

EQUITY STUDIES STUDENTS UNION



Newsletter Editor and Designer:
Doyali Farah Islam

2011-2012 in Review

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ESSU Greet You!

By MONICA ESPAILLAT, ESSU President, 2011-2012

The Equity Studies Students Union (ESSU) is a student-run organization that stems from the Equity Studies Program and supports students in their academic endeavours. The ESSU also applies equity-related theories towards anti-oppression work within our university and the community at large, through extra-curricular events and activities, such as our annual "Decolonizing Our Minds Conference" and "Disability Studies Week".

The ESSU has witnessed tremendous growth in student involvement and enrollment in the Equity Studies Program. These successes are exciting and reflect the importance of our work. The ESSU was selected by UTSU as the "Outstanding Academic Union" for the 2011-2012 term, and we hope to build on these successes in the future by widening and maintaining an ongoing conversation between ourselves, students, faculty and the wider community to raise awareness about issues of social justice.

Between September and April, the ESSU offers daily office hours in the New College Student Center. Come in and speak to us about a class, an event idea, or any campus or community concerns. Or, simply come to chat and get to know us. We're always seeking new members, so drop us a line regarding opportunities for involvement!

ESSU news and events: www.uoftessu.com
E-mail to get involved: uoft.essu@gmail.com
Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/equitystudies>
Facebook: Equity Studies Students' Union

Equity Studies Program: Contact Information

Equity Studies is an undergraduate program that focuses on *social justice* theory and practice in a variety of local and global contexts. Cutting across a spectrum of academic disciplines, the program uniquely combines class-room based learning with community and activist work so that students can built tools for social change. Course offerings focus on *disability, social advocacy, and global food equity*. With a vibrant student body, a wide range of community partners, and a bold curriculum, Equity Studies at New College is a leading centre for social justice education in Canada.

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ESSU Wins "Outstanding Academic Union" Award!

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

This year, the University of Toronto Student Union (UTSU) honoured ESSU's achievements by awarding it with the "Outstanding Academic Union" Award. Having been a member of ESSU for two years now, I have observed and felt the positive changes taking place within the ESSU as well as its widening impact on both campus and community. This award is well-deserved, as the ESSU members worked together this year to problem-solve, instigate change, and reach out with warmth. Congratulations, ESSU!



Left:
Some of the 2011-2012 ESSU members, along with supporters, at the 2012 Decolonizing Our Minds Conference



Above:

Dr. Anne McGuire

(Photo Courtesy of the University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies E-Newsletter)

Welcome, Dr. Anne McGuire!

By PHILIP COX

(Article Adapted from New College's Newsletter)

New College is pleased to welcome Dr. Anne McGuire to the Disability Studies stream of the Equity Studies program. Dr. McGuire is certainly no stranger to the College's hallways, having worked closely with Dr. Rod Michalko as a Teaching Assistant in the Disability Studies stream for the last four years. "I'm so excited to be here," she says. "There's such a profound, strong interest in Disability Studies from all areas of the University. It's such a treat to work with students who are highly focus[s]ed on these issues and [who] have taken all our courses." As part of the Equity Studies program, Disability Studies courses introduce students to the social, political, historical, and economic dimensions of disability. By drawing upon a variety of interdisciplinary approaches to social justice theories, they examine every-day language and cultural practices to identify the wide range of effects that each has for people living with a disability. Dr. McGuire's research interests include questions of representation and the means by which people with disabilities are denied access, accommodation and respect.

Her doctoral research, *The War on Autism: On Normative Violence and the Cultural Production of Autism Advocacy*, analyzed the social significance and productive effects of cultural representations of autism in contemporary enactments of autism advocacy. McGuire has won several awards, including a Social Science and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Fellowship, an Ontario Graduate Scholarship, and the University of Toronto McLeod Fellowship. In addition, she is a founding member of the Doing Disability Differently Research and Activist Group, which has twice been awarded a Commendation Award from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. She is also a co-author of a 2009 Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities publication, [entitled] "Representations of Disability in Universities in Ontario". Please join us in congratulating Dr. McGuire and welcoming her to New College!



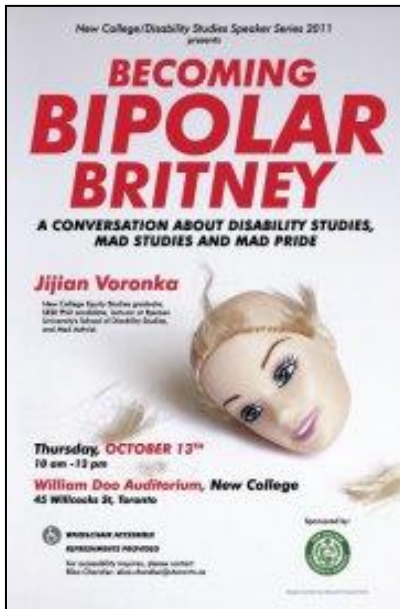
Above:

Eliza Chandler

Welcome to Eliza Chandler, the Inaugural Equity Studies Senior Doctoral Fellow!

