# THE EMERGENCE AND ROLE OF BLACK INTELLECTUALS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF NUMSA

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The labour movement and intellectuals

Many observers and commentators have acknowledged the pivotal role which trade unions have played in the struggle for democracy in South Africa. The history behind this role is well known and documented[1]. However, there are various aspects of trade unions with regard to how they are structured and operate which have remained unexplored. There is therefore, a "black box" which needs to be investigated to comprehend how unions came to play such a crucial role in the struggle against the system of apartheid. The study of the sociology of the trade union movement in South Africa has, for example, paid attention to the role of trade union education and democracy. Connections have been established between education and democracy in the unions and the successful struggle against apartheid. However, these issues do not present and represent the entire story as other factors which shaped the role of trade unions still need to be explored. There is still room to further investigate the missing links between trade unions and their contribution to the broader struggle against apartheid.

The role intellectuals have played in the establishment and consolidation of the union movement has received the least attention. Intellectuals in the South African labour movement, like elsewhere, are an important element in trade unions. It is important to investigate the function of intellectuals in the unions to broaden the understanding of the role trade unions have played in the struggle. This study seeks to establish how intellectuals emerged in the unions and the role they played in the development of these unions.

Some hold the view that intellectuals and their activities are historically embedded and thus should be understood within the network of discourses, institutions and politics within which they are located[2]. According to this view intellectuals cannot be understood in isolation from the broader context in which they were located and operate. The historical context of intellectuals therefore shapes the nature of intellectual activity, given the politics, institutional arrangements and discourses in which intellectuals play their role. This context also provides a framework for analysing the emergence and function of intellectuals. There are three elements that contribute to the context of the emergence of intellectuals namely, the geographical space, time and ideology as discourse in the development of intellectuals[3].

To understand intellectuals therefore, it is important to locate their role within a historical context, the different ways in which they have been conceptualised and current debates on intellectuals. For this purpose the traditional role of intellectuals and how it has changed is explored. This role is central to the Marxist conception of the role of intellectuals in society.

The literature review illustrates that there has been a bias in both the international and South African literature in viewing intellectuals and intellectual activity as an exclusive preserve of educated middle class professionals. In South Africa an intellectual is assumed to be white, middle class and educated. There are therefore two elements that shaped the concept of an intellectual in South Africa namely, race and class. The debates on intellectuals in the international and South African literature have been centred on the role and social position of intellectuals in society. These debates have focused on intellectuals as professional middle class agents.

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[1] For example, Baskin, J. (1991). Striking back: A history of COSATU. Johannesburg: Ravan Press; Maree, J. (1992). 'Developing trade union power and democracy: the rebirth of African trade unions in South Africa in the 1970s'. Unpublished manuscript and Ginsburg, M. (1997). 'Trade union education: its past and future role in the development of the South African Labour movement'. MA research report: University of the Witwatersrand

[2] Bove, P. (1949). Intellectuals in power: A generation of critical humanism. New York: Columbia University press.

[3] Ibid.

Theories of intellectuals in the unions and intellectuals elsewhere have generally neglected the role of organic intellectuals as a distinct category of intellectuals. These theories often assume and use the term 'intellectuals' to refer to formally trained intellectuals. In instances where organic intellectuals have been mentioned it has always been in passing. They make an assertion that organic intellectuals exist without probing any further about their nature and operation. Hence there has been no in-depth investigation about organic intellectuals, their role and the way they operate in organisations.

It was Gramsci who first differentiated between professional and organic intellectuals and in a sense highlighted the need to consider intellectuals from working class backgrounds[4]. His view is that each class has potential to produce from within its formation, organic intellectuals. In working class organisations there exist organic intellectuals who serve to produce the ideology and hence the hegemony of this class. Intellectuals therefore need not be middle class and professional in nature. While Gramsci recognises the existence of organic intellectuals he did not make any further investigation and analysis to explore the nature and role of these intellectuals.

He simply asserts that capitalist society possesses the ability to produce from within the class formations organic intellectuals. He does not probe any further into how these are reproduced within the organisations of the two classes. It is in this area that this study seeks to make a contribution to the understanding of the nature and role of intellectuals. It focuses on the emergence and role of organic intellectuals, in particular union-made intellectuals in the development of the trade union movement in South Africa. This is important in showing how black trade unions as particular forms of worker organisation, organically produce and reproduce own intellectuals and how these intellectuals influence the agenda of their movements. This is also done in the light of the tension that existed between white intellectuals and union-made intellectuals from the 1970s in the unions.

Organic intellectuals do not posses the features traditionally associated with intellectuals, that is, they are not professionally educated and they are not from middle class backgrounds. The notion of intellectuals as the formally educated perpetuated the conception of intellectuals in narrow occupational terms. This view has elevated the status of professional intellectuals to that of 'high priests' in the field of knowledge. This pattern of thinking, and linking intellectuals with the use of the highest mental faculty[5], different in status from the rest of the members of society, runs in all Marxists theories.

Modern literature still conceptualises the intellectual as an educated professional and in this way has contributed a biased view of intellectuals. This has resulted in workers perceiving intellectuals suspiciously, as they do not share the same class background. These include views of intellectuals as power hungry individuals who are only interested in imposing their own world-view on workers and their movements[6]. Since most intellectuals in the unions were white in South Africa, these suspicions became even worse at some stage because of the deep race divisions in this country. Nonetheless, at the top of these distortions is the notion that intellectuals are those with the ability to use their mental skills beyond the bounds of the ordinary by virtue of their educational background.

By focusing on intellectuals from within the unions this study has different implications from the traditional views of intellectuals. It argues that since union-made intellectuals share a common social background and consciousness with workers they tend to have more legitimacy and authority

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[4] Gramsci, A. (1996). Selections from the prison notebooks. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

[5] For example, Konrad, G and Szelenyi I (1979). The intellectuals on the road to class power. Sussex: Harvest press.
Gouldner, A. (1979). The intellectuals and the rise of the new class. London: MaCmillan Press.
Mills, C. W. (1948). New men of power: American labour leaders. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
[6] Ibid.

of knowledge in the trade unions. It is the fact that they are organically produced by the class formations they represent as intellectuals that enabled them to take control out of white professional intellectuals in the unions in the 1980s[7]. This argument is a challenge to the view that trade unions are incapable of having their own intellectuals and hence need them from outside[8].

It is argued in this study that organically produced proletarian intellectuals in the layer of the shop stewards and officials in the unions, are neither professionally educated nor middle class in their background. Yet some are intellectuals in the sense that they combined action and thinking in their role. One therefore does not need to be a professional with a middle class background to be an intellectual.

This argument is therefore in contrast to the view that the only intellectuals are formally trained[9], by arguing that shop stewards and union officials in the 1980s have combined manual trade union work with advanced thinking about the conditions of their own members and themselves. In this argument it is pointed out that the position of shop stewards provided a platform on which intellectual activity together with action was exhibited. Secondly, this intellectual activity has its roots in the experiences of the intellectual leadership of shop stewards and union officials from their own communities. As a social category of the intellectual leadership of workers, their experiences and role in their communities groomed shop stewards and union officials. The union provided a podium on which they displayed their intellectual potential.

Thirdly, the role they played, especially in worker organisations, often embraced the dimension of politics. However, this role has often been reflective, meaning that they tended to shape the political direction of the unions and were in turn shaped by the outcome of political resolutions in the unions. Unlike traditional intellectuals, they also tended to articulate the views and aspirations of those they represented, that is, articulated on the basis of a mandate. They were not independent agents of their own views but of the workers they represented.

It is clear from the above discussion that the concept of intellectuals has long been the subject of debates and arguments. Many theories were developed and dedicated to explaining what intellectuals are and what their role is or should be in society. The theories and the explanations thereof have been an acknowledgement of the crucial role ideas and intellectuals play in developing different sectors of society. However, many have explored the nature of intellectuals without successfully covering or including variations that exists within this concept. The assumption here is that intellectuals are not a homogenous group and that they exist in different forms and should be treated as such. Against this background an adequate understanding of intellectuals will require an appreciation of the complexities and variations in the meaning of the concept of intellectual. The complex nature of this concept can be captured by the view that this concept can mean different things to different people depending on their perspectives.

## 1.2    Background of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA)

This research investigated the role of black intellectuals in the unions from the 1980s to 2000. This was done by focusing on a union considered to be one of the most vibrant in intellectual activity, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). It was formed in May 1987 by four unions, MAWU (Metal Allied Workers Union), MICWU (Motor Industry Combined Workers

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[7] Ginsburg, M. (1997). Trade union education: Its past and future role in the development of the South African Labour movement. MA research report: University of the Witwatersrand

[8] For example, Lenin, V. (1972). On historical materialism, a collection: Marx, Engels and Lenin. New York: International publishers.

[9] Lenin, V. (1972). On historical materialism, a collection: Marx, Engels and Lenin. New York: International publishers and Gouldner (1979).

Union), NAAWU (National Automobile and Allied Workers Union) and UMMAWUSA (United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers Union). Two other Congress Of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) unions, GAWU (General and Allied Workers Union) and TGWU (Transport and General Workers Union) gave their metal members to NUMSA. These unions have a history that stretches from the 1960s and the 1970s, and therefore, have a long history pre-dating the period covered in this study.

Secondly, NUMSA is one of the founder members of the COSATU and one of the biggest affiliates with over 200 000 members. It was and still is an important affiliate, one of the most influential in the decision-making processes of the federation. Thirdly, it contributed policy documents such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The RDP was first developed in NUMSA and then was adopted by COSATU as its official policy document and later by the African National Congress (ANC) as its programme of reconstruction and development. It organises workers in the metal, belt rubber and related industries.

The theme of the 6th national congress of NUMSA in August 2000 was "Taking the struggle for socialism into the 21st century" and this theme has been NUMSA's guiding principle from its inception. There are many competing political ideas within NUMSA often with divergent policy perspectives. However, the socialist political tradition has been dominant and therefore shaping both political and economic policies in NUMSA[10]. In the congress this was shown when other regions argued that the alliance between COSATU and the ANC should break in view of the governments' with its macro-economic policy, the Growth Employment And Redistribution (GEAR). This policy has been viewed as the ANC's turn to the 'right'. It is viewed as a counter to the unions' economic policy approach contained in the RDP that was 'leftist' or in favour of workers in orientation.

On the basis of the discussion above, the central question posed in this research is how did organic union-made intellectuals or black union-made intellectuals emerge, and what role did they play in the development and consolidation of the trade union movement? Since traditionally intellectuals have generally been male, how, in terms of gender, did the concept of a 'union-made intellectual' as an organic intellectual manifest itself in the unions?

The section that follows identifies the processes and the conditions under which black union-made intellectual leadership emerged and was produced and reproduced in NUMSA. Secondly, it investigates the strategies through which intellectuals formulate and advance their ideas and contest with and other currents of ideas at various levels of the trade union movement. Finally, it examines gender issues in the production of these intellectuals, that is, who in terms of gender became an intellectual, how and why?

The third part of this paper is on the theoretical framework adopted in this study. It reviews the literature on intellectuals in both the international and South African context. It presents the structural and functional approaches to understanding intellectuals. Then defines the concepts used in this study and the theoretical underpinnings which underlie them. The fourth one presents the findings and analyses data on the basis of the responses of the subjects and material collected on secondary sources such as profiles and biographies. It focuses on the impact of the broader socio-economic and political context on the emergence and role of black union-made intellectuals. The fifth section is a continuation of the discussion of the findings but focus on the more specific internal trade union dynamics such as gender, underground structures, the role of white intellectuals and black intellectuals and culture. The last section summarises the findings and presents conclusions of the study.

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[10] An observation made while attending NUMSA's 6th National Congress on 20-24 August 2000 at Mafikeng.

## 2.    Literature review

## 2.1    What is an intellectual?

This section reviews the literature on intellectuals in both the international and the South African context. The concept of 'intellectual' has received different interpretations as a result of the many attempts that have been made to describe it. The concept was first used in France in the late 19th century when in the "manifesto of intellectuals", intellectuals expressed their concern at the imprisonment of Dreyfus[11]. Dreyfus was a French intellectual imprisoned because of his radical political views. The definition of an intellectual was first conceived as a phenomenon that incorporated participation in public life[12]. Being an intellectual therefore went beyond the narrow scope of scholastic occupation to include active involvement in politics. Intellectuals were perceived as often engaged in opposition activities[13]. That is, they have placed much emphasis on their inherent tendency to criticise the social orders in which they exist. Even in the United States intellectuals historically have been viewed as a source of unrest.

Other attempts, however, tended to emphasise different aspects of an intellectual, from a scholarly function on the one hand, to a social or political function on the other. The definitions therefore tend to focus on either the social position or the function of an intellectual, with the more recent definitions fusing or reaching a compromise between the two extremes[14].

Others emphasise the cultural aspect of intellectual activity, because they view intellectuals as bearers or producers of culture[15]. Intellectuals are viewed as cultural specialists and hence leaders of cultural communities because they prioritise cultural values. In the same vein, others argue that it is not sufficient for a person to be involved in cultural occupations to be an 'intellectual'[16]. They base their argument on the notion that often intellectuals are antagonists rather than advocates of their cultures.

The second interpretation has been that of intellectuals as "men of ideas", that is, people whose main occupational activity largely involves the formulation or the creation of ideas on the basis of which culture takes form [17]. To this effect they have been referred to as "men of letters" [18], or as "the antagonist of the status quo" [19]. According to this view intellectuals are distinguished from other social groups or members of society by their ability and keenness to engage in tasks that require high levels of cognition. In this view they can therefore be defined as,

> An aggregate of persons in any society who employ in their communication and expression, and with higher frequency than most other members of their society, symbols of general scope and abstract reference concerning man, society and cosmos. This high frequency of their use of such symbols may be a function of their own subjective propensity or the obligation of an occupational role [20].

[11] Hazareesingh, S. (1991). Intellectuals and the French Communist Party: Disillusions and decline. Oxford: Claredon Press.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Lipset, M and Basu, A. (1976) "The roles of the intellectual and political roles" in The intelligentsia and the intellectuals: theory, method and case study. Gella, A. (ed.). London: SAGE studies.

