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Protest Pedagogy

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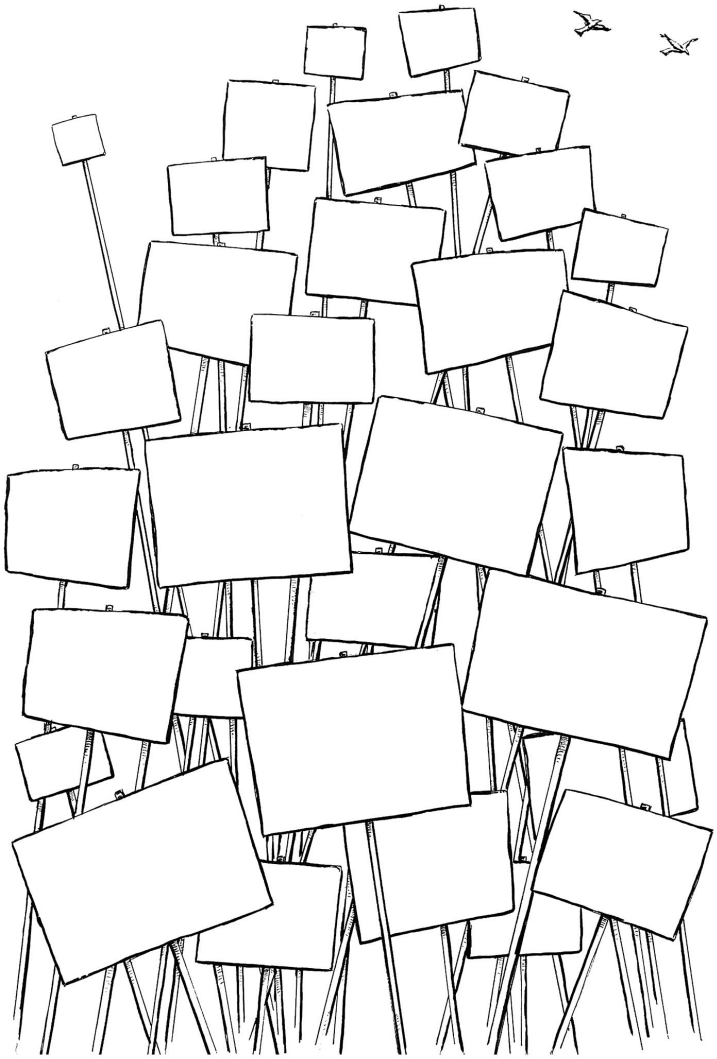

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Framing Pedagogy Through a Lens of Protest

When we take to the streets in protest, we use our bodies to take up space, both physically and ideologically. Within these subversive locations, we create a new community with our collective wisdom, voices, and passion. In doing so, our gathering transforms into building blocks for the world we want to inhabit, while working to disrupt oppressive structures that make this world unlivable.

This article explores what protest means in a university course context. What is the pedagogy of protest? In my very first semester as a new assistant professor, I found myself asking this question in an institutional context where I was very much an outsider. My entrance into this space took place within a global context of protest, as the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the inequities encoded into our way of life. This included the wave of street protests, in the U.S. and world-wide, instigated by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police (Roth & Jarrar, 2021; Taylor, 2021); the mass movement of farmers in India who were protesting the economic burdens of new government policies (BBC News, 2021a); and U.S. teachers rallying against regulations aimed at eliminating critical discourse on race in schools (Schwartz, 2021). Moreover, the course I was assigned to teach proved to be much more challenging than I anticipated in terms of students' conservative ideological entrenchment and aggressive response to critical course content. This form of student backlash is a familiar experience documented by several faculty of color in predominantly white institutions (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2019; Rodriguez, 2009; Ruparelia, 2014). Reflecting on and analyzing the struggles I faced through this course, led to my conceptualization of protest within a pedagogical context. Heeding Gloria Anzaldúa's (1990) call for people on the margins of power to occupy theorizing space, in this article I introduce *protest pedagogy* as a framework for liberatory teaching and learning.

So, what does it mean to engage a pedagogy characterized by protest and aligned with the aims of liberation struggles? Grounded in my lived experiences as a co-instructor for an online and asynchronous graduate education course, I built out dimensions of *protest pedagogy* in dialogic praxis with genealogies of scholarship and genealogies of protest. The collective work encapsulated in *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015) served as a model for me in synthesizing protest, scholarship, and pedagogy. I open this paper with an overview of the course that formed the basis for my pedagogical exploration. Following this contextualization, subsequent sections of the article highlight the mirrored dimensions of protest in the streets and protest as pedagogy. The key elements of this pedagogy include protests of individualism, status quo, binary, and productivity. I conclude with how this theoretical frame of protest as a pedagogical approach also relates to transforming the self, as part of our study and struggle (Kelley, 2018).

