Chapter 10
Through the Agency of the Muselmann

Abstract  In this chapter, we take the opportunity to reflect on the kinds of stigma and shame students and academics can and do experience in higher education – from experiences of discrimination and marginalisation to violence. As troubling as these might sound, higher education has always been a convergence of hope and academic performance, on the one side, coupled with the struggles and tensions created by issues of race, ethnicity, culture, religion and gender, on the other side. It is important, therefore, to take stock of the potential experiences of stigmatisation and shame. Immediately, however, it is equally important to ask who bears testimony to and takes responsibility for the shame and stigma, as symbolised through Agamben’s (Remnants of Auschwitz: the witness and the archive (trans: Heller-Roazen D). Zone Books, Brooklyn, 2012) Muselmann. To us, this is the role of academic activism – the act of bearing witness or testimony resides in a preparedness to do so on behalf of others. To bear testimony, we argue, is to make manifest our humanity and our activism.

Keywords  Giorgio Agamben · Stigma · Shame · Testimony · Humanity · Responsibility

Introduction

We are attracted to Giorgio Agamben’s (2012) thoughts and expositions on the Muselmann for various reasons – not only because it offers glimpses into the parallel condition of inhumanity and humanity but because it provides profound reflections on conceptions of shame, stigma, testimony and responsibility. As our concluding chapter, we take the opportunity to reflect on the kinds of stigma and shame which students and academics can and do experience in higher education – from experiences of discrimination and marginalisation to violence. As troubling as these might sound, higher education has always been a convergence of hope and academic performance, on the one side, coupled with the struggles and tensions created by issues of race, ethnicity, culture, religion and gender, on the other side.
It is important, therefore, to take stock of the potential experiences of stigmatisation and shame. Immediately, however, it is equally important to ask who bears testimony to and takes responsibility for the shame and stigma as symbolised through Agamben’s (2012) Muselmann. To us, this is the role of academic activism – the act of bearing witness or testimony resides in a preparedness to do so on behalf of others. To bear testimony, we argue, is to make manifest our humanity and our activism. Academic activism, therefore, does not exist separate to who we are as academics; academic activism resides in our very being. To be an academic activist means to act when we witness shame and stigma; it means to speak out when others will not; and it means to assume responsibility for the ‘zones of non-responsibility’ (Agamben, 2012: 21), which perpetuate the experiences of higher education. In this regard, we conceive the very writing of this book as a manifestation of our activism. This is not simply an academic text, which speaks about the criticality of academic activism; the text embodies our own lived experiences as activists.

The Muselmann and Bearing Witness to Inhumanity

One of the key concerns for Agamben (2012), in Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive, is the act of witnessing – in terms of both what is meant by ‘witnessing’ and who does the ‘witnessing’. He distinguishes between the Latin testis, which suggests a third party in a trial, superstes, which refers to someone ‘who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it’ (Agamben, 2012: 17). In his exploration of the prisoners in the Auschwitz concentration camps, while he turns to the act of superstes, he asserts that those who survived might not be able to bear witness to their experiences. This is because what they had been subjected to had stripped them of all notions of what it means to be human and, hence, to see the humanity in others. In other words, the depth of debasement experienced at Auschwitz was such that it had left its survivors without the tools and words to bear witness.

In response to this dilemma, Agamben (2012) turns to the notion of the Muselmann (plural, Muselmänner) – a term initially used by Primo Levi (1988). The Muselmann described prisoners who had been reduced to absolute exhaustion, hopelessness and misery due to hunger and the horror of concentration camps – ‘one hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death’ (Levi, 1988: 33). In Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive, Giorgio Agamben (2012) explores the concept of the ‘bare naked man’ and writes about Muselmann as ‘a bare, unassigned and unwitnessable life’: the body stripped and devoid of all humanity and being. When translated from German, Muselmann means Muslim, but this is not to be confused with the Muslim, as an adherent of Islam. The most likely explanation, writes Agamben (2012: 45), can be found in the literal meaning of the Arabic word Muslim: the one who submits unconditionally to the will of God – ‘It is this meaning that lies at the origins of the legends concerning Islam’s supposed fatalism, legends which are found in European cultures starting with the
Middle Ages’. From a distance, continues Agamben (2012), the prisoners looked like Arabs or Muslims, because of their kneeling and rocking motion – as if they were participating in the ritual of Islamic prayers.

