

Start Where
You Are

A ZINE and WORKBOOK ABOUT
ACTIVISM IN EDUCATION

By: Jimil Ataman

HELLO!

Someone once told me that they believed that poetry (as a genre & practice) should "ride the bus". They reflected on how the genre has morphed into one that self-righteously declares itself as "cultured" or even "civilized" and which prides itself on being intentionally obscure and confusing.

When I first got into graduate school, I was elated. I felt proud and everyone praised my achievement of obtaining admission into such "a great institution." "How prestigious!" they exclaimed. And while perhaps objectively such statements are true, I've been confronted by these notions of what this place ("prestigious institution") is, what it does or doesn't do, and where exactly I fit in all that.

Right now, my feelings about graduate school are more complicated. I've begun to wonder about this notion of riding the bus. Are we making any of this work and thought and "prestige" *do* anything outside of these ivy-covered walls? If I dedicate my life to this place, which will most certainly continue to make me feel inadequate and out of place, will my work be *worth it*? Can I take what I'm learning and make it ride the bus?


This project is a response to those questions, though I'm not certain it answers them. It is an attempt to create something intentionally non-academic as a form of resistance to the institution's expectations of what "quality" graduate work looks like. It is also a form of access into the coursework, dialogue and reflection that exists in the space I am currently occupying.

To be clear, this is not a project, which "dumbs-down" the work of academia. In fact it is quite the opposite, it is a project, which hopes to illuminate and give access to the ideas and thoughts discussed in my graduate school course on Activism in Education. It hopes to share information, which is often systematically and systemically denied to many people because of their race, gender, age, ability, socioeconomic status, or their position as "outsiders" of academia.

So, welcome! this is a space for you, and for me and for anyone who'd like to be here. my hope is that you'll learn something new about activism, or education, or yourself. and maybe if we're all lucky you'll feel called to share with a friend, or a mentor, or a stranger on the bus. until then, thanks for being here.



A FEW NOTES



Ella Baker (an incredible civil-rights activist and community organizer) while discussing her strategy for organizing, once said, "I don't have any cut pattern, except that I believe that people, when informed about the things they are concerned with will find a way to react. Now whether their reactions are the things most desirable at a given stage depends, to a large extent, upon whether the people who are in the controlling seat are open enough to permit people to react according to the way they see the situation. **In organizing a community, you start with people where they are**"

This zine has been created with the intention of providing you (the reader) with space (both literally and figuratively) to interact with the material presented. I have taken Ella's words to heart and hope that you find this space both accessible and engaging. I hope that it gives you an opportunity start where you are.

Inside the zine, there are reflection questions and other activities throughout these pages and I hope you'll consider them. Many them are questions that were posed to me during my classes, which I was then given time to consider and share. For me, this process was incredibly meaningful as it gave me a chance to consider how theoretical ideas actually relate to my life. I'm inviting you to consider this as well.

I have worked quite diligently to create and curate this space, and in many ways it represents a lot of what I've been thinking about this past semester. That being said, this is only a tiny bit of the literature and the ideas, which were discussed in my class, and I've provided a reading list for you, if you'd like to learn some more.

KEY TERMS

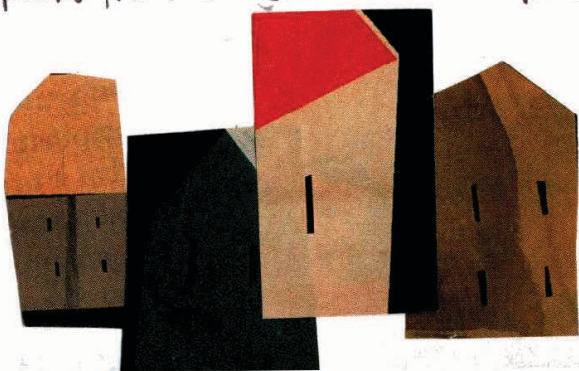
Here are a few quick definitions.