Course Context

My formulation of *protest pedagogy* emerges within the context of a co-taught course that intentionally complicated, questioned and expanded ways of perceiving the world and building knowledge. Scholar and wisdom holder Ruha Benjamin (2019) encourages us "to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the ones we cannot live within" (p. 14). Benjamin's vision is embodied in protests that emerge from the margins of power and are centered on collective action, and it was this vision that guided our pedagogical intentions. This was a fully online and asynchronous course entitled 'Social Context of Education.' (Note: I've used pseudonyms for names and titles throughout the paper). My co-teacher, also a woman of color, supported my entry into online teaching by sharing her expertise in instructional design. Together, we aimed to design and facilitate a humanizing online learning space (Dias & Brooks, 2023). Our 25 students were predominantly white and came from a few different disciplinary practices within education. Female students made up almost 70% of the class, and all eight male students were white. We were situated within a university whose faculty and student body are also majority white, and within a majority white city and county with a long history of racial segregation (Dickinson, 2021). As two women and faculty of color situated within this predominantly white space borne from settler colonialist ideology, protest offered a deeply meaningful mechanism through which we could operate as fully human.

Within an online course, the line between curriculum and pedagogy is blurred. How you present yourself through the course outline and material you select becomes an integral component of your pedagogy because there are few opportunities, if any, to make real-time adjustments. Therefore, characterizing protest within an online and asynchronous course context, encompasses all aspects of the course design as pedagogical praxis.

Given the subject of our course, the larger social context was always present in our work. We drew from education movements in particular, as we conceptualized our approach to teaching this course. For example, in 2012 tens of thousands of Chicago teachers and community members took to the streets to fight for equitable labor practices, and against reform efforts that sidelined and maligned educator voices: "The objective was ostensibly to negotiate a new labor agreement, but the bargaining was as much a platform for educational justice as it was a process for reaching a contract" (Ashby & Bruno, 2016, p. 4). So, these teachers were dismantling extractive labor practices while building equitable education spaces. A wave of "red state" teacher strikes followed with similar demands for funding and policy support to create a more equitable schooling landscape (Blanc, 2020). This expansive form of protest that operates within and across the dual framings of agitation against injustice and building toward justice was a salient social context for our course. Educator protest is a powerful vehicle for transformation through solidarity and imagination. But it also, necessarily, creates a destabilized context for

students who join the field for its more colonial, conservative purposes (Ruparelia, 2014). This destabilization influenced how we organized our course.

We structured our course through modules as depicted in prior work (Dias & Brooks, 2023). Each module engaged with a different exploration of education and society, and they all fit within a broader story arc. We opened our course with a module that established our learning community through exchanging introductions and instilling relational values. Module two continued this relational dialogue as we explored each of our own lived experiences with schooling and asked critical questions about the history and function of state sanctioned schooling. As part of this exploration, we charted our school experiences by grade level to note when we felt at the table of our own learning (Teacher-Powered Pittsburgh, n.d.); we asked questions about how knowledge is constructed in conversation with Michelle King (TEDx Talks, 2015a) and Munir Fasheh (TEDx Talks, 2011); we interrogated historical narratives through Malcolm Gladwell's podcast episode on Brown v. Board (Gladwell, 2017); we examined education policy in conversation with David Gillborn (2005); and we engaged with critical pedagogies through the work of Brayboy and Maughan (2009).

Our third module moved us from the personal to the systemic view to investigate connections between schooling and other institutions, namely prisons, economics, and technology. In this section we were in conversation with scholars and thinkers such as Erica Meiners (2007), Chana Joffe-Walt (2020), and Ruha Benjamin (TEDx Talks, 2015b). Module four was focused on understanding social movements connected to education-movements insurgent within the academy and outside it. For this exploration we engaged with material on the Black Panther Party (Peralta Colleges, 2014) and Russell Rickford's (2016) work on Black power and radical imagination. Our fifth and final module looked to the future and encouraged students to dream into being the equitable and just futures they wished for. James Baldwin's (1963) articulation of the purpose of education served as inspiration for considering the education futures we want to build toward. We coupled these core modules with our humanizing practices that included relational responsibilities (Vaught, 2021), a positive response protocol (Koch, 2020), and our grading with care policy (Dias & Brooks, 2023). Collectively, this course design sought to disrupt dominant punitive structures and transactional practices, to make space for a pedagogy of protest to emerge.

Our throughline of disruptive design was largely organized around self-reflection. Grounding our exploration in the self was critical in making sense of the broader social context of education. As co-teachers, we too embraced the vulnerability of reflective sharing in our teaching practice, often analyzing course material in relation to our own lived experiences. Thus, who we are became a part of our pedagogy. In turn, this exposure of us as individuals was available as a subject of student retaliation and often reasserted the imposter within us. Gloria Anzaldúa once asked "*Who am I, a poor Chicanita from the sticks, to think I could write?*" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 249). As a Brown, cis, bi, woman from Sri Lanka, I too often question whether I belong in the grand halls of academia. The right to exist in spaces that were not designed for us is a constant conundrum in my mind. This is the tension that propels me, and those who came before me, to resist that voice in our heads that says, and at times screams, that we are not enough, that we are imposters. To push against this sentiment that is not only a feeling but an encoded reality, is to protest the imposter inside us. At the same time, we have to continuously imagine into being the spaces that can hold us - us, the interlopers in this world. Alexis De Veaux noted that her ancestors had to "*Wake up every day and figure out freedom*" (John Hope Franklin Center at Duke University, 2016). This daily work of resistance and imagination is the act of protest that has shaped my entry into and path within the academy.

