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**Mortal men : the rise of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union under the leadership of Joseph Mathunjwa and the union's move to the political left, 1998-2014**

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# Mortal Men

The rise of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union under the leadership of Joseph Mathunjwa and the union's move to the political left, 1998-2014



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Photo front page: Joseph Mathunjwa during a mass meeting in the Olympia Stadium of Rustenburg, 19-01-2014. Photo by Julia Foudraine.

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## **Abbreviations**

AMCU	Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union
ANC	African National Congress
APC	African People Convention
AsgiSA	Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CUSA	Council of Unions of South Africa
DLF	Democratic Left Front
DSM	Democratic Socialist Movement
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MWU	Mouthpiece Workers Union
NACTU	National Council of Trade Unions
NDP	National Development Plan
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions

SAPS	South African Police Service
UDF	United Democratic Front
WASP	Workers and Socialist Party
WAU	Workers Association Union

# Chapter 1: Introduction

*“We respect the voice of our members.”<sup>1</sup>*

## §1. Notes from my fieldwork

Sunday the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2014 was an important day for many South African mineworkers and the South African media had been talking about it for weeks. The mass meeting that was going to take place on this day in the Olympia Stadium in Rustenburg in the North West Province of South Africa was the last out of three meetings after which one of the largest strikes that the South African platinum mining industry had ever known was going to start. The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) was the initiator of the strike that was going to shut down the three largest platinum producers in South Africa, namely Lonmin PLC, Impala Platinum Limited and Anglo American Platinum Limited.<sup>2</sup> Rumours had been going round that with the strike more than 80,000 mineworkers would lay down their tools.

This Sunday, the members of AMCU that worked at Anglo American were going to vote for the strike. People showed up already early in the morning at the Olympia Stadium, many of them wearing the green t-shirts of AMCU or the black t-shirts which call for the remembrance of the ‘Slain of Marikana’. From nine o’clock onwards, mineworkers from the different Anglo shafts had started to gather on the platform or the field of the stadium. Mineworkers from other mines had also showed up to show their support with their comrades from Anglo. While groups of workers were marching in circles on the field, the platforms were filling up with men who were silently waiting for the arrival of their hero and president: Joseph Mathunjwa.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Mathunjwa during an interview with SABC News on 21-01-2014.

<sup>2</sup> <http://metals.about.com/od/Top-10-Producers/tp/The-10-Biggest-Platinum-Producers.htm>. Last visited on 22-08-2014.



Photo 1.1. Mineworkers at the Olympia Stadium in Rustenburg, 2014.<sup>3</sup>

In the mean time, men from the politically left oriented organization, the Democratic Left Front (DLF), were handing out large signs which called for a united fight by mineworkers against ‘the bosses’ greed’ and for a living wage of R12,500 per month.<sup>4</sup> They also distributed a pamphlet in which the DLF explained the aims of the upcoming strike. On the backside of the pamphlet, the DLF saluted the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA).<sup>5</sup> According to the DLF, who is trying to form a left political bloc against the governing African National Congress (ANC), AMCU and NUMSA should work together to form a union against the ‘capitalist movement’. With this movement, the DLF meant the ANC and its government that, seemingly, sustains the capitalist exploitation of South Africa. However, AMCU President Mathunjwa refused to allow NUMSA to speech in the stadium since NUMSA still had to be seen as the enemy due to its, formal, affiliation with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it seemed as if Mathunjwa wanted to reinforce the apolitical standpoint of his union with this statement. One of the local organizers of the DLF shook his head when he told me about the decision of Mathunjwa and told me that if Joseph Mathunjwa was against it, it would not happen.

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<sup>3</sup> Photo by Julia Foudraïne.

<sup>4</sup> Approximately €850,00.

<sup>5</sup> In the first few months of 2014, NUMSA decided to no longer support the governing political party the ANC at the elections of 2014 and announced that it wants to form an alternative party, aimed at moving away from the policies of the ANC: <http://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2013/12/20/numsa-cuts-political-ties-with-anc>. Last visited on 23-08-2014.

<sup>6</sup> COSATU forms the South African Tripartite Alliance together with the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). The ANC governs the country.



Photo 1.2. Mineworkers at the Olympia Stadium in Rustenburg holding a sign handed out by the DLF, 2014.<sup>7</sup>

The atmosphere on the field was upbeat while people were chanting and singing to the marching groups on the field from some of the platforms. On the largest platform, most men were expectant and awaiting the start of the meeting. They were reading the pamphlets or listening to their neighbour reading the text on the pamphlet out loud. In the middle of the field, a small white tent was being built for the leaders and employees of AMCU. A small stage next to the tent was waiting to be climbed on for the speeches. People were sitting on the ground in and around the tent, chatting a little bit, eating and drinking. The first speeches had been started by AMCU, accompanied by songs.

It seemed as if the tension slowly started to rise since people started looking around and peeking towards the gate of the stadium to see whether the president and the other leaders had arrived yet. I also heard people asking each other at what time the president would arrive and why he was so late. Approximately three hours after the start of the meeting, the gates of the stadium suddenly opened and everybody started to scream, applaud and whistle. While the noise in the stadium became louder and louder, four large cars entered the stadium and speeded towards the centre of the field. Everybody on the platforms stood up and started to sing a welcome song for Mathunjwa. After Mathunjwa stepped out of the car, he first walked towards the fences to greet all of his supporters on the platforms. He walked past all the platforms at high speed, escorted by his bodyguards, while journalists, researchers and

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<sup>7</sup> Photo by Julia Foudraine.

photographers were running in front of him to catch him on camera. The mineworkers and supporters on the platforms had all stood up and were waving, cheering, singing and clapping while Mathunjwa waved back at them. People took pictures of the president with their cell phones and tried to reach him by sticking their arms through the fences. It seemed as if a king had arrived.



Photo 1.3. Joseph Mathunjwa arrives at the Olympia Stadium in Rustenburg, 2014.<sup>8</sup>

After walking around the stadium, Mathunjwa sat down at the table under the white tent. He first took his time to greet employees that had encircled his table. He had a few words for everybody and shook every hand that reached him while the stadium kept singing songs in honour of him. In the mean time, the four big bodyguards were leaning against the cars and the media had started to install their cameras in front of the small stage. After that, Joseph climbed onto the small stage and started dancing with a couple of AMCU members while he sang along with the rest of the workers. When everybody calmed down, Joseph began his speech with a prayer. The entire stadium seemed absorbed in his words and sat or stood with bowed heads. After his ‘amen’ the people started applauding and singing again. Mathunjwa held a speech in Fanagalo<sup>9</sup>, mixed with English, and he had put some (inside) jokes in his story which made the atmosphere in the stadium feel intimate and amicable. At the end of the

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<sup>8</sup> Photo by Julia Foudraine.

<sup>9</sup> Fanagalo is a pidgin based primarily on Zulu, but with input from English and Afrikaans. The language is mostly used as a lingua franca in the South African mines.

mass meeting, people had to vote for the strike. The workers were unanimously voting for the strike by raising their hand after which Mathunjwa disappeared within a few seconds. The meeting was over, people were going back to their homes and it was time to start striking.



Photo 1.4. Mineworkers are listening to the speech of Joseph Mathunjwa in the Olympia Stadium in Rustenburg, 2014.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Photo by Julia Foudraine.

## §2. The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union

The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, and specifically President Joseph Mathunjwa, became worldwide known for its involvement during the so-called ‘Marikana Massacre’. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 2012, a group of miners started a strike at the English mining company Lonmin PLC near Rustenburg with a wage increase and better living and working conditions at stake. The miners and sympathizers were armed with traditional weapons and had gathered on a hill nearby the mine and they refused to leave the ground. The government had sent a police force of 3,000 heavily armed officers, supported by dogs, helicopters, horses and water cannons. The strike resulted on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August in a violent confrontation between the miners and the South African Police Service (SAPS) and would from that point on be known as the day of the ‘Marikana Massacre’. A total of 44 people got killed during the strike of which 34 on August 16<sup>th</sup>. In the days prior to the shootings, ten people got killed in various confrontations between strikers, leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), the SAPS and the security guards of the Lonmin mine. Furthermore, more than 100 striking miners got injured. The total number of injured people remains unknown.<sup>11</sup>

According to newspapers such as City Press, the strike was sparked by a spreading conflict between the NUM, a large and very powerful COSATU aligned labour union, and the upstart AMCU.<sup>12</sup> Despite the fact that this allegation is doubtful<sup>13</sup>, the NUM lost many members with the arrival of AMCU and the membership rate of the NUM has decreased under fifty percent in most mines in the Rustenburg area due to this occurrence. This resulted in the NUM not having organizational rights anymore while AMCU is currently conquering a good place at the negotiation table concerning wages and working conditions. Both the NUM and AMCU are trying to generate large numbers of members to get as influential as possible which creates much tension and violent conflicts between both unions and their members.<sup>14</sup>

As already mentioned, AMCU and Mathunjwa have played an important role during the week of the strike. Not because AMCU members started the strike but because of the great support that the strikers received from the union. The strike at Marikana started because mineworkers from Lonmin demanded a raise. Their own union, the NUM, did not support this

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<sup>11</sup> Bill Corcoran, ‘Murder in Marikana’, *NewsAfrica*, 30-09-2012, 12-15, 14.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.citypress.co.za/news/union-rivalry-in-the-spotlight-at-marikana-commission/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>13</sup> AMCU was not in the picture when the strike started.

<sup>14</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/08/17/world/africa/marikana-south-africa-mine-shootings>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

demand so the mineworkers decided to form independent workers committees in order to organize an illegal strike. Halfway through the strike, AMCU members from another Lonmin mine joined the strike to sympathize with the workers. Furthermore, on August 15<sup>th</sup>, Joseph Mathunjwa interfered in the situation by suggesting that AMCU, the NUM and Lonmin should meet to solve the issues of the disgruntled mineworkers. AMCU stepped in here to act as some sort of mediator between the strikers, the NUM and Lonmin. On that same day, Mathunjwa decided to come and talk to the mineworkers and tell them that a solution was being sought. The following day, the day of the massacre, Joseph returned to the striking mineworkers and begged them to go home because, as he later stated, he had already noticed that a catastrophe was about to start because of the many police vehicles that had entered the area on the morning of the shootings.<sup>15</sup> Not only in the week of the strike but also during the long aftermath of the massacre, Joseph Mathunjwa has been of great significance for the survivors and those involved. He has attended many meetings of the Farlam Commission of Inquiry that is investigating the shootings and has always been standing up for the strikers. It is because of this level of commitment with the strikers in the Rustenburg area that many mineworkers left the NUM and joined AMCU. As a result, the membership of AMCU rose from 9,489 members in 2011 to 42,766 members in 2012 and the numbers are still rising.<sup>16</sup>

However, the history of AMCU goes beyond its involvement in Marikana because the union has actually been an officially registered union since 2001. Despite the fact that AMCU can celebrate its thirteenth birthday this year, the union is still very young compared to its largest rival the NUM, which has been existing since 1982. It was actually within the National Union of Mineworkers that Joseph Mathunjwa developed into a strike leader and labour unionist. His strong personality and a conflict with the leaders of the NUM eventually resulted in his departure at the NUM and the start of his own union. One of the largest differences between AMCU and the NUM is their political viewpoint. The NUM is affiliated to COSATU, and with that closely related to the ruling ANC. AMCU on the other hand claims to be an apolitical union and does not want to get involved in politics. However, questions can be raised concerning this apolitical viewpoint since the union is being surrounded with leftist parties and organizations who are striving for a different political system than the policies of the ANC. At this moment, AMCU is representing workers at various mines, including coal,

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<sup>15</sup> Rehad Desai, *Miners Shot Down*, Uhuru Productions, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Labour, Membership AMCU, File nr. LR 2/6/2/97.

chrome and platinum mines in Mpumalanga, at coal mines in KwaZulu-Natal and at chrome and platinum mines in Limpopo.<sup>17</sup>

### **§3. Research objective and research questions**

Up until this day, not only the international community, but also the South African population and most members of AMCU have fragmented knowledge of the history and character of the union. Even people who have been interviewed in Emalahleni, where AMCU originates, only know the union because of its involvement at Marikana. Some articles, such as the article by Jan de Lange<sup>18</sup>, have been written about the establishment of AMCU but the given information is very limited and calls for more questions than answers.<sup>19</sup> The subject that has been written about mostly is Marikana and the current growth and struggles of AMCU without mentioning any historical background or a more in-depth analysis of the union. The apolitical standpoint of the union, with a thorough analysis of political parties and organizations that are surrounding AMCU, is also being mentioned seldom. Marikana is a booming topic, not only for journalists from all over the world, but also for researchers. However, a thorough study on the history of a union which gained international acquaintance with a relatively small involvement during a severe shooting incident and with a membership that quadruplicated in a few months might lead to new insights. Examples of these insights might include the way in which AMCU was established, the evolving character of the union and the place of the union in larger political and economical contexts in South Africa. For this reason, the objective of this research is to gain more insight in the history of AMCU, its leadership and its current position in broader political economical contexts. The historical research is aimed at sketching a story of AMCU from its beginning around 1998 until the massacre and some current developments. The focus on the leadership of AMCU, and specifically on Joseph Mathunjwa, will deepen the understanding of the character and working method of the union. Furthermore, this study will be complemented with a political economy approach to place the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union in larger historical and political economical contexts. The aim of this research is to argue that, despite

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.miningmx.com/special\\_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm](http://www.miningmx.com/special_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm). Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>18</sup> A journalist for, among other South African news papers, Beeld.

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.miningmx.com/special\\_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm](http://www.miningmx.com/special_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm). Last visited on 07-07-2014.

the fact that the union is known for its apolitical standpoint, AMCU seems to be part of a larger breakaway to the political left which includes many different political parties and organizations.

In order to achieve these research objectives, the following research question has to be answered:

‘How is AMCU being perceived in various layers of the South African society in the context of an emerging political leftist movement?’

In an attempt to answer this question, a number of other questions have to be asked in this study:

-What is the historical background of AMCU and how did AMCU fit in the political and economical context in which South African labour unions and movements in general operated between 1998 and 2014?

-What is the personal history of President Joseph Mathunjwa and how can AMCU’s members be characterized?

- How is AMCU being represented in the media and how can the relationship between the union and the media be described?

- Are there significant signs to argue that the rise and success of AMCU can be understood in a larger shift to the left?

#### **§4. The research field: from Rustenburg to Emalahleni**

The research area for this research encompassed the Gauteng Province, North West Province and Mpumalanga in South Africa. The study has been conducted in Pretoria for one month, in Rustenburg for three weeks and in Emalahleni for three months. The research field in Pretoria encompassed the University of Pretoria and its library. Furthermore, I have visited Johannesburg extensively to meet with relevant sources and to dive into the archive of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Rustenburg is a municipality with an area of 3423 km<sup>2</sup>, 549,575 inhabitants and is situated about 112 km west of Johannesburg and Pretoria in the North West Province. The

majority of the population is black and speaks Tswana.<sup>20</sup> Despite the fact that the city of Rustenburg is most known for its Royal Bafokeng Stadium that was built for the FIFA World Cup in 2010, its main economic sector is mining and that is very visible in the landscape around the city. Just outside the centre of Rustenburg, the large empty plains covered with mining shafts and buildings are clearly visible. Rustenburg is home to three of the largest platinum companies of the world, namely Lonmin PLC, Impala Platinum Limited and Anglo American Platinum Limited. Together with several smaller companies, the exploitation of platinum is the main economic activity in the area.<sup>21</sup> In Rustenburg, the research field included the mining area around the city, including Marikana and its surrounding region.

Emalahleni, to many still known as Witbank, is a city of 108,673 inhabitants and covers an area of 164,27 km<sup>2</sup>. The city is situated about 120 km east from Johannesburg in Mpumalanga. The division between black and white is approximately equal and most people speak either Afrikaans or Zulu.<sup>22</sup> Emalahleni is known for its extensive coal production and accommodates for this reason the head office of Eskom, the South African electricity public utility. Due to this type of industry, Emalahleni is one of the most polluted cities in the world and host of many coalmines.<sup>23</sup> In Emalahleni, the research field included the city itself, including the nearby townships.

## **§5. Studying AMCU: methodological issues**

In order to study AMCU in the South African political economical contexts, an extensive study had to be done in a wide variety of places. It is for this reason that the research does not only exist of interviews, but also out of the attending of several meetings, observations, archival and media research and the so-called ‘informal information circuit’. This research is thus both a historical and anthropological research and will be influenced from both disciplines concerning the methodology and used sources.

