

In Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka [Mohawk] territory

**Le Centre communautaire des femmes sud-asiatiques**



**WISHING YOU PEACE & JOY  
IN 2019!**

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*Dear SAWCC members,*

*Happy 2019 to you! At the start of a new year one is filled with hope and aspiration to continue building on past achievements and also to charter new courses for ourselves. Our SAY youth have aptly reminded us, in their blogging, that it is also important to take time for gratitude and pride in who we are today, amidst images appealing us to aspire towards ideals not always of ourselves. The work of social justice emerges through justice to ourselves; an often overlooked ideal for many, particularly women, going about their work of care and well-being for others. The January Women's March in Montreal and around the world is a reminder that we will continue the struggle for this. So this year we wish for you the time to appreciate yourself as you take time to do the same for those around you.*

**Qu'en pensez-vous?  
What do you think?**

- Let us know your thoughts about the bulletin.
- Que pensez-vous de notre journal?
- We encourage you to send in your stories and articles for upcoming newsletters in any language by the 25th of every month to:

• [sawccbulletin@gmail.com](mailto:sawccbulletin@gmail.com)

• Écrivez - nous à

[sawccbulletin@gmail.com](mailto:sawccbulletin@gmail.com)

## CENTRE Hours and Accessibility:



### Centre Hours/heure d'ouverture

Our centre is open 9-5 every weekdays. (Mon-Fri)

But there is a possibility of taking an appointment (at least a week in advance) in the evening from 6-8 pm on a Thursday

The Centre is wheelchair accessible

Le centre est accessible aux fauteuils roulants.

**Volunteers —** If you are interested in helping out at the Centre, please contact Juvaria (Ext. 104 or juvaria@bellnet.ca) to coordinate a meeting!

### **SAVE THE DATE:**

**Next Executive Council Meeting: (tbd) February 2019 All members are welcome.** If you're want to attend the meeting, please contact the Centre for the date which should soon be available.

## Membership Renewal

You may renew your SAWCC membership to ensure you get all the mailings and can participate fully in the organization.

Changes to your information (address, phone number, etc. email, etc.)? Download the membership form from our website, insert the correct information and send it along with your membership dues.

<http://www.sawcc-ccfsa.ca/EN/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Membership-form.pdf>

Please mail cheque to: SAWCC, 1035 Rachel est, Montréal, Qc., H2J 2J5.

Make cheque payable to: "South Asian Women's Community Centre".

Indicate in the note section: "membership".

*Making a donation to SAWCC at the same time?* Donations of \$20 or more will receive a tax-deductible receipt (for 2019 tax year). If including a donation indicate as well the amount towards "donation".

### **Membership dues:**

\$1- \$15.00 at your discretion, membership approved by the EC

### **SAWCC Bulletin -- submission guidelines:**

SAWCC members are encouraged to send submissions to the Bulletin, to share items of interest with other members. Send submissions to: sawccbulletin@gmail.com

If using the post send to: SAWCC Bulletin, 1035 Rachel est, Montreal, Quebec, H2J 2J3

Submissions should reach by the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month.

Submissions may be original work or reprints (with permission) and can include -- art, reports, photos, information, opinion pieces, short fiction, poetry, announcements, recipes, etc.

Publication criteria are guided by SAWCC's commitment to not negatively discriminate on the basis of physical and mental ability, religion, colour, nationality, age, sexual orientation and identity, caste, and class. Publication is further guided by the feminist ethos of sisterhood, and principles of intersectionality\*, equality, equity, and transparency. As well, material that may compromise confidentiality of individuals without their consent will not be published.

SAWCC reserves the right to select, reject or edit submissions. When authorship identified, items reflect the views of the authors.

\*Intersectionality -- the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, that create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.



## CENTRE NEWS: Juvaria Yasser, Gestionnaire du centre/ Centre Manager

SAWCC reopened as of January 7<sup>th</sup>. The French and English classes started on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January.

Our info sessions start on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Jan with a needs analysis of our centre users' needs so that we can organize sessions that they will find useful.