From this struggle to resist white supremacist standards of academia while carving out a space where I can thrive as a scholar, I identified protest as a vehicle through which I could develop my praxis. In what follows, I explore the mirrored dimensions of protest as experienced in the streets and in the classroom; as a whole, these components form a pedagogy of protest.

Collective Mindset as a Protest of Individualism

I recall my first experience joining a mass protest as a young activist. As soon as I stepped into the flock of people, I felt a sense of purpose, belonging, courage and hope, anchored by our shared goals of justice and liberation. During moments of isolation as a young immigrant student of color in a predominantly white college, I often channeled the communal power of protest to stay grounded and strong. Even now, many years later, as an assistant professor, I continue to draw on protest as a collective framework for pursuing justice-centered work in institutionally isolating environments.

The lineage of protests in the streets that have shaped my framing of *protest pedagogy* are all necessarily collective and actively work to absorb the individual into the whole. Within a U.S. context, perhaps the most widely recognized community-based protests took place during the civil rights movement, which included several forms of collective action from sit-ins to marches and boycotts, as well as legal actions and art (Wilson, 2013). Although participants entered these spaces as individuals, motivated by their own commitment to justice and freedom, they were trained to become a part of the whole when they joined the protest (Hartford, 2004). These strategies live on in today's marches and acts of subversion against domination. Once immersed in the group, no one voice stands alone. We chant together, we sing together, we move together. Individual speakers may take up a podium to share wisdom and raise spirits, but as we march, their voices blend into the whole. In this context, no one person is isolated–we become a flock much like a murmuration of starlings. A beautiful example

of how Individuals combine forces to transform into a more powerful whole is the 2021 Indian Farmer protest, which included thousands of women who donned yellow clothing to symbolize mustard fields and demonstrate their collective struggle for visibility and livelihood (Al Jazeera, 2021). This solidarity protest was one of the largest (if not the largest) in world history and illustrated the power of mass movements motivated by shared goals rather than individual benefit (BBC News, 2021b; Dhillon, 2021). So, although individuals are recognized, protests are fundamentally driven by a collective vision and purpose; thus, moving against the isolation of capitalist logics that pit us against one another to compete for seemingly scarce resources.

Even when the protest is catalyzed by the experience of an individual, that person is absorbed into the whole. For example, when George Floyd was murdered on the streets of Minneapolis, his name was carried by a community of people through racial justice uprisings that spread across the world (Roth & Jarrar, 2021). Moreover, his story did not stand alone; it was woven into a collective narrative fabric that linked all those killed at the hands of police. During marches, we "say their names" to remember and honor each individual, while contextualizing their collective experiences within a broader system of racialized police violence (Wu et al., 2023). Likewise, slain Gaza professor and writer Refaat Alareer, along with the tens of thousands of Palestinian people killed in Israel's collective punishment of Gaza, have been taken up in the solidarity protests across university and college campuses in the U.S. and across the globe (Al Jazeera, 2024). White kites are frequently displayed during Free Palestine protests as an ode to Alareer's final poem (Syed, 2024), and most recently the New School faculty encampment was named after the late poet scholar (Fadulu & Roberts-Grmela, 2024). These symbolic references intentionally incorporate an individual's wisdom and scholarship into a collective consciousness that pushes forward a shared vision for freedom. As such, even though one person's name is lifted up specifically, it is not done through a hierarchical mechanism that prioritizes an individual's interest over others.' Thus, there is no space for any one person's actions to encroach on another's right to exist, as is the normative experience under racial capitalism, which is focused on individual interests, often at the expense of collective well-being (Kasser et al., 2007; Nelson, 2019). Through these different animations of protests, we see a throughline of collective action for community prosperity and against isolated competition. My conceptualization of *protest pedagogy* mirrors these themes from protests in the streets.

Accordingly, relationships and relationality are central to a pedagogy shaped by protests. My pedagogical story begins in relational dialogue with my co-teacher, Dr. Brooks. Individually, especially as women of color in a predominantly white institution, we experienced the pressures to measure up to institutional standards of academic success. Academia is deeply entrenched in the neoliberal project that is sustained through efficiency, competition and market gain (Moosa, 2024). This ethos creates a hostile environment for most faculty, and especially those of us who enter from the margins and thrive on connection and collaboration (Spinrad et al., 2022). Dr. Brooks and I found each other at this incongruous intersection between our values and institutional norms. The mere fact that we were co-teaching a course was a subversion of university dictates that discourage this practice because it defies the logics of efficiency and individualism. Against this backdrop, we embraced moving as a unison and at the speed of trust. We drew inspiration from the work of scholars such as Freire (2017), who conceptualized pedagogy within a dialogic framework: "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist, and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers" (p. 80). As such, we anchored our course in an adaptation of Dr. Sabina Vaught's (2021) "Relational Responsibilities," which advocates for fostering a learning community of conscience, through collective study, generous engagement, and respectful scholarly discourse. These shared responsibilities reminded us to act as a collective, attending to each other's learning and wisdom. In practice, this manifested as checking in with each other regularly, sharing the workload of course design, implementation and management, struggling through disagreements through a dialogic process, letting go of control to make space for growth, and being honest with ourselves and each other about our capacity and needs.

