



For Gülden

Activist and intellectual legacies

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ABSTRACT

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

KEYWORDS

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



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ACTIVIST AND INTELLECTUAL LEGACIES

Dr. Gülden Özcan (November 26, 1983 - May 11, 2022) was a brilliant scholar, activist, colleague, friend, loving partner, and mother. She worked as an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Lethbridge prior to her untimely passing in May 2022. She would have turned 39 years old on November 26 of this year. I had the honour of working with and being friends with Gülden for just under four years. During her short but brilliant career, Gülden accomplished many things. Gülden completed her BA at Baskent University (in Turkey) and her MA and PhD at Carleton University (in Canada). She was an engaged intellectual whose academic work spans the fields of critical criminology studies, social theory, feminism, and social justice, to name a few, and a prolific and well-published scholar. She was also an active member of the equity subcommittee of the Canadian Sociological Association. Here at the University of Lethbridge she was a founding member of SNAC+ (Support Network for Academics of Colour Plus), and the first ever recipient of the SNAC+ Excellence in Equity Award. She was also a member of the University of Lethbridge Faculty Association's Gender, Equity, and Diversity committee (GEDC). Her international and internationalist work was reflected in her active involvement with Scholars-at-Risk, and through Gülden's advocacy the University of Lethbridge became a member of this international network of higher education institutions and associations dedicated to protecting scholars and promoting academic freedom around the world. However, Gülden was so much more than her accomplishments and accolades. She was fierce and funny and one of the kindest people I ever had the honour of becoming friends with.

On Mar. 4, 2022, sociologist and NY Times columnist Dr. Tressie McMillan Cottom noted on Twitter that "the institution cannot love you." This is especially true for "outsiders" in the academy. For racialized people, women, queer and trans people, first-generation scholars, working class people, disabled folks, neurodivergent people, and for those who experience linguistic racism and xenophobia (please note that these are not mutually exclusive categories) universities are elitist, exclusionary, and indeed toxic spaces. This is not metaphorical. Racialized women in particular experience higher levels of microaggressions, burnout, and allostatic load (which is the cumulative burden of chronic stress and life events). Racialized women become sicker and die sooner than their white counterparts in the academy.

I will end my intro with a poem by Audre Lorde, who referred to herself as a "Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet," and who was also disabled, a writer, feminist, professor, and civil rights activist. And then I will provide a quote for from Gülden. First, from Audre Lorde, who died of breast cancer at the age of 58 on November 17, 1992.

Here is her poem entitled "A Litany for Survival."

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice

who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours;
For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon

this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.
And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

Thank you Gülden for always speaking, and for always advocating for social justice. As Gülden said, "I believe in the potentials of connection and solidarity to turn impossible to possible in miraculous ways--In fact I consider my whole existence as an example of it." Thank you all for joining us today.

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