

Chapter One:

Introduction, background and context

1.1 Introduction

This study explores the state of gender transformation and the role of trade unions in post-apartheid workplaces. The study looks at how women and the men are using these gender structures to transform gender dynamics within masculinised spaces and more specially trade unions. By exploring how the gender structures work within NUMSA as the focus of the study, this research tries to argue that in union organising, race is still principle and the main unifier between female and male trade unionists. As a result, women fail to organise amongst themselves as they see gender issues as secondary to the issues that affect the collective; such as employment protection, wage issues and racial discrimination in the workplace. Consequently, gender structures will not be utilised to their full potential as the women themselves fail to organise around issues that concern them specifically. And more than this, the women are in actual fact not supportive of each other as colleagues and potential leaders; promulgating what the participants in my study title *Pull Her Down Syndrome* - which hinders the participation and growth of women within unions. This study aims to further illustrate how in contrast, masculinity is re-shaped within male dominated unions such as NUMSA where male shop stewards are more involved in the creation of female shop stewards within the union, subsequently increasing female representation within trade union leadership. Moreover, this shift in gender relations is permeating into society as more husbands are supportive of their wives becoming shop stewards. They are more willing to assist at home to alleviate the double burden that has hindered many women from becoming union leaders.

My interest in the topic arose from the numerous studies that have been conducted attempting to comprehend the multifaceted interrelationship between women's and men's locations in trade unions. I was particularly interested in NUMSA as it is a male dominated union, which however strives for and recognises the need for equality amongst men and women. Although, there have been copious amounts of literature exploring the complexities of gender within

trade unions, the units of analysis have usually been located within the European context and perspective where the trade unions have been occupied by white males in blue collar jobs (Ledwith and Colgan, 2002). Thus, the most exciting part of this research is that it explores black masculinised trade unions that are slowly transforming to accommodate a more diverse workforce, as especially more women are entering industries unionised by NUMSA. More than adding new ideas, this study is centred on adding to the existing body of literature on gender and South African trade unions in order to analyse how far we have come in the last twenty two years in promulgating gender equality.

This research also explored the following broad questions:

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of female unionists of gender transformation in NUMSA?
2. What are NUMSA gender transformation strategies and are they changing the dominant gender politics?
3. What are the challenges that women unionist face in their union and workplace (regarding gender transformation) and what are their responses to such challenges?

1.2 Background and context

Where previously jobs in South Africa were dominated by men, in the 1940's this began to change as the labour force had altered as a result of many immigrant Africans, migrants and women who resided in urban areas, had undertaken a vigorous exodus into towns and when it came to choosing a job there was a biased preference amongst them all for labouring in the manufacturing industry (Forrest, 2005). However, in the 1970's there was a noticeable and steady growth in black female labour in the metals and manufacturing industry, where in 1988 women working in the metal and mining industry accounted for 3 per cent of the entire workforce (Forrest, 2005). However, it seems women have always had a tough time operating within these masculinised workspaces, as the work has continuously been described as arduous, repetitive and boisterous. Exacerbating the situation even more is the fact that their employers did not observe safety regulations and no safety equipment was provided such as gloves, earplugs and overalls to better the situation for them (Forrest, 2005). They were also overworked and underpaid and at times denied of their overtime remuneration; additionally

facing dismissed without any justification and at times dissolution of employment contract due to pregnancy was often the reason in the women's case. Women furthermore, were the lowest earners and received lower remuneration than their male colleagues doing the same job (Forrest, 2005). Such reasons were the main motivations as to why the female members had decided to join NUMSA at its formation, although there had been other trade unions prior such as MAWU, MICCWU, NAAWU and UMMAWOSA; after the merging of all these four unions, NUMSA was the biggest and therefore seemingly most influential as it amalgamated five unions into one in 1987. Although NUMSA resolved to fight against all inequality and discrimination experienced by women at home, work, union and in society at its founding congress in 1987, they stated that: "We, the members of National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, firmly commit ourselves to a united South Africa, free of oppression and economic exploitation"- there was a need for gender to be a standalone and as such a "Resolution on Women Workers" was formulated at the inaugural Congress of NUMSA in May 1987, which encompassed a vow to never stop fighting "for childcare and family facilities to meet workers' needs and make it easier for workers to combine work and family responsibilities" (Forrest, 2005: 57).

A number of activist women were inspired by this resolution and prepared a "National Women's Seminar" to advance demands that could be put forth along with the union's "Living Wage Campaign". And such a National Women Workers Committee (NWWC) was founded in 1988 which promulgated childcare demands in two key areas: to begin with, "a demand for ten days paid childcare leave per annum was proffered in order to deal with such exigencies as" meetings with teachers, sick children and other issues associated with one's children. Secondly, there was a demand for the establishment of childcare facilities at the workplaces provided by employers as the NWWC elucidated,

"Working women worry a lot about the problem of childcare. There are not enough crèches. Often child-minders are old women who may not care properly for so many children. Added to this child care is expensive and women's wages are low."(Forrest, 2005: 328)

NUMSA has made significant gains since 1987; however "NUMSA acknowledges that 'gender' plays a big role in influencing the involvement of women in society, in the workplace and in the union". Its gender and women's resolutions since that founding

congress spell out ways in which all the challenges... can be overcome so as to achieve its long term vision of a society free of oppression and economic exploitation” (NUMSA Policy Resolutions, 1987- 2012). “NUMSA as a Marxist-Leninist inspired socialist trade union that men and women are born equal, but oppressive and exploitative societies teach boys to pretend that they are superior to girls and girls to pretend that they are inferior to boys; in order for society to oppress women” 1st Deputy president of NUMSA. With this statement they point to capitalism as the centre of all unequal gender division, even within the union. However, she also highlights the serious issue of gender socialisation that perpetuates the subordination of women. This union commits itself to help in creating an egalitarian South African society and promulgate equality as stipulated in their principles and policies. NUMSA (2013) states that they want to ensure “that women are given jobs that are traditionally held by men if they are skilled enough to do them and furthermore, women must be paid equally for doing the same job as men”. How far has NUMSA come to achieving this, from the experiences and perceptions of both men and women, these are the questions that this research report tried to unpack and elucidate.

At its National Gender Conference in 2011 NUMSA (2014) had again resolved to fight all unequal and discriminatory treatment of women at work, society and in the union so that women and men could have equal status in all facets of life. As one of the biggest and most influential working class trade unions in South Africa, it is a union that contributed to changing the political landscape of South Africa; a progressive union at the forefront of current issues such as the climate change and alternatives of green energy. Devan Pillay (2014: 22) states that “although other South African labour movements have been slow to respond to such issues, in recent years NUMSA has been at the forefront asking serious questions about the country’s green economy approach”. From the literature read however, NUMSA by its own admission “acknowledges that the status of women workers both in society and in the union environment is not equal to men” (NUMSA: 2012) - with only 13% female members, 10% in the national executive committee and 17% as national office bearers. The challenge of gender transformation is central to the transformation of labour movement structures and practices. Generally, the metal industry was male-dominated, and only recently have women entered this sector. A survey conducted in 2009 (NUMSA News, 2010) within the engineering sector uncovered that in terms of employment equity not much has changed, out of 33 000 female employees: only 4,3% of higher level management is

female, as compared to the all-industry average of 17, 8%. “At the skilled technical level, women represent 11, 1% against the all-industry average of 39, and 3%”. It is challenging to retain and attract female engineers, who comprise 30% of the work force in the sector, where one in ten South African engineers are women. The survey also indicates that only a few women in senior management received training in 2008. Only 4, 1% of female managers received training, against the all-industry average of 33, 3% (NUMSA News, 2012). This in itself produces a further obstacle for women to enter this sector and occupy traditionally male-dominated positions. Various authors such as Acker (1990) explains that trade unions are not spaces that are immune to gender neutrality, they essentially perpetuate the division of labour from society and espouse it, women do enter trade unions but as (Puwar, 2004) space invaders, people who do not belong and therefore will constantly have to accept that trade unions are masculinised, thus they accommodate and tolerate the body and presence of the male. Cockburn (Ledwith, 2012) explains that in various countries, a brotherhood amongst male unionists is seemingly preserved within trade unions. These observations are based on the notion of “exclusionary” practices (Ledwith, 2012) found in trade unions, painting them as patriarchal institutions that perpetuate gender inequality. This for me then implies that “though trade unions purport to fight against discrimination and inequality in the workplace, they can be seen to be also propagating it as shown by the low numbers in the top echelons of these organisations...” (Tsomondo, 2010: 1).

1.3 The research report layout:

Chapter one is the introduction that succinctly outlines the aims and objectives of the research, supplemented by the background and context to give relevance to the study.

Chapter two captures the theoretical framework and literature review. Succinctly this chapter covers the debates and discourse that emanate from within the feminist framework covering concepts such as gendered organisations, patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. The literature review particularly examines and unpacks the scholarship surrounding the participation of women within unions internationally and most significantly in South Africa. Furthermore, by examining the debates of gender and trade unions are explored to unpack the relevance of gender structures and how these structures play vital and complex roles in promulgating women's specific gender interests and sexual differences.

Chapter three is the methodology. This chapter discusses the research approach and methods used to collect and analyse the data. It also details the actual research experiences and the study's limitations.

Chapter four examines how the gender transformation structures are working within these two factories and most importantly how are they being utilised by women to enhance their won individual needs within the union.

Chapter five discusses the findings on the gendered nature of workplaces that try to discriminate, exploit or subordinate women's voices and highlight their assumed physical displacement within masculinised spaces using the narratives of Azania, Kefentse and Ntombi as points of departure.

Chapter six succinctly explores a neglected part of trade union literature surrounding the question of how trade union female shop stewards are spotted, groomed or capacitated to encourage active involvement within the union and how female shop stewards are sustained without buckling under the pressure.

Chapter seven offers the conclusions and recommendations for possible advancement of gender relations, for promotion of gender equality and for sustained gender transformation within NUMSA.

Chapter Two

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, literature on the gendered nature of the family, society and the economy will be discussed, focus on South African trade unions and more specifically NUMSA. The discussion aims at revealing the experiences of black female trade unionists from previous literature on the topic of gender transformation. Firstly, the discussion is based on feminist theoretical framework that examines theories and concepts such as patriarchy, gendered organisations, intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity that explain the processes of discrimination and subordination of women within society, the workplace and the trade unions. Thereafter, the literature review contains a critical summation of scholarly work on recent and relevant literature on themes such as gender transformation strategies, the roles women play within trade unions, more especially how trade unions are re-shaping themselves to retain and attract female trade unionists.

2.2 Patriarchy, gender regimes, intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity

In trying to unpack the issues of gender within trade unions, it was most suited that this research be conducted utilising the feminist lens. According to Cock and Luxton (2013: 116) “Feminism is both an intellectual project and a political movement, so its theoretical debates are also political and strategic”. It is the tendency of feminists to be connected based on their commitment to challenge the oppression of women, whilst also coming from diverse political and theoretical backgrounds which obscure the assumed unity of feminist theory. Highlighting the reality those various ‘feminisms’ do exist. For example, existentialist feminism, African feminism, radical feminism, black feminist thought feminism, liberal and the like. However, simply put by Bell Hooks (2000) in her seminal work *Feminism is for everyone: Passion for politics*, “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.” An explanation which is purposefully devoid of painting the male figure as the enemy, Hooks (2000) explicates that framing the problem of gender around sexism, links the ambitions of feminists directly to the nucleus of the matter. The implication of this

definition centres on the idea that sexist thinking and action are to be problematised as they can be promulgated by anyone; irrespective of gender, age, race, nationality and so forth. It is also a definition that is wide enough to comprise of an understanding of structural sexism. “To understand feminism it implies one has to necessarily understand sexism” (Hooks, 2000: 1).

However, most feminist analyses of patriarchy illustrate how the power relations of gender structures create favourable conditions for the subordination of women and the dominance of men. Patriarchy in Weber’s (Cock and Luxton, 2013) use of the term was based on the ideal of the patriarch- the dominant male figure who rules over the economic production of the household, family, or society. Similarly, Hartmann (1981 cited by Cock and Luxton, 2013: 129) delineates patriarchy as “men’s control of women’s labour power in terms of both their sexuality and their access to resources. “With his contribution Millet (1977) adds that patriarchy is the main mechanism utilised to divide society and this division is realised through the nuclear family. The Marxian perspective of female subordination is linked to the economic base, where capitalism ultra-exploits the unpaid reproductive labour performed within the private domestic sphere by the woman. The uneven dissemination of resources and wealth is viewed as the source of domination and sexual subjugation which is an aspect of class subjugation (Beasley, 1999:60). Concurring with this argument, Barrett (1988) suggests that the oppression of women by men in society is a consequence of the oppression of workers by capital and class oppression is central in society as it shapes gender oppression. Hartmann (cited in Walby, 1990: 25) in an opposing view claims “that patriarchy pre-dates capitalism and that this expropriation of woman’s labour is not new and distinctive to capitalist societies and hence cannot be reduced to it”.

Cockburn (1981) takes this argument further by declaring that without taking into account the complexities of sex and gender the experience of class will remain perpetually misunderstood. In order to resolve such a problem she thus, amalgamates a socialist-feminist understanding of sex/gender, with a Marxist inquiry of class. She further asserts that it is not adequate to view sex/gender categories as an unintended consequence of class processes (Secombe, 1974; Zaretsky, 1976). In asserting the claim that capital’s exploitation of cheap labour provided by women is resisted by the working class man, neglects the socio-political

advantages accumulated by men of various classes, based on women's extensive historical subordination (Cockburn, 1983).

2.3 The family and gender socialisation

The family, as the aorta of patriarchy, is where the supremacy of the male is instilled and submission of the women is learned. The existentialist French feminist, author and philosopher, Simone De Beauvoir (1949) uses the term "other" throughout her magnum opus *The Second Sex* to analyse and denote the female's secondary status in patriarchal societies. De Beauvoir (1949) claims that woman's inferiority in society is not a consequence of class oppression or even of innate disparities between the two genders; but a consequence of the disparities of how a man and a woman are socialised; simply put "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De Beauvoir, 1949: 301). De Beauvoir (1949) highlights the reality that the supremacy of males is not innate nor destined, but subsequently trained and reinforced at every level of human development. De Beauvoir (1949) asserts that men acquire and internalise their power and control over the female body. Much in the same way, women are not born colourless, passive or immanent beings. To an extent, she is socialised to internalise that real women must personify these traits. Overtly or covertly, she is trained to believe that the negation of her real self is the way in which she can attain contentment and acceptance (De Beauvoir, 1949).

Socialising boys to be dominant and women to be submissive is usually the basis for patriarchy to manufacture a gender-based division of labour restricting women to specific types of jobs in the domestic sphere; to a point where even when they escape the private sphere they are relegated in care work, cleaning and cooking which are viewed as inferior by society. The term immanence by De Beauvoir (1949) is used to further this understanding, as immanence describes the historical realm that women are imprisoned in: a restricted domain where women are stagnant, passive, inward and saturated in themselves. Contrastingly, men engage in skilled work which is viewed as superior "whilst they are not expected to share in the domestic work" (Chafetz 1991: 74). Transcendence describes the opposing counterpart as: powerful, creative, active, productive, outwardly protruding into the external universe. The dichotomous interaction of immanence and transcendence is something that should be

experienced by every living being according to De Beauvoir (1949); historically however, the male has eschewed the female of the transcendent role. De Beauvoir (1949) delicately and intricately details the female's "situation", illustrating how females are forced to abdicate their right to existential transcendence and to accept the monotony of a limited life. For the female, there is no breaking out of this imprisonment but through the male, which even then has no promise of success to transcendence. As the male is occupied by activities, projects and accomplishments and the female just have the male (De Beauvoir, 1949).

2.4 Gendered organisations

Recently however, the term patriarchy has tended to give way to the concept of gender regimes, by looking to Sylvia Walby who offers six interrelated units of analysis from which she claims the structures of patriarchy function to oppress dominate and exploit women. They are the household; paid work; state; male violence; heterosexual relations and culture (1990, 1997: 6). However, these are neither rigid, nor common and the shape they take will be dependent on interrelated structures of history, social relations, culture, economics and politics. Feminist analysis has also effaced the illusion of gender neutrality and the belief that organisations, particularly trade unions are asexual.

According to Joan Acker (1990), gendering within organisational spaces happens in various ways. Primarily, through the state, labour market structures, gender based divisions in work, power, physical locations and family. For example gendering takes place in interactions amongst women and men, where relationships of dominance and submission, strengthen gender divisions. Thus, organisations, whilst appearing gender neutral have a “gendered substructure” reproduced through organisational activities, Acker (1990) infers that organisations are severely entrenched in gendered processes and the only solution is a radical transformation of organisations to create a truly egalitarian space especially within unions for women; agreeing with, Healy and Kirton (2000) who have also brought gender back into mainstream debate. They say that the female population can challenge male oligarchic leadership, though oligarchic predispositions guarantee that gendered transformation is evolutionary rather than transformative, deepening “gender deficit”.

Furthermore, according to the theory of “gendered organisations”, as explained by Acker (1990), Britton (2000), and Ely and Meyerson (2000), work organisations are not gender

neutral; gender is a fundamental part of how companies function. Companies reproduce gender by recruiting women and men for different jobs and placing these jobs at different spots in the job hierarchy. Companies promote normative expectations and social interaction that reinforce this division that result in inequality between men and women in terms of working conditions, pay and power, a position that will be further explored within chapter five. Furthermore, this theory of gendered organisations, the gendered division of labour, power and pay within companies rests on some underlying assumptions that family and work are separate spheres, that women are engaged more in the former sphere while men are engaged more in the latter and that paid work should always come first, especially for men (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2000; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). These assumptions reinforce women's lower status in companies; they also set the stage for active fatherhood to be invisible at work and make it difficult for a new norm of shared parenthood to become established.