Academia can too often be a lonely pursuit. We are evaluated individually and pushed to outshine the flock in many ways (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017). To be in authentic partnership in this space is to refuse the institutional ego, open our hearts and minds to another's perspectives, and commit to the dialogic practice of shared creation. Our regular planning meetings were dedicated to strengthening our relationship through learning about each other on a personal and professional level, discussing course material to better understand our scholarly dispositions, and grappling with how to tackle any issues that arose along the way. Over time, much like the radical authors of *This Bridge Called My Back*, our two pedagogical voices became a chorus. In doing so, we strove for what Moraga described as a revolutionary solidarity, where "women of color, who had been historically denied a shared political voice, endeavored to create bridges of consciousness through the exploration, in print, of their diverse classes, cultures and sexualities" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. xvi). Dr. Brooks and I shared some of our dialogue with students to convey how we, as course facilitators, were also grappling with questions related to course content and concepts. For example, during the exploration of our lived experiences in school Dr. Brooks and I shared a video recording of our conversation about this topic. In the video we each shared personal stories from our school experiences and contextualized those narratives against the broader backdrop of state sanctioned schooling. This was an effort to create an atmosphere of collective learning and model dialogic teaching and learning.

By explicitly attending to how we chose to be in relationship with one another, we created an opportunity

to be in honest dialogue and make space for each other's and colleague scholars' contributions to our collective study. Throughout the course we offered students similar opportunities to put our relational responsibilities into practice through course discussions, peer reviews, and collaborative annotations of texts we studied. Our hope was that these efforts would support building a learning community that could surrender to vulnerability, so that we might challenge ourselves to complicate and expand our own viewpoints through relational discourse. However, we found that the asynchronous virtual environment was not always conducive to this form of dialogic connection. Students mostly worked individually, and although they shared their comments with the larger group, there were few moments of authentic exchange. A key exception took place when discussing our school experiences. We used a Padlet dashboard to share our stories, and students had an opportunity to engage in dialogue with each other based on shared and disparate experiences. Additionally, students found dialogic spaces through our collective annotation work via Perusall and occasionally through course discussions on Canvas. Still, there remained a tension between what we envisioned for course engagement and the ways students engaged with the course. Moreover, one or two students engaged in practices that frequently breached our relational responsibilities. For example, our guidelines invited students to "practice complexity over critique" (Vaught, 2021); however, one of our students, Bob, often defaulted to critique, primarily criticizing course material, and occasionally also debating fellow students and course instructors. Bob's refusal to engage in relational learning demonstrated his rigid adherence to neoliberal ideals of individualism and was a stark reminder of what we were operating against through a collective pedagogy. In response, we remained committed to a collaborative dialogic process. Through our feedback and communication, we continually pushed students to step outside the competitive framework that promotes showcasing individual cleverness at the expense of opportunities to learn from and with others. Although this message did not resonate with Bob and a few others, most students did make an effort, at least at the superficial level, to honor our relational responsibilities. Most often this manifested as polite exchanges, or praises and echoes of each other's work. However, we did see students engaging in dialogic learning with course material we explored. For example, when studying the Brown vs. Board of Education case through the stories of Black teachers from that time, several students reflected on why they only learned a sanitized version of that history in school and began to question how their social context has limited their perception of the world. This form of vulnerable reflection is a critical aspect of collective learning because it requires a surrender of individual ego and an openness to growing our thinking through discourse with others.

Protest pedagogy must be collective at the outset, building on and transforming who we are through the process of collaboration to take risks and create new relational possibilities for dialogic teaching and learning.

Centering the Margins as a Protest of the Status Quo

We intentionally prioritized non-dominant perspectives and voices in the readings and media that guided our collective exploration. Much of our course content was authored by critical scholars, such as Erica Meiners, bell hooks, Ruha Benjamin and James Baldwin. Additionally, our praxis was shaped by pedagogical conceptualizations emergent from outside political and institutional power, including critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2021), feminist pedagogy (Light et al., 2015), engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994), and disability justice pedagogy (Shelton, 2020). Our goal was to protest the dominant framework through which we often construct and view the world. As Toni Morrison articulated, we asserted that perspectives emerging from the edges of power are central to our study and inquiry (dadadad321, 2017). In order to disrupt dominant narratives and understand concepts beyond a status quo framing, we established core material that intentionally engaged with knowledge traditions and ways of knowing that are frequently relegated in conventional academic discourse. We wanted to raise critical questions about how we understand education as intersected with race, class, ability and other markers of difference, so as to disrupt the status quo systems we operate within. As Moraga articulates,

> It is not always a matter of the actual bodies in the room, but of a life dedicated to a growing awareness of who and what is *missing* in that room; and responding to that absence. *What ideas never surface because we imagine we already have the answers?* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. xix).