Agamben (2012: 51) describes the ‘tortured bodies’ of the Muselmänner as proof of the Nazis’ atrocities – that is, ‘a group of prisoners crouched on the ground or wandering on foot like ghosts ... who have survived by some miracle or, at least, prisoners very close to the state of Muselmänner ... [more specifically] naked ... half-living beings ... unbearable to human eyes’. In a way, the Muselmänn represents the transfiguration of human into non-human through atrocious extermination (Agamben, 2012: 52). In other words, the Muselmänn is ‘the one who has abdicated his inalienable freedom and has consequently lost all traces of affective life and humanity’ (Agamben, 2012: 56). The Muselmänner in the extermination camps have reached a ‘point of no return’ – that is, they have been dehumanised and lost all their dignity in the camps (Agamben, 2012: 61). When humans no longer exercise their freedom through communication, they have been subjected to domination against their will, and the only freedom they still have (but might not actually demonstrate it publicly) is their conviction in a God. As stated by Agamben (2012: 63):

The Muselmänn has, instead, moved into a zone of the human where not only help but also dignity and self-respect have become useless. But if there is a zone of the human in which these concepts make no sense, then they are not genuine ethical concepts, for no ethics can claim to exclude a part of humanity, no matter how unpleasant or difficult that humanity is to see.

By a lack of dignity and self-respect, Agamben alludes to the conditions of Auschwitz as a radical refutation of obligatory communication. Any attempt to engage the persecutors and torturers in the camp resulted in a beating of the Muselmänner with ‘the place of communication being taken by the rubber whip’ and not being talked to became the norm in the camp (Agamben, 2012: 65). When human dignity becomes lost, then humans lose their decency beyond imagination (Agamben, 2012: 69). Agamben explains the loss of human dignity and the rise of inhumanity in the following passage:

In Auschwitz, people did not die; instead, corpses were produced. Corpses without death, non-humans whose decease is debased into a matter of serial production. And, according to a possible and widespread interpretation, precisely this degradation of death constitutes the specific offense of Auschwitz, the proper name of its horror. (2012: 72)

The point about speaking of corpses instead of deceased humans is that extermination has been induced by executioners of humans so that death has been degraded. When the dignity of death is negated for humans, they did not really die but are merely produced as corpses (Agamben, 2012: 75). The Muselmänner who had been denied the possibility of communication, and ultimately been subjected to inhuman torture and horror, could not have died in the camp of Auschwitz – that is, they only bore witness to non-human atrocities (Agamben, 2012: 75). Communication had been denied to them, and the only recourse to anything was to themselves and, by implication, their innate connection to a God to whom they either appealed for assistance or rebuked as a consequence that no help was forthcoming as they
endured the horror of inhumane torture and persecution. Despite their subjection into inhumane actions, and despite being stripped of their humanity, the Muselmänner are still human. As living corpses, they are neither living nor dead. It is at this point, according to Bernstein (2002: 2), that we can begin to see the larger ramifications of Agamben’s inquiry:

Auschwitz shows us that it is possible to lose one’s dignity and decency beyond imagination, but that there is still life in this most extreme degradation. Indeed, this paradoxical knowledge becomes the touchstone for judging all morality and all dignity. The Muselmänner is the threshold of a new ethics, an ethics of a form of life that begins where dignity ends.

To Agamben (2012: 52), the idea that the *Muselmann* is the true witness of the camps reveals that ‘the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its centre it contains something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors of authority’. While we have clear historical accounts of what unfolded in the camps, and what the legal circumstances were, and implications are, the same cannot be said for the ethical and political significance of the extermination – ‘Not only do we lack anything close to a complete understanding: even the sense and reasons for the behavior of the executioners and the victims, indeed very often their words, still seem profoundly enigmatic’ (Agamben, 2012: 11).

Although paradoxical, what we gain from Agamben (2012: 41) is that the act of bearing witness resides in a preparedness to do so on behalf of others:

We may say that to bear witness is to place oneself in one’s own language in the position of those who have lost it, to establish oneself in a living language as if it were dead, or in a dead language as if it were living – in any case, outside both the archive and the corpus of what has already been said.

