

**Fifth Annual Julius Nyerere Memorial Lecture  
Presented by Pregs Govender in 2008**



**Biography of Pregs Govender**

Pregs Govender is the author of *Love and Courage, A Story of Insubordination*, a personal exploration of an alternative to the politics of hate, greed and fear. In the struggle against apartheid, Pregs served as an activist, teacher and trade unionist. In the union movement she served as National Educator before leading SA's first Workers College. She managed the Women's National Coalition, a coalition through which 2 million rural and urban women shaped SA's transition and impacted on the Constitution. Elected ANC MP in 1994, Pregs initiated SA's gender budgeting, which catalyzed similar initiatives globally. She chaired parliament's Committee on Women, which ensured that 80% of women's legislative priorities were enacted. In 2001 her presentation of this Committee's report on HIV/AIDS, broke the silence in the ANC Caucus caused by the President's position. She was the only MP to register opposition to SA's arms-deal in the 2001 Defence Budget Vote itself and resigned in May 2002. Among other awards, Pregs received the first Ruth First Fellowship for courageous writing and activism. She works locally and globally building an alternative politics through writing, policy and education. She chairs the Independent Panel reviewing SA's Parliament and is a member of the Panel of Eminent Persons tasked with developing a global Human Rights Agenda by December 2008. She has two adult children and lives in Cape Town with her husband and youngest child. She practices yoga to sustain her activism.

## **The 5th Julius Nyerere on the 11 September 2008 Lecture on Lifelong Learning:**

Love and Courage: Inciting Insubordination: Pregs Govender

Thank you to the University of the Western Cape for ensuring that we do not forget a great teacher – Julius Nyerere. I am deeply honoured to present this year's lecture. Thank you to Shirley Walters and all the staff of DLL for making today a gift for each guest here today - with music, poetry and flowers. Thank you to the UWC choir for the music and to Malika Ndlovu for a beautiful poem - may every one of us experience the generosity of spirit that moves you.

In honouring Julius Nyerere today I remembered that the highest form of praise is not to put those we honour on a pedestal – to turn them into saints or gods - but to understand and learn from their example. It is too easy to turn those we respect into saints or gods gilding over the lessons we could learn from their weaknesses and the effort they made to develop themselves.

The best teachers, like Nyerere, know that you do not 'develop people' as if they are empty vessels waiting to be filled with your wisdom or clay to be molded into the image you wish to carve out. The best teachers create the conditions in which people 'develop themselves', in which we recognize our own power and our beauty. Great teachers help us to develop the tools of analysis and understanding but it is through our own efforts that we reach clarity. It is through our own practice of the values they embody that we develop our own commitment to those values.

Those who claim ownership of the world's wealth are a handful of people yet they are able to rule the world and to assert their values of greed, hate and fear as paramount. Directly through the International Financial Institutions such as the International Monetary Bank and the World Bank as well as through their ownership and sponsorship of media and educational institutions this small group has been able to rationalize their actions notwithstanding that these have increased war and conflict and inequality between the obscenely wealthy and the desperately poor. It is not surprising that the UN report Women, War and Peace, draws a clear link between the militarization of society and the increased levels of violence against women on the streets, across borders and in homes. Countries at war and countries emerging from a war reflect the same tragic statistics. From the United States to Iraq, from Zimbabwe to Israel and Palestine, to our own country, women share the same story of gendered violence.

Why is it that those of us who are in the majority across the world - who want peace, who want a better future for all the children of our world – why is it that we are seemingly powerless? What is

it that demobilizes our best efforts? What is it that creeps into our hearts and silences us? What is it that makes us complicit? Why is it that the patriarchal authoritarian values and priorities remain intact? Why do they continue to guide individuals, families, political, economic, religious, educational and media institutions? Why is it that misogyny, the hatred of women and everyone and everything that is defined as female, continues so that those who form the majority of the poorest and those who continue to bear the worst impact of violence and HIV and AIDS are female?

Why is it that the leaders we vote into power do not stand up for the poorest amongst us – not as an act of charity but by changing those policies and practices that push people into poverty and deny them the rights that they worked for and won? Is the elimination of a Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the Congo, by a global alliance between the Belgian, US, UK and Apartheid SA, a sufficient explanation of why they so easily found and replaced him with pliable men of greed. Why can those motivated by the politics of hate, greed and fear manipulate us so easily? Why do we collude even when we are in the majority? What is the process by which we begin to shut our eyes, to close our ears, to seal our lips to the injustices that we have the power to stop?