We sought to explore these relatively less known spaces of creating knowledge and scholarly discourse.

Our course began by first interrogating knowledge itself and asking questions about who gets to claim they are authorities on knowledge and whose ways of knowing are dismissed as uneducated. In disrupting our foundational comprehension of what it means to know, we learned with Munir Fasheh (TEDx Talks, 2011), who pushed us to acknowledge and value the many sources of wisdom we draw on throughout our educational journey (in Fasheh's case, this included a chicken). Similarly, exploring science curriculum through the work of Brayboy and Maughan (2009) compelled us to consider Indigenous ways of relational learning that contrast the more transactional western traditions. Throughout the course, our explorations were guided by critical scholars who questioned normative practices and examined the ways historical inequities have systemically shaped our current institutions. Students engaged with material that often unsettled their preconceived beliefs about U.S. education and society and compelled them to confront messier truths. For example, they learned how the Brown v. Board decision did not end de facto racial segregation in schools, how school disciplinary practices mirror prison logics of surveillance and punishment, and how higher education institutions are complicit in gentrification. This discourse truly disrupted most students' worldviews as they began

to ask questions about their educational experiences, including the types of knowledge we prize in K-12 schools (TEDx Talks, 2011), the ways policy and regulations reinforce racial injustice in education through testing and surveillance (Gillborn, 2005), and the narratives we hear about education technology that are often profit-driven rather than pedagogically sound (Watters, 2019). Protests in the streets are fundamentally engaged in this form of agitation to unsettle dominant ideologies. A great example of this emerges through Occupy Wall Street, which rebelled against the oppressive capitalist logics that maintain wealth inequity, enabling 1% of the population to hoard riches while the other 99% are left with the scraps (Levitin, 2021). This movement brought attention to the fallacies that uphold our corrupt economic system and centered their protests on the experiences of the majority of people who live on the margins of economic power. At the same time, Occupy also ignited the nation's imagination of a more just economic landscape that is collectively shaped by the 99 percent. The Freedom Schools movement in the Civil Rights era, also exemplified this dual role of protests by agitating against the fundamentally racist project of state sanctioned schooling while, at the same time, reshaping schooling in a liberatory context (Hale, 2016). Congruously, our students studied historical and persistent injustices in education and society, while also exploring possibilities for more liberated education futures. For example, they considered alternatives to high-stakes grading structures in conversation with thinkers such as Alfie Kohn (Fiddlestick Productions, 2016) and engaged with Baldwin's message to teachers from 1963 to articulate their own hopes for the future of education. Thus, our course curriculum mirrored the two-fold arc of protests that seek to dismantle oppressive status quo structures while also creating more liberated spaces oriented through the lens of those on the margins.

Examining the ways power operates in society through a non-dominant lens compels us to grapple with our identity and positionality. As such, our course content pushed students to reckon with their own identity and complicity in systems of injustice, and wrestle with how they might be actors in building education equity. Unsurprisingly perhaps, we experienced reactionary resistance from students, much of which emerged from the center of socio-political power through Bob, a white male student. He asserted that we were deceiving students into accepting our subjective, critical perspectives as the objective truth–assuming a singular objective truth exists. Additionally, Bob posited that we lacked intellectual humility to entertain other aspects of education and society, outside of examining the marginalizing influence of systemic white supremacy, which he deemed to be the only offering of our course. Many of these comments were included in Bob's summative assessment of our course (only visible to instructors), which he saw to completion. On several occasions he also contradicted course material by debating concepts through clever rhetoric. This tension became particularly prominent during a discussion of Erica Meiners' Right to Be Hostile (2007). Bob debated the merits of Meiners' (2007) argument with Dr. Brooks by pointing out that anger and hostility are distinct, and while anger is a natural feeling, people should expect consequences from showing hostility. Furthermore, he posited that Meiners' analysis was too simplistic in attributing social inequities to white supremacy and structural racism, which were concepts he deemed irrelevant or illegitimate to the discussion. In contrast, Bob maintained that the social issues Meiners described can be attributed to the complexity of human nature and individuality. One white female student challenged Bob's views in a couple of heated exchanges, but Bob never yielded his point. Other students did not engage with Bob; their silence left us uncertain of whether the anonymity of online spaces shielded their agreement with his comments. Ultimately, Bob was invested in defending the status quo through his refusal to accept any complicity in the project of white supremacy and his denial of the existence of systemic oppression. As such, he altogether rejected our approach of study that centered the margins, and deemed us biased against his dominant, status quo ideology.

