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Roots of women's union activism: South Africa 1973-2003

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Stellingen behorende bij het proefschrift *Roots of Women's Union Activism: South Africa 1973-2003*, door Cynthia Malehoko Tshoedi

1. The historiography of trade unions in South Africa (with a few exceptions) fails to reflect the critical role played by women activists in workplace struggles and the mobilisation of workers at the national level. Women took initiatives to challenge management injustices in the workplace and mobilise workers to join trade unions.
2. The 'maternal' instincts theory has limitations in explaining the mobilisation and activism of women trade unionists in South Africa. Similarly to their male counterparts, women participate in politics to pursue social justice and human rights.
3. Experiences of patriarchal domination within the family or personal relationships are not homogeneous among African women. Generational differences and the social context influence these experiences and how they were mediated.
4. Assertions made by some scholars that South African women failed to challenge patriarchal power relations during the 1980s are disputed in this study. Instances of women demanding maternity rights, equal employment opportunities, and equal pay for work of equal value featured significantly in women's struggles during this period.
5. The mechanical application of principles of democracy within the labour movement has as consequence the concentration of power in male hands, perpetuating male domination. Women's demands for gender equality and access to leadership positions have been rejected on the basis of majority consensus politics.
6. The struggles of women in the trade unions and the work place have contributed significantly to the proposals adopted by the Women's National Coalition which were subsequently incorporated into political negotiation process during the transition and ultimately into the constitution.
7. Women's fora in the trade unions are central for developing gender identity and collective gender solidarity. These fora have been critical in developing strategies to open spaces for women to compel the labour movement to debate gender equity issues in the provincial and national union decision-making structures
8. This study contributes to the feminist project which challenges earlier theorisations that only prioritised gender in analysing women's experiences. It argues that women's experiences (and subsequently, their activism) took place within a particular social context wherein race, class and gender categories formed an intersectional web of life experiences.

9. The biography of individuals, their history and social background is important in explaining women's motivations to become activists within the labour movement. This research demonstrates that deeper understandings of their actions are rooted in various events that take place over a certain period of time.

10. COSATU's poor record in following up on resolutions on gender discrimination within its structures reflects its lack of commitment to addressing gender equality. In the post-apartheid period, this is manifested by the diminishing representation of women in the provincial and national leadership positions.