[14] Torpey, J. (1995). Intellectuals, socialism and dissent: Tthe East German opposition and its legacy. London: University of Minnesota Press.

[15] Feur, L. (1976). "What is an intellectual"? in The intelligentsia and the intellectuals: Theory, method and case study. Gella, A. (ed.). London: SAGE studies.

[16] Parsons quoted in Reiff, P. (1969). On Intellectuals. New York: Doubleday .

[17] Coser, A. (1965). Men of ideas: A Sociologists view. New York: Free Press.

[18] Tocqueville, A. (1955). The old regime and the French Revolution. New York: Doubleday Anchor books.

[19] Schumpeter, J. (1942). Capitalism, socialism and democracy. New York: Harper and Brothers.

[20] Shils, E. (1968). "Intellectuals" in International encyclopaedia of the social sciences. Shils, D. (ed.). New York: MacMillan. p339.

Therefore, intellectuals are engaged in creative work through ideas and they are naturally inclined to reject many aspects of the status quo in their societies. Molnar defines the intellectual as,

> A man whose life is guided by devotion to an idea ... an intellectual, puts his mental activity, articulateness and experience to some political or social use; he is not satisfied with interpreting events but also tries to influence and transform them[21].

Intellectuals therefore, do not formulate ideas for their own sake. Rather they seek to influence and even transform the social order which they are opposed to. A more functional definition includes all those who are involved with culture, either through creating, distributing or applying it[22]. However, Molnar goes on to argue that it is not only this functional role which determines an intellectual, but also the social structure an intellectual is a component of, which also determines who becomes, or is, an intellectual.

> An intellectual however, cannot be measured by his mental powers, insights and creativity alone. It is rather, the social milieu of which he is a part and the nature of his relationship to this milieu, that determines his role and status as an intellectual[23].

This structural definition of an intellectual maintains that it is the social belonging that gives intellectuals common consciousness of their role, their status in society, their relationship to the state and to those who seek power. On this basis they form a class to the extent that they share similar aspirations and influence in a society with classes as a form of division.

A more comprehensive definition of intellectuals is one that emphasises both the structural and functional components of intellectuals. That is, it combines the traditional approach to comprehending intellectuals in terms of occupation and training with one that entails a function of producing ideas and culture[24]. This definition is important because it provides a balance between functional and structural factors in the definition of an intellectual. Those who subscribe to this definition argue that the problem with the functional and structural definitions of an intellectual is that they are determinist. This position puts emphasis on both the functions, for example, to produce cultural values and the social structural position as determinants of an intellectual.

Most of the supporters of the view that intellectuals are critics of the status quo in capitalist industrial societies hold the assumption that, all intellectuals are "left wing" in the sense of being critical of capitalism. Another argument is that even in totalitarian state socialist societies intellectuals do find themselves in opposition to their regimes [25]. Intellectual activity has, therefore, not only been confined to progressive intellectuals but also includes conservative or reactionary intellectuals. For example, intellectual (and student) movements which gave support to the Fascist Party of Mussolini and the National Party of Hitler before they came to power, were not left wing[26].

Therefore, intellectual criticism may be either left wing or right wing depending on the historical circumstances. Another point is that intellectuals have also been involved in protecting or preserving the governments of their time. The difference is that typically intellectuals have been prominent among dissidents or opposition groups[27]. They are constituted mostly among those who diverge from the 'line', often political, of their societies. Intellectuals have therefore been central to

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[21] Molnor, T. (1961: 7). <u>The decline of the intellectual</u>. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company.
[22] Lipset, M. (1981). <u>Political man.</u> Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
[23] Ibid, p9.
[24] Torpey, J. (1995). <u>Intellectuals, socialism and dissent: the East German oppression and its legacy.</u> London: University of Minnesota Press.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Lipset, M and Basau, A. (1976).
[27] Torpey, J. (1995).

many of the political developments around the world. They have questioned not only those in authority but also the source of this authority.

## 2.2    Intellectuals and the labour movement in South Africa

In the context of South Africa the term 'intellectual' has been used in the same way as in the international literature already discussed. However, with few exceptions[28] the role of intellectuals in the South African labour movement has remained largely an unstudied area. One attempt partly focused on the role of organic intellectuals, tradition and structural forces (grass roots intellectuals) in the formation of class-consciousness[29]. It must be noted that while some attention is given to the role of organic intellectuals the focus of the thesis is on the formation of class-consciousness and not organic intellectuals per se. Maree on the other hand gives a brief analysis of intellectuals and the unions but does not go further than asserting that there is evidence to suggest that trade unions do produce their own organic intellectuals[30]. Other than these attempts which are not enough in themselves, most writers focus on professional intellectuals.

One writer focuses on intellectuals broadly in relation to political struggles but pays particular attention to university-based, and thus professionally trained, intellectuals and their relationship with political organisations[31]. He points out that it is important that left intellectuals, often close to political struggles, be allowed more space for intellectual activity in the 1990s.

Zita's analysis focused on professional socialist intellectuals and the 1973 white intellectuals who were aligned to the black working class movement[32]. Sephiri also focused on white intellectuals by critically investigating the relationship SALB (constituted by mainly white intellectuals) and the trade union movement from the early 1970s to the 1990s[33].

Mothapo views organic intellectuals as those who develop within the dominant social group in society[34]. He too focuses on professional intellectuals. Therefore there has not only been a bias against, but also a failure to investigate, black intellectuals and union-made intellectuals as part of organic intellectuals broadly.

There are various types of intellectuals that have been identified on the basis of the significant role they played in the development of trade unionism in South Africa. Webster has identified different types of intellectuals who had an impact on the development of the labour movement in South Africa. He identified professionally trained intellectuals such as lawyers, sociologists, economists and others as the first group.

The second group is the party intellectuals who are officials in the unions and seek to promote the views of the party to the rank and file members in the unions. The third group were free-lance intellectuals who related to unions and other organizations as research consultants by doing commissioned research for unions. The fourth group is union-made intellectuals who combined

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[28] Maree, J. (1992). 'Developing trade union power and democracy: The rebirth of African trade unions in the 1970s'. Unpublished manuscript.
Webster, E. (1992). 'The impact of intellectuals in the South African labour movement'. Transformation. 18.
[29] Bonnin, D. (1987). 'Class consciousness and conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940-1987: The case of the B.T.R. Sarmcol workers'. MA research project: University of Natal.
[30] Maree (1992).
[31] Lewis, D. (1989). "Intellectuals, the working class and politics". Transformation. 10.
[32] Zita, L. (1997). "Intellectuals and transformation" in The African Communist: Journal of the South African Communist party. No. 147, third Quarter.
[33] Sephiri (1999).
[34] Mothapo, W. (2000). "Intellectuals and the labour movement" The African Communist: Journal of the South African Communist party", 38.

their trade union experience with intellectual work. As union thinkers they linked ideas with action to be taken by the union. The fifth group is grass roots intellectuals who educated workers through poetry about past struggles and how these affect their present conditions[35].

While these groups are important in highlighting different types of intellectuals, the concept of union-made intellectuals is the only one adopted in this study. Therefore a distinction is not made between union-made and grass-roots intellectuals because grass roots intellectuals are themselves union made intellectuals.

Some work has already been done on the role or impact of intellectuals in unions broadly, but nothing has been done on the role of shop stewards encompassing that of an intellectual. Existing analyses of the role of shop stewards [36] and organisers[37] have limited analytical value because they do not conceive of the role of the union organiser and shop stewards in intellectual terms. Some have even gone as far as understanding some of the effects of the exodus of many union officials as "the big brain drain" implying that many who functioned as the intellectual brains of the unions have moved out of the unions[38]. Many of the officials referred to in this article started in the unions as shop stewards, and therefore had a history of engaging in intellectual activity.

While these scholarly contributions are important for understanding the role and impact of intellectuals in the labour movement, none of them explore or make an in-depth investigation of the role of the black union-made intellectuals in the development of the trade union movement. For this reason, the role of black union-made intellectuals has remained a neglected subject. This study seeks to address this shortcoming in the literature.

To engage with these questions a brief discussion of the kind of trade unionism within which union-made intellectuals emerged is provided to map out their context. The black union-made intellectual, like any social actor, is embedded in social formations in the same way that trade unions are embedded in societies. They cannot be understood in isolation from the social fibre they are a part of. The trade union as the social local context of black intellectuals provides a framework of analysis in which intellectual activity occurs. The discipline of sociology, generally defined as the study of social phenomena[39], society and its organisations, enables us to explain how social actors such as organic intellectuals emerge and influence trade unions.

An understanding of the emergence of organic intellectuals in the unions therefore requires a brief background of the history of black trade unionism in South Africa. This is important for mapping out the context within which organic intellectuals emerged in the unions. The history of the labour movement is familiar and has been well documented and is only dealt with as far as it demonstrates the concept of union-made intellectuals. This chapter, therefore, partly deals with the question of the conditions under which black intellectuals emerged. This is important because the processes through which these intellectuals were produced do not necessarily have their origin in trade unions but in their families and communities.

The emergence of black intellectuals in the unions can be traced back to the 1920s with the development of general trade unions, in particular the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). One of the reasons for the fall of the ICU was its failure to build working class leadership,

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[35] Webster, E. (1992). 'The impact of intellectuals on the labour movement'. Transformation,18. p. 88.

[36] Pityana, and Orkin, (1992). Gostner, K. (1995). "Shop stewards and workers" South African Labour Bulletin, Vol. 19 no 5. Keet, D. (1992). "Shop stewards and worker control" South African Labour Bulletin, Vol. 16 no 5.

[37] MacShane, D and Plaut, M. (1984). Power, black workers their unions and struggle for freedom in South Africa. England: Spokesman.

[38] Buhlungu, S. (1994). "The big brain drain: Union officials in the 1990s". South African Labour Bulletin, Vol. 18 no 3.

[39] Alant, C. (1990). Sociology and society: a humanist profile. Pretoria: Southern Book Publishers.

strong structures of democratic control and the reliance on charismatic leaders such as Clements Kadalie[40]. The failure to build strong shop floor structures can be said to have been a blow for union-made intellectuals because it is from these structures that they emerge and develop. Shop floor structures, therefore, provide the stage for the development and growth of black intellectuals. Without strong democratic structures in the workplace there can be no (strong) union-made intellectuals. There are many debates about democracy but it still remains the basis on which union-made intellectuals develop[41].

In the 1940s, there were other attempts by black unionists to revive the unions[42]. One can also read this move to mean that there were black leaders, however few, with potential intellectual skills to be resourceful enough to organise and set up trade unions on their own. This was also a statement to white intellectuals that the organisation of African workers does not rely on them. In the mid-1950s the South African Council of Trade Unions (SACTU) was formed from the progressive forces from Trade and Labour Council (T&LC) and Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETA)[43]. It too renewed the hope for the growth of African trade unions and subsequently the possibility of union-made intellectuals. This was short-lived as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the ANC were banned by the end of the 1960s, and because many union leaders belonged to these political organisations, they were either arrested or forced into exile.

It could then be argued that the development and growth of union-made intellectuals was hampered directly by the apartheid states' attitude towards African organisations, including the trade unions. The debates on whether or not SACTU's alliance with the ANC affected the leadership strength of SACTU have no bearing here[44]. The main reason for the lack of development of African trade unions and union-made intellectuals, consequently, is to be sought in the historical context characterised by a repressive apartheid government. In short, the oppressive political climate made it difficult to develop African trade unions and strong shop floor structures that would have ensured the development of union-made intellectuals.

It was in the early 1970s that the development of union-made intellectuals began, because the renewed resistance of black workers set the pace and laid the basis for the consolidation of a strong African union leadership in the 1980s[45]. It is from this category that the intellectual leadership of the unions emerged. A new generation that was to lead the unions was being exposed to the social, economic and political injustices of the apartheid state. Many were involved to various degrees in the 1976 Soweto uprising and similar actions. Many unions were formed with strong shop floor structures and these included the unions which later merged to form NUMSA. The 1970s therefore laid the foundation for the serious emergence of union-made intellectuals in South Africa.

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[40] Baskin, J. (1991). Striking back: a history of COSATU. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

[41] Maree, J. (1982). "Democracy and oligarchy in the trade unions: independent unions in the Transvaal and the western Province General Workers' Union in the 1970s" in Social Dynamics. Vol. 8, no 1.

[42] Baskin, J. (1995). "Planting the seeds: unions before COSATU" Striking back: a history of COSATU. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Lambert, R. (1989). 'Political unionism in South Africa: An analysis of the South African Congress of Trade Unions', PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand: Department of Sociology.

[45] Friedman, S. (1984). Building tomorrow today: African trade unions, 1970-1984. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

## 2.3    Rationale of this study

The labour movement in South Africa has played a pivotal role in the struggle for democracy and this role has already been recognised[46]. The trade unions were not only active in the struggle against apartheid, but also contributed their own leadership to the democratic government and the private sector in the transition period. Among these are former union leaders such as Mbazima Sam Shilowa (now premier of Gauteng) and Cyril Ramaphosa (now a businessman).

The fact that people like Shilowa started as shop stewards in the unions and eventually became strategists and thinkers of the movement means that it is possible to talk about union-made intellectuals in the unions. They have their origins in the grass roots of the union movement. Union-made intellectuals are organic intellectuals in the sense that they come from within the ranks of unionised workers. For the purpose of consistency the concept of union-made intellectuals is used throughout the project to refer to proletarian organic intellectuals. The emphasis on "black" in the intellectual category used here is informed by both the observation that most of the union-made intellectuals are black, and secondly, they have not received any scholarly attention as intellectuals because it has mostly been their white professional counterparts who have enjoyed such attention.

However, the researcher's motivation to undertake research on black union-made intellectuals developed when he was still a research intern in the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP). He did research on the role of white intellectuals in the union movement[47]. This research investigated the relationship between the South African Labour Bulletin (SALB) and white intellectuals; it was through the SALB that they interacted with and were involved in the union movement from the early 1970s.