In many ways Bob's rhetoric often paralleled our own, except he co-opted and distorted our language to delegitimize our practice. As such, *protest pedagogy* was itself protested, to reassert a sense of self that is entitled to take up space based on a dominant perception of moral and intellectual high ground. Moreover, this student's reaction demonstrated to us how readily our scholarship can be invalidated as mere opinion. As two people emerging from the margins of power and pushing against the status quo canon, we embodied the pedagogical approach of our course. This positionality led us to wonder whether Bob would have responded so brazenly if we were white men delivering similar content. To be minoritized, is to often question whether people are responding to you as a person or reacting to your otherness, because your existence is disruptive to their expectations–that is, their expectations for who is granted personhood and permitted to take up space, especially in academic settings. During these exchanges with Bob, our entry from the margins was met with the aggression of his position within the status quo, and he never shifted his gaze to see beyond this purview. We understood that engaging Bob on his terms would only reinforce his dominant framework, so we did not seek to justify our approach with him. Instead, we refused to entertain debates about the existence of white supremacy and systemic oppression, and refocused discussions on grappling with key lessons offered by our course material. Most importantly, we remained committed to our pedagogical values and continued to encourage Bob to surrender his supremacy to make space for scholarly growth.

Protest pedagogy must be rooted in struggle and study framed by perspectives on the margins of power, so that we might better understand the function of status quo narratives and unsettle them as we continue the freedom struggle.

Complexity as a Protest of the Binary

Key to our course was the push to complicate our understanding of education and society by moving beyond

the boundaries of binary thinking. In this context, we invited students to wrestle with their conceptions of the world as shaped by popular narratives entrenched in binaries such as us/them, self/other, winners/losers, right/wrong, and heroes/villains. Specifically, our course offered students perspectives on Brown vs. Board of Education and the Black Panther Party that troubled the dominant binary framings of these topics. For example, listening to Gladwell's (2017) Revisionist History podcast episode on Brown v. Board, compelled students to view this story from a perspective that goes beyond naming winners and losers of the court case. Learning about this piece of litigation from the viewpoint of Black educators of that time, in particular, revealed a more complicated story. Students grappled with the fact that although the ruling succeeded in striking down blatantly racist segregation laws, it also served to reinforce racial tropes of Black inferiority, and in practice, resulted in the mass expulsion of Black teachers and the institution of de facto segregation. In addition, revisiting this case led students to question why most of them previously only learned about the case as a win for civil rights through heroic legal efforts that defeated the villainous racist southern laws. These sanitized stories serve to maintain national myths of righteousness while concealing messier truths. Our protest of the binary embraced the multiplicity of complex truths, which at times are contradictory and yet coexist. Complicating one's worldview in this way can also lead you to question your own identity, as it has been shaped through stories that idealize the U.S. in terms of heroes, freedom, and patriotism. Therefore, confronting multiple truths requires courage and an open-mindedness, because it is more convenient and safer to accept the partial story that fits into the U.S. 'progress' narrative.

As students wrestled with their intersecting identities and complicated their views through our efforts to protest the binary, perhaps the most prominent dichotomy we disrupted was the notion of being right vs. wrong. In education, we are often pushed to find the "correct" answer and are rewarded for acing the test with "right" responses. However, by excavating history and explicitly grappling with systemic inequities and injustices, we offered students an opportunity to question what they previously thought to be "right" and welcome spaces of not knowing, re-examination, and wonder. Moreover, refusing the dominant binary framing enabled us to engage in more nuanced and complex analyses of education and society. We modeled this disruptive approach after fugitive pedagogy (Givens, 2021), which is grounded in subversive actions undertaken by Black educators to disrupt the white supremacist education landscape. By transgressing the eurocentric canon, these educators challenged the right/wrong binary logic that maintains a hierarchy of knowledge and reinforces learning from a single, "right" perspective. For example, in our course module on the Black Panther party, we heard directly from those within the party (Peralta Colleges, 2014), who disabused dominant misconceptions about the group as one-dimensional villains and described the many ways the party fought for justice and pushed for education freedom. Dominant stories that paint the Black Panthers as dangerous while protecting white innocence, exemplify how the binary paradigm serves to separate us by creating an artificial us vs. them barrier based on harmful stereotypes and manufactured fear. Our identity often gets wrapped up in this oppositional discourse, pitting us against each other to maintain dominant hierarchies. Anzaldúa articulates how we might deviate from this bifurcated narrative arc to embrace our multiplicity of being: "Because our positions are nos/otras, both/and, inside/outside, and inner exiles—we see through the illusion of separateness, we crack the shell of our usual assumptions by interrogating our notions and theories of race and other differences" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 264). Protesting the binary then paves a path to our full humanity in all its dimensions and complexity.

A common refrain we heard from students, in response to our course content, was that we only presented "one side" of the story or had a singular political vantage or agenda from which we curated the course. We had prefaced the course by explicitly stating our intentions to apply a critical lens in exploring education and society. Reducing our pedagogical approach to being simply "one-sided," underscored the normative expectation of neutrality or bothsidesism in discussions, often reinforced in popular media and rhetoric. Of course, the notion of impartiality itself is complicit in binary hegemonic societal structures. Neutrality, while posing as an ideal, is rooted in upholding dominance of some over others. This form of objectivity or notion of 'balanced' viewpoints was not our goal; rather, we sought to disrupt and complicate widely accepted narratives that emerge from the center of power. As such, we encouraged students to struggle with their conceptions of neutrality by asking questions about how they perceive balance in a binary context, and by exploring why they needed a reiteration of the normative story to weigh against critical viewpoints. In doing so, we invited them to grapple with how neutrality is conceptualized in narrow terms of either/or rather than the more expansive framing of both/and, which could hold multiple truths simultaneously.