2.5 Race, class and gender

Nirmal Puwar's 2004 book *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* examines how women and minorities are entering spaces entrenched in white male power at an increasing rate. These spaces symbolise white male meaning and history and as a result these spaces are exclusive to one type of body that rightfully occupy this space. But "what happens when those embodied differently come to occupy spaces rarely occupied by them?" (Puwar 2004: 141), they transform into space invaders- bodies that invade and disrupt the racialised and genderised positions within organisations and more specifically in trade unions. Relating to a similar argument, MacAdam's (1992: 1213 cited by Tshoedi, 2008) claims "that [the] lived experience of gender, wherein beliefs and ideas about femaleness and maleness are ingrained in the social structure in many different ways, produces differences between women and men's social life experiences". The consequence is a complicated system of opportunities and limitations that strongly mould the experiences that women and men can have (MacAdam, 1992 cited by Tshoedi, 2008). Because the research centred around black female experiences, the lens provided by black feminist thought, was necessary in emphasising the concept of *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1989) or the intrinsic role that race, class, and gender (Collins, 1986) play within the lives of black women. Intersectionality as a concept is not an abstract idea, but rather a way of describing several oppressions that the

black female is exposed to. Crenshaw (1989) utilises the analogy below, referencing an intersection or crossroad, to solidify the concept:

Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. . . . But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm.

However, Shireen Hassim (1991: 68) suggests in her paper, *Gender, Social Location and Feminist Politics in South Africa*, suggests that gender, race and class constitute a component of a singular identity, which at a political level prioritise the black female's racial oppression. The use of the concept of the triple oppression "becomes a way of identifying a political constituency, rather than a means of understanding the specificity of women's oppression in South Africa". The concept of the triple oppression is consequently to take account of the black female's additional burden. These feminist theorists ensure to contextualise and problematise their location within white Eurocentric feminism that seeks to colonise and even suggest that woman in developing nations are victims, helpless, weak and devoid of gender consciousness. What they overlook is the reality that women in general and their circumstances are dissimilar. Women will be empowered or disempowered in various places at various times, for example some of the women within the study felt empowered when they spoke up for themselves against their employer, but disempowered when their colleagues would berate them for *ukudelela umlungu* (being disrespectful to the white boss). In trying to exist in the aftermath of colonial rule, the very first freedom to acquire is not located in gender equality, but in the undoing of decades long political, economic, societal and cultural oppression of Africans by colonialists (Hassim, 2004). More than anything these theories reassert the agency of women, leaving the determinist theories of patriarchy behind because in

“postcolonial countries the notion of patriarchy has been unhelpful as it fails to account for the particular intersections between class, race and colonial forms of domination, and the oppression of women” (Hassim, 2004: 2), whilst also however acknowledging that although women's situations constrain their actions, they do not however, determine them (De Beauvoir, 1949). From Tshoaedi's 2008 seminal piece, there is an understanding acquired after reading her work that women, especially African women are strong; they exhibit leadership capabilities and they are aware of their oppression by both the white and black man during Apartheid, but they focus on singular issues at one time. For example, they cannot fight against the pass system imposed by the Apartheid system that will limit their work freedoms and power, whilst fighting their male counterparts as well. They strategically fought against the Apartheid system at the forefronts side by side with their male counterparts (Tshoaedi, 2008).

2.6 Hegemonic masculinity

The scholarship of masculinity studies has made significant contributions to a research agenda that had predominantly accepted without in-depth analysis or examination, the unquestionable objective truth of male domination. Masculinity studies seek a further analysis of the assumed male norm. Connell (1995) as a pioneer of masculinity studies took this challenge upon herself to reconceptualise and invigorate the ideas surrounding masculinity. Having covered the same groundwork as Walby's six gender regimes- Connell (1995) had inclusively utilised Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony; a cultural aspect by which groups sustain and claim a dominant position in social life. From that analysis Connell (1995) conceptualised hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a concept used by various gender scholars as the foundation for arguing against the assumption of a predetermined dominating masculinity which exists only for the subordination of women. The limitations of patriarchy as an analytical tool are underlined here; patriarchy is too narrow in its formulation- whereas the conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity highlights that patriarchy assumed to embody a single type of masculinity which is predominant within society (Morrel, Jewkes and Lindegger, 2012). This concept weakens the straightforward dualistic understanding of male/ female and rigid gender roles. It reveals numerous and ever-changing gender identities of femininities and masculinities, acknowledging that men are not

homogenous; male identity is no more a unifying factor as female identity and in essence according to (Franzway, 2002: 13) “not all men, or masculinities, are dominant”. Anthropologists Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfame (2003) accept the reality of dominant types of masculinity, but suggest that the control of one type of masculinity is 'never totally comprehensive' neither does it 'ever completely control subordinates'. Morrel (2012: 12) having advanced and contextualised Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity by suggesting that there was not one type of dominant masculinity, but that in South Africa there existed three. A white masculinity which was represented in the political and economic dominance of the white ruling class. An African rurally based masculinity that resided in and was perpetuated through indigenous institutions (such as chieftainship and customary law) and finally black masculinity that had emerged in the context of urbanisation (Morrel, 2012).

2.7 The history of South African Trade Unions and women

Trade unions have throughout history had important roles in shaping societies and changing the financial and situational circumstances of many workers for the good, even right here on the African continent. According to Sakhela Buhlungu (2012: 2), trade unions in Africa “are a creation of colonialism”. The formation of trade unions were grounded on “issues of low wages, discrimination, lack of trade union rights for the black/local workers, conditions of service, humiliation, exploitation, among other reasons”. Thus, for Buhlungu (2012) it is easy to understand why the issue of gender during that time was not part of the main concerns. His (Buhlungu, 2012) argument claims that women in Africa began to join unions at a later period and not during their formulation since males were in the world of work, whereas women participated in work at a much later stage.

Iris Berger (2007) in her chapter *Generations of struggle: Trade unions and the roots of feminism 1930–60* highlights on the contrary how many women unionists such as Lucy Twala Mvubelo, Liz Abrahams, Frances Baard and the like; were involved in the formation of unions as early as the 1930's. The beginnings of the 1970s however indicate the materialisation of a strong black labour movement. The lawful acknowledgment of black labour movements came later, after the Wiehahn Commission, following its enquiry into the 1972/3 Durban strikes over wages suggested it to the government- as the industrial relations

in South Africa at the time were categorised as twofold, where white employees were lawfully protected in the workplace, whilst black employees were not.

Malehoko Tshoaedi and Hlengiwe Hlela (2006) in their chapter, *the marginalisation of women unionists during South Africa's democratic transition*, narrate the story of how in the 1970's many more women were involved in joining and mobilising trade unions along with their male counterparts, in order to fight in an organised manner against the capitalist apartheid regime. As Meer (2005: 37) explains, the popular liberation movements, spearheaded by men, were interested in women's participation only because there was a need to increase the number of people participating in the liberation struggle to obliterate "the national and class oppression of black people and workers". When it came to the labour movement however, trade union bargaining power against management depended on their capacity "to sign up 51 per cent of the workers in a work place as paid-up union members" (Meer, 2005: 37). And because female workers made up a significant proportion of the labour force, a majority for the trade unions could only be attained when women were recruited and signed up as members of the trade union. It was thus, important for the unions to recruit and sustain the membership of women workers. Emma Mashinini, founder of SACCAWU; Maggie Magubane, founder of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) and Lydia Kompe, national organiser of Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU, currently recognised as NUMSA) along with numerous other women performed crucial roles in the construction of trade unions in South Africa. It is their significant activism in trade unions that promulgated the involvement of other women in trade union pursuits.

In unison, black men and women aimed at eliminating the discrimination and inequality they experienced within the segregationist society of that time, by relying heavily on racial identity, as a common thread linking their lives and experiences, a notion that has been carried over into the new democratic South Africa as evidenced and explored within the fourth chapter. Diani (1992) explains that although collective identity is about common beliefs and ideals, she cautions against assumptions of homogeneity between the two genders within social movements. Trade unionists may share collective experiences and interests in terms of their race and working class status; but, gender differences can be an intervening factor in their understanding of racial suppression (Diani, 1992), and as a result the thoughts and expectations of their trade union involvement may differ. Although women themselves

are not a homogenous group as suggested by feminists, Munro (2001) claims that it is possible to identify women's multiple identities whilst maintaining that there are homogenous experiences between women that make it possible to identify the various work interests that pertain predominantly to women (Munro, 2001).

This is emphasised by the fact that upon attainment of this democratic society, most women who played significant roles in the trade unions during apartheid revolution, found themselves discarded into administrative or secretarial roles, whilst the men were appointed into decision-making positions (Tshoaedi and Hlela, 2006). In many societies and specifically South Africa, there exists for as long as one can remember a sexual division of labour, which becomes the basis for the gender roles that separate the private and the public sphere. "Gender is the hierarchical division between men and women embedded in both social institutions and social practices" (Masina, 2010: 28) and how gender is enacted within the workplace would be no different in essence. Although, according to Orr (2001) women do escape the household; their labour is characterised by low status; devaluation; earning of low wages- as work performed by women is believed to be an extension of household activities performed within the public economic sphere. Franzway (2001) further adds that trade unions are thus "shaped by sexual politics... [where] men actively exclude women from most high status positions in the occupational system, something that is often justified by reference to women's higher emotional investment in the family" (Franzway, 2001: 2).

Currently, globalisation has altered the design of work and labour both, intra and inter countries and continents; but trade union membership has been in decline in various countries as traditional constituencies have evaporated (Ledwith, 2002; Orr, 2001). Simultaneously however, groups organised around race and ethnicity are redefining societies, disturbing traditional beliefs and defying conventional structures of power (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998 cited by Ledwith and Colgan, 2002: 1); with further young, homosexual and disabled employees also defying the status quo. Cornell and Hartmann (1998 cited by Ledwith and Colgan, 2002: 1) dispute that labour movements have not been willing or capable to identify and take advantage of potential membership of this recent labour. Principal amongst these are women, who at the beginning of the twenty-first century compose half of the world's labour and are varied in terms of sexuality, age, ethnicity and race.

Cobble (1990) states that the feminisation of work and the reorganisation of the family have reshaped the experiences of many men bearing a resemblance to those formerly linked to women. In the new restructured and globally competitive economy, men progressively face economic insecurity; essentially “the decrease in unionisation for men can be traced to the move of work from the heavily unionised male-dominated goods-producing industries to the less unionised service industries” (Mainville and Olineck, 1999; cited by Briskin, 2002: 29). Franzway and Fanow (2009; Cobble, 1990) concur, arguing that the future of trade unions is dependent on its capability to change in order to win the allegiance of women. Thus, the involvement of women in trade unions is an essential precedence “for any union revitalisation effort” (Kirton and Healy, 1999: 45). And this can only happen through the inclusion of women within trade unions that is expressed in multifaceted ways depending on the scholar, with some referring to it as feminising, or feminist organising or a feminist trade union agenda (Cunnison and Stagemen, 1995; Creese, 1995 and Munro, 2001).

Munro (2001) in particular has argued that even though the trade union agenda may not be formally defined within the union, it is a known fact that certain issues will receive preferential treatment as opposed to others, because those in power define the trade union agenda, and those in power usually end up being the male trade unionists. Munro (2001: 457) further elaborates that a majority of union members, along with the women are accepting of the union agenda, which “serves to reinforce the very aspects which are most relevant to women- the gendered labour market, gendered definitions of skills, gendered wage structures, etc.” More than this according to Munro (2001), the manner in which problems or issues are identified and defined by the members is moulded by this union agenda. Creese (1995: 145) suggests then that “defining women’s issues may be essential to get new issues on the agenda”, but this may suggest “that men are the norm and women atypical workers with some select needs that are secondary to the general needs of all workers”. And as such Munro (2001) elucidates, that this occurs because the trade union agenda is engendered in the hierarchal composition of the labour market that serves and prioritises the interests of the male workers which have been articulated as the common working class interests, which then are recognised as detrimental to the interest of the other members within the trade union. Using Robert Michels (1915; cited by Healy and Kirton, 2000: 344) famous “iron law of oligarchy” political theory, it is easy to understand why trade unions as supposed democratic organisations fall into this rhetorical trap. He argued that bureaucracy is a key component

that allows the dominant class to secure their long term domination “through a control over communication and a monopoly of political skills and it gives officials a monopoly of power” (cited by Healy and Kirton, 2000: 344). Kelly and Heery (1994) further highlight how those who try to challenge the leadership and trade union agenda are unsuccessful, as the leaders use their power once elected to eliminate all opposition to their power especially, “outsiders” such as for example women.

Collective bargaining is an arena in which women have experienced marginalisation and exclusion; by trade unions bringing women’s issues to the forefront they are then quite capable of retaining their female membership or even increasing it (Ledwith and Colgan, 2002). Malehoko Tshoaedi’s (2008) seminal work entitled *Activism Roots of Women’s Union: South Africa 1973-2003* documents how historically collective bargaining issues were framed around males colluding in patriarchal practices within the workplace; employers were willing to bargain and compromise only on gender neutral demands; since unions emphasised wages and working conditions, discounting the concerns of maternity leave and equal pay amongst women and men. “Sex discrimination against women was rarely considered among issues to be included in the working conditions” (Ibid: 151). According to the female unionists in Tshoaedi’s (2008) study, the discrimination against and power over women was located in all parts of society. African women suffered chauvinist attitudes from both white and black South African men. Women’s issues or interests as women in the workplace and in the unions were not fully addressed, thus whilst working-class identity was crucial in uniting both African women and men in the mobilisation and organisation of trade unions at their places of work, this identity was not instrumental in mobilising on gender related issues. The common working-class issues articulated within this interest group excluded the collective concerns of women workers (Tshoaedi, 2008).

2.8 Separate structures for women

As such women activists have critiqued the hierarchy and disproportionate division of labour, which they experience within their union positions. Using the radical feminist viewpoint, militant women have begun declaring their gender difference and their own orientation, defining it “as practical, affective and emotional” (Beccalli and Meardi, 2002: 119). Their innovative method rejects ‘equal opportunities’ as an objective and rather planned to alter the

rules and regulations of the game for both genders. The approach was “self-organisation, not proportionality” (Beccalli and Meardi, 2002:119), in essence radical feminists sought to transform the unions, as opposed to finding their positions within them. In the 1980s, women activists Thembi Nabe, Maggie Magubane and Lydia Kompe did the same thing in a less radical form, by creating informal women’s forums from which women questioned the unfair power relations between both genders at the factory floor; the labour movement; the freedom movement and broader society. Briskin (2002) however, says that unions need more gendering; in times when unions face decline there is a need for trade unions to engage in gender mainstreaming in order to avoid the potential peripheralisation or side lining of women’s issues. On the other hand Britwum (2010) argues that the establishment of space for female unionists have in many instances disappointed in transforming male domination (practices and norms) and has forced women to the margin consistently deprived of resources, shifting the responsibility away from trade unions. In debates surrounding the relevance of gender structures, Creese’s (1995: 146) research stresses that women unionists have been involved in meaningful initiatives around representation and reshaping union matters and intensifying the collective bargaining agenda. As a result, unions have altered the way in which they conduct their work and moved towards greater inclusivity and more democratic practices (Briskin, 1998). Female unionists are not a “...weak subordinated female population” (Bozzoli, cited in Tshoedi, 2008: 12) that are devoid of gender consciousness or the potential to develop it. Britwum (2010: 1) suggests that “the consensus however, is that the potential of union gender democracy initiatives to transform patriarchal union structures depends on the presence of a critical core of women with sufficient consciousness to take advantage of the space generated”.

However, there was and continues to be an important role that these spaces played as illuminated by Elizabeth Thabitha, “for us to meet as women, it was because of the concerns we had as a group and we felt that it was important to take action if things were to change” (Interview 2004, cited in Tshoedi, 200: 156). The primary aim of women’s forums was to grow the number of women unionists within the trade unions so as to permeate leadership composition. Creating gender consciousness between women workers was the solution to realising their aims. Women unionists assumed that this would empower women to attain power in decision-making positions, which would be valuable in getting women’s struggles on the programme of the labour movement. These entailed talks about the different kinds of oppression African women were subjected to (Rain Chiya, Interview 2004 cited by Tshoedi,

2008: 156). Arguing against the importance that was often put on apartheid oppression, the forums stress the oppression of women by men in a variety of areas in their lives. For example, the triple oppression concept was examined in these forums. This concept correlated the struggle that women contested from three different positions – as blacks, as women and as a component of the working class.

South Africa has become a multi-cultural society with individuals from various backgrounds, thus for academics such as Tshoaedi (2008) there is a belief that trade unions are required to portray themselves as eager to react to the prospects and difficulties that democratic South Africa presents. Trade union agendas for the growth of membership in South Africa are acknowledging this diversity by focusing on the recruitment and organisation of women, young workers, casual workers and targeting particular non-unionised jobs e.g. precarious work (Naidoo, 1999 cited by Tshoaedi, 2008). However, one of the problems currently facing unions in recruiting and organising women is the under-representation of women in leadership positions in South African unions. The South Africa Employment Equity Commission (2007-2008: 44) report for 2008 indicates that only 17.7% of senior management positions are held by women. This provokes some crucial questions for South African labour movements, given the roles historically played by women in trade union development.

Previously females have held leadership positions as shop stewards, presidents such as Faith Modise or even general secretaries such Emma Mashinini; Maggie Magubane and Thembi Nabe. The structure of labour movements in the formative years was less hierarchical and consequently union rankings were not connected much with power and influence. But, with the expansion and triumphs of the unions in the beginnings of the 1980s, they achieved power within the workplace and for broader societal emancipation. However, because the characteristics of power did not match to the prevailing stereotypes of the female gender, “there were those who felt that they could not be led by a woman” (Patricia Khumalo, Interview 2004 cited by Tshoaedi: 2008: 150). Maggie Magubane, who was the general secretary of Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union in 1975, claims that:

“Kwa-Zulu Natal was especially difficult because the male workers felt that you could not do certain things as a woman, that a woman cannot address

them. It was more the tradition that 'a woman cannot stand in front of us and tell us what to do'..." (Maggie Magubane, Interview 2004 cited by Tshoaedi: 2008: 150).