To sketch a history of AMCU and tell the stories of the individuals who are behind this organization or in some way connected to it, 26 in-depth interviews have been conducted with academics, AMCU members, labour experts, local political organizers from the

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.localgovernment.co.za/locals/view/191/rustenburg-local-municipality>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>21</sup> <http://metals.about.com/od/Top-10-Producers/tp/The-10-Biggest-Platinum-Producers.htm>. Last visited on 22-08-2014.

<sup>22</sup> <http://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/868>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/science/2013/04/30/more-tests-run-on-emalahlenis-polluted-air>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

Democratic Left Front, mining corporation Aquarius Platinum Limited, the Bench Marks Foundation, labour union Solidariteit, journalists, the Department of Labour, locals and local NUM leaders. The wide variety of interviewees is due to the fact that I spoke to everybody who was willing to answer my questions about AMCU. These interviews have taken place between September 2013 and January 2014. The interviews have been semi-structured<sup>24</sup> so people had the chance to tell their stories without constant interference. Furthermore, I am always interested in first reactions to questions. The gathered information was usually very comprehensive.<sup>25</sup> It was possible for me to deviate from the guidelines of my interview when necessary and stray away from the standard questions and ask for more clarification if that was interesting for the research. There is a basis to which I could hold on to but the rest of the interview was determined by the answers of the interviewee. According to Ritchie and Lewis:

*‘Interviews are interactive in nature. The material is generated by the interaction between the researcher and interviewee. The researcher will ask an initial question in such a way as to encourage the interviewee to talk freely when answering the question. The next intervention by the interviewer will usually be determined by the participant's answer.’*<sup>26</sup>

This research method was very appropriate for this type of research.

Furthermore, I attended a march in Emalahleni, organized by COSATU, where I had the chance to talk to some people from AMCU's 'rival unions' and reflect on the position of AMCU in the broader context of labour movements. Moreover, since AMCU has been very hesitant towards my research<sup>27</sup>, one of the best opportunities to see AMCU at work from up close was attending one of the mass meetings that were being held in January 2014. Despite the great vagueness that surrounded the presence of AMCU leaders at local meetings, I managed to attend one where the entire leadership of AMCU showed up. This way, the interaction and relationship between the institution AMCU, its leaders and members became more visible and has been of great value to this study.

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<sup>24</sup> Semi-structured interviews are characterized by the possibility to allow new ideas to be brought up during an interview because of what the interviewee says. There is a framework of themes in which questions are being asked but there is no specific set of questions that have to be answered by the interviewee.

<sup>25</sup> K.L. Barriball and A. While, 'Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper', *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 19 (1994), 328-335, 330.

<sup>26</sup> J. Ritchie and J. Lewis (ed.), *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* (London 1997), 36-37.

<sup>27</sup> The exact reason for this never became clear. However, I heard from several other researchers and journalists that AMCU in general prefers not to interact too much with researchers and the media. This is maybe because of the mostly negative way in which the union seems to be portrayed in the media.

The interviews and meetings have been supplemented with trips through the mining areas of Rustenburg and Emalahleni whereby I visited mine hostels, townships, informal settlements and Marikana. Furthermore, I had many informal conversations with inhabitants of both cities. This research methodology resulted in a study of the many different involved parties that are surrounding and influencing AMCU from within and from the outside throughout the years and experience the rough mining environment in which people do not only have to work but also have to live with or without their families.

Moreover, I have been able to visit the semi-public archive of the National Union of Mineworkers in Johannesburg and managed to get an appointment with the registrar of labour unions from the Department of Labour in Pretoria to take a look into the official records that AMCU has to present to the Department every year. The archive of the NUM pointed out to be of no use despite the interesting fact that AMCU has not been mentioned anywhere. The records of the Department of Labour helped in creating an overview of the official membership numbers of AMCU throughout the years since the media, such as Mining Weekly, has been speculating immensely after Marikana about the number of NUM members that left their union to join AMCU.<sup>28</sup> In both cases, the archival research encompassed looking through every available document.

To gain more insight into the way in which AMCU interacts with the South African media and the way in which the media reports about the union, I kept track of several South African newspapers, news sites and online magazines for the last year. Media such as the Mail&Guardian, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, the Citizen, Amandla! and the Daily Maverick have reported much about AMCU, especially after Marikana, and their news coverage showed different sides of the union. Furthermore, it was interesting to see which stories about AMCU received full attention in the media and which ones did not.

The last source that has been used many times for this study is the so-called 'grey, informal circuit' of information, which contains action magazines and journals, blogs on the internet, the websites from AMCU and other social movements, YouTube and other informal empirical data that can tell something about, for instance, the history of AMCU and perceptions on AMCU by members, labourers and people in general. This informal circuit encompasses many different sources of information, such as Twitter, which are very important for the understanding of, especially, the way in which people talk about AMCU,

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.miningweekly.com/article/emerging-amcu-mine-union-favours-competitive-coexistence-joseph-mathunjwa-2012-06-06>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

their actions and their members and the way in which the union interacts with their members and the outside world.

Getting access to mineworkers who were also willing to talk to me about their union was probably one of the biggest challenges. The problem was that most mineworkers had no or little experience with researchers, except the men I interviewed in Rustenburg, and often refused to give an interview. The exact reason for these refusals is not yet clear but it could be that they did not entirely understand the purpose of my visit and the fact that they did not benefit from the interview in an immediate way. Furthermore, when I found mineworkers who agreed to be interviewed, there was always a language barrier. Since I did not always have a translator by my side, many interviews had to be done in a simplified manner to make sure that the interviewee understood me and the other way around. Regrettably, the leadership of AMCU has not shown any interest in the research up until this day. Despite the creative lobbying from different sides, AMCU prefers to communicate with researchers, but also with the media and others interested, as little as possible, as I already stated earlier in this introduction. With their extreme increase in membership numbers and their large strikes, the union has to face the media but is still very keen on denying others any insight in the union. As a result of this, a history of AMCU has been constructed without the support and help of the union itself. This is a loss for this research and it confers a sense of mystery to the union that it might not deserve.

## **§6. Conceptualization of the research**

AMCU can be labeled as a social movement within the South African context and has, as a social movement, many reasons to be established, to grow, to decline and, in particular, to mobilize its members for actions and strikes. According to McCarthy, a social movement is:

*‘A set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society.’<sup>29</sup>*

Social movements can have many specificities but it depends on the context whether a movement will fit in these specificities. Many African movements can be called a social movement since they are rooted in social networks and are concerned with broad social

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<sup>29</sup> John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, ‘Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory’, *The American Journal of Sociology* 82:6 (1977), 1212-1241, 1218.

issues, but they have a hybrid nature since they often display social, political and religious characteristics that can be overlapping.<sup>30</sup> Social movements in Africa make use of multiple methods that are commonly associated with social movements in the rest of the world such as demonstrations, the use of mass media to broadcast their message to a wider audience and tactics of civil disobedience to attract public attention and frustrate the state in such a way that they pay attention to the demands of the movement.<sup>31</sup> In the case of AMCU, the above mentioned methods are also used by them, but they are not solely aimed at the state, but also towards the mining companies and the NUM specifically.

Multiple theories are aimed at explaining the nature of social movements and the mobilization of members. There are the classical theories of ‘collective behavior theory’, ‘mass society theory’ and ‘relative deprivation theory’ which all rely on the idea of:

*‘Some form of structural strain (be it industrialization, urbanization, unemployment) [that] produces subjective tension and therefore the psychological disposition to engage in extreme behaviours such as panics, mobs etc. to escape from these tensions.’<sup>32</sup>*

Contentious situations are seen as spontaneous, irrational, expressive and often violent outbursts of collective action as a reaction to grievances, discontent and anomie. Protesters, such as the mineworkers during the ‘Marikana Massacre’, are often stressed, frustrated and marginalized individuals who are affected by situations like an economic crisis or an unfair distribution of money and social rights.<sup>33</sup> It can be stated that, in the case of the mineworkers of Lonmin, the protesters felt frustrated because of the perception of unfair distribution of welfare among the workers. The deprivation theory is closely connected to this since it argues that social movements are founded by people who feel deprived from goods or resources and want to improve their situation. The theory relies on two preconditions: ‘*Wanting what one does not have and feeling that one deserves whatever it is that one wants but does not have.*’<sup>34</sup> AMCU was founded as a result of labourers who wanted to be unionized in order to fight for better working and living conditions, of which they felt deprived.

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<sup>30</sup> Stephen Ellis and Ineke van Kessel, ‘Introduction: African social movements or social movements in Africa?’, in: Stephen Ellis and Ineke van Kessel (ed.), *Movers and shakers. Social movements in Africa* (Leiden 2009), 1-16, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ellis and Kessel, ‘Introduction: African social movements or social movements in Africa?’, 12.

<sup>32</sup> Jacquelin van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans, ‘Social movement theory: Past, presence & prospects’, in: Stephen Ellis and Ineke van Kessel (ed.), *Movers and shakers. Social movements in Africa* (Leiden 2009), 17-43, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, ‘Social movement theory: Past, presence & prospects’, 22.

<sup>34</sup> Iain Walker and Heather J. Smith (ed.), *Relative Deprivation. Specification, Development and Integration* (Cambridge 2002), 2.

However, some of the contemporary theories are also applicable to this research, such as the ‘political process theory’. This theory focuses more on external features such as changes or differences in the political and institutional environment of social movements. The form of action taken by the movement depends on factors such as the structure of the political system, the level of repression and cultural traditions.<sup>35</sup> In the case of AMCU, changes in the political and institutional environment might have influenced the growth of the union and its ideology and one of the aims of this research is to clarify the influence of the political economy of South Africa on AMCU.

Joseph Mathunjwa, as the leader of AMCU, is one of the key components of this research. In order to get a good understanding of the way in which Mathunjwa is acting as a leader, a conceptualization of the term leadership is necessary. Leadership in a global way can be viewed as ‘*a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.*’<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the notion of power is important here since it is part of the influence process and, in the case of Mathunjwa, not only the reason why he is so successful at the moment but also the reason why he can be successful.<sup>37</sup>

The concept of leadership knows many theories but two seem to be relevant for this study, namely the essentialist theories and the relational theories. The essentialist theories present the phenomenon of leadership in a very objective way by stating that it is something done by leaders to followers. Good leadership here can reside in the personal qualities of the leader, his behaviour and his performance. The core of this set of theories exposes how effective and good leadership is constituted.<sup>38</sup> This is also exactly the way in which many mineworkers view the leadership of their union leaders. When Mathunjwa as the president of AMCU is friendly to its members, but at the same time tough and harsh towards the mining corporations to support the members, many mineworkers seem to find him a good leader. However, Mathunjwa also needs to deliver and not break his promises. The relational set of theories on the other hand argues that leadership is not something that comes from the leader within him but in his relationship with others. There is one person who is leading the group but in the end everybody contributes to a common cause and functions have to be carried out

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<sup>35</sup> Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, ‘Social movement theory: Past, presence & prospects’, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: theory and practice* (California 2013), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Northouse, *Leadership: theory and practice*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Bolden and Philip Kirk, ‘African Leadership: Surfacing New Understandings through Leadership Development’, *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 9:1 (2009), 1-20, 3.

by the group. Leadership here is seen as a group quality.<sup>39</sup> This is an interesting argument since many leaders talk about ‘the collective’, ‘the union’ and ‘the members’ as if they have a voice as well. The question is whether this argument is valid for the way in which Mathunjwa is leading AMCU. One of the things that Mathunjwa says very frequently is that what he does is all for the members and because of the members. They have chosen him to lead the union but there will not be a union when the members decide that Mathunjwa is no longer a good leader. However, there have been occasions whereby Mathunjwa did not seem to listen to his members that well or whereby it took a long time for the president to include the opinions of the members in his decision making process.<sup>40</sup>

Besides the concepts of AMCU as a social movement and President Mathunjwa as the leader of the union, the term ‘political economy’ has to be mentioned here in relation to larger South African political economical contexts. The concept has known many different interpretations over the years. Many renowned scientists such as Adam Smith, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill have lent their name to theories concerning this concept. According to Adam Smith, political economy had to be explained as the science of managing a nation’s resources to generate wealth. In the Marxist philosophy, political economy was the way in which the ownership of the means of production influenced historical processes.<sup>41</sup> Nowadays, political economy usually refers to interdisciplinary studies involving economics, political science, law, history and sociology in trying to explain the role of political factors in determining economic outcomes. In essence, it can be stated that political economy is drawing upon the interaction between politics, society and economics.<sup>42</sup>

However, during a large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept had contradictory meanings. Some scientists viewed it as an area of study while others saw the concept as a methodological approach. For this study, a very broad idea of the term political economy suits best, namely the interrelationship between economics and politics, since this study concerns the political notion of an economically based institution, namely a labour union.<sup>43</sup> Where many approaches to political economy are focusing on the role of economics to explain phenomena in politics, the broad theoretical aspect of political economy that is usable for this research concerns specifically the interplay between politics and economics. This interplay

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<sup>39</sup> Bolden and Kirk, ‘African Leadership: Surfacing New Understandings through Leadership Development’, 3.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.enca.com/workers-put-pressure-amcu-settle>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>41</sup> Barry R. Weingast and Donald A. Wittman, ‘Introduction. The reach of political economy’, in: Barry R. Weingast and Donald A. Wittman (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of political economy* (Oxford 2009), 3-28, 3.

<sup>42</sup> <http://poec.athabascau.ca/what/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>43</sup> Weingast and Wittman, ‘Introduction. The reach of political economy’, 3.

will be used in an attempt to argue that AMCU might be placed in a larger South African political phenomenon that is currently strongly evolving, namely the move of various organizations to the political left, away from the governing ANC, SACP and COSATU. The role of AMCU within a larger South African political economy perspective is that of an economically based organization that is being influenced by politics but that is also influencing politics. In this sense, economics can be defined as the system, incorporated in every society, which organizes the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. In that system, a union such as AMCU is on the production side of the story to make sure that the wellbeing of labourers in that production line is looked after. Politics here has to be seen as the system in every society that organizes the relationship between people in an overall way, such as in the workplace.<sup>44</sup>

The idea of an interrelationship between economics and politics can be seen in the concept of organized labour since that is a social force within politics and economics and an entry point to the understanding of the wider aspects of human society and history.<sup>45</sup> Above all, labour unions have always been strongly associated with radical political movements, which also applies for this South African case. Many unions fought a, both political and economical, struggle against apartheid: *'In South Africa, the labour movement was central to creating the conditions for transition, in shaping its character and indeed in legitimating the process itself.'*<sup>46</sup> Therefore, labour unions have always been associated with concepts of working classes and unions were often seen as a leading organization of the working class.<sup>47</sup> As already mentioned above, this argument is global but is definitely very appropriate for the situation of South Africa and the way in which we have to view AMCU within the South African political economy.

## **§7. Structure of the thesis**

After this first chapter in which I have concentrated and reflected on the mass meeting of the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2014, a short introduction of AMCU, the objectives of this research, Rustenburg and Emalahleni, the conducted fieldwork and the necessary concepts, it is time to

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.economywatch.com/political-economy/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>45</sup> Jeffrey Harrod and Robert O'Brien, 'Organized labour and the global political economy', in: Jeffrey Harrod and Robert O'Brien (ed.), *Global Unions? Theory and strategies of organized labour in the global political economy* (London 2003), 3-28, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Harrod and O'Brien, 'Organized labour and the global political economy', 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, 7.

return to the early years of Joseph Mathunjwa in Emalahleni and the establishment of a new union. The time and place where the NUM was sovereign among the mineworkers in a, with dirty air polluted, Witbank and where miner Joseph Mathunjwa was still living in one of the townships surrounding the 'place of coal': 1998. Chapter two will thus elaborate on the history of the NUM up until now and the way in which AMCU was established in this larger socio-economical context. In Chapter three, a portrait of Mathunjwa will be sketched and includes not only his personal history and character but also the opinions of others surrounding him. Furthermore, attention will be paid to the diverse membership base of AMCU and the profiling of a few of these mineworkers. To give an idea of the public opinion on AMCU, Chapter four is based around the representation of AMCU in different forms of media. Chapter five tries to give more insight in the apolitical status of AMCU and the political organizations that seem to have started to surround not only the mineworkers of Marikana but also the union.

## **Chapter 2: ‘Only the Best for the Mineworker!’? A history of the establishment and growth of AMCU**

*‘The NUM is the largest single trade union in the history of South Africa, and its success in pushing back the frontier of despotic control in the mining industry, with all its private police forces and prison-like compounds, is a monument to the struggles of thousands of black mineworkers and a powerful illustration of the multifaceted nature of the South African transition.’<sup>48</sup>*

This statement made by Sociology Professors Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu is glorifying the NUM and its achievements and they are probably not the only scientists who have this view on the union. Strong words have been used to characterize the role of the NUM during and after apartheid but, as this chapter will show, not everybody agrees with that. This chapter elaborates on the history of the NUM up until now. Furthermore, the historical background of AMCU, as counterpart of the NUM, will be discussed. Lastly, this chapter tries to answer the question of how AMCU fits in the political and economical context in which South African labour unions and movements in general operated between 1998 and 2014.

