

Parks: Yeah. I was very fortunate in grad school that I stayed with Gayatri Spivak. Incredibly fortunate. The phrase that echoed in all of her classes was, "Learning your privilege is your loss." I think what you touched upon is that in graduate education, I think we are often taught to think of ourselves as the smart one, the one who knows politics, the one who understands how culture works. Then, because we wait to do this work until we get tenure, we develop a very tin ear to what communities have to offer.

I think what Spivak was pointing out is that what your privilege has earned you is the inability to listen to the resources within the community, and it has led you to be unable to see the intellectuals that are all around you. I think there's a lot of tension right now about how can communities, how can different embodied experiences sort of come together around alliance politics. I think this notion of humility coupled with you do have some valuable skills is sort of that way of crossing over. It's hard work, and people get angry, and it fails and all that.

I am unsure whether grad programs that are trying to produce future research I scholars are letting people in the beginning of their career do something like ... Well, STJ is massive and global. Even that small, tense dialogue with a community around gentrification. Where are those opportunities that really show that we have a public face, a public set of skills we can offer? I'm not sure. I'm not sure I see that as much as I thought I would when I first entered the field. I mean, when you sort of thought about comp rhet and it applied to grad programs—and you're in a great grad program, so you're lucky in that way—but were you imagining gaining a public voice that would speak back to the community you came from? Or were you imagining you were going to get this academic career which may or may not relate to your sort of origins, as it were?

Kumari: I don't think it's either of those. Maybe it is. I am a child of immigrants. I often thought of my getting my education as a way of gaining a cultural capital so that I could help my family, who continues to help me, and pay it forward and pay it back. Okay, so my future could look like this. Not that my parents had a bad life or anything, but their life was different than mine, or it is different. They're still here. I think my goal in going to grad school initially, and it's changed and evolved of course, was I want to carry my family's name in that way and gain that voice or cultural space in America, in this context where they don't have that voice and still don't have that voice and may not feel that privilege of "I can talk to my community, I can do X, I can do Y." Since then, I think my job is to change the world. Not really, but through the work that I do, I want to make an impact on students that can then carry that forward. It's always about moving it forward. I mean, I'm not going to be able to do it alone. Based on the way that I engage my pedagogies, the way that I have formed my practices, perhaps I can impact one person that could also keep moving that forward.

Parks: You kind of move from the classroom and then hinted at collective work with colleagues and administration. I don't want to be heard as saying I don't find that work valuable, because I've done a lot of it. I do think there's real politics and agency in that. When I think of Syrians for Truth and Justice, it's the example of if we don't attend to public policy and legislative and economic context, then a lot of the work that happens in the program and in our classrooms just gets pulled under, and it doesn't really do much.

We have a sense of who we want to teach, but the policies don't let them attend our schools because of new student learning programs. We have a sense of change that we want in university, but the legislators are imposing standards. STJ is just an example of what this work might look like. I share the same desire of thinking about the classroom and the program as creating a space where truth in the future can be created, that speaks to a larger set of justice issues than we might have imagined long ago.

I still wonder, though, to what extent we're training people to be advocates in that larger context. My classroom pedagogy, deeply progressive. They work with urban resource poor communities, immigrant communities under stress. I could list all the sort of stereotypes of what a white, 50-year-old, liberal man would do as progressive politics, but if I don't do something that changes the actual politics, then I feel like I'm teaching them an alibi for action. I'm not teaching them what change looks like.

Kumari:

I think it goes a little bit, also, beyond our field. There's things we can't control, right? The goals of the university and what they think our classroom should do for students. I think of those student learning outcome statements that many of us probably have to include in our syllabi across the nation that say, our class is going to do XYZ, because it has to meet these outcomes that the university has instilled on what they think this class should be doing. So yes, maybe we can do activist work and do that, but where is the pedagogy to train us to do that? Perhaps in a comp practicum course is the space to teach graduate students to do that kind of work or to think about let's read these scholars this week and also think about these spaces in our community. How might we put this together in one dialogue and still meet these outcomes? Of course, it's going to do it in one way or another. It's always rhetorical thinking. It's always critical thinking practices. It's all these things that these outcomes asked us to do, but reframing our work to think about how can it be more publicly oriented.