Emma Mashinini who was also general secretary of SACCAWU, supports this claim. Even though she left the labour movement in pursuit of other interests, her choice was also affected "by the power struggles within the labour movement that challenged women's leadership roles" (Emma Mashinini, Interview 2005 cited by Tshoaedi: 2008: 151). The problem for these women leaders did not come from dealing with the men in the unions, but dealing with employers as well. Women were not seen as capable of standing up for workers on vital issues such as working conditions or income. Kirton and Healy (2008) recognised three core reasons that restrained women from trade union leadership. First, they contended that women face tribulation as a result of the gendered character of domestic work that is undervalued and unpaid. Second, the order of union activities is likely to inconvenience women. Kirton and Healy (ibid) further argue that the order of women's work limits the opportunities to advance the capabilities and skills to become leaders. Britwum (2010) uncovered what she labelled a *gender democracy deficit* in unions, arguing that there are few women in unions as constituents and also as leaders because of these restraints. She concluded that unions as social institutions replicate the socially gendered inequities and need organisational and structural alteration that welcomes and nurtures the gendered requirements of their constituents.

There has been a central debate in most trade union literature about the proposition of designating posts for women within the unions- based on the recognition that women face difficult structural and systemic constraints such as late night union meetings, sexist language and behaviour (Britwum, 2010). As a result many unions have introduced quota systems for visible women representation in union leadership. In South Africa, various trade unions have acquired their quota system from the political system which conserves a part of the leadership to represent women (NALEDI, 2011). Challengers of this radical gender transformation strategy, dispute that quotas are anti-democratic since those selected are not actually representative of the membership (Ledwith and Colgan, 2002). A related argument is founded on the ideology of union solidarity and unity, contesting that quotas are divisive (Ibid). Some

women unionists are against quota systems as well, according to them quotas reinforce the idea that women are not equal to men and therefore need to be “put” into positions and cannot get there on merit (NUMSA, 2011); however in the sixth chapter of this research we will see how quotas are actually working effectively to help in creating female shop stewards. Phillips (1991 cited in Munro, 1999: 6) argument warns us against examining leadership and promulgation of women’s concerns as naturally linked. He says that “getting more women elected may be necessary to the inclusion of women’s concerns on the political agenda but, that it is not sufficient to ensure it”.

Kgoali, Magubane, Makutu, Ndzuta, Shefer and Hurt (1992: 6) explain that “it is rare to find a woman who is active and married”. Some women find that their gender roles right now have to change in order to securely accomplish this objective and that is why they make personal sacrifices by choosing to remain single in order to devote their entire being to the labour movement. In many societies and specifically South Africa, there exists for as long as one can remember a sexual division of labour, which becomes the basis for the gender roles that separate the private and the public sphere and because the family can be seen as a hindrance to the participation of women within unions, female unionists cannot attend late night meetings or travel, as their children and husband expect her to cook and clean for them (Orr, 2001). The dialogue within the women’s forums ranged from experiences in the workplace, in their private relationships and in the family, to those in their society or communities, including those within the trade union organisations. According to Veronica Mesatywa (Interview 2004 cited by Tshoaedi, 2008), women used to talk about the responsibilities they faced in the household and the refusal of their partners to assist with household chores or childcare illustrating how women used to cope within the unions. Public institutions and organisations such as trade unions are entrenched in the patriarchal societal framework and thus are “shaped by sexual politics... [where] men actively exclude women from most high status positions in the occupational system, something that is often justified by reference to women’s higher emotional investment in the family” (Franzway, 2001: 2). From this viewpoint Franzway (2001) deduces that prejudiced male attitudes and dogmatic male culture within the trade union also contribute significantly in the subordination and marginalisation of women in labour movements. This will be explored in the fourth chapter of the empirical findings.

2.9 Conclusion

Trade unions as institutions that promote democracy and equality, have not come far however in promulgating the issues of gender inequality, as illustrated within this chapter. Although trade unions have been known to fight for workers' rights and better working conditions, their masculinised structure has always been exclusionary to women. This is exhibited in the way women were discarded by unions in South Africa and demoted to secretarial positions after; democracy had been attained in South Africa (Tshoaedi, 2008). Although they played a significant role in the mobilisation and establishment of the labour movement, fighting alongside their male counterparts against the white apartheid government; they no longer became useful in leadership roles when the trade unions had gained power and influence. Some authors such as Acker (2001) blame the negligence on the idea that organisations are gendered and organised around an *abstract body*, which is in essence the body of the male. When a *space invader* (Puwar, 2004), such as the woman enters these masculinised spaces, trade unions and workspaces, they will be excluded by the gendered oligarchy that controls the unions activities.

The literature further illustrates how women as a result of the triple burden have tried and failed to establish structures that will cater to their specific needs as mothers and spouses; as it has been discovered that it is usually these roles that prevent them from being active within the union. However, scholars such as Franzway (2001) acknowledge that these roles are in collusion with patriarchal structure of society that purposefully relegates women to the domestic sphere and even when they escape, because of their assumed gender roles, they take those activities with them into the public sphere. De Beauvoir (1949) gives the explanation that women are taught to be immanent and seek transcendence from a man and as such women will never seek to take leadership roles within the union when they feel that the man can speak on their behalf for example.

Although, the women that were looked at in this literature proved that they could and would stand up against the men and they could acknowledge that there was a gender deficit (Britwum, 2010) within the union. Quotas have been ways that the women tried to establish legitimised methods to ensure that their voices were heard, however again because of the established trade union agenda (Munro, 2001) that paints the illusion of being democracy these cries have not gone far in improving the lives of female trade unionists. And as such this chapter will be the grounds I will utilise to examine the gender transformation strategies

of NUMSA and see how far they have come to promulgating gender issues and gender awareness within the workplace.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The focus of the study is to uncover the subjective experiences of gender transformation for the female NUMSA members at the two factories in the East Rand. Through conducting a qualitative research study that focused on the narratives of the informants, I was able intricately get their perspectives and ideas on what gender transformation means to them. This chapter discusses the methods employed to explore the research question, as well as the limitations and ethical issues faced when conducting the research.

3.2 Study Design

The research design is based on qualitative research methodology principles based on the interpretative approach. This approach is useful in understanding and interpreting informant's perspectives, which an important component of my research. The strength of these methods lie in the richness and depth of the data collected and furthermore, qualitative method will allow the participants to give answers that will hopefully uncover how they see the world, as opposed to how the researcher may view it (Neuman, 1995; Bernard, 2000). The research study also relied on both primary and secondary data. Such data included textbooks, online news articles and local and global statistical reports, journals, unions' policies and resolutions as well as interviews.

Qualitative methodology was chosen because it is not fascinated with examining frequency and statistics. It is usually enamoured by meaning formation and lending weight to interviewees' understandings of their social world. Here the concern is not to calculate the total number of men and women displaying some traits but to appreciate how these women and men involved give clarification into the meanings of such experiences and perceptions.

The fundamental reason for choosing this methodology is because, it allows the researcher to obtain subjective views from all the informants, making available the human experience and subjective perceptions that would occasionally not be found in quantitative research design. Assisting in discovering whether the data found in data would correlate with the reality of what is actually happening in society; since, "qualitative methods are resources that

researchers use in observing and making sense of aspects of social life” (Miller and Dingwall, 1997: 3). And as such when talking about “experience” for the purpose of this research, it is referred to as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) drew on Dewey’s two criteria of experience to develop a narrative view of experience. Drawing on Dewey’s first criterion, interaction, they wrote, “People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context.” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 2). They drew on Dewey’s second criterion, continuity, as they explained:

Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum - the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future – each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 2)

Building on Dewey’s theory of experience and taking a narrative turn, they defined narrative inquiry as:

...a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, overtime, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 20)

Interviews are advantageous because they allow for adaptability, which permit a skilful interviewer to “follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which a questionnaire can never do” (Bell, 1993: 100). On the other side of the coin the interviewer is put at a disadvantage- for one, interviews are time-consuming and interviews are highly subjective techniques (Ibid) that can incur bias. Beneficially, interviews “can yield rich material and can often put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses” (Ibid).

There are many ways in which interviews can be conducted, however the three most popular are participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. Each method is specifically appropriate for acquiring a specific kind of data. Participant observation is suited for obtaining data on behaviours that organically occur in their natural contexts. Focus groups are successful in producing data on the cultural standards of a group and in producing wide-ranging outlines of issues to the cultural groups or subgroups represented. In-depth interviews are ideal for gathering data on individuals' personal experiences, histories and perspectives, predominantly when delicate topics are being investigated (Legard and Keegan, 2003: 138-149).

For this research in particular where I am trying to discover subjective experiences and perceptions of gender in trade unions I find that in-depth interviews will give me the rich and detailed data that I will need. More especially if they are unstructured in-depth interviews, as "unstructured interviews... in skilled hands do, produce a wealth of valuable data" (Bell, 1999: 93). The questions asked during the interview will have to be open-ended to accommodate the unstructured nature of the interview. Neuman (1995: 373) says that "researchers ask open-ended questions to capture how the person understands his or her own past". Primary methods of data collection encompassed the qualitative field interview. The main method for generating data was in-depth, face-to-face, open-ended interviews conducted at participating factories which predominantly had NUMSA members. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the information supplied to me by my informants the names of their workplaces. However, I will differentiate by location, one factory was in Nigel and the other was in Springs, located east of Johannesburg in Ekurhuleni. The entire sampling frame consisted of twenty participants; ranging in ages from twenty five to early fifties.

During a period of three months I interviewed one union official and six women from the Nigel factory who were ordinary members of the union. Two female shop stewards from the Springs factory were interviewed in addition to six ordinary female workers from the same workplace. Although, I had planned to conduct two focus groups with five males in each, I was unable to do such due to time constraints as work schedules were clashing with the male workers. Therefore, I had to be flexible within the field. I still needed the male voice within the union to give me the position of that particular perspective and as such, I found that the

most available male participants were the shop stewards, whom I was already utilising as my key informants to help me gather individuals to participate within my research. And as such, decided to conduct in-depth unstructured interviews with five male shop stewards. Even though I had tried to get other shop stewards to interview, this was a nearly impossible mission.

Lack of clear communication on availability of dates and times was a constant issue with the one from Nigel. Workplace bureaucracy had blocked my interaction with one shop steward from a Benoni factory whom I had been communicating with for three months. He had advised me to contact the HR manager of plant manager to discuss access to the factory. I had contacted both these individuals and after much back and forth, the plant manager informed me that I could return at a later stage however, currently they were too busy to accommodate my research needs which would disrupt factory work. This was true as most of my interviews conducted already were located at the workplace; however the reason appeared to emanate from a deeper source such as perhaps a fear of “NUMSA researcher” probing within their workplace.

Secondary data collection was important to this study for two reasons. Firstly, it is important for analysing the history of black women’s involvements within trade unions by examining books compiled by COSATU female trade unionists, journals and autobiographies of female trade unionists. Secondly information such as online news articles obtained from NUMSA’s website and NUMSA newspaper, are important because they assist in understanding and analysing the articulation of gender within NUMSA currently.

The sampling method utilised to obtain the target population in the field was purposive. More specifically, quota sampling, were one chooses, whilst designing the study, how many people with which qualities to incorporate as participants. Qualities might include race, class, gender, age, gender, class, profession or marital status. The criterion I choose to select participants permitted me to focus the insight of informants pertaining to the research topic. I had desired to utilise quota sampling in obtaining the workplace at which I was to conduct my interviews; however the sites selected where on the basis of which places NUMSA headquarters had given me permission to conduct my research at. I was given three choices based on the proximity of the location, fair number of female workers and concentration of

NUMSA membership. My options were a factory in Benoni, Nigel and Springs. Because of reasons previously stated, I could only conduct my research at two of the suggested research sites.

I analysed my data utilising narrative analysis, which in the social sciences “refers to a family of approaches to diverse kinds of texts, which have in common a storied form” (Reiss, 2005: 1) - as governments and countries create ideal historical narratives, so do organisations, social movements, ethnic/racial groups, scientists, and individuals in stories of experience. The essence of what makes such miscellaneous texts “narrative” “is sequence and consequence: events are selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (Reiss, 2005: 1). The narrator’s interpretation of the world and the way they experience it; leads them at times down a path of creating moral tales of how they think the world ought to be. Narratives epitomise storied approaches individuals use to know and to communicate (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997). In my research I primarily focussed on the narratives of personal experience of black female trade unionists.

Embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalised, and the muted, personal narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities, and ‘get a life’ by telling and writing their stories (Langellier, 2001: 700).

I utilised thematic analysis to analyse my data findings as I was more interested in what was being said by the informants as opposed to how it was said. “A (unacknowledged) philosophy of language underpins the approach: language is a direct and unambiguous route to meaning” (Reiss, 2005: 2). Similarly to grounded theorists, researchers gather numerous narratives and inductively generate conceptual categories from the findings. A list of narratives are then organised into themes, mostly with case studies offering illustration as applied within my research. In my study to understand the experiences and narratives of female trade unionists in a trade union such as NUMSA that emphasises gender transformation- I identified a general cultural story and analysed how it shaped the intimate experiences of female trade

unionists – key moments in their working careers where they were forced to stand up for themselves against management, were habitually told as episodes.

3.3 Access

In the early stages of writing my research proposal, I had quickly ensured to gain access to NUMSA via a gender co-ordinator at NUMSA Headquarter. I thought this would prevent any access problems I might face within the future; however this was not to be the case. I soon came to discover that union bureaucracy, coupled with the suspicious was to delay the research for a long time. Twenty fourteen came to be a revolutionary year for NUMSA. They refused to campaign for the African National Congress, as the tripartite partner linked by their relation to COSATU, to rule the country for another term as they believed the ANC had completely usurped the capitalist ideals and in fact they were ones (Steyn, 2014: Mail and Guardian), leading them to allude to potentially starting their own communist party, “United Front”. They organised another economically paralysing four week strike for South Africa in July. However, more dramatic than this, was the expulsion of NUMSA from COSATU.

Thus, one can imagine that my research study was not on anyone’s top agenda and during that extremely tense period of time, the political suspicion was high and so any type of “research” within NUMSA would be treated with suspicion because of the timing and political tension. I had already made a key informant whom I felt would lead me to the research sites, he was also quite wary of my research, but after I explained my intentions he was more than willing to assist. I emailed him all necessary documents containing pertinent information about my research, but because of the many disruptive events, a response was delayed. After constant email harassment and unexpected visits to the headquarters, the gender co-ordinator explained that there was nothing that he could do as the superiors had to approve the research before anything could happen. I voiced my frustrations to my supervisor who gave me contacts of someone she knew within the union who would be another possible key informant. After contacting this particular informant, I was sent to another person, a regional gender co-ordinator who helped me greatly in getting the permission and even the research sites which I was to go to. After months of back and forth and even at times doubting my research, I was extremely relieved.

3.4 Field interview procedure

In the first stages of contacting key informants i.e. shop stewards, I provided background information regarding the study, the reasons for the interview, as well as my particulars. Before entering the field to conduct face-to-face interviews, I would contact the shop stewards and organise a time and date of when the interviews would take place. I would also request the number of people I desired to interview and specified the gender. Upon arrival I was informed at most times by the key informants that I would have identify as a NUMSA researcher to anyone who enquired, not a student from the University of the Witwatersrand. If I was a simple postgraduate researcher from the University of the Witwatersrand, I would have no authority to conduct interviews at this site, as I would be interrupting workers from their duties and it was not for “official union matters”.

Participation was voluntary and anonymity of informant’s identity was guaranteed. When I started my field work I noticed the intense nature of how serious this aspect was, especially within the factory environment where the workers covertly suggested the implications of being seen being interviewed by me. In trying to establish rapport with my interviewees, I always tried to start off with a joke whilst explaining the participant information sheet and the documents they had to sign. As soon as they laughed they felt much more at ease and would loosen up a bit in order to ask me questions about the purpose of my research and who would hear the interview and mainly how the results could be accessed. The first questions which were about their “life story”, essentially inquiring about where they grew up and the family dynamics, there was there were sparks of excitement in the way they relayed their childhood memories with me.

However, there was a constant problem before most of the interviews started, the shop stewards would go and fetch the informants, whilst I waited in the shop stewards office. The problem here is that at one of the research sites the shop stewards offices were located in the same building as management offices and so the interviewees (the women more often than men) would come into the room apprehensively and with worried looks on their faces as they assumed I was part of management and they had been called in because of something wrong that had happened. But more particularly at the Nigel factory, the women were dubious as they assumed I was there to interview them about the ominous retrenchment that was

rumoured to occur in the following two months. As they would sit down I would introduce myself in a gregarious manner and explain to them the details of the research; always emphasising that the research had no implications on their job security and the company specifically would have no access to the primary data and so they need not worry.

The factory in Springs had an underlying air of perpetual suspicion attached to it, because as I soon came to find out, workers were constantly at the shop stewards office because of the issues workers had with management. Spatially, I observed the racial divide at both factories; however it was more prominent at the Springs factory. This busyness caused constant disruption to the interview process, as people were frequently knocking on the office door enquiring about where this particular shop steward was and such the interviewee and I would have to pause, until that particular person had left. Picking up the “conversation” where we had left off was always a challenge in the beginning, because I wanted to remain professional and establish researcher/ researched distance as, I was viewing the interview process from the neo-positivist position of “search-and discovery mission”, (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). But as I became more comfortable with conducting interviews, I became more flexible.

As the researcher I had the “outsider within” status (Collins, 1991: 37) - black female- therefore the female informants would find it easy to converse with me. However, there are a number of potential difficulties with this type of thinking. Ramazanoglu (1989) highlights this, by pointing to the fact that women are separated by other many differentiated factors and this can disturb the research process. Firstly, while all women share significant experiences as articulated by their gender, it is not enough to supersede the structural barriers of class, race, status, age and disability in different forms of understanding and expression. In this I understood that my postgraduate student status would play a role in creating and emphasising power dynamics- however, I did not anticipate that my age would be the big factor that I discovered it was. This was evident with the women as they said that they felt intimidated that I had achieved “so much” and was “so intelligent” at such a young age as I was completing my masters research.