The disjunction between the human as living being and speaking being, argues Agamben (2012), is the condition of possibility of testimony – ‘if there is no articulation between the living being and language, if the “I” stands suspended in this disjunction, then there can be testimony’ (Agamben, 1999: 130). As Mills (2003) explains, ‘testimony arises in the intimate non-coincidence of the human and inhuman or the speaking being and the living being, the subject and non-subject’. More succinctly, testimony appears as the practice of remaining human, since testimony marks the trial by which the human being undergoes ‘the double process of appropriation and expropriation in speaking, in which the human endures the inhuman and survives beyond its own expropriation or desubjectivation in language’ (Mills, 2003).

In continuing, we are in no way suggesting that the experiences of Agamben’s (2012) Muselmänner are akin to that of students. While it is indeed the case that numerous parents and family members of South African students were subjected to the dehumanising brutality of apartheid, including torture and death, our particular interests here reside in the experiences and emotions of stigma, shame as well as testimony and responsibility.
On Shame

We are interested in Agamben’s understanding of shame as being consigned to something from which we cannot in any way distance ourselves (Agamben, 2012: 105). He provides the following explanation:

To be ashamed means to be consigned to something that cannot be assumed. But what cannot be assumed is not something external. Rather, it originates in our own intimacy; it is what is most intimate in us (for example, our own physiological life). Here the ‘I’ is thus overcome by its own passivity, its own most sensibility; yet this expropriation and desubjectification is also an extreme and irreducible presence of the ‘I’ to itself. It is as if our consciousness collapsed and, seeking to flee in all directions, were simultaneously summoned by an irrefutable order to be present at its own defacement, at the expropriation of what is most its own. In shame, the subject thus has no other content than its own desubjectification; it becomes witness to its own disorder, its own oblivion as a subject. This double movement, which is both subjectification and desubjectification, is shame. (Agamben, 2012: 105–106)

There are numerous complex factors, which serve as sources or which perpetuate shame and dehumanisation in university settings. Firstly, although students from poor backgrounds gain access to university, equitable participation and substantive equality often do not follow (McLean, 2018: 116). Statistics show that 55.5% of South Africans are not able to sustain their needs within their income levels. Within this group, 25.2% of South Africans live in conditions of extreme poverty where they are unable to meet their daily dietary requirements or fulfil their basic sanitation or housing needs (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds usually have insufficient and precarious financial resources (often going without food and other basic necessities); sometimes feel they do not ‘belong’ and do not always experience teaching and learning that is confidence-enhancing and imparts critical knowledge (Caltiz, 2018; Calitz, Walker, & Wilson-Strydom, 2016).

Although often under-reported, students experience significant psychological distress as they attempt to conceal their poverty, borne from shame and internalised oppression and the desire to avoid the stereotyping and stigma that they perceive they would receive as a result of being labelled poor (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010). These students, as McLean (2018: 116) shares, are often first-generation. As such, they are often full of hope for themselves and their families, who hope to benefit from their education. Their biggest fear is not just that they will not succeed at university but that their failure will force them back into generational poverty. However, the transition to university, continues McLean (2018: 116), is often punishing for a range of economic, academic, linguistic and social reasons. As a result, students from impoverished family backgrounds have higher rates of dropping out of university and lower rates of throughput to graduation (Letseka & Maile, 2008).

A second major theme is that of race, racialisation and institutional racism, as well as classism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia (Kerr & Luescher, 2018: 218). That these different categories of discrimination are couched together speaks to the intersectionality of these experiences. According to Kerr and Luescher (2018:
research on racialisation and institutional racism comes mainly from historically white universities (or merged components thereof). Overall, research ‘gives a view of universities as enduringly racialised and segregated spaces in which black students repeatedly come up against the normative power of whiteness’ (Kerr & Luescher, 2018: 219):

The pervasive racism that appears to bedevil black–white relations in the historically white institutions is not the only form of discrimination in residences at higher education institutions. Equally pervasive, it appears, are (i) sexual harassment, which cuts across the divide of historically black and white institutions, (ii) xenophobia, which lurks in the background in some of the historically black institutions, as well as (iii) racial tension between African, Coloured and Indian students at the latter. The different forms of discrimination and the associated pathologies are the products of differences in the social, cultural and economic backgrounds of the students. (DHET, 2008: 75–76)