We are looking forward to have the first potluck of the year on **THURSDAY** the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, where we would be showing the movie "MOM". The movie starts at 10:30 and we will eat lunch at 1:00pm.

Please note the change of day — we will have our monthly potlucks on the last Thursday of the month.

We have uploaded the coming two months of activities on our website. Please check out the website for details and let us know what you think of the new look of our website.

### **Cont'd from p. 7**

"...The government must distinguish between 'formal equality' (merely declaring "equality between women and men") and 'substantive equality' (actually working to enable equality by empowerment rather than disempowerment). The government must understand that the Charter in attempting to undermine religious fundamentalism has created another fundamentalism, with its own dogma – secular fundamentalism.

In conclusion, the South Asian Women's Community Centre is in solidarity with people, including women-identified people who struggle for a dignified life. 32 years of experience, working and organizing in our communities, informs our analysis and perspective. We oppose all coercion. We are against authorities forcing individuals to dress, talk or behave in a certain way. We support women who refuse to wear the veil because they are being forced to do so. Similarly, we support women who refuse to remove their veil because they are being told to do so. Our solidarity is our strength, and we will continue to struggle for our collective liberation, rooted in our diversity and vision for a just society. This law must be removed."



On Saturday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, I got the opportunity of a lifetime when I was invited by Lembas Works to do a public interactive event with none other than the famous world cellist Yo-Yo Ma, alongside three other spoken word poets.

The theme of this pop-up event centered on making an impact in the community, and connecting with those we share this city with through art and through music. Yo-Yo Ma has been working hard to make connections with the public using art and music, in hopes of creating a world where we all feel closer to each other. It was in following with this theme that I was asked to write a short poem to perform (*see following page*).

I did not really know what this event would look like until the day of, and it was absolutely marvelous. Yo-Yo Ma played Bach Minuets, and one by one the poets got an opportunity to recite their poem with Yo-Yo Ma's music to complement the poetry.

By the end, I also felt a real connection with the audience, so much that I had to refer to my paper with the words of my poem, even though I had it perfectly memorized, but I just got lost in the moment. It was clear that the audience was so engaged, both being carried by the music as well as the words of the poets.

The event ended with Yo-Yo Ma finishing the recital of the minuets and then paying a tribute to Leonard Cohen by playing the song Hallelujah, while the poets, organizers and the audience sang along. This last moment of connection left almost everyone in tears, including myself. I did not expect this moment to be as powerful as it was, but I think what made it powerful was that there was an intention of connecting with each other, and I think that entering the space having this intention was monumental in making this moment a reality. It is amazing to believe that it was really that simple, and yet, it worked magnitudes in allowing people to really look at who is around them, and allowing themselves to get swept away by the music, the words, and the feeling of sharing space with those that live in our proximity.

This event reinforced my faith in how much of an impact the arts can make, and how they can be a tool to creating a world where we are able to better empathize with each other, better connect with each other, and better listen to each other. Magic exists. And this precious afternoon showed me that even in a climate of hostility and fear, the simple intention of wanting to connect and experience our truths together is enough to spark powerful moments and motivations for change.

For this opportunity I am so grateful to the South Asian Women's Community Centre, to Lembas Works, and to Yo-Yo Ma's vision and work.

**Intention: by Harleen, SAY Collective Coordinator**

Below is the poem I performed as part of the performance.

*my mother knows 5 languages  
Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu , French and English  
during her first few jobs in Tiohtiá:ke,  
she learned phrases in Italian and Spanish,  
she knew  
that language holds the power of connection.*

*in this city we have boroughs,  
neighborhoods, lines of houses  
filling every direction of the compass.  
but you cannot place people  
between borders and  
call it a village.  
community is not proximity by chance.*

*maybe i too am afraid  
to know the neighbour that always passes me  
on my street,  
but I know today I am alive because  
my mother would have spoken to her.*

## Quebec Head covering law and impact — Charter 'light'

As the newly elected CAQ government took Office at the end of 2018 various ministers as well as Mr. Legault noted that actions would be taken in 2019 towards implementing the ban on religious head covering.