NEOLIBERALISM: Sometimes considered an ideology & sometimes it references the social order of the 'market' or capitalism. Often it refers to how capitalism functions between the dominant and subordinate classes. While it does have a role in the global market, it is not globalization. (Duménil & Lévy, 2005)

GLOBALIZATION: This refers to the 'global market'. Usually it is used to describe the process of international trade growth, the flow of capital(s), and an economy that exists throughout the globe. (Duménil & Lévy, 2005)

PEDAGOGY: The practice, art or science of teaching. This term is usually used to describe a method of teaching which is centered around a certain principle, goal or curriculum. Examples: Social Justice pedagogy, Queer pedagogy, & Critical pedagogy. (Merriam-Webster, 2016)

HEGEMONY refers to the cultural influence exerted by a dominant group. Antonio Gramsci theorizes that the establishment of hegemony is ~~not~~ not violent, but the revolution that it often requires is violent. He also posits that every human community has a hegemonic force. (Day, 2016)



SOLIDARITY: A word that gets thrown around a lot these days, especially on social media. It evokes conceptions of "sameness" or mutual support within a group. The term also implies having a common enemy or opponent to whom solidarity is not extended. This view actually evokes distinctions or "difference" between two groups. Another idea about solidarity is that it is bound up in the idea that we all "have stake in one another's oppressions" (Kip, 2016)

DISCOURSE: A form of written or spoken communication. In some contexts it refers to the prevalence or dominance of certain ideologies or socially accepted notions. Often it is used when discussing how one idea/norm is valued more than another (Merriman-Webster, 2016)

PRIVILEGE: Has a few connotations, but the one that fits with our discussion is that privilege comes to describe "the general power differentials between social groups" (Williams, pg 328). This can be based on race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, physical or mental ability, citizenship status, faith background, and the list goes on and on... (Williams, 2016)

OPPRESSION: Refers to the "prolonged, cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of authority, control, or power." Some activists today often conceptualize any exercise of power to be oppressive, and others see the potential for power to be exercised in a non-oppressive way. To some, it implies that oppression is the opposite of privilege. For example white people have skin privilege, therefore non-white people are oppressed. (Podur, 2016)

INTERSECTIONALITY: Used in activist discourse to acknowledge the interconnected nature of social categorizations, oppressions and privileges. Intersectionality is important because it makes space for the many identities which an individual may hold. It also gives validity to the idea that a person has a range of identities where some can be privileged and some marginalized - and that these categorizations can change based on environment! (Merriman-Webster, 2016)

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

Before we discuss activism in education, an understanding of theory is necessary. I'd like to present a brief overview of a few theories of education as explored by Jay MacLeod (2009). These theorists all discuss the idea that schools are sites of reproduction. Although tedious, an understanding of the power dynamics, which are foundational to school structure, is necessary for our larger goal of understanding activism within those educational systems.

Bowles and Gintis: These two are Marxists who understand education as a system that is reflective of the class structure. They argue "schools train the wealthy to take up places at the top of the economy while conditioning the poor to accept their lowly status in the class structure" (MacLeod, 1995:12). They also focus on the "**correspondence principle**" which reproduces a power dynamic (administrators control teachers, teachers control students) that is found in the work place. Essentially they argue that education keeps students from upward mobility and actually reinforces their social class.

NOTES:

Pierre Bourdieu: Presents the concept of "**cultural capital**" which is the "general cultural background, knowledge, disposition and skills that are passed from one generation to the next" (pg. 13). Bourdieu's theory is one that says that schools are sites of cultural reproduction, which cater to the dominant class and oppress the subordinate one. He argues social class determines success in school because students who are in subordinate classes will not have the same linguistic or cultural capital necessary to succeed in school. Additionally, he believes that school perpetuates social inequality because schools are actually reproducing class privilege.

NOTES:



Basil Bernstein: Focuses on language patterns that are mentioned in Bourdieu's discussion of cultural capital. Bernstein identifies that "schools require cultural resources which only specific students are endowed" (pg. 16). He presents the idea that certain "**linguistic codes**" are generated based on social class, and schools value and expects students to understand and use the codes which are created in the upper classes. For Bernstein this model reinforces social class as those students who use linguistic codes generated from the lower class are generally excluded from academic success.