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM and PHILIP COX

The ESSU would like to welcome Eliza Chandler, the inaugural Equity Studies Senior Doctoral Fellow. While creating a bridge between undergraduate and graduate students, this program also provides selected PhD candidates with shared office space, special library access, a cash stipend, and the opportunity to receive funding for travel and other academic initiatives in their field of study. Chandler is a PhD candidate in the Sociology and Equity Studies in Education department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT). While working predominantly in Disability Studies, her work cuts across diaspora studies, critical race theory, feminist theory, critical geography studies, and cultural studies. Her dissertation, *A geography of disability: From containment to community*, pulls from these various disciplines in order to map the normative geography of disabled and racialized people. Through this critical mapping, Chandler's research seeks to reveal how the geographies understood as the rightful place of belongingness for disabled and racialized people are intertwined. Following this exploration, her research suggests that diaspora and 'crip' communities offer spaces of alterity in which disabled and racialized people can belong in the midst of a culture which does not welcome them as desired citizens. Chandler holds a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), and she teaches courses in Disability Studies at New College and at OISE/UT.



Above: Poster for Voronka's Talk

Below: "Cultivating Community" Panelists



Nicole Tanguay
(Photo Courtesy of Black Coffee Poet)



From Left to Right:
Kehinde Bah
(Photo Courtesy of The Remix Project)
Jane Farrow
(Photo Courtesy of JaneFarrow.ca)



Sean Meagher
(Photo from Public Consultation Canada)



From Left to Right:
Tanguay, Meagher, Farrow, Bah

"Becoming Bipolar Britney": Jijian Voronka Speaks

By LANDAN J. WU

As part of the 2011 New College/Disability Studies Speaker Series, Jijian Voronka spoke to curious students on Oct 13 in the William Doo Auditorium. Voronka, a PhD candidate in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), was happy to visit her alma mater and discuss Disability Studies, Mad Studies, and Mad Pride. After a brief survey of the history, politics and current activism surrounding Mad Studies and Mad Pride, she lectured on the media representation of subjects deemed and/or represented as 'mentally ill', as reflected in the media representation of prominent celebrities. Her celebrity of focus was Britney Spears. Upon interrogating the contentious "'diagnoses'" and often humorous "'symptoms'" presented in pop culture with regard to Britney's and others' mental health conditions, Voronka examines the relationship between the media's tropes of 'mental illness' and its consolidation of the dominant narrative and power structures of the psychiatric industry. Aside from being a lively exploration of the intersections of media and madness, this event provoked much thought and debate with respect to various equity issues and their intersections.

"Cultivating Community" Panel

By YADESHA SATHIASWARAN

On Nov 9, the NEW270 class hosted a public panel with community activists Nicole Tanguay, Kehinde Bah, Jane Sparrow, and Sean Meagher in order to discuss visions of and challenges to community engagement in Toronto. Poet and playwright Nicole Tanguay kicked off the event by sharing the personal difficulties that drove her to work for social change. As a member of the lesbian and Aboriginal communities, Tanguay explained that her marginalization in society encouraged her to take up a radical form of activism in her early years. She acknowledged that her way is not the only way to have one's voice heard, recalling that she achieved greater success with reformist approaches. Although she began quite somberly, Tanguay's words grew noticeably in strength and produced an inspirational story.

As a young person, Kehinde Bah was a member of the Toronto Youth Cabinet in City Hall. He saw politicians in a constant struggle between "altruism and personal ambition". Bah thus raised a fundamental issue regarding individual impetus for community involvement. After his experience with the municipal government, Bah recognized that he would much rather focus on his own neighbourhood. He started "The Remix Project," an arts-based initiative for at-risk youth. A grassroots organizer, Bah has made himself available as a mentor for enterprising and entrepreneurial teens.

Jane Farrow founded Jane's Walk, a group dedicated to the creation of accessible communities. She is currently serving as a councilor in City Hall, a job that she never dreamed that she would enjoy doing. She stressed the importance of open-mindedness in light of her experiences. She advocated for self-care, arguing that one needs to ensure care for the self while engaging in social-justice work. Farrow reminded us that we were in charge of our lives – lives that were just beginning.

Official policymaker and development coordinator, Sean Meagher was our final speaker. Meagher called us back to the power relations that still persist in practices of community engagement. Meagher called for non-hierarchical peer-led structures that would educate and include more people in campaigns – such as neighbourhood revitalization. In his comments, Meagher encapsulated the theme of the day: community engagement may begin with an individual's efforts but ends by bringing people together.

Food for Thought: Global Food Equity Talk with Author Carolyn Steel

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

On Oct 20, architect, teacher, and author Carolyn Steel gave a talk entitled, “Sitopia: Changing the World Through Food”. The talk, which was sponsored by the Toronto Food Policy Council, Equity Studies, and New College’s Office of Residence and Student Life, took place in the William Doo Auditorium (45 Willcocks St.) from 6 to 9 pm. The event was part of the Global Food Equity project which comprises a network of scholars and community workers – including New College and Equity Studies, Hart House, the Toronto Food Policy Council, Meal Exchange, and the Centre for Community Partnerships.

