



# Centre Communautaire des Femmes Sud-Asiatiques

## Thinking outside the ballot box:

### An argument for Participatory Democracy

- Farha Najah Hussain

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“Between the Parti Libéral de Québec, Parti Québécois, Coalition avenir Québec, and Québec Solidaire as well as Option Nationale, and the Green Party no political party truly represents me”. This is what I have been hearing from various people, from my mom, to occupational therapists, to fellow community workers.

After a set of inspiring months of students bringing into fruition their vision around empowerment and justice by taking to the streets, attempting to make links of anti-racist feminist & worker solidarity, and challenging the status-quo by using a diversity of tactics, the provincial elections (as part of a liberal parliamentary/representative democracy) is not inciting creativity, nor galvanizing into true transformative change – from the ground up.

And why would they anyways? First, electing an individual to the National Assembly perpetuates a hierarchal system by giving power to politicians as opposed to empowering people to be agents of their own change. Second, only Canadian citizens can cast a ballot, thus upholding a class and status divided society whereby our sisters and active members in our communities who are non-citizens are systematically prevented from participating in this political process. Third, these elections take root in a capitalist and colonial governing system, one that is responsible for the violence faced by Native peoples, racialised communities, especially Women. Lastly, marking a piece of paper reduces our own intelligence, dynamism, and creativity, particularly as conscious Women constantly organizing to build flourishing and healthy communities.

Transformative change occurs when people feel responsible for and ownership of their communities and society, when people feel that their opinions matter and have a space to convey them in meaningful ways. At its core, participatory democracy (PD) attempts to offer this. PD is by no means a novel concept, and is often practiced without us realizing it. In more

recent times, I'd argue that different permutations of PD have been seen within the Occupy/Decolonise Movements, and at the General Assemblies held by Quebec students in the context of the strike against tuition fees. The South Asian Youth (SAY) collective at SAWCC has been making consensus-based collective decisions. Each individual gets a say (pun intended). If the majority agrees with a political position or plan of action, but one member strongly disagrees for a given reason, then further discussion is held. I'd argue that SAWCC's volunteer-run Executive Council has also been working in the spirit of PD, in that the *majority rules* approach does not dictate its functioning. Instead, the focus is on ensuring that people are given the opportunity to have an in depth discussion before arriving to a conclusion. Although it may be cause for a lengthier process, the final decision is arguably more meaningful in the long-term because each individual feels like an active participant.

In situations where PD is not in place, we need to experiment collectively! Most importantly, just because we may not have a concrete idea as to what a truly democratic process can look like on a larger scale, it does not mean we should resort to what the elites of society dictate. Something a family member once told me, and resonates with me, “just because a system has not and currently does not exist, it doesn't mean it can't.” If we truly want to see true change, we have to think of alternatives from structures and systems that are at the root of the violence we fight everyday. We need to think outside the box, and in some cases, value the meaningful, feminist and collective processes we already engage in.

*“For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.” -Audre Lorde*



#### What do you think? Que pensez-vous?

- Let us know your thoughts about the bulletin
- Que pensez-vous de notre bulletin?
- We encourage you to send in your stories and articles for upcoming newsletters in any language!
- Please write to [say.jsa@resist.ca](mailto:say.jsa@resist.ca)
- Soumettez vos pensées et œuvres écrites à [say.jsa@resist.ca](mailto:say.jsa@resist.ca)

## Emerging Female Leaders - by Indu Krishnamurthy

In June 2012, I had the privilege of being one of 23 participants in the first cohort of the Canadian Women's Foundation Leadership Institute. This program is run in partnership with the Coady International Institute at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia. This is a one year distance learning program for emerging female leaders to build their capacity to become the next generation of leaders in the women's community economic development sector.

This summer, I spent nine days on the beautiful campus of St-Francis Xavier University, as part of this program. It was an opportunity for me to meet fascinating women working in the non-profit sector across Canada, in rural and urban communities and to learn from their experience and realities. I would like to

share with you one of Canada's well kept secrets...The Coady International Institute....whose mission is "to Ignite leadership". Established in 1959, at St. Francis Xavier University and named after Reverend Dr. Moses Coady, it is a world leader in education and action research for community-driven development. It uses adult education approaches to building leadership and strengthening organizational capacity. In its 50 year history, Coady has produced over 5000 graduates in more than 130 countries around the world. The recent programs of the institute include Global Change Leaders' certificate, Indigenous Women in Community Leadership and International Centre for Women's Leadership.

If you or someone you know are working or thinking about working in

community development (in Canada or in developing countries) and are looking to further their skills I would encourage them to check out their website and to find out about the scholarships for their programs. It is a secret waiting to be discovered! Info: <http://coady.stfx.ca/education/>



## South Asian Youth (SAY) / Jeunes sud-asiatiques (JSA)

This month SAY is in a process of re-visioning in the context of adjusting to change. Two of our dear core collective members—who have been instrumental to SAY's functioning this past year—have moved on from our collective. Keren Tang will be pursuing a Masters in Public Health in Edmonton, and Swathi Sekhar has begun

an articling position and will be continuing social justice organizing in Toronto. We wish them the very best in these endeavors. We will miss their presence, energy and commitment to anti-



racist feminist efforts in Montreal, but look forward to our paths crossing again, particularly in the context of our organizing.