NOTES:



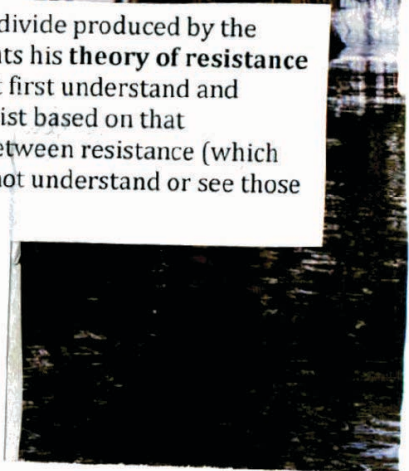
Paul Willis: Using the example of Lads and Ear'oles who are working-class students that are divided. The Ear'oles conform to expectations of students, aspire to be middle-class and follow the rules. The Lads refuse to conform, reject school policies and expectations and openly oppose the school. Willis explores how cultural practices and agency of the Lads and Ear'oles reproduce and reinforce their working class status. His work says that the correspondence principle (see above) is too deterministic and he argues, "there is no clear separation between agency and structure" (pg. 20).

NOTES:



Henry Giroux: All of this brings us to Henry Giroux who bridges the divide produced by the above theorists. Giroux examines student non-conformity and presents his **theory of resistance** which says that resistance can be counter-cultural, but students must first understand and recognize the systems of oppression which impact them and then resist based on that understanding. This understanding of oppression is the difference between resistance (which sees systems of oppression) and oppositional behavior (which does not understand or see those systems).

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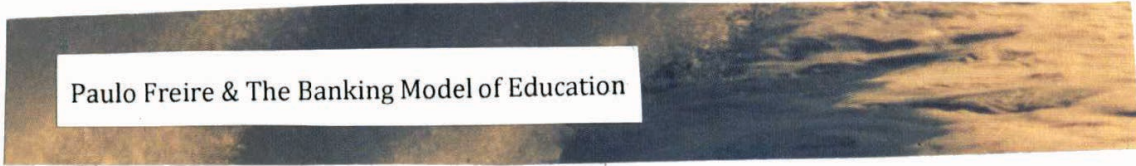


TRANSFORMING

EDUCATION

Something I think a lot about, having learned about the theoretical foundations of education is how can schools be transformed?

I found two pretty good answers to that inquiry...



Paulo Freire & The Banking Model of Education

In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire introduces the concept of "the Banking Model of Education." This model shows how education has become "an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (pg. 53). Freire discusses how this model allows the teacher to justify their existence by projecting complete ignorance upon the student, and the student accepts their ignorance because they never realize that "they educate the teacher" (pg. 53)

Freire poses that the purpose of education as a practice of liberation can be achieved through "its drive towards reconciliation" (pg 53). He argues that the solution is not within the banking model of education, as this model not only mirrors the oppressions of society, but it strengthens their control. Instead Freire discusses liberation as praxis: "the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (pg. 60). Like Giroux, Freire believes that this liberation would come from viewing students as conscious beings. Freire challenges us to replace the depository function with one that poses "the problems of human beings in their relations with the world" (pg. 60). This method breaks down the power dynamics of teacher-student. It allows teacher to learn from student and for student to learn alongside the teacher, as co-investors.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION IS?



In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks writes on what she calls "engaged pedagogy". She explains that this approach to teaching, and to school emphasizes "well being" and it "means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well being if they are to teach in manner that empowers students" (pg. 15). This practice, draws from the teachings of Paulo Freire and Tich Nhat Hahn. hooks sees the vocation of teaching as sacred, one where teachers can be healers, and have a "responsibility to be self-actualized individuals" (pg. 16).

Engaged pedagogy as a practice does not seek to empower both teachers and students. hooks challenges us to not require students to be the only ones who "to share [or], to confess". She considers engaged pedagogy to "also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process" (pg. 21). This process requires professors to be vulnerable with their students and to create curriculum that does not reinforce systems of oppression (pg. 21). Ultimately, hooks describes this practice as a pedagogy which allows student to "enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply" (pg 22).

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE SCHOOLS TRANSFORMED?

DESCRIBE A TIME/EXPERIENCE YOU HAD IN SCHOOL WHICH MADE YOU FEEL EMPOWERED?

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ABOLITION vs REFORM

A conversation that has been coming up A LOT in my class on Activism in Education is an inquiry into what we think is the best method of activism, that is, how can we balance the short-term goals of our social justice movements, with the long term ones. This almost always brings us to the debate of whether abolition minded activism or reform minded activism is the best avenue for our work.

ABOLITION: The act of dismantling a system, institution, or practice

REFORM: The process of improving or changing the institution or system in place.