Majority of them asked me questions about my background, showing particular interest to my field of study and asking how one enrolls for such courses. In the traditional sense of conducting research answering these questions would break the boundaries of the professional relationship a researcher and their subject should have. But Ann Oakley (1981) states that the interviewer ought to invest in the research relationship her personal identity by sharing experience and knowledge; answering interviewees' questions and when asked to, provide support. This she labelled reciprocity (Ibid). The understanding that the subject is not passive containers that can recite stored documentations of their lives when asked carefully crafted questions by the researcher. This perspective dismisses the idea "of the vessel waiting to be tapped in favour of the notion that the subject's interpretive capabilities must be activated, stimulated and cultivated" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997; 122). It was a challenge at first because, I felt that the data would be compromised if I became too personal, however I found that by creating a situated friendship (Douglas, 1985: 118) with the informant, "the quality of the interaction" determined "the quality of the findings".

I was intimidated by the prospect of conducting focus groups with men. As in African culture I knew that men do not take well to younger women inquiring about their lives and more especially why they lived that way, which was basically questioning their culture and beliefs. Or perhaps those were my own biases about NUMSA men that depicted them with the same chauvinist and misogynist image. My age, gender and educational background would play big factor in how the focus groups would go and I felt that I was already at a disadvantage as a result of those factors. However, because of time constraints within the field I decided that would replace the focus groups with individual interviews with shop stewards as mentioned previously. The men were less impressed by my education, but I found that they opened up more quickly and were friendlier and helpful, sometimes even before I established rapport.

The interviews were primarily conducted in my mother tongue, which was isiZulu or any Nguni language my interviewees knew, but I also catered to those who wanted to speak English as well. From this perspective, language is regarded as a process of communion (Douglas, 1985) between researcher and interviewee and as such, choosing the correct language is essential to calming the interviewees and eliciting genuine answers. I preferred to conduct interviews in isiZulu, because I wanted the answers to be as authentic as possible. Rubin and Rubin (1995: 173) add that the utilisation "of the interviewee's native language is

potentially a powerful route to acceptance and an indicator of one's 'willingness to enter into the world of the interviewees'". Tsang (1998: 511) concurs with this statement explaining that "communicating in the respondent's language is of paramount importance" for three main reasons: it permits informants to "fully express themselves"; it creates "good rapport"; and allows the researcher to interpret the informant's accounts with "cultural understanding". Furthermore, I identify as an African researcher living in Africa and thus if possible, I should utilise my own advantage within the field.

Other peripheral information was documented as field notes during the interviews and when I would arrive or leaving the premises of the research site, such what I noticed about the interaction between male and female members within the corridors, offices etc; the interaction between shop stewards and members and most significantly for me the interaction between the management and shop stewards (management). The field notes also contained my own feelings, thoughts and desires for the interviews- mainly after they had occurred. Reflecting on the power dynamics, the body language and information I observed and harvested from the interviews.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Whenever scholars undertake research on individuals, the welfare of the participants being researched needs to be of primal importance. This means that research question researchers aim to answer is perpetually of lesser value than the protection of participants. Consequently this means if a decision must be taken between harming a participant and harming the research, the research has to be forfeited (Family Health International, 8). Fortunately for this research, I found that I did not experience any ethical issues, as I was not working with a vulnerable group and ensured job security via confidentiality agreement with my informants.

To ensure that their participation was voluntary and based on full informed consent, I provided them with consent forms to sign. These forms contained details of what was expected of the informant, it further explained simply the goals of research and also included stipulations which outlined the standard components of consent such as: "a. provision of

appropriate information, b. participant's competence and understanding, c. voluntariness in participating and freedom to decline or withdraw after the study has started and d. formalisation of the consent, usually in writing" (Wassenaar, 2006: 72).

3.6 Limitation of the study

The limitations of this study's methodology lie in the lack of variation when it comes to the number of research sites where I could have conducted my research, but as prior mentioned time constraints and accessibility to the area where the primary factors in deciding where I was to conduct my research. I do still feel that I could have benefited by having had the focus groups, but as also prior mentioned the time schedules between the informants always seemed to clash. However, more significant than this is the fact that I could not conduct my research all around South Africa, NUMSA is the biggest union possibly in Africa and I do acknowledge that in the different provinces and all the various cultural compositions could have played a major role in the results I could have harvested from the interviewees.

Chapter Four:

Structures for Transformation in NUMSA

4.1 Introduction

According to Ledwith and Colgan (2002: 20) “transformation involves a wider range of structural and cultural organisational change such as extensive and innovative diversity structures and a reallocation of union resources, whereby representing the interests of diversity groupings becomes central to campaigning and collective bargaining agendas”. And as such this chapter will utilise the narrative of the union official to explain and examine the gender transformation strategies that exist within NUMSA. This chapter will also argue two things broadly. Firstly, because women are not knowledgeable of the gender transformation strategies, they fail to make use of them to promulgate their own issues as women. This argument is complicated however, by the shop stewards who say that women lack interest in union matters, until they have experienced a grievance at work.

Furthermore, there is an understanding that even if women knew about the gender transformation structures they would not make use of them deliberately, because they say that women are not supportive of each other. The second argument lies in the reality that gender transformation structures are only known to and visible to shop stewards and others in general leadership positions and because the gender structures are meant to create and promote gender consciousness- putting individuals who in essence are already gender conscious into these structures is essentially ineffective in permeating gender consciousness to shop floor, which is where most discrimination against women is acted out. As according to Ledwith and Colgan (2002) transformative strategies form the basis of empowerment for minority groups within the union and could be a site utilised to contest the exclusionary practices of trade unions and to carry out change.

4.2 NUMSA's gender agenda

Upon entering post-Apartheid South Africa, reconciliation and the promulgation of non-racialism have been prioritised so as to prevent the cruel domination of one group over another. Many mechanisms have been utilised to achieve these goals such as open dialogue e.g. TRC trials and changing of legislature to accommodate the diverse nature of the South African population. These new laws are trying to promulgate equality and correcting the injustices of the past. Women have been most prioritised in these laws which include Black Economic Empowerment and Employment Equity Act laws and Basic Conditions of Employment Act, which encourage companies to hire black women as; the government understands that structurally they were the most oppressed group based not only on their race or class, but also their gender (Hassim, 2004). Many organisations have recognised a need for reform, most significantly trade unions that understand that as more women enter the job market and continue to dominate it, their strategies for attracting members have to appeal to females as well, who carry their roles as mothers and role as wife into the workplace. In general, NUMSA as a progressive union is seen to promulgate the issues of gender equality passionately on paper and in public trade union discourse (NUMSA News, 2012), but two decades later, how far have they come to realising this vision? The starting point was simply in questioning those in leadership what in fact a gender structure was. The female union official explained:

Okay let me start by where we were in the 1980's, in the 80's because we do not have many women within the organisation the union decided to have a women's structure, its one structure that would look at education for women it would also look at what are the challenges women face on a daily basis over and above what the union itself does, but have a special focus on the issues and challenges that are confronted with on a daily basis so we decided to have a women's committee. But then after a while we realised that this women's committee is not working because it is only women in this committee it's like you put women in a corner, they vomit and they complain to themselves about their own issues and the people who are mostly responsible for the challenges women are confronted with on a daily basis, are somewhere else and they don't even hear what you are complaining about. Then we decided to have a

gender structure. In the early 90s, to bring in men so that they could also have a proper understanding of the challenges that women are facing. (Union official 2015 interview).

According to Paul, the youngest shop steward at the Springs factory:

I think it is about quality, we recognise women as people too. Because there were places which were assumed to be for males only such as izintshimbi (steel division of the company); stereotyping women as belonging in teaching or nursing professions or basically in the kitchens. So by introducing gender [structures] we are opening the doors of freedom for them to become artisans or machine operators. So you see with that we are saying, if I can utilise a grinding machine, you, Nokwanda can also do it. So by having this structure it makes it more comfortable for women to say that I can also work in the steel division, many opportunities open up and it is no longer saying that a woman cooks only. (Paul interview 2015)

Another view of a gender structure was provided by the local gender co-ordinator Jabu (interview 2014):

The gender structure is a support system; we are fighting against the oppression of women. You can find women who are having domestic issues, but they do not have confidantes to share that information with and say that no I am being mistreated in this way and I need help. So now we are building that confidence of people knowing that people can come to us and be free in knowing that we will fight for their rights as a woman. But it is not only women that are oppressed. Men themselves are oppressed or abused, but men do not want to report these issues because if they say that at my house I am being treated like this and men also need people to talk to who can assist me with the problem I have. So that is why I say [gender] is a two way street; it is not only directed to females, but males as well, it looks at both sides.

In bringing gender back to fore these structures seem to understand all the important aspects of what a woman deals with in performing her gender. Firstly gender is not about females,

although the automatic assumption is always built to single out the female. As the gender coordinator said it is a two way street that is utilised by both men and women in supporting the idea of gender equality and eradicating the oppression women experience at home, work and larger society. NUMSA has however acknowledged that not much change has occurred, but with their NUMSA policy resolutions (2012) they have tried to map out a path that would direct them to get there. However, these gender structures currently have also made significant gains; NUMSA women were the first to bring the condition of six months paid leave to the fore, which is now a permanent fixture in South Africa's labour laws (Forrest, 2014). COSATU (Horn, 1989) women also rallied for issues of reproductive health highlighting the plight of the working class woman, who because of being overworked at home and at work had no time to attend to her health and as such it was found that many women were dying from cervical cancer. COSATU women more especially again, NUMSA women were at the fore in promulgating the idea that women should be given one day off to go get checked.

At the Springs factory I actually discovered that initiative was still being practiced, however it was also in conjunction with sexual awareness campaigns that would happen at work to encourage the workers to also test for HIV and Aids (Mandla, 2014). Whereas, the Nigel factory itself actually had a reproductive health clinic on site that deals with many aspects of gender based health issues, including prevention and pregnancy and maternity care. Gender structures have also historically been involved in trying to alter the fabric of society's misconceptions about gender roles and more especially fatherhood by advocating paternal leave and trying to radicalise the role of the father to stay at home with the child for nine months, because the mother has carried the child for nine months as well (NUMSA office bearer). However, for now paternal leave has been won, but the three day paternal leave may not be much; however it says something about the importance of a father's role in the nurturing and care of the child. Alan Hosking (2006: 216) in her chapter *men, work and parenting* tries to move the lens away from patriarchy and the assumption that men themselves do want to be involved in the development of their children but says that “the workplace which men have inhabited over the past half-century has not been at all sympathetic to the responsibilities of working fathers. Home and childcare have been constructed as female activities and the notion of the father has been largely to economic

provision for the family” and essentially men have been negated the necessary support and opportunity to build healthy families, without forfeiting their careers.

However, according to Mandla (interview, 2014) some women actually do not see the benefit of this because the men will sit in the townships and view that time as a three day holiday to recuperate and drink with friends, instead of actually helping out. At national level gender structures were implemented to accommodate women as mothers, as the gender co-ordinator explains that sometimes when one is attending a meeting away, a shop steward can call and ask that a child minder be around to look after her child whilst she is attending conferences during the day and at night she can take over again. This practice ensures to break the patriarchal mould that assumes that the *abstract body* (Acker, 1990) is the one that functions and exists in masculinised organisations. By breaking the myth of gender neutrality, it can be understood that women and men inherently have different needs, although this may seem like a propagation of gender inequality by forcing the woman to take her child to a conference whilst the husband could look after them. But in understanding differences and accommodating them, these organisations allow for "powerful women" (Paul, interview 2014) to transcend within the unions and at work without anything holding them back.

4.3 Women’s demands not union demands?

In my attempts to further identify the gender structures in NUMSA, I explained to all participants what gender structure were and what they were meant to do for women. Both women and men were interested in finding out more, especially that these were spaces that catered for their lives outside the union. I gave examples such as paternity leave and suggesting that men also take leave for nine months to take care of their babies. Most women and men laughed and said that culturally it was impossible and they believed a man could not take care of a baby. But when I asked if it is fair, some took time and thought a while, but eventually all said yes. I also enquired about NUMSA’s desires to alleviate women’s ‘triple burden’, such as offering onsite crèches and counsellors for women who are facing domestic violence in any forms and initiatives to accommodate them on their menstrual days, by advocating for one days menstrual leave. The menstrual leave was the one that received the most attention from the women as something that needed to be attended urgently, as they

found that some days when they would start their periods, their period pains would be extremely painful and as such would affect the way in which they worked. Because menstruation is such a private matter, they would never feel comfortable explaining to the manager or shop steward why they were under performing on that particular day. And so I curiously asked the union official how far they had come in advancing the menstrual leave day, she explained:

We lost that bid because we did not prepare properly. We had a demand that says women must be given at least one day leave for when they have their period. But I think we as the structure we did not caucus properly with the male comrades for them to understand really what's the issue. (Union official 2014)

This brought to light other issues related to union bureaucracy, as I asked her where in actual fact did this demand for a menstrual day come from, she further elaborated:

The demand came from the structure, but when you have a demand in your structure like your national gender meeting, you say before you go to negotiations. The structure would have the meetings and we would talk about what are the challenges that women are facing, what are the challenges? So one of the demands that women says is that this thing when we have our periods it's so difficult you know, some women cannot get out of bed because of how painful it is. We think we should have a demand that says over and above your normal sick leave that you have women must get another extra day for those instances for when they have their periods. Already we one day for when you can go for a pap smear, you get one day leave. It's not from your normal sick leave. So this was one of the demands from the gender structure, but, because the gender structure is a sub-structure. If you sit in the gender structure and these are our demands now you must go to, whether it's your local structure or regional structure and put that demand on the table. You must explain to them it's so important that we have this issue as a demand. So

then the demand comes back to the national bargaining conference where we debate the issues. So unfortunately who ever had to go back to their constitutional structure did not motivate this demand properly why we should have this demand. And so we lost out and because the men said no, we already have a long list of demands we cannot add this one on too. (Union official 2014)

I asked her further, what they as the gender structure were actually prioritising on their list of demands. She further explained:

During the last round of negotiations we had, currently we have three days family responsibility leave that you can take when your child is sick and so forth. There was a demand for paternity leave. Paternity leave is basically when the woman goes into labour, the husband gets three days off, and they wanted an increase in that. Increase in shift allowance, days off for education and training. So coming with this day and we don't even understand what you talking, so it was just shot down. But then when we had the gender meetings, I raised this thing with them. I told them you did not prepare properly for this thing. But it's good to have a structure because in this structure you can especially on a national level you can have all the nine regions. So you can discuss and you can have the same demands that you can sell when you go back to your region, so there are still challenges when it comes to women issues. (Union official 2014)

As was illustrated within the literature review by Munro (2001) women's issues will always be second to the union agenda and the gendered nature of it, will consistently ensure that such issues do not over power the issues that are deemed principle to the working class issues of the union as a whole (Healy and Kirton, 2000). And so one can deduce that the rejection of the menstrual day cannot solely be based on the fact that someone had not prepared properly, but rather on the fact that even though "COSATU has a number of strong gender policies but insufficient action [has been] taken in terms of implementing these. When attempts are made,

real changes are often prevented by the hostility of men and the unchanged patriarchal culture of the trade union movement” (NALEDI, 2006:144 cited by Tsomondo, 201: 15). And as such women and their demands will always seem unreasonable as observed with the rejection of the menstrual leave day as it was believed to be another demand on top of a mountain of demands that women were unreasonable in asking for.

This illustrates that a hegemonic masculinity that *silences and subordinates* exists within this NUMSA. Michael Blake’s 2001 article, *The Mal(e)aise in COSATU*, justifies this point by explaining that South African society is a severely patriarchal and masculinist. He (2001) notes then that within trade unions males will abuse their power and use it to eschew and devalue women’s concerns and contributions. This shows essentially that gender structures exist; albeit at national level primary, but the reasons could be that they are also fighting for existence and importance at the very top were they exist. The union official further explains another problem that is generally experienced within most unions. The negation of women to participate within the bargaining agenda, which she highlights as another barrier that prevents the issues of women being raised by women at bargaining meetings, because yet again when men attend a bargaining meeting with an employer, a demand such as menstrual leave will be the first to be eliminated. She explains:

I think one of the other things that we as a union is fighting with our regions is to have women as part of the bargaining teams so that when you have collected your demands and you have decided that these are the demands that you are going to take to employees and negotiate you like have a team of negotiators. So the challenge that we have is that not many women are part of those teams who are negotiating. So even if you have the demands that would better the lives of women, when it comes to compromising some of these demands, it would be those demands that better the lives of women and so the men would say let’s take out this demand it’s not very important, let’s take out this one. (Union official 2014)

Another big issue that NUMSA gender structure is facing is the fact that the gender structure in itself is not an independent structure that can take decisions on its own without having to attend through union bureaucracy.

The one problem that we have is to have the gender structure be a constitutional structure that can take decisions. So at the moment it is a substructure, it takes its decisions there, but then you must take those decisions to a constitutional structure to adopt it and to make decisions of the organisation. (Union official 2014)

Linda Dickens (1998) solidifies this argument by contesting for more women to be included within the actual negotiation and that their contribution behind the scenes with research and creating bargaining proposals, have actually been shown to have a positive influence in issues of gender equality being encompassed in agreements. Essentially, women's participation within bargaining structures will assist to "develop different agendas from the traditional male worker agendas" (Dickens, 1998: 34). In these ways the presence of women can not only transform the bargaining process, the interpretation and implementation of the claims, but can also help challenge and undermine the prevailing masculinised hegemonic ideologies and practices underpinning collective bargaining.