Interested in joining SAY? Drop us a line at [say.jsa@resist.ca](mailto:say.jsa@resist.ca) OR attend a meeting! See the calendar (p.5) for upcoming meeting dates.

## Announcements / Annonces

For updated list of events with respect to the student movement and CLASSE events, please consult/Pour plus d'information concernant les événements et manifestations d'étudiantEs, veuillez consulter: <http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/calendrier/conferences/>



EC meetings are open to all members. Agenda items should be sent at least one week prior to a meeting to: [dolchew@hotmail.com](mailto:dolchew@hotmail.com)

We will also have 'retreat-type' meetings to take our Revisioning agenda forward. Please see the calendar (p.5) for upcoming meeting dates.

We'd also like to welcome **Ruwani Payoe**, our new Youth Representative on the EC.

**Membership 2012-13:** call today to become a member!

**Volunteers:** If you are interested in helping out at the Centre, please contact Homa (ex. 102 or [homa@bellnet.ca](mailto:homa@bellnet.ca)) for a meeting so we can get to know your skills better!

## Centre update

### Language Classes

Our French and English Language classes will start on September 24th 2012. Registration is open for both classes. French evaluations will be held on September 6th between 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. Please bring you I.D. documents—PR card or Citizenship card or other immigration documents proving your status in Canada.

For more information call Ghazala Munawar at [514-528-8812](tel:514-528-8812) ext 104.

### Support a fund-raiser for the South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC) and Le Groupe Herencias

**How?** Clean used/unused Shalwar Khameez and Saris. The clothes should be in decent condition.

**When?** by September 12th, at 2pm (in SAWCC's youth zone)

**Where?** SAWCC, 1035 Rachel East 3rd floor (unless you have coordinated other drop off points with someone at SAWCC or Le Groupe Herencias)

### About the groups

The South Asian Women's Community Centre is an organisation that helps women achieve their full potential in society and promotes women's autonomy and independence.

Le Groupe Herencias' mandate is to produce works of creative art and

provide education, training, and therapeutic intervention using the arts for the promotion, exchange, and acceptance of cultural heritage. Art productions aim to create dialogue across and within communities by breaking down hierarchies within and across



religion, race, gender, generation or status.

The actual fundraiser will be held on **September 16th from noon-4pm in Parc Athena in Parc-Extension.** Money raised will be equally distributed across both groups.

## Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice *(courtesy of Dolores Chew)*

Edited by Aziz Choudry, Jill Hanley, Eric Shragge

How do we organize for progressive social change in an era of unprecedented economic, social, and ecological crises? How do political activists build power and critical analysis into their daily work for change?

Grounded in struggles in Canada, the USA, and Aotearoa/New Zealand, as well as transnational activist networks, *Organize!* links local organizing with global struggles for social justice. From organizing immigrant workers to mobilizing psychiatric survivors, from arts and activism for Palestine to support for Indigenous Peoples, activists, academics, and artists reflect on the tensions and gains inherent in a diverse range of organizing contexts and practices. *Organize!* encourages us

to use history to shed light on contemporary injustices and how they can be overcome.

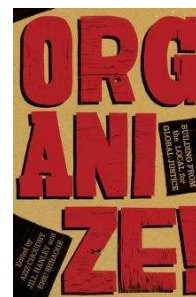
**The chapter, "Making Our Space, Taking Our Place: Lessons from Migrant Women's Organizing in Montreal" documents and discusses aspects of the history of SAWCC and the 8<sup>th</sup> March Committee of Women of Diverse Origins.**

Other chapters include: Organize!: Building from the Local for Global Justice -- Activist Research -- Research Partnerships and Local Community Organizing -- Fundraising: Politics and Strategies

-- Some Comments on Law and Organizing -- Rights, Action, Change: Organize for What?

--Escape, Retreat, Revolt: Queer People of Colour Living in Montreal: Using

Photovoice as a Tool for Community Organizing -- Listen to the Music: Work the Music—Organize the Community -- Art for Palestine: "Re-Narrating" History and the Present -- Immigrant Worker Organizing in a Time of Crisis: Adapting to the New Realities of Class and Resistance



-- Research Group on Collective Autonomy Prefigurative Self-Governance and Self-Organization: The Influence of Antiauthoritarian (Pro) Feminist, Radical Queer and Antiracist Networks in Quebec.

We have a copy of the book in the SAWCC library.

## HEALTHY LIVING - Cucumbers: September's Fruit of the Month.

Fun fact of the day: **Cucumbers are actually fruits!**

Not only are these super fruits refreshing and delicious, they are packed with vitamins and offer many health benefits.

### 15 health benefits of cucumbers:

1. Keeps the body hydrated
2. Promotes healthy skin
3. Helps fight cancers, including breast cancer, uterine cancer and ovarian cancer.