One of the main conclusions of that research was that the influence of white intellectuals started diminishing in the labour movement with the emergence of black union-made intellectuals in the 1980s[48]. The paper argued that this was an indication that an organic leadership of the union had intellectually taken control of the unions from white intellectuals. This was, in part, the result of the industrial relations context proposed by the Wiehahn Commission in the late 1970s to legalise African trade unions. Although it was done to control these unions, the legalisation produced favourable conditions for independent and free intellectual activity within the unions.

White intellectuals were placed in a better position by historical circumstances to organise and lead the unorganised mass of African workers who lacked leadership and direction. Hence they dominated these unions from the 1970s but only to lose control of them in the 1980s[49]. One of the mediums through which white intellectuals communicated their ideas was the SALB. In its coverage the SALB captured the changes in labour relations, including the emergence of black union-made intellectuals in the 1980s. Some have argued that the crushing of activism by the state

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[46]Baskin, J. (1991). Striking back: a history of COSATU. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, Ginsburg, M. (1997). 'Trade union education: Its past and future role in the development of the South African Labour movement'. MA research project: University of the Witwatersrand, Maree, J. (1992). 'Developing Trade Union Power and Democracy: The rebirth of African trade unions in the 1970s' Unpublished manuscript.

[47] Sephiri, T. (1999). 'A critical investigation of the relationship between the South African Labour Bulletin (SALB) and the trade union movement': paper presented at the South African Sociology Association: University of the Western Cape, 2-5 July 2000.

[48] In fact the present study is a direct result of this conclusion.

[49] Maree, J. (1982). "Democracy and oligarchy in trade unions: independent unions in the Transvaal and the Western province General Workers' Union in the 1970s". Social Dynamics, Vol. 8. No1.

in the 1970s resulted in many black union leaders being jailed and exiled and hence white intellectuals took the lead[50].

The second point is that there was a growing anticipation of political freedom demonstrated by the increasing participation of black workers in the political struggle of South Africa from the early 1980s. White intellectuals were dominant in the 1970s in the unions because they had strong social networks and leadership skills while black workers lacked leadership and direction as a result of the repression of unionism in the 1940s. They were thus placed in a better position by history to take the lead in organising black workers, and the fact that they possessed intellectual and leadership skills meant that they were assured dominance in the labour movement through their ideas for some time. The SALB served as one medium in which these ideas were exchanged by these networks.

Union-made intellectuals emerged as a result of the opening up of the South African industrial relations system to black workers. In its coverage of labour issues, the SALB captures this change by showing more input from this emerging layer of black intellectuals. The research on white intellectuals and the development of the labour movement through their interaction with the SALB, was a recent indication that intellectuals who have been given attention in terms of scholarly contribution were white intellectuals, with little or no attention on black intellectuals.

It is mainly for this reason that black intellectual leadership in the labour movement became the focus of this study. Their role both as shop stewards and (later) union officials has been captured and articulated, but their contribution as intellectuals remains unexplored[51]. This study therefore seeks to fill this knowledge gap by examining the nature and role of black organic intellectuals in the trade unions.

This study, however, does not assume that all black union leaders became intellectuals. Rather, it argues that there were union leaders, particularly from unions that became affiliates to COSATU, who became influential union intellectuals. Like traditional intellectuals, they had a particular interest in ideas about trade unions and the political ideologies that should guide them. Their intellectual activity was also demonstrated by the development and growth of cultural expressions in the form of poetry and songs.

## 3    THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1    Intellectuals' self conception

Intellectuals and their role within the Marxist tradition have been viewed in terms of their location in the social structure. The classical conception of intellectuals within this tradition is based on the assumption that class formation or identity form the basis on which the individual's position within the social relations of production is determined, hence the social categories, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat[52]. The place of intellectuals is therefore determined by the social structure. The social structure however is not sufficient to determine one's own social position because intellectuals need to develop a common consciousness of their existence as a collective to play a political role. According to this view, it is important then that intellectuals in the capitalist societies develop a

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[50] Lambert, R. (1989).

[51] Kelly, J and Heery, E. (1990) "Full-time officers and the shop stewards: Patterns of co-operation and interdependence" in  Fosh, P and Heery, D (eds.) Trade unions and their members: studies in union democracy and organisation. Houndmill: MacMillan.
Keet, D. (1992). "Shop stewards and worker control" in the South African labour bulletin. Vol. 16 no 5.
Lane, T. (1974). "The trade union officer" in Lane, T. The union makes us strong. London: Arrow.

[52] Marx, K and Engels, F. cited in Hazareesingh, S. (1991). Intellectuals and the French communist party: disillusion and decline. Oxford: Claredon Press.

revolutionary consciousness to be able to challenge the system that exploits them like manual workers. The following remark is a good illustration of Marx's conception of the conditions in capitalist societies that should drive intellectuals to develop revolutionary consciousness.

> The bourgeois has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into paid labourers[53].

Therefore according to this view what ties the working class and intellectuals is the fact that they have compatible interests, the result of capitalism's pauperisation of intellectuals. However, it is only those intellectuals with a working class consciousness will become thinkers and strategists for the working class.

> When the class struggle nears the decisive hour…a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift and joins the revolutionary class…and, in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole[54].

This view was laying the foundation for the conception of the role of intellectuals in the workers' movements. In the end the reduction of intellectuals, their status and occupation to the level of the working class, mean that intellectuals could contribute their theoretical skills to a revolutionary cause[55]. This was Marxism's way of justifying the involvement of intellectuals in working class movements, who do not share class backgrounds with workers. Intellectuals resemble workers in the sense that they too live by selling their labour and so are exploited by the power of capital. The relationship between workers and intellectuals is summarised as follows:

> As philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so, the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapons in philosophy[56] (emphasis from text).

The problem with this conception of intellectuals' role as ideologists of the workers is that it denies the existence of different class backgrounds between intellectuals and workers. Those within the Marxist tradition who reject this view argue that the intellectuals' pauperisation is a ploy to wrest control out of the workers' movements[57]. They instead stress that the social and economic circumstance of the workers and the knowledge thereof is unique and different from that of intellectuals.

Intellectuals are therefore considered as having bourgeois consciousness that has no relevance and significance to the working class struggle. They suggest that, to overcome capitalist exploitation and alienation, workers need to develop their own political leaders whose social origin is exclusively proletarian. This interpretation of the emergence and role of intellectuals is important for this study because it focuses on intellectuals whose social origin is that of the workers. According to this view then union-made intellectuals would not only serve the interest of their own members but also play a crucial political role in the emancipation of workers because they have direct experience of the same social background as workers.

Lenin however, rejected this view and argued instead that in the context of political action social origins were irrelevant.

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[53] Ibid: 1991, 65.
[54] Ibid: 1991, 26.
[55] Ibid: 1991
[56] Ibid: 1991, 187.
[57] Ibid: 1991.

The organisation of revolutionaries must consist, first, foremost, and mainly of people who make revolutionary activity their profession…In view of this common feature of the members of such an organisation, all *distinctions as between workers and intellectuals* and certainly distinctions of trade and profession, must be *utterly obliterated* (emphasis from text)[58].

Lenin too, therefore, viewed intellectuals as ideologists of the workers' movement. They have to play a central political role in light of the lack of education and political consciousness of the working class. He argued that the role of revolutionary intellectuals was to bring socialist consciousness to the spontaneous working class movements (i.e. trade unions and political parties of the working class). According to this view the working class movements cannot develop the consciousness to overthrow capitalism on their own. This consciousness has to be brought to workers "from without" by intellectuals.

The function of intellectuals would therefore be to reveal the inherent class tensions of capitalism to workers and to organise them for its destruction. This can only be achieved when the "role of the vanguard of fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory"[59]. The spontaneous element in the collective action of the working class is viewed as embryonic consciousness because workers themselves are not aware or conscious of the irreconcilable nature of their conflicting interests with employers and the implication to the whole of the modern political and social system. The only consciousness which the working class can develop is trade union consciousness.

The problem with the spontaneous nature of the working class movement is the possibility of succumbing to the bourgeois ideology. Trade unions are viewed as an indication of the ideological enslavement of the working class by the bourgeoisie, in that they in themselves are incapable of developing political consciousness and hence will remain enslaved to capitalism. This means that by their nature trade unions are not revolutionary, but reformist. They strive to secure measures to improve the conditions of workers and yet cannot fight to abolish the very cause of this condition, the subordination of labour to capital. That is, they seek to reform rather than transform capitalism. This trade union condition is seen as result of lack of capacity to develop intellectuals with a revolutionary consciousness within the unions. The task of intellectuals is thus to drive the working class movement away from the spontaneity of bourgeois trade unionism, the "movement of least resistance"[60] to a revolutionary movement.

Gramsci further elaborated this Marxist conception of intellectuals as the 'Priests' of the workers movement. Like Lenin, he believed that intellectuals were the transmitters of consciousness and possessed high levels of intellect through which consciousness is conveyed. However, he emphasised that the two principal classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, can produce their own organic intellectuals or ideologues[61]. Organic intellectuals are therefore found in any of the two classes. Gramsci goes a step further in the sense that he distinguishes between the traditional professional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. The defining characteristic of professional intellectuals is that they have specialised education and are in this sense professionals in their areas. Organic intellectuals on the other hand are products of their own organisations and tend to bridge the gap between the leadership and the masses. They keep the leadership of the working class movements in touch with its roots, the masses. The organic intellectual does not merely act as a link

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[58] Ibid (1991:189).
[59] Lenin, V. (1972). <u>On historical materialism, a collection, Marx, Engels and Lenin.</u> New York: International Publishers, p 385.
[60] Ibid (1991).
[61] Femia, J. (1975). "Hegemony and political consciousness in the thought of Antonio Gramsci" <u>Political studies.</u> 23. Vol 1.

but also has an "active involvement in practical life, as constructor, organiser, permanent persuader"[62].

Organic intellectuals therefore, tend to have links with their own class members both economically and politically because they develop from within their own class formations and reflect these class dichotomies in their thinking. Unlike professional intellectuals organic intellectuals are produced from within their organisations and do not necessarily have to posses any formal professional training.

Gramsci's argument is therefore that intellectuals do not develop independently of class formations and hence cannot be understood without looking at the social background they come from. That is, they are part of the class structures of their own societies and need to be understood as thus, that is, as part of the class structure in a capitalist society. Everyone can potentially be an intellectual in the sense of having and using their intellect but not everyone is an intellectual in terms of their social function according to this view. To understand intellectuals and the role they play it is important therefore to look at the class they represent or belong to and the function they perform. This means that any social group in a capitalist society has the potential to produce from within itself organic intellectuals to serve its needs[63].

The working class, like the bourgeoisie, can produce its own intellectuals from within its own social formations. The working class is therefore able to produce its own intellectuals from trade unions and worker political parties. Having intellectuals representing the views of their own class makes it easier to achieve social hegemony within that class. Gramsci's conception of social 'hegemony' stresses that the political domination of the ruling class was not brought about by material power alone but was also achieved through control of ideas. Since organic intellectuals share the same outlook of life with the masses, their existence will serve to give legitimacy and provide some form of social cohesion and hegemony within the organisation that produced them and the views they represent. The shop stewards, whose role has encompassed that of intellectuals, are better placed to perform this task.

There are a number of problems, which Gramsci did not address, with respect to intellectuals. The first is that his definition of intellectuals did not specifically deal with intellectuals in the unions[64]. That is, what would be the nature of the relationship between intellectuals and the trade union movement? Then the problem becomes on what basis does one determine who is or becomes an intellectual in the unions organically? Maree used administrative and strategic planning as the two criteria to determine intellectuals in the unions. However, not all performing these activities (shop stewards and organisers) may be intellectuals. Since organic intellectuals are involved in all aspects of the struggle of their own classes, be they economic, social or political, it is however the latter which has been the defining characteristic of the South African shop stewards. They played and still do play an extensive role in the political structures of their own communities.

In fact it is in this area that the tension as to whether unions in South Africa should deal with politics as well, that was a bone of contention between white and black intellectuals. Therefore, in this study intellectuals were determined by their involvement in political discussions and study groups, and used the decisions taken as the basis on which they drew strategies to influence the agenda of the unions. Interest, extensive involvement in political ideas (particularly underground), and influence determined who was understood as an intellectual in this study.

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[62] Ibid. p 40.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Maree (1992).

Organic intellectuals are also differentiated between grass roots, self-made and union-made intellectuals. These may be understood to mean that organic intellectuals come from among the rank and file, and are self or union-made. They were not produced through the formal educational or professional structures or bodies but by the unions. There is therefore no difference in the three concepts; the only emphasis is on different aspects of organic intellectuals in the unions. But additonally, they are not necessarily a homogenous group in that the role they play may differ depending on their experience and roots. An important point suggested about these intellectuals is that in the event that they come to occupy high positions they become members of the intellectual elite - the "new man of power". They cease to become intellectuals of the masses because of the positions that pull them up and away from the rank and file. This view seems to suggest that within working class organisations there are tendencies towards the concentration of power at the top of the hierarchy.

In the same way that union-made intellectuals provide the ideology of those they represent, intellectuals (professional) are ideologues of their own classes. This view is held by others to mean that capitalist intellectuals may be critical for the survival of capitalism in times of crisis, that is, they may come up with effective solutions to save the system from sinking. These intellectuals serve the interests of capitalism by providing the ideology necessary for its own reproduction and survival.

They provide the ideology necessary to sustain capitalism when capitalists themselves are struggling to establish themselves[65]. The view that intellectual activity can be or is neutral is rejected. Like the Marxist classical conception of knowledge, this view holds that the ideological interests of the intellectuals have always been tied up with class. That is, the knowledge produced by intellectuals tended to serve the class interests of intellectuals. Therefore, no knowledge or intellectuals are neutral; they serve the interests of the classes they represent.