4.4 Where are the gender structures on the shop floor?

Even with all these problems there have been observed benefits of gender structures or initiatives at the Nigel factory was that they had an onsite reproductive health clinic and most importantly to the women, education opportunities were supplied by the union itself and sometimes they would negotiate with management to fund their members. The women at the Springs factory also had the educational benefits, along with one day leave for annual check-up. They were aware of these utilities but they assumed it was an inherent part of union duties, to ensure that their safety is secured. The union official explains why the lack of gender transformation strategies may be seen as invisible:

The big challenge for us is to have gender structures on the shop floor currently we only have the local structure and the regional structure and the national. But having a gender structure on the shop floor is one of the challenges. So last year what we said to the structure was, we think that

maybe the reason why we do not have gender structures on the shop floor is because, there seems to be a top down approach, like when you develop programmes you develop programmes up there and the programmes might not respond to the challenges that workers are facing on the shop floor, therefore there is no interest on the shop floor to have a structure. Because I am making a simple example, you might focus on HIV/Aids, that's the programme, but on the shop floor the challenge that workers are facing with is substance abuse and therefore I am not interested in HIV/Aids because I'm struggling at home, my son is a drug addict I don't know what to do, now you want to come with HIV/Aids which is not a problem for me now. That's why we said all of you must go back to the shop floor and have meetings with the workers to get a sense what are the issues the workers are confronted with and then we come back and develop a programme on the challenges workers are facing on a daily basis. (Union official 2014).

Those who knew of the gender structures were the shop stewards; even if they did not know the details they still had a vague idea. When I asked for more details, Paul the youngest shop steward, reiterated union gender empowerment rhetoric in its confused form, explaining that gender structures are there because, “we have to be balanced”. This “balanced” perspective highlights a theme that has been recurring within most of my interviews. There is the 50/50 parity philosophy, citing that woman are equal to men and thus should earn the same amount, but should also do the same amount of work. In trying to understand the role of men and women within society and the union in accordance to the 50/50 parity, I am told by Gugulethu (interview, 2014) that:

Men always want to have the last word, you know how men are. And they think everything said by them is right and we women will always be in the background. But that is not happening now. Because siyazi yenzela manje (we are doing it for ourselves).

Essentially, these gender transformation strategies seem to be failing at reaching their targeted population and actually assisting in making women's lives better through dialogue and practical action. And so I asked the union official if they should just not forget about these strategies and give up on them, she explained that:

We are not giving up on the structures. We have done a lot of good work in the organisation apart from the workplace, but also the structural working in communities and so forth, we need to promote gender sensitivity. (Union official 2014)

The informants were asked what they understood gender to refer to and the constant reiteration surrounded the idea of gender equality and referred back to the philosophy of 50/50 parity. According to them, the 50/50 concept meant that women and men are equal in work, society and the union and the consequence of such was equal pay and equal opportunities for things such as promotion at work and being able to run for shop steward. The shop stewards actually encouraged women to study further, advocating for preferential treatment in job posts and some were informally mentored in preparation for potential shop steward positions. The fundamental ideas of these gender structures are actually grasped by the women even though, as uncovered none of them had been part of any gender initiatives such as gender workshops, gender conferences or attending gender schools. It is through their shop stewards that information about gender was sourced. Zoleka (interview 2014) explains however, that there had been a gender structure within the Nigel factory that had died and was slowly being revived, even though they lacked a gender representative at work. This was a baffling revelation, if in reality there are gender structures and according to the Jabu (interview 2014) they are well funded as they are prioritised in the national budget, then what is preventing women from gathering together and discussing their specific gender needs? Zoleka explains how gender structures actually need to be prioritised by the union and the women within the union themselves as without interest and playing a proactive role these structures will not be visible. She explains her story of being proactive in initiating gender related activities at work:

I was involved in gender equality and went on within NUMSA to serve as a gender representative in 2004. I opened the channel for women to get hired,

because women were not getting hired, until a department, fibre glass was opened and then women were hired in greater numbers. And then we tried to mobilise ourselves so that we could protect ourselves and we would not be things of the men. Because to get a promotion, back then you had to do “something” to these men. So when the new recruits would arrive I would address them and say ladies we are here to work we are not here for umjolo (dating), we know where we come from and we have to help each other out. Because, there is a tendency for women to act like damsels in distress when they have to work, for example having to pick up heavy equipment. First you must pick up the equipment and feel how heavy it is; if it is then you may ask for help, but not to say aiaiai I cannot do this from the very beginning. When you come to work you must tell yourself that you are here to work, you must not come with the mentality that this is a man’s job, I cannot do it. This is what they were training us to understand in the gender meetings, that we must do the job and not say that this is a man’s job, because when we say it is a man’s job that is when we are violating our own rights and closing opportunities for ourselves. (Zoleka interview 2014)

How did you initiate the implementation of gender representation? She responded as follows:

There was a change of management and I approached the HR manager named Daphney and I explained what was happening and she understood and agreed to it. This structure is still around, though it had died a bit, it has been revived as of late. However, I am no longer deeply involved within those things. There is this new “gang” of youth that are coming forward and we have to step aside and give them a chance. We saw that we were not being promoted and if you worked here they said there was a ceiling, so you had to work here until retirement. So there was not thing that a woman could enter into carpentry... but now there are plenty even electricians. Here at work they were demarcating. So we were pushing to be put in, but if we were not successful, the employers could say they cannot take you all because of one two three. There is no one that can say they cannot do their job apart from... From the group I was in, the mature, we could see that we needed to push ourselves

because we know where we came from. So we know what we want, what we have gone through we do not want our children to go through. Each and every cent you make you make sure that your child eats, they go to school and get the best education. (Zoleka interview 2014)

Gender consciousness is clearly what pushes women to drive their own issues home, however talks of gender and gender inequality have been happening since the 1980's and more especially since the first COSATU women's conference as highlighted within the literature review. And so to think that gender in all that time has only been highlighted again in 2015 is quite a disturbing reality for two reasons. Women have been infiltrating these industries and as such if gender has not been recognised and only relegated second to issues of wages and work conditions, how do they expect to accommodate people who have been raped? Mothers who have given birth, however their companies have failed to reinstate them? How does a union that relegates women then hope to deal with the realities of women as workers? But according to Jabu there are plans and strategies underway to re-insert gender into the dialogue practically and productively. He explained:

There is going to be a pilot project within companies to try and implement this [gender structures], because it has been such a long time of preaching and saying let's try and do this. But in this year, on the national plan there is that that thing that companies have to try by the first quarter or second quarter to have launched within companies. Perhaps one local [gender structure] has been launched at five or six companies, we are chasing implementation, because for now this year no matter what this has to be implemented. (Jabu interview 2014)

4.4 Gender structures and female leadership

The main priority with gender transformation at these two factories according to the shop stewards is to groom the women for leadership positions. As it is well known that there is a gender deficit (Britwum, 2010) when it comes to leadership positions, some feminist scholars

claim that “the general trend has been a tendency for women to be marginalised as union members and to be absent in union hierarchy and activities. A fact that has been blamed on women’s capacity, gendered division of labour in households, labour market barriers, and union exclusionary practices” (cited in Britwum, 2010: 4). Possibly a part of the struggle for feminists emanates from the way trade unionists are epitomised or embodied in the masculinised culture of the labour movement (Britwum, 2010). Although Mandla (interview 2014), thinks that female shop stewards will play a significant role in opening up the communication between the trade union and female members, the female shop stewards I spoke to contrastingly disagreed; according to them the women there were “shy” to speak about certain things such as domestic abuse issues or sexual harassment or reproductive health issues even with them. So this is not a gender issue perhaps, but fostering open communication within society of certain issues, because cultural (Tshoaedi, 2008) aspects for some women prevent their openness on certain issues. But the role of female shop stewards goes far beyond this, if they will not stand in their own way.

There is, however an underlying feeling that, if the quotas were not put in place, gender would still not be prioritised. In the bid to further solidify this commitment to gender mainstreaming and building women union leaders, NUMSA in its resolutions policy states that by 2015 where applicable all affiliates should have a 50% quota of women at all leadership levels. And furthermore, we must continue to campaign for the election of women as shop stewards and actively work towards the election of women into leadership positions and ensure that gender sensitive people are elected as office bearers (NUMSA policy resolutions, 1987-2012). Although conscientised men are supportive of gender equality, it is important to remember that “women and men share common interests stemming from common needs for money, security of employment and tolerable conditions of work. But women also have distinctive needs and priorities” (Cunnison and Stageman, 1993: 220). In this way one can see that quotas are a vital life line to radicalise the exclusionary brotherhood of masculinised trade unions. The union official (interview 2014) emphasises the importance of quotas by stating that:

Quotas are important because you have to force the union to elect women into union positions and force union in a certain direction and to that we have

women who are capable to lead the organisation and lead workers, but sometimes the will is not there to acknowledge that we do have women who are capable to lead. Because sometimes when I address, especially gender meetings I always make the example of... you know when it comes to elections the male comrades will always agree no, but first we must capacitate women before they can take up these positions, now I ask how you measure the capacity of women in the organisation. How did you come to the conclusion that I do not have the capacity to lead?

The issue of quotas has been highlighted as a highly contested issue in the literature review; however Mandla (interview 2014) gives a different perspective on this issue. He says that it forces them to pick women for the sake of picking and not necessarily harvesting great talent and potential. Mandla (interview 2014) explains that during elections members are encouraged to nominate and vote for female shop stewards, because they have to meet quotas, even if it means electing women for “window dressing”. I asked union official (interview, 2014) about this matter of window dressing and she said:

If you just put a quota there and you do not put measures in place to capacitate women in the union... I do not want to use that word capacitate, really, but in the absence of a better word; if you do not put measures in place to capacitate women in the union then it would become window dressing. So what we are trying to do through the gender structure is looking at training and education for women. But also in other areas, we also have a course that they can do at Wits, we have an agreement with Wits, so we have many women who are studying at Wits. If you decide to elect a woman just for window dressing, it is one of your weaknesses, because then you set up women for failure. You know that that person does not have the capacity to be in that position, but if she has a little support she will be able to grow in that position. If you do not put up those measures in place then, one you are setting those women up for failure and two it is just window dressing and that is what we are trying to avoid (interview 2014)

Although there has been plenty of debate about quotas from men and woman alike claiming that special favours for certain groups may incite divisions within the unions or that quotas are implying that women are not good enough to enter on merit (Tshoaedi, 2008). According to Britwum (2010: 13), in her paper, *Reconciling Class and Patriarchy: Female Unionists and Union Governance in Ghana*, the quota representation and reservations have strongly affected individual women leaders. The female trade union leaders she interviewed observed “that their engagement with their unions constituted a journey in self-discovery, an awakening of individual ability and heightened self-confidence. Women leaders’ access to mainstream union office had broken two myths, male scepticism about female capacity to hold office and female reticence about their ability to succeed as office holders”.

4.5 Conclusion

The structures of gender transformation and how they work within the union have been explored through the in-depth narratives of the informants. Succinctly, it was discovered that these structures did in actual fact exist, but only to a few who knew about them which were the shop stewards predominantly. The problem with finding is that how does the gender structure work to encourage gender consciousness amongst ordinary members when ordinary members are denied access? And so the efficacious nature of these structures only exists to conscientise those who are already gender sensitive. In Tshoaedi’s (2008) research the women choose to get together by themselves, around issues based on their identification as women and mothers. However the women within this study felt as though such things could not occur as the women were not supportive of each other and that limited their solidarity. However, more than anything was the idea that class solidarity usurps the idea of being female first as noted within the fourth chapter concerning Kefentse and Ntombi’s stories. Succinctly, although gender transformation has an important role to play, the gender structures require more visibility to the females and males themselves in order to perpetuate gender consciousness.

Chapter Five: Gendered experiences of masculinised spaces

5.1 Introduction

As prior mentioned within the literature review a growing number of women from the mid 1980's and so forth have started entering into the labour market, quickly saturating the service sector; however we also find that some women are entering spaces which they were previously restricted from, such as the metals, manufacturing and engineering sectors, which are unionised by NUMSA. The masculine culture within the metals and manufacturing industry has also been subliminally inherited by unions that organise in this industry. The infiltration of women within these industries however is starting to challenge that dynamic and forcing the industry and consequently the labour movement to change and accommodate a new and diverse labour force. Even with such, one still finds that these are still gendered spaces that work towards the exclusion of women, succinctly, “gendering occurs in at least five interacting processes that, although analytically distinct, are, in practice, parts of the same reality” Acker (1990: 146). As Acker (1990: 146) further explains an organisation is believed to be gendered when “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine”. This chapter will argue through the narratives of Azania, Kefentse and Ntombi that race is still the primary unifier within amongst trade union members and as such women will not support each other, because there is a need to erase racial discrimination first as opposed to dealing with gender on its own.

5.2 Where is the female toilet: Azania

Azania is a married mother of three, who lives in Kwa-Thema and works as a data capturer at the Springs factory and is above the age of 35. Azania's narrative captures this postulation and illustrates the complexities of gendered spaces. Azania is above the age of 35 married with children and still pursuing her education through the company. In retrospect she is lucky; however she gets luckier when after two years she is promoted to a data capturer in another department. The first day starting her new job she noticed that she is the only female

within that department; however she is a quiet and reserved person- so that idea does not worry tremendously- the issue begins when she has to go to the toilet she realises that there are no female toilets within her department. She enquires to her manager and the manager says that she should go to the male toilets as there are no female toilets within that department, neither in the entire building. She decided to herself that she could never enter the male toilets, as one never knows what might happen, suggesting hesitation for her safety. So she decides to rather walk across to the other building which is two buildings behind hers, where she can relieve herself. Zoleka (interview 2014) explains that she was one of the four females to enter the Nigel factory in 1995 and has subsequently opened doors for many women behind her. From this statement one begins to wonder why it has taken so long for the physical design of the factory to have been altered to accommodate the growing number of women working there. The shop steward explained that women within there made up about 30% of the entire labour force there. Even though relatively low, it is still quite a difference to the four women who started there in 1995.

This story is bewildering, why would they not accommodate her, but rather make her suffer in that way. To the feminist eye this is a deliberate exclusionary practice (Franzway, 2001) to ensure that the woman understands and accepts that the work in the factory is designed for a certain body, the male body. Even when she complained to the manager she was continuously told that there was nothing he could do, because it was expensive to just build a toilet for one woman. She cannot relieve herself, more than anything it is a basic human right to have a break to eat and recuperate from the drudgery of work and that includes relieving oneself. I asked her what happens when her bladder is so full that the urine starts dripping, what happens? She quickly retorted "what if you have a runny tummy?" One can then see that women's place in masculinised spaces and their demands for alternative public structures intimidates male privileges to control and shape these spaces.

The private certainly came to the forefront and made visible, when one day according to Azania (interview 2014), a contractor had come into her department as many had before, but this particular day the contractor asked for the toilet. She said she looked at her colleague and in that instant of eye contact they chuckled. When asked about the joke, Azania replied that there were no female toilets. The manager stepped in a few minutes later and was visibly

embarrassed by the revelation made to the contractor. He offered to escort her to the other building where she could relieve herself. Certainly after weeks of fighting with the manager about this matter, this incident highlighted the truth about the exclusionary practices of masculinised spaces. Three months later a toilet was built for Azania, albeit she notes that the bathroom is small and definitely created for one person. Even though at the end she managed to physically to break down the public/private, the productive/reproductive dichotomy to make her department more accommodating to all workers; in so doing, she integrated women concerns into the public view of masculinised spaces. The private needs of women would become part of the factory's public spaces. The reality that she had to fight for this right highlight the arguments brought forth by Acker's (1990) argument about the fallacy of gender neutral spaces. Moss Kanter (1977: 291- 92, cited by Acker, 1990) supports , by showing that gender disparities in organisational behaviour are legitimised by structural oppression as opposed to specific male or female traits. Gender is emphasised through organisational roles that "carry characteristic images of the kinds of people that should occupy them" (1977: 250). Recognising the primary challenge of appearing gender neutral; from Moss Kanter's (1977: 46) observations the implication is that even though organisations were being described as "sex-neutral machines, masculine principles were dominating their authority structures."

One inconspicuous issue that is striking however relates to what Azania's manager did not say to the contractor when she asked to use the bathroom. He immediately asked to escort her to an alternative ladies bathroom, but never at one time suggested that the contractor use the men's bathroom. Issues of class and race intercept in this key moment. The manager had no reservations about telling a black data capturer that works under his supervision, to enter a space that is taboo and foreign to her biology or identification as a woman. He disrespects her dignity, by forcing her to run up and down just to relieve herself.

In connection to the trade union, Azania tells me she did not bring the matter to the shop stewards, as she thought her problem was a frivolous one not for NUMSA to take on. It was just up to her to be understanding of the situation and *abekhezele* (to hold in there) for the time being, whilst money was being allocated to build the toilet for her. Even though she had to fight, she feels as though the situation was no one's fault as no woman had ever worked in that department.

5.3 Equal pay for unequal work: Kefentse

Kefentse is a single mother of one, living in Kwa-Thema and working at the Nigel factory she is under the age of 35. Kefentse's narrative of the gendered spaces begins when asked her if according to her NUMSA catered to women, she simply said no. This answer was located in her frustration towards the nonchalant attitude of shop stewards when she would bring up the issue of the heavy workload within her department, but she has been disappointed by their inactivity and delayed response. Essentially, she explains that her role as a store woman forces her and her female colleagues to engage in arduous manual labour which she complains is not good for them to undertake as females because, it affects ones chances of having children in the future. She explains:

Our voices are not heard correctly by NUMSA, because at work there are some jobs which are intrinsically for men such picking up steel because they are stronger. Yes I agree it is 50/50 but it is the man's job to pick up steel (interview 2014).

