I will never forget the sound of 40 children laughing and singing while passing through the Qalandia checkpoint on our way to the Golan Heights, and they had permits to enter Israel for the first time, and dance at the first Art festival between the Golan Heights and Palestine. I think of those young artists resilient and joyful as I write this. I think of the man who had organized the festival, knowing he would not enjoy the fruits of his labor. This man has a Gaza ID and for fear of being sent back to Gaza has avoided checkpoints for the last nine years. One cannot travel far in the West Bank without crossing a checkpoint. His physical world is small. Art gives him space, art makes his world large. It is for him, the children, and others like them, that I keep making art.

It’s not only in Palestine that I’ve felt this way towards artists and community organizers. When I lived and volunteered in Oakland, Santiago, Rio de Janeiro, Sevilla, and Berlin, I also marveled at the ways artists come together to engage and empower their communities. The problems they face in these various communities are often similar and the resolution through art also binds them. This combined with the way
that electronic media allows me to continue to collaborate with them, in conjuring new art, in finding new forms of catharsis, make the great distances that separate us feel small. And once again art makes space insubstantial. We are part of one community, a supranational community, and they are my heroes in it.

I contribute to this community in the ways I can: pedagogy, performance, printmaking and other practices. My contributions fall within some social-political discourse. For me, the political can be personal. Though I do not deny the importance of art for art’s sake, and foster this love in my students, I believe it’s my role as a member of the educated class to work with the intent of these marginalized groups. Art can be a powerful tool for education, innovation, political discourse, to enable the marginalized to find a voice and be heard. I say this not as an intellectual, but as a marginalized person, a first-generation college graduate, and an African-American woman.

Education is my art, art is my voice. My ink tells of sickness and its grief, of prison, addiction and death, of the child who grows too fast, of blood and burdens inherited. Yet my palate is bright, even for dark subjects: echoing the strength found in life and within myself. I build community to overcome those burdens. And I engage stories beyond myself, beyond my country, beyond my time at the intersection of past and present. I seek to intervene in the life of my audience through Performance, that we may see no distinction between our humanity and the humanity of others.

At times my performances, activism, and prints seem to be separate activities. I am finding ways to integrate the personal and political content. The same is true of my pedagogy and civic participation. Graduate study will give me the time, resources, and flexibility to come together with artists and scholars in a collective learning environment, while, still contributing to that supranational community I hold so dear.