### **§1. The establishment of the NUM**

By the early 1980s, labour unions for black workers were largely accepted by the apartheid regime as a part of the South African economy. However, this process had bypassed the mines where the situation was very different from other sectors. According to union experts Jean Leger and Philip van Niekerk, the mine compounds were often far away from the major urban areas and the strict security measurements at the compounds made it difficult for unions to organize and recruit. Despite efforts by the mining corporations to improve the wages and living conditions of the mineworkers, the 1980s was the period of large scale workers resistance and labour unrest. Because of the growing unrest, the management of multiple

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<sup>48</sup> Andries Bezuidenhout and Sakhela Buhlungu, ‘Old victories, new struggles: the state of the National Union of Mineworkers’, in: Sakhela Buhlungu, John Daniel, Roger Southall and Jessica Lutchman (ed.), *State of the Nation: South Africa 2007* (Cape Town 2007), 245-265, 245.

mining corporations decided that better communication with the workers was necessary to stabilize the situation.<sup>49</sup>

The NUM was founded in 1982 by the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), a Black Consciousness federation that had been established two years earlier. The foundation of the NUM was triggered by a mineworkers strike in 1982 where the workers were protesting against a unilateral wage increase. The strikers approached CUSA for help with the start of a new union.<sup>50</sup> Cyril Ramaphosa<sup>51</sup>, an activist and lawyer, worked for CUSA at the time and was assigned by them to form the NUM. Earlier attempts to organize black mineworkers into a union by the federations the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) were unsuccessful. According to Andries Bezuidenhout and Sakhela Buhlungu, Ramaphosa and a few other activists were able to achieve phenomenal success with building the NUM and they managed to recruit thousands of members in a relative short period of time. The exact scale of this phenomenal success and the meaning of ‘a relative short period of time’ are not mentioned by the authors, so that will remain undefined. However, the reason for the immediate success of the NUM has been explained with two reasons. Firstly, and as already mentioned earlier in this chapter, some mining companies identified the need for a more structured process of collective bargaining in the mining industry, and with that a better communication with the workers. Secondly, the Wiehahn recommendations had been adopted by the state.<sup>52</sup> These recommendations encompassed:

*‘...the government to grant all South African workers the unequivocal right to join trade unions, to dismantle once and for all the system of job reservation that had long barred Africans from certain positions, and to extend to all unions, regardless of racial composition, the opportunity to be incorporated into South Africa’s complex, corporatist industrial relations machinery.’<sup>53</sup>*

In 1983, the NUM started to organize black mineworkers and a year later, the union held the first legal strike of black mineworkers in the history of South Africa. With Cyril Ramaphosa in charge, 70,000 workers laid down their tools. As a result of the overwhelming

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<sup>49</sup> Jean Leger and Phillip van Niekerk, ‘Organisation on the Mines: The NUM Phenomenon’, in: SARS (ed.), *South African Review 3* (Johannesburg 1986), 68-78, 72.

<sup>50</sup> Sakhela Buhlungu and Andries Bezuidenhout, ‘Union Solidarity under Stress. The Case of the National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa’, *Labor Studies Journal* 33:3 (2008), 262-287, 266.

<sup>51</sup> Currently, Ramaphosa is the Deputy President under Jacob Zuma and he was, as a Lonmin shareholder, directly involved in the ‘Marikana Massacre’: <http://news.iafrica.com/sa/823497.html>. Last visited on 22-08-2014.

<sup>52</sup> Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, ‘Union Solidarity under Stress’, 267.

<sup>53</sup> <http://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/seminar/Lichtenstein2013.pdf>. Last visited on 12-07-2014.

strike, the union became the largest single union in South Africa in 1985 and held 80% of its membership at over half of the mining industry, including Anglo-American and Rand Mines.<sup>54</sup> A large proportion of NUM's membership included migrant workers. In order to organize the large concentration of these mineworkers in the compounds, the NUM had to develop a model since that did not exist yet. Before the arrival of the NUM, the employer had used 'tradition' in order to control the workers. The miners were divided along ethnic lines, allocated to living quarters by 'tribal group' and ethnic symbolism was promoted. The union decided to undermine these longstanding tribal divisions created by the mining companies to seek a sense of solidarity instead of division. Because of its background in the Black Consciousness<sup>55</sup>, the NUM was able to emphasize the common black identity of the workers and overcome linguistic, regional and ethnic differences that had previously been so reinforced. The NUM also had to deal with mine branches of up to 20,000 members who were concentrated at one mine. But once they controlled the compounds, it became much easier to hold meetings with the members. The union could also use space in the compounds for offices and nearby stadiums were used for rally's and mass meetings. As a result, the leadership of the union did not only face immediate pressure because of their presence in the compounds but also at the large meetings in the stadiums where they had to talk to their members face-to-face.<sup>56</sup>

The Chamber of Mines was impressed with the way in which the NUM recruited members and fought over legal issues with several mining corporations concerning the improvement of conditions for the workers.<sup>57</sup> The Chamber had a clear vision of responsible unionism and the NUM seems to have fit in this vision. Furthermore, the public at large started to notice the NUM as well and black mineworkers joined the union since it seemed to represent their interests.<sup>58</sup> The NUM as an upstart union also had to face challenges since the exponential growth of the union in the 1980s, after expanding to several mining sectors, allowed little time for the organization to consolidate and strengthen its organizational base. However, positive remarks about the quick development and maturity of the union have been made by Jean Leger and Phillip van Niekerk. According to them, the union developed a sophisticated bargaining strategy within three years and the union adopted a high profile on

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<sup>54</sup> Judy Seidman and Neva Seidman-Makgetla, *Hlanganani Basebenzi: a brief history of COSATU* (Johannesburg 2005), 23.

<sup>55</sup> The Black Consciousness Movement was formed as a reaction to the Apartheid state's white racism. One of the most prominent leaders of the movement was Steve Biko.

<sup>56</sup> Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 'Union Solidarity under Stress', 267.

<sup>57</sup> Leger and van Niekerk, 'Organisation on the Mines', 73.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, 74.

political issues from mid 1985. These issues included the union's warning of national industrial action if President Botha would carry out his threat of repatriating foreign migrant workers. This attitude could lead to a significant influence on the future political direction of the country was the optimistic idea at the time.<sup>59</sup>

## **§2. The arrival of COSATU and the transition to democracy**

At the founding conference of the federation the Congress of South African Trade Unions in 1985, COSATU set itself three objectives, namely to build a strong and militant trade union, to represent the interests of workers against employers and to challenge 'the might of apartheid'.<sup>60</sup> These objectives were followed by the NUM, who made a grand entrance onto the national stage in 1985 and joined the new federation. In the period that followed, the union consolidated its structures and gave meaning to the idea of worker control, which was one of the key principles of COSATU. Health and safety structures were being set up, together with the building of branch and regional structures and education committees. Researchers, legal officers, education officers and health and safety officers were brought in to help developing the NUM. All of these efforts, together with its militant membership, turned the NUM into 'a confident labour union' according to Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu.<sup>61</sup>

However, the ending of the apartheid regime in 1994 was going to bring new challenges to the union who had just overcome their first set of challenges while they started to grow and extend their organizational power. The organizational achievements of the NUM, the gains it had won for the members and the shift from apartheid to democracy led to a broader membership base. The union started to organize parts of the energy, building and construction sector next to their already existing members in the mining industry. In order to serve the growing membership base, the organizational structure of the NUM needed to be revised and extended. Furthermore, because of the gradual deracialization on the work floor in the last years of apartheid, the education and training of workers and the recruitment of higher educated workers, it had become possible for black workers in general and NUM members in particular to rapidly move up the ladder. Many NUM members moved up into artisanal, more

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<sup>59</sup> Leger and van Niekerk, 'Organisation on the Mines', 77.

<sup>60</sup> Themba Masondo, 'The sociology of upward social mobility among COSATU shop stewards', in: Sakhela Buhlungu and Malehoko Tshoaedi (ed.), *COSATU's contested legacy: South African trade unions in the second decade of democracy* (Leiden 2013), 110-131, 112.

<sup>61</sup> Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 'Union Solidarity under Stress', 268.

skilled, supervisory and managerial positions because of this. As a result of this upward mobility of black workers, the NUM lost members on the work floor.

In the last couple of years before the transition to democracy in South Africa, the NUM became even more visible in various parts of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM).<sup>62</sup> NUM branch members started to participate actively in ANC and South African Communist Party structures and Ramaphosa left the NUM in 1991 to become the General Secretary of the ANC.<sup>63</sup> After the 1994 elections, the expectation was that COSATU and the aligned unions would have a powerful position in the governance of the democratic South Africa. But despite the fact that the labour unions continued to be an important force in society, these aims were not realized.<sup>64</sup> The largest problem was the continuing departure of leadership, the numbers are not mentioned, into the government, political parties, the corporate sector and junior and middle managerial positions in the workplace, which was an issue closely related to the above mentioned challenge of upward mobility for the NUM. COSATU lost thousands of leaders on all levels over the years due to this tendency.<sup>65</sup> The exact number of leaders is also not mentioned here. Despite the fact that COSATU members became influential through their presence in government and parliament, little of this influence returned to the federation and their close ties to labour became lost. Because many of the more senior and active leaders went into politics, COSATU faced a large brain drain. This tendency was the opposite of what COSATU General Secretary Jay Naidoo had envisioned at the time. At his speech in 1993, when he left the federation and joined parliament, he declared:

*'We are not taking leave of COSATU, we will be going to the National Assembly to carry forward the work of COSATU, its policies and principles. COSATU has always been, and will continue to be, the guardian of the poor.'*<sup>66</sup>

Delegations of COSATU participated in labour negotiations but their questions and demands were usually sidelined by the ANC government and management of companies with whom they negotiated. Even the very effective negotiator Ramaphosa could not get a foot in the door and he got fully enmeshed within the ANC delegation, according to Professor of Economic

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<sup>62</sup> The MDM was a loose alliance between the anti-apartheid movement the United Democratic Front (UDF), COSATU and the ANC aimed at campaigning for civil rights and against apartheid: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/mass-democratic-movement-february-1988-january-1990>. Last visited on 22-08-2014.

<sup>63</sup> Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 'Union Solidarity under Stress', 269.

<sup>64</sup> William Freund, 'Organized Labor in the Republic of South Africa: History and Democratic Transition', in: Jon Kraus (ed.), *Trade unions and the coming of democracy in Africa* (New York 2007), 199-228, 216.

<sup>65</sup> Masondo, 'The sociology of upward social mobility among COSATU shop stewards', 110.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, 114.

History William Freund.<sup>67</sup> However, questions can be asked concerning this statement. The Labour Relations Act (LRA) for instance, which is aimed at promoting, among other things, social justice and democracy in the workplace has been established. This act included demands made by COSATU.<sup>68</sup>

After the alignment with the ANC and SACP, COSATU had to significantly compromise its independence, and with that its union character, and did not align itself with organizations who were critical of the newly elected government, according to Pillay. Unfortunately, he does not mention whether this decision was build upon opportunistic or political reasons. COSATU was hardly present during community struggles over water and electricity privatization and other working class struggles. These struggles would inevitably lead to clashes with ANC town councilors. Furthermore, the federation no longer reached out to communities to support the workplace struggles as it did during the 1980s. The gap between the leaders and members widened after the internal democracy of the federation became more oligarchic. Affiliated unions became larger and more professionalized and union leaders started to become a part of the middle class of South Africa.<sup>69</sup> A study of COSATU members in 1995 showed evidence of ignorant union leadership around policy issues. Workplaces have been described where shop stewards had been left on their own with almost no training or education from their union while facing sophisticated counter-offensives by management of the companies.<sup>70</sup> According to Buhlungu, the character of labour unions changed after the ending of apartheid. Unions lacked a clear sense of purpose, political direction and were confused regarding the future of the workers' struggle. There was no vision and direction. The old sense of solidarity and a clear value system had been washed away with the coming of a democratically elected government. Notions of sacrificing oneself for a better South Africa and the collective struggle had been replaced by individualism, accompanied by the search for personal wealth. Many unionists got rid of any radical notions which resulted in unions no longer being seen as agents for radical societal change by their members.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Freund, 'Organized Labor in the Republic of South Africa', 216.

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.labour.gov.za/DOL/legislation/acts/labour-relations/labour-relations-act>. Last visited on 22-08-2014.

<sup>69</sup> Devan Pillay, 'The Enduring Embrace: COSATU and the Tripartite Alliance during the Zuma era', *Labour, Capital and Society* 44:2 (2011), 56-79, 64.

<sup>70</sup> Eddie Webster and Glenn Adler, 'Introduction: Consolidating Democracy in a Liberalizing World – Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa', in: Glenn Adler and Eddie Webster (ed.), *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997* (London 2000), 1-19, 14.

<sup>71</sup> Sakhela Buhlungu, 'Generational transition in union employment: the organizational implications of staff turnover in COSATU unions', *Transformation* 39 (1999), 47-71, 64.

### §3. The arrival of splinter unions: the start of AMCU

A tendency that might have been closely related to the growing absence of a vision and direction among the existing labour unions was the establishment of many splinter unions. Despite the fact that COSATU had the largest number of affiliated unions, there has been a time in which splinter unions popped up. From late 1996 to May 1997, more than a hundred new unions were registered. Most of these new unions were a product of division within COSATU affiliated unions. One example of this was the Mouthpiece Workers Union (MWU) which was established after a suspected assassination of at least ten workers at a mine of Anglo American.<sup>72</sup> It might be that this tendency of breakaway unions reflects some of the problems that COSATU was facing at the time on an organizational level due to the loss of some senior officials. However, it can also indicate the shortcomings of COSATU's policy of 'one industry, one union'.<sup>73</sup> The unity of COSATU and its affiliates based upon this philosophy might not always work flawlessly and could come at the expense of the workers.<sup>74</sup>

The MWU was by far not the only splinter union and also not the only one that was the centre of attention and discussions. AMCU, to many only known for its involvement during and after the 'Marikana Massacre', has also been considered a splinter union since it was established after a NUM member got into conflict with his union.

1998 was a year full of conflicts within the NUM at the Douglas Colliery in Emalahleni, a coal mine owned by BHP Billiton. The management of the mine had decided that approximately 3,000 mineworkers had to be retrenched due to high costs.<sup>75</sup> Labour expert Albert de Beer<sup>76</sup> stated that the NUM agreed with the retrenchments but Mathunjwa, at that moment not only a general worker at the colliery but also the NUM chairman of the branch at Douglas Colliery, demanded a retrenchment fund for the workers. After long negotiations, Douglas agreed to that but Mathunjwa got dismissed by Douglas because of allegations of

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<sup>72</sup> Geoffrey Wood, 'South African Trade Unions in a Time of Adjustment', *Labour/Le Travail* 47 (2001), 133-150, 142.

<sup>73</sup> This policy was implemented to create a unity among workers from the same industry. The aim was to organize unions to cover an entire industry whereby they would not compete with each other. A downside of this policy was that unions individually had less influence and that putting unions with different traditions and organizing methods all together proved to be rather difficult: <http://www.labornotes.org/2003/02/bigger-necessarily-better-south-africas-experience-one-industry-one-union>. Last visited on 22-08-2014.

<sup>74</sup> Wood, 'South African Trade Unions in a Time of Adjustment', 143.