The complaint complements two arguments in Ackers (1990) theory- firstly the workplace is designed for the abstract worker, who is essentially perpetually male and as such the supremacy and preference of the man will materialise through disparate remuneration strategies. In her department Kefentse tells me that there is one man and there are four ladies and as the ladies they have had to support him in order to make sure that the job gets done, but this has been hard. I asked her how fair this is assuming that she would still require equal pay with the male who is now doing more work. She tries to unpack her reasoning by saying:

Let's say we were washing dishes at work and we were all asked to contribute. You know how men are; even they would have that thing that oh dishes! I am a man! Oh, no dishes! I am a man. So there is that thing. This is not to say that these are things we cannot do, but it's the things we do that affect us in the long run. We work at stores, so when the gigantic steel tanks arrive here, you have to climb the steep of the container and operate the biggest forklifts here in the company and we are the first ones to operate it because our job

demands that you do such things and unpack those big deliveries that come in the steel tanks (interview 2015).

Joan Acker (1990) has so eloquently articulated and obliterated these myths surrounding the female body. It is not that females are incapable; it is the reality that these organisations are designed in such a way as to accommodate only one type of body. Women are more than capable of doing the same jobs; it is just a matter of recognising where certain things can be put in place to accommodate their specific female body needs. According to Cockburn (Palgrave-Journals, 1981) saying that men that do more manual labour because of the physical strength as opposed to women, is a statement that is only being truthful and it is also truthful to say that a majority of men work better with machinery than women do. She further adds that men's economic and socio-political power enables them a physical presence that "reinforces their authority and their physical skills enhance their earning power" (Palgrave-Journals, 1981).

The entrenched gender disparity actually blinds women and forces them to think that maybe they are not capable; maybe they do not deserve their positions within masculine spaces. But Kefentse (interview 2014) although seeming to promulgate the self-doubt, actually surprises me with her thinking. I asked her essentially what does she want? How does she want the problem in her department solved? Instead of saying she would like for men to take over the entire department, she says more men are needed in her department to assist with the heavy loads. The issue of women's reproductive health is significant in shaping how organisations are viewed. But as mentioned previously in the literature review it is impossible for organisations to be neutral spaces, when there is the dichotomy of the dominant and the submissive, where "the dominant is the one that occupies a position in the structure such that the structure acts on its behalf" (Bourdieu 1997: 76).

We need assistance with picking up the deliveries by ourselves, picking them up with a forklift is not a problem. Picking up the deliveries by us needs more manpower, especially the physical strength men. It decreases your chances of having a child. Because we are constantly bending and sometimes sitting up to

seven hours on the forklift. So you can see kidneys and all those things get affected. The men always get affected by kidney problems? So what more will happen to us as women with our wombs and such there? (Interview 2014).

A male shop steward, Mandla (interview 2014) disagrees entirely with arguments put forth by Kefentse; which even as an open minded man, who believes in equality for women states that equal pay for unequal work is unfair. Why should women be paid the same if they have not done the same amount of work? Yes women are designed differently from men and men may have more physical strength, however as a result of working in a masculinised space a woman will have one of three choices. Accept the reality that her work will require her to be physically fit and she is supposed to undertake her work independently. Second option she can also leave that particular department which is physically demanding and go to another department that does not require as much physical strength or lastly she can accept that she cannot fulfil that role when it comes to physical strength and again accept the reality that she will be remunerated disproportionately to her male counterpart. Another informant, Lerato a female shop steward, justifies the equal pay argument by adding the *ubuntu* argument to the mix.

She suggests as Kefentse (interview 2014) does that the female and male bodies are designed differently. The men in her department complain when she asks them to pick up a computer for her, they say "you wanted to be independent right? 50/ 50? Well now do it yourself". But she says at times it's a matter of being thoughtful, especially when it comes to pregnant women. She tells me that a pregnant woman was expected to pick up something heavy, however because she is pregnant it was harder for her. The men did not care to jump and assist her. She further states that that is not about pay or 50/50 here, but it is about ubuntu. "Where has ubuntu gone? Because of money we cannot help each other?" Succinctly the female trade unionist often women navigate these masculinised spaces in fluidity between empowerment and disempowerment quickly and easy. Whilst she may be empowered in the knowledge that she is equal to the man on paper, a concept reinforced and propagated by the 50/50 concept, however she is disempowered when her body becomes the hindrance to her transcendence. This backward confusion then forces her to believe that she is the problem, but when she does not acknowledge that accusation, and then she is being too demanding by

asking to be accommodated instead of fitting in like all the other abstract bodies- unequivocally illustrating the assumptions of Acker (1990) as veritable and still relevant in revealing the layers of patriarchy that cover “gender neutral” organisations. The trade unions become affected immediately when the issues of wages comes up and for the fact that some male unionists support men in their plight to promulgate equal pay for equal work is unfair to the struggle for gender equality.

In Tshoaedi’s (2008) seminal work, harassment and sexual harassment by both black and white males were issues within the unions that were not only about sex, but also involved power relations and dominance over the other. In this case sexual harassment is being exercised to reinforce these notions of domination and subordination. In spite of occupying leadership positions within the unions, which should have given them the same status as their male counterparts, women are still treated as the ‘other’ that is inferior: women are still regarded as outsiders and therefore not authentic members of the trade union (Tshoaedi, 2008, Themba Kgasi, Interview 2004). However, in this study the only time the issue of harassment arose was only when the male shop stewards spoke about it as one of the problems women were facing. No female informant in this study spoke about having had experienced sexual harassment but, they generally felt constant harassment from umlungu or management. Mandla (interview 2014) told me a particular story that he was currently dealing with of a woman who had felt one of her colleagues had now sexually harassed her. He says often times in such a male dominated space men may take advantage of the reality and try to enforce their power over the women and their bodies. But they as the union try very much to eradicate this problem, by empowering women to talk. The main issue however is that women are not expressive of their issues, especially towards to male shop stewards and sometimes end up just dropping their cases. He says that it may be the perception that they as the shop stewards will take advantage of their vulnerable state and *shela* (ask them out) in that time. Walby (1990) stated that male violence is another space from which patriarchy is perpetuated and sustained. And Kefentse's experience with harassment and violence solidifies those claims. She says:

I was assaulted at work. Attempted assault. It was not about work; however it happened at work, with someone from work. I had borrowed some guy money,

when I requested to receive it back and he reimbursed me after a long time, about seven months after that. So when he gave me the money that day I told him I did not have change and I would give it to him around lunch, because work rules are strict and we are not allowed to do up and down. So I explained to would return his change at around lunch, but he decided to return to me before lunch to receive his change. When I wanted to explain that I did not have it he grabbed the money from my hand and pushed me down. At that time I had just had an operation, he further threatened me by stating that this would not end here and after work it would continue and he would beat me up after. (Kefentse interview 2014)

In an act of defiance, she decided to go and report him. This narrative emphasises the point that De Beauvoir (1949) makes. The man has learned to dominate and so when the female is no longer passive and she retaliates with the same amount of vigour she is punished and pushed back into immanence. She has no authority to demand what is hers back; it is only when the man is ready that he will initiate the process of reimbursement. And so when the woman tries to exercise authority, she is reminded of who is in power through violence, succinctly “all men can potentially use violence as a powerful means of subordinating women. Men as a class benefit from how women's lives are restricted because of their fear of violence” (Dutton, 1994: 168). The one who can push you down and moreover gets celebrated and the victim relegated. I asked her what she did thereafter and she explains that she reported him, instinctively I asked, why? He had already verbally threatened her of more physical harm, what if he would come to your house?

No, I figured he had to do what he had to do and I had to do what I had to do. I reported him in order to prevent him repeating his behaviour, because I left the matter just like that it would show him that there is nothing wrong with what he did and that means he can get away with anything. I first reported the matter to the shop stewards and they told me it had to go to another person who handles such cases at work. After a conversation with my shop stewards, I told them that no I am not satisfied and I would like for this matter to be taken forward. The offender was given a written warning stipulating that if he

should repeat this behaviour within a year he would be dismissed. (Kefentse interview 2014)

As a NUMSA member this offender illustrates one type of hegemonic masculinity that exists within the union, one where women who dared stand against a man would be put in their place, much like Ntombi's narrative to follow. Also in the same breath, NUMSA helped her tremendously and she further adds that the support she received from the shop stewards was comforting. However, it seems as though that was the only support she received, as upon hearing about the case others began to shun and ignore her, others even saw the incident as her fault because she should have known her place. She explains:

There were other people passing comments like whom does she think she is doing this blah blah. A combination of men and women, I was becoming an outcast amongst people who I used to talk to as they no longer spoke to me. Others asked me why I wanted to get someone fired. And they said if he gets fired it will all be your fault. (Why is it that people did not have any sympathy for you?) Well it's that thing that I can go to the doctor and get better, but where will he find another job? I was asked if I wanted him fired by the shop stewards and I said no. I just want him to be taught a lesson. I want him punished for what he did because this situation will not end with me.

The strength of collective worker identity and solidarity is exhibited here. The harassment Kefentse (interview 2014) has experienced has been relegated as a private matter that need not enter the public arena in fear that the perpetrator's material conditions be affected. They do not recognise that a woman was harmed in this matter, but that a father could lose their job. The invisibility of her hurt and pain is usurped by the reality that jobs for black South African males is scarce and she needs to take responsibility for that to ensure that her fellow black brother is not fired. He shows no remorse and even threatens more violence against Kefentse, but still they take his side. This lack of sisterhood is underlined by a long history of women's issues being put secondary to issues that were primary to worker solidarity. Similar beliefs were held by some women who had been involved in the liberation struggle during

Apartheid who said, "It would be suicide for us to adopt feminist ideas. Our enemy is the system and we cannot exhaust our energies on women's issues" (Hassim, 1993: 296). An ANC activist, Frene Ginwala echoed the same sentiments in 1986 when she said: "women's liberation in South Africa cannot be achieved outside of the context of the liberation struggle" (Hassim, 1993: 296). Black women are oppressed by triad (Hassim, 2004), and here again their race is crucial as they have to "understand" that she could go to the doctor, but where will he get another job? "The lack of focus on gender issues within the labour movement is directly related to the notion of black liberation which accords primacy to race and to a limited extent, class" (Tshoedi and Hlela, 2006: 109). She as a black working class woman has to understand and forgive the black man for his actions.

5.4 "Workers are parents too!": Ntombi

Ntombi is a married mother of two, she works as an operator at the Springs factory and is younger than 35. Ntombi who used to be a cosmetologist highlights how these rights are still undermined and oppressed by *abelungu* (white people). She tells me that she was employed at the Springs factory with only her matric, however she had attained her qualification as a beauty therapist. She was tired of dealing and working with people and wanted to work with inanimate objects that do not talk back. She explains however, that having worked with people taught her how to develop thick skin and allow her to speak up for herself. I also asked her why she joined the union and she narrated an eye opening story:

Number one, I am very outspoken, I do not hold back whatever I feel. In this industry once you talk too much you become a target. (For?)Management. They will be after you, so you have to have someone in your corner. That is the main reason I joined NUMSA. (Did you have any of this experience in your first month?) First week at work! I was supposed to knock off at two and I was told I could not because, there was a lot of work and I told them I have a child, I cannot call now and say that I am not knocking off at two. And the boss said if you knock off at two, I am to sit with my child and stay with my child forever and not come back to work. And I told him that I am not hired by you, I am hired by the company, in as much as you are hired by the company. I will be

told by the company not to come back to work, right now my shift ends at two I am going home to my child at two. So the next day when I returned, the people there had become accustomed to certain lifestyle that encouraged this behaviour, as if umlungu (a white person) says this, you do it. So I am from a different environment and I am that person that speaks up for herself. From then I became an outcast, people were asking why bengidelela (being disrespectful) and umlungu was against me, asking why when I arrive suddenly there are questions? It is my first week and I have a say. And it is then that I realised that I need to have someone in my corner. (Ntombi interview 2014)

Similarly, other women were asked to elucidate why they had decided to join NUMSA. The resounding answer related predominantly to worker security and legal protection that NUMSA offers to its members, all factors that have been highlighted in Tsomondo's (2010) study about the hardships of female leadership as well. Most women did not feel safe having a one on one relationship with their employer because of the horrible past mistreatment they have experienced at the hands of their bosses or management. They share a similar sentiment that South Africa has not truly transformed and racism is still very much present within the actions of the white bosses and as such, black workers are still a vulnerable group within the labour market- especially if you do not know your rights. They elucidate:

When I got here I did not have any idea about unions; so when I got here they introduced me to this union. I became a member through influence from colleagues telling me that the union will protect me against cases if there are cases, against retrenchment and if there is any problem at work the union is there to protect you and also speak on your behalf (Nontokozo, interview 2014).

I wanted to become a member, because when I was scanning the environment of this factory I could see that, no man, there are other things that are not right when you do not have union. (Things like what?) Anything let us say if you have problems in your department. Like sometimes they would threaten you and you do not know your rights. (Threaten you how?) Like if you would

arrive a bit late, they would threaten you and say you know I have the right to fire you. So you can see that when you have just started the job you are not aware. (Thembi interview 2014)

And when I arrived first day we were on strike whilst I was still being shown the ropes. I did not know anything about strikes and I had never been in an environment where there had been strikes before, so yeah we were locked out for two weeks. When we got hired, there was this thing of probation for three months, you would sign for three months and you would not be appointed within a permanent position. Luckily with me I did not sign the three month probation; we were out for those two weeks when we were on strike and NUMSA fought for us to be permanent, so I was permanent straight after the strike. So I did not get the chance to sign the contract for three months (Gugulethu interview 2014).

The title of this subsection was in fact adopted as the maxim of a COSATU campaign desired to integrate the understanding that workers have multiple identities and part of that is also being parent. During the 1980's many achievements were being won in reference to parental rights and childcare, "the 40 hour week was linked to the childcare campaign, and how... maternity leave was linked, and your housing demands, and we developed a beautiful Campaigns Bulletin" as Mokgalo explains (cited by Forrest, 2005: 329). And so with the historical achievements of the trade union, it is bewildering as to why women as mothers are still disrespected in this aspect. Further solidifying Joan Acker's (1990) assumptions that women are relegated to the domestic sphere even when they are in the work environment, a man employee is viewed as an abstract body that has no emotional investments in the home, they are not reproductive and will always put work first, because they have support from their counterpart in the domestic sphere. Ntombi's narrative reveals "the use of such abstract systems continually reproduces the underlying gender assumptions and the subordinated or excluded place of women" (Acker, 1990: 154). I asked her to explain what had happened afterwards, as this is what she said:

My colleagues felt that I spoke too much... but when a person is used to the status quo they do not question it. I suppose that if it is your first time working and you are working under that environment you automatically think that that is the way things are done. So I am from a different field and I am used to working for myself and the manager would come to oversee. So when I was sure about my work, I would tell you, even when you are a manager, that you manage what you manage and I am managing my own job, so when I am sure of my job I stand up for myself and say I will not stand for this or you must do it yourself the way you would like to do it. So I used to be independent and outspoken, I have worked with a lot of people... and clients that make one strong. And I was used to saying I will not take nonsense from anyone, as long as I am sure that I have done the correct thing. And that day I was sure they had said I must come in at 6am and leave at 2pm, so you cannot come and tell me at 1pm that I will knock off at 10, I have children. And then when I tell you I have children you do not hear me. You tell me to stay at home forever. (Ntombi interview 2014)

This entire situation brings up curious questions. Why did she not follow the rules like everyone else, what made her defy her boss essentially. Was it his approach that she did not like? Because sometimes one has to understand that work genuinely has to be done and there are targets to be met, so why did she not make an alternative plan with her children and accommodate the needs of the company? She continued to explain:

I hear that, my answer was that I have kids that I must go look after; at school they know that umama will be home in the afternoon. So if you are going to tell me that okay, go and look after your kids forever. That means me and you are in a one way route. It is your way or no way at all. He was also supposed to listen to me and say I understand you have kids what time do they come back from school? And I would say they arrive at 5 o'clock and he suggests perhaps that I work until 5 o'clock then. Do not tell me you do this or you are going to get out, you understand? I figured that he is some sort of dictator, which is not going to dictate me. I and he are employed in this company. I and

he are the same, it is just that he is in a management position and I am an operator that is it. (Ntombi interview 2014)

She further elaborates on how the issue was attended to by the union.

I came here (shop steward office) and at that time, Sam who was the full time shop steward was here. Apparently the company was aware of that situation at work, but there had been no one who had come forward to them and spoke about it. And he (the boss)... the minute he realised that I would not stand for it and I would not take that shit, suddenly he backed off from me, but he had this thing that he wants to shame me. We suddenly had issues, the two of us. But he never did anything formally because he knew what he was doing was totally wrong. Like, I told him that do whatever you have to do and I will also do whatever I have to do. I and you will meet wherever we meet, that is it. We did not have a formal hearing, because he knew what he was doing was wrong but he had just got used to it. When he felt like at 10 o'clock he did not feel as though he wanted the people to leave work and when you go to him one day with your overtime needs and he says it is not there, but whatever he wants he gets. I mean if you are a boss I believe it is a two way thing this thing. You can tell me yazini (you know) I wish I could help you but I cannot. But one day you should help me, because I help you. So he was this person and those people working under him were used to that lifestyle and I was not going to stand for that. So I realised that I need someone who would speak for me in the working industry, because I realised even if you have a lawyer, in internal matters the lawyer does not intervene until the case has to go outside. So meanwhile whilst I am still inside I need someone who is going to stand for me. That is why I joined NUMSA. After all of this, I and him did not work well together I worked in that department for three weeks as I had applied for a position in another department. (Ntombi interview 2014).