At one university, Kerr and Luescher (2018: 219) report, parts of the white university community continue to offer active and sometimes violent resistance to racial integration of residences (Kerr & Luescher, 2018). The series of student protests, which commenced in 2015, characterised by the slogans, #FeesMustFall, and ‘#RhodesMustFall’, speak, on the one hand, to the economic disenfranchisement and, on the other hand, to the alienating (‘white’) spaces of certain university campuses. The widespread prevalence and reporting of institutional racism and sexism at a number of universities led to the establishment of a government-commissioned probe, which culminated in the ‘Report of the ministerial committee on transformation and social cohesion and the elimination of discrimination in public higher education institutions’ (DHET, 2008), also known as the Soudien Report (Prof Crain Soudien, former Deputy Vice-Chancellor of UCT, served as the chairperson of the committee).

The tipping point for the initiation of the commissioned inquiry was when the leaking of a video made by four young white Afrikaner male students of the Reitz Residence at the University of the Free State (UFS) came into the public domain in February 2008. It showed the students forcing a group of elderly black (cleaning) workers, four women and one man, to eat food into which one of the students had apparently urinated. The video had ostensibly been made under the auspices of an initiation ceremony. However, an investigation into the incident found that its real intent was to protest against the university’s recently introduced policy to integrate the student residences (DHET, 2008). Unsurprisingly, the video provoked widespread outrage and disgust:

It [the video] demonstrated white supremacy (extreme forms of racial prejudice and disrespect), and enacted direct and subtle discrimination through the weaving together of multiple forms of inequality. Its abuses invoked racism, ethnic and cultural supremacy, classism and sexism through the dehumanising debase ment of four middle-aged, working-class, black cleaning women and a man, by what is assumed to be privileged young white male students. (Lewins, 2010: 127)

Disciplinary proceedings instituted by the university were not only found to be insufficient but seemingly fuelled more anger among the student body as well as the broader public. Beyond this specific incident, the commission of inquiry exposed an
inhospitable institutional culture at many universities – characterised by racial discrimination, harassment, a pervading sense of whiteness, colour-blindness and an aspiration to Western ideals and a refusal to redress historical identities and contexts (Lewins, 2010: 129). Significantly, in a number of cases, the experiences of students were not any different to that of academics. The commission of inquiry (DHET, 2008: 57–58) found:

The role of an institutional culture that remains white and the pervasive racism that it engenders … is the source of immense unhappiness and frustration amongst black staff across institutions. The Committee was struck by the almost ubiquitous sense of disenchantment, alienation and anger amongst them, and by the fact that they did not feel at home in the institution. The full extent of the pain and hurt and humiliation that black staff members have had to endure is indicated by the observation by black staff… (they) are treated as ‘unknowns’ if their status and name is not known.

Perpetuating these painful and dehumanising experiences is a ‘culture of silence’, which permeates institutions because of the fear of victimisation. ‘Black’ academics choose to remain silent, because they fear not being promoted or not being given a good reference should they leave the institution (DHET, 2008: 58). This fear was equally prevalent among participants during the interview process of the commission of inquiry, with one academic (signed as anonymous) submitting the following:

We make this submission on the understanding that confidentiality would be preserved and our identities not be made available to the University … or the public. In doing so we note our concern with respect to negative consequences in the form of possible victimisation. (DHET, 2008: 58)

The third major theme is that of gender-based violence. Like poverty and issues of race, gender-based violence also intersects with other forms of othering and discrimination. It emanates from an array of intersectional points and norms, which include culture, religion, economics, age, gender, sexuality, space, community as well as education or a lack thereof. While there appears to be consensus on the understanding that culture, religion, economics, age, gender, sexuality, space and community patriarchal norms play significant roles in legitimising gender-based violence, there is less consensus on the understanding of the role and influence of education or lack of education as a causal factor for gender-based violence. The seemingly unrestricted environments offered by university campuses, insofar as students are away from their homes, add to misperceptions around associations between sexuality and violence and the right by men to have sexual intercourse (Phipps, Ringrose, Renold, & Jackson, 2018: 1).