After discussing the historical trajectory of food production, Steel brought up the “Urban Paradox” – that is, a “paradox that is fundamental to civilization” and which binds “social needs” – that is, the “need to be proximate to each other” – with “sustenance needs” – that is, the “need to eat” as well as the “need to be proximate to nature.” Her lecture traced how food has shaped and continues to shape cities. Moreover, she touched on the changing nature of the ways in which many people in the West eat, by using slides on the Wal-Mart phenomenon, “food deserts” in New York City, and a recent map of obesity rates in Britain. On the relationship between class and the quality of food consumption, Steel stated, “You are what you eat, but if you don’t have an equitable food system, you’re not in control of it.” She also remarked that “[i]f we want a democratic society, we need a democratic food system.”



Above:

The audience gathers for Carolyn Steel’s lecture in the William Doo Auditorium

Below:

Dialogue at the Student Salon with Carolyn Steel

Student Salon with Carolyn Steel

Visiting Author

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

On Oct 21 from 12-2 pm, Hart House, Equity Studies, and New College’s Office of Residence and Student Life presented a student salon with Carolyn Steel. Along with a few other moderators, Steel, the author of *Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives*, instigated enriching discussion amongst a diverse group of participants, including Equity Studies students and community members interested in both nutrition and city-planning. While participants enjoyed a free lunch, they discussed topics such as food production and distribution, urban planning, and the impact of food on cities.



From Left to Right:

Carolyn Steel engages students at the salon; participants at the student salon; Professor June Larkin listening in at the salon

“Trauma in the Aftermath of Genocide” Symposium

By ADAM WOERLEIN

On Nov 03, I attended a symposium entitled “Trauma in the Aftermath of Genocide”. Equity Studies and Facing History collaborated to bring some unforgettable speakers to talk about their personal experiences with genocide. The night’s purpose was to convey the crucial importance of genocide education and to counter a common practice of minimizing the effects of such atrocities or denying that such atrocities occurred. Dr. Robert Krell summed up his message perfectly by stating, “Genocide is the erasure of victims from the collective memory of the world.”

The most prominent idea across the speeches was the importance of resisting denial. The advice to “leave history to the historians” does not serve to grant understanding to the true scope of a genocide. The Armenians today have very little left of their culture, as the oral traditions that had been part of their people for centuries were lost during the Ottoman crusade. They were not a large population – barely surpassing a million people in the country before World War One – but more than half were killed viciously in what is now called the first genocide of the modern world. To this day, Article 301 of the Turkish penal code makes it a punishment to insult Turkey.

Survivors of genocide and their descendents play a crucial role in resisting the despicable act of revisionists who continue to deny these victims their rightful voice. The speakers at this symposium were adamant about the necessity of seeking justice by bringing war criminals to light. These aberrations of humanity should not find shelter in any country that wishes to be considered civilized. As part of Serbia’s bid for membership in the European Union (EU), Serbia was required to turn over all war criminals to the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague. In fact, the EU has become the world leader in making sure that revisionists and harbouring war criminals will not be tolerated by any prospective members. Serbia has complied with these wishes and now stands to be a part of the EU in the next few years. Slowly people are becoming aware that genocide reverberates through the ages, affecting each generation, and that genocide marks not just the survivors and victims, but humanity as a whole.

20th and 21st Century Genocides

Armenian 1915-1923
Australia 1900-1969
Assyrian 1914-1920
Bangladesh 1971
Bosnia 1992-1995
Burundi 1972
Cambodia 1975-1979
Darfur 2003-2010
Democratic Republic of the Congo 1998 - present
Congo Free State 1885-1908
Dersim Kurds – 1937-1938
East Timor 1975-1999
Equatorial Guinea 1968-1979
Greek 1914-1923
Holocaust 1939-1945
Holodomor 1932-1933
Iraqi Kurds 1980-1989
Partition of India 1947
Rwanda - 1994
Zanzibar 1964

Janet Lambert Book Prize

The Janet Lambert Book Prize in Equity Studies, named in honour of a long-serving member of the New College administrative staff, goes to a graduating student who has excelled, and made a contribution, in the Equity Studies Program. This year’s winner is Anthony Foster. Congratulations, Anthony!



