

Julius Nyerere Lecture on Lifelong Learning: Popular Education: Inspiring Activism and Education



Julius Nyerere Lecture on Lifelong Learning: Popular Education: Inspiring Activism and Education, Thursday 30 October 12h00 – 14h30 at UWC's Senate Hall

Featuring: **Jana Natya Manch** (The People's Theatre Group), also known as *Janam* (Birth). Janam has created original plays for the past 40 years; they have performed more than 8000 times in over 150 towns and cities of India, using public spaces and educating and engaging their audiences in discussions around issues of common concern. Janam is on its first tour of South Africa. They will perform '*Enough is Enough*'. A play based on the personal narratives of industrial workers in and around Delhi, gathered by the actors. The play is a juxtaposition of hilarious, over-the-top farce with deadly serious, quietly assertive docu-drama on the work conditions of workers. Through testimonies of real workers, we learn about issues that confront them, such as low wages, long hours of work, inadequate safety measures and the contract labour system.

How do the conditions of Delhi workers relate to the conditions of workers in South Africa today? How much has changed for workers post-1994 and post-Marikana? How can popular theatre, as a form of popular education, be used to inspire activism and social change?

Don't miss out! ¹

Brief Report on Julius Nyerere Event 30 October 2014

The 11th Nyerere Event was a great success with over 150 people appreciating the Senate Hall transformed with wonderful posters, washing lines of 'struggle T shirts', and music from the 1970s and 80s. The 'theatre in the round' with Jana Natya Manch (Janam), a group of six performers from Delhi, India, mesmerising the interactive audience. We even had Sumangala Damodaran sing an Indian / SA struggle song (she happened to be in town as part of the Mayihlome-Aahwaan Indian/ SA musical dialogue). There was a lovely mix of older and younger activists/ scholars present.

¹ Downloaded from <http://www.populareducation.co.za/content/reminder-julius-nyerere-lecture-lifelong-learning-popular-education-inspiring-activism-and> (line is aborted?)

The topic was *Popular Education: Inspiring education and activism*. The event was coordinated by Professors Shirley Walters and Astrid Von Kotze of the Traditions of Popular Education Research Project within the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL). This project is supported by the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (IHSS) and UWC to uncover the history of popular education in South Africa in order to bring these traditions to the attention of those thinking about community learning centres / colleges which are mentioned in the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training. As part of the project an active website and Facebook page are populated www.populareducation.co.za – this site was also visible for participants to get a feel for the interactive site; and they were invited to contribute and keep in touch with one another through this site.

Shirley Walters stated that “twenty years after the first democratic elections, there are at least 300 community protests per year in South Africa. People are protesting poor service delivery, lack of access to basic facilities such as water and school text books; crime, violence against women and children etc. We know from media reports that protests throughout the country have become an everyday occurrence, but unfortunately, often they only bring short term attention to the appalling living conditions of communities. When a new media focus occurs, the plight of communities is once again relegated to obscurity”.

She continued, “Historically, in the 1970s and 1980s particularly, many of the anti-apartheid organisations developed a very strong tradition of popular education. However since democracy, it has, understandably, lost momentum. Popular education begins with the belief that the injustices and inequalities in society are the root cause of many of the social problems in our country. Popular education begins with identifying the most critical social problems, for example lack of decent toilets, facing a community. It initiates critical analysis of the problems, educates about the underlying causes, and promotes strategic action for change. It always begins with participants’ everyday lives and builds on existing knowledge and skills. For example, in the harsh realities of many communities most women have intimate knowledge of violence having personally experienced abuse – yet few make the connection between their own experience, that of other women and contextual forces. In dialogue, they learn to analyse critically the causes of gender-based violence. Once they have generated a deeper understanding of how unequal gender relations are maintained, and for whose benefit, they are better equipped to think strategically about how to lever individual and collective changes”.

Professor Astrid Von Kotze elaborated on the tensions and contradictions that are apparent in the popular education research findings; she emphasised the importance of popular education for building active and democratic citizens today. She then introduced Janam who have been performing since 1973, with over 8000 performances in villages and towns across India. And then Janam performed the play *Enough is Enough*, which is about the appalling working conditions of the majority of Indian workers. This was followed by participants discussing the links between Indian and South African working conditions (which are many, with the tragedy at Marikana being used to illustrate this); also the role of popular theatre was discussed within popular education. The event ‘walked the talk’ of popular education and participants continued with their animated discussions over an informal lunch.

In the two weeks Janam is in South Africa, they are performing in several communities in greater Cape Town. It was a lively, entertaining, and provocative event which was in the spirit of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, first president of independent Tanzania. He advocated for self-reliance as a cornerstone of an African Socialism where people are actively engaged in managing their daily lives. The annual Nyerere event is an important occasion in the university's calendar as it encourages alternative perspectives and voices on adult and lifelong learning to be debated and discussed.²

² Downloaded from: DLL/News/Pages/Brief-Report-on-Julius-Nyerere-Event-30-October-2014.aspx#.VFtkHFfueVM