Ntombi's narrative highlights the *intersectionality* of the discrimination experienced in that moment when a black mother engages her white manager in defending her rights to attend to her motherly duties. When Ntombi's narrative is put under a feminist lens, it brings about the

understanding that management is not only patriarchal and racist, but again, the female is negated accommodation because of the baggage she comes with: deliberately acting on the ideas that the male is superior to the female and as such she should not have answered back to the white male manager (De Beauvoir, 1949). Moreover, she should have stayed and worked having made alternative arrangements for her child. But in her defying the subliminal power dynamics, she is showing agency and the spirit of empowerment. Because she acts like a praying mantis, she will subsequently be punished. The manager tries to make it difficult; she again continuously defies him but, at some point decided that she is too unhappy to stay there. She became isolated not only by management but, outcasted by her colleagues as well. Their lack of support towards her reinforced the structural dynamic of racial power that permeates all throughout South Africa; by berating her for answering back- illustrating their perceptions that he is not to be defied and not to be undermined with questions; as Ntombi says, as a dictator it has always been accepted that what he says is final. She on the other hand having had the chance to engage with other such strong personalities has come to recognise that she matters, issues that affect her, matter. Even as a black female, her voice matters as a consequence she will use her outspoken nature to stand up for herself against a dictatorship. She enters with the mindset that even though she is an employee, the relationship between management and the employee is mutually dependent, which runs in contradiction to that of her fellow colleagues, who show their complacency by trying to force Ntombi to understand *ukuth isiya ncengalana* (we are beggars here).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the varied experiences of women working within masculinised spaces, with focus on the NUMSA members. The experiences of the women were and are still framed around the issues of domination and subordination by the males, both black and white; however the running thread between all the narratives was the idea that racial discrimination still usurped all other matters, more especially those of gender. The women were able to exercise agency and vocalise their issues when they felt overpowered and transgressed, however as was demonstrated within the findings women who try to transcend their roles by speaking too much or being defied are punished in various ways, but the most significant is the retaliation by the other workers; most significantly the women; who will take the side of the male as opposed to the one who has been transgressed. In many ways this

illustrates the truth of the theories around patriarchy found in the literature review. Society relegates outspoken women who want to matter and know they matter outside of their immanence; however for this bravery they are never shown support instead they are ignored and treated like outcasts. The narrative of Azania further demonstrates the physical gender deficit were masculinised spaces in a bid to keep women out of them, will not even provide something as mundane, however so essential as a toilet. Instead she will have to fight and argue, and then her rights will be recognised. The trade union however, at all times managed to be a pillar of strength throughout all the turmoil these women experienced and feeling them feel as though they mattered. The trade union is thus seem more a mediator between management and the worker,

Chapter Six: My shop steward is female

6.1 Introduction

Trade unions have been accused on countless occasions for being nonchalant about building women trade union leaders and often leaving women's issues to the margins. Even with the implementation of gender structures and gender initiatives, it seems women's voice is always second within these masculinised spaces. However, this chapter will illustrate the complexities that go into the making of female shop stewards. Patriarchal undertones often influence the lack of ambition within women to take their roles seriously within unions. The making of a female shop steward is a long and arduous journey that involves primarily spotting potential within the women by the shop stewards and then the process involves the shop stewards convincing them of their potential. Thereafter the process of grooming begins, which involves building women's confidence and familiarising them with trade union practices and labour laws.

6.2 Where are the women?

In trying to uncover why women were less participative within the union; I asked the informants who was more active within the workplace union meetings that happened once a month. Majority of my informants said that the men were more loquacious and boisterous within these meetings and dominated conversation and debate.

Men are more active within the meetings than women. We may want to talk, but then we think to ourselves that there is a possibility I may speak and the other colleagues may go haaa when there is a meeting and maybe what you said was stupid. Sometimes we do not see things the same. You may see that what I am saying is correct and others may respond and say haaa or wuuu, you know those types of things. (They do those types of things) yes or they can clap their hands or make a lot of noise. (Thembi interview 2014)

Some of the women said at times the men would not even make sense because they would just reiterate what another person had just said, because they want to show off, using union jargon that confused the women and the men themselves. I asked the women why they were not so vocal and majority blamed their shyness, being afraid of *amehlo* (having people's attention centred on them) and being booed whilst on stage. But as a disclaimer some mentioned that in smaller groups they were not afraid to express themselves, however they would still rather look for a representative to forward their concerns than do it themselves. Between the two female shop stewards interviewed they explained that they did not actually need to speak all the time, as one was a secretary and during meetings she takes notes.

For the female shop stewards it was naturally different as they are expected to be vocal and "brave", because men would sometimes challenge their points and they had to be sharp and on their toes to counter the male points of contention. Lerato (interview 2015) explains that she does not speak much because she has a low voice and when she is talking people at the back complain that they cannot hear her and as a result ends up not saying much because she cannot scream. However, when there is a microphone she is able to freely express herself, she is not afraid of speaking about serious issues. The female informants mentioned that sometimes this counter arguing was used as a tactic to derail or embarrass women essentially; because at times the men would raise an opposing point for the sake of challenging and not necessarily because there was anything of value they wanted to add. The frivolous debates that would ensue from the men were contributing factors that marginalise women and push women away from being able to express themselves within the union according to the findings.

Munro (2001: 469) highlights however that, "until members have the space in which to identify and articulate concerns in a collective context; it is difficult for them to perceive the legitimacy of challenging the union agenda". I assumed that perhaps the meetings would be spaces utilised for gender mainstreaming by both the shop stewards and the ordinary members, as this was the only time and space at which most members were together and were free to discuss union matters. But time is a scarce resource, the meetings are only an hour and occur once a month. And so the shop stewards have the hard time of prioritising what is to go into the agenda, what would be prioritised on the agenda are the matters of the day, such as

pending cases, disciplinary hearings and national NUMSA news e.g. in 2014 it was NUMSA's expulsion from COSATU.

6.3 What makes a female shop steward?

During the course of my research there was a noticeable pattern with the women interviewed in leadership positions. I asked them why they decided to become shop stewards and they explained that they saw inequality within their society and in some way wanted to change that, especially racial discrimination. For the union official (interview 2014) the desire to transform society was solidified at work. She managed to lead a strike at her workplace without any official position within the union or workplace. The company was trying to implement a new work strategy that would force them to work harder in much shorter time; however they would still earn the same pay. With great disdain towards the actions of the employers, she was able to mobilise the other workers and organise a weeklong strike, until the company gave in to their demands. I asked her why people would follow her when she had no mandate or union status. Chuckling, she postulates that it would have been the passion she exhibited at the time and the fact that they could see that she was not afraid to speak directly to management. Furthermore, every day she would leave work, head home and on her way there she would see the physical discrimination and often violent injustices and she was tired of it. A key moment that exhibited her exasperation with white people and their inconsiderate nature was that particular day at work. Diketso (interview 2014) says that the boundaries created for women motivated her to want to become more. Even currently she is married to a businessman who earns five times more than her and whom has offered to pay her to stay at home, but she says she likes independence and she enjoys being in control of her own life. In her earlier years she was told that she should rather study accounting and such subjects, engineering was a subject for men and as such, she would not cope. Because she identifies as a defiant spirit, she says she purposefully studied engineering to see if where they had said she could not cope was really a place where women would naturally fail.

They say a woman cannot drive a truck and she needs a little Uno, because that is appropriate for you. That is the mentality we grew up with. You cannot

dig as a woman... I did not want to be a secretary you understand? I wanted something challenging. (Diketso interview 2014)

During the course of my research I further uncovered the significant difference in the political, social and gender consciousness of black women back then during Apartheid and now post-Apartheid. The women of Apartheid times were born at the thick of regimes turbulent times and so have been exposed to the racial discrimination at some point in their lives, especially within the workplace as they were working at that point in time. The ones that are of post-Apartheid times were born closer to the 1980's however, did not really experience the harshest times of the regime and did not work during that time as well. Zoleka refers to these post-Apartheid women as the “gang of youth” (interview, 2014), that are according to her more interested in buying cars and impressing friends. From her perspective, there is a shift in the perceived location of freedom, no longer is freedom situated in the liberation struggle, but centred on economic emancipation. She asserts that, then it is not unusual for women to be ‘deconscientised’ about things such as gender structures, because they have are interested in “receiving their pay and leaving”.

I asked Paul (interview, 2014) perhaps why that is, why are so few women participating in union activities, this question however was spurred by a question relating to his activities in his high school Student Representative Council where the entire leadership was headed up by males. I was curious to find out why he thought no girls in his high school ever stood for SRC elections. A natural question especially when one is dealing with gender is to ask where the women in your leadership are and he explained in this way:

You know according to me I think it is what is happening even here at work. It is all about your participation and interest that you have in that thing. So the girls had the mentality that ai izintho zabafana (those are male activities). Okay, this one is brave and he can talk to meneer (teacher) whenever something is wrong. So they relax in knowing that sizoba khulumela (we will speak for them) (Paul interview 2014).

6.4 Male unionists support gender equality

The main proponent of feminism within NUMSA is the male unionist. This claim does not blindly assert that all the males are supportive of the promulgation for female equality on social and economic basis, but it also rejects the idea that males are naturally oppressive and dominating over women (Connell, 2005). The males are however categorised by their gender consciousness and gender sensitivity towards the idea of gender mainstreaming, which is further solidified by the reinforcing gender education received from attending gender workshops and gender schools. The study could have benefitted from the narratives of the ordinary male members, however as elucidated prior, the constraints of time prevented this. And so the males referred to here are the five shop stewards interviewed from the Springs factory. The idea of men in a male dominated space in leadership positions promulgating women's issues and advancement of women within the union seems quite contradictory to what the deterministic theories of patriarchy have claimed. As the women themselves elucidate this claim, stating that the most supportive of them as potential leaders and leaders are the men (shop stewards). In fact, the women tell me that it is more that women are not supportive of women and instead disseminate the poisonous PhD (pull her down) syndrome amongst each other. Instead of standing together to build each other up, they tear each other down with gossip.

What was most fascinating was that gender strategies that target women for leadership positions as shop stewards within the Springs company, are usually quite informal. Although as leaders they are mandated to participate in the promulgation of gender mainstreaming, the male shop stewards seem to go above and beyond the mandate and as I discovered, they have personal investments in the grooming of women for leadership positions; similar to a mentorship relationship. Mandla (interview 2014) says that when he sees potential he makes all possible avenues available for them to be more involved. For instance in the meeting he would encourage them to speak, calling on specific people. This way, the matter of women being shy to speak within the meetings can be obliterated by putting them on the spot and showing them that there is nothing to be afraid of. He ensures also that he gives them booklets on NUMSA policies that will engage their minds and conscientise them on deeper

workers issues. Sometimes he does acknowledge that some women come to his office to harvest information on their own accord. This is the most exciting part for him. When women take the initiative and know that they can also contribute to the union, more than financially or just by being a member on paper. Paul further highlights the transformation that is happening within the union, more especially from his observations within the union. He says:

Majority of workers are young people, I think if I am not mistaken, I think here in Nuffield, maybe we are the second company to have appointed female shop stewards, if I am not mistaken. But from my knowledge there are not many companies with female shop stewards. If there are, it is perhaps because they have started now since the union has begun to address issues of gender. So now it is the older shop stewards that are saying, comrades if you are voting you need to elect abomama (women). A women that you see as being active to represent you. Since we are being vocal about gender now, it seems as though now to some the mind-set is starting to open up. (Paul interview 2014)

Britwum (2010: 26) adds that “the informal mentoring at play in the lives of women trade union leaders provides an important site for developing bonds and generating sites for building solidarity and pushing for a union gender transformational agenda”. However, I must highlight that these informal mentorship relationships are propagated by “conscientised” men who are gender sensitive. As shop stewards, they have been exposed to the initiatives of the gender structures such as having attended workshops and conferences, where they admit to having being more enlightened about gender issues, more than they had understood before. They represented a different type of masculinity than the hegemonic masculinity, framed around the domination and subordination of men and women (Connell, 2005). They were sympathetic to the plight of women and sometimes when answering questions they would say, “There are those men, but I think” (interview, 2014).

Bafana (interview 2015) is a contradictory case. In short Bafana contends that he does not see gender, but however he does see competency. He is quite supportive of women, even telling me that his wife drives the car at times. Even when his friends tell him that it is inappropriate

for her to drive, he says “no, she is able and competent, so why not?” (Interview, 2014) However, in reference to promulgating gender mainstreaming he said because NUMSA was a democratic organisation there was no need for gender mainstreaming. Democracy allowed people to make correct decisions according to whom they felt was good enough to represent them. He does not support pushing for a gender agenda but rather pushing for flexibility. He says that even he would not like to be appointed in a job position just because he is black or African it is not something to be proud about. He has to get the job because he is competent. Arguing against the 50/50 philosophy he claims that it is pushing South Africa down the drain because South Africa is looking for a woman or a man and not a participant and for the flexibility of the people. Because this thing of assigning people into positions perpetuates laziness and inefficiency as some people enter those positions with nothing to add.

Although quite simple and straight forward again, it is not easy to leave everything up to a masculinised space that in its nature reproduces discrimination and inherently perpetuates inequality amongst men and women (Acker 1990). Trade unions require gender mainstreaming to bring such gender specific issues to the fore. Where it may seem an innocuous issue of competency and seeing potential- in a space where 70% (union official interview 2014) of the individuals are males, what is the chance for a female to be elected based on her competencies? When again Bafana himself highlights the fact that men at times do not go to female shop stewards for assistance with workplace issues. Even when the woman is in the same department, they would rather wait for lunch and walk all the way to his office or to Mandla's office, because they do not want to talk about their issues to her.

Solidifying the arguments that feminists make in accordance with gender. Even when one is a leader, people will doubt her capabilities because she is female. And that is why according to the union official (interview 2014) men believed that women need to be capacitated first before they can take up leadership roles. But she asks them, how do you know she needs to be capacitated? What if she already is? It is the idea that resonates with De Beauvoir's (1949) arguments that women will always be relegated as a second sex, she has been socialised to become immanent. Succinctly, it is not a simple matter of voting for someone with capacity, it is matter of voting for someone vocal, who is not afraid of confrontation- all attributes associated with the active man, but also someone who will be a participant. It is about

understanding the dissimilar ways in which men and women have been raised to think about their gender roles in society. Men are prepared by society for transcendence and women are prepared for immanence. And so it is justifiable that gender mainstreaming, initiatives such as quotas are put into place to change the mentality of the people within the union and that workplace.

6.5 My supportive husband

Trade unions require plenty of dedication and sacrifice, the union official explains:

Being a shop steward is about hard work and commitment it's about making sacrifices in the union. Because right now I am not with my family, I am in one province and they are in another. It's also about sacrificing your time. I cannot say we have weekends as shop stewards, especially the higher up you go, you end up not having a social life. So you do not have a life of your own. Your life belongs to the union. You cannot be a shop steward without commitment to... you cannot be half hearted in terms of the work you must do and you must really be committed to serving the workers at your workplace. (Union official 2014)

From the above response, it is no wonder that trade unions have been referred to as *greedy institutions* that require more commitment and sacrifice from women, negating the reality of being married and having children (Franzway, 2001). As observed within the literature trade unions are assumed to hinder the active involvement of females within unions because of their assumed domestic responsibilities, which include childcare and marriage. Often it has been implied that trade unions require young single females with no children. However, mediation of these responsibilities as a two way street that involves the father and the mother have often been at the top of current trade union gender mainstreaming (Munro, 1990) so as to ensure female support and participation. But, as highlighted by Walby (1990) heterosexual relationships are also sites of patriarchal domination over the woman's activity in the private and public sphere. And for most married women the blame for their inactivity has been squarely put on their husbands. But the three shop stewards in my study actually challenge

this assertion by highlighting the support they have received from their husbands and in general the other male shop stewards.

Mandla (interview 2014) explained, as did the other male shop stewards, that sometimes being a shop steward is difficult for a woman, but more so a married woman in particular because of her partner. According to him, women tend to become usurped with their marriages and because they do not want to lose their husbands, this hinders them from actively and meaningfully participating within the union as the union may require plenty of time travelling, which is something most husbands are opposed to. It means many sacrifices of time from social and family life and sometimes of husbands as well. Most women are not willing to make this sacrifice, unless they can get the support they need to cope from their husbands, family or sometimes children. Diketso (interview 2014) a shop steward at the Springs factory explains that she would probably not be a shop steward if it was not for her husband's support, explaining that it is not good to have tension in the house because your spouse is angry at you for having been away for three days at a conference. Being happy with her husband and building a happy home are essential to her, as a wife and a mother which she identifies with first. She explains:

It becomes easier when your partner supports you in everything you see? You are then able to engage about your work within the union with your partner and ask him, baby if there was something like this, how would you solve it? Then he would advise me and give me suggestions saying what if you went about solving it this way and like this? So he also has input and he gets involved in everything I do, so it becomes easier for me. But you understand if he did not want me to become a shop steward and next thing I arrive at home and he is moody, because since Friday I have been away. (Interview 2014)

Furthermore, I asked her does she feel as though as a mother she is missing out on raising her children as a result of her union responsibilities and she said that time with her children has not been sacrificed as shop steward meetings do not happen until night time so usually around six she is back home. Her husband helps with cooking and looking after the children,

if she will be home later than that time. Beyond helping with domestic chores, Diketso conveys to me how her husband is interested in her work. She is able to go to him and talk to him about what is happening at work and sometimes she will ask for advice and he will assist her, giving her solutions as to how she can solve certain matters, so it becomes easier for her.

However, for other women like Azania (interview 2014) this seems not so easy to do. I asked her about her involvement within the union activities and she explained that she was vocal at meetings although her soft spoken nature would have one think otherwise. I further asked after seven years of being a member, why would you not desire to be a shop steward and she explained:

I would like to become a shop steward, but ngyasaba ukucela umnyeni wam (I am afraid to ask my husband). I thought he would not be an understanding person but I was so surprised, when he was elected this year (2014) as a shop steward. Now it is convenient as he has entered first and he is always on the road travelling into meetings. And so now I think he will understand. I was afraid to tell him, because if I say I am a shop steward and I need to travel, arriving home at 1am. As umama (a married woman) what do I say? Uyaz' ubaba uzakuqabangela kay' two, three (your husband will become suspicious) (interview 2014).