As noted in the Gazette editorial on Nov.30, 2018:

*“ He also reiterated the intention to “move quickly” to ban signs of religion for public employees wielding state authority, including teachers, this in the name of state secularism (but, as Legault earlier stated with presumably unintended irony, **not before Christmas**). Such a measure would be an odious violation of religious freedoms, discriminatory in its effect and be the opposite of socially unifying.”*

At SAWCC we will continue to stand against such narrowly defined views of secularism and neutrality, and how they serve to marginalize the experiences of minority groups. The Oct.7th anti-racist march, the Oct.18th action by teachers as well as statements put out by teachers' unions indicate that this government's sentiment is not shared by many in the public sector.

### ***Timely reminders—excerpts from SAWCC's public positions on earlier iterations of the same*** ***Excerpts from SAWCC Briefs on 1)Reasonable Accommodations; 2) Charter of Values***

***1) The following excerpt from our 2007 Brief to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission on Reasonable Accommodation highlights the historical nature of the discourse of religious neutrality in Quebec. This excerpt cautions of the persistence of sexist and racist discourses and their political use to not only target a minority group but also to keep Quebec society divided...***

“The use of the term “reasonable accommodation” is problematic because it assumes there are limits; that one can go beyond what is ‘reasonable’. When those limits are crossed, there will be no accommodation. Linguistically it sounds sane and rational. Yet who will determine what is ‘reasonable’? At the moment the discourse indicates that the same Quebecers, descendants of colonists from New France will do so. It is like children in the playground who tell the new child that she can play with them, but only if she does what they tell her to.

The truth is that the newer arrivals are the ones making all the accommodations to fit in to mainstream society, yet this is insufficient. They need to become “white” and demonstrate a commitment to a “judeo-christian ethos” that goes beyond religion and is essentially an imposition of what for lack of a better term is called “Western Civilization”. Some Quebecers who regard themselves as part of the host community, seem concerned with issues that are either non-existent or that they have moved away from, e.g. a closer adherence to a heritage religion, in this case for the most part Roman Catholicism. So religiousness that is visible in public space seems to cause discomfort. Of course it is the visibility of difference. Symbols, such as the crucifix, seem to cause no discomfort, being cited as cultural heritage instead of religious.

Most of the outcry today seems to centre around the hijab, the very visible headdress some women have chosen to wear. The targeted community is conveniently Muslim at a time when Islamophobia is sweeping the world. The other aspect is that people of colour are to be “accommodated”. Unfortunately, the good intentions of the government have been turned into a public forum for elements in society to air their racism. ”

(Complete Brief may be found

at: [https://www.bibliotheque.assnat.qc.ca/DepotNumerique\\_v2/AffichageFichier.aspx?id=68899](https://www.bibliotheque.assnat.qc.ca/DepotNumerique_v2/AffichageFichier.aspx?id=68899).

## 2) *From our Brief on proposed Quebec government's Charter of Values (December 2013)*

"... the proposed Charter of Quebec Values, appropriates a fundamentalist interpretation of secularism to mount an attack on religious minorities, in order to escape having the real intent of the measure called out for what it is – racism and xenophobia. .... essentially attacks against religious minorities, have led to increasing discrimination, as well as patriarchal and racist assaults and intimidation of Muslim women who are veiled. The government has acted irresponsibly by putting out this charter. It has legitimized bigotry and xenophobia. ...

Moreover, we find it highly problematic that the government believes that neutrality can be enforced by law. 'It is unreasonable to presume the partiality of a public sector employee due to the simple fact that he or she wears a religious symbol.' [Quebec Droits de la personne] In fact it has been our experience has shown that lack of neutrality and racist bias can come from public servants who wear no overt religious symbols; minority women of colour are among the most vulnerable members of our society, where overtly discriminatory practices are concerned. ...