Right: Izzy Mackenzie

Conference-bound: Equity Studies Students Shine at Two Conferences

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

Society for Disability Studies

This summer, several undergraduate students in Disability Studies headed to Denver, Colorado, to present their academic papers at an international disability-studies conference, the Society for Disability Studies (SDS). The students who were invited to speak were Kayla Carter, Anthony Foster, Sarah Hoedlmoser, Russell Moore, David Preyde, and Amber Reid. Below are their paper titles:

Kayla Carter: “Our anger: The edifice that is the mad black angry womyn”

Anthony Foster: “The Severe Life of Alman Tracy Gino”

Sarah Hoedlmoser: “A scarred narrative: Troubling psychiatric disability and the body” and “Exoskeleton”

Russell Moore: “Staying in the shadows: A critical approach to awareness and stigma”

David Preyde: “If I knew the way”

Amber Reid: “Invisibility within queer and crip communities: Subverting the gaze”

The Canadian Women’s Studies Association

Undergraduate student of Equity Studies, Izzy Mackenzie, presented on May 29 at the annual congress conference of the Canadian Women’s Studies Association/L’association Canadienne des Etudes sur les Femmes (CWSA/ACEF) in Waterloo. She was invited to speak alongside Katie Aubrecht, the research co-ordinator at Mount Sinai Vincent University’s Nova Scotia Center on Aging. Their talk was titled “Seeking Solidarity at the Crossroads: Re-storying the Contemporary ‘Woman’ Student”. Dr. Anne McGuire, Assistant Professor in the Disability Studies stream of the Equity Studies programme, marks both pieces of news as a “significant accomplishment for these students”. Congratulations to all!

Linked Oppressions: Racism, Homophobia and Transphobia



Linked Oppressions Week

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

The University of Toronto Equity Studies Student Union (ESSU); Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Trans People of U of T (LGBTOUT); the Women and Gender Studies Student Union (WGSSU); and the Centre for Women and Trans People joined together to hold a week-long series of free events between Nov 22 and Nov 28 2011. The week, entitled *Linked Oppressions: Racism, Homophobia, and Transphobia*, was presented in conjunction with *Trans Awareness Week*. The events included a documentary screening of “Paris is Burning”, a panel discussion, a trans workshop, a showing of Alex Butler’s “My Friend Brindley” and other short films, as well as an open mic and potluck night.

“Paris is Burning” Film Night

By KAYLA CARTER

Anytime “Paris is Burning” is mentioned around me I instantly spew out a plethora of questions: “Which house is your favorite? Don’t you love Octavia? What did you think of the ending?” So you can only imagine my excitement when I found out that the ESSU was screening “Paris is Burning” on Nov 22. “Paris is Burning” is, by far, one of my favorite movies. It is not because it deals with LGBTQ issues but more because of the vulnerability in and surrounding the documentary. When the lights dimmed in the William Doo Auditorium and the first seconds of the film began to play, I felt unbelievably exposed. This intimate event for Linked Oppressions showed the power that this movie has on people. During the discussion after the screening, the questions and concerns with regard to the movie came from a place of wanting to interrogate if the lives and realities depicted in the film are the same for people today. After we had cleaned up, the people who were still in the auditorium agreed that this film is classic because it is real. It demonstrates the voices of people who often are not given the space to tell their stories.



Discerning Panel Discussion: Resistance and Community-Building

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

On Nov 23, the *Linked Oppressions* panel discussion brought together three community activists – Rahim Thawer, Sze-Yang, and Jelani – for intelligent and thoughtful engagement with the topic of “Resistance and Community-Building”. Thawer is a queer and Ismaili social worker. Sze-Yang and Jelani founded ILL NANA/DiverseCity Dance Company, a queer-positive and multiracial dance company that supports the on-stage and media representation of LGBTTIQQ2S people, people of colour, and people with varying body types, class backgrounds, and abilities while also offering accessible dance education to these communities. The panelists discussed the importance of establishing connections between communities and addressed ways to acknowledge and combat one’s personal privileges with regard to race, body physique, gender, language, sexual orientation, and education. On the topic of creating safe community spaces, Sze-Yang also pointed out that “you can’t just call a space ‘safe’ and make it safe: it’s work.” Attendees had much to take away and consider.



Affective Open Mic Night

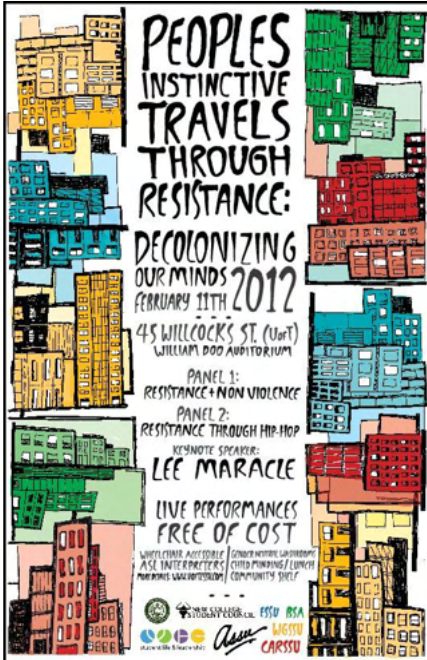
By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

On Nov 24, this year’s *Linked Oppressions Week* closed with a successful Open Mic Night. Held at the Centre for Women and Trans People (563 Spadina Ave.), a lively and friendly group met to eat freshly-cooked vegan food, to share personal stories and knowledges, and to read aloud some poetry. One of the highlights of the evening was ESSU president Monica Espaillet’s affective reading of June Jordan’s “Poem about My Rights” – a poem that speaks, through a strong sense of voice, to many issues, including the intersectionality of gender, race, and power on both personal and national levels.

