



The University and Its Worlds

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ABSTRACT

Panel Honouring the late Dr. Gülden Özcan, University of Lethbridge, Women Scholars' Speaker Series

KEYWORDS

Gülden Özcan, feminist knowledge, colorred women academics, University of Lethbridge



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The first time I met Gülden Özcan with her partner Özgür who was guarding his tea pot, I remember she mentioned to respect his ceremony if we want to drink his tea. This was during; Voices in Dialogue event of the community gathering. The beautiful, full of energy Gülden was remarkable and she became a friend as we met again around a creative work before leaving Ottawa for the teaching position. I remember how moving was not easy for her; leaving the community she worked for and with and finally she did it. Then when she was at Lethbridge University, she invited me to present a research creation *Birds crossing borders*, I did around refugees. It was engaging storytelling of Syrians to create a deeper understanding around the newly arrived ones; here we met around the social justice. This woman did not set limits for her dreams, she kept searching for ways and side doors to engage and apply her values, believing not only through a class space within institutions but also at the heart of the communities.

When I was a child back home, I knew that on the other side of the artificial borders so many dreamers worked really hard to achieve similar dreams around justice to end the racism & oppression we survived. Our resistance and its process were shaped in so many ways I can easily relate to hers. We always looked for spaces to own our intellectual freedom, to own our language and culture, besides our basic human rights.

I never imagined that her journey will be so short. I never imagined her stopping the fight as she had never done. Her dream when she was a child to be a writer within impossible conditions was the force to push her to cross borders as to create art has pushed me; it was important for us to add meanings to our world and to exist within the universal one, to stand up for the marginalized undo the colonial, keep an eye on our friends and families back home be there for them be the connection and be the space creator for voices that usually are not heard.

We always saw her smile as I do. This smile of courage is our feed for coming days and will be for us a continuation for her journey to serve values we share and be there for each other, conserving our differences and respect it; see it as a way to gain new insights, a new understanding and inspire other ways to exist as we can by being ourselves.

Gülden as I have known was a fighter, I looked at with pride of being able to stand up. Gülden and so many other women do the fighting not by carrying weapons as other Kurdish women do now in our region to reserve families lives, but through her work to change, and offering other form of knowledge that has impacts on the intellectual and contribute to it. To undo the historical way of performing power while still at the centre of the communities. Today where I stand and talk, I put myself in her position, to be Gülden, I am certain she would be advocating for justice and communities, issues around the practises of social justice... and for her I wanted to light the issue of my own experience in the academic life and share meanings around inclusion within the universities.

Please note: (That I will use me, me as a community, as my own experience was never personal it was because who I belonged to):

Most of the time, here and back home, I feel in others, and especially in institutions, a desire to put me in a category; usually under a general label of "the marginalized" that has never responded to my actual needs. In Syria, such a technique served to exclude me (as a Kurdish),

and to deprive me from my basic rights; here, it is a way for the institutions to gain political power, and to reinforce an image of social progressivism. Paradoxically, this has at times benefitted me; it is in part how I came to be pursuing a PhD. But thinking of this usually leads me to ask if I was really seen in the selection; if the institution is truly trying to answer my needs, or simply reaching through me for generalized solutions. This question, I know, resonates powerfully across marginalized communities. Categories are ways of looking-at, not listening-to. The strategies of inclusivity are not usually designed for the marginalized, nor do they usually work; rather, at least for me, they tend to reproduce intense memories of exclusion based on my difference and disobedience to established powers, contra to what they expect of us; they perpetuate segregation, drawing an ever-sharper line between myself and others. They seem to suggest that I am incapable of choosing my communities, or of jumping between their different priorities. But problems of color, race, and gender cannot be sliced and treated separately; they are of one body. Its parts have different functions, but the whole-body and its organs feed each other; and when even one grows healthy, it can become a great support to the rest.

I don't want to be called women of color.

.. I prefer to be called colorful women with so many identities layering me as a person.

I chose to perform as weeds at academia while producing knowledge in a way that will empower me:

I will tell you why a weed: Here In my garden, it was not a question of beauty to remove weeds, but my neighbour kept asking me to do it, they were seen as do not fit. For me to keep the weed was because I saw it ecological and more economic choice, as grass needed water, care and kept adding more seeds. I decided to leave the dandelion and to promote the clover over the grass as I stopped watering the grass and let nature do the job. The question I asked was how aesthetics ideas change? Why do we love seeing these weeds and enjoy seeing, benefiting from what they do only where they will usually grow, but not in our back yard, when they are so close?

As Marginalized, I do have the quality of weed; every one of us and every weed is there for a reason. I learnt that the Common Dandelions that disturbed my neighbour the most were there as the ground needed it to be softened. The plant goes away as the job is done and searches for other places; to work the soil beside it is edible and full of nutrition's.

This made me the colorful women, the weeds in the academia to allow the changes and to work the soil and give it a quality for nourishing all colors...

So, if we think of University, I believe that we should remain open to other forms of embodied knowledge: as we

Learn from birds, straw by straw a home is made. we learned architect.

Learn from spiders, make it from your own body, we learned about belonging.

Learn from ants make it for future, we learned preservation.

Learn from bees make it collective, we learned about the community's power.

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Learn from mothers make it within you, we learned that we can grow while within the other's

Learn from children make it playful, we learned the power of exploration and playfulness.

Learn from philosopher create an idea, we learned that value exceed the object.

Learn from artist imagine it, we learned how to see possibilities and the unseen.

Learn from trees make it where roots can grow and breath, we learned there is always a new coming.

Learn from clouds make it everywhere they can be, we learned we are in endless change.

Learn if one home die another is born, no one can elemental others keeping them in within otherness.

And I will end with a note from the mystic poet Jalal al-Din al-Rumi: Truth is a mirror that falls from the hand of God and was broken. Everyone picks up a part and says the whole truth is out there.

And to Gülден, which by the way means flowering in Kurdish, the tireless work and resistance she showed us is one part of that mirror and its upon us to continue finding other parts.

Have the Truth that is needed to end all forms of violence and oppression.

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