Why is it that even after we have been able to overthrow colonial rulers or Apartheid's rulers that we do not move from what Nyerere described as 'political democracy to economic democracy'? In the last Julius Nyerere Lecture Ann Hope quoted Nyerere as saying:

“At the World Bank they asked me “How did you fail?” I responded that the British ruled us for 43 years. When they left I took over a country where 85% of the adult population was illiterate; there were two engineers and twelve doctors. When I stepped down in 1988 there was 91% literacy, and nearly every child was in school. We had trained thousands of engineers and doctors and teachers. The per capita income was \$280.

“Ten years later, the per capita income had halved to \$140. Enrolment in school has fallen to 63%, and conditions in health and other social services have deteriorated. In those ten years Tanzania has done everything the IMF and the World Bank wanted. So I asked them: ‘What went wrong?’

What happens to each of us when we step into positions of power wherever that may be – from homes to schools to religious organizations and political institutions? Into institutions whose shape, values and priorities have long before been cast in stone...in the United States today many place their faith in the possibility that Barack Obama will be able to lead the US out of the war it is embroiled in – he can - only if the millions who are working so hard to put him into power,

continue to work to ensure that he is not overwhelmed by the deeply vested interests who determine the priorities for the United States of America, and all too often, for the rest of the world.

How do these vested interests continue to hold us to ransom? What are some of the global economic and trade prescriptions that all our countries are expected to follow that undermine the political, economic and social rights that we won in our Constitutions? Why is it that those chosen to represent the poor and the working class, so often fail to understand the consequences of their decisions or deliberately collude? We all become complicit – through our actions, through our silence.

In 1993 in the National Economic Forum COSATU endorsed GATT - the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs. There are several studies that have documented the impact of this agreement and the speed with which it was implemented on the lives of workers. Huge numbers of the clothing and textile workers, mainly women, (whom I had served as educational officer, in the 80's), lost their jobs. Many of them were forced into the informal economy: piecework, seasonal work, domestic work and sex-work. From work where they were protected by the labour laws that they had fought for; they moved into sectors that were unregulated and unprotected. While peace is the rhetoric, the global trend is reflected in increased military spending...and our country has not been any exception to the rule.

In 1996, SA's new growth, employment and redistribution strategy, Gear, was launched. It aimed at 'a faster fiscal deficit reduction programme ... a reduction in tariffs ... tax incentives to stimulate investment ... an expansion of trade and investment flows in Southern Africa ... flexibility within the collective bargaining system'. It promised: 'a growth rate of 6 per cent per annum and job creation of 400 000 per annum by the year 2000. Gear's target of 400 000 new jobs per annum by 2000 had, till 2007, not been met. The jobs that have been created have been mainly in low-paid, vulnerable and unprotected work, and the numbers of jobs created do not match the increase in the labour force. The result is that unemployment levels as well as the numbers of the 'working poor', particularly women, have increased substantially.

Many developing countries have signed the General Agreement on Trade in Services. GATS commits countries to commercialize and privatize their public services including health, education, water and social welfare. Just before the first democratic elections in 1994 SA signed GATS and a year later our democratic Parliament ratified it. In Senegal, one of the first to privatize water in accordance with the commitment to GATS, studies have shown that women today spend more time finding sources of cleaning water and collecting it than they did before

privatization. And we want to know why it is that maternal mortality and infant mortality rates across our continent are increasing...

There are many other global economic and trade prescriptions which help explain why it is that poverty and HIV/AIDS mortality statistics across the world are not decreasing, despite all the wonderful rhetoric. Most poor and 'middle income' countries across the globe signed bilateral trade agreements with the US in which they have written away their right to import or produce affordable generic medicine. The consequences for countries grappling with the challenge of HIV and AIDS, is a disaster.

Decisions made at the World Trade Organization on issues such as the patenting of seeds by global corporations has had a major negative impact on the ability of small farmers to provide nutritious and safe food for their families and communities. But we are not without power. The International Commission on the Future of Food, for example, has undertaken to 'promote a transformation of the agro-food system through participatory democracy, knowledgeable consumer behaviour, socially responsible enterprises and independent nutritional education on the basis of guidelines for development that contribute to combating the erosion of agricultural biodiversity, chemical and genetic pollution and contamination and global warming of the planet; Work towards the reform of international rules for food and agriculture, especially the regulations and standards of the WTO and the regulations of the FAO Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures that are in conflict with the aforementioned principles; Promote the ratification of international agreements aimed at guaranteeing the supply of high quality raw materials and seeds which are certified "GMO-free" to respect the principle of fair trade between the Northern and Southern parts of the world'

When people feel powerless because they are not able to control their material circumstances, they often search for scapegoats. They tighten control over whoever they may hold power. It is no surprise that women's bodies have become a major battleground, with everyone from priests to husbands and traditional leaders all attempting to assert control. With the global rise of religious fundamentalism we have seen a massive push for Bush's policies of abstinence, opposition to condom use and opposition to the right to reproductive choice (supported by a patriarchy's woman candidate, Sarah Palin). Locally this has taken the form of a 'return' to virginity testing, With HIV infection women and girls are blamed as the source of the disease on the one hand and on the other are raped as the cure. The old dichotomy of the virgin- whore is centre-stage.

