the storyteller, deepening and enriching a narrative. Once a storyteller has their narrative, they audio record it. That recording in turn becomes the narration to which a storyteller adds images and music layers, combining it all into a short – generally 2-4 minutes long – mp4 or mov file. That file is then shared out via a distribution tool such as vimeo, youtube, or other such video sharing services. The final element of the process is for the gathered storytellers to share their videos in a “theater-style” event, in which a group of people see and hear each other’s stories, and engage them. Key to this pedagogical process is the *story*, with the “digital” elements coming in as factors only once the story is available.

It is at this point that I can highlight the ways in which digital storytelling can illuminate each of the four modes of “thinking through others” I have identified in womanist scholarship.

*(1) Thinking by means of the other*

Remember that the first way of thinking through others I called attention to is that which “recognize[s] the other as a specialist or expert on some aspect of human experience, whose reflective consciousness and system of representations and discourse can be used to reveal hidden dimensions of ourselves” (108-109).

For many students and teachers who are living in dominant spaces – people with the conferred dominance that comes with white skin in the United States, for instance – womanist scholarship offers an invitation into different way of seeing biblical texts, it offers different lenses for reading texts, and in doing so lifts up elements which can “reveal hidden dimensions” of such texts to readers, and even in some cases, can reveal God in new ways.

For many students beginning their study of the bible, the psalms can function in this way. A teacher using digital storytelling in this mode might invite students into a story circle and offer them a story prompt which expresses a moment when they felt something similar to the feelings evoked for them by the psalm they are being invited to study. The next step in the process, that of layering images and music onto the story, is supported by drawing on the many databases which offer images and music around specific psalms. For the student, creating a short digital video which combines their narrative with the psalm’s text, and then layering onto that story images and music which resonate, is both enjoyable and illuminating (Hess, 2012, 408). This way of engaging a psalm is very basic, and has much in common with the form of biblical study which Lutherans label “devotional” (cite), and the Benedictines experience as *lectio divina*.

For many people this first mode also supports the kind of “consciousness-raising” so familiar in womanist work. Sharing a personal story in the context of a story circle invites a learner to hear their story in new ways, through the insights of their fellow circle participants, and doing so
more than once slows that attentiveness down to a pace that, again, allows new insight to emerge. As Weems writes:

As a womanist biblical interpreter and teacher my role is to respect readers’ needs to view the bible as a collection of sacred stories while at the same time challenging them to understand their role as agents in the sacred act of preserving stories and passing them down to the next generation. As an agent in the task of preserving and transmitting stories from one generation of women to the next, readers must be empowered (1) to become a part of a story’s audience and to feel free to raise questions of the author about his or her assumptions about the world and people’s relationship to one another; (2) to use one’s imagination to retell the story in ways it was never meant to be told in order to get at hidden truths and meanings embedded in stories; and (3) to take responsibility as a reader/interpreter/storyteller for the impact the stories we tell has on the lives of other women, men, and children who hear them and try to live up to them. (53)

As womanist scholars demonstrate, however, this first mode is all too easily one which can simply re-inscribe preexisting assumptions about a text, because it remains at the level of “sympathetic identification” – that is, it is a first step into a text, a first attempt to listen for resonance in the text. It is an important first step, but also a limited one.

For white students, for instance, the “hidden dimensions” brought to light from a text might simply re-inscribe their existing understanding and convictions, in that way merely putting a biblical “gloss” on what in many cases are oppressive dynamics.

(2) getting the other straight

The second mode of “thinking through others,” therefore, is an important next step. Indeed, it can be helpful to think of the four modes as points along a circle, much like Cannon’s dance proceeds in a perpetual cycle. “Getting the other straight” is about “providing a systematic account of the internal logic, of the intentional world constructed by the other.” This is a mode which aligns well with historical/critical biblical scholarship and is a fruitful next step once a student’s curiosity and wonder have been ignited by an initial round of storytelling.

At a very basic level, taking digital stories students have created (think of the psalm exercise) and sharing them in a wider community makes it possible to include voices that come to us through time. That is, after an initial round of digital storytelling, students can return to their rafts and dig more deeply into scholarly resources (particularly historical/critical ones) to add further depth to their pieces. In this mode a teacher is inviting deeper contextualization, essentially asking the learner to go from their personal story experience more deeply into a text.

