

Pedagogy Primer



Teaching Resistance: Pedagogical Reflections on “Sociology of Resistance”

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Abstract

This article reflects on the pedagogical journey of designing and teaching “Sociology of Resistance” at Ibn Haldun University in Istanbul. The course examines how resistance emerges in response to power, inequality, and structural domination, encouraging students to think critically about agency, autonomy, and tactics across varied contexts. Through a multidisciplinary syllabus integrating sociology, political science, feminist theory, and cultural studies, students explore case studies ranging from Palestinian resistance to Indigenous struggles in Kashmir, South Africa, and the Americas. Central to the course is the inclusion of guest speakers, activists, artists, and ex-detainees, whose lived experiences brought theoretical concepts into immediate contact with contemporary political realities. Attention to language justice through in-class translation allowed guests to speak in their tongues. This reflection highlights the intellectual and ethical work of teaching resistance in a politically urgent time. The course has since developed into a global book project aimed at decolonizing resistance pedagogy.

Keywords

Sociology of resistance – interdisciplinary pedagogy – Palestine – decolonial education – Global South

Introduction: Locating Resistance in the Classroom

When I first introduced Sociology of Resistance at Ibn Haldun University, I knew I was doing more than designing a course. I was cultivating a space for political thinking, ethical encounter, and critical consciousness. Resistance is not a distant sociological subject to be clinically dissected, it is lived, embodied, and often dangerous. It shapes and is shaped by our positionalities, relationships, and structural constraints.

The course was taught in the 2023–2024 academic year, during which the Israeli military's escalating assault on Gaza and the West Bank unfolded before our eyes. In this context, Palestinian resistance became a central thematic and emotional anchor for the course, not only as a case study but as a lens through which students could interpret broader dynamics of colonization, structural violence, and resistance. However, derived by a similar-targeted course conducted by Nareman Amin (2023), I made a deliberate effort not to treat Palestine as an exceptional case. Rather, I consistently emphasized how Palestinian resistance resonates with and is linked to global struggles, from Indigenous land defense movements in the Americas, to anti-caste mobilizations in South Asia, to anti-apartheid and post-liberation struggles in South Africa, to Kashmiri feminist resistance.

I wanted the course to offer both academic rigor and political relevance, and this meant interrogating resistance as both theory and practice (Ezbidi & Ashrawi, 2022). I aimed to move beyond the Eurocentric canon of social movements and revolution, centering narratives from the Global South and disrupting the hierarchy between academic and activist knowledge. In other words, I wanted to be able to practice “how to re-tell the stories of the marginalized and silenced ‘others’ in our classrooms” (Fulco & Tatarević 2024).

Designing a Curriculum of Agency and Tactics

The course began by anchoring students in foundational sociological concepts: agency, autonomy, tactics, and power. These terms were not treated as abstract theories but as tools to understand how everyday people, under surveillance,

occupation, censorship, or marginalization, carve space for dignity and transformation (Alexandrakis, 2016).

The syllabus included classical and contemporary texts. Hollander and Einwohner's (2004) "Conceptualizing Resistance" offered a typology of resistance acts, intentional, unintentional, recognized, and silenced. Erik Schneiderhan's (2016) piece on "Theorizing Resistance" helped frame resistance as dynamic and shaped by cultural frames and narrative strategy. These initial readings provoked critical questions: When is something considered resistance? Who defines it as such? How do social contexts affect its visibility or legitimacy?

We discussed the legacies of Foucault, Gurr, and Bourdieu in shaping theories of domination and resistance. Yet we also criticize the Western framing of these theorists and have sought out alternative genealogies rooted in Indigenous, decolonial, and feminist thought, such as Frantz Fanon, Ali Shariati, Bell hooks, and Rosa Luxemburg.

Dialogues with Resistance: Guests as Co-Educators

One of the most transformative dimensions of the course was the inclusion of weekly guest speakers. Their voices, emerging from prisons, art collectives, occupied lands, or activist circles, expanded the curriculum. For instance, a Palestinian ex-detainee spoke about sustaining resistance under occupation. These guests were co-educators, not add-ons. Language justice was key; translators were arranged so guests could speak freely. As one student reflected, 'The class became real when the guest spoke. It was no longer theory, it was a heartbeat.'

A defining feature of the course was the weekly inclusion of guest speakers. Each session featured someone with lived experience in the domain of resistance we were studying: artists, environmental activists, ex-political prisoners, former student activists, and women's rights defenders.

In our week on artistic expressions of resistance, Safaa Khatib, a Palestinian photographer and film maker introduced her experience in establishing her phenomenal exhibition "The Braids Rebellion" which is based on the real-life story of young Palestinian women under the age of 18 who were arrested and imprisoned by Israeli authorities in 2015 and 2016. In our week about feminist resistance, Prof. Omaima Abu-Bakr introduced Islamic feminism to the students as part of resisting both the traditional masculinity perspectives in *Tafseer*, and liberal feminism that doesn't take religion as a main source and driver of the motivations of Muslim societies towards change or maintaining existing

phenomena. For armed resistance, Dr. Nowar, a Palestinian former student activist and a lecturer at Jordan University, joined via video call to introduce the model of the “engaged intellectual” Basil Al-Araj. During the week on environmental movements, exclusive videos from indigenous people in North America were shown to reflect resource extraction and spiritual sovereignty. In our week on social movements and resistance, Dr. Ravza Kavakcı, along with Ayla Kerimoglu, inspired the audience with their experience in resisting the era of excluding veiled women in Türkiye. These guests were not “supplementary” voices, they were central to the pedagogy.