Decolonizing Our Minds Conference

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

NOW Magazine listed this year's conference as one of its "big 3" events in Toronto. Presented as a collaborative effort of the ESSU, the Women and Gender Studies Students Union (WGSSU), the Caribbean Students Association (CARSSU), and the Black Students Association (BSA), the 2012 *Decolonizing Our Minds* (DOM) Conference took place on Feb 11 in the William Doo Auditorium (45 Willcocks St.). Conference collaborators, artists, and attendees alike braved the blustery and snowy conditions that wreaked havoc on Toronto's streets and public transport services to attend the event. Keeping with the spirit of decolonization, I wanted to include three different narrative accounts of this year's conference, each with a unique voice and perspective on the day's proceedings. As well, here are some photographic highlights from the action-packed and thought-provoking day!



Above:
Poster for the 2012 DOM Conference



Above:
Some of the DOM 2012 Attendees
(Photo by Ify Ekoh)



Right:
NOW Magazine's Listing of DOM 2012 as one of its top 3 things to do in Toronto

DOM: Perspective 1

By ALEXANDRIA INCH

"People's Instinctive Travels Through Resistance" by way of educational discourse and expressionistic art was the focus of U of T's most highly anticipated event: this year's annual Decolonizing Our Minds (DOM) conference. Hosted by the student unions and associations of New College at the University of Toronto, DOM 2012 was modeled on the promotion of community power, resistance to hegemonic conformity, and the breaking-down of colonial thought processes, through panel discussions and a variety of arts-based media.

There were a number of excellent performances by groups and individuals who contributed positively to DOM 2012. Dr. Stan Doyle-Wood started the performances with an enthusiastic reading of a few selected books. He was followed by a poetic reading done by ESSU's incoming president for the 2012-2013 year, Kayla Carter. The evident authenticity of all of the readers and panelists offered the sort of raw truth that is too often masked in historic accounts. In short, the early performances were refreshingly honest and real.

With the afternoon rolling in, the conference was revitalized with exciting crumpers and dance groups. The William Doo Auditorium was alive with the rhythm of stomping feet, clapping hands, and occasional outbursts of roused participants – because our audience was more than simply viewers. They became part of the performance. Positive energy and celebration are an essential part of resistance because they are a defiance of conformity to expected feelings or attitudes. This is why song, dance, poetry, books, painting, pictures, acting, and all other forms of art play such an important role in the promotion of resisting colonial power.

The language was frank and edgy, a style that created discomfort for some participants. The ESSU's overall goal, however, was to showcase the myriad approaches to speaking out against injustice. The entire DOM conference was a great success, and it would not have been so if it were not for the dedication and bravery of the performers, panelists, organizers and participants. Thank you all!

*Below: Professor Lee Maracle Speaks
(Photo by Ify Ekoh)*



DOM: Perspective 2

By ADAM WOERLEIN

On Feb 11, the day of the Decolonizing Our Minds Conference, a furious winter storm blew in overnight and, as temperatures dropped to a point that would scare most nudists into a parka, the ambitious student unions of New College – ESSU, BSA, CARSSU, and WGSSU – hosted the fourth annual Decolonizing Our Minds Conference in the William Doo Auditorium.

Around 11:15 am, Dr. Stanley Doyle-Wood opened the conference by speaking about the importance of self-awareness within oppressive conditions as well as the importance of alternative ways of knowing in order to oppose the constructed identity of the colonized body and spirit. His energizing pattern of speech brought power to every word and set the framework for the significant themes of the day. The crowd was already in the auditorium and spilling out into the hall and, judging by the size of it alone, the event already appeared to be a success.

The messages to be taken away from DOM reveal its effectiveness as a meeting place for all who resist the colonial point of view. We do not put the past into a burial ground: its relics will not be confined to the museum to be misinterpreted, forgotten, sanitized, and even appropriated and then sold. We are here to recognize that history is not an extinct volcano, but one whose lava stirs throughout the generations. This era is not a postcolonial era; it has been rebranded and reconstructed under organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Conquering through charity rather than social justice and historical accountability has become the neo-colonial message.

Colonialist interference into indigenous culture, language, and peoples is being resisted today through a powerful reclaiming of identity through art. The first step in this process is understanding how the colonial state – in particular, Canada – ignores its colonial past through a regime of disappearance. What is meant by this is that people are consistently denied their voices through institutional violence that is systemic across society. The existence of the Indian Act of 1876 is a constant reminder of Canada's hypocritical logic that attempts to normalize and deny the racist oppression of Aboriginal people. Reminding ourselves that the Canadian nation and we, as Canadian citizens, exist today because of acts of violent and interlocking oppressions against Native peoples is crucial. This remembrance is not "white guilt", but a critical awareness that forces us to be active agents in decolonization. Instead of passive accomplices who help to prop up the Canadian colonial settler state, we ally ourselves with those who resist the state's attempts to erase the colonized.

