



Glimpses into the Legacy Ronald Sultana leaves behind for us

When our dear ones pass on, the feelings of loss are unbearable and we are confronted by a space which is now bereft of their presence. Ronald Sultana is no longer physically amidst us. Yet, all that we know of him still remains in our thoughts, minds and memories.

Ronald was one of the founding editors of the Indian Journal of Career and Livelihood Planning. In these pages of the journal Tristram Hooley, Rie Thomsen, Tony Watts, Gideon Arulmani and Sonali Nag reflect on the legacy he built for us.

Our intention here is not only to eulogise, reminisce and express our grief, but to provide a source for our continued interactions with what Ronald created.



A Reflection on the Legacy of Ronald Sultana

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Introduction

Ronald Sultana died on Friday 24th November 2023. Since then, many eulogies have been written about his life and the friendship and mentorship that he offered to so many. As friends and colleagues of Ronald, we are still grieving for him, yet in this piece, we start to turn the focus towards the incredible body of work that Ronald left behind. Our hope is that this piece will provide an introduction to his work, and particularly to his work on social justice.

An Unmatched Contribution

The worlds of education and career guidance are in shock at the loss of Ronald Sultana. His contribution to these fields was unmatched and we are sure much more will be written in the future about his numerous contributions to all of the areas that he has worked in. We would particularly highlight his contributions to educational sociology (Sultana & Baldacchino, 1994;

Sultana et al., 1997), to island studies and the study of small states (Sultana, 2006), to the study of education and career guidance in the Mediterranean region (Bray et al., 2013; Sultana, 2017) and in his home country of Malta (Sultana, 1992) and, of course, careers education and guidance where he extensively mapped the field's interface with politics, policy and culture (Sultana, 2004; Watts & Sultana, 2004).

But, in this short article we wanted to focus on Ronald's unique contribution to the pursuit of social justice through career education and guidance and to his contribution to thinking about career guidance in the global south and to a politics of anti-imperialism.
Career guidance for social justice

Ronald was the pivotal figure in discussions about career guidance and social justice. As far back as 1985 Ronald was drawing on critical pedagogy, writing about Henry Giroux and then in his 1987 PhD dissertation discussing 'schooling for work' in New Zealand and finding hope and possibilities for contestation in forms of education where others only saw indoctrination. These themes continued throughout his career where he wrote about critical education (Sultana, 1989), social class (Sultana, 1991), and diversity (Sultana, 2002).

Much of this work took on more urgency after the global financial crisis in 2008. Increasingly Ronald started to talk about neoliberalism, rights and politics and to position career guidance as a mechanism for social inclusion (Sultana, 2010). And then in 2014 he produced an explosion of writing discussing social justice in neoliberal times (Sultana, 2014a), arguing for an optimism of the will in such times (Sultana, 2014b) and setting out a typology of career guidance which accorded a central place to an emancipatory tradition in his article Rousseau's Chains (Sultana, 2014c).

It was around this time that that we really started working with Ronald. His turn towards social justice gave us confidence that this was possible. Career guidance could be about more than just managing oppression and transforming yourself into a good neoliberal citizen. It could be something critical and emancipatory.

Ronald became our friend, mentor and spiritual guide. Working with him was always a broad education, as he brought discussion of the arts, philosophy and the world to our many talks on life in academia and beyond. He was especially supportive to those who were new to publishing academic work and those for whom publishing in English was a new experience. His commitment to ensuring that there was a chance for new voices and voices from beyond the Global North to be heard was central to his generosity as an editor and a mentor.

Together we worked on numerous projects. A special issue of the NICEC journal (Hooley & Sultana, 2016), the two edited collections Career guidance for social justice (Hooley et al., 2018) and Career guidance for emancipation (2019), the creation of a blog dedicated to career guidance for social justice (<https://careerguidancesocialjustice.wordpress.com/>) and the development of the five signposts for social justice framework (Hooley et al., 2021).