So while the women of our country organized to influence the transition and the Constitution, to put in large numbers of women into Parliament and other political structures, to enact and adopt

gender-responsive laws, policies and budgets, to establish institutions aimed at strengthening democracy such as the Constitutional Court, the Human Rights Commission and the Commission for Gender Equality – changes that are heralded globally as best practice in ensuring and furthering commitment to substantive gender equality, we have not seen the change that we worked for.

Against this background, the question is are we able to use our power in the interests of the poorest and most powerless, not simply as voting fodder, but in terms of a real commitment to changing the conditions of exploitation, injustice, inequality and oppression. Can we harness our collective power to transform our world?

In the Chapter entitled Stand Up for our Lives in Love and Courage, A Story of Insubordination, I describe the decision to initiate public hearings by the Joint Monitoring Committee on Women. 'Even though we began at the height of the HIV/AIDS controversy, I was emboldened by the words of Nelson Mandela: 'If 27 years in prison have done anything to us, it is to use the silence of solitude to make us understand how precious words are and how real speech is in its impact upon the way people live and die...'

One of the central features of patriarchal authoritarian systems is the way in which we stop thinking for ourselves and begin to depend on the political leader, the expert, the husband or the priest. One of the most potent ways we can incite insubordination is to rebuild our respect for ourselves and each other – to develop the clarity with which we can make the connections clear – the courage with which we can act to transform the power of hate, greed and fear that paralyses our hearts and our world...

I would like to pause here and conduct an adult education exercise that I used as a COSATU union educator with shop stewards in trade unions and in the Workers College here at UWC in the 80's. It is a simple reflection on power and leadership through the metaphor of the mirror. I would like you first to close your eyes and look in the mirror of yourself - center yourself in the power of love within. Now, open your eyes and turn to the person next to you. In silence, retaining that deep self-respect, recognize the love within him or her. Within the confines of the space you are in, silently move your face and hands, in your most creative and humorous manner. Without communicating with words, your partner is going to mirror whatever you do. Now reverse roles. This simple exercise illustrates the power of both leading and following. We can choose whom to follow and every single one of us is able to lead.

We can redefine power as the power of love within us, even when we may have forgotten it. In *Love and Courage* I quote Mandela in a letter written from Robben Island in which he describes the daily meditation practice through which he kept his heart and soul intact. In the mirror of ourselves we can experience the power of love that can inspire us to develop the qualities that will enable us to fully embody that love. Such power evokes joy and laughter, not the desire to kill... With such power we can evoke the courage to be insubordinate to the dominant power of hate, greed and fear that rules our world and permeates our hearts and minds... that dominates all our institutions, from the political, economic, educational and religious institutions, right through to the family. In the mirror of our own conscience and through being open to being reminded by others when we forget, we can remember who we are and be inspired to the most powerful collective action. Please take a few quiet moments now and fill out the cards you have on how you will use such power in your life and what we can do collectively

I would like to conclude the Nyerere Address lecture by sharing some of my own lifelong learning, that will continue way past my almost half a century. In *Love and Courage, A Story of Insubordination* I share my exploration of and experiments with this alternative power. This extract describes part of that journey:

“The easy verdict about people like me is that we teach best what we most yearn for. Perhaps that is true. I taught others about the power within the self, taught it so well that I sometimes saw magic happen. While I experienced happiness and peace of mind through my meditation and was able to take this into my work and share it with others, I struggled to maintain this power consistently within myself. Perhaps it was true that I was throwing my energy into the world and its pain because I was running from my own. But I knew that the simple equation that reduced the hard work itself to the problem was not correct...Early in 2003, shortly before the United States invaded Iraq, I accepted an invitation to join a mission to Iraq to listen to the testimonies of women. In Baghdad we heard a woman whose son had died of leukemia -- sanctions had blocked the supply of essential medicine. She cried bitterly as she spoke. ‘I don’t want your tears,’ she said to us. ‘Take my voice and spread it in the whole world. I want to hear the echo of what you do.’ The message is the same from the women of Zimbabwe, of Palestine and Israel, of Sri Lanka, from across our country. Use your power, use your position, use your access – wherever you are – assert your power of love and courage. Thank you.

