



Honoring Gülden Özcan

Social immunity is impossible

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ABSTRACT

SNAC+ (University of Lethbridge), Excellence in Equity Award Ceremony

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SOCIAL IMMUNITY IS IMPOSSIBLE

Hello everyone,

I am happy to have this opportunity to celebrate Güliden's achievements and her ongoing contribution to the struggles and history of our humanity.

I am a friend of Güliden, not a colleague, and I met her in 2005, year she arrived in Canada. She was this quiet, calm and very thoughtful young woman. We spent that Christmas period together, also with a common friend of ours, Bülent. She had started her master's degree in political economy at Carleton University and I was doing my graduate work in psychology. As settlers on this land, it's always a privilege, a chance to find like-minded friends from your home country. There is a shared language, there is literature, culture and common problems to discuss.

Following years, Güliden and I worked together for a restaurant and for a catering company as well. I remember that those years were not the easiest ones economically. A good portion of our time was dedicated to economic survival, while we were doing graduate work.

Well, it is now 2022, 17 years after her arrival in Canada, Güliden has been experiencing some significant health problems. I just want to highlight here that certain health problems don't emerge out of nowhere. After a conversation I had with her last summer, I learned that about 3-4 years ago, right after finishing her PhD thesis at Carleton, Güliden had one of the most stressful periods of her life. Academic job applications, future uncertainty and economic challenges, she told me, possibly influenced her wellness significantly, particularly her stress levels. After finding this position and settling here in Lethbridge, almost every Sunday she had to sit down and prepare lectures or write articles and book chapters, and make sure that she just moves on the track to a tenured position.

I previously taught a few sections of Health Psychology. One of the most interesting concepts I learned in this subdiscipline is called psychoneuroimmunology. Very briefly, it is shown in this field that the way we think influences our nervous system, for example when we think about our future, and we feel certain emotions. Then those

emotions mobilize a certain set of hormones in our bodies, for example, such stress hormones as cortisol. Finally, when the hormonal system is very active in mobilizing our bodies against stress, our immune system may be suppressed. But remember we started with individual thinking and psychology, and psychologists are great in psychologizing what is seemingly social and political.

For the last four years, I worked for First Nations on their health and wellness. We know that certain difficulties we experience in life are social and political in nature and they influence our wellness at the psychological and biological level. Maybe we should talk more about psychopolitical determinants of our health and wellness, rather than just isolated psyches of individuals, which individualistic North American psychology has been emphasizing and drawing our attention to.

Güliden's life has been much more than these struggles. Güliden was there for us when a leading Armenian journalist, Hrant Dink, was killed in Turkey in 2007, she was there during Gezi protest movements in 2013, during general elections of Turkey in 2015 in which Peoples' Democratic Party won a significant victory, and finally she was there for the activities of the Academics for Peace in Turkey, a critical group of scholars targeted by the current political power in Turkey.

This is a meaningful life in which there is engagement with community and a strong sense of responsibility. I think Güliden always chased personal meaning in her social life and sociopolitical relevance in her academic endeavors. That's why she is very valuable as a friend and very valuable as an activist researcher.

Güldencim, I wish you all the best in everything you are going through. Please remember you are unique with your story and precious for us.

Ersin Aslıtürk