

https://dspace.org/

An exploration of theatre as activism as an anti-homophobia intervention amongst Zimbabweans living in South Africa : a practice led research project of The Trial of the Senior Citizen.

Ndlovu, Bhekilizwe Bernard

2011-05-31
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/9970

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

APPENDIX B- FACILITATOR'S REFLECTIONS

To: Bheki Ndlovu
Fr: Betsi Pendry
Re: The Senior Citizen Dialogues
February 17, 2010

First Bheki thanks(sic) for involving me in *The Trial of the Senior Citizen*, it has been a very satisfying and nourishing experience and to me, as a lover of creating democratic environments and processes, a great example of democracy in action. It is also a great example of there not needing to be a separation between theatre wanting to be great theatre as well as a vehicle that can reflect and engage with critical social issues in a way that gives the audience an opportunity to go new places, emotionally as well as a group of citizens engaging with critical political and cultural questions. It was a nice example of the "audience" being able to form itself anew, as not just passive recipients of theatre, but as Citizen Characters, helping to shape the value, form and meaning of the play. It was adventurous, risky, (on multiple levels) and a wonderful expression of the captivating energy of live theatre, its collaborative nature and its challenges. We saw on many levels, through your commitment to dialogue, exploration and collaboration, how the sum was greater than all the whole of the component parts.

My comments are going to be limited to the dialogues I facilitated, 4 in total (sic). I am going to write about them as a whole, not chronologically or discreetly, because to me they represent one whole conversation, not 4 discreet ones.

I thought the dialogues represented 7 main points, 1) the responses to the very specific issues of the play, gay rights in Zimbabwe, 2) the question of how, given the cultural and legal norms of Zim, does one raise the issue of the rights of gay people and then from there begin to fight for them, and the role of citizens, the Constitution and government within that, 3) the relationship of Human Rights norms as represented by the UNDHR to Zimbabwe, (and other countries) that for many do not recognize Gay people or their rights as a part of their culture, 4, is(sic) gay Rights an important issue to address given the nature of the other problems, poverty, good governance,(sic) etc., so why the play on this, not on the other issues too, as in good governance, and in many different forms,(sic) 5, how can ordinary people be more involved in the political and cultural processes of their country (how does culture change?),6, the relationship, and mechanism for mediating minority rights and majority rights and 7, what is the role of Africans in solving their own problems and who is recognized as African, is it a racial identity, a cultural one, historical, geographic ?

To me each dialogue reflected some interesting challenges for Human Rights, and gay rights in particular, in the Southern African context. The audience also reflected what I think is pretty representative of the social, cultural and political history, tensions and landscape of the region. This is what made it especially valuable to me.

Questions such as: Are Human Rights a western construct being imposed on Africa? Is homosexuality European by nature, and not African, and if one thinks that, then how does one understand African gay people? Is there a hierarchy of rights, such that civil and political rights (which have mostly been defended in the west, freedom of expression, the rights of political prisoners, etc, which dominated during the cold war era) less "important" than economic and social rights, (which during the cold war is how Communist countries countered the debate with the west). Are civil and political rights and economic and social rights destined to be at cross purposes and can they really be "indivisible"? What is the relationship between economic development and the ability to realize rights (are there more rights in SA because it is richer? (sic) because there was a different and more expansive view in the Constitution making process , because of the influence, history and power of white people ?) Why more people are interested in FIFA, and probably know more about it, than in human rights, and how come FIFA is probably more powerful than the UN? (Not sure what that really means but that was an interesting line of thinking), Is Justice selective? How come the Big Fish, as in Bush and Blair are never taken to court, it is always the smaller fish, is the International Criminal Court therefore biased and less effective?(sic) (this to me was fascinating, because it might show that people are unaware that there have been Big Fish prosecuted, or that in the absence of Bush and Blair being prosecuted, other prosecution are less meaningful.) Another question that did not come up but I think has value is that the jury is a jury of the defendants peers, to me there is a lot of room to raise what it means to be a "peer" in the political – democratic- human rights sense, as it raises the question of citizenship, accountability, responsibility, collectivity and what makes one accountable to others.

I think the dialogues gave people an opportunity to ask questions, to wonder, to express opinions, (both positive and negative) and to listen to others, for me, I was trying to ask philosophical questions to help people see not only that they think, but how they have come to think what they think, and how they can shape their own thinking/belief processes.

In regards to developing the play I think it could benefit from talking with some lawyers, so some of the legal procedures, etc, are clearer and maybe more challenging for the audience I regards to what Justice is, not just the mechanisms of it, and I think there could be a TV screen, with clips of a reporter and interviews with people about the case, to help bring the audience into the play, knowing where it is, what some of the cutting edge issues might be and some views from around the world, so that the audience sees itself as a part of a world political dialogue, not just the one in the theatre. (sic)