4. Control blood pressure
5. Beneficial for teeth and gums

6. Aid in digestion
7. Promotes joint health
8. Reduces acidity levels
9. Promotes healthy nail growth
10. Relieve gout and arthritis pain
11. Defends against diabetes
12. Reduces cholesterol
13. Stimulates hair growth
14. Acts as a diuretic
15. Aids in weight loss

## Justice for Victims of the Gujarat Genocide – the struggle continues (Courtesy of Dolores Chew)

### A judicial vindication for those who Struggle for Justice for Victims of the Gujarat Genocide – the struggle continues

On 28 August a Special Court in Gujarat (India) convicted 32 people including Maya Kodnani, a member of the Gujarat Legislature and a former Minister of Education of Gujarat and the notorious leader of the Bajrang Dal (youth militia of the Bharatiya Janata Party) Babu Bajrangji (who had made it his avowed life's mission to 'rescue' Hindu girls who had married Muslim husbands – a euphemism for forced kidnapping, violence and murder. They were arrested for their participation in the Gujarat genocide of 2002, in particular the massacre in Ahmedabad city's neighbourhood of Naroda Patiya.

327 witnesses testified in the case. The prosecutors presented 2,005 documents. 67 people were charged. 32 were convicted and 29 acquitted; 6 defendants died during the proceedings.

It is assumed there will be appeals, but for the survivors of the genocide and the families of victims, as well as those who have tirelessly worked with them to pursue justice, this is a victory and a public vindication of what they witnessed and testified to.

In February-March 2002, a genocide occurred in the Indian state of Gujarat. Muslims were targeted by goons and thugs who belonged to organizations whose objective is to convert India into Hindutva – a Hindu nation. More than 2000 people were killed. Women were particularly targeted in brutal and gruesome ways.

The current ruling party of Gujarat, the Bharatiya Janata Party, a Hindutva party (which was also in power at the time of the genocide) and the current Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi (also in power at the time, and named as directly involved in the genocide) have as usual adopted a Teflon strategy and distanced themselves from the implications of this decision. In the case of former Minister Kodnani, for example, they have emphasized that she only became a minister after the genocide.

Since 2002, Chief Minister Modi who has his sights on becoming the next Prime Minister of India also tried to detract attention by pointing out the commercial and economic success of Gujarat under his government – open for business, great for investors, etc. The Indian multinational Tata has built a car factory in Gujarat, once it seemed it

was becoming difficult to do so in the state of West Bengal. The Ford company is also there. The Canadian government has a commercial office in Gujarat. Because of his economic success and his scathing rhetorical acrobats, Modi is hugely popular among many in Gujarat. In fact, in state elections soon after the genocide, Modi won a resounding victory.

To boost his image further, PM Modi has a public relations company in Washington working for him. They had attempted to get him named TIME in magazine's global on-line poll, one of the 100 most influential people. Thanks to effective mobilization by people around the world who are working for justice for the victims, not only did Modi who had sitting comfortably at # 1 slip to 3<sup>rd</sup> place, but what disappointed Modi and his supporters more, was that he got more 'No' votes than 'Yes' ones, when people were asked to indicate whether or not he should be included in the prestigious list.

Over the years, SAWCC has worked to support the struggle for justice for the victims of the Gujarat genocide.



**South Asian Women's Community centre**

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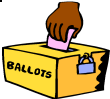






31 years of sisterhood, strength, struggle and success 1981-2012

[www.sawcc-ccfsa.ca](http://www.sawcc-ccfsa.ca)

*The South Asian Women's Community Centre is a not-for-profit organization that helps women achieve their full potential in the Québec and Canadian societies and also helps them become independent.*

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|---|--|
| Sept. 4—Election Day                              | 4 sept—Jour des élections  |
| Sept. 6—French class evaluations                  | 6 sept—Évaluation pour cours de français                                 |
| Sept. 7—SAY meeting 1PM                           |  |
| Sept. 11—Consumer Protection info session 10:30AM | 7 sept—Réunion du Comité des jeunes sud-asiatiques (JSA) à 13h00         |
| Sept. 18—Tenant's Rights info session 10:30AM     | 11 sept—Séance d'information sur la protection des consommateurs à 10h30 |
| Sept. 21—SAY meeting 1PM                          | 18 sept—Séance d'information sur les droits du locataire à 10h30         |
| Sept. 24—EC meeting 6PM                           | 21 sept—Réunion du Comité des jeunes sud-asiatiques (JSA) à 13h00        |
| Sept. 25—Info Session 10:30AM (topic TBD)         | 24 sept—Réunion du conseil de direction à 18h00                          |
| Sept. 28—Monthly potluck 12:00PM                  | 25 sept—Séance d'information à 10h30 (sujet à déterminer)                |
|   | 28 sept—Notre dîner communautaire mensuel 12h00                          |

# September 2012

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	 4	5	6	 7	8
9	10	 11	12	13	14	15
16	17	 18	19	20	 21	22
23	 24	<b>TBD</b> 25	26	27	 28	29
30						