I think it is useful to consider this in context of a specific movement, and right now I'd like for us to consider mass incarceration. In her book, *"The New Jim Crow,"* Michelle Alexander (2011) outlines the history of the mass incarceration in the United States. She defines mass incarceration as "the criminal justice system but also the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled as criminals both in and out of prison" (pg. 13). Her book is a powerful one, as it shows its readers that mass incarceration is facilitating a new caste system in America, one that disproportionately affects African Americans in this country. The entire system is a "gateway into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization" (pg. 12).

Before we move on to consider abolition & reform, I would like for you to watch a clip on YouTube. The clip is filmed at a panel discussing the movement to end mass incarceration. If you have time I'd suggest watching the entire thing, but for the purposes of this section you need only start at the timestamp: 52:30 and watch through 1:12:00.

LINK: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJDCoodQix0&t=303>

NOTES ON
PANEL DISCUSSION

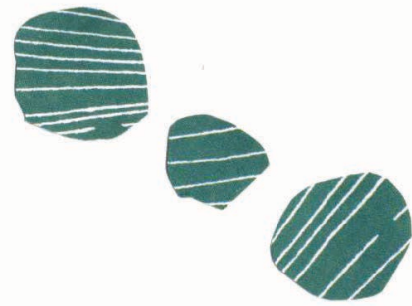
what did the panelists say about abolition
in the mass incarceration movement?



and reform?

WHERE DOES THIS DEBATE FIT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ISSUES
YOU ARE MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT?

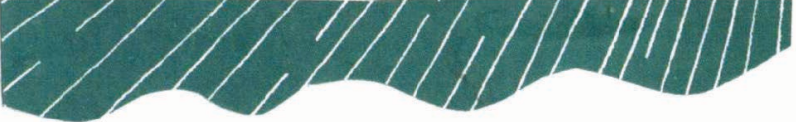
GETTING ORGANIZED



WHEN DID YOU FIRST CONCEIVE OF YOURSELF AS A POLITICAL ACTOR?

DESCRIBE A TIME WHEN YOU FELT POWERFUL...

Community organizing can be broken up into two varieties. In their article, *Community Organizing or Organizing Community? Gender and the Crafts of Empowerment*, Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker (1998) discuss two types of community organizing. They consider how they are influenced by gender and how they blend the public and private spheres. Although very different, these models each have a history of success.



Alinsky Model ("Community Organizing"): Created by Saul Alinsky, this model is based on the idea that public and private spheres must remain separate for community organizers. Alinsky believed that community organizing was not for "family types" and that "problems could not be solved within the community but by the community being represented better in the public sphere" (pg. 733). This model tends to focus on aggressive confrontation in the public sphere as a means to the goals of the movement.


Saul Alinsky argued that the job of a community organizer must come above all other parts of an organizer's life. It should also be known, that Alinsky was blatantly sexist in that he was skeptical of female organizers because he feared women were "too delicate" for the job. (pg. 735).

Essentially this model focuses on the idea that "real power could not be given but only taken" because Alinsky viewed the world as a "battle" between self-interest individuals inside the public sphere (pg. 738).

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Women-Centered Model ("Organizing Community"): This model believes that a distinction between public and private spheres in community organizing is not possible and impractical. This model seeks to extend the household into the neighborhood, thus "dissolv[ing] the boundaries between public and private life, between household and civil society" (pg. 733). Also, it focuses on building strong relationships within the community through inter-personal actions as a means to achieve its goals.

Women-centered organizing cannot be attributed to a single person, though bell hooks and Ida B. Wells have been influential in its growing significance. This model places an emphasis on community building and collectivism which. It also draws upon the idea rooted in Black motherhood which relies on "other mothers," which stimulates a more generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability" (pg. 732). Most importantly, this model sees justice "not as a compromise between self-interested individuals but as a practical reciprocity in the network of relationships that make up the community" (pg. 739).



NOTES:

GETTING GOING

What are some "issues" you feel passionate about?