Career Guidance in the Global South

Ronald demonstrated amazing persistence in serving wider society through research. His work gave voice to marginalised and oppressed people and showed us how to strive for common good. One of his greatest passions was fostering the development of career guidance in the Global South (Sultana, 2019). He was always insistent that this should not just be about the importing of ideas, approaches and concepts from the Global North, but should rather be about developing indigenous approaches that were attentive to the cultures and ways of being of the place from which they came (Sultana, 2023).

Ronald set this out clearly in an article that he wrote for this journal (Sultana, 2018). In this article he argued that 'Euro-American master narratives' dominated our thinking about career and career guidance and that they have had 'a harmful impact on the subjectivities of colonised/neo-colonised subjects, and need to be decolonised' (p.50). To do this we need to 'open up discursive spaces that bridge current global divides and inequities in the production of knowledge' and amplify alternate voices that recognise indigenous practices and champion local knowledge and creativity.

So, What is Now to be Done?

Ronald's passion and ethical approach to research kept us on our toes, but for now, the loss and realisation that he is no longer there has pushed us on our heels. True to Ronald's legacy we cannot stay here for long, we will continue his tireless work of scholarly writing and debate in journals, projects and on the blog, we founded together. So, we must find the courage to continue Ronald's legacy of solidaric critique in the field of career guidance research, practice and policy.

The fight for justice goes on, inspired by the writing, legacy and memory of Ronald. We hope that others will continue to join us as we all move forwards together.

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Ronald Sultana's Critical Work on International Public Policy

A.G. Watts

I wish to add to the tribute to Ronald Sultana in the article above by Tristram Hooley and Rie Thomson, and also to complement their coverage of his legacy. My main working contacts with Ronald were linked to the overlapping series of international reviews conducted by a range of influential international organisations in the early 2000s. We worked together on many of these projects, in many different countries. We became close friends as well as strong colleagues. He was a kind and sentient man, but also highly intelligent and wise, always probing difficult questions with moral and intellectual integrity. I learned so much from him and feel privileged to have known him.

The International Reviews

The cross-national reviews conducted between 2001 and 2010 were carried out by a number of influential international organisations. First, OECD conducted a review of lifelong career development policies and practice in 14 countries: 11 European countries, plus Australia, Canada and Korea (OECD, 2004). The World Bank then decided to use an adapted form of the OECD process to conduct a parallel review in 7 middle-income countries: Chile, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Africa and Turkey (Watts & Fretwell, 2004). At this point, Ronald Sultana was commissioned by the European Commission, as part of its policy work on lifelong learning, to use the OECD questionnaire to collect information through its agencies the European Training Foundation (ETF) and Cedefop respectively to enable it to report first on the 11 'acceding and candidate countries' of the time (Sultana, 2003) and then to cover the 29 countries that were members either of the European Union or of the European Economic Area (Sultana, 2004). Subsequently, he and I prepared a 'megasyntesis' on the 37 countries covered in these various studies (Watts & Sultana, 2004). This was used as the core document for a major conference held in October 2003 by OECD and the Canadian Government in Toronto, Canada, in association with the European Commission, the World Bank and the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance.

Two further reviews were later conducted by ETF, which has responsibility for linking EU policies and programmes with candidate countries and with other neighbouring countries. Both were carried out in regions experiencing high levels of political turbulence and conflict. One was the Western Balkans, covering seven countries: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Both Ronald and I were involved in these country studies; a synthesis report was prepared (Sweet, 2006) but not formally published. The other was the Mediterranean region, covering ten countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip), Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. At Ronald's instigation, particular attention was paid to the distinctive socio-cultural contexts of the participating countries, and the extent to which these required adaptation of career guidance concepts drawn largely from Western practice. The resulting synthesis report (Sultana & Watts, 2007; 2008) paid stronger attention to these issues than the earlier reports in the series.

Finally, as an annex to the series, we carried out a study for the European Commission of career guidance in Europe's public employment services (Sultana & Watts, 2006a; 2006b). The reviews were also used as data sources for two handbooks for policy-makers: one published jointly by OECD and the European Commission (2004); the other – addressed particularly to low- and middle-income countries – by the International Labour Organisation (2006). In addition, the studies underpinned the work of two European policy-oriented bodies

– the Lifelong Guidance Expert Group (2002-08) and the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2007-15) (ELGPN, 2015) – in both of which we participated.