Many spoke languages other than English. To ensure access and respect for their voices, I brought in translators, often at my own expense, so that guests could speak in their own words. I considered this a pedagogical responsibility: language justice is a form of resistance. One guest spoke in Arabic, another in Turkish, and another intended to speak in Urdu. By refusing to make English a gatekeeper for legitimacy, I demonstrated to my students that epistemic plurality and linguistic autonomy are integral to decolonial learning.

These encounters left lasting impressions. One student wrote in their reflection paper: “I always thought resistance was political action. But when our guest cried during her talk, I realized that resistance is also refusing to be erased.”

Case Study: Palestine as Pedagogical Center

Palestine and Gaza were not just a course topic, they were a pedagogical and emotional core. Given the genocide unfolding during the semester, it was impossible to teach resistance without engaging with the ongoing occupation, dispossession, and collective punishment faced by Palestinians.

We engaged critically with narrative resistance (Selbin, 2010), studying how Palestinians use art, literature, music, and performance to resist erasure. We discussed sperm smuggling from Israeli prisons as an act of bodily resistance (Bajes, 2024). We listened to music and translated each word along with the lyrics we listened to (Bajes & Özdemir, 2025). We examined how visual arts, graffiti, and digital storytelling become tools to assert national identity, memory, and futurity.

Yet, we also questioned the ethics of representation: How do we teach about suffering without reproducing voyeurism? How do we resist the flattening of Palestinian life into trauma alone?

By pairing the Palestinian case with others, Kashmir (Malik, 2015), Indigenous North America (Hall & Fenelon, 2015), and post-apartheid South Africa (Bucaille, 2011), we moved from comparison to connection, building

transnational solidarities in our theoretical frameworks and classroom dialogue.

Art, Drama, and Digital Resistance

Students engaged with readings on feminist art, music, theatre, and social media activism. We discussed Playback Theatre in Palestine and the power of narrative as resistance (Rivers, 2015). TikTok satire, encrypted protests, and subversive hashtags showed how technology reshapes visibility and vulnerability.

Aesthetics was a core theme in the course. In our weeks on art and resistance, we read *Feminist Art in Resistance* (Dastarlı & Cin, 2023), which prompted students to reflect on the politicization of form, color, and space. We analyzed traditional Palestinian songs, South African songs, and American indigenous songs (Korczyński, 2015). We mixed both content and discourse analyses to get more in-depth with the soul of each rhythm.

Digital resistance was another crucial component. Students presented on viral hashtags, TikTok satire, and encrypted activist networks. We read Carmen Leong et al. (2018) on digital empowerment and examined how algorithmic censorship complicates online resistance.

Assessing Reflexivity, Not Just Recall

Assessments were designed to promote critical reflexivity, not just recall. Students wrote two reflection papers, a midterm, a short think piece, and a final presentation on a resistance movement of their choice.

Reflection papers invited personal-political engagement with readings. The think piece required a minimum of 500 words linking a theoretical concept to a real-world resistance event. Final presentations ranged from Uyghur activism to student protests in Bosnia and Return Marches in Gaza.

Evaluation also focused on ethics and clarity of thought. I prioritized students' ability to question power, situate themselves in relation to what they study, and communicate with integrity.

Recognizing Gaps and Confronting Structural Obstacles

Despite the course's success, several structural and intellectual gaps became visible. The most pressing was the lack of sociological literature on resistance

written from the Global South. While the field of political sociology has grown, much of it remains rooted in Western frameworks. The contributions of Palestinian, Indigenous, and Kashmiri thinkers often exist outside mainstream journals or are written in Arabic, Urdu, and other languages, largely invisible in Anglophone academia.

I struggled to find texts that captured the epistemologies I knew students needed. Many of the most powerful resources, memoirs, poetry, and oral testimonies, were not formally published or translated. I often took on the financial and logistical burden of translation and invited speakers without institutional support. This reality underscores the resource inequality embedded in academic knowledge production.

This experience taught me that teaching resistance also involves resisting exclusion within academia itself, questioning what counts as theory, whose voices are cited, and who has the funding to produce and distribute knowledge.

Conclusion: Teaching as a Political Act

Sociology of Resistance began as a classroom experiment, but it has since grown into a broader intellectual and political project. The conversations, challenges, and gaps revealed throughout the course have led to the development of a collaborative book project titled *Sociology of Resistance: A Key Concepts Reader*. This forthcoming textbook, co-authored with scholars from the Global South, will offer undergraduate students a decolonial, accessible, and multilingual resource rooted in both theoretical insight and lived experience.

The goal is not only to document resistance, but to practice it through pedagogy, to build a curriculum that resists erasure, promotes solidarity, and democratizes knowledge.

Teaching resistance has transformed me. It has reminded me that education is not neutral; it is always political. And when practiced with care, humility, and courage, it can become its own form of resistance.

Biographical note

Dalal Bajes is a postdoctoral fellow and lecturer in the Sociology department at Ibn Haldun University, where she teaches the Sociology of Resistance course. She is also the co-founder of Tamkeen Foundation to empower women in conflict zones. Her research focuses on political sociology, emphasizing social movements, women's studies, postcolonial studies, and Palestine studies.

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