

“Why Wouldn’t I?”

**Essay slightly altered due to privacy concerns*

Last semester, I was the Writing and Rhetoric teaching assistant for an international student from Asia. She recently told me that she was offered a summer volunteer position in Ecuador, my country of heritage, so I offered to teach her basic Spanish on Fridays. However, the timing of our first meeting conflicted with the March in Solidarity for a Clean Dream Act. Not wanting to miss either commitment, I asked her if she would be willing to hold our first lesson while also holding signs. That is how we ended up marching side by side with signs that read “Fighting for a Clean Dream Act” and “We Dream, Congress Act”, while also reviewing basic Spanish phrases in between cries of “¡Sí se puede!”

Because the international student is from Asia, I initially assumed the protest would not seem relevant to her and did not expect her to participate. When I pointed this out and thanked her for marching anyway, she responded, “But of course I’d come! Why wouldn’t I?” To me, her response exemplifies what global citizens do: transcend national identities to “care deeply about their fellow human beings” and “do what they can to make life better” in a sustainable manner (Yunus 2017:59).

Achieving these ideals is not always as simple as attending a march. After the event, I was told multiple times that supporting undocumented immigrants hurts American citizens who are also underprivileged. According to this argument, by supporting “the illegals,” I am wasting time and energy that could be spent helping American citizens like myself. While I do not believe that supporting undocumented immigrants and underprivileged American citizens are mutually exclusive goals, this reaction highlights how global citizens are challenged to address and balance their duties toward those who do and do not share the same national identities as themselves.

Another challenge global citizens face is ensuring that their good intentions actually produce sustainable results. While undocumented

immigration offers many examples of this point, human trafficking is another issue that clearly highlights this challenge. As an anti-trafficking advocate, I have encountered attempts to combat the issue that do more harm than good. For example, I learned in my Roots of Human Trafficking course that some activists created organizations overseas to purchase victims' freedom from their traffickers. While well-intended, this act only reinforces the market for slaves by providing manumission money for traffickers who will likely replace the "free" person with another victim. This method also often neglects the long-term rehabilitation of survivors, which results in many returning to their original situation. Finally, this method abets a savior complex because it focuses more on single pseudo-heroic acts of rescuing rather than long-term prevention and rehabilitation processes. While a global citizen's first challenge is to acknowledge and address their duties toward other human beings, the second challenge is to ensure that their actions generate positive change.

Despite these challenges, global citizenship has its rewards. The most fulfilling reward is producing sustainable changes that are brought about by a comprehensive understanding of global issues. This is a reward that I witnessed during my summer internship at Starfish Project, an American and Asian-founded social enterprise that employs sex trafficking survivors as jewelry makers. As an intern, I observed the workers address the challenges and reap the awards of global citizenship in two ways. First, they balanced their duties toward survivors of sex trafficking with their global responsibility to empower survivors from other countries. They achieved this, not only by collaborating with their own employees and volunteers around the world, but also by advising advocates who want to plant anti-trafficking social enterprises in their own countries. The team approached the second challenge global citizens face by ensuring that their good intentions resulted in sustainable change. Starfish Project does not rely on savior-focused acts but rather on preventative activities in local neighborhoods and holistic rehabilitation for survivors. This approach has led to the "social emancipation" (Smith and Verdeja 2013:11) of over 125 women and

their families (Starfish Project 2018).

Motivated by the rewards of global citizenship that I witnessed at Starfish Project, I returned to the States with a plan to develop as a global citizen. I created *The Trafficking Dispatch*, a podcast by and for young adults to raise awareness, debunk misconceptions, and inspire concrete action against human trafficking. The podcast features interviews with survivors and advocates from various countries, and we recently partnered with Youth Underground, the largest youth-led anti-trafficking advocacy organization in the world, in order to connect with more young advocates. Although the podcast began as a solo endeavor, it has since grown to a team of five members, two of whom are also Notre Dame students. One team member and I had the chance to incorporate our episodes into a Catholic Relief Services online course that we created in the Center for Social Concerns seminar, Human Trafficking: Causes, Consequences, and Current Debates. Our episodes have reached listeners in over 80 countries on all habitable continents and are currently being translated into Spanish and Mandarin by four volunteers. Because we are constantly balancing our responsibilities toward survivors and advocates in many countries and are continually researching sustainable methods to combat human trafficking, *The Trafficking Dispatch* has allowed my team to care deeply about others and do what we can to make life better. Our hope is that we motivate our audience to become global citizens themselves and join us in the fight against human trafficking.

From my conversation with the international student during the march, my time at Starfish Project, and my current work for *The Trafficking Dispatch*, I have observed and learned from global citizens. Their words and actions have inspired me to utilize the rest of my time at Notre Dame to prepare for an anti-trafficking career. In my future career I hope to always understand the purpose of global citizenship so that if anyone ever asks why I bother confronting its challenges, I can respond with the same confidence as the international student – “Why wouldn’t I?”

Works Cited

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