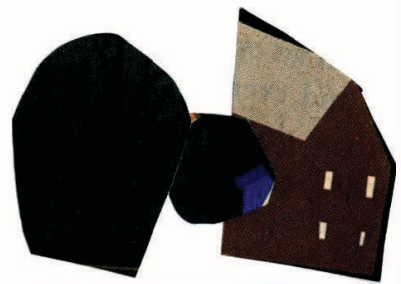
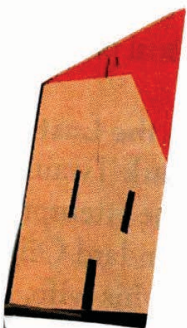
DIRECT ACTION:

In his book titled *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, David Graeber (2009) provides us with a rich history and exploration of direct action. Graeber shows that direct action cannot be simply defined, and that many folks disagree about what exactly it means. Keeping that in mind, I think Graeber (2009) sums it nicely when he says, "Direct Action aims to achieve our goals through our own activity rather than through the action of others" (pg. 202). He goes on to explain that direct action represents a certain ideal that requires us to act as if we were already free from the systems, which oppress us (pg. 207). This concept of direct action relies on people to liberate themselves on their own, without the direction of a leader or elite.

Graeber also discusses that for movements seeking to dismantle oppressive systems, the necessity of autonomy is a tough ideal to uphold. Often Direct Action groups must engage with "larger economic, social, or political systems that surround them" in order for them to create sustainable and permanent free communities (pg. 210). Historically this has proven quite challenging for groups who ally with organizations or unions for support.

Have you ever experienced collective leadership?

How about Direct action?



PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

In the 1960's a concept called participatory democracy gained traction. Carol Mueller discusses this in her chapter titled "Ella Baker and the Origins of Participatory Democracy." The label is a broad one but generally emphasizes three factors of community action:

1. "An appeal for grassroots involvement of people throughout society in the decisions that control their lives
2. The minimization of hierarchy and the associated emphasis on expertise and professionalism as a basis for leadership
3. a call for direct action" (pg. 79)

Participatory democracy calls for a broader base of decision making. It incorporates the use of direct action not as a response to crisis but rather "a part of a broader set of collective citizenship obligations" (pg. 80).

"We create much more room for collaboration, for expansion, for building power when we nurture movements that are full of leaders, and allow for all of our identities to inform our work and how we organize. This then allows for leadership to emerge from our intersecting identities, rather than to be organized around one notion of Blackness. Because of this we resist the urge to consolidate our power and efforts behind one charismatic leader"

Black Lives Matter Founders,
Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza & Patrisse Cullers-Bignac

WHERE DO YOU FIT in all this?

Daniel Hunter (2015) wrote a guide to organizing called "*Building a Movement to End The New Jim Crow*." The book is a wonderful practical guide to organizing, and if you are interested in learning more, I'd recommend starting there. For now, I'd like us to consider his discussion of the different roles needed in organizing. Hunter (2015) discusses four general positions needed in organizing. *Note: these categories are generalizations and not a comprehensive list of the needs or potential roles in community organizing

WHAT STRENGTHS CAN YOU BRING TO A MOVEMENT?

SOME ROLES:

HELPERS: Are the people who can offer access to immediate needs, such as shelter, food, caring. These people tend to provide "direct service such as opening their homes, education about job interviews, offering therapy for family members" (pg. 8). Helpers can do enormous good, but if they are uneducated about the presence of structural and systematic inequalities they can end up providing only "feel-good band-aids" and could also "create cycles of dependency" (pg. 9).

ORGANIZERS: Are people who bring together those impacted by systems of oppression. Organizers tend to work outside the system by focusing on root causes of the problem and "bringing people together to solve problems, with a belief that they can build power to make change" (pg. 12). Organizers can be ineffective if they get wrapped up in the politics of their communities. They can also get stuck going "after goals they deem "winnable"—even when the people most affected are urging otherwise" (pg. 12).

ADVOCATES: Are people who help those in need navigate the systems of oppression. They often do work such as "social work, public advocacy, or impact litigation" (pg. 8). These are people who understand systematic oppression and work within the system. Advocates can "dampen people's desire for radical change by urging that they accept the system" (pg. 10).

REBELS: Are the people who bring the passion, energy and often times radical expectations to the group. Often they are "unyielding in pursuit of justice and willing to go through great personal sacrifice to make their point" (pg. 13). Just like the other groups, the Rebels can become ineffective if they rely too much on their marginal identity or use tactics, which are unrealistic and ineffective for the purpose of being radical (pg. 13).

Where do these roles fit into our previous discussion of abolition vs reform?

Do any of these roles speak to you? Whose voice is missing here?



INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is an important piece of any conversation about activism (or even education). I've noticed that conversations around how identities intersect or the ways systems of oppression overlap are pretty constant in my classes.

Let's start with a quick activity:

In each box write one identity of yours —

examples: ← IT CAN BE ANYTHING YOU WANT
(race, gender, faith, meaningful experiences)

Consider how these identities intersect in your daily life...

③ Which of your identities are public? Which are private?

④ Do you notice anything missing from this list?

⑤ How do you relate this activity to the information we've discussed so far in this zine?

PRIVILEGE :

We cannot talk about activism, or education without talking about privilege. And while, this topic is often an uncomfortable one, I believe that if we want to deeply engage in social justice work we *must* confront our own privilege. This work asks us to honestly reflect on ourselves and to interrogate our positionality and biases.

I'd like to share a piece I've written about confronting my own privilege. I hope that in sharing this, you will consider writing something about privilege for yourself. I share this because it is not easy to be honest, but it is important to say these things out loud: (T.W. abuse)

I grew up in an unsafe home. I do not remember much from my childhood, but some things are hard to forget:

My parents are looking down at me. They say I'm lying about him molesting me.

For an hours I lie on the floor with my face smooshed into the carpet while he screams at me. I did not do the dishes like he told me to.

He comes flying into my room. His hands are wrapped around my throat. I can't breathe. He tells me I'm not strong enough to save myself.

When I could finally get out; I ran. I told them a thousand miles would be too close.

Then I was alone and in a new place. Freedom! I thought to myself, college is where I will make myself whole.

People were always asking things like "tell me about yourself?" and "what was your life in Idaho like?" I quickly learned that they didn't want the real answer. I wished that I could be a different person.

In my search for a new identity, I got dreadlocks. They made me feel like a new person. I felt beautiful and strong. Sometimes my friends would mention the term cultural appropriation to me. I had never heard that phrase. For a long time, I avoided the conversation.

Over time I learned what cultural appropriate meant. I started talking to my friends about it. I started to *listen*. I learned some things that were hard to hear:

White privilege is wearing dreadlocks and being considered "quirky" and "bold" rather than "dangerous" or "lazy."

White people who wear dreadlocks are contributing to white supremacy.

White privilege is getting to feel empowered by hairstyle, while not even considering the cultural significance or meaning it has in the black community.

*this list goes on and on...

I thought to myself, well I have a *real* reason for wearing my hair this way. I justified my decision on the grounds of the trauma I endured in my youth. By now I started seeing white privilege everywhere. It was all over me, and a lot of the people I knew.

Finally, I cut my dreadlocks off.

When you have privilege it is easy to be blinded by it. When you are hurting, it is hard to see how you are hurting others. This does not excuse my bad decision. And cutting my dreadlocks off was only the first step.

Today, It's helpful me to consider confronting privilege as a practice. It is something that you get better at if you practice it everyday.

Today is another day of practice.

How could you confront privilege in your own life?
What would that look like?

FINAL THOUGHTS:

What do you think about all this? What, if anything do you feel compelled to learn more about?

THE END!

We've come to the end of the zine. What a journey! For me, this has been wonderful experience of making and thinking and learning. I hope that you found a place for yourself here. Whether you did, or especially if you didn't, I would L O V E to hear your feedback. Any thoughts, suggestions, and/or reflections are welcome, and appreciated. I'm going to keep on making zines about the things I'm learning in graduate school and your feedback is important to me!

You can find me at: jimil.ataman@gmail.com

Also, I owe a big T H A N K Y O U to Dr. Krystal Strong, whose course inspired this project, and whose mentorship encouraged it. Her work as a scholar and professor give me hope that the academy can, and is, being transformed. I am grateful to be learning from and with her.

"All that these transformations have in common is that they begin in the imagination, in hope. To hope is to gamble. It's to bet on the future, on your desires, on the possibility that an open heart and uncertainty is better than gloom and safety. To hope is dangerous, and yet it is the opposite of fear, for to live is to risk."
- Rebecca Solnit

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jimil Ataman is an M.S.Ed candidate in the Education, Culture & Society division at Penn GSE. She is a first time zine maker, hoping break down the barriers of educational elitism. Her research interests include: the experiences of student activists/organizers on college campuses, accessibility of academia, and qualitative methods. She is a true believer in the power of people's narratives and the practice of education as an act of resistance.

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