<sup>75</sup> [http://www.miningmx.com/special\\_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm](http://www.miningmx.com/special_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm). Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>76</sup> Albert de Beer knows Joseph Mathunjwa from up close and has been negotiating and congregating with him for more than ten years now. He established reports on AMCU and his president in February 2012 in order for mining corporations to get a better insight into the upcoming labour union that they had to start dealing with. De Beer worked for several mining companies, among which BHP Billiton, Glencore and Impala): Interview Albert de Beer, 17-01-2014, Johannesburg.

intimidation and threatening violence.<sup>77</sup> According to online news provider, concerning the African mining industry, Miningmx, the workforce started a protest against the dismissal of Mathunjwa and an unprotected strike, which lasted for two weeks, was organized by the workers to support Mathunjwa. The strike ended after the Labour Court decided that Mathunjwa had to be reinstated at Douglas as a general worker.<sup>78</sup>

However, a second conflict was not far away and De Beer stated that there was a conflict between Mathunjwa and shop steward Patrick Malek at around the same time as the retrenchment. Mathunjwa and Malek were both running for NUM chairmanship for the branch at Douglas. Malek got outvoted by the workers and NUM General Secretary Mantashe, who already disliked Mathunjwa according to rumours, expelled Mathunjwa. According to the NUM, Mathunjwa had organized the elections in his favour and the election was not done anonymously but by raising hands, which is an unofficial election method.<sup>79</sup> According to Miningmx, Mathunjwa had to go to a disciplinary hearing of the NUM for bringing the union into disrepute. Deputy General of the NUM, Archie Phalane, was sent to investigate the charge against Mathunjwa but he concluded that Mathunjwa had done nothing wrong. A second official concluded the same.<sup>80</sup> However, NUM General Secretary Gwede Mantashe insisted that Joseph would appear before a disciplinary hearing that he would chair himself. Since Mathunjwa and Mantashe had a difficult relationship, Mathunjwa refused and insisted that an independent person should chair the hearing. According to Mathunjwa, his membership of the NUM was subsequently terminated from that moment onwards. However, Joseph Mathunjwa was very popular among the workforce. One of his achievements was the implementation of a bonus system for underground workers. After the termination of Mathunjwa's contract, the workers called a mass meeting where they all, 3,000 workers, decided to resign from the NUM. Since the workers did not have a union anymore and none of the existing unions appealed to them, they told Mathunjwa to start a new union and AMCU was officially registered in 2001.<sup>81</sup>

According to Miningmx, AMCU gained recognition at Douglas because the entire workforce stood behind him. But in the years that followed, the union faced an endless

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<sup>77</sup> Interview Albert de Beer, 17-01-2014, Johannesburg.

<sup>78</sup> [http://www.miningmx.com/special\\_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm](http://www.miningmx.com/special_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm). Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>79</sup> Interview Albert de Beer, 17-01-2014, Johannesburg.

<sup>80</sup> This is an interesting conclusion since a voting procedure by raising hands can have serious implications. Peer pressure is a high risk when everybody around you can see what you are voting and can thus influence one's vote. During the mass meeting of January 2014, the same kind of voting procedure was used by AMCU. However, this type of voting has been incorporated into the constitution of AMCU.

<sup>81</sup> Interview Albert de Beer, 17-01-2014, Johannesburg.

struggle to gain recognition at other mines because of suspicious employers who were colluding with established unions such as the NUM.<sup>82</sup> This was what also happened exactly at Douglas just after the establishment of AMCU. De Beer admitted that Douglas tried to block the registration from AMCU legally:

*“We said to the registrar that there was a problem because AMCU and NUM had exactly the same constitution. We wanted to get rid of animosity, we did not want another union, we already had three unions (NUM, UASA, Solidarity) and AMCU was only present at one mine; Douglas.”*

When AMCU in the end did get recognition at Douglas, BHP Billiton did everything they could according to De Beer to make sure that the presence of the new union would be limited to Douglas Colliery:

*“Douglas did not have a policy of ‘divide and rule’ which would ensure that both AMCU and the NUM would not become too powerful by granting them both accesses. It was policy of Douglas management to try in negotiations to limit AMCU to Douglas and not allow it to gain recognition at other Ingwe/BHP Billiton Energy Coal SA operations. There were meetings that benefited the NUM such as negotiations to agree on a minimum threshold for unions to participate in collective bargaining which eventually led to only the NUM being recognized for collective bargaining to this day. Reason for this was that Ingwe tried to stabilize the company without having unions fighting each other. We wanted to limit the presence of AMCU to Douglas.”<sup>83</sup>*

#### **§4. AMCU’s consolidation in Emalahleni**

After the official establishment of AMCU in 2001 up until approximately 2009, the union mainly operated in Emalahleni and the province of Mpumalanga. However, there are no records or documents available of this part of AMCU’s history, despite the fact that this period encompasses the largest part of their existence. The only people that know exactly how the union operated in these years is the leadership of AMCU but as already mentioned in the introduction, the leaders have not been willing to talk to me. Surprisingly enough, most of the inhabitants and those involved that I have talked to or interviewed could not tell much about

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<sup>82</sup> [http://www.miningmx.com/special\\_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm](http://www.miningmx.com/special_reports/mining-yearbook/mining-yearbook-2012/A-season-of-discontent.htm). Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>83</sup> Interview Albert de Beer, 17-01-2014, Johannesburg.

the history and presence of AMCU in Emalahleni. It seems though as if AMCU, despite their conflicting start, did not impress the inhabitants of the town of coal and did not manage to persuade many mineworkers to join the union.

According to Richard, Head of the Kopanang Secondary School in one of Emalahleni's townships Ackerville, Joseph Mathunjwa and his AMCU moved to Marikana and Rustenburg because they did not get support here. The mineworkers in Emalahleni are more satisfied and have better salaries than in the Rustenburg area.<sup>84</sup> What became clear in the stories that Richard told me is that, despite the fact that Emalahleni is the birth place of AMCU, the NUM still has the majority in the mines:

*“Here in Witbank, you see very few people in green AMCU t-shirts, people are not free here to do that in contrast with Rustenburg. We look at them. NUM still is the majority here. Wearing a green t-shirt is not wearing it proud, NUM is still stronger here, looked at with suspicion. My wife works at the mines, at BHP, when they hand out t-shirts she will take them home for me; it is always NUM.”<sup>85</sup>*

However, it has to be mentioned that Richard is a member of COSATU and was very negative and suspicious about AMCU and their members in general. At a certain point during the interview, he started to accuse AMCU members of removing COSATU placards that he and other COSATU members had spread. Richard: *“We are not sure who did it, but who could have done that? Amcu is the only rival here. It happened for the first time.”<sup>86</sup>*

Yesie shares the same opinion as Richard, despite the fact that she can be considered a neutral actor. As a councilor in township Lynnville, she knows many mineworker families and seemed to be well aware of union memberships. According to her, AMCU is no longer popular in Emalahleni and numbers have dropped dramatically. When AMCU got established, the union was very popular because workers were disgruntled with the NUM. Joseph Mathunjwa had followers, supporters and members in Emalahleni but after five years they all went back to NUM. When asking her why the mineworkers all went back to NUM, Yesie responded:

*“AMCU did not have the answers. People were angry with NUM over wages and the relation between NUM and management. Expectations were not met by AMCU, people*

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<sup>84</sup> It has not been possible to check this.

<sup>85</sup> Interview Richard O. Usinga, 14-11-2013, Emalahleni.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem.

*think that AMCU is following the roots of NUM. Why they returned to NUM then? Maybe NUM is safe, they know NUM.*”<sup>87</sup>

Besides the interviews, a small amount of information can be found on the activities of AMCU between approximately 2001 and 2009. In a report that labour expert Albert de Beer wrote about AMCU<sup>88</sup>, he states that the union tried to establish the union at other collieries but without major success. AMCU managed to recruit at small mining operations and among coal mining contractors. The union established itself by using unresolved worker issues and disgruntled NUM elected officials to further the AMCU cause.<sup>89</sup> However, their membership dropped after Douglas closed its doors in 2009. Until then, the largest part of AMCU members had been working there.<sup>90</sup>

According to PhD Researcher Crispin Chinguno, AMCU spread to Kwa-Zulu Natal, Northern Cape and the North West where it faced challenges in the mining sector because most of the large mines had recognition agreements with the NUM. Since the NUM was against the idea of union pluralism, there was only room for AMCU at small mines with no such recognition agreements and among subcontractors.<sup>91</sup> De Beer merely agrees with Chinguno about the strategy that AMCU used to recruit more members by stating that the union expanded to the anthracite mines in Northern Kwa-Zulu Natal and Limpopo. While doing that, AMCU focused on recruiting contractor personnel while the NUM had its members among the regular workers.<sup>92</sup> Most focus stayed on the platinum industry where they could benefit from the dissatisfaction of mineworkers with distribution of wealth and employee benefits.<sup>93</sup> It does not become clear from the report whether the dissatisfaction over these matters is channeled against the management of the mines or the NUM, but the fact remains that AMCU seems to try to recruit workers that are disgruntled or dissatisfied with their current situation. According to de Beer, the relationship between AMCU and the NUM remained acrimonious during these years with neither union really being good at managing it. Any dispute between them, mostly over membership, were made by both unions as being management’s problem, with the NUM mostly blaming management for supporting AMCU.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Interview Yesie, 12-11-2013, Emalahleni.

<sup>88</sup> According to Albert, he wrote these kinds of reports as an expert for whoever wanted them, mostly people in the mining industry that had to deal with AMCU.

<sup>89</sup> Albert de Beer, Mr. Joseph Mathunjwa and AMCU, *Competitive Labour Advantage*, 2.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Crispin Chinguno, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order*, SWOP working paper 1 (April 2013), 17.

<sup>92</sup> Albert de Beer, Report regarding Mr. Mathunjwa and AMCU, AMCU Report January 2012, 2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

## §5. Conquering Rustenburg

According to a report from Control Risks, an independent global risk consultancy, AMCU was boosted in 2010 after a NUM election for the position of General Secretary.<sup>95</sup> NUM regional leader Archie Phalane from the Rustenburg area, who was very popular with the mineworkers and seen as a charismatic leader, was running against NUM General Secretary Frans Baleni. At the NUM Congress, just before the voting procedure, Phalane was told that he could not contest in the election since he was an employee of the union and not an elected official. Baleni won the election and became General Secretary again which led to a sense of resentment against the union among a group of NUM mineworkers in the platinum belt.<sup>96</sup> Mineworkers felt that their opinion and interests were being sidelined when senior NUM members embarked on a systematic campaign to prevent their representative, Archie Phalane, from contesting in the election. A crack emerged between the NUM and the members and AMCU took advantage from that to gain a foothold in the Rustenburg platinum sector.<sup>97</sup> The resentment of mineworkers against the NUM peaked when in May 2010 the NUM Vice President, Piet Mathosa, wanted to persuade his members at Lonmin that an offer by the management was fair even though it did not meet the demands of the workers. This attempt by Mathosa to persuade the mineworkers into accepting a doubtful offer was met with violence. A mineworker threw a rock at Mathosa after which he lost his eye.<sup>98</sup>

According to Crispen Chinguno, AMCU has been present in Rustenburg from 2011 onwards, apart from the situation with Phalane in 2010.<sup>99</sup> By focusing on the workers that the NUM did not have as members, namely the subcontracted workers, workers of labour brokers and non-members, AMCU managed to break through in the turbulent platinum area. According to Chinguno, AMCU started in exactly the same way as the NUM had done years ago: defend the workers of a lower level and represent them on issues on the ground and in day to day stuff.<sup>100</sup> In January 2011, AMCU had a national congress during which they decided that the union had to make inroads in the major platinum and gold mining operations across the country. Their first major breakthrough was at the Karee mine, owned by Lonmin,

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<sup>95</sup> Prime Control Risks, *South Africa: Between a rock and a hard place* (2012), 2.

<sup>96</sup> [http://www.iol.co.za/news/beyond-the-chaos-at-marikana-1.1364787#.U3ndPPI\\_vfI](http://www.iol.co.za/news/beyond-the-chaos-at-marikana-1.1364787#.U3ndPPI_vfI). Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>97</sup> Prime Control Risks, *South Africa: Between a rock and a hard place* (2012), 2.

<sup>98</sup> [http://www.iol.co.za/news/beyond-the-chaos-at-marikana-1.1364787#.U3ndPPI\\_vfI](http://www.iol.co.za/news/beyond-the-chaos-at-marikana-1.1364787#.U3ndPPI_vfI). Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>99</sup> Crispen Chinguno, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order*, SWOP working paper 1 (April 2013), 17.

<sup>100</sup> Interview Crispen Chinguno, 26-09-2013, Johannesburg.

after an unprotected strike in June 2011. The NUM had suspended the branch chairperson of the Karee branch because of allegations of misappropriation of funds. The workers however claimed that the union was collaborating with management in victimizing a union representative that had the workers interest at heart. More than 9,000 workers got dismissed after they started a strike, but the NUM managed to reinstate 7,000.<sup>101</sup> Despite this, the harm was already done and the workers that got rehired by Lonmin refused to re-join the NUM. In the mean time, rumours were going round that there was a new union in the platinum belt. The workers heard this news from people who came from Limpopo and had met AMCU there. The non-member workers invited AMCU to organize and recruit workers at Lonmin and AMCU ended up with the majority of the mineworkers of the Karee mine in their pocket.<sup>102</sup> The only reliable source on this story has been the working paper of Crispin Chinguno. I have heard some similar stories about the occurred events during informal conversations but it has to be kept in mind here that the above mentioned events have come from only one source of information.

In 2011, there was also a large wildcat strike at the mines of Impala Platinum in the platinum belt after which workers left the NUM and joined AMCU. Despite the fact that the mineworkers had won a substantial wage increase with their strike and got rehired after being fired, 17,200 workers decided that the NUM was no longer meeting their demands.<sup>103</sup>

## **§6. NUM's challenges in the new era**

While AMCU was busy following its own course, rival union NUM faced its own challenges. The mining industry had been subject to restructuring since the early 1990s. Besides the fact that thousands of jobs got lost, various forms of flexibility on the workplace, especially the implementation of subcontractors, got adopted.<sup>104</sup> As a result of this, permanent and fulltime mineworkers had to make room for subcontracted workers. At the beginning of 2000, the number of outside subcontracted workers was 46,355 and at the end of 2003, this number has risen to 90,231. In the platinum industry, 31,833 subcontracted workers found a job at the cost

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<sup>101</sup> Crispin Chinguno, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order*, SWOP working paper 1 (April 2013), 17.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*, 18.

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.amandla.org.za/amandla-magazine/133-amandla-issue-30/1718-the-end-of-nums-hegemony-amcu-and-new-militancy>. Last visited on 12-07-2013.

<sup>104</sup> Sakhela Buhlungu, *A paradox of victory: COSATU and the democratic transformation in South Africa* (Scotsville 2010), 94.

of permanent contractors. In an attempt to protect their members, NUM is defending the existing jobs and organizing the vulnerable workers into the union. Unfortunately, this fight seems to end just after it has been started.<sup>105</sup> Because subcontracted workers are a serious issue and a real concern to the NUM, many members seem to think that their union has lost some of its power. The number of subcontracted workers in the industry has risen so the union must have done something wrong while trying to stop this tendency, which is how the mineworkers seem to argue. Furthermore, a possible solution might have been to organize these workers within the NUM but since only ten percent of the mineworkers belong to this group, the method was not that effective. Whether Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout are stating that the NUM wants to organize the subcontracted workers or not remains unclear, but the fact is that this group of workers does not only threaten the jobs of the other mineworkers but also the reliability of the union. These developments are creating tensions within the workforce and threatening the union's solidarity which is aimed at helping to unite workers against injustices in the mining sector.<sup>106</sup>

Another issue for the NUM evolved around the new phenomenon of upward mobility of black workers. The opportunity for black workers to outrank their fellow mineworkers has caused serious tensions within the union and it has put the position of shop steward in a spotlight.<sup>107</sup> Next to part time shop stewards, who do not get paid for this sideline job, there is the creation of full time stewards. These workers have a full time job in the union and get a good wage for this, a better wage than the workers. As a result, the position of full time shop steward is something to fight for and the competition for this job sometimes even gets violent. The solidarity in union branches suffers severely and a high level of distrust surrounding this issue has become very common.<sup>108</sup>

There is also the issue within COSATU concerning the vision and goals of the leadership. More and more reports of undemocratic behavior and corrupt practices by union leaders have been revealed and reported in the media.<sup>109</sup> Individualism instead of a sense of unity seems to have taken over the unionists in more than one way. Furthermore, there have also been reports published about unions facing serious financial problems because of a diminishing membership, fraud and corruption.<sup>110</sup> Closely related to this is the argument made

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<sup>105</sup> Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu, 'Old victories, new struggles', 254.

<sup>106</sup> Ibidem, 255.

<sup>107</sup> Ibidem, 250.

<sup>108</sup> Ibidem, 251.

<sup>109</sup> Sakhela Buhlungu, 'The state of trade unionism in post-apartheid South Africa', in: John Daniel, Adam Habib and Roger Southall (ed.), *State of the Nation: South Africa 2003-2004* (Cape Town 2003), 184-203, 189.

<sup>110</sup> Buhlungu, 'The state of trade unionism in post-apartheid South Africa', 190.

by Chinguno that workers allege union indifference and that it had been captured by management:

*'The union has become co-opted by management. They would come to the workers and say according to Act so and so this strike is illegal and the workers would return to work without any reasonable increase... In many of the strikes of the past the union will usually after the fifth or sixth day plead with the workers to return to work arguing that the strike is illegal and the employer has a right to dismiss them.'*<sup>111</sup>

## **§7. Marikana**

The seemingly sharp contrast between the progress that AMCU was making and the challenges that the NUM was facing was well portrayed during the strike that led to the 'Marikana Massacre' on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 2012. The SAPS brought the leaders from the NUM and AMCU, one at a time, to the Marikana koppie to diffuse the tension.<sup>112</sup> However, where the striking mineworkers accepted the addressing of Mathunjwa, the NUM president was catcalled. Crispin Chinguno stated it well by arguing that the failure of the NUM to address the workers outside the armoured police vehicle symbolized the rejection of the union, and everything that it stands for such as its political affiliation, by its workers.<sup>113</sup> Chinguno also argued in his working paper of April 2013 that the last place where AMCU, up until now, has been very active and successful is in Marikana.

