

Part 3. Global

“I felt so proud to be part of this small mission.”

– Ibrahim Shebani, *“Four Days of the Revolution,”* Revolution by Love

Being responsible requires being globally aware. Our dreams cannot be imagined within the contours of a nation-state, such as the United States, without supporting a reality that excludes and oppresses much of the globe. Or to state the case slightly differently, “Writing Beyond the Curriculum” should not imply that concepts and practices framed within the specificity of a 21st century United States can be applied without negotiation within contexts as diverse as Syria, Lebanon, Bolivia, Myanmar, or Serbia. To some extent, such a statement is self-evident. Yet as I have worked with global democratic advocates over the past decade, I have learned that “self-evident” does not mean “self-policing.” Which is to say, that even a conceptual framework that naturally defaults to nation states to describe international work (see previous sentence) handicaps the formation of new political and collective possibilities for those too often on the wrong side of privilege.

The impact, however, is not just in our public work. Our classrooms are also impacted when the rhetoric of “international partnerships” frames student collaboration which crosses existing national borders. In the same way that “community” had to be fractured to allow alternatives to emerge, our international partnerships must facilitate the creation rhetorical spaces which allow alternative identity and collective formations to be created. Such rhetorical spaces are particularly important at a moment when the public dialogue concerning the dynamics between nation-states, colonized populations, diaspora communities, and human rights to a question of “justified violence,” state sanctioned or otherwise. In this environment, I would argue, we have a collective responsibility to enable spaces where micro-connectivity among individuals can seed possibilities of peace and safety. To not take on such work, to place it outside of our immediate concerns, seems, to me, the ultimate example of privilege.

The essays in this section trace how I came to this understanding, an understanding that I recognize needs to continue to grow. “The Goals of Grassroots Publishing” traces the move of New City Community Press from a focus on local moments within the United States, detailed in the previous section, to an expanded global viewpoint through involvement with Arab Spring advocates. Through work with these advocates, I came to understand the necessity of a global understanding of our responsibilities as community-engaged scholars and teachers. The following essay, “Then Comes the Fall,” traces the tension between the rhetorics surrounding international human rights (as well as classic tropes

of American democracy) and the “realpolitik” actions undertaken by individual nation-states become manifest. “Universal Human Rights,” advocates discovered, were no match for nation-state desires. As such, these essays ask our field to reconsider the comfort implied by theories premised on community human rights premised on nation-state protections.

It asks to what extent there is a need to move toward concepts of collective political identity which move beyond such conceptual structures, perhaps endorsing a critical regionalism that allows alternative identities to gain political legibility (an idea that was first suggested in the “Dreams and Nightmares” essay featured above.). “Of Rights Without Guarantees: Friction at the Borders of Nations, Digital Spaces, and Classrooms” provides one model of how such alternative frameworks might be created within a U.S.-based required writing course linked to an English as a Second Language course in Algeria. The student dialogues were initially premised on “nation-state” differences within the concept of “universal human rights.” Students soon used the opportunity to create frameworks which exceeded these categories, often moving towards the value of local communal conceptions of equality. In doing so, a concept of rights emerged which both rejected “universal rights,” given a historic sense of how they had authorized colonialist actions. (Consider the history of Algeria.) Instead, human rights emerged, not as universals, but as a negotiation among different communities, secured by consent involved, premised on mutual understanding. As Arab Spring advocates discovered, though it is an open political question whether such rights can stand up to the “universal” power of dominant nation states.

At the same time, the essays in this section argue the “old rules still apply.” In a collection of essays that focus on disrupting disciplinary borders, this might seem surprising. One of the most important lessons I have learned from working with global democratic advocates, though, is that the practices of academic research carry significant importance in their struggles. The concept of a neutral researcher, using recognized methods, to produce factual data offers a space from which to document the atrocities of authoritarians and to based arguments for justice. For this reason, this section ends with two essays focused on Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ). The first essay, which carries the name of the organization, focuses on the development of STJ and the importance of documenting the war crimes and brutality of Bashar al-Assad. In doing so, it builds on the argument that as scholars, we have the responsibility to undertake such work. In “I hear its chirping coming from my throat,” the brutality of Assad is presented through the story of a young boy held in a detention camp. From a moment of brutality, I try to articulate how our work can contribute to ensuring such moments do not happen again.

And without claiming to have any of the courage of the advocates detailed in these essays, invoking Libyan advocate Ibrahim Shebani, I am proud to have played even a small part in their labors to build a more just and peaceful world.

Featured Essays

- “The Goals of Grassroots Publishing in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring,” *Reflections: A Journal of Community Engaged Rhetoric and Writing*, vol. 12, no. 1, Fall 2012, pp. 134-51, <https://reflectionsjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/CopyrightUpdates/Vol12N1/12.1-GrassrootsPublishing.pdf>.
- “Then Comes Fall: Activism, the Arab Spring, and the Necessity of Unruly Borders,” with Ghandour, et al. *Unruly Rhetorics: Protest, Persuasion, and Politics*. Edited by Alexander, Jarrat, and Welsch. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018.
- “Of Rights Without Guarantees: Friction at the Borders of Nations, Digital Spaces, and Classrooms,” with Ahmed Hachelaf, *Literacy in Composition Studies Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2019, pp.90-113, <https://doi.org/10.21623/1.7.1.6>
- “Syrians for Truth and Justice: Articulating Entanglements, Disrupting Disciplinarity,” *Making Futures Matter*, with Bassam Alahmad and Ashunka Kumari, edited by Rick Wysocki and Mary P. Sheridan. Computers and Composition Press, 2018. <https://ccdigitalpress.org/book/makingfuturematters/index.html>
- “I Hear Its Chirping Coming from My Throat: Activism, Archives, and Long Road Ahead,” *Literacy in Composition Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2017, pp. 85-91, <https://doi.org/10.21623/1.5.1.8>