Nearing the end of a long but emotionally- and intellectually-satisfying day filled with 6 kinds of jerk chicken, two 40 minute panels, a plethora of diverse and talented performers, and copious amounts of coffee, we arrived at our keynote speaker: Lee Maracle.

For the second time in a week, I had the chance to hear Professor Maracle speak. She is one of the few academics who combine knowledge with a passion for activism. In fact, I would classify her activism more as a lifeblood that drives her anti-colonial and anti-oppression teachings. Her speech begins with a reminder that, since it was first inhabited by hunter-gatherers, the land we are on now was and remains a meeting place for various cultures. She went on to talk about the injustices and social ills imported by the Europeans during the genocidal conquest of the Americas. She also pointed to the dominant society's resistance against change by asking the rhetorical question, "Should every generation have to make resistance music?" It seems like we are constantly in a fight that is considered inconsequential by people who are not involved in the decolonization struggle. However, in Toronto, we have a rare opportunity. Lee Maracle's final point was that we live in a city that bleeds with culture, and that, because of this fact, we should utilize this chance to form a resistance. Power will only come when marginalized groups share the same voice.

DOM: Perspective 3

By MONICA ESPAILLAT

Art is a healing practice, a practice of renewal and exploration, and of storytelling. Art is a space of self-definition and self-understanding that ties us simultaneously to larger histories, to a shared narrative. Art is medicine that bridges the gaps between times, spaces, and divisions that have been violently constructed by the colonial enterprise.

These were my initial reflections on the theme chosen by the Equity Studies Students' Union, the Women and Gender Studies Students' Union, the Black Students' Association and the Caribbean Studies Students' Union for the annual *Decolonizing Our Minds Conference*. The conference theme – “People’s Instinctive Travels Through Resistance” – was chosen five months prior and manifested itself in an impactful way on Feb 11. The organizers’ goal was to explore and discover the potential that art and creativity offer in individual and communal travels through resistance, within the continual process of decolonizing our minds, bodies, experiences, and realities.

The title of the conference implies that resistance is *instinctual*. That critically engaging with contemporary realities is natural. Why then, I ask, do some institutions of power stop being questioned? Why, when, and how do institutions gain legitimacy? Through what processes and to whose disadvantage do particular beliefs become societal norms? And if there is something instinctive about resistance where does this instinct go when we stop actively engaging?

The DOM conference served as an interesting space within which to consider these questions. The conference, which the organizers hoped to create as an open forum of conversation, benefitted from the large array of narratives shared. The stories of both high school and university students, of professors, of organizers/activists, and of artists all approached resistance in different ways. Resistance was explored as a personal, societal, and transnational struggle. However, within these varying discussions of resistance, one theme was continually present and powerfully asserted: resistance becomes fruitful through movements of solidarity.

Chandni Desai was one of the speakers on the panel entitled “Resistance through Hip Hop.” Her talk, which focused on Palestinian Hip Hop as a powerful mode of resistance to occupation and violence, explored the potential of cross-cultural solidarity between struggles for survival. Chandni is beginning to “draw parallels [between] the Aboriginal struggle for self determination here in Canada” and Palestinian Hip Hop. Desai presented the moving and transformative potential that solidarity offers.

Lee Maracle, who has been a part of the Aboriginal studies and English departments at the University of Toronto, was the DOM conference keynote speaker. In her talk, Maracle, too, spoke about the transformative potential offered by solidarity movements. Maracle spoke specifically about the rare opportunity offered to those doing decolonizing work in Toronto, where there is such a diverse population. A strong point made by Maracle was that effective movements must start on a personal level. Historical and contemporary awareness about the colonial processes within Canada are crucial as well. Solidarity as discussed by Maracle starts with interpersonal conversation and decolonization proceeds from this point. Maracle asked the audience how many of those present knew her or another indigenous person on a personal level by asking, “How many of you have walked with me?”

It is my belief that resistance is instinct and that this instinct is not lost. This instinct is, however, often submerged under institutions fashioned to weaken resistance and destroy ties of solidarity. The powerful lesson of the Decolonizing Our Minds Conference was that solidarity bolsters resistance. Movements of solidarity offer tremendous transformative potential in contemporary decolonizing work.

From Left to Right: Dr. Paul Adjei and Kabir Joshi-Vijayan speak on “Resistance and Non-violence”; bucc ’n flvr Dance Crew; S.I.C.K. Boyz Dance Crew
(Photos by Ify Ekoh)