Much recent work in womanist biblical studies provides vitally original understandings of biblical texts, drawing as it does on a much wider range of contextual studies. Gafney’s “womanist midrash” on Zipporah, for instance, is a rich resource to offer students as they do this kind of digital storytelling (2015, 131-157).
Unlike pedagogical strategies which focus solely on engaging printed texts, digital storytelling offers a different kind of access to the affective elements of a text. By inviting more sustained attention to these differences, the process of creating a digital story allows learners both to slow down – to observe shifts in meaning they might have glossed over initially – as well as to approach the differences appreciatively. Given how strange biblical texts can appear to contemporary listeners, this process of “believing rather than doubting” (to use Elbow’s insight), offers access points with new possibility (Elbow, 1986).

Both of these ways of “thinking through others” in biblical texts -- the first (other as expert) and the second (getting the other straight) -- live primarily in the early part of Cannon’s dance of redemption. They function as forms of initial conscientization and begin to build anchoring points for the strong central threads of the web of meaning. These are the anchors which connect biblical texts with a learner’s life and history, asserting that these texts are revelatory in some way without foreclosing the meanings that might be made with them.

(3) thinking beyond the other

Cannon’s middle steps in the dance -- emancipatory historiography, theological resources, norm clarification -- align well with Shweder’s third mode of “thinking through others”: thinking one’s way out of or beyond the other. Indeed, I believe these are two ways of describing the same process. “Emancipatory historiography,” for example, is a “method of investigation that involves critical, socio-ethical analysis of the past, undertaken by examining who has been silenced, “marginalized,” excluded in specific historical records in order to achieve a more profound understanding of the structural interactions among varying dynamics of our forebears” (81 dictionary of feminist theology). As Russaw (2015) writes:

The epistemological challenge for womanists to know more “than is ‘good’ for” her “and in greater depth,” relative to black women’s experience, requires that womanists expose, transgress, break down, and counter oppressive epistemologies as the subjective and political constructs that they are. This is not to say that womanist epistemologies are not subjective and political as well; we acknowledge this. But womanists must construct other more liberating ways of knowing, epistemologies, that prioritize the justice needs of black communities and other oppressed groups. (243)

Or as Weems (2015) notes:

One of the most effective ways to introduce women students and interested male students to a hermeneutics of liberation is by turning their attention to stories of rape and violence in the bible and asking them what kind of world would our world be if stories like these were normative, if we duplicated, reproduced, or transmitted them to the next generation without warning and comment? (54)

This mode is focused on helping learners to see how exploring the silences, the margins, the interstitial spaces of biblical texts can offer insight.
It is necessary to broaden the range of voices drawn on in the community of truth by drawing on digital stories created by people in other settings. This third mode of “thinking through others” is a moment when pedagogically we are also moving a bit away from my initial definition of workshop-based digital storytelling. When digital storytelling is done in dominant settings, it is not enough simply to draw on the voices of those who are present, or even the voices of biblical texts through time, because far too often the historical record of these texts holds only dominant voices. We must invite silenced and oppressed voices into the conversation, into the storytelling.

Consider, for instance, the challenges involved with engaging silences and structural marginalization with learners who inhabit the privileged ends of various spectra of oppression. Using digital storytelling that focuses solely on personal stories, and then enlarges those stories with historical critical scholarship, still risks ignoring the marginalization of current persons, the impact that specific biblical interpretations still can have on people in the world today. It is only by engaging those dynamics, by finding entry points into perceiving oppression’s impact, that digital storytelling processes can catalyze emancipatory historiography. As a person who bears white privilege, for instance, when I find myself in settings working only with white students, it is imperative that I broaden the voices in the room beyond those of white people. Digital stories created by people in other settings afford me an opportunity to do so.

Shweder (1991) expands upon this dynamic when he writes that:

… ‘thinking through others’ … is the sense of thinking one’s way out of or beyond the other. It is the sense of passing through the other or intellectually transforming him or her or it into something else – perhaps its negation – by revealing what the life and intentional world of the other has dogmatically hidden away, namely its own incompleteness. It is a third sense, for it properly comes later, after we have already appreciated what the intentional world of the other powerfully reveals and illuminates, from its special point of view. ‘Thinking through others’ is, in its totality, an act of criticism and liberation, as well as of discovery.” (109-110)

From womanist standpoints this “passing through and transforming” is a double-edged sword. Consider that engaging sexism has both the edge of confronting sexism which oppresses women from without – the texts of terror – as well as seeking to heal internalized sexism (all the ways in which biblical stories have been wielded as a sword to subdue women). What can it mean to “think through and beyond” a text in this way? At a minimum it requires drawing on systemic analyses which engage race, class, gender, and other intersecting forms of oppression. Such analyses form “sticky strands” which capture and filter meanings which might otherwise be ignored or even suppressed by dominant voices.