Mannheim on the other hand thought that the class position of intellectuals and their interests were not sufficient to provide an adequate and comprehensive definition of the roots of social knowledge[66]. He is of the view that it is important to take into account aggregates such as generation, occupational, status groups and so on, and the mental characteristics of each in determining other aspects about intellectuals. This is important for the way in which social knowledge is approached in this study because it is viewed as shaped by, most importantly, the generation experience of intellectuals. This means that the knowledge produced by intellectuals is also determined by their experience.

This was a useful sociological concept employed in this research to guide in the identification of union-made intellectuals who became dominant in the 1980s. The notion of a generation implies intellectuals born approximately at the same time; as a result they have a common experience, a shared outlook on life and a sense of collective destiny[67]. The concept of generation implies a common experience of important events in the lifetime of the generation, which shape the form and content of their experiences. It is this common experience which enabled union made intellectuals to network. The links between union organisations and their federations facilitated this process. The process of networking is evident in all aspects of the unions including among unionist themselves.

What is different and significant about intellectuals is that they move beyond the limits provided by the experience of their generation to become a source of inspiration for future generations. Their impact is therefore not limited by their generation experience but reaches far beyond the scope

[65] Bozzoli, B. (1981). The political nature of a ruling class: capital and ideology in South Africa 1890-1933. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul.
[66] Konrad, G and Szelengi, I. (1979). The intellectuals on the road to class power. Sussex: Harvest Press.
[67] Eyerman, R. (1994). Between culture and politics in modern society. United kingdom: Polity Press.

provided by this experience. It can be said that early union leaders (from the 1950 and 1960s) albeit small in number, were intellectuals. Mainly because they used the experience they accumulated in their time to teach the generation of the 1970s about the dynamics of trade unionism in South Africa and in so doing, impacted on another generation.

Therefore intellectuals are shaped by the historical context in which they are born. But their views and vision transcend the generation and impact on future generations. The teachings of the old intellectuals greatly impacted on the new movement intellectuals who drove the trade union struggle in the 1980s. The RDP document is an example of a vision by intellectuals in NUMSA for the reconstruction of a democratic South Africa. To this extent intellectuals not only seek to produce ideas and interpret events but also seek to influence others and the future generations. They do not create or formulate ideas for their own sake but seek to transform the status of their societies. This is true of the union-made intellectuals in NUMSA who were involved in politics because they sought to transform this society.

The existence of intellectual activity and spirit in the unions is perhaps best demonstrated by Petros Tom, who wrote in his biography that, "intellectuals and academics have, for  far too long, been writing books about us. But now the time has come for us, the working class, to take a stand and write our stories about our experiences in life" (Tom: 1985). Tom is one of the union-made intellectuals who in the light of the power of white intellectuals in the unions resolved to become independent of their influence and control. He belongs to a generation of intellectual leadership of the unions which took it upon itself to be independent from competing white intellectuals to control and influence workers.

The concept of generation has been overlooked by many theorists to distinguish intellectuals from one another. This study takes it as one important aspect of intellectuals because it determined both the contents of their experiences and consciousness. The fact that this study focuses on those union-made intellectuals who were active in the 1980s is indicative of the seriousness of the view it takes of the impact a generation experience can have on intellectuals. It was important as another tool for selecting shop stewards who were active in the 1980s.

Party intellectuals, union-made intellectuals and grass roots intellectuals constitute Gramsci's notion of organic intellectuals in that they are produced by the unions and serve the interests and aspirations of the unions in which they organically emerged. To this list Ginsburg adds movement intellectuals, the generation of intellectuals which emerged in the wake of the 1970s-strike action by workers[68]. In contrast to the earlier generation of the 1950s and 1960s, these intellectuals were produced by a particular form of unionism which became dominant in the 1980s, social movement unionism.  This concept basically refers to the trade unions' combination of unionism and politics.

Ginsburg has gone further than asserting the existence of organic intellectuals, identifying trade union education as a process through which organic intellectuals are produced and reproduced, in that, it provided the platform or the basis on which they expressed and debated their views. Trade union education was thus characterised by internal contestations and through this played an important role in developing the trade union movement. His view is that it enabled professional and organic intellectuals in the unions to reach a compromise over trade union strategy and practice. This means that trade unions through the education and experiences they provided became "learning sites" for unionists.

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[68] Ginsburg (1997)

For Ginsburg, trade union education therefore provided the space for contestation among labour intellectuals and for the possibility of the emergence of new union intellectuals, movement intellectuals. This view is influenced by his definition of a trade union as a contested terrain, where ideas at various levels compete for the direction which the movement is supposed to take. While this provides a useful insight into the role of trade union education in creating the space for the emergence of intellectuals, it does not provide an in-depth investigation of the role of some union–made intellectuals and black intellectuals in particular, in the development of the labour movement. It focuses primarily and largely on trade union education as a process in the development of the union movement and not of black intellectuals per se. It is however, beyond doubt that trade union education, formal and informal, was a critical instrument in advancing the struggle of African unions.

Thompson examined the way in which ordinary people taught themselves how to read and write. This process of self-education was about how they taught themselves to read the bible. It also has relevance in relation to self-education, in the context of Bantu education in South Africa, in the sense that black people, and unionists in particular, through observational learning engaged in self-education about their movements. Ginsburg called this struggle-education of the unions a 'site of learning' but it is not sufficient to explain how the process of self-education took place. Social networking was one the processes through which trade union leaders taught one another. Freire (1968) stresses the importance of education (formal, informal or self-education) in arguing that it brings new awareness or consciousness of the oppressed, and compels them to critically engage in endeavours that will change the social situation responsible for their oppression.

Tarrow views social networks as informal connective structures that rest at the heart of formal organisations and serve as potential bases for collective action[69]. They are therefore not a formal source of association but a system of informal groupings. He argues that social groupings shed light on the subversive role informal networks play in spreading new models of forms of collective action. These interpersonal social networks are the centres of social movements.

Tarrow also argues that informal networks depend on the context within which they are located. When trade unions become open and legal, there is a tendency to rely on formal channels and structures of the organisation to deal with union issues, that is, those that are not networked underground. However, in the context of state repression these formal tools of association could relapse or revert to informal networks. Informal networks therefore tend to dominate when governments are wary of collectivities. The advantage of informal networks under such conditions is that they are less easily infiltrated by the police and informers than formal associations, because of the covert nature of their operations. They are thus difficult to repress and control under such conditions.

There is another argument that "men can educate each other through the mediation of the world"[70]. Through this all human beings possess the potential of self-reflection in relation to their world and each other, enabling them to see their reality differently and critically and become conscious of the contradictions in their reality. It is this educational experience which leads some members of the oppressed to become "new men of power", or leads to the formation of new men, intellectuals. There is also an acknowledgement here that an educational system can also lead to a "culture of silence" among the dispossessed.

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[69] Tarrow, S. (1998). Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics. (2nd. edition). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
[70] Freire, P. (1968: 13). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: The Seabury Press.

Thompson argued that "the articulate consciousness of the self-taught was above all a political consciousness"[71]. The process through which people teach themselves is also a process of acquiring political consciousness. The process through which intellectuals are produced is also for him a political process. It is within this theoretical framework that the emergence and role of black intellectuals in the labour movement in South Africa is understood.

While acknowledging that this process involves political consciousness of a certain kind, the reproduction of working class consciousness is also understood as a result of networking. Without the interaction between the old and the new intellectuals of the early 1970s the emergence of union-made intellectuals in the 1980s would have been much more difficult. The political context in South Africa in the 1970s to the 1980s therefore provided a useful framework within which the emergence of black intellectuals in the labour movement could be understood.

Molnar also recognizes the need for intellectuals to posses some degree of common consciousness to effectively undertake their role. The important concepts here are therefore the idea of an intellectual generation, intellectual emergence as a process of acquiring political and working class consciousness and most importantly, intellectual production as a result of networking.

## 3.2 The 1980s intellectual generation of the unions in South Africa

It could be argued that it is not the generation experience alone which enabled black intellectuals to play such a crucial role in the development of the labour movement. The networking amongst themselves as a generation also enabled them to become a social force able to advance its views at all levels of the trade union movement. It then eventually enabled them to gain intellectual control of the movement by the 1980s.

The eventual acceptance by white intellectuals in the labour movement that political issues should form part and parcel of the trade union struggle in the 1980s, is evidence of this control. Ginsburg argued that the new movement intellectuals arrived at an alternative view of trade union strategy and the role of unions in community politics[72]. It could not have been possible without networking among the emerging movement intellectuals at the time.

The independence and confidence of the African union leadership and the tensions that existed between white and black union intellectuals is expressed by Petros Tom further when he said that:

> My message to the working class is that nobody will liberate you except yourself. Do not give your struggle to intellectuals and academics and other organisations who do not have the interest of the working class at heart, who want to further their aims at the expense of workers[73].

This clearly demonstrates that by the 1980s many union-made intellectuals were beginning to assert themselves and their independent thinking with respect to strategies and ideas around the management of their trade unions. Sephiri also argued that the influence of white intellectuals in the union movement started to diminish by the early 1980s[74]. He is of the view that white intellectuals too had an informal social network and that this was reflected through the SALB. Until the early

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[71] Thompson, P. (1963: 781). The making of the English working class. London: SAGE publications.

[72] Ginsburg (1997)

[73] Tom (1985: 68)

[74] Sephiri, T. (1999). "A critical investigation of the relationship between the South African Labour Bulletin (SALB) and the trade union movement": paper presented at the South African Sociology Association: University of the Western Cape, 2-5 July 2000.

1980s views expressed in the SALB were largely those of white intellectuals who were communicating among themselves and was also a reflection of their dominant views and influence in the unions.

However, this changed in the mid-1980s, when more black union leaders started writing and expressing their views and opinions in the SALB. This served as an indication that a new network of intellectuals was emerging from within the unions, preaching a different political programme which the trade union movement should take. This political strategy favoured linking workplace struggles with the broader need for political liberation, in contrast to the strategy of white intellectuals (and some black union leaders).

Ginsburg (1997) points out that the tensions between white professional intellectuals and black intellectuals became more pronounced in the split of MAWU in 1984. Those who favoured links with civic organisations and the liberation movement went to form UMMAWUSA. Professional intellectuals and those who favoured a worker oriented trade union movement remained in MAWU.

The tension was around trade union strategy. The new movement intellectuals wanted community politics to form part and parcel of the trade union strategy of resistance to apartheid. Professional intellectuals emphasised worker-controlled politics, to the exclusion of what they referred to as populist politics. The bone of contention was therefore about control of the union, fought between white intellectuals and movement intellectuals. This was really about the role of trade unions in society, especially when such a society is faced with the question of transformation[75].

Ginsburg is of the view that the 1980s saw a move towards a new compromise between black and white intellectuals because the latter were able to bring the former under their influence. This was evident when white intellectuals abandoned their rejection of unions participating in community politics. They acknowledged that trade unions should bear in mind community politics in their struggle against exploitation.

This paper argues that the potential of union-made intellectuals to influence and thus control the direction of the labour movement, took place through networking. This point was also evident in the methodology used to select interviewees. In 'snow-balling', interviewees often referred to people they knew and were in the same social circle with politically. This is only one indication that a form of network existed and functioned as a mechanism of social interaction and cohesion amongst black intellectuals.

This chapter focused on the theoretical framework within which this project is located. It traced the theories around the concept of the intellectual from Lenin. It showed that he viewed the role of intellectuals in society and the trade unions specifically as to provide revolutionary consciousness. It showed further that Gramsci took this debate a step forward by recognising the existence of professional and organic intellectuals in organisations. Mills moved even further when he identified differences within organic intellectuals. This section also traced how these concepts can be understood within the context of the South African labour movement and its history. This chapter also highlighted the need to deepen the understanding of the nature of organic intellectuals by focusing on union-made intellectuals. It also indicated that concepts such as generation within the context of labour in South Africa would be important in understanding the emergence and role of the 1980s generation of shop stewards in NUMSA.

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[75] The unions were not alone in deciding whether or not to politically align themselves. Civic organisations as part of working class structures also faced this dilemma, although this was not between white and black intellectuals. See Mayekiso, M. (1996). Township politics: civic struggles for a new South Africa. New York: Monthly review press.

# 4 THE EMERGENCE AND ROLE OF UNION-MADE INTELLECTUALS IN NUMSA

## 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide and analyse the responses of worker leaders, that is, shop stewards and organisers and to illustrate how their role is inherently intellectual. It is an attempt to capture the experiences of worker leaders as intellectuals produced from within the ranks of NUMSA. Secondly, the interpretation and analysis will be based on the interviews and profiles that have been recorded by the SALB. The SALB has been running profiles of these union leaders since the beginning of the 1990s, covering their social background and involvement in the unions and how they assumed union leadership. Although these profiles are not necessarily about NUMSA leaders they are important in showing the extent to which these union leaders shared common experiences and roles. They are therefore significant to the extent that generalisations could be made from the data they present.

The term generalisation is not quantitatively understood to mean the extent to which findings could be generalised to the broader target population[76]. These two sources of data were used together with autobiographies that have been written on some of the union-made intellectuals in NUMSA.

The patterns of experience of these worker leaders highlight the similarities in the experiences of a generation of union-made intellectuals. Firstly, they share common social backgrounds in that they are all from working class backgrounds. Secondly, their emergence can be traced back to the community and school political struggles. Thirdly, as ideologues of the working class they developed and brought working class consciousness from within the unions. Fourthly, women union-made intellectuals, however few, challenged the patriarchal ideology of men in the unions. Fifthly, tensions and political differences existed between two dominant political traditions in NUMSA. The sixth point is that there were and still are underground structures in which all political traditions formulate strategies and plans to influence the agenda of the union. The seventh issue is that not only white intellectuals played a role in building the unions but also black union-made intellectuals themselves. The last important finding discussed is that union-made intellectuals were not only strategists and thinkers of the union but they were also cultural producers of the union struggle.

