

We PhiniseD. It might have taken five, seven or ten years, but we have finished. Do you know what else is finished this semester? Game of Thrones.

Game of Thrones first aired when I started my doctoral program and lasted until I finished it.

Game of Thrones and Dissertations are similar: both of them are sophisticated and complicated.

But when it comes to viewings, Game of thrones and dissertations differ. Some episodes of Game of Thrones reached up to 90 **MILLION** viewings. We would be thrilled if only 90 people read our dissertations.

But hey. After watching the finale of game of thrones, I felt empty ... I felt a consumer waiting for someone else to feed me...

HOWEVER, When I **submitted my dissertation** ... I felt ready to **change the world**.... Full of ideas and projects ... ready to start publishing my dissertation and exploring new research programs... I felt the empowerment of a producer who wants to keep producing.

If the purpose of academia is to count viewings, reads, and citations, then Hollywood would beat us. But if the purpose of academia is to empower people, then we may have a chance at winning.

I come from a humble family, my parents never made it beyond middle-school, yet they invested in educating me and my siblings.

I grew up in Lebanon, a country ravaged by a 30-year civil war. As in Game of Thrones, problems were solved mainly by fighting, literally by hurting and killing one another.

I didn't like this. I wanted to be different.

I liked the way mathematicians solve problems, without hurting others. I found hope in education. So I studied and studied ... I attended four higher educational institutions in three different countries, including Europe and the US. I earned masters degrees in mathematics, philosophy, and theology. **BUT IN none of these institutions and programs**, did I feel empowered and ready to shape the world, as I feel now after 7 years at the graduate school of education at Berkeley. It's here and now that my childhood dream materializes and I feel set for a promising journey.

My fellow graduates share the same empowerment. Zohra, a colleague graduating today, started her doctoral program wanting to answer her 1,000 questions, and is leaving with 1 Million other questions. Instead of answering her questions, the doctoral degree gave her “the ability to replace false assumptions with **theories** to be investigated, the opportunities to observe with **compassion** the complex nature of the human condition, and the habit of choosing **curiosity** over complacency.”

Zohra just captured what constitutes a genuine empowerment that can make the World Great Again. Allow me to share with you why GSE-Berkeley was great for us.

First and foremost, GSE is a place where people from different ethnicities, religions, political views, nationalities, sexual orientations, and any status... feel SAFE to VOICE who they are.

In GSE Berkeley, authority does not reside in status but in the shared knowledge of the group. At the GSE in Berkeley, we do not say "I work under a professor" but "I work WITH a professor."

The influence of GSE-Berkeley goes far beyond Education. Geopolitical history have established Lebanon and Israel as enemy countries. Israelis cannot visit Lebanon, and Lebanese cannot visit Israel.

It is here, 72,00 miles away from these countries, where I – Lebanese - have enjoyed productive collaboration and FRIENDSHIP with my Jewish Israeli favorite so-called enemies.

I am aware that by saying this I might be subject to a homeland security investigation when I will visit Lebanon next month. Truly I'm fine with it. We need to break walls of enmity. For me, such a wall was broken here on this campus.

Randi Engle earned her Ph.D. at Stanford, then became a professor at GSE-Berkeley. When working at Stanford, she argued that a balance between accountability to established norms and innovation is needed to produce learning. After 7 years of teaching at Berkeley, she changed her mind. She told us, You must give priority to innovation, even at the risk of breaking with the norms established by a system.

GSE-Berkeley accepts breaking norms in order to accommodate a developing human experience. The flexibility in this department allowed each one of us, now graduating, to follow our individual and unique trajectories.

Faculty and staff, for all the above and more, we are **deeply grateful** to you. You put us on the right path and gave us powerful tools to make a better world.

Your physical presence evokes a sense of gratitude in each one of us. We feel the same gratitude towards the professors and staff who have passed away. **Barbara White, Randi Engle, and Jose Zaveleta**, we miss you.

To our family members, spouses, partners, colleagues, and friends.

Some of you, like **Amalia Rada Burr-well, Mr. and Mrs. Tay-je,** and **Maroun and Sonia Chidiac**, could not make it here due to illness and travel complications. We are grateful to those who travelled from near and far to represent our absent family members.

The support that you gave us throughout our doctoral program was not only a Catalyst. Your love for each of us, your belief in each of us -- has not only supported us but **MADE** the ideas that we put in our dissertations.

Our dissertations reflect you as much as they reflect us.

you are NOT here to celebrate us.  
WE altogether are here to celebrate US ALL.

To sum it up, If you think GSE-Berkeley is about thinking, you're missing the point.

GSE-Berkeley is about being.

At GSE-Berkeley, yes sometimes we debate, cogitate and innovate

but we also stagnate,

We conceive babies,

We don't only ideate,

We lose and gain weight,

We get depressed and celebrate,

We protest and habituate

day after day until we ...?... – Graduate –

I meant Emancipate.

Now let's continue to celebrate.

Thank you.