A remark however has to be made on the exact growth of AMCU and the numbers behind its membership base. It has been argued in Chinguno's working paper that AMCU's growth has been huge since August 2012. In November 2012 AMCU General Secretary Jeffrey Mphahlele explained that the union had jumped from just over 23,000 members in January 2012 to 105,000 five months later. However, Chinguno states that these numbers are not easily to verify. The difference between the official membership numbers, see the table below, and the numbers made available by AMCU might be partly explained by Mphahlele. He stated: *'As we speak we have boxes and boxes full of forms of members signing up to join*

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<sup>111</sup> Crispin Chinguno, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order*, SWOP working paper 1 (April 2013), 20.

<sup>112</sup> A 'koppie' is the Afrikaans word for a small hill. It was on a small hill in Marikana that the striking mineworkers had gathered.

<sup>113</sup> Crispin Chinguno, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order*, SWOP working paper 1 (April 2013), 21.

AMCU.’<sup>114</sup> It might be possible that the numbers that he released were a rough estimation. However, the numbers that I received from the Department of Labour are so different from the numbers given by AMCU that a small comparison has to be shown. The figures from the Department of Labour are the numbers that AMCU has officially handed in as part of the continuing registration procedure:

Month/Year	Source: Department of Labour <sup>115</sup>	Source: AMCU <sup>116</sup>
2009	5,908	13,000
2010	8,485	18,000
January 2012	x	23,000
June 2012	x	105,000
November 2012	x	150,000
December 2012	42,766	x

## §8. Summary

This chapter constructed for the first time a historical background of AMCU and the way in which the union operated in the South African political and economical context of labour unions. AMCU filled up a gap that slowly opened between the NUM leadership and its members. After a relatively promising start, the NUM was faced with multiple challenges due to the transition to a democratic South Africa. The upward mobility that had been created led to a large brain drain in the NUM and COSATU. COSATU members became influential through their presence in the ANC government and parliament but little of this influence returned to the federation and their close ties to labour became lost. After the establishment of the Tripartite Alliance, COSATU moved further away from the community. In the mean time, the NUM, among others affiliated to COSATU, became larger and more professional and the union started to lack vision and direction. One of the splinter unions that then started to pop up was AMCU. After a difficult start in Emalahleni, the union tried to gain a foothold in the

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<sup>114</sup> Crispin Chinguno, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order*, SWOP working paper 1 (April 2013), 18.

<sup>115</sup> Department of Labour, Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, Financial Year End 12/31, File nr: LR 2/6/2/97.

<sup>116</sup> Crispin Chinguno, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order*, SWOP working paper 1 (April 2013), 18.

platinum industry which was mainly established in the Rustenburg area. The shootings in Marikana proved to be the turning point for AMCU.

As already stated in the first chapter, AMCU has not only been critical towards the policies of the state, but also towards the mining companies and the NUM. By responding to the current weaknesses of the NUM and using unresolved worker issues, AMCU managed to convince many mineworkers to leave their union. Changes in the political and economical environment of the NUM made many mineworkers look at their union in a different way. As a result, AMCU was founded due to labourers who wanted to be unionized in order to fight for better working and living conditions, of which they felt deprived by their former union. AMCU had to face large challenges from the start because the mining corporations rather cooperated with the NUM and wanted to maintain the status quo. It was only after the 'Marikana Massacre' that AMCU managed to truly gain a foothold in the platinum industry. Many involved mineworkers became, even more, fed up with the NUM, the mining corporations and the ruling ANC because of their involvement during the massacre. AMCU provided a safe haven for those mineworkers that wanted extensive changes in their lives and the mining corporations became forced to work with the new union.

Besides constructing a history of AMCU, it is important for this research to examine the presidency of Joseph Mathunjwa and to characterize the members of the union. A 'union' remains an abstract notion of an organization that includes many different people and power layers. A closer look at 'the people behind the union' might give more insight in the way this vibrant organization works and, above all, is still growing. The next chapter will try to give a face and voice to this organization.

## Chapter 3: The president and his members

*“AMCU is number one. I am a proud member of AMCU.”*<sup>117</sup>

These words of praise were shared with me by one of the AMCU members from Marikana and he is not the only one who thinks about the union in this way. This chapter sketches a portrait of AMCU’s president Joseph Mathunjwa. This portrait includes not only his personal history and character but also the opinions of others surrounding him in the work sphere, based on interviews. Furthermore, attention will be paid to the diverse membership base of AMCU and the profiling of a few of the AMCU based mineworkers.

### §1. A portrait of Joseph Mathunjwa

Joseph Mathunjwa was born on 26 May 1965 in Kwa-Zulu, South Africa.<sup>118</sup> He finished matriculation in the capital city of Kwa-Zulu, Ulundi, before he moved to Mpumalanga. There he started working as a laboratory assistant at Douglas Colliery, part of the coal mining company BHP Billiton, in Emalahleni from 1986 onwards.<sup>119</sup> Besides these common facts, not much information is present about the man who is now worldwide known for its influence in the mining industry via his labour union AMCU. Interviews on his personal life are almost absent since Mathunjwa is trying to avoid the media and researchers. Apart from some short interviews, all of the information about AMCU’s president came from second hand.

In an interview with Mining Weekly, Joseph told the journalist that his personal best achievement was the fact that he came up with a union that encompasses all walks of life, irrespective of political affiliations. The biggest influence on his career has always been the plight of the working class. Mathunjwa’s work for the mineworkers and his faith, he is a member of the Salvation Army, seem to be closely connected to each other.<sup>120</sup> According to Reuters on Mineweb, Mathunjwa is a ‘preacher turned unionist’ who sees himself as a Christian soldier fighting for South Africa’s downtrodden miners: *‘I was chosen by the plight and the suffering of the working class in South Africa.’* These words were said by Mathunjwa himself during one of his speeches to the mineworkers at Marikana. During the interview with

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<sup>117</sup> Interview Sam, 18-10-2013, Marikana.

<sup>118</sup> <http://whoswho.co.za/joseph-mathunjwa-762777>. Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>119</sup> [http://www.miningmx.com/pls/cms/mmx\\_rain.profile\\_detail?p\\_nid=464](http://www.miningmx.com/pls/cms/mmx_rain.profile_detail?p_nid=464). Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.miningweekly.com/article/joseph-mathunjwa-2012-08-03>. Last visited on 12-07-2014.

Reuters, Mathunjwa stated that he was heavily influenced by his parents' generosity to others less fortunate while he was growing up in a semi-rural Kwa-Zulu during apartheid. According to Joseph:

*'When a person is born on planet Earth they're here for a purpose. And that purpose is God's purpose. So I believe that I am one of the luckiest to realize what purpose I'm here for. It's to work through the systems that oppress other people.'*<sup>121</sup>

According to De Beers' report, Mathunjwa is a very intelligent and charismatic leader who can integrate religion, politics<sup>122</sup> and business into a 'likeable' message to the masses. In other words, he has the ability to rally support for almost any issue by integrating unrelated issues and just bending the truth slightly.<sup>123</sup> De Beer goes even so far by stating that Mathunjwa is likened to the notorious leader of the extreme right wing Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging Eugène Terre'Blanche who led his members in a similar way: *"Both men are charismatic, very religious and totally dedicated to their cause. Both have the emotional support of their followers."*<sup>124</sup> De Beer also warns his public for the strong way in which the Christian religion is a part of Mathunjwa's work ethic: *'By using religion very well, Mathunjwa is highly effective in getting people to be martyrs for a cause.'*<sup>125</sup>

However, more and more stories and rumors are going round about the increasingly luxurious life of Mathunjwa. This seems to be a sensitive topic for many AMCU mineworkers since they have put their hope for a decent living wage into the hands of Mathunjwa, who used to be a general worker as well. When the workers are living in shacks and the president of their labour union is driving in expensive cars, it seems to suggest that the fee that the AMCU members have to pay is not used for the benefit of the workers but to provide for luxurious goods for the president. In the next chapter, I will elaborate more on the role of the media and the internet in the creation of a certain image of AMCU and his president, but for now it is suffice to note in which ways Mathunjwa seems to spend his money, according to news site IOL 'against the background of Christianity, salvation and his poor members'. Mathunjwa currently owns three cars and when he goes to meetings he is guarded by three bodyguards while wearing expensive suits according to IOL. Mathunjwa has three BMW's

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<sup>121</sup> <http://www.mineweb.com/mineweb/content/en/mineweb-political-economy?oid=193744&sn=Detail>. Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>122</sup> This statement by De Beer is interesting because the labour expert is referring to a political message that Mathunjwa apparently is spreading, while the president is leading an apolitical union.

<sup>123</sup> Albert de Beer, Report regarding Mr. Mathunjwa and AMCU, AMCU Report January 2012, 2.

<sup>124</sup> Interview Albert de Beer, 17-01-2014, Johannesburg.

<sup>125</sup> Albert de Beer, Report regarding Mr. Mathunjwa and AMCU, AMCU Report January 2012, 4.

registered in his name with a total worth of about R900,000. Furthermore, he has three houses with a total estimated value of R1 million.<sup>126 127</sup>

The observations on the way in which Mathunjwa negotiates and communicates on the work floor also seem to have positive and negative aspects. Reuters perceives the communication skills of Mathunjwa as twofold. On the one hand, the president comes across as uncomfortable when he is giving press conferences in English, on the other hand he is a powerful orator with the style of an evangelical preacher when talking to ‘his people’ during a rally or mass meeting. His speeches are complemented with Biblical references while he speaks in Zulu, Xhosa and English. However, when addressing the mineworkers, he does that in Fanagalo most of the time. According to Reuters, this approach appeals to class, racial and religious solidarity.<sup>128</sup> De Beer reported that Mathunjwa takes on an emotional route during negotiations instead of arguing on principle.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, the president is such a charismatic leader who inspires people that this can lead to violence and leaderless revolts despite the fact that Mathunjwa and AMCU are not preaching violence, concludes De Beer in his report.<sup>130</sup> But the president is not only inspiring and leading the mineworkers, with his smooth talk, ‘capitalist mindset’ and his sincere appearance, he also gains the trust and support of managers, states De Beer.<sup>131</sup>

## §2. Friend and foe

Joseph Mathunjwa has been praised and cursed by many in the mining industry. However, besides the negative stories about the president, admiration is also something that I have heard many times while interviewing colleagues and employers, even though this does not account for the first organization mentioned here. The Democratic Left Front is one of the political organizations that I got to know while doing research in the Rustenburg area and also one of the parties that does not seem very content with the presence of AMCU in the area, mainly because of President Mathunjwa. The members of the DLF who I have spoken to find it difficult to explain what the organization exactly is and does at this stage. According to Senior

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<sup>126</sup> [http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/amcu-leader-s-life-of-luxury-1.1690081#.U4Gy-vl\\_vfI](http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/amcu-leader-s-life-of-luxury-1.1690081#.U4Gy-vl_vfI). Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>127</sup> R900,000 is approximately €62,000, R1 million is approximately €69,000.

<sup>128</sup> <http://www.mineweb.com/mineweb/content/en/mineweb-political-economy?oid=193744&sn=Detail>. Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>129</sup> Albert de Beer, Report regarding Mr. Mathunjwa and AMCU, AMCU Report January 2012, 2.

<sup>130</sup> Albert de Beer, Mr. Joseph Mathunjwa and AMCU, Competitive Labour Advantage, 2.

<sup>131</sup> Albert de Beer, Report regarding Mr. Mathunjwa and AMCU, AMCU Report January 2012, 2.

Lecturer in International Relations, activist and member of the convening committee of the Democratic Left process, Vishwas Satgar, the Democratic Left practice pushes the boundaries and horizons of anti-capitalist left politics.<sup>132</sup> One of the aims is to bring together movements and socialist organizations on a national level to a common platform. Socialist and anti-apartheid activist Trevor Ngwane states that the DLF is trying to show people that the way forward is to unite the left and fight for an alternative political organization because people still look to the ANC for salvation.<sup>133</sup> The most recent actions of the Front are concerning the ‘Marikana Massacre’ whereby they try to support the mineworkers in all possible ways. According to Bheki, one of the DLF’ers who is very active in Marikana, the DLF is not supporting AMCU or the workers committees but ‘the masses’. Bheki did not seem very impressed with AMCU when I asked him about the union while standing in the middle of the field where the mineworkers died in August 2012: “*AMCU is bad because it is being run by one man.*”<sup>134</sup> This opinion is being shared with Matthews Hlabane, who claims to be the national organizer of the DLF besides his work as an ecosocialist. Whether he truly is the national organizer is something that I could never verify well but he seemed to be very busy with the organization during the time that I frequently met him. Hlabane is questioning whether Mathunjwa would step down if he was asked to do so. Furthermore, the agenda of Mathunjwa is not favouring the working class because of his religious program. Bishop Seoka, who is known for his great concern around the ‘Marikana Massacre’, is more radical and looks more like a leader of the workers than Mathunjwa, stated Matthews: “*He is more politically informed, conscious and a visionary.*”<sup>135</sup>

An interview with somebody from the management side of the table sketches a different side of AMCU and their procedures. Charles Kendall, Head HR and Transformation at Aquarius Platinum SA in Rustenburg, admitted that it is a challenge to work with Mathunjwa and AMCU on the one hand. If Mathunjwa is not present at meetings or negotiations, the representative of AMCU is reluctant to sign anything because, as Kendall stated: “*They are not authorized to sign.*” Only the highest structures can do that and since the leadership and the people on the ground are sometimes out of line, the demands of shop stewards for instance are different from the demands of the leadership of AMCU. On the other hand, Kendall states clearly that Joseph Mathunjwa is a true strategist and a very clever man. Kendall got to know Mathunjwa pretty well after having to deal with him a couple of

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<sup>132</sup> <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/reclaiming-the-south-african-dream/>. Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>133</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-02-16-democratic-left-front-comments/>. Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>134</sup> Interview Bheki, 14-12-2013, Marikana.

<sup>135</sup> Interview Matthews Hlabane, 03-12-2013, Emalahleni.

years ago when the president came to talk to Aquarius about a possible AMCU membership base at the Rustenburg mine. The low-level mine in Rustenburg that is owned by Aquarius still has a NUM majority but they keep the front door open for AMCU. Mathunjwa understood the situation and did not see the benefits of having a majority at this mine. Kendall sees the Christian aspect of AMCU as something that people can connect with. Furthermore, Mathunjwa can easily bring people with him because they see him as a steady, gentle person says Kendall.<sup>136</sup>

Union colleague Gideon du Plessis, General Secretary of the Christian and Afrikaner member oriented labour union Solidariteit, is also both critical and positive about the new rival union. Du Plessis:

*“AMCU is fairly destructive in negotiations. This is because of their capacity problem. Furthermore, they need breathing space during negotiations because they are not experienced, and Joseph is running a one man show, everything has to be consolidated by him first.”*

According to Du Plessis, Jeffrey Mphahlele, General Secretary of AMCU, admitted this last statement to him. At this moment, since the extreme growth of AMCU after Marikana, the union is under pressure and dysfunctional says Du Plessis. Mathunjwa is currently alienating all important stakeholders such as other unions, employers, the Chamber of Mines, the Department of Mineral resources and the government and the union is isolating itself with their behavior. But labour relations is all about connections, that is where the power is. Du Plessis: *“I have got a feeling that he trusts nobody, he does not allow anyone to come close to him. It is difficult to communicate with him, he is always under attack and aggressive on stage.”* Mathunjwa’s biggest fault according to Du Plessis is that he treats everybody as an enemy and he is not using the system of interacting with journalists and the media while they are the ones that determine his image.<sup>137</sup> This adds to a more general view of Mathunjwa as somebody who seems to keep everyone at a safe distance and distrusts people quickly. Only few seem to have had the opportunity to get closer to Mathunjwa, such as Albert de Beer, and be able to call him a charismatic man. Furthermore, he rather not talks to the media and, from my own experience with him and what I have heard from other researchers, he tries to avoid all other kinds of interviews and interactions with researchers and organizations. Mathunjwa is also a dangerous man says Du Plessis:

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<sup>136</sup> Interview Charles Kendall, 29-11-2013, Rustenburg.

<sup>137</sup> Interview Gideon du Plessis, 22-10-2013, Pretoria.