The following two chapters attempt to show that the role of black worker leadership was intellectual in nature. The role they played in the development of their unions was tied to a vision shaped by their ideas of a post-apartheid South African workplace and society. That is, a just society based on the principle of equality, non-discrimination especially on the basis of race (and gender), political freedom and the recognition of worker rights as human rights. As intellectuals they had different political (and economic) ideas about what a future South African society should be. These political ideas ranged from right, middle to left-wing ideologies. The following is a description of their social background, influences and development, and union involvement.

The South African shop stewards and black organisers are different in the sense that they have an interest in politics, a feature uncommon in the nature of British shop stewards[77]. This means that there may have been contextual features in the South African political system of apartheid that informed the nature of the role of shop stewards and black organisers in this country.

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[76] Neuman, W. (1994). Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches. London: Allan and Bacon.
[77] Pityana, S and Orkin, M. (eds.). (1992). Beyond the factory floor. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

## 4.2    The family and communities

An important finding of this section is that they emerged and developed out of their family and community struggles. They did not emerge in the unions as the concept 'union-made intellectual' might suggest.  Rather, they are the products of community and school political struggles. It comes as no surprise then that they all come from similar and impoverished backgrounds. They are from large families with the mother as either housewife or (mostly) a domestic worker, and generally a father as a semi or unskilled worker. Bheki Hlatshwayo from MAWU had to leave school, and he provides the following reasons:

> I was born in Orlando West and I am not from a rich family. I had to sell all sorts of things in the train station to finance my studies and found it hard to do both at the same time. My mother also depended on my father who had another family of four. The fact that I had a kid when I was 17 in 1974 and another one in 1975, all this meant that I had more people to take care of and this led me to seek formal employment to help my family[78].

This was also true for many unionists from unions other than MAWU, from which the above interviewee came. Sipho Kubheka, former MAWU organiser and later general secretary of PPWAWU, was born in Alexandra in 1953.  His mother was a domestic servant and because of poverty he only studied until standard 9.  He had to sell coal from a wheelbarrow and he was a golf caddie on weekends[79].  Vusi Nhlapho, the president of NEHAWU, was one of seven children at home.  He relates this experience:

> It is striking that many of these union leaders had to leave high school because of financial difficulties and the arising need to support their large families. It is common knowledge that people in the rural areas often have many children as an investment because they know that they will in turn work in the farms and because of their huge number there will be enough labour and returns. Then the more children a family has, the more income will be available to the family because of the availability of children for farm labour[80].

Alex Ramahlo describes his social background as follows:

> I was born in Duiwelskloof near Tzaneen and was the first born of nine children and went to a rural school until standard 6 in 1969. I started working in the plantations of blue gum trees serving people food and water and was called "dairy boys". I left because I had a need to find a better job and sold ice cream for Dairymaid in Roodepoort and I stayed at Dobsonville hostel. I have worked as a domestic and gardener at Kruger National Park and my parents were both farm labourers. I was called 'baas boy' tack[81].

They came from impoverished backgrounds where there was no money to send children to school so that they could at least finish high school. Large families further exacerbated the question of financial difficulties. There seems to be a cycle where these families by virtue of being working class, tend to reproduce themselves on this basis. If children are not able to advance educationally the chances of social mobility are far too limited. The blocked chances of social mobility in turn lead to working class families reproducing themselves. The same rule would apply to middle class

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[78] Interview with Bheki Hlatshwayo, Regional Secretary Wits Central West: 01/03/2001)

[79] Kubekha, S. (1993). "The labour movement has to fight for its independence." in South African Labour Bulletin. Vol. 17 no. 1.

[80] Nhlapho, V. (1994). "The president who dreamed of studying law" in South African Labour Bulletin. Vol. 18 no. 1.

[81] Interview with Alex Ramahlo, International officer in NUMSA: (7/02/01).

families but with different effects. In most cases, then, working class families would tend to produce children who in turn would become working class adults.

While the social background for both men and women can be similar, there are certain experiences which are unique to women. Women were not only forced by impoverishment out of school; factors such as pregnancy also played a role. The experience of Grace Khunou captures this because she had to leave school at matric when she fell pregnant[82]. While the need to support their families was a major contributing factor for them in leaving school, women were also faced by pregnancy, caring and looking after children.

This point only serves to demonstrate the different social position of women and the experiences it comes with, even when social backgrounds are similar to those of men. The above discussion does not suggest that the social background determine one's social position later in life; rather that it largely influences that position. Some writers have argued that women's dual role in society can help explain the lack of women in the leadership structures of the union[83]. As large numbers of women join the labour market they still have domestic responsibilities. The argument here is that the dual roles which women play restrict their career mobility in organisations, hence it is difficult for them to participate to the same degree as their male counterparts in the unions.

This argument takes into consideration the fact that many of the people who fall into the category of subjects in this study have, since the 1994 general elections, moved to the private sector and government. That is, they have climbed the social ladder to become part of the middle class. On this basis, it could then be said that not all working class families end up with working class children; the possibility of social mobility exists for the few.

There are many other things that have shaped the experiences of the subjects and the way they described and interpreted them. They cited a number of experiences from observation of their parents and their communities and South African society as a whole as having had a major impact on them. Nkosinathi Nhleko provides a description of this experience:

> While I was still young, in standard 4 or 5, I realised there was inequality in our society, but didn't know the real reason for it. For example, in the rural areas, the white man was highly regarded as occupying the second place from heaven, like he was god…I was worried by the fact that my father or anyone of his age would bow to a boy of my age just because he was white[84].

Joyce Mabudafhasi saw her father working very hard to build a Lutheran mission station only to be paid next to nothing, whilst the white priest transferred to the mission was given a new house, car and monthly salary[85]. Vusi Ntlapho would also notice how white supervisors exploited his father when he went to work with him during the school holidays. They would send him around to do odd jobs at their homes[86].

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[82] Khunou, G. (1997). "I am here to push change" in <u>South African Labour Bulletin.</u> Vol. 21 no. 1.

[83] Rees, D cited in Tshoaedi, M. (1999). 'Functional differentiation in trade union employment: A study of gender inequality with specific reference to women union officials'. MA thesis: University of the Witwatersrand.

[84] Nhleko, N. (1990). "Nkosinathi Nhleko, the new general secretary of Transport and General Workers Union" in <u>South African Labour Bulletin.</u> Vol. 14 no. 6 p84.

[85] Mabudafhasi, J. (1993). "Joyce Mabudafhasi" in <u>South African Labour Bulletin.</u> Vol. 17 no. 6.

[86] Nhlapho (1994)

For Jabu Gwala it was the experience of his father who was dismissed from work after fifteen years of service in his company because he was absent for three days attending to family problems[87]. These experiences, while they did not directly involve them, surely had an impact because they happened to people they were close to and had a relationship with. It was what was happening in their 'world' and it informed a lot of the decisions they made later, especially with regard to joining the unions. Union-made intellectuals are a product of a set of experiences which were not alien to black workers. They experienced the exploitation and discrimination of those around them and themselves. They had similar experiences as those whom they represented in the unions.

It was not only indirect experience, especially of the treatment of their parents, which influenced them but also the direct experiences in which they themselves were involved.

An example of such a direct experience would be some discriminatory practice directed at them or in which they were involved. For example, some union leaders had direct experience of forced removals as they were growing up. Levy Mamabolo states,

> My family lived in the town of Pietersburg alongside poor whites, Indians, coloureds and three other African families…In 1948 after the elections, we were forced to leave Pietersburg because it was declared a white area[88].

There were many other unionists who experienced forced removals at some stage, such as Emma Mashinini. Her family was moved by force from Diagonal Street in Johannesburg[89]. Forced removals were not always racially motivated because some were simply just moved from one township to another for various reasons, like Petros Mashishi whose family was moved from Alexandra to Soweto[90]. There was therefore interplay between the indirect experiences of parents, families and the communities in which they lived broadly, and the experiences which they directly went through as young people growing up under the system of apartheid in South Africa. The apartheid system and its racial practices provided to various degrees a homogeneous experience which, as members of the same class, they could relate to and use as the basis on which to unite for a common cause. By spreading these experiences they provided the grounds out of which future worker leadership emerged.

These experiences occurred not only in families and communities but also in schools. The schools provided another site of experience which influenced this group towards community activism. While activism was limited to high schools the conditions which informed it were the same in primary schools. It was in high schools that they experienced some of the issues that had broader socio-economic and political implications. Attending high school therefore pushed them deeper into the issues that faced their communities. It is here that many had their first encounter with politics. As a student, Nkosinathi Nhleko says,

> I first became involved in 1984, in a student organisation. That was when I first got to know about Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) and I had my first detention for public violence after a school boycott in 1986[91].

Mtutuzeli Tom refers to a similar encounter with politics but he also brings into light the influence of black consciousness in his growth and development as a young political activist.

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[87] Gwala, J. (1990). "Jabu Gwala SACTWU organiser" in South African Labour Bulletin. Vol. 15 no. 4.
[88] Mamabolo, L. (1996). "Levy Mammabolo, the people's mayor" in South African Labour Bulletin. Vol. 20 no. 1 p86.
[89] Mashinini, E. (1993). "women are left far behind" in South African Labour Bulletin. Vol. 17 no 4.
[90] Mashishi, P.(1996). "At home in the unions" in South African Labour Bulletin. Vol. 20 no. 6.
[91] Nhleko: (1990: 84).

I first discovered politics at school. There were Black Consciousness (BC) slogans which we supported, but without a clear understanding of what they meant … After the banning of the BC organisation in 1977, there was a period of silence …We had to organise the COSAS in semi-clandestine fashion. Everyone was recruited on a one-to-one basis – we never had a chance to sit down in a group and discuss things with comrades. Things changed in 1981. The Ciskeian police crushed COSAS…So students felt too threatened to be involved in action…I left school in 1982 after matric[92].

For Bethuel Maserumula it was the short-lived experience at the University of the North that equipped him with the political tools that became important in his trade union work.

My experience at this university was short lived because my involvement in student demonstrations and the intolerance of the then Lebowa government of student unruliness as they used to call it at the time[93].

The schools therefore could be said to have been very instrumental in the beginnings of the formation and emergence of black intellectuals. Early political activism and experimentation could be said to mark the beginning of breeding worker leaders for the 1980s. It is true that trade unions have been an important "learning site" or a "a school for struggle" for the emerging black intellectuals[94]. However, this process began in earnest in high schools, and it is important to understand the formation of these intellectual leaders as a process. Although the process started in families and in the communities, the schools further exposed them to the injustices of a society they were trying to understand. Some have argued that, unlike early union leadership which came from unskilled migrant hostel workers, the new worker leaders were drawn from the better educated urban based workers[95]. To understand union-made intellectuals it is important to acknowledge their development not only in the unions, because what developed and influenced them predates their involvement in the unions. What they experienced in the unions was part of the process of experiences that had started early in their lives.

Therefore, the internal dynamics of trade union education are not adequate in explaining the emergence of union-made intellectuals or movement intellectuals. In fact, the first learning site for trade unionists and many activists alike was the high schools and their communities. It was there that union-made intellectuals emerged, because their activism in schools provided the first encounter with politics and the first stage on which to practise politics. The culmination of school political practice was the 1976 Soweto youth uprising and the importance of this process cannot be ignored.

This youth uprising which started in Soweto spread throughout the country creating an awareness among the black youth that there was potential to resist the dismal Bantu education they were fed and hence many started becoming active on that basis. It also marked the beginning of political activism in schools for some students. Freedom Dlamuka relates his involvement in politics in schools as follows:

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[92] Tom, M. (1991). "Interview with Mtutuzeli Tom, Mercedes Benz shop steward, vice-chair of COSATU's Eastern Cape region" in South African Labour Bulletin. Vol. 15 no. 5 p91.

[93] Interview with Bethuel Maserumule, employee at FES: (25/10/00).

[94] Ginsburg, M. (1997). Trade union education: its past and future role in the development of the South African Labour movement. MA dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand,

[95] Allas, C and Mckan, V. (1995). Industrial sociology: A South African perspective. (First edition.) Johannesburg: Lexicon Publishers.

In 1976, when I was in secondary school, there were student demonstrations in Soweto. I was caught up in the winds that blew from there. I did not understand what was happening, but there was a teacher who told us that we needed to support the students who were boycotting classes…We used to leave school before the bell rang to listen to radio Maputo. They discussed how FRELIMO was coming to liberate us. He also exposed me to a Muslim newspaper, and I started to read about the liberation. That was how I was introduced to politics, though I was not clear as to what role I should play[96].

Norman Mokoena picked up political involvement at school, from merely observing what was happening around him.

My first engagement with active struggle was when I participated in the student demonstration against the school principal who refused to accept us. We managed to have him removed. That gave me a sense of what the masses could achieve united and armed with a political will[97].

The observations and the experiences unionists had both as children and young adults growing up in the rural areas or the townships were important in building up a strong political will against apartheid. No doubt political activism in the schools was very important in planting the seeds for future engagement. The first building block of a South African union-made intellectual could then be said to be political experience of the school, which was the source of Bantu education, against which they resisted. The schools were therefore very instrumental in the beginning of the formation and emergence of union-made intellectuals. This political activism was however immature in the sense that they had not fully comprehended some of the concepts and political ideologies intellectually.

The schools were not the only spaces for early practice sessions in politics. Old ANC veterans and others from the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), were involved in instilling the culture of the struggle among the South African youth. Ginsburg describes this process as informal and experiential learning[98]. This learning process however, did not necessarily start or did not only take place in the unions. It happened in the schools and was instrumental in shaping the level at which these unionists came to engage with political issues in the unions. Mtutuzeli Tom gives an illustration of his encounter with informal transmission and experiential learning:

There were some old people who were members of the ANC many years ago who use to sit down with us and tell us about the old days. They also gave us examples of the resistance of the people from 1973, the workers in Natal and how they embarked on forms of strikes and other such histories. But they said we should be part of Black Consciousness organisations and support them … Immediately after I was employed, we talked about establishing a youth congress in our area…The youth congress received a blessing because one of the most popular and respected comrades in the area Comrade Steve Tshwete was at the launch to speak to us. He really made an encouraging speech. It was the first time in our lives that we saw a strong veteran of the ANC who spent so many years in Robben Island. He encouraged us and said he felt in his blood that the country was going to be free, because were we starting to build these organisations[99].