Despite references to turbans (mostly worn by Sikh men) and kippas (worn by Jewish men), the main target of the Charter is Muslim women. The veiled Muslim woman has become the signifier of the outsider who is seen as threatening the culture and the national identity. She is the Other, not part of Québec, even if she was born here, lived here all her life and her first language is French. The conflation of religion with ethnicity in this instance displays profound ignorance as well, because there are observant Muslim women who veil, who are converts and whose origins are Québec *de souche*. Most recently, the issue of niqab-wearing daycare educators in Verdun elicited extreme and shocking hate-speech and misogyny: "2 bullets; it's hunting season, let's go!"; "Let 's burn these women and rape them like pigs!" [CBC] ...

For many decades now, Québec has been progressive and a trend-setter in working towards a pluralistic, equal society, an example in Canada and elsewhere in the world. The fixed cost of daycare has made it possible for many women to access equality rights. The proposed Charter has turned the clock back ....

*Instead of forcing women who wear hijabs and/or niqabs into their homes, [emphasis for this excerpt] the government should attend to other areas of gender inequality and exploitation of women, for example, the objectification of women's bodies for capitalist profit. It is ironic that the semi-clad female body in public space elicits little governmental concern, but that the covered body does! And the government should be working to end violence against all women in Québec. That would demonstrate a true commitment to ensuring gender equality. ...*

The proposed charter violates the rights of women to self-determination, to be who they are without interference. It violates both the bodily sovereignty of women by presuming to deny the public wearing of religious symbols, and is a violation of a human being's body. Having the state tell women what to wear (or not wear) is unacceptable. We do not accept any impositions on women's bodies, by anyone -- priests, mullahs, the state! ...

The motivation of many women who wear the veil is connected to the values of community, the cultivation of virtue and closeness to God, and a way of living one's embodiment. The liberal interpretation of choice, very much part of capitalist consumer society, does not represent the reality of human life. Many social, cultural, economic and religious factors create a complex context of constraint on choice. For many Muslim women, wearing the veil is an expression of identity ; as is the wearing of the turban and kirpan – Sikhism, and the kippa – Judaism. As the recent statement of several McGill psychiatrists noted, denying these expressions to those who work in the public sphere can have a negative effect on health and well-being. [Gazette, 15 Oct 2013] There must be openness to a broader understanding of what agency and choice mean in the area of religion. To understand the struggles of racialised women in Québec – including those who wear the veil, we need to acknowledge the reality of women who navigate their faith, spiritualities, religions or approaches to life, very deliberately and courageously, between the tyrannies of secular fundamentalism (as proposed in Bill-60) and religious fundamentalism (what the government assumes it is saving Muslim women from)."

And our brief on the Charter of Values, on SAWCC website at: <http://www.sawcc-ccfsa.ca/EN/> Then go to dropdown box "About Us", click on "Resources" and choose "Publications". The document is English and in French is at the heading: "**Brief submitted to the Commission de l'administration publique, National Assembly**"

## **SAWCC ACTIVITIES FOR January 2019**

Tuesday 8th Jan: Planning week- No session

Tuesday 15th Jan: Planning week- No session

Tuesday 22nd Jan: Intro to SAWCC- Needs' analysis of our participants

Tuesday 29th Jan: Winter comfort foods & recipe exchange

Thursday 31st Jan: Potluck & a movie "MOM" Lunch 10:30-1:00

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Tuesday 5th Feb: Centre Staff training day

Tuesday 12th Feb: Valentine's day activity, Card making and a surprise breakfast

Tuesday 19th Feb: Gender equality at work

Wednesday 20th Feb: Manifestation campaign "Engagez-Vous"

Tuesday 26th Feb: Employability in regions of QC

Thursday 28th Feb: Potluck & a how to plan stress free party

**Centre Communautaire des femmes sud-asiatiques**

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37 years of sisterhood, strength, struggle and success 1981-2018

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



# January 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		<i>1</i> Planning Week-No Session	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i> Planning Week-No Session	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i> EC meeting	<i>12</i>
<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>15</i> Intro to SAWCC	<i>16</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>20</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>22</i> Recipe Exchange	<i>23</i>	<i>24</i> Luck & Movie	<i>25</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>27</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>31</i>		