*“He is very dangerous because he is clever. He believes that he has got a calling from God, that is dangerous, he can get carried away easily. He is also a bit of a dictator, he calls the shots.”*

The General Secretary however also has many praising words for the disputed president. Du Plessis: *“Mathunjwa is a fairly brave leader, he has a difficult task and he has more enemies than friends, I respect him for that.”* He is resolute in negotiations and that is a good quality, it is not a popularity contest for him but he is fighting for a cause, according to Du Plessis. Du Plessis stated that he also got to know Mathunjwa a little bit outside work and he sees the president in that setting as ‘a very pleasant and friendly guy’.<sup>138</sup>

Journalist Jan de Lange, widely known as one of the intermediaries of Mathunjwa, is merely optimistic about the leadership of AMCU’s president:

*“He is idealistic and highly intellectual despite not having a tertiary education. He is religious but is not galvanizing his people, he just believes. He is very suspicious as being the underdog union in the shadow of the powerful NUM.”*

At the same time, De Lange admits that Mathunjwa is an intermediary whereby he not only has to change the lives of the mineworkers, but also has to make sure that the mining companies are satisfied. That can result in a situation whereby Mathunjwa might not be able to meet all of the demands of his members. Otherwise the companies can ‘kill the goose that lays the golden eggs’, concludes De Lange.<sup>139</sup>

As already mentioned earlier in this article, Mathunjwa’s job and his faith seem to be closely related to each other. This is an interesting notion that deserves some clarification and comparing notes. Organizational anthropologist Harry Wels noticed the similarities between Mathunjwa as president of AMCU and Mathunjwa as a member of the Salvation Army. Firstly, Mathunjwa sees himself as a Christian soldier according to Reuters and a Salvationist is just a different name for this. Furthermore, De Beer concluded that the Christian religion is a large part of Mathunjwa’s work ethic. The Salvationist workers mentality contains that one always has to work hard for God. Moreover, Gideon du Plessis refers to the president as ‘a bit of a dictator’ and Charles Kendall refers to an event whereby only Mathunjwa or one of the other AMCU leaders was authorized to decide over labour matters. While considering the fact that the Salvation Army has a strict hierarchical structure, it might not be surprising that Mathunjwa, as the leader of the union, acts as ‘a bit of a dictator’ and is not very concerned with the opinions of those lower in rank. Lastly, according to Wels, the fact that Mathunjwa

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<sup>138</sup> Interview Gideon du Plessis, 22-10-2013, Pretoria.

<sup>139</sup> Interview Jan de Lange, 26-11-2013, Johannesburg.

seems to find it difficult to deal with the media but manages to win the hearts and minds of the mineworkers with his emotional and convincing in-crowd speeches is typical for the way in which the Salvation Army works.<sup>140</sup>

### §3. AMCU's membership base

An exact description of the membership base of AMCU is difficult to give at this moment. There has been no analytical article on this subject published yet and the answer given by various interviewees did not provide a satisfying answer. However, some remarks can be made on the type of people that have been applying for an AMCU membership. Just after the establishment of AMCU and in the following years, the union was perceived to be racially based and focusing mainly on recruiting and representing Zulu speaking workers, especially Zulu speakers that came from Northern Natal around the area where Mathunjwa was raised.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, Professor Bond stated that most workers that got involved during the massacre came from the Eastern Cape's Pondoland, Lesotho and Mozambique.<sup>142</sup> This does not mean that the entire membership base of AMCU consists of labour migrants but since many striking mineworkers in Marikana joined the union after the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, at least a part of AMCU's members are migrants.

If we move away from an ethnic approach of the question about AMCU's members, you see that the union is recruiting mostly disgruntled NUM members who have lost their faith in the NUM because it is not meeting their demands. Where the NUM is bureaucratic, AMCU is more charismatic and actively 'workerist' centered which is something that the members appreciate in their everyday life.<sup>143</sup> This will show in the member profiles below. Furthermore, the NUM has a clear political orientation because of its affiliation with COSATU, while AMCU is staying away from politics as far as possible and emphasizes the apolitical character of the union.<sup>144</sup> However, it can be stated that, by separating themselves from the political orientation of the NUM, AMCU is also carrying out a political statement. After being so disappointed with the COSATU and ANC based NUM, the mineworkers, especially in the Rustenburg platinum belt, seem to appreciate an apolitical union more. This

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<sup>140</sup> Informal conversation with Harry Wels, 15-07-2014, Leiden.

<sup>141</sup> Albert de Beer, Report regarding Mr. Mathunjwa and AMCU, AMCU Report January 2012, 1.

<sup>142</sup> Patrick Bond and Shauna Mottiar, 'Movements, protests and a massacre in South Africa', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 31:2 (Durban 2013), 283-302, 293.

<sup>143</sup> Albert de Beer, Mr. Joseph Mathunjwa and AMCU, *Competitive Labour Advantage*, 2.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibidem*, 2.

idea is endorsed by De Beers report on AMCU where he states that ‘*NUM’s leadership is bland, political and technocratic – AMCU’s leadership is charismatic and inspiring.*’<sup>145</sup> Moreover, Crispin Chinguno stated that many of the unskilled workers have confidence in, and are less critical of, AMCU even though there is no guarantee that the union will be any different from the NUM. AMCU is showing characteristics of business unionism, running a union as if it was a business, and is focusing on shop floor issues and the improvement of working conditions. These are all characteristics of AMCU that are attractive to the mineworkers.<sup>146</sup>

One aspect of AMCU that also seems to appeal to the mineworkers, according to Chinguno, is that Mathunjwa speaks in Fanagalo during mass meetings. An AMCU worker stated to Chinguno that Fanagalo means togetherness and common understanding for the mineworkers and is the language of the hard workers.<sup>147</sup> The NUM, on the other hand, uses the main local languages Tswana, Xhosa and some English translations to address the workers. The NUM believes that people from other areas should learn local languages to integrate into the local community. The AMCU worker in Chinguno’s article responds to this argument by stating that Mathunjwa uses Fanagalo in order for all the mineworkers to understand what he is saying since most workers have very limited formal education. Furthermore, the pidgin language should bring people together irrespective of ethnicity, argues the worker.<sup>148</sup> It seems like the NUM has removed itself from the mineworkers and does not fully understand what is going on among the workers.

Despite the fact that AMCU states that the union is open to everyone who wants to join them, the bulk of the members are black. I have met one white shop steward in Rustenburg and rumours were going round that he had been hired to attract more white mineworkers to the union. According to Gideon du Plessis, the following points are characteristic for the average AMCU member: ‘black, entry level and mainly unskilled’ and mainly present in the mining industry.<sup>149</sup> When asking the same question to a variety of mineworkers, all AMCU members, the answers were almost similar to the answer of Du Plessis. AMCU member Gaddafi Mdoda: “*We are a multiracial union. Our people are fed up*

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<sup>145</sup> Albert de Beer, Mr. Joseph Mathunjwa and AMCU, *Competitive Labour Advantage*, 2.

<sup>146</sup> Crispin Chinguno, ‘Impala Platinum strike. Lessons and implications’, *South African Labour Bulletin* 36:3 (August/September 2012), 9-11, 11.

<sup>147</sup> Crispin Chinguno, ‘Battle for Impala. Amcu grassroots activists’ speak’, *South African Labour Bulletin* 36:3 (August/September 2012), 12-15, 14.

<sup>148</sup> Chinguno, ‘Battle for Impala’, 14.

<sup>149</sup> Interview Gideon du Plessis, 22-10-2013, Pretoria.

[with NUM] and want something else.”<sup>150</sup> Moreover, the base for solidarity among the union members seems to be mainly the disaffection with the NUM which is, for most AMCU members, their former union. A sense of a workers class consciousness might also be present since most AMCU members seem to be blue-collar workers but more research on this topic is needed before conclusions can be drawn.

Despite the fact that more detailed information about the characteristics of AMCU’s membership base is difficult to collect, something can be said about the mineworkers that live in and around Marikana and of whom many are member of AMCU. According to Amandla!<sup>151</sup>, the majority of the Marikana strikers live in informal settlements surrounding the Lonmin mine. These settlements are no different from any other settlement in South Africa, but what differentiates them is that they are positioned right next to the mine infrastructure and shafts: *‘a very physical representation of the enormous wealth generated in the digging up of platinum, which is of little benefit to these communities.’*<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, the sewage is literally flowing through the streets, dirt roads are deeply eroded and there is no health service or electricity.<sup>153</sup> According to Hargreaves, the workers live under democratic dispensation and yet these are the deplorable circumstances of their existence: *‘A deep and grave injustice is being done to the workers of Marikana, and their communities, and it is this reality, combined with exploitative wages, that gave rise to the strike action which now ripples through the mining sector. With a state that is completely absent and mining companies that plunder national resources with little investment.’*<sup>154</sup>

As already mentioned earlier in this paragraph, many AMCU workers are migrant workers. These men have to maintain two households, namely their own nearby and their family abroad.<sup>155</sup> There is thus much social pressure to earn enough money to support these families. Moreover, many mineworkers increasingly have to deal with a casualisation of labour in the mining industry due to subcontractors. According to Bezuidenhout, Theron and Godfrey, non-core functions such as shaft sinking and underground construction were being subcontracted before the mid-1990s. However, this changed approximately twenty years ago. ‘Core’ mining operations have increasingly been subcontracted as well and the conditions of

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<sup>150</sup> Interview Gaddafi Mdoda, 14-10-2013, Rustenburg.

<sup>151</sup> Amandla! is magazine and website project that aims to promote discussion and debate towards a new left and anti-capitalist politics in South Africa and Southern Africa: <http://www.amandla.org.za/home/about-us>. Last visited on 22-08-2014.

<sup>152</sup> Samantha Hargreaves, ‘And what of the women of Marikana?’, *Amandla!* 26/27 (September 2012), 21-22, 22.

<sup>153</sup> Hargreaves, ‘And what of the women of Marikana?’, 22.

<sup>154</sup> Ibidem, 22.

<sup>155</sup> Bond and Mottiar, ‘Movements, protests and a massacre in South Africa’, 293.

employment of workers employed by contractors vary. Bezuidenhout argues that evidence suggests that employees of contractors are paid lower wages than regular employees and they also tend not to have access to medical aid, sick leave or injury compensation, pension, severance pay, free safety equipment or death benefits.<sup>156</sup> According to Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu, a third of those mineworkers working in the Rustenburg area are subcontracted and live in filthy, old style, overcrowded dormitories. The majority of these workers live in shacks in informal settlements.<sup>157</sup>

#### **§4. Faces behind the union**

A number of interviews have been held with AMCU members who not only elaborated on their personal life, but also about the way in which they heard about AMCU, the reasons to join the union and what they are expecting from it. Six mineworkers are selected here to sketch an image of the people behind the large group of members that AMCU managed to recruit.<sup>158</sup>

Sana was the only mineworker in Emalahleni who was willing to talk to me. She is a plant operator and a member of AMCU since last year. According to her, AMCU is the best union because it is focused on helping people and negotiating for a living wage. Even though she had heard of AMCU before, she decided to only become a member in 2012 because she wanted to wait and see how the union would evolve. The problem that Sana had with the NUM was that the union had been around for a long time without any real competition which made them lose focus. Sana explained that she never knew who the president of the NUM was but that she knows Mathunjwa whom she finds a very good and fair leader, a man of his word, bold and supportive of the people. The shop stewards from AMCU are also helping her and are very supportive. Sana recently had a problem at work and she won a case against her employer because of AMCU. Above all, the provincial organizer of AMCU comes to the mines when something is really wrong and the union is always active. Furthermore, Sana is pleased with the way in which AMCU is currently present in Emalahleni. Despite stories that I heard about AMCU being almost entirely absent in this town, Sana states that the union

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<sup>156</sup> Andries Bezuidenhout, Jan Theron and Shane Godfrey, 'Casualisation. Can we meet it and beat it?', *South African Labour Bulletin* 30:1 (February/March 2005), 39-43, 39.

<sup>157</sup> Andries Bezuidenhout and Sakhela Buhlungu, 'Winners and losers in the mining boom', *South African Labour Bulletin* 36:3 (August/September 2012), 7-8, 8.

<sup>158</sup> There is no specific order or argumentation concerning the interviews.

recently became more active in Mpumalanga after Marikana.<sup>159</sup>

Sam is a rock drill operator at Lonmin in Rustenburg and one of the survivors of the 'Marikana Massacre'. He became a member of AMCU just after the shootings and he considers himself a proud member: "*AMCU is number one, is good union. Last year NUM does not help me, they do not care. AMCU cares about the members.*" Sam was a member of the NUM since 1999 but he is very determined not to go back to his old union when AMCU might disappear. He states that 'enough is enough' and that the NUM was not good for him:

*"NUM takes decisions without members, if you want to run together do not do that. NUM does not care, their stomach is full. NUM was my first union. If NUM had addressed the workers during Marikana Massacre, I would have stayed with them. I do not care about ANC and NUM, they do not care about the workers. Rhino's are more important than me. I do not care about rhino, I care about the people. ANC in the news; 'stop poaching'. I do not vote ANC anymore."*<sup>160</sup>

Currently, Sam is a part time shop steward for AMCU next to his job as a rock drill operator. What Sam wants from AMCU is to negotiate for higher wages. He has five children and he is the only one in the family that can work. Furthermore, he has to look after his three brothers and sisters. AMCU seemed to have won Sam over in the week of the massacre. Sam told me about his involvement in the deadly strike and the way in which Mathunjwa came to the koppie, went down on his knees and begged the striking mineworkers to leave the mountain and go home. The way in which he told me this story made clear that he was impressed by the way in which Mathunjwa handled the situation at the koppie. Sam ended the interview with a resolute confidence in a better future with AMCU: "*I am telling you; AMCU is going forward, not going back.*"<sup>161</sup>

Lazarus, a 31 year old mineworker used to be in charge of pipes, timber work and ventilation at the Khuseleka Mine in Rustenburg, owned by Anglo American. Now he is the fulltime Chairperson for Education and Training Structure for AMCU and he was a member of AMCU for approximately six months when I spoke to him in October 2013. In September 2012, there was a wage strike at Anglo American but the NUM did nothing according to Lazarus: "*People were fed up, they wanted to go to other places with their own meetings where their voice could be heard.*" Lazarus had been chosen by the other workers to be part of a workers committee since the NUM did not do anything for the mineworkers during the

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<sup>159</sup> Interview Sana, 19-12-2013, Emalahleni.

<sup>160</sup> Interview Sam, 18-10-2013, Marikana.

<sup>161</sup> Ibidem.

strike. The NUM also refused to hold a meeting with the committee since it was unrecognized and unofficial. The mineworkers and the committee were looking for a union that was going to work for them and that would work out the strike via negotiations. The mineworkers chose AMCU because they had heard of the union via workers at Lonmin and Impala Platinum and because they had been on the news since the shootings at Marikana, said Lazarus. Lazarus had never been a member of the NUM or any other union and he seemed very suspicious about other unions except AMCU: *“I knew before, since 1982, there is no progress.”* After asking why there is no progress according to him and what he wanted from AMCU, Lazarus said: *“Nothing has changed. We want change. There was no freedom after Mandela, people still live in shacks. It is time for NUM to go.”* One of the things that he appreciated most about AMCU is that the union never talks about percentages during wage negotiations, they always ‘just talk about Rand’, which is something that every, uneducated, mineworker can understand. Furthermore, AMCU is a union for the people: *“We are not aware of things, AMCU tells things.”* Lazarus also talks about the religious character of AMCU. After asking him why the union starts every meeting with a prayer, he answers: *“It shows that AMCU has been sent by God. Joseph is a priest, come to rescue the people who have been suffering.”*<sup>162</sup>

William Tyhali, 37 years old, is in charge of the pipes as he explained it during an interview I had with him in a small bar in Rustenburg. He works at Khomanani mine, owned by Anglo American. In October 2013, he was a member of AMCU for about a year already. William used to be a member of the NUM, but, as he stated, he had problems with the leaders of his union: *“NUM is inside management, I was deleted from NUM for three years.”* William told that he could not go back to the NUM. He had been a member for nine years but when the NUM does not agree with the members they take their own decisions in name of the members stated William. When he became a member of AMCU, he did not know the union at all but he wanted to be member of a union and AMCU was the only option. One of the biggest changes for William after changing from the NUM to AMCU was that his new union listens to the members and every issue is taken to the members. Issues over negotiations and other matters are explained to the members:

*“AMCU listens, go to stadium to vote for the members, to vote for a decision. They come to us on the ground level, then they go to the management, give feedback to us after that, then take a decision as a collective. Mathunjwa does not take the decision on its own. We are aware of issues, opening eyes even of not educated people like me,*

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<sup>162</sup> Interview Lazarus, 19-10-2013, Rustenburg.