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[96] Dlamuka, F. (1996). "Things have changed" in South African Labour Bulletin. Vol. 20 no. 5 p94.

[97] Mokoena, N. (1997). "Against the stream" in South African Labour Bulletin. Vol. 21 no. 4 p101.

[98] Ginsburg (1997).

[99] Tom (1991: 91-92).

Again the involvement of some of the ANC veterans and black consciousness activists in encouraging the rebuilding of all forms of anti-apartheid organizations is evident. The workplace provided Mtutuzeli Tom with a world of opportunities for engagement. Bonnin (1987) [100] found in MAWU that many of these old activists tended to play the role of grass roots intellectuals by educating and encouraging new intellectuals to engage in the struggle. In this way they kept alive the history of the past struggle and reinterpreted it in the new context for the emerging intellectuals. It is argued in this study that this informal transmission of knowledge was also a form of self-preservation. It did not take place for its own sake; there was a need for these old intellectuals to preserve their ideas and views of the world by transferring them to the new generation of intellectuals. Ginsburg argues that through experiential learning, collective action and grass roots intellectuals' informal transmission of organic knowledge, there was created a new movement identity [101].

Although this was true, this is not a complete picture. The development of organic knowledge can not be viewed as a momentary event. This knowledge was created and recreated, practised at schools and communities, and made clear by grass roots intellectuals. The informal transmission of knowledge was a process which can be traced back to the social backgrounds and experience of the new intellectuals. Informal transmission of knowledge, the practice of politics in schools and communities were not sufficient in building a union-made intellectual. The initiative to read broadly and widely around the material on unions and the ideologies of trade unionism and society, ensured a well informed and cognitively able trade union leadership. That is, it formed a stronger basis on which to differentiate intellectuals from other forms of black leaders in the unions. This description serves to illustrate the continuation of the organic development of union-made intellectuals.

Essau Ekkie sees the role of community organisations in the development of future union intellectuals as a result of the political situation under apartheid.

> Because of the political situation people were very active, they attended meetings and were well informed about what was happening and what was going to happen. There was always someone available to replace the members we were losing, even shop stewards. Because of the experiences and the way in which people were treated there was always a pool of willing participants in the movement. Many shop stewards had a background in leadership from their communities. It was natural training; it came with their experiences from their backgrounds [102].

So it was not only schools and trade unions that served as 'learning sites' for activists but also the community organisations. In fact, what the above description emphasises is that it was from community organisations that experience about the struggle and the spirit with which it was conducted was received. The process of learning how to debate, the freedom to express ones views without fear are part of the ideals and spirit of democracy. They all indicate one of the processes at play, which could be said to illustrate the production of union made intellectuals as well. In this instance the processes can be traced to communities from which they came. Learning through observation in their communities, and actively getting involved in changing the social conditions of their lives both at work and in their communities, could be said to be part of the broader process of the way in which union-made intellectuals were produced.

One way of understanding the role of politics in the schools in creating the inclinations for intellectual activity among the unionists, could be to say that the schools served as rehearsal venues for the preparation of a play to be performed in the theatre, that is, the unions. They engaged in

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[100] Bonnin, D. cited in Ginsburg (1997).
[101] Ginsburg (1997).
[102] Interview with Ekkie Essau, representative of the International Metal Workers Federation (IMF): (7/03/2001).

political activism in the schools without understanding or knowing much about politics, but they read the scripts and rehearsed the play only to develop solid political characters in the unions as union-made intellectuals. Many of them may have started their activism in their schools, but it was in the unions that they came to fully comprehend their role and positions. The point, however, is that the emergence of union-made intellectuals should be understood as a process which precedes activism in the unions, not as a process which happened in the unions.

## 4.3    Joining the union

Richard Ntuli provides the following reason for joining the union:

> In the past, workers were dismissed like nothing for nothing at times, and the Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) [did not?] try to limit the power of management from abuse. Workers were very vulnerable, and still are, and it was my position as a worker then that pushed me to defend the workers[103].

The vulnerability of workers and himself as a worker was one of the reasons he joined the unions. But it must be noted that while all African workers in his position felt this way it was a few who took it upon themselves to take up issues with management. It was only a few people like him who had the courage and the will to challenge management's prerogative to unilaterally run the workplace, and to demand to bring the views of the workers in.   The reasons to be involved in the unions are not only found in the unions.  In providing the reason he got involved in the unions, Veli Mjiyago states his view of the world as he sees it:

> You don't have to look far to understand why I got involved in the unions and the organisation of my community. If you go to Soweto right now, those reasons are still there, *mfanakithi* (my brother). If you go to the CCMA there are even more[104].

The way in which what was happening in Soweto and the conditions known to be associated with it as a township, and the activities of the CCMA, show that it was on two fronts that these unionists received the motivation to become active against apartheid. This statement serves to strengthen the point made earlier about the connection between the conditions in the townships encouraging participation in politics and vice versa.

Most of these unionists became involved in the union in their first few years of working life. This involvement is often triggered by some negative workplace practice, such as the dismissal of a fellow worker culminating in industrial action. After the dismissal of his father, who was a SACTU member, Jabu Gwala started work at Frame Textiles in 1967.

> Then in 1974 we had another big strike which led to Halton Cheadle – one of the students involved in labour matters then – being banned. That is when I started to take a leading role in the unions … I took initiative with a couple of guys to go into the factory and to negotiate … After the strike people started to follow me and push me to be elected to the liaison committee. We decided to make it our strategy to infiltrate the liaison committee and to use it to the advantage of the workers … In 1974, I was elected to the underground shop-steward committee, which was meeting in the office, planning outside of the *impimpis* (informers) serving in the liaison committee[105].

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[103] Interview with Richard Ntuli, NUMSA organiser in Germiston local: (2/02/2001).

[104] Interview with Veli Mjiyago, deputy General secretary of Metal and Engineering Bargaining Council: (1/03/01).
[105] Gwala (1990: 83).

Again, joining the unions should be understood as a process and as a result of certain experiences in the workplace such as unfair dismissal and others of a similar nature. The position of a shop steward then required not only the leadership instincts and the bravery to lead but also strategic thinking about the best ways to counter management strategies to contain the unions. The use of words such as '*impimpis*' or informers, and 'infiltrate' gives an impression of the conditions under which shop stewards and organisers were operating. The creation of structures such the 'underground shop stewards committee' as a counter is evidence of the use of underground networking under the conditions of anti-unionism in the workplace. This was an important tool the unions used to protect themselves against management infiltration through informers.

According to Tarrow, networks tend to be most common and effective under conditions of oppression as described in the case above[106]. What seems to have been in operation here is underground networking and the underground shop stewards committee is evidence of that. It must be remembered that the conditions under which African trade unions operated were not favourable and hence the use of underground strategies was useful and important in the face of managements' anti-union strategies. Underground networking was therefore important in giving shop stewards and organisers the role of underground network controllers in fighting for workers. Their role was to build and develop the unions in the factories and fight for worker's rights in the workplace. For this to be achieved the union leadership would have to posses sound legal knowledge of procedures (of good administration), to be thinkers and strategists who are able to foresee developments and stumbling blocks, as guardians of the rights of workers.

However, the latter intellectual role would not be sufficient if confined to the workplace alone. The involvement of shop stewards in community politics stretched beyond the workplace to include the implications of workplace happenings for the workers' home lives. For example, if workers got a salary increase which became eroded by a hike in the price of petrol, it meant that they would have to engage the government. The South African political context alone was sufficient to force many of these shop stewards to become politically active.

## 4.4    A union-made intellectual as a visionary

The role of shop stewards was not merely as representative of the workers on the shop floor but was also as visionary of the workers' struggle. While many mechanically represented workers, some took this a step further by including in this role a vision of shop stewards in a post-apartheid South Africa. Jabu Gwala understood his role and that of workers as follows:

> I see the role of workers as getting rid of apartheid and then going further. That is why I prefer the independence of the unions, building the consciousness of the workers. We managed to build up consciousness against the employers by creating trade unions. Now we have to build the consciousness of the workers, of the working class to lead[107].

This is a vision of a worker leader; it speaks of what the role of working class leadership should achieve. There is a political cause which working class leadership should attain[108]. The role of union-made intellectuals would therefore not only be to interpret and represent workers on the shop floor, but also to try to lead them in the political project of transforming society into a working class led society.

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[106] Tarrow, S. (1998). <u>Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics.</u> (2nd. edition). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
[107] Gwala (1990: 85).
[108] Molnar, T. (1961: 7) <u>The decline of the intellectual</u>. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company.

While it is true that many black people had a vision of a post-apartheid South Africa, the intellectual leadership of the unions had the function of cultivating the struggle towards that ideal. The role of worker leaders (shop stewards and organisers) and intellectuals is seen as bringing consciousness to the working class to lead the struggle. The prerogative of bringing consciousness from 'without' or from professional intellectuals has been fused here with the role of worker leaders. But the need for unions led by African leaders means that it would have to be black union-made intellectuals who would need to bring forth and cultivate working class consciousness and not white intellectuals. This is bringing forth working class consciousness from within, rather that from without.

The reason is that union-made intellectuals share similar class backgrounds with those they represent and are therefore better placed to formulate or bring ideologies to workers. This is the conscientisation process that is important in bringing forth a common understanding to workers and thus it develops consciousness from within. Therefore, Lenin's assumption that worker trade unions do no have the capacity to develop their own intellectuals, and that conscientisation has to be brought in from without, is problematic. Through a number of processes such as informal learning, political practice and experimentation, trade unions can develop their own intellectuals. In fact the focus of this study on union-made intellectuals is based on the assumption that trade unions can develop organic intellectuals.

Gwala makes a distinction between intellectuals and worker leaders and surely, in this view, does not consider himself an intellectual. Richard Ntuli, says:

> Intellectuals like getting stuck with ideas, but we were at the frontline of action, because it was what we wanted. It is fine to talk about ideas of socialism and so on, but those ideas without action are useless. For me it was always action, and ideas later[109].

This means that union-made intellectuals regarded themselves as primarily men of action. They do not dismiss the importance of ideas in fostering this action but they do not regard themselves as intellectuals. This is because they view intellectuals as professionals always preoccupied with ideas. Whatever the sequence of their role it surely included some fascination with ideas. It can also be said on the basis of this evidence, that union-made intellectuals do not primarily regard themselves as intellectuals, rather as men of action who played their role as implementers of ideas, and the strategies that came from such ideas.

The level at which union-made intellectuals engaged employers and the South African government surpassed the mechanical function of their positions. Their level of engagement took them beyond the conditions of oppression under which they lived; their action and thinking was guided by the ideal of a post-apartheid South Africa, free of oppression and racial discrimination.

It is also true that trade unions were instrumental in shaping the experiences of workers and instilling a culture of thinking among its leaders. As worker leaders, union-made intellectuals participated in debates which fostered intellectual growth. The culture of openness and free speech in the unions provided the space for people to air their views freely without fear and thus encouraged thinking broadly and boldly. Mthuthuzeli Tom describes the political atmosphere in the unions then as follows:

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[109]Interview with Richard Ntuli, organiser in Germiston local: (2/02/01).

> In 1986 I attended the COSATU regional congress …We in NAAWU were pushing for the adoption of the Freedom Charter in that congress and we faced strong opposition from former MAWU members who were saying we should not adopt it, as it is not a programme of the working class and all that...Each and every speaker was speaking on mandates. You speak because you say that you have met with the workers and these are the workers feelings, so when you are speaking you are speaking with the voice of the workers. And you have the confidence that if one comrade is raising an issue opposing yours, you just go to the mike with the feeling that the workers back at home are saying[110].

There were tensions and political differences in the unions. However, these differences were also an indication of a culture of engagement of different political traditions as a result of the encouragement to express ones' views in the debates about approaches to trade unionism. Ginsburg is of the view that these debates were also about control of the unions[111]. The debate on whether to merge community and workplace politics or not, for example, was also a struggle for control of the unions. The role of worker leaders as voices of the workers illustrates the level of democratic participation and close relationship of the rank and file and their leaders or shop stewards. They not only represented their views but also spoke on the basis of the mandate provided by workers; they represented the feelings of workers about issues.

## 5    INTERNAL DYNAMICS AND INTELLECTUALS

### 5.1    Gender politics and intellectualism

Table 1: Occupational positions according to gender

| Gender | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Current position | Male | Female | Total | Female as % of total |
| Local administrator | 2 | 32 | 34 | 94 |
| Branch administrator | 1 | 24 | 25 | 96 |
| Regional administrator | 3 | 48 | 51 | 94 |
| H/O administrator | 5 | 53 | 58 | 91 |
| Local organiser | 79 | 7 | 86 | 8 |
| Branch organiser | 33 | 8 | 41 | 20 |
| Regional organiser | 46 | 6 | 52 | 12 |
| National organiser | 24 | 3 | 27 | 11 |
| Branch secretary | 17 | 4 | 21 | 19 |
| Regional secretary | 23 | 1 | 24 | 4 |
| General secretary | 10 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Research officer | 6 | 3 | 9 | 33 |
| Legal officer (regional) | 14 | 3 | 17 | 18 |
| Legal officer (national) | 2 | 3 | 5 | 60 |
| Education officer (branch) | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Education officer (regional) | 12 | 0 | 12 | 0 |
| Education officer (national) | 11 | 3 | 14 | 21 |
| Media officer | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Other | 43 | 40 | 83 | 48 |
| **Total** | **340** | **238** | **578** | **41** |

Source[112]

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[110] Tom (1991: 92).
[111] Ginsburg (1997).
[112] Buhlungu, S. cited in Tshoaedi (1999:11).

According to Tshoaedi these findings show the traditional occupation structure of employment where men are at the top of the hierarchy in powerful and influential positions[113]. While women are at the bottom of a hierarchy in positions that require them to stay in the office. They show that unions reproduce the sexual division of labour common in patriarchal societies. It could be added that this pattern is also evidence of the intellectual occupational structure in the unions. This is because men are concentrated in positions that require intellectualisation whilst women are concentrated in positions of monotony and routine, that is, positions of less power.