Once again, Bob was the chief architect of the critique that our course was one-sided in a two-sided world. Dr. Brooks was exceedingly generous with her comments to Bob, but the interaction was draining and only fueled Bob's need to prove his point and re-assert the right/wrong binary. Most other students, save for one, did not challenge Bob's views or respond to his claims. The one female student who did challenge Bob, quickly realized that it was futile because he seemed less interested in complicating his own preconceptions than he was in "winning" the argument. Instead of continuing this pattern of debate with Bob, Dr. Brooks and I decided to take a step back and be more strategic in our approach. We offered all students individual feedback at different times during the semester and used that communication to thank Bob for his engagement with the course and encourage him to think beyond "winning" an argument because proving that you're "right" does not necessarily support your growth as a learner and scholar. Although Bob's viewpoints did not change, our shift in strategy helped us to avoid getting wrapped up in his simplistic binary frameworks of winning/losing and right/wrong. That is, our goal was not

to convince him to see things "our way"–this would have simply mirrored Bob's own logic of domination through argumentative discourse. Instead, we sought to change the terms of engagement such that we could stay true to ourselves in all our multifacetedness. Protests emanating from the streets and the classroom offered us an alternative framing through which we could formulate our approach. In particular, we drew inspiration from the movement for trans rights (Ring, 2023), which is in and of itself a protest of the binary in terms of gender and sexuality demarcations. Local activists recently disrupted rhetoric that is steeped in oppressive gender-binary ideology, while also creating discourse that complicates traditional notions of identity and acknowledges our full humanity (Schneider, 2023). Building on their example, we interrupted Bob's argumentative discourse aimed at proving himself "right" and shifted the framework to engage in reflective pause and complex dialogue.

Protest pedagogy resides beyond the dominant binary that cannot hold the richness of our complex histories and identities. This framing unveils the capitalist agenda of creating winners and losers, so that we might evade those trappings and move toward more expansive liberatory futures.

Care as a Protest of Capitalist Productivity

We centered care across the design of our course and in our approach to teaching. Specifically, we incorporated compassionate policies, especially in relation to grades and deadlines, which are two primary causes of stress for students. Our grading with care policy (Dias & Brooks, 2023) extended grace to students if they needed extra time to complete coursework and assuaged grade anxiety by offering an above-passing grade for merely participating in the course. Additionally, when offering students feedback, we employed a positive response protocol (Dias & Brooks, 2023), which always opened with an appreciative comment about what students offered and concluded with questions and comments to help push their thinking further. By applying these tools, we sought to foster a course environment that cultivated authentic learning, free from the rigid controls that are often equated with academic rigor. Accordingly, we structured our course so that students could take the time they needed to engage deeply with course material, instead of feeling overwhelmed by a large volume of readings and assignments that they would struggle to keep up with. A care-based pedagogy is not invested in productivity and speed. Our goal was to move at a pace that allowed for students to think critically, formulate and grapple with their own lines of inquiry, and collectively make sense of broader concepts covered in the course. We looked to liberatory pedagogies (Perlow et al., 2018) as a guide for countering dominant academic productivity logics that are steeped in white supremacist and patriarchal hegemony. Cultivated through the work of Black women scholars, liberatory pedagogy offered us a pathway for embracing a humanizing praxis that could more meaningfully grow students' ways of knowing and being within a liberatory context.

In prioritizing care over efficiency, we presented a range of media for students to engage with (including readings, podcasts and videos); we offered students opportunities to choose the content they wanted to explore; we embedded a week of respite between longer course modules; and we were flexible with course deadlines based on student needs. As a result, our students, overall, felt supported and produced authentic and meaningful scholarly artifacts and discourse. For example, students worked on a final portfolio project where they reflected on their learning journey in the course through a variety of mediums including voice memos, infographics, papers and slideshows. These artifacts demonstrated their creativity and authentic voice. More importantly, the majority of our students shared that the course helped them grow and that they found joy through learning with us.

Navigating our classroom demographics as two dark-skinned, immigrant women of African and South Asian descent, forced us to recognize that while we had institutional power as professors, we were still vulnerable to the socio-political equations that undermined our value and credibility. This enabled us to make sense of student affronts as cooptations of protest in the form of complaint and defensive denial. With this recognition, we could step aside, disengage from toxic exchanges, and instead practice self care and attend to students who were genuinely studying and struggling alongside us. Anzaldúa describes this tension in the context of what we need in order to build bridges toward liberation:

> Not acts of barging in the door and ramming our ideologies down people's throats but of turning away, walking away from those who are not yet ready to hear us, who perhaps can never hear us. To stand our ground with those who look us in the eye, to wait for the glimmer of recognition to pass between us, to let the force of our being penetrate the other gentleness. (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. xxviii)

Whenever Dr. Brooks or I became embroiled in exchanges with problematic comments or provocations from students, we returned to our values and relational guidelines to ground ourselves. We often had to remind ourselves that our role as educators is not to persuade students, but rather to expose them to new ideas and concepts and create the conditions for them to freely embark on their own learning journey. Attempting to prove ourselves or "win" an argument would be following the logic of conquest that extractive capitalism is built on. Instead, we chose to step aside and refocus on our goals and wellbeing as a radical act of care.