Disability Studies Week

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

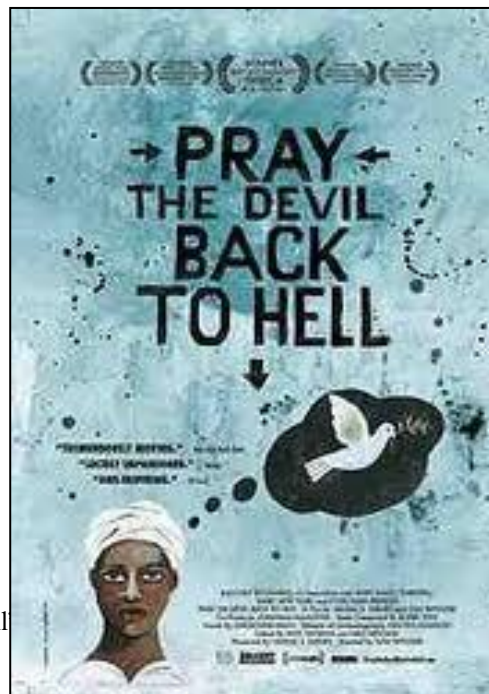
The second annual Disability Studies Week ran from March 13 to 17. The week began with Dr. Anne McGuire's public lecture in Sidney Smith. The lecture, entitled, "'Life Worth Defending'?: An Analysis of the 'War on Autism', the 'War on Terror' and the Racist and Ableist Production of Threatening 'Types'", investigated the "critical intersections of the wars on terror and autism". On March 14, the ESSU screened a film, "The Insatiable Moon", and on March 15, students came together for a Disability Arts Exhibit. The week culminated in the March 16th Disability Justice Workshop with Sins Invalid and the spectacular March 17th Sins Invalid performance at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO).

International Women's Day Events

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

This year, the ESSU decided to fill March not only with DS Week, but with events held in recognition of International Women's Day as well. On March 07, a small group screened Gini Reticker's "Pray the Devil Back to Hell", an extremely powerful documentary that recounts and honours the crucial place of women in Liberia's struggles during a horrific civil war during the Charles Taylor regime. The discussion that followed the viewing was productive, and several attendees felt motivated by one of the messages in the film – namely, that the achievement of peace is a process, not an event. Another aspect of the film that spoke to attendees was the way in which these women united across different lines of faith to fight courageously and non-violently for the same peaceful vision.

An Open Mic Night at the Centre for Women and Trans People (563 Spadina Ave.) followed suit on March 09 and was equally productive. Amidst hearty vegan food, participants recited poems and shared moving spoken-word videos, and used these artistic pieces as starting-points for wider discussions – for example, on the relationships between and complexities of gender and body image.




Poster for the Open Mic Night on March 09

*Open Mic Night
for International Women's Day*

Join the Equity Studies Student Union as we host our 1st Open Mic Night for International Women's Day. It will be an evening full of performances that celebrate and empower cisgender and trans women of different races, religions, sexualities and abilities. Everyone is welcome. All spoken-word artists, dancers, singers, poets, etc. are welcome to take the stage. If you simply want to watch, come out and enjoy some good food. Dinner will be a potluck.

So what are you waiting for? Mark March 9 on your calendar!

*Date: March 9
Time: 6-8 pm
Location: Centre
for Women and
Trans People*



Disability Justice Workshop with Sins Invalid

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

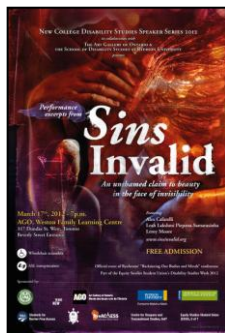
On March 16, Ryerson's Heaslip House was packed with participants ready to attend the Disability Justice Workshop with Sins Invalid. This engaging and interactive workshop was about the emerging framework of Disability Justice as central to the success of our broader social justice movements. No longer accepting disability within a framework of "individual" struggle, the crew at Sins Invalid addresses disability within a broader social context that includes race, gender, class, and sexuality. The workshop was co-facilitated in an innovative way by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Patty Berne, the latter of whom was Skyped into the conversation. Leroy Moore, Alex Cafarelli, Maria Palacios, and Ralph Dickinson led small group discussions.

Sins Invalid Performance at the AGO

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

On March 17, the Sins Invalid crew gave a free performance at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). Sins Invalid is a performance project that incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of color as well as queer and gender-variant artists as communities who have been historically marginalized. The group's performance work explores the themes of sexuality, embodiment, and the disabled body. Conceived and led by disabled people of color, Sins Invalid develops and presents cutting-edge work where normative paradigms of "normal" and "sexy" are challenged, offering instead a vision of beauty and sexuality inclusive of all individuals and communities. The performance was, indeed, "an unshamed claim to beauty in the face of invisibility".

In its definition of *disability*, Sins Invalid includes people with physical impairments, people who belong to a sensory minority, people with emotional disabilities, people with cognitive challenges, and those with chronic/severe illness. The crew understands the experience of disability as one which can and does occur within any and all walks of life, with deeply felt connections to all communities impacted by the medicalization of their bodies, including trans, gender variant and intersex people, and others whose bodies do not conform to our culture(s)' notions of "normal" or "functional." To find out more about Sins Invalid, please visit www.sinsinvalid.org.