Echoing the ‘culture of silence’ that inhibits the reporting or resistance to racism in university settings, gender-based violence, too, is shrouded in veils of under-reporting – predominantly due to the shame associated with being a victim of this scourge. Contrary to widespread ‘stranger-rape’ myths, in the majority of gender-based violence cases, the victim and the assailant are known to each other as an acquaintance, friend or date (Rennison & Addington, 2014). The commission of inquiry (DHET, 2008: 85), for example, found that with a few exceptions, there has been a deafening silence on sexual harassment in general and in residences in
particular. From the few cases where it was raised, it is clear that sexual harassment, of women and gays and lesbians, is rife – as reported by one academic:

Our student thugs are also mostly male, also racist – believing themselves to be superior to other human beings of different colours/ethnic groups, different sexual orientations, and gender… [O]ur thugs have beaten up gay men, including black gay men, beaten up and raped female students, raped lesbian women to ‘cure’ them, ridiculed and denigrated all homosexual people. (DHET, 2008: 85)

The shame and stigma attached to being a victim of gender-based violence are often reinforced by the social and institutional discourse and norms. Programmes and initiatives aimed to prevent GBV are regularly directed at women or victims of these crimes and place the responsibility of stopping this violence on them, rather than the perpetrators, or the contexts that might facilitate these crimes (Rentschler, 2015).

In terms of reporting, the experiences of students and academics are not dissimilar. Even when students want to report incidents of gender-based violence, contends Ahmed (2015), they are actively discouraged from doing so: ‘if you complain you will damage your career (this can work as a threat, you will lose the very connections that enable you to progress); or if you complain you will damage the professor; or if you complain you will ruin a centre or collective’ (Ahmed, 2015). Once complaints are made, more walls come up: an injury to the student or professor’s reputation.

Furthermore, according to Jackson (2019: 698), women may not frequently or openly discuss experiences of gender-based violence, even if these are commonplace for them, because of early/initial experiences where such sharing – particularly about experiences that border on sexual harassment – is met primarily with objections and/or scepticism. Moreover, complaints about sexual harassment are not made public as a way of protecting the organisation from damage (Ahmed, 2015). Notably, despite the distinctive differences among South African universities in terms of historical identities, infrastructure and institutional cultures, they seemingly share one common feature – that is, a perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity, which maintains both the stigma and silence on gender-based violence.

**Academic Activism as Testimony and Responsibility**

Following Agamben, the purpose of a philosophy of (higher) education, we would argue, is to see the world ‘from an extreme situation’ (2012: 50). When seen from the dilemma of the Muselmann, philosophers (as academic activists we would assert) ought to find ways to procure the freedom and self-respect of humans. Such a philosophy would then be concerned with the acts of inhumanity, indignity and disrespect that seemed to have negated an ethics of communication everywhere. If philosophy and philosophy of higher education deepen analyses into inhumane
actions and situations, then the possibility might be there to juxtapose such analyses against what can be perceived as humane. So how can this be done?

Certainly, our university courses should become more aligned with challenging what unfolds as inhumane practices everywhere. This would involve, first of all, identifying and bearing testimony to inhumane occurrences in the world and then to set out on a path of offering potential philosophical responses to how inhumanity and suffering in the world should be restrained. Here we specifically think of bringing philosophy of higher education into conversation with actions that can be considered as inhumane, for example, human trafficking, human displacement and forced migration and ongoing wars. In agreement with Agamben (2012: 99), a philosophy of higher education, and, by implication, academic activism, ought to be concerned with the revocation of the spirit of revenge and resentment. In his words:

It is no longer a question of conquering the spirit of revenge … nor is it a matter of holding fast to the unacceptable through resentment. What lies before us now is being beyond acceptance and refusal, beyond the eternal past and eternal present … Beyond good and evil lies not the innocence of becoming but, rather, a shame that is not only without guilt but even without time.

It is shameful that we do very little, if anything, when students come to university without a meal or without having paid their tuition fees or without knowing where the next place of shelter will come from – all socio-political realities of a democratic South Africa. If academic activism cannot assist in bringing to disgrace such deplorable acts to which we bear witness, then our commitment to a philosophy of higher education is questionable. The destruction of the human being and the reemergence of the Muselmann are imminent if not already present. The Muselmann in itself should be freed from that which undermines his or her *humanitas*. And, for the latter to happen, philosophy of higher education ought to be looked at in a renewed (radical) way, such as to make political liberation even more possible.

