

# IN MEMORY OF RONALD SULTANA



**PROFESSOR RONALD SULTANA (UNIVERSITY OF MALTA) DIED ON FRIDAY 24TH NOVEMBER 2023. IN THIS ARTICLE, HIS FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES, RIE THOMSEN AND TRISTRAM HOOLEY REFLECT ON HIS LIFE AND LEGACY**

**R**onald Sultana was one of career guidance's most important thinkers and writers. After growing up on the island of Malta, he studied career guidance in Reading, his PhD in New Zealand and then became a Fulbright Fellow at Stanford University, before returning to Malta to raise his family. But Ronald could never be pinned down for long and continued to work internationally throughout his life. One of his greatest passions was to support and co-create culturally appropriate forms of career guidance in the Global South.

Ronald's work gave voice to some of the most marginalised and oppressed people and showed us how to strive for the common good. In his recent work he has argued for a postcolonial turn in career guidance, written about the need for career guidance for migrants and in multi-cultural societies, and chided us for using 'dirty words' like

'vulnerability', 'resilience', 'employability', and 'activation' without thinking about what they mean for those to whom they are applied.

Ronald's commitment to social justice gave us confidence that career guidance could escape the criticism of managing oppression and transforming people into good neoliberal citizens. It could be a critical and emancipatory praxis. 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.

Balancing family and work was always a theme in Ronald's life. He treasured family life. In November 2021 he traveled with his wife, Rosaline to receive an honorary doctorate from the Université Laval in Québec, Canada. Rosaline participated in the celebration, creating memories for them both. In his acceptance speech Ronald shared memories of being 13 and meeting a teacher that sparked potential in a student from a modest background feeling misplaced in an elite-school:

'Here I am now, 50 years later, sharing with you a back-to-the-future moment, mindful of Kierkegaard's



perceptive reflection that we can only understand our lives by looking backwards, but that we can only live it forwards. It is only when we look back on our lives that we can join the dots in our narrative, and yet we must make the leap of faith into the unknown, as we strive to shape our destiny, not quite knowing what the future may hold. We are born, we live, we die. We have little if any say on the first and the last of these. It's what happens between the coming and going, between the becoming and the departing, that defines us.'

Ronald encouraged us to speak up about the hard times that we all meet in life. Sharing makes them a little easier and he was always there with a comforting word. His family meant everything to him. Even though he remained active as a scholar, in recent years, he had started to slow down. He prioritised family visits to France and being a grandfather to grandchildren in need of his care. He spoke with pride of his sons and their families. Our thoughts are with his wife Rosaline, his sons Samuel and Daniel, his grandchildren, and all his relatives and friends.

Ronald's passion and ethical approach to research and life 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, and so, we must find the courage to continue Ronald's commitment to solidaric critique in the field of career guidance research, practice and policy.

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