Left:

Poster for the March 17th Sins Invalid Performance at the AGO

“Mapping Difference”: Eliza Chandler Lectures at the New College Luncheon Speakers Series

By DOYALI FARAH ISLAM

(Adapted from the Abstract for the Event)

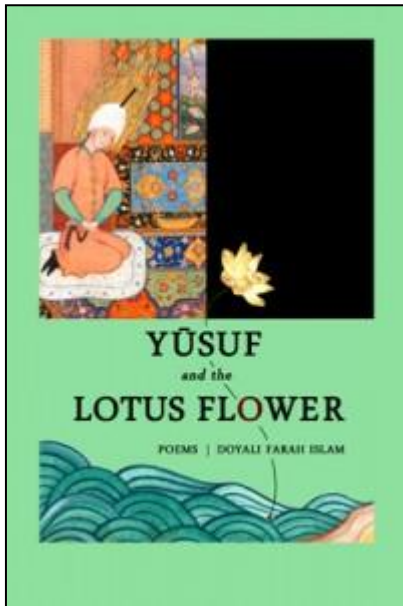
On February 10, Eliza Chandler, the inaugural Equity Studies Senior Doctoral Fellow, gave a talk in Wilson Hall (40 Willcocks Street) entitled "Mapping Difference: Critical Connections between Diaspora and Crip Communities". The talk covered the various and interconnected ways in which disabled, racialized, and disabled racialized people have been routinely produced as undesirable citizens. Chandler spoke of the racist turn-of-the-century immigration practices that used disability as categorical grounds to disqualify racialized people from entering America. She also spoke more contemporarily about the ways in which, in Canada and the United States, racialized and aboriginal peoples are becoming disabled as a result of unsafe drinking water and other environmental hazards in their poor, working class towns and cities. Due to racist domestic policies – termed "environmental racism" – these places have not been attended to or cleaned up. Drawing on her dissertation research, Chandler demonstrated how geography has much to do with the material and social production of disabled and racialized people as undesirable citizens, or the denial of citizenship altogether, as well as the ways in which organizing, distributing, and policing space influence how such people come to be treated. Working closely with Katherine McKittrick's 2003 configuration of geography as a cultural "container" which functions to physically contain bodies as well as cultural understandings of such bodies, Chandler emphasized how meanings of humanness and meanings of geography are always entangled as well as revealed how, as Dionne Brand (2002) said, "new geographic stories can be told." Chandler's research was supported by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funding.

Equity Studies Student Publishes 1st Collection of Poetry

By PHILIP COX, Advancement Communications at New College

(Article Adapted from New College Website, Courtesy of New College, University of Toronto)

A quick search on Google of Equity Studies student Doyali Farah Islam returns an impressive array of results. Alongside her work as a lead Editor of the Equity Studies Students Union newsletter, one finds article after article about first book of poetry, titled *Yūsuf and the Lotus Flower* (BuschekBooks, \$18).



Left:

The cover of Doyali Farah Islam’s first book of poetry, *Yūsuf and the Lotus Flower*, published by BuschekBooks (Oct 2011)

Islam, who has now completed a double major in Equity Studies and English, has read her work at the Decolonizing Our Minds 2012 Conference and the [2011] International Women’s Day Cultural Night. She has sold her collection at the Small Press of Toronto (SPoT) Book Fair, is the first-place winner of Contemporary Verse 2’s 35th Anniversary Contest, and has been published in Grain Magazine. Most significant, however, is a review from the Canadian playwright, novelist, poet, Governor-General’s Award winner and Professor George Elliott Clarke, who describes her work as “a fusion of Emily Dickinson and Allen Ginsberg” and calls Doyali herself “a poet of capacious heart and sagacious mind.”

Clearly these accolades and accomplishments did not accumulate overnight. Add one full year of writing with one full year of editing and you get the culmination of almost six years of what Doyali calls ‘*spirit work*’ – “listening to my inner consciousness and, subsequently, taking the necessary actions – that is, making the necessary changes in daily life.” Part of this work is the daily practice of Islamic prayer and Kundalini yoga, which she says were not deliberate aides to the writing process, [while] admit[ting] that “the work reflects the insights [she] gained through a commitment to these practices.”

Doyali cites the Introduction to Disability Studies course taught at New College as a major influence on her work. This course brought her attention to the way language can privilege or normalize a specific group or set of cultural preferences and practices. It was in the editing process that she became aware that certain elements of the language she had employed reflected values that were not her own, which prompted a careful revision of her work. “It’s in the process of editing that we choose or re-choose – that is, affirm or re-affirm – who we want to be as creative artists – and, by extension, who we want to be as humans” she says.



Above: Doyali Farah Islam

The type of person Doyali wants to be, it seems, is both compassionate and conscientious. For her book launch she chose U of T’s Multi-Faith Centre because she “wanted a welcoming, inclusive, beautiful, and wheelchair-accessible space.” Reading poetry, she says, “is not – or, rather, should not be – a passive act. It is an active process that requires the [author and the audience] to engage intimately with the poem.” And by now it should come as no surprise that even the physical space she chose would be open to as many people as possible.

She is careful to explain that both her editing process and her book of poetry “show that even if writers do not call openly for social justice, their writing can be informed by a desire to transform society.”

For more of Doyali Islam’s work and information about her collection, please visit her website at www.doyalifarahislam.com. She also has a Facebook page for “Yusuf and the Lotus Flower”.