To Agamben (2012), the possibility of testimony discerns between the human as living being and speaking being is the condition of possibility of testimony. When humans bear testimony through speech, they lay claim to their humanity – their testimony bridges the ‘fracture between the living being and the speaking being, the inhuman and the human’ (Agamben, 2012: 135). Academics and students alike see, observe and, at times, even participate in inhumane practices. It is not enough to stand in silence, knowing but not acting. Activism requires the action that makes knowledge, objection and resistance visible and audible. Academics, for example, are often fully aware of the precarious situations of students – whether related to adverse poverty or institutional marginalisation. So, too, they are often aware of colleagues who embark on dubious relationships with students – such as sexual favours for improved results or skewed assessment practices in relation to race, culture, nationality or religion.

When academics and students turn against these practices, they turn both against the inhumanity of what they have witnessed and against their own inhumanity in remaining silent. The point here is that opting to remain silent is in itself an act of inhumanity in that it refuses to acknowledge the inhumanity being witnessed,
thereby allowing it to continue. Hence, Agamben’s (2012: 155) assertion ‘with its every word, testimony refutes precisely this isolation... of survival from life’. To him, an ethics of witnessing and bearing testimony is separate from a juridical responsibility, simply because, as Mills (2003) explains, it cannot be presumed that the law exhausts the question of responsibility. To Agamben (2012), there are ‘zones of non-responsibility’, which speaks to ‘a confrontation with a responsibility that is infinitely greater than any we could ever assume. At the most, we can be faithful to it, that is, assert its unassumability’ (Agamben, 2012: 21).

To us, academic activism ought to be embedded in actions of ethical responsibility and demands an unassumable responsibility. What this means is that as activists, we assume responsibility for that to which no responsibility has been assigned. Who takes responsibility for poor and hungry students at universities? Who takes responsibility for students who have been subjected to inhumane ‘initiation’ practices in university residences or for students who have been debased because of their sexual orientation? Who takes responsibility for students who are at risk of attrition because of student debt or who cannot graduate because of outstanding fees? Who takes responsibility for students when they have been subjected to racism, xenophobia or other forms of marginalising practices? Who takes responsibility for the culture of sexism and harassment, which often pervades departmental or faculty meetings?

Policies, no matter how well-intentioned and well-designed, can neither respond to nor alleviate inhumane and unjust experiences; policies cannot undo the harm of the inhumanity of others. Moreover, even when faculties and departments have modules specifically focused on matters and experiences of social justice, that which is taught theoretically in the confines of lecture theatres seldom find expression in how academics treat or respond to the plight of particular students. There is a clear disjuncture between what students are taught, and what they should be doing in relation to the world in which they find themselves, and what students actually experience at the hands and words of the same academics who teach them.

In South Africa, for example, we note the increasing criminalisation of poverty and homelessness. Those who are most vulnerable and in the greatest need of social and economic assistance are brutally evicted from makeshift shacks; homeless people are issued with fines for living on the streets or ‘obstructing the sidewalk’. Earlier this year, as the world embarked on a series of lockdowns in response to the global pandemic of COVID-19, provincial authorities of Cape Town established a tent facility on a desolate piece of land. Approximately 2000 homeless people were relocated. Despite being justified as conditions necessary for the lockdown, it quickly became evident that the facility lacked a capacity for proper social distancing; had inadequate healthcare access; lacked food, water and ablution facilities; and was beset by allegations of sexual assaults. The appalling conditions of the facility resulted in the Human Rights Commission comparing it to concentration camps and demanded its immediate closure (Mahomedy, Boggenpoel, Van der Sijde, & Tlale, 2020).

Despite being found instructed by the Cape High Court to desist from fining, harassing and abducting homeless people in the city centre, and unfairly discriminating against the poor, the Cape Metro police have continued with their actions...
under the guise that homeless people are contravening COVID-19 regulations (Farr & Green, 2020). According to Farr and Green (2020), the astonishment now being expressed at the levels of city-authorised violence should be read as a testimony to the lack of national oversight of city policing and the erosion of public engagement in city and provincial decision-making about what constitutes safety and security. These are the ‘zones of non-responsibility’ – ‘a confrontation with a responsibility that is infinitely greater than any we could ever assume’ (Agamben, 2012: 21), which are the unassumable responsibilities of academic activism.

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