Protests in the streets are also built around a practice of care. With our collective bodies, we protect each other and offer comfort. We also support the group through nourishment and assistance, by way of passing water around or having medical support on hand. Moreover, when we move together, we travel at the speed of the group and take the safest routes even if they might take a

longer time. As such, protests do not adhere to capitalist ideals of efficiency and productivity and instead prioritize care and grace while agitating for justice. For example, while seeking to dismantle oppressive segregation laws, Civil Rights activists were also creating spaces where they could be fully human and preserve Black knowledge and cultural traditions (Hale, 2016). At times refusal is the mechanism for protest, and this action too is centered on community and care. The freedom struggle that Du Bois termed the "general strike" is a great example of this collective refusal of capitalist productivity. Instigated by enslaved people during the Civil War, "It was a strike on a wide basis against the conditions of work. . . . They wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the plantations" (Du Bois, 1935, p. 67). Within the context of our course, our efforts were designed to disrupt transactional education productivity aimed at producing volumes of academic output. Instead, we prioritized care through relational learning, deep reflection, and authentic exploration. Most notably, we honored the affective as scholarly, in resonance with Moraga's gravitation to feminism: "What brought me to feminism almost forty years ago was 'heart.' Feminism allowed 'heart' to matter" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. xxi).

Protest pedagogy is heart-work rooted in an authentic care for our collective wellbeing; it requires the audacity to see our emotions as scholarly wisdom and to value our humanity over productivity.

Protest of the Western Self

Protest pushes us to embrace all the complexity of who we are even when those in power might deny our worthiness. Protest also allows us the freedom to imagine and build a world that fully embraces us. It is a struggle against the construct of 'the self' that comes from a dominant perspective and brings into question who gets to be an individual self and thus considered fully human.

As two women of color professors, we understood how we were positioned within a predominantly white institution. At the same time, we recognized our power to offer students perspectives outside of the status quo. However, in our efforts to subvert the status quo, the status quo pushed back. By decentering dominant narratives and voices, we awoke a form of backlash within our learning community. In our undertaking of protesting the self as constructed within a western, colonial, capitalist and individualistic framework, students who reside in this dominant context stood in defiance of our protest. Their counter protest reflected the ways we aimed to dismantle, change, and rebuild the self as a construct. Anzaldúa reminds us that:

> We must turn the heat on our own selves, the first site of working toward social justice and transformation. By transforming the negative perceptions we have of ourselves we change the systems of oppression in interpersonal contexts—within the family, the community—which in turn alters larger institutional systems. (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, pp. 264-265)

Protest pedagogy is not possible without confronting the self, to take off the mask so that we might transform. In essence, it is a protest of self that challenges the ingrained vestiges of white supremacist thinking inside us and opens the door to a more liberated self.

Conclusions

My articulation of a *protest pedagogy* emerges from what Moraga terms a 'theory in the flesh,' which is "...Both the *expression* of evolving political consciousness and the *creator* of consciousness, itself. Seldom recorded and hardly honored, our theory *incarnate* provides the most reliable roadmap to liberation" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. xxiv). When we demand to be heard, when we reject the dominant narrative, when we embrace our full humanity in all its complexity and beauty, we create possibilities for our freedom futures. This is the function of protest. In this paper I offer a pedagogical construct of protest through my lived experience with the first course I co-taught as a new assistant professor. This framework is rooted in a collective mindset as a protest of individualism, complexity as a protest of the binary, care as a protest of capitalist productivity, and a protest of the western self to pave the way for a liberated self. These concepts bring the ethos of street protests into the classroom, pushing us to question and challenge dominant framings, and create space for more equitable, just, and liberated possibilities in education. By enacting the spirit of protest in our course we built a counter-space where the affective was honored as part of our scholarship, where not knowing was valued as an avenue for further inquiry, and where collaboration was recognized as deep and meaningful work. My conception of protest pedagogy builds on the tradition of defiance and creativity encapsulated in *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015):

> With *This Bridge*… we have begun to come out of the shadows; we have begun to break with routines and oppressive customs and to discard taboos; we have commenced to carry with pride the task of thawing hearts and changing consciousness… Women, let's not let the danger of the journey and the vastness of the territory scare us—let's look forward and open paths in the woods… Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks. (p. 254)

Moraga & Anzaldúa's (2015) book shaped my early years of activism in education, and now informs my approach to pedagogy, as a fellow radical woman of color, striving to contribute my ways of knowing as a theoretical foundation that moves us toward liberated education futures.

In closing, I return to my imposter self and internal protest. Perhaps I was not meant to be here. Still, here I am, because those who came before me dared to dream my existence in these spaces into being, and I in turn will create space for those who will follow me.

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