*dark light for nine years. NUM tells something, members want something, not possible according to NUM, we sign something for two years, they talk about ten percent, but what is that? We demand Rand, that is what people understand, AMCU gives clarity, the Rand I use every day, I know that.*<sup>163</sup>

William blamed Frans Baleni for presenting the decisions of the NUM in the media while the members did not know anything but had to hear about it via the media and the news. Furthermore, William also accused the NUM for bribing mining management and covering the management side instead of the workers.<sup>164</sup> Lindile Zuku was accompanying William at the interview and I asked him some questions too. Lindile is a machine operator at the same mine as William and a member of AMCU since September 2012. He saw that AMCU and Mathunjwa were the only union and president going to the Marikana koppie in August 2012 on the news and he decided to become a member at that point. Lindile was a member of the NUM for fourteen years but he also states that the union was failing and did not take the matters of the workers to the management.<sup>165</sup>

Gaddafi Mdoda was also one of the leaders of the workers committee during the strike in 2012 at Anglo American after being elected by disgruntled mineworkers who did not feel that the NUM was meeting their demands. According to himself, Mdoda was ‘just an ordinary worker’ at Anglo before the strike and no member of the NUM. He is currently a fulltime shop steward under the wings of AMCU. Gaddafi is 33 years old now, works seven days a week, does not get paid a lot and does not have a car, he stated in the interview.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, he knows that he can easily lose his job again too: *“I have to keep them satisfied, they will end their faith in me and I will lose them if I do not work for them.”* Gaddafi came into contact with Mathunjwa after the workers committee was already formed. When I spoke with Mdoda in October 2013, he was full of praise about AMCU and Mathunjwa and he seemed very determined to change the current situation on the work floor under the wings of the NUM. Mdoda:

*“AMCU is a newborn baby; we make a change in the workplace. We want freedom of the working class and we challenge things that have been here for thirty, forty years. This is the first time for me and others to say no. We serve the interests of the people.”*

Furthermore, a strong belief in the power of God was present in the answers that Mdoda gave to me:

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<sup>163</sup> Interview William Tyhali, 18-10-2013, Rustenburg.

<sup>164</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>165</sup> Interview Lindile Zuku, 18-10-2013, Rustenburg.

<sup>166</sup> Interview Gaddafi Mdoda, 14-10-2013, Rustenburg.

*“God must remember the comrades of the Marikana Massacre, their souls rest in peace. We do not have the power to change things, except for God. He is the only one who can change things and he is doing that right now. We do nothing; it is all God’s work. It is not magic, god is for all the people, he loves them at all times. God saw the people suffer, he was tired and wanted to make sure that the people get something back for their hard work. God was there.”*

Whether Gaddafi believed that Mathunjwa was sent by God remains the question but the influence of God was very clear for the shop steward. The largest difference between AMCU and the NUM according to the shop steward was that AMCU did not have a friendship with mine management and no business was done with them. Furthermore, AMCU did not take bribes from the management side of the table. Mdoda saw a bright future for his new union and seemed to be very willing to contribute to that: *“I am preaching peace and prosperity in the name of AMCU, that is what I am doing and will be doing. Everything for AMCU.”*<sup>167</sup>

However, a couple of months after the interview, the opinion of Mdoda on Mathunjwa and AMCU seemed to have changed and he is not the only one. From mid-January 2014 onwards, the Rustenburg platinum belt is gripped by a strike. Mathunjwa encouraged the mineworkers from the three largest platinum producers, Lonmin, Impala Platinum and Anglo American, to start a strike for the R12,500. At the moment of writing, June 2014, the strike is still ongoing and the estimation is that more than 80,000 mineworkers laid down work to force the mining corporations to raise their wages. Just before the start of that strike, the media was reporting that there was an internal conflict in AMCU between the union and a group of members that are stating that AMCU does not have the interests of the workers at heart.<sup>168</sup> One of the disgruntled members stated to SABC:

*‘We left NUM because of dictatorship. We joined Amcu and hoped that things would be better, however Amcu's leadership has done nothing for us. They clearly do not want anything to do with us. It's like being in the wilderness, outcast and uncared for. Amcu promised us so many things and yet they could not deliver and when some of us were dismissed by our employers they did nothing.’*<sup>169</sup>

Furthermore, disgruntled AMCU members have accused Mathunjwa of corruption, driving in expensive cars, having multiple body guards and acting dictatorial. Five AMCU shop

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<sup>167</sup> Interview Gaddafi Mdoda, 14-10-2013, Rustenburg.

<sup>168</sup> [http://www.iol.co.za/business/companies/dissent-rocks-amcu-s-rank-and-file-1.1630849#.U4oIRv1\\_vfJ](http://www.iol.co.za/business/companies/dissent-rocks-amcu-s-rank-and-file-1.1630849#.U4oIRv1_vfJ). Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>169</sup> <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/3c59f00042874c079338fb56d5ffbd92/Disgruntled-Amcu-members-vow-to-form-own-union>. Last visited on 12-07-2014.

stewards have come forward and have been presenting themselves in the media to share their opinions on the flaws of their new union and to announce that a new labour union will be established when AMCU does not improve the situation. One of these mineworkers is Gaddafi Mdoda.<sup>170</sup> The accusations against Mathunjwa do not stop here however. Mdoda stated that, after Mathunjwa heard about the disgruntled members and the possible establishment of a new union by a group of mineworkers, Mathunjwa started accusing Mdoda and his colleagues of, among other things, deserting AMCU and receiving funds from the NUM and ANC to aid the destabilization of AMCU.<sup>171</sup>

## §5. Summary

This chapter discussed the detailed history of AMCU's president Joseph Mathunjwa and elaborated on the membership base of the union. Despite the fact that not much is known about the earlier years of Mathunjwa and that the president has not been very eager to share any of those details with the outside world, a characterization of him could be made based on interviews with people that got to know Mathunjwa more or less. In general, Joseph is seen as a very religious man who not only preaches but also speeches in a powerful way. Furthermore, insiders claim that he is an emotional, but also charismatic and friendly man, despite the fact that he distrusts many and tries to keep people at a safe distance. The most heard criticism was based on the way in which he, allegedly, leads the union as it is a one man show. There is some evidence that suggests that AMCU is mainly being ruled by Mathunjwa. For this reason, it remains the question whether people mean the entire organization of AMCU or specifically Joseph Mathunjwa when talking about the union. In my opinion, AMCU is in general almost a synonym of Mathunjwa since he seems to be in command, especially seen his background in the Salvation Army. The hierarchical structure that Mathunjwa has been used to, and since that type of structure is also implemented to AMCU, seemed to have made AMCU into a 'one man union'.

The AMCU members that I have spoken to have been solely positive about Mathunjwa and sometimes even almost seemed to worship him. The union is recruiting mostly disgruntled NUM members and the subject that the interviewees could not stop talking

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<sup>170</sup> <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/labour/2014/01/21/turmoil-in-amcu-rises-to-surface-on-eve-of-strike>. Last visited on 12-07-2014.

<sup>171</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-01-20-shop-stewards-want-meeting-with-amcu-president>. Last visited on 12-07-2014.

about was the difference between the NUM, focused on ‘the bosses’ and AMCU, who was supposedly really listening to the members. The living and working conditions of many mineworkers, with the emphasis on those people in and around Marikana, seem to have made them so desperate and angry with the NUM that they moved to AMCU.

However, the image of Mathunjwa that has been sketched by the interviewees, both positive and negative, is not always the same as the way in which the president, and the union, are being portrayed in the media. The South African media, just as the media in any other country, has a large influence on its society and can be used by both friend and foe to put somebody in a good light or create a distorted image. This image then might influence the way in which society looks at a certain person or organization. A closer look at the relationship between AMCU and the media might explain the way in which some people value the union and the reason behind the methods used by the media to elaborate on the organization in a specific way.

## Chapter 4: AMCU and its relationship with the media

# ‘AMCU COULD CAUSE PLATINUM SECTOR TO SHUT DOWN!’<sup>172</sup>

The relationship between AMCU and the South African media seems to have been a difficult one since the shootings at Marikana. Large screaming headlines have been filling up the front covers of newspapers and online blogs, articles and statements whereby the union has often been put into disrepute. Furthermore, the input of AMCU on the Internet is basically nil despite the fact that the worldwide web is full of blogs, articles, Twitter accounts, Youtube clips and magazines about the union. AMCU is visible, both online and offline, because of news providers from all kind of types but not because of AMCU itself. For a couple of months,<sup>173</sup> AMCU had a website, which remained under construction for the entire time that it was in the air, but it seems that the union has shut it down again. But while being online for the last couple of months, I noticed that the news coverage concerning AMCU sometimes seems to be rather jumping to conclusions and rather negative. This chapter elaborates on the representation of AMCU in different types of media and the public perspectives on AMCU. Furthermore, some notes will be made on how AMCU is representing itself towards the media and how Mathunjwa interacts with the media.

### §1. Mathunjwa versus the media

Journalist Chris Barron wrote in January 2014 an interesting article about an interview that he had held with Mathunjwa for the Sunday Times around the time that the large strike in the Rustenburg area was about to begin. He described that he found the conversation not only a brief but also a ‘slightly chilling experience’. The president apparently had made it very clear, in a belligerent way, to the journalist that he was not prepared to answer questions about the economic consequences of the strike, his leadership, how many members actually want to

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<sup>172</sup> <http://www.northwestnewspapers.co.za/herald/index.php/128-news/4661-amcu-could-cause-platinum-sector-to-shut-down>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

<sup>173</sup> The exact period is unknown since it took me a long time before I found the website around November 2013.

strike etcetera, since these questions were ‘nonsensical’ and he was therefore not going to dignify them with an answer.<sup>174</sup>

Barron stated in his article that the honeymoon period of AMCU and the media after the union had achieved national prominence in 2011 seemed to be over. In 2011 and even after the ‘Marikana Massacre’, which many blamed partly on the union, President Mathunjwa managed to stay reasonable calm and polite during interviews.<sup>175</sup> Apparently, that has changed somewhere along the line. After doubt about his leadership, internal tension and allegations of corruption mounted, the president became increasingly belligerent towards the media: ‘*Under his carefully constructed veneer of civility disturbing signs of intolerance have appeared.*’<sup>176</sup> Barron stated that Mathunjwa even went so far as to tell his members during a mass meeting that those criticizing and making allegations against the leadership should be identified and dealt with.

The interview of Barron with Mathunjwa already ended before it had really started after AMCU’s leader had stated that the journalist was ‘... *pushing the very same propaganda. You want me to glorify, or dignify, your nonsensical questions. It is very much unprofessional of you.*’ Lastly, Barron stated that many close observers still do not know what to make of him. Mathunjwa is not only fairly religious, ‘saying “God bless you” if you do not annoy him’, but he can also be very insulting. Furthermore, he does not seem to trust the people on the other side of the table and his body language shows that all too well, says Barron.<sup>177</sup>

According to Charles Kendall, Joseph Mathunjwa had the media against him and he had to fight, being an underdog.<sup>178</sup> Journalist Jan de Lange complements this argument by stating that Mathunjwa has been very suspicious of the media and researchers because he and his union were the underdog ‘in the shadow of the powerful’, which is the NUM.<sup>179</sup> General Secretary of Solidariteit Gideon du Plessis argued that AMCU’s president treats everybody as an enemy whereby he does not use the system of interacting with journalists and the media while they are the ones that determine his image.<sup>180</sup> Sociology professor Sakhela Buhlungu

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<sup>174</sup> <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/labour/2014/01/26/honeymoon-may-be-over-for-amcu-boss>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

<sup>175</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>176</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>177</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>178</sup> Interview Charles Kendall, 29-11-2013, Rustenburg.

<sup>179</sup> Interview Jan de Lange, 26-11-2013, Johannesburg.

<sup>180</sup> Interview Gideon du Plessis, 22-10-2013, Pretoria.

adds that South Africa is already not so kind towards splinter organizations and people predict doom and gloom for new unions.<sup>181</sup>

Since the start of the ‘Marikana Massacre’, Mathunjwa directed his criticism about the shootings mainly towards the ANC, the NUM, Lonmin management and the SAPS and did not seem to hesitate to speak up about this towards the media.<sup>182</sup> At the same time, both the national and international newspapers seemed to emphasize the so-called ‘ongoing rivalry between AMCU and NUM’ as the main cause of the massacre. Mathunjwa slammed the media for characterizing the conflict at Lonmin as a clash between the two unions as stated in an article by the Mail&Guardian. The president claimed that the massacre had nothing to do with AMCU and that it was purely ‘an in-fight of the NUM members with their offices’.<sup>183</sup>

Furthermore, Mathunjwa has always reacted strongly to any allegations turned against the union. Miningmx reported in June 2012 on a, by the website referred to as ‘rare’, media appearance that was arranged by AMCU to correct the so-called ‘selective’ media coverage. According to Mathunjwa, the media had portrayed the union as disruptive and violent. Miningmx argued that the situation between AMCU and the ‘selective’ media had to do with a dispute that the union had with both Impala and Anglo American. At Impala, a NUM member died and Mathunjwa stated that it was the fault of the NUM itself since another NUM member had pulled a gun and started firing following the outbreak of quarrel with members of AMCU. Mathunjwa goes even further during the briefing by stating that the NUM had lost its objective of serving the workers and is more interested in becoming shareholders of big companies.<sup>184</sup> From this statement, it can be argued that AMCU and the NUM are rivaling each other. But AMCU and the NUM being each other’s rivals in the platinum industry is something different than the argument that this rivalry was the main cause of the massacre.

At the beginning of 2014, Mathunjwa even went so far in to addressing approximately 1,500 workers that had gathered at the Wonderkop Stadium in Marikana about the South African media. According to the president, the media had repeated lies that had been told by Lonmin which alleged that the strike would be damaging to the workers’ cause. Furthermore, Mathunjwa said that the media had also accused him of being a dictator. The Mail&Guardian, the newspaper that published this article, stated that the striking workers were hesitant to talk

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<sup>181</sup> Interview Sakhela Buhlungu, 30-09-2013, Pretoria.

<sup>182</sup> By attacking not only the SAPS and Lonmin management, but also the ANC and the, COSATU affiliated, NUM, Joseph Mathunjwa seems to have hinted towards a more political message.

<sup>183</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-08-17-amcu-blames-num-politics-for-lonmin-massacre>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

<sup>184</sup> [http://www.miningmx.com/page/news/platinum\\_group\\_metals/1291144-Amcu-ranks-swell-to-20000-turns-to-Amplats#.U72Xsfl\\_shY](http://www.miningmx.com/page/news/platinum_group_metals/1291144-Amcu-ranks-swell-to-20000-turns-to-Amplats#.U72Xsfl_shY). Last visited on 13-07-2014.

to the media after being warned that there would be consequences if further lies were told about the strike's prospect. How the newspaper got this information remains unclear however. The workers who were willing to talk to the newspaper stated that the media had perpetuated a myth that the mineworkers would be dismissed as a result of the strike which was not possible since the strike was protected.<sup>185</sup>

## §2. Another side of the story

As a way of defending themselves against the rage of Mathunjwa against his 'enemies', parties such as the NUM but also the ANC government have started an impressive counterattack on the union, which has also been covered by newspapers and online media. At the beginning of September 2012, the SACP attacked AMCU online by claiming that the union was a vigilante group that was terrorizing the community. The statement had been written by Solly Mapaila, the Second Deputy General of the political party, and published on the website of Politicsweb.<sup>186</sup> Mapaila quoted several people who claimed that their lives in and around Marikana were no longer safe due to AMCU:

*"I've had to flee with my family from my shack on the Lonmin side of the settlement. We left behind all our possessions, a TV, a microwave. It's too dangerous to go back there." (a NUM shopsteward). ... "They are still going to the koppie now, but only during the day-time. Every morning AMCU thugs go shack to shack to grab any men they find to force them to go to the koppie."*<sup>187</sup>

These were the kind of stories that were being told at the community mass meeting convened by the SACP in Marikana. Mapaila argues that the community meeting reminded the SACP that there was a different story to be told about the suffering of Marikana's community than the one which was so dominant in the media. According to the Second Deputy General, the dominant story in the media before the massacre was the so-called 'trade union rivalry' between AMCU and the NUM as the reason behind the violence in the area. After Marikana, the media started to focus on the story of 'a brutal authoritarian state versus unarmed strikers'. However, the SACP seems to suggest that both the NUM and the state

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<sup>185</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-01-23-amcu-accuses-media-of-lying-about-strike-prospects>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

<sup>186</sup> Politicsweb is a website focused on the news and politics of Southern Africa.