Again, the position of women in the unions becomes highlighted when a woman has been elected to a high position in the unions. Faith Modise defends her position as a woman official who started as a shop steward, and states that it was on merit that she was elected and not because of her gender.

> I was not elected because I am a woman. I believe it was my contribution and my vision that made workers elect me to this senior position…One of the challenges is to build confidence in women. Women easily get intimidated by their male comrades. Confidence building can be achieved through education[114].

This strong voice on the position of women in unions highlights and further emphasises the argument made earlier about the need to recognize women as both a separate group and as intellectuals who have played a role in the development of labour. Furthermore there are women, however few, who have been active in the unions as far back as the 1950s. Emma Mashinini, now in the Land Commission, is one of the few women who have been active in the unions for a long time.

> In 1956, I started work at a garment factory, Henochsburg, which made uniforms…I started as a cleaner and then worked as a machinist. Workers here were dismissed for no apparent reason. This led me to organise workers[115].

Because they also had to fight their male counterparts in the unions, it can be argued that women had not a double shift but a triple shift: domestic responsibility, work itself and union work. The fact that Modise emphasises that it was because of her vision that she was elected into a senior position, means that she possessed intellectual leadership skills. She agrees that women have a different experience in terms of their position and role in society.  Even so, they achieved many victories by standing up and becoming active in the unions.

> Despite the low level of education, especially from the side of women, we have managed to inculcate confidence among workers[116].

One of the most striking and touching biographies of women unionists is the story of Jabu Ndlovu. According to Fairbairn[117], Jabu Ndlovu was born in 1967 as the daughter of farm workers in white-owned land in the Natal Midlands. She joined MAWU in 1980 while working at Prestige a kitchenware factory. Like many South African workplaces for African workers, the conditions under which she worked were bad, ranging from safety to racism and gender discrimination in the workplace. Like any working woman in the unions, she also experienced the 'dual shift' syndrome. Luckily, unlike other women in the unions, she had an understanding husband and had taught her children to share the households work.

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[113] Tshoaedi (1999).

[114] Modise, F. (1993). "The challenge to build confidence in women" in South African Labour Bulletin. Vol. 17 no 5 p 95.

[115] Mashinini (1993).

[116] Modise, (1993:97).

[117] Fairbain, J. (1991). Flashes in her soul: The life of Jabu Ndlovu. Natal Workers History Project.

What is interesting about her story is that she was one of the most influential women in the unions. This was the result of her dedication and involvement in a community which was bedevilled by violence. Yet in the face of all that, she vowed to continue the struggle for the rights of workers even to her deathbed. She influenced a lot of women workers to take up positions and be active in the unions. Her experience in the struggle taught her that the women's struggle was double-edged, that is, as a fight against both employers and male colleagues in the unions. She attributed the sense of inferiority and lack of confidence among women as the cause of the patriarchal nature of South African society. Due to her and many other women in the struggle, the voices of women began to be heard in the unions. This was indicated by the debate around whether women should or should not campaign differently for their issues. That is, because the experience of women workers differed from that of men in some respects, did this mean that they needed separate campaigns for their cause?

Tshoaedi argues that to understand the subordination of women in the unions one has to locate the unions within a patriarchal society that discriminates against women[118]. Furthermore, the unions reflect the culture of the society in which they are embedded. The culture of male domination in society therefore also finds its way into the structures of the trade unions where women tend to occupy positions of less power. These are positions that have no influence or impact on the decision-making process of the unions. Another indication of the absence of women in the intellectual arena emerged in the recommendations of male interviewees in this study. As there were few female interviewees, they were only mentioned by their male counterparts when a question was raised about them and the possibility that they could contribute to this study.

Nonetheless one of the efforts and successes of Jabu Ndlovu's involvement in the unions was the formation of the Prestige choir which sang at mass meetings and gatherings. It was part and parcel of the union's broader cultural activities, such as poetry, struggle songs and plays performed at mass meetings and other worker gatherings. This was done to both encourage workers to join the unions and to communicate the plight of South African workers to the outside world. For example, the Sarmcol strike in 1985, which sparked violence against MAWU members in Natal resulted in the play called "The Long March". It was performed not only around Durban but also overseas, to keep the spirit of the workers high and to mobilize support for Sarmcol workers. When Jabu Ndlovu died memorial services were held as far London, Cambridge, Norwich and Liverpool[119]. This showed the extent of her influence. This is one of the cases which gives warranty to the recognition of women as a group which contributed towards the development of the trade union movement.

The question of gender equality and representation is posed not only in the unions, but in South African society as a whole. Discrimination against women is evident in many institutions and organisations. Trade unions are one of the social forces that have been calling for gender equality in the workplace and also trying to address their gender dynamics. In fact, at the NUMSA's sixth national congress in Mafikeng, 20-24 August 2000, it was agreed that the union had been less successful in bringing more women into top positions in the unions. But even at the lower level of shop stewardship women still make up a low percentage. The resolution taken was to create the space for and encourage women to participate in the structures of the unions. There was a special room allocated to women who came with children to the congress, for changing and feeding them[120].

Lack of participation in the structures of the unions is the reason for the absence of women as union-made intellectuals. If there is participation, it has tended to be one-sided (in administrative positions) with men occupying positions of strategic importance for playing an intellectual role.

[118] Tshoaedi (1999).
[119] Fairbain (1991).
[120] Observation made in the NUMSA sixth National congress at Mafikeng, 20-24 August 2000.

## 5.2    Hawks and doves

An important finding here is that the role of union-made intellectuals found expression in the different political traditions that exist within the unions. There are different political traditions in South Africa.   Hailisi differentiates between nationalists, socialists and apolitical populism[121]. Nationalists are regarded as members of a liberation movement which is multi-class and without intra-racial class divisions, but one in which black people as a nation are prioritised in the struggle. They are nationalists in the sense that liberation is advocated for South Africa's nation which is mostly black people, without necessarily excluding other race groups. Socialists hold the views of socialism, which is defined as the organic thought of the working class movement.  Populists hold the views of apolitical populism, which refers to the integration of union and political concerns. In the union there were two dominant political traditions, the populists and workerists. The populists in the trade unions belonged to the tradition of apolitical populism.

Intellectuals in the unions were not a homogeneous group. They not only differed in terms of their racial background but also in terms of politics; that is, they belonged to different political traditions which nurtured and developed their intellectual skills. Populists and workerists are traditionally the two main political groupings, into which union-made intellectuals and white intellectuals were divided. This was demonstrated in the split of MAWU in 1984. Swilling is of the view that the split was the result of amorphous organisational structures and lack of political direction[122]. One camp, led by white intellectuals, favoured a separation of unions from politics, whilst another group, led by black union leaders, argued that black workers should be active in both the workplace and in their communities because they were oppressed on these two fronts. Moses Mhlambe describes these political tensions as follows:

> The debate about the two different political traditions in the unions was seen as one between "Hawks and Doves". The former was what was called the populists who were much stronger by influence politically and the latter were workerists led by white union officials. During these debates we used to organise material, especially political material, to read and have discussions to strengthen our knowledge and ideas about our positions. People from the other camp would do likewise before we went to discuss these issues. They would meet wherever, to read and discuss politics so that they were able to influence the outcome of the debate on political resolutions. We used to exchange material amongst ourselves for this purpose; reading and discussions were very much part and parcel of debates. We used to call these political discussions 'cells'; these were caucus groups and all the leadership of the union belonged to one camp or another[123].

The importance of the above discussion is to show that union-made intellectuals did not exist in a vacuum; they were part of the political traditions that sought to influence the political direction of the unions. The role of union-made intellectuals should therefore be understood within the context of the political arrangements within the unions.

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[121]  Halisi L. (1990). <u>Dividing lines: black political thought & the politics of liberation in South Africa</u>. Xerographic process U.M.I: Los Angelis.

[122] Swilling, M. (1984). "Workers divided - A critical assessment of the split in MAWU on the East Rand" in <u>South African Labour Bulletin.</u> Vol. 10 no. 1.

[123]Interview with Moses Mhlambe, now in the business of constructing taxi ranks: 22/02/2001.

## 5.3  Underground structures and their influence

There are underground structures in the unions which seek to influence the resolutions or the agendas of the trade unions. They operate in the form of networks of both organic and professional intellectuals, in the underground levels of trade unions. This description of how these underground structures operate provides evidence of the existence of social networks below the formal structures of the unions.  These were not only important in developing union-made intellectuals but also critical in influencing the debates 'above', that is in the formal structures of the unions: the local shop steward committees, regional meetings and, most importantly, the national congress, where resolutions, which have long-term implications for how the unions will operate, are taken.

Steven Ntlapo describes the way in which the different political traditions found expression in NUMSA:

> NUMSA has members coming from different political backgrounds, from social democrats, leftists you name them.  We had political forums on Saturdays where we discussed the idea of socialism among social democrats, radical socialists (from WOZA) and other leftists (moderates) mostly from the South African Communist Party (SACP). Most educators from NUMSA come from the left or push socialist ideas. Our education came up with socialist interpretations in seminars and this influenced my political education. I participated in the ANC but as a strategy to influence its ideology to be in line with our socialist ideals, and we called this strategy *'entryism'*; you can call it 'the politics of entryism' because we sought to enter the ANC ranks with the objective of influencing it to our direction. This was the result of the idea that we should have an alternative because the ANC and the SACP were seen to be moving to the right. There were underground structures of the different political traditions and we formed an organisation for socialism.  We called our paper "*Qina Msebenzi*" (Worker be Strong). The fact that there were differences is the result of healthy debates in the unions. Prior to every congress we would meet secretly to strategise on how we were going to influence the political resolutions and this would be the same strategy taken by different underground political structures. These groupings will caucus and find out ways to influence the agenda of NUMSA.  Most debates were won by real socialists and the idea of forming a workers' party came from NUMSA. But we lost the resolution at the COSATU Congress[124].

The existence of these underground structures is stronger evidence of the existence of black union-made intellectuals. The structures could be taken as the breeding ground of black intellectuals, because it here that they received their tutorials on politics and other issues. However, not many shop stewards and union officials were interested in these political discussion groups because they were meant only for those who had the inclination, drive or interest in political ideas. Political ideas had a direct impact on the thoughts of intellectuals because they had a bearing on the way in which unions should operate. The direction which the unions are supposed to take in relation to the dominant political ideology, meant that ideas and intellectuals are important influences for the emergence and growth of trade unions.

These fall outside formal union structures and yet they inform the debates and influence all the most important outcomes of the debates in various levels of trade unions. Therefore, ideas, politics and traditions competed in trying to influence the agenda of the trade unions. These ideas were debated from the underground structures to the formal structures of the trade unions. It is difficult to imagine how the ideas could better be advanced without prior planning and preparation, which, in the case of trade unions was underground. The levels of trade union structures are not just the

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[124] Interview with Steven Ntlapo, representative of International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) in the Southern African region: (9/03/2001).

formal structures as outlined in the constitution. Underneath the structures of trade unions lay preparations for ideological battles and policy debates which sought to influence the direction of the trade union movements. Since these underground structures are found in most, if not all, unions affiliated to COSATU it means that they are a powerful force which greatly influences the trade union movement as a whole.

The problem with these underground political networks or structures is that they made it difficult for women to participate as intellectuals in the trade union movement. Even though some women performed an intellectual role because they challenged the male dominated status quo in the unions, they were not involved in the most strategic structures which influenced the unions.

It was difficult to recruit women to these underground structures because there was the danger of police harassment and so on. But this does not mean that there were no women in the union who became strong, for example Ruth Mhlongo, now a councillor in Alex. There were also some white women organisers who contributed to the development of the unions. Still, few women participated because of marriage and family responsibilities. Few husbands would allow their wives to go where they did not know for a two or three days, with a bunch of men from the unions. So, unlike for a man, it was difficult for women to go on some meetings underground, sometimes even outside the country where no one would know, for security reasons. The family, and even members of other underground political organisations, would not know. There is still contact with these underground structures to this day. In the Congress it was the ANC/SACP versus the "entrists". These underground structures operate to influence who becomes elected into leadership positions. Underground structures consisted of academics, students from Wits, civic leaders and so on[125].

Tshoaedi argues that the unions are guilty of creating structures which only find women at the bottom of the hierarchy[126]. It is such structures which have made it almost impossible for women to become union-made intellectuals, because by their very nature they excluded women. But the question of women participation's has been asked in all structures of the trade unions. The underground structures influence what is happening in all the structures of the trade unions; that is, nothing happens at the overt level of trade unions that has not been influenced by the underground structures.

They are responsible for the failure of the unions to develop women intellectuals. In this way they have contributed to functional differentiation, that is, women performing administrative roles and men intellectual roles. This sexual division of labour where women do the 'manual' work and men the conceptual work, led to great differentiation within the trade unions. It is difficult to have women as intellectuals without their participation in the leadership structures of the unions. It is not surprising, given the position of women in the unions, to see that there are few women union-made intellectuals.

## 5.4 White intellectuals and the unions

One of the groups that were identified as having played a role in the establishment and development of labour are white intellectuals. Ginsburg pointed out that white intellectuals were instrumental in the initial stages of rebuilding the trade union movement[127]. However, they soon had their domination and control of the unions challenged. The debates between workerists and populists or 'doves' and 'hawks' were about white intellectuals against black union-made intellectuals. However, it must be pointed out that there were many other black union-made intellectuals who,

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[125] Interview with Steven Ntlapo, representative of International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) in the Southern African region: (9/03/2001).
[126] Tshoaedi (1999).
[127] Ginsburg (1997).

whilst they were activists in the unions, they advocated the separation of unions and politics. So, while it was presented as a matter of control over the unions, fought between white and black intellectuals, not all black intellectuals belonged to the populist camp.