Reflexive Critique

Ronald was a highly significant and much-valued contributor to nearly all of these significant studies and related activities. He had strong reservations, however, on what we were doing, about which we talked many times. With his characteristic clarity and perceptiveness, he articulated some of these concerns in a major paper (Sultana, 2011).

Ronald's main concerns were two-fold. The first was the process of policy lending and policy borrowing – why countries engaged with these processes, and how they do so – recognising that policy transfer is “necessarily enmeshed in webs of power”.

The second was a deeper and more personal “critical self-reflection” of the dilemmas he faced as a “boundary person” seeking to re-contextualise the career guidance “gospel” – “including individualism, self-determination, the centrality of work in the project of self-construction, autonomy in the face of authority, priority to self-actualisation, the striving to define and realise a life project” – in “conflict-ridden occupied Palestinian territories where the largest group of non-citizens in the world finds access to opportunities severely restricted by limited mobility and rights”. Drawing from the work of Pakistani anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2005), he focused particularly on Muslim women in the mosque movement whose life project is “neither to find themselves nor to express themselves through work” but rather “to construct a virtuous self through performative behaviour that shapes inward disposition”. He concluded: “we should not assume that, in the encounter with the ‘other’, and in the process of culturally transmitting other life worlds, our own certainty about how the world should proceed can remain stable”.

Ronald's paper is strongly recommended to all involved in such work in the future, whether as researchers or as consultants in the career development field but also more widely. It is an important part of his legacy.

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Personal Tribute

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As is typical in the lives of academics, my first meeting with Ronald Sultana was at a conference. I noticed him because of the deceptive lightness of his gaze as he took in the arguments being made. He clashed with the speaker and at that time it felt like he was so invested in his point of view that he was willing to ignore counter arguments. However, over time, as I grew to know him, I also came to understand that alongside his deep commitment to his own point of view he also showed a unique sense of acceptance of alternate points of view. His was not the way of petty posturing and vehement dismissal.

Our meetings over the next decades were always fleeting but that did not mean the discussions weren't deep, or fun. We shared a love for good food, lazy walks, and allowing everyone else to speak while we took to blending into the background. It suited us fine that we did not need to fill in when the conversation stalled.

I am not sure when Ronald turned from a colleague I met now and then, to a friend not too many emails away. It was perhaps when we explored Kyiv, wandering through the cavernous metro stations and lamplit streets. Or perhaps when he whisked us up a church tower in his native village simply announcing to the bewildered gatekeeper that we wanted to be close to where the bells toll. The plan was always to find excuses to meet once every few years. Now that is not to be.

At a professional level, what Ronald gave us through his peer reviews, scholarly contributions and sensible advice made the IJCLP a stronger journal invested in open scholarship. We hope to remain a journal true to Ronald's commitment to ensuring that multiple voices find a place at the table when decisions are made about our futures—all our futures, but especially the futures of the marginalized and unaccompanied.

Personal Tribute

Gideon Arulmani

The Promise Foundation

and Chief Editor of the Indian Journal of Career and Livelihood Planning

We first met Ronald Sultana nearly 2 decades ago at a conference in Warsaw. This acquaintance grew over the years to various professional collaborations in several countries and more importantly to a special friendship. When he invited us to his beautiful country, he was our very erudite tour guide. He took us all around Malta through ancient, cobbled streets to megalithic temples to village fairs, stunning views of the ocean and even to the top of a church belfry... while the huge bells were pealing! And of course, we received fascinating historical, political, anthropological and sociological lectures from the professor about all that we saw!

It was during these walks that a deep friendship bloomed between us, characterized by Ronald's genuineness, kindness and deep affection. Ronald was always there for us... someone we could turn to both professionally and personally. He leaves a void that cannot be filled. Perhaps someday there will be acceptance of his passing ... but because of what he leaves behind in our hearts, he will not die.

Farewell dear friend, and although you did not believe in them (!), may flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.