Do you think I can come home and say I am a shop steward? Tjo! My husband does not like izintho ezisnaaks (inappropriate things). Being a shop steward involves plenty of time away. And I do not think my husband would appreciate that. He does not want me to be involved in things that make me forget that I am a mother and a wife. (Sithandazile interview 2014)

Sithandazile (interview 2014) positions her opinion on why she would not become a shop steward from the same place as Azania, even though she believes in gender equality. She says like many other women that this role needs one to travel a lot and that is not a role that can be fulfilled by a mother or someone who is married. According to her in contradiction to what Diketso's narrative illustrates, the shop steward role is essentially designed for someone

single. However, more important than this, is the understanding that men have the final word in the activities of the women, even though Azania had no idea that her husband was running to be a shop steward. Moreover, as De Beauvoir explains;

Men's economic privilege, their social value, the prestige of marriage, the usefulness of masculine support- all these things encourage women to ardently want to please men. They are on the whole still in a state of serfdom. It follows that woman knows and chooses herself not as she exists for herself but as man defines her (1949: 159)

There was no need for them to have discussions or negotiate his aspirations, yet all the women understand their marriages as spaces of consultation and mutual decision making, which however always seems one sided. Reverberating De Beauvoir's (1949) maxims that women is *other* and the man is the subject, and until they view each other mutually as subjects, the woman will not be truly emancipated from the man. The union official however puts forth an amalgamation of both these arguments. She stipulates that she was married to her high school sweetheart at twenty one years of age; however the marriage lasted a short while because her husband was not happy with her constant neglect of the home to attend to activities organised by the union. She is now over forty five years of age and has remarried to a man involved in politics, she explains:

He travels just like me, so he understands the activities of the union even right now he is in Lesotho. He does not get jealous which was another problem I had with my ex-husband, because my current husband is involved in politics and trade unions so understands that these are my colleagues and how my job works. (Union official 2014)

I asked Mandla (interview 2014) how they were targeting the husbands to ensure that they were given enough information to understand sufficiently what happens when their partner becomes a shop steward. He said that they could not really talk to the husband because men

are territorial and they may feel disrespected if we approach them. And so Paul (interview 2014) explains that the women are given enough information in the form of pamphlets book and conversation to relay back to their husbands. However, the obstacles for women are further solidified by the actions of their male colleagues, who act inappropriately towards them. He cites an example of a woman who had come to him and said that she was having problems at home with her husband after the conference they had attended the previous week. One of her male colleagues, who were also an attendee at the conference, wrote down her numbers from the register which they all had to sign. Upon returning home that Sunday at midday she received a call from her male colleague and her husband exploded with anger. He asked her if that is what they do at conferences now. Sexual harassment is an important aspect of gender issues according to Mandla (interview 2014) and as such is pulling the union back from further progress. Women are afraid of being harassed and thus avoid leadership for such reasons. Even the trade union official explained to me that she did not want to become a shop steward because of the stigma attached to being a shop steward in those days of being a female shop steward.

That's why today as a union we have a sexual harassment policy. There were all those issues of sexual harassment and so forth. And the union took those issues very seriously and it introduced sexual harassment policy and for me it was like, the things I hear, I will never become a shop steward. (Union official 2014)

6.6 Women are not are not interested in gender

I identified during the course of the research, that at times the gender deficit and hindrance to union leadership at times is self-inflicted by the women. The gender co-ordinator (interview, 2014) further clarifies,

Sometimes it is the women themselves who do not have the interest of gender structures. As we are saying, there will be elections soon and we try to...

itafulalethu (at our table) we want a balance and we want women to be there. So if you check, women are elected and chosen, but are not active.

As I probe deeper into what this means, Azania (interview, 2014) an ordinary female member explains,

When it is election time, we do not want to be elected. For some of us, me in particular ngishayiwaiskathi (I do not have time). Maybe if I was not studying I would agree to become a shop steward. I am shy, but I can speak, when I have something to ask I will ask.

These responses indicate that women the potential for women to lead and enter into leadership positions is there however women fail to make use of these resources themselves, blaming the double burden for their lack of time to engage more proactively within union matters. Diketso (interview 2014) a female shop stewards challenges the assumptions put forth in the literature review, that because a space is masculinised women will automatically be prevented from participating within the union. Rather, she explains that the resources are there but, the women are lax about union participation; until they are in trouble at work; that is the only thing that incites active involvement.

Women do not participate, not because there are many men, we are also many but I think the women are lazy or perhaps they have no interest? People are never interested in the union until they have work related challenges facing them. Then they will know that oh there is Diketso that I can go to. (Diketso interview 2014)

Another male shop steward expands this argument by stating that the reason women may not actively participate within unions or vigorously pursue union activities may be as a result of their inability to challenge white management, because they still have some underlying social fear of white people, that forces them to show respect that they may not even show their black male counterparts. This illustrates that “there is also a strong continuity with the past,

where race and class struggles are still seen as central to the struggles of the labour movement” (Tshoaedi and Hlela, 2006: 105).

I think that women are not comfortable to lead because; they are not comfortable with confrontation. Confronting the issues of the workers. Because sometimes as a woman shop steward they will be scared to go to their boss and tell them, ‘look here there is an issue we must tackle now’. They will say ai myekele umlungu (no leave this matter; you are dealing with the white boss). You see this everywhere even in shops or supermarkets. When a white guy comes, you will see how the black female teller will react. But when a black or African male comes in you will see the difference. So women mainly, I do not know about you if you have this fear, which has not disappeared from them in terms of confrontation. (Bafana interview, 2014).

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how women are prioritised by the male shop stewards and their issues are valorised further by these men, however it is discovered that it is the women who constantly stand in their own way. Self-doubt, family responsibilities and fear of leadership play a role in how active women will be in the union, more especially how they may even become shop stewards. However, it seems as though the valorisation of gender issues by the shop stewards would not be as intensely motivated, if it were not for the quotas and the policies that push for gender parity.

Stemming from similar debates surrounding quotas, (Tshoaedi, 2008); most of the men believe that by promulgating the quotas, they are forcing members to choose women for the sake of choosing without actually choosing a “participant”, instead women should be chosen on their competency or capacity, however as Ledwith and Colgan (2002) have said, in masculinised spaces it is not easy for a women to get into leadership with her capabilities, because a masculinised trade union will always find ways to be exclusionary to women.

However, by promoting women into such positions the union is empowering women to actively engage in the leadership positions that will allow them to transcend within the trade union (Britwum, 2010). By pushing for more women into leadership, it will influence other women to engage more actively within the union as observed within the union. Even when Diketso (interview, 2014) did not want to become a shop steward as she was unsure of herself, the vigorous support she received from her fellow colleagues and the male shop stewards encouraged her to go further in the elections. The findings further showed that even though gender structures are not visible on the shop floor, gender dynamics are altering and the NUMSA itself is becoming more accommodating to women. Diketso (interview, 2014) again explains that as a female shop steward she does not feel as though she is missing out on her family time with her children and family, as her shop steward duties never end late and they alternate when it comes to attending conferences, workshops and the like. Succinctly, NUMSA tries by all means to accommodate working mothers and married women. The spouses and family also play a pivotal role in encouraging women to transcend beyond their assumed gender roles. And as such, the trade union also recognises the power in solidifying support not only from within the trade union, but also in changing the mentality of the husbands as well, because this will easily permeate to a shift around gender relations and gender roles within society.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusions

This study has identified and examined the effects of gender transformation strategies within NUMSA, by examining the narratives of ordinary female and male members using qualitative research methods. Acker's (1990) theory of the gendered organisation was used as a point of departure, allowed for the examination of the narratives under a feminist lens. What was evident was that patriarchal power that was exercised by both black and white male workers to exclude women from masculinised spaces. This evident in the little things such as negating female bathrooms; "punishing" them for bringing the burden of motherhood within the workplace; using intimidation and humiliation.

This research report highlighted how women were forced to the margins when they decided that they would speak up for themselves against "dictators", even though it meant that their own co-workers would always side with the perpetrators i.e. the man. Even within their monthly meetings, the women claim that the men would contest everything they would say in order to undermine them in hopes of revealing their perceived "weaknesses". However, the fluidity of empowerment and disempowerment makes it hard to locate specifically where women are subordinated and where they are silenced.

Secondly this study examined the nature of the gender transformation strategies examining and their effectiveness by looking at how they worked to promulgate gender awareness. The findings showed that the visibility of transformation strategies did not exist at shop floor level as only shop stewards and select shop stewards at that, had experienced or attended gender related conferences, workshops, classes etc. This was in hopes that a trickledown effect could happen from the top, where shop stewards would pass on their acquired knowledge to the rest of the members. Racist management was another element that deviated women from connecting around the shared identity of gender and their specific biological differences (Hassim, 2004). As was illustrated within the literature review, similar to the women who were fighting the Apartheid regime alongside their male comrades, the women in NUMSA are also doing the same thing. Tshoedi's (2008) informants explained that they were motivated to join the union because of the racial discrimination that they had experienced in society and this was also true for my informants. Most of them joined the union upon their first encounter with management that they felt was racially motivated. This illustrates that

even though South Africa has been democratic for over two decades, most workers do not feel that much has changed and as such, need to unite on the basis of their class identity, which has negative implications for the female trade unionists, who themselves fail to see the need to organise as group, as opposed to the bigger goal of fighting against white management.

Thirdly, in contestation with the literature it seemed that women themselves were hindering their own progress within the union by not taking advantage of the opportunities that were there. Succinctly, the women were labelled as fearful, lazy and self-doubting- characteristics that further justify the view that females do not make good leaders Tsomondo (2011). However, the narratives of the female shop stewards and the union official, illustrated how all women within unions experience this anxiety, nevertheless it does not hinder their abilities to grow and advance within the union. Their transcendence within leadership is centred on the changing discourse of gender roles, where husbands are able to play supportive roles for their wives and male trade unionists are at the forefront of promulgating gender discourse and female participation. Essentially, permeating not only the boundaries of masculinised spaces but of patriarchal society as well.

This study is quite relevant in examining the importance of trade unions in female trade unionists lives, especially considering the enormous role past female unionists have played in mobilising and generating trade union support since the 1920's in fact (Iris Berger, 2007). And as such, because plenty of women are entering masculinised spaces that were previously closed off to them at a higher rate, this study was important in tracing the development of gender discourse and action within NUMSA. However, as a shortcoming gender has been given so much attention; sexuality and gender identification have not. Because, NUMSA is still identified as having an intrinsically heteronormative patriarchy, it would be useful to explore the experiences of gay men within the union and how they are contesting their own masculinity against the dominant hegemonic masculinity that exists and persists

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APPENDICES:

Research participants

Name	Location of work	Position within union	Married	children	How many years within union
Jabu	Springs	Shop steward	Yes	Yes	6
Mandla	Springs	Shop steward	Yes	Yes	16
Bafana	Springs	Shop steward	Yes	Yes	10
Paul	Springs	Shop steward	Yes	Yes	6
Khulu	Springs	Shop steward	Yes	Yes	9
Union official	Johannesburg	Union official	Yes	Yes	17
Azania	Nigel	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	7
Kefentse	Nigel	Ordinary member	No	Yes	4
Sithandazile	Nigel	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	4
Zoleka	Nigel	Ordinary member	No	Yes	18
Lucritia	Nigel	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	4
Esther	Nigel	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	6
Senzi	Springs	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	4
Nozipho	Springs	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	9
Lerato	Springs	Shop steward	Yes	Yes	4
Thembi	Springs	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	4
Gugulethu	Springs	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	5

Nontokozi	Springs	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	6
Natasha	Springs	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	6
Diketso	Springs	Shop steward	Yes	Yes	6
Ntombi	Springs	Ordinary member	Yes	Yes	7

Applications to Carry Out Research in Different Institutions

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Private Bag X 3,

Johannesburg, 2050

January 16 2015

Dear Sir/ madam,

RE: Application to Carry Out Research

My name is Nokwanda Sihlali. I am a student at University of the Witwatersrand doing an M.A. in Industrial Sociology in the Department of Sociology, Johannesburg, South Africa. I am seeking permission to carry out research in your union from July 2014 to approximately end of September. The study intends to investigate whether the gender transformation strategies such as your gender structures that promote gender equality through workshops, conferences, leadership quotas and gender schools work, by examining the narratives of the women within your union.

I would like three women to participate within the individual interviews and one shop steward to participate in individual interviews. Although, my primary focus is on women, I would like to complement my study with the cultural views of men.

The intended research involves in-depth interviews with some NUMSA female unionists in various positions (ordinary members to office bearers) who are key informants in the proposed research. The second part of the research which involves group interviews with male unionists. My study focuses on how issues of gender transformation in the face of union decline due to globalisation's employment restructuring are impacting on women participation within the working class unions with specific reference to NUMSA.

University of the Witwatersrand.

Regards,

Nokwanda Sihlali

073 560 7098/ 076 763 4553

E-mail: 457205@students.wits.ac.za/ sssihle@yahoo.com

Interview Guide

Introduction

My name is Nokwanda Sihlali. I am a student at University of the Witwatersrand, doing M.A. in Industrial Sociology in the Department of Sociology, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. The interview is done as part of my M.A. Degree Research Project in the Department of Sociology, Wits University in Johannesburg, South Africa. The purpose of the research is to explore the narratives of female unionists who belong to a union that emphasises gender transformation. The question will be what are their subjective experiences of transformation and meanings that they attach to their activities in the union and outside? The most significant question will be what are the subjective experiences of gender transformation for women in trade unions? A case study of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA). The interview/ focus group is therefore to understand if gender transformation strategies are really helpful to women on the participation of women in your union. My study focuses on how issues of gender transformation in the face of union decline due to globalisation's employment restructuring are impacting on women participation within the working class unions with specific reference to NUMSA.

PLEASE NOTE:

Confidentiality and Anonymity are guaranteed. You must be assured that your responses will be treated as confidential and will not be used for any other purpose apart from my research. The findings will not be published without your consent. Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary and you can choose not to participate or decline to participate during the course of the interview.

Age: (21-30) (31-40) (41-50) (50+)

Marital Status: Single/ Married/ Divorced/ Widowed

Do you have children? Yes No (If Yes, how many)

What is your occupation?

Personal history

1. Where did you grow up? (if not in Johannesburg, when did you come here?)
2. How many siblings did you have?
3. Who were mainly responsible for household chores?
4. Who was the breadwinner/s at home?
5. What types of jobs did they do?
6. Were they always at home?
7. How was your mother treated in the household by your father within the household?
8. How did your mother treat your father within the household?
9. The experiences and perceptions of female unionists in NUMSA?
10. What motivated you to become a member of NUMSA?
11. For how long have you been a member of NUMSA?
12. Have ever had a grievance at work? (If yes, would you tell me what was it and how your union helped).
13. Have you ever experienced any grievance at work because you are a woman? (how do you know it was because you were a woman? How was it resolved?)
14. Have you ever sought any assistance from your union apart from work related problems? (If Yes, Briefly explain what it was about and how the union assisted).

15. Do you think there are any benefits for being a member of this union? Why?
16. Trade unions have traditionally been male dominated and thus labelled as patriarchal, do you think this is true or has this perception changed? Why?
17. Do you think that NUMSA is accommodating to women as members and as office bearers? Why?
18. According to your own understanding are women well represented within the leadership and collective bargaining structures within NUMSA? Why?
19. Awareness of Gender transformation strategies
20. Do you know about the gender structures that exist within NUMSA?
21. Do you think that these gender transformation strategies serve any purpose in transforming the ideas surrounding gender within the union?
22. Do you think that enough resources are being used to support gender structures within the union?
23. Have you ever attended any events organised by the gender committee? Why?
24. What were they and why did you attend?
25. What did you receive from the experience?
26. Challenges of work and the union
27. What are the challenges women face at work?
28. What are the challenges women face as a union members?

29. Please tell me how you think women respond to the challenges.

Thank you for your answers. It has been a pleasure conducting this interview with you.

Participant Information sheet interviews

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Private Bag X 3,

Johannesburg, 2050

11 November 2014

Greetings,

My name is Nokwanda Sihlali, I am an Industrial Sociology student at the University of the Witwatersrand completing my M.A with the Sociology department. The study intends to investigate whether the gender transformation strategies such as NUMSA gender structures that promote gender equality through workshops, conferences, leadership quotas and gender schools work, by exploring the narratives of the women within NUMSA. Fundamentally, this study contemplates what the subjective experiences gender transformation for women in trade unions? The research will be beneficial to the labour movement in light of its contribution to approaching an understanding of the how the aim of gender equality can materialise as practically as possible.

I am inviting you to be part of the interview because, as a member of NUMSA I understand that you will have a wealth of knowledge and insight of NUMSA and therefore will contribute significantly to my research study. The interview will be recorded and requires that I ask you 25 questions for 45minutes to one hour, with you giving me your reply with each question.

If you agree to participate, I want to clarify however that I will not in any way pay you (money, gifts or otherwise) for your participation within the study. Your participation is completely voluntary and if you would like to withdraw from the study at any point in time you may do so. Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. You must be assured that the responses will be treated as confidential and will not be used for any other purpose apart from my research. The findings will not be published without your consent. Pseudonyms will be

used in the final report which will be available on request and in the main library. Your membership or job within the NUMSA will not be at risk in any way.

University of the Witwatersrand.

Regards,

Nokwanda Sihlali

073 560 7098/ 076 763 4553

E-mail: 457205@students.wits.ac.za/ssihle@yahoo.com

Consent form for tape recording

Private Bag X 3,

Johannesburg, 2050

January 2015

Consent form for tape recording

I _____ agree to my interview with Nokwanda Sihlali for her study to be tape recorded. This tape and transcripts will not be seen or listened to by anyone else besides Nokwanda Sihlali and will solely be used for her Masters Research. All the recordings will be stored on a computer with password, with my identity protected, after the research.

Informed Consent Form for Interviews

University of the Witwatersrand,

Johannesburg

Private Bag X3

Johannesburg, 2050

Informed Consent Form for interviews

I.....hereby consent to participate in the interview for the research project conducted by a University of the Witwatersrand Industrial Sociology student, Nokwanda Sihlali. The purpose of the study has been explained to me and I understand that my participation is voluntary. I am aware that my responses will be kept confidential and that there will be no direct benefits or rewards for my participation in the study.

Signature.....

Date.....