Populist intellectuals argued that union members should engage in political or community activism in their own capacities, but the union should not, as an organisation, be involved in politics. Some argued that this view was mostly influenced by the experience of the fall of SACTU in the 1950s, which collapsed because of its alliance with the ANC[128]. White intellectuals were important in rebuilding the trade unions from the early 1970s. In fact one could say that white intellectuals encouraged the emergence of black union-made intellectuals because of their view that black people should take the lead in their organisations and not be led by white intellectuals. Their presence therefore necessitated a need for intellectuals of union origin. The experience of Faith Modise reflects the important role white intellectuals played in developing trade union consciousness among workers.

> In 1971 I joined Gregory Knitting Mills in Elandsfontein where I still work…Because of the closed shop agreement the company had with the National Garment Workers Union (NGWU), we were all forced to become members. Though we paid subscription to NGWU we were never introduced to it formally and the officials never visited us or took up pertinent issues. Through Helton Cheadle we learned the ABC of trade union work. I started organising workers into the ranks of the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW)…I knew nothing about unions, but through regular contact with our senior union officials and the training with which they provided us, I was able to handle disputes…In 1983, I was elected Vice-Chairperson of the East Rand shop-steward council. As a unionist and a resident of Katlehong, I could not divorce myself from community based struggles. Having established strong organisational structures, we strove for the unity of textile workers[129].

White intellectuals were instrumental in the emergence and the production of union made intellectuals or movement intellectuals[130]. This argument partly answers the question of how these intellectuals emerged, because some would not have emerged if it were not for the effort of white intellectuals.

The role of union-made intellectuals, however they emerged, has additionally been the active building up of trade unions, from scratch, for some, to conceptualising and experimenting with different political ideologies. Sipho Khubeka describes his involvement in the unions and captures his role in more detail, which also brings the role of white intellectuals into the picture.

> In 1972, I was employed as a clerk by a wholesale company called Imextra House. There I met ANC veteran Manci, who organised us as a force in that company. During the year, I was introduced to the Industrial Aid Society (IAS), formed by SACTU [then operating underground] and Wits students. Our white IAS colleagues had been rejected and isolated by the black consciousness movement. During weekends I attended classes on labour and politics organised by SACTU members in the IAS. Although the Wits lecturer Phil Bonner and trade unionist Bernie Fanaroff were not in full agreement with SACTU politics, they played an important role. They taught us trade union politics…I initially supported general unions but was later convinced industrial unions were the most formidable force of the working class…I was instrumental in the formation of MAWU in 1975[131].

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[128] Ibid
[129] Modise (1993: 96-97).
[130] Ginsburg (1997).
[131] Kubekha (1993: 85).

This quote shows the role of white intellectuals in the development of black union-made intellectuals. They not only instilled a culture of reading and critically thinking about issues but also raised, to some extent, the political consciousness of union-made intellectuals.

## 5.5    The changing political climate and union-made intellectuals in South Africa

The changing political climate in South Africa has had an impact on the role of shop stewards, union officials and subsequently on union-made intellectuals. It has also meant a change in the kind of politics and strategies that unions had to undertake as a coping mechanism in a new political dispensation. The change to adapt to the new political climate has been one of survival. Sipho Kubheka sees it in this way:

> We are now moving away from the politics of resistance to that of reconstruction…Trade unions will have to address the bread and butter issues of workers. They will not be immune from politics…I joined the SACP because of its long-term socialist project, whereby person-to-person exploitation shall be removed[132].

The traditional role of intellectuals as critics of the status quo seems to be losing relevance as the political context, which most were opposed, to has changed. However, this does not mean that union-made intellectuals have entirely become protectors and supporters of the new dispensation. The debate on whether to break the alliance with the ANC has been evident not only in NUMSA but also in most, if not all, the unions affiliated to COSATU. The reason given has been that the ANC has moved ideologically, from a party representing the aspirations and interests of the working class and the poor to representing the middle class and employers. GEAR has been at the centre of these debates; this indicates that the spirit of resistance and oppositional activity often associated with intellectuals is still present within the unions, however low.

The concept of movement intellectuals has its shortcomings. In the first instance it does not capture variation in the nature of organic intellectuals. It is too broad a category to capture the divisions that existed in the intellectual leadership of labour, and the implications of these political and ideological differences, which nearly permanently split some of the unions in the 1980s. It also does not make it possible to fully understand the struggle for control in the unions. It is true that this struggle was in part between white and black intellectuals because white intellectuals were at the forefront of the ideas of non-political involvement for the unions.  But it is also true to say that there were many in the black intellectual leadership who favoured this approach to unionism.

The term 'movement intellectual' does not accommodate them in its definition of intellectuals as those produced by the broader liberation struggle, including the unions. While they were also part of this movement they did not subscribe to the view that unions should be political. Instead they were vehemently opposed to this approach, opting for a division between the unions and politics. It is this aspect which the concept of movement intellectuals does not capture because of its overarching understanding of organic intellectuals in the union. It could then be said that the term 'workerist intellectuals', as part of union-made intellectuals, should be acknowledged as an intellectual grouping that emerged and was involved, along with white intellectuals, in the struggle for control of the unions.

Osborn Galeni, a National organiser of NUMSA, is one of the intellectuals who can be viewed as a workerist intellectual, because of his views:

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[132] Kubheka (1993: 86).

In the debates about what route the union should take with respect to politics, I was opposed to the alliance with the ANC because even with SACTU it never worked. Workers are now dismissed as never before, and even more vulnerable because of the alliance with politics. Workers are continually getting retrenched as never before, so when you talk about change what are you talking about? There is no change, only it is idealised. But we will not experience it with the way we are continuing with things. When I move out of the unions in the coming years I will never work for the government; because it is the comrades from unions who are now in government [who] have changed, and they are doing much damage to the workers[133].

## 5.6    Black intellectuals and culture

The concept of 'union-made' can also be used to describe the deployment of cultural resources, such as poetry, songs and plays as a form of education and as a mobilisation strategy directed at workers. Alfred Temba Qabula is an example of a union-made intellectual who used cultural activities to influence workers. His speciality was poetry. He was born in 1942 in Flagstaff in Transkei and, like many who were born into working class families, his father was a migrant worker who 'coughed out' the harshness of his life onto his children[134].

In 1964 Qabula moved to Durban and in 1974 worked as a forklift driver at Dunlop. That is where he started composing struggle songs. He joined MAWU in 1983 and helped in the organisation of Dunlop workers. He also participated in the "Dunlop play". From 1984 he started to perform in union mass meetings. One of his famous writings which led to the revival of cultural expressions such as poetry for workers to express their struggle, was "Izibongo zika Federation Of South Africa Trade Unions (FOSATU)" (praise poem for FOSATU). A part of the poem reads like this:

> You are a hen with wide wings
> That protects its chickens.
> Protect us too with those
> Sacred wings of yours
> That knoweth no discrimination,
> Protect us too so that we gain wisdom…

This passage indicates that the period of the revival of trade unionism for African workers was at its peak during the formation of FOSATU. It also illustrates the vulnerability of the workers and the need to have a federation that will unite and strengthen the workers against management and the state. One of the purposes of this cultural activity was to educate workers about their struggle and mobilise them to unite against exploitation. The definition of intellectuals as producers and bearers of culture becomes relevant in this instance. This work of using higher intellect, which other workers did not have, to think about trade unions and the struggle of workers in an abstract way, is indication of the intellectual and cultural role played by union-made intellectuals.

## 5.7    Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the main findings of this study. It pointed out that as a generation, black union-made intellectuals shared similar experiences and social backgrounds. It was these backgrounds and experiences which shaped and informed their political involvement in their communities and the unions. The argument was that the emergence and development of union-made intellectuals should not be understood as a momentary event which took place only in the unions.

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[133] Interview with Osborn Galeni, National Organiser in NUMSA: (7/02/2001).
[134] Qabula, A. (1989). A working life: Cruel beyond belief. Pinetown: NUMSA.

Rather, it should be understood as a process, which started in the family, communities and schools from which union-made intellectuals came. Another important aspect discussed was that old intellectuals from the ANC, BCM and PAC also played a role in the development of union-made intellectuals by educating them about past struggles and how they should be interpreted. It was pointed out that this transmission of knowledge did not take place for its own sake. Rather, it also came from a need by these old intellectuals to preserve themselves. This self-preservation was about the need to preserve their ideas and outlook on life and hence they transferred them to the emerging intellectuals.

The chapter also argued that there is a need to recognise women as a distinct group which played a role in the development of the union movement. However, it also showed that the 'dual shift' of women places them in an unfavourable position, not fully able to participate as intellectuals in the unions. Furthermore, this chapter argued that the unions have done little to improve this situation as many women still occupy positions with less power and influence over strategic decisions in the unions.

White intellectuals also played a role in the growth and development of black intellectuals. They too educated and provided union-made intellectuals with the skills intellectuals need in order to lead workers. The role of these union-made intellectuals was to bring forth consciousness from within. This view is a challenge to Lenin's idea that working consciousness can be brought from 'without' or outside the unions. Finally, it was shown that the role of union-made intellectuals was to facilitate the production of culture through poetry (*izimbongo*) or praises, which educated workers about their conditions. This was one of the processes through which consciousness was brought to workers from within.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The focus of this research was on the emergence and role of black union-made intellectuals. The first chapter was an introduction which mapped out issues and problems in the study of intellectuals. It provided an overview of the project as a whole and the issues covered therein.

The second chapter was the literature review, which looked at specific literature on intellectuals, both internationally and in the context of South Africa. It showed that the literature on intellectuals has in both cases failed to provide an in-depth analysis of the emergence and role of organic intellectuals. While acknowledging that organic intellectuals exist within the two broad classes in society, the literature does not provide any further analysis of how they are produced and reproduced in these social formations. The literature in the South African context covered the history of the development of labour, to the extent that it relates to the formation and development of union-made intellectuals.

The third chapter provided a theoretical framework for intellectuals and organic intellectuals. It showed that concepts such as generation, gender politics in the unions, and intellectuals as men of ideas and power, are important in explaining the emergence and role of union-made intellectuals within the context of South African trade unions. It argued that there is a need to recognise women as a separate group intellectually who contributed to the development of the labour movement, however few.

The focus of the fourth chapter was laying the theoretical framework for the concept of intellectuals. This chapter recognised the variations that exist in the concept of the intellectual. It identified professional and organic intellectuals as two groups within the traditional view of intellectuals. These views and concepts were traced within the context of South Africa, and it was

pointed out that within 'organic intellectuals' in this country, there are two groups, movement and workerist intellectuals. The former group is recognised by its fusion of politics and unionism; the latter, however, seeks to separate the two with a view to concentrating on building strong shop-floor structures.

The fifth chapter concentrated on the analysis of responses to interviews conducted on this subject. It showed that the emergence and role of the intellectual leadership of the unions was 'cooked' in underground political structures which are not part of the formal structures of the unions. It is from here, I argued, that different currents of ideas originate, compete and are advanced 'above', that is, in the formal structures of the unions, such as local councils and the congress, to influence the direction which the unions should take.

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# THE EMERGENCE AND ROLE OF BLACK INTELLECTUALS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF NUMSA

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| **Personal information** | - Nationality: South African<br>- Date of birth: 06 March 1973<br>- Place of birth: Soweto |
| **Objectives** | I have a strong work ethic and enormous drive to contributes towards the social, political and economic development of this country. Challenges have been at the center of my motivations and ambition to be a successful person. Being innovative in the process is one of the most crucial characteristics in the quest towards having a positive influence in society. |
| **Educational Qualifications** | **2001 Completed Masters by course work and a research project at the University of the Witwatersrand. Research Topic**: The role of black intellectuals in the development of the trade union movement in South Africa: the case study of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa 1980-2000. This research focused on the emergence and development of union-made intellectuals (or organic intellectuals) and their contribution in the development of labour in this country. Supervisor: Sakhela Buhlungu (011) 717 4451 e-mail: 029sak@muse.wits.ac.za |
| | Supporting courses: Advanced Social Research (SPSS), The World Bank and economic restructuring in Africa and Economic Sociology. |
| | **1999 Bachelor of Arts degree with honours in Industrial Sociology.** |
| | Supporting courses: Globalization and social policy, Advanced social research and NUDIST (software package for qualitative data analysis), Advanced social theory, Whiteness and race, Social transitions and Work and Industrial relations. |
| | **1998 Bachelor of arts degree**. |
| | Majors: Industrial Sociology and Psychology |
| | **Courses in Industrial Sociology**: South African Industrial Relations, Researching Social life, Sociology of Work and States and Markets. |
| | **Courses in Psychology**: Occupational Psychology, Organizational Psychology, Clinical Interventions, and Cognitive Psychology. (Supported by Human Resource Psychology and Ergonomics at 2$^{nd}$ year level) |
| | **1994 University of South Africa (UNISA).** |
| | Course: Sociology |
| | **1993 Matric Certificate:** Thesele Senior Secondary School. |
| | Subjects: Business Economics, Biology, History, English, and Tswana. |

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| **Work Experience** | **2001** Currently working as a part-time research assistant at Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) on Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility Project in the chemical industry in South Africa. |
| | **January - March 2000**: Research assistant at Centre for Science and Industrial Research (CSIR) measuring the effects of heat on the performance of cognitive tasks. |
| | **April-May 1997 and April-May 1998:** Marketing the Wits University Arts faculty to high school students around Gauteng. |
| | **October 1997- February 1998**: Worked as an assistant to the Esselen residence administrator. Administration work. |
| | **1992- 1996** Tutor at the Student Upgrading Project (SUP) in Soweto (NGO). Tutored Business Economics, Economics and English to Grade 10 to 12 learners. Also headed the commerce department. |
| | **1997-**Tutor at Read Enrichment Education Project (REEP). Tutored Business Economics and Economics. |
| **Languages** | South Sotho (fluent), Northern Sotho (fair), Zulu (fluent),Tswana (fluent), Xhosa (fair), English (fluent). |
| **Awards** | **1999:** The National research Foundation (NRF) post-graduate scholarship award for honours studies: University of the Witwatersrand. |
| | **2000:** The National research foundation post-graduate scholarship award for Masters studies, University of the Witwatersrand |