Hebrew bible texts are a rich resource for engaging in this kind of “thinking through others” as a form of liberation, because they are so deeply embedded in our religious traditions – the bedrock, if you will, the anchoring points of our knowing – but their very distance from our contemporary contexts also makes them “strange” in a way that invites study if we are to continue to find them meaningful, revelatory, authoritative.
So how does digital storytelling support such learning? As mentioned earlier, one key way to do so is by inviting other voices into the storytelling conversation, into the community of truth. There are many examples of digital stories which offer critical, compelling, and at times even humorous routes into this necessary form of systemic analysis. I think here of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TED talk on the “danger of a single story,” or Alok Vaid-Menon’s TEDx-Middlebury talk on “we are nothing (and that is beautiful).”

Although neither of these examples is directly connected to the bible, both of these stories draw out dynamics which have immediate resonance to the challenge of living through narratives. Here again, womanist scholars have long drawn on narratives from a wide variety of genres – personal testimony, literature, song, poetry, and so on – claiming such narrative weaving as an essential part of their methodological practices. Weems (2015) notes that:

> Stories offer readers an inner script to live by, glimpses into the way things are and more importantly reasons and a way to talk about how things ought not to be. Stories can lure readers into seeing the world in different ways, shock them into a critique of the world in which they live and help them imagine the ways things ought to be. (53)

The pedagogical power of using such digital stories which come absent any specific connection to the bible is that you are connecting your participants’ stories to contemporary analyses – again, widening the circle of the community of truth – and doing so in ways that help to make biblical texts immediately relevant to current events. Further, because these stories are digitally available, you can invite them into spaces of learning, into contexts which would otherwise be isolated from such narratives, and awaken learners to the expansive insights of such widening.

The danger, however, is that you can eclipse the biblical texts by reading over them in ways that turn their meaning into mere illustration of points you have already determined will be made. In that case the texts no longer reveal and confront, but only “proof text” pre-existing convictions. Consider, for instance, all of the ways in which biblical texts have been used to reinforce support for slavery, for homophobia, for narrow gender restrictions, and so on.

Cannon’s dance of redemption highlights the importance of “norm clarification” in this process. “Thinking through others” by thinking beyond, by critiquing, is crucial – and continues to draw on the deep anchoring convictions, while filtering for redemptive, liberative interpretations. Such work can, as Weems notes, recover “the contributions of women such as Hagar, Huldah, Judith, Deborah, Lydia and the Canaanite woman [this] is important for those desperate for role models, images, stories, and examples from the bible to help them struggle and survive the hardships of gender oppression” (52).

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4 The danger of a single story (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg), we are nothing (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxb-zYihAOA).
The fourth and final mode of “thinking through others” we are exploring here is a process in which “representing the other goes hand in hand with a process of portraying one’s own self as part of the process of representing the other, thereby encouraging an open-ended self-reflexive dialogic turn of mind” (110). Here we come to the part of “dance of redemption” which centers on strategic options, annunciation and celebration, action.

Here is where performative assembly matters, and where digital stories and the pedagogies they support can draw people beyond mere story-sharing -- digital or otherwise -- into accountable community, where “witnessing in the context of engagement with the other” becomes at once both a daily practice and a catalyst for continuing learning. Here creating digital stories becomes a direct mode for resisting dominant interpretations. We know that stories can be transformative, and finding ways to collaboratively tell stories of resistance -- and then share those stories out into the world – can be tremendously impactful.

As the last decade has shown, sharing stories in digital spaces can invite people into relationships that demand action. Rather than being stymied by an artificial dichotomy between “online” and “offline” story sharing, digital stories become a route by which to exchange meaning across previously unassailable borders. Vivienne is eloquent about the impact of such work (2016):

Bridge building is reflected in the capacity to negotiate one’s position as a part of or apart from networked publics – including familiar, intimate, counter and unknown. Digital storytelling creates opportunities to ‘bring things up,’ to broach difficult discussions ‘out in the open.’ Ownership of one’s position in society (as represented in a digital story) is reflected in the capacity to receive and give affirmation. Further, public expression of marginalized voices opens space for others to speak as they also negotiate how and where they fit in the world. As a medium that facilitates speaking across difference and bridge building, digital storytelling evokes the profound significance of participatory media as a widespread global phenomenon. (196-197)

This kind of digital storytelling, this “witnessing in the context of engagement with the other” is also the place in which I believe biblical texts continue to be revelatory of truth beyond the individual/personal – this is a mode which demands ongoing humility paired with deep convictions, which demands the deep anchoring strands, wound together by the more fragile but sticky filters.
References