<sup>187</sup> <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71654?oid=324680&sn=Detail&pid=71654>. Last visited on 24-08-2014.

should not be blamed for the violence in Marikana and that a closer look has to be taken on AMCU. The General Secretary stated:

*‘... as if AMCU was a normal union, as if NUM and AMCU were equally to blame for the violence that saw two policemen, two security guards securing NUM offices in Rustenburg and six NUM shopstewards murdered.’<sup>188</sup>*

Lastly, Mapaila stated that there needed to be a thorough, no-holds-barred investigation into the conduct of the police on August the 16<sup>th</sup> and also into allegations of torture afterwards: *‘The commission will take evidence from all sides and we will certainly seek to ensure that the voices of the Marikana community have an opportunity to present their story.’<sup>189</sup>*

However, some remarks can be made about this statement of Solly Mapaila. It is clear for instance that the political party is supporting the NUM by explicitly pointing out the deaths on the side of the NUM and the stories told by several members of the Marikana community. This way, it seems as if the NUM did nothing wrong in the week of the massacre and cannot be blamed for any of the violence that occurred. Furthermore, it seems a bit contradictory to put AMCU in a bad light but then state that extensive research has to be done. However, Mapaila argues that the research has to point out whether the police made mistakes or not. Since AMCU is already blamed for several errors and there is apparently no research necessary on the actions of the government or the NUM, the SACP seem to suggest here that the NUM cannot be blamed for anything despite the fact that the NUM has been found guilty of killing several mineworkers during the week of the strike. Furthermore, there is evidence that the NUM can be, at least partly, accused of being actively involved in the massacre.<sup>190</sup>

The second so-called ‘attack’ from the SACP on AMCU dates from approximately one and a half years later, which has also been reported on by Politicsweb. During the NUM Shop Steward Council of 12 April 2014 in Boksburg, SACP General Secretary Blade Nzimande held a speech about the exposure of AMCU’s lies about the NUM. At the start of the speech, Nzimande greeted the NUM on behalf of the SACP and congratulated the union for staying true to their course in the turbulence that occurred mainly in the Rustenburg platinum belt since around 2012. The political party again wanted to send their sincere condolences to the many shaft stewards and members that the NUM had lost in the

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<sup>188</sup><http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71654?oid=324680&sn=Detail&pid=71654>. Last visited on 24-08-2014.

<sup>189</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>190</sup> [http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-06-04-num-amcu-marikana-tis-the-season-to-be-bloody/#.U\\_nCJ\\_1\\_uik](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-06-04-num-amcu-marikana-tis-the-season-to-be-bloody/#.U_nCJ_1_uik). Last visited on 24-08-2014.

Rustenburg area because of the turmoil. The General Secretary goes on by arguing that: *‘We want to reiterate our condemnation of the use of propagandas of falsehood, intimidation, violence and killings as a strategy by some to build trade unions for themselves.’*<sup>191</sup> These words were most likely meant for AMCU. Nzimande proceeds by stating that an attack on the NUM is an attack on the SACP, ANC, COSATU, the rest of the Alliance and the entire revolutionary liberation movement. An even more direct focus on AMCU was made later on in the speech when Nzimande stated that in 2012 a vigilante union emerged through lies, intimidation, violence and the killing of workers. One of the big lies of that union was that the wage demand of R12,500 was possible to strive for and that mining management was willing to grant workers that but that the NUM was selling out and preventing this to happen.<sup>192</sup>

Besides these words of the SACP, the NUM is using the media to condemn AMCU, just as AMCU is using the media to make the NUM look bad, most likely leaving the average South African reader behind in confusion. An example of this can be found in a press statement of the NUM that was published on the website of AllAfrica in September 2013. NUM spokesperson Lesiba Seshoka stated that the NUM has noted the statements made by AMCU President Joseph Mathunjwa in which he said that six of his members were assaulted by the NUM strikers at Sibanye Gold in the Free State. However, the NUM argues that the police had no record of such injured people and Mathunjwa did not only fail to point such people to the media but also to tell where such injured people had been hospitalized. Seshoka concluded the statement by claiming that the NUM has correctly categorized the claims made by AMCU as ‘jealousy’ and ‘an intention to provoke violence under the guise of retaliation’.<sup>193</sup> This last allegation is interesting since Seshoka claims that he correctly categorized AMCU’s claim as a bad intention while he cannot be sure of that.

Lastly, on January the 28<sup>th</sup> 2014, acting NUM National Spokesperson Livhuwani Mammburu issued a statement in which he argued that Mathunjwa should stop blaming the NUM and should rather deal with allegations of corruption and lack of accountability in his own organisation. Mammburu argued that when Mathunjwa engages with the media, the president always wanted to draw the NUM to his own union internal issues:

*‘As the NUM we have observed and watched a heated interview that he had with eNCA Reporter Xoli Mngambi where he was asked about the issues of corruption and*

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<sup>191</sup> <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71654%3Foid%3D589051%26sn%3DDetail%26pid%3D71654>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

<sup>192</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>193</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/201309070439.html>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

*lack of accountability in his union , instead of dealing with the issues that he was being asked about he mentioned NUM's President name when it was not necessary.'*<sup>194</sup>

### **§3. Machinations by the media itself**

Sometimes, the media also came up with interpretations, versions or opinions on AMCU. The source of these statements usually remained unclear to me. Above all, the media did not only jump on top of AMCU in the days, weeks and months before and after Marikana, but also more recently, because of the large strike that AMCU was going to start at Lonmin, Impala and Anglo American in January 2014. The union made many headlines and not only the South African ones. The British Reuters posted this headliner in January 2014: '*S.Africa's AMCU union threatens platinum sector strike.*' In the accompanying short article, the news provider stated that Mathunjwa was 'a charismatic lay-preacher who had casted himself in the role of a Christian soldier fighting for South Africa's black workers'. Furthermore, AMCU 'wrested' tens of thousands of members from the NUM in a turf war in which dozens of people were killed, this including the 'Marikana Massacre'.<sup>195</sup> The question is where Reuters got the information from to sketch this kind of image from the president. Furthermore, the article almost seems to suggest that AMCU violently stole members from the NUM and was actively involved in the deadly outcome of the massacre. This reconstruction of events that occurred in the past two years is merely making people jump to conclusions since no nuance seem to be provided here.

The website The Citizen mentioned in an article in April 2014 reports that had come out over Mathunjwa's ownership of several cars and his property which was worth millions of Rand. Where these reports came from remained uncertain but the story about the possible usage of union money to buy expensive goods can be severely damaging to those involved. According to Mathunjwa, these claims had no substance and he had never taken union money to build his house or buy expensive cars. Furthermore, the president stated that when the NUM was striking, no questions were asked about whether NUM leaders were getting paid

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<sup>194</sup><http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71654?oid=524598&sn=Detail&pid=71616>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

<sup>195</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/15/safrica-amcu-strikes-idUSL5N0KP0VZ20140115>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

while their members were striking: *‘But because it’s AMCU it has become a personal issue and no longer a mining sector issue.’*<sup>196</sup>

#### **§4. Voices for AMCU**

At the same time, several newspapers, magazines and broadcasting corporations have paid attention to more positive or more nuanced stories about AMCU, which were usually connected to the massacre. The documentary that has been made about the massacre, ‘Miners Shot Down’, by filmmaker Rehad Desai has been broadcasted by the South African television channel M-Net. The documentary, which has been rewarded with multiple international awards, is using the viewpoint of the mineworkers to follow the strike from the start on August the 11<sup>th</sup>. Furthermore, the combined forces of Lonmin, the ANC government and their allies in the NUM have been blamed for the massacre, according to the site of Desai.<sup>197</sup> While watching the documentary, I noticed that Joseph Mathunjwa has been portrayed in a rather positive way. The moment is being showed whereby Mathunjwa was able to speak to the striking mineworkers while his colleague from the NUM is getting booed at. Furthermore, a moment is shown when Mathunjwa is bursting into tears over the loss of the mineworkers.<sup>198</sup>

Furthermore, one of the articles that received much attention from the media was the article ‘The murder fields of Marikana. The cold murder fields of Marikana’ by photojournalist Greg Marinovich, which he wrote in September 2012. The article has not been written specifically about AMCU but, by accusing the SAPS of the massacre, the union is being excluded from discussions surrounding the massacre. Furthermore, Marinovich attacks the media for not recording the massacre properly. The main aim of the article was to try and find out what really happened during the massacre, according to Marinovich, since some of the miners who got killed appeared to have been shot at close range or crushed by police vehicles. In the article, Greg Marinovich called the SAPS murderers and stated that, of the 34 killed mineworkers, no more than a dozen were captured in news footage shot at the scene. The majority of workers were shot beyond the view of cameras. According to the photojournalist, the difference between the 34 miners that got killed and the dozen bodies that were recorded by the media is due to most journalists and others not interrogating this

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<sup>196</sup> <http://citizen.co.za/162139/strikers-sent-home-for-easter-by-amcu/>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

<sup>197</sup> <http://www.minersshotdown.co.za/>. Last visited on 24-08-2014.

<sup>198</sup> Rehad Desai, *Miners Shot Down*, Uhuru Productions, 2013.

situation properly. The ‘Marikana Massacre’ is only one of few moments in the bloody part of South Africa’s history that has been captured on camera, stated Marinovich. Because of this, the actions and reactions of both the strikers and the police could be scrutinized. According to Marinovich, a dominant narrative developed within the public discourse whereby the facts have been fed by the police, various state entities and the media. According to this discourse, the strikers provoked their own deaths by charging and shooting at the SAPS. This story can be interpreted as an over-reaction by the police to a threat when looking at the filmed events. However, what happened elsewhere, namely prostrate miners that were being run over by police vehicles, cannot be described as self-defense or as any kind of public order policing, argues Marinovich.<sup>199</sup>

Also, an interesting op-ed piece has been written by regular blogger Nco Dube on the website of the Mail&Guardian concerning Marikana. According to Dube, the media had been recklessly reporting on Marikana, the government reacted slow and confused, Lonmin management had an indifferent attitude, politicians were opportunistic, the police incompetent and the unions greedy. The focus here will be on the first accusation, namely the one about the reckless media. Dube accuses the South African media to act as partisan towards the politicians and Lonmin whereby the coverage of the shootings ‘has been disgusting in the very least.’ The blogger stated that the South African media gave a very simplified and subjective coverage of the massacre whereby the police was put in the spotlight and the level of sensation was at its highest possible.<sup>200</sup>

The arguments of Marinovich and Dube can be connected to an analysis that Professor Jane Duncan, Highway Africa Chair of Media and Information Society in the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, wrote for SABC News on Marikana and the role of journalism. According to Duncan, journalists that were reporting on the ‘Marikana Massacre’ from behind the police line on August 16<sup>th</sup> presented images that on the surface defended the gunfire of the SAPS as self-defence. However, subsequent academic, journalistic and eyewitness accounts have showed another side to this story with evidence of a second place, next to the open field next to the koppie, where miners were allegedly killed by the police. Those journalists were not present at that site and had completely missed this part of the story. Duncan continues in the article by claiming that the bureaucratic and social organisation of news in contemporary media organisations often leads to journalists

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<sup>199</sup> [http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-08-30-the-murder-fields-of-marikana-the-cold-murder-fields-of-marikana#.U-ZUNfl\\_uik](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-08-30-the-murder-fields-of-marikana-the-cold-murder-fields-of-marikana#.U-ZUNfl_uik). Last visited on 22-08-2014.

<sup>200</sup> <http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/ncodube/2012/09/15/marikana-an-orgy-of-opportunism-in-the-face-of-disaster/>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

prioritising the dominant groups in society. In the article, a pie chart concerning the representation of journalistic sources concerning the massacre showed that 27%, the largest group of the chart, of the sources are from the business world: *‘Those with the most power and money have the biggest voice.’*<sup>201</sup> A phenomenon known as ‘pack journalism’ is applicable to the situation of the massacre states Duncan. ‘Pack journalism’ is the tendency of journalists in fast-paced newsrooms to rely on sources of information that are more readily obtainable and have been validated by other media. At the same time, sources that are less ‘trusted’ and require more validation are being avoided since they are more time-consuming. This type of journalism can give journalism a sameness that reduces diversity of voices. The most easily validated sources are likely to be organisations that have the resources to maintain a constant flow of information to the media, such as government agencies and big business. Duncan argues that organisations or individuals who are representing the working class are likely to be less well resourced and lack the capacity to communicate proactively, which can lead to them dropping under the radar of journalists. Furthermore, many media organizations have employed business reporters while there are hardly any labour reporters left. This situation makes it even more likely that the perspectives of the workers class are being sidelined in the media.<sup>202</sup>

The South African media seems to have been very economical with their nuance concerning the massacre, including the role of AMCU, and this has been immediately taken over by the international press. For example, the *Volkskrant*, a renowned Dutch newspaper, reported on the ‘Marikana Massacre’ but failed in providing the correct information. They, for instance, claimed that AMCU had only recently been established, that AMCU solely blamed Lonmin for the strike and that the NUM and AMCU, despite their rivalry, agreed on the fact that Lonmin’s attitude towards the mineworkers had caused them to die.<sup>203</sup>

Another contribution to the seemingly nuanced view of (South African) media on the massacre and the role of AMCU has been made by *Amandla!*. According to the magazine, the majority of the South African English newspapers depicted the strike as a result of the greedy and unethical leadership of AMCU while the union placed the country’s economy in jeopardy by lying to the mineworkers about the viability of their wage demand of R12,500 per month. The magazine argues that this statement, which made it not only through the entire country

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<sup>201</sup> <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/00f7e0804cfe58899b00bf76c8dbd3db/Marikana-and-the-problem-of-pack-journalism-20120710>. Last visited on 23-08-2014.

<sup>202</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>203</sup> <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2664/Nieuws/article/detail/3302590/2012/08/17/Hoe-een-staking-uitliep-op-een-bloedbad.dhtml>. Last visited on 13-07-2014.

but which could very well have been taken over by the international press, is ‘bullshit’. The strike was a direct result of the ‘state massacre’ of Marikana and the colonially structured mining industry.<sup>204</sup>

## §5. Summary

This chapter elaborated on the way the media and Joseph Mathunjwa and AMCU are interacting with each other. Since 2012, AMCU has been filling the newspapers on a regular basis whereby the shootings at Marikana and the six months long strike at the beginning of 2014 were the so-called ‘big stories’ of the union. The Daily Maverick noticed in January 2013 that not only President Joseph Mathunjwa, but also General Secretary Jeffrey Mphahlehe and Treasurer Jimmy Gama were now more familiar with the press after being relatively quiet in early 2012.<sup>205</sup> Being the centre of attention as a marginal union that suddenly started to rise with immense speed after Marikana must have not been easy for AMCU’s leadership base. Furthermore, the union faced multiple challenges in 2013 and the first half of 2014 which all were covered by the media as well. AMCU had to deal with difficult situations in the media. Marikana, for instance, was a very complicated event that had many different sides to the story. Multiple organizations were involved, including not only the government but also the, COSATU affiliated, NUM. Everybody had their own interpretation of what had happened and who had to be blamed. Not every story was verifiable and multiple interests were at stake. Above all, Mathunjwa proved not the easiest person to communicate with for the press. It seems as if the president lacked support from the public opinion due to his icy relationship with the South African media. Furthermore, the NUM and his allies targeted AMCU at any possible moment, just as AMCU was doing the other way around. The interplay of the two unions did not make the situation any better. On top of that, the media did not always bring nuance into their articles.

On the one hand, the South African and international newspapers seemed to be rather unnuanced of AMCU, and Joseph Mathunjwa in particular, and the president and his union had to deal with false accusations concerning the ‘Marikana Massacre’. On the other hand, there has been much attention as well for a more nuanced, or even positive, view of

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<sup>204</sup> <http://africasacountry.com/dont-believe-the-media-hype-about-striking-mine-workers-in-south-africa/>. Last visited on 23-08-2014.

<sup>205</sup> [http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-01-18-amcu-the-champion-of-nationalisation-sort-of/#.U58Wavl\\_vfJ](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-01-18-amcu-the-champion-of-nationalisation-sort-of/#.U58Wavl_vfJ). Last visited on 13-07-2014.

Mathunjwa and AMCU during the massacre and in general. Both views have been influencing the public perspective but the question remains to what extent this happened and which image of Mathunjwa and AMCU is predominant among the South African population. The media has been full of diverse, and sometimes contradicting, stories about Joseph Mathunjwa and AMCU and it remains the question who follows the news, who reads which stories and who has access to Internet. Newspapers, online magazines and blogs are not available to everyone, which makes it more difficult for some people to receive a complete and overall image of news that is being presented on AMCU.

During my stay in South Africa, I noticed that AMCU was usually portrayed in newspapers such as the Mail&Guardian as troublesome because of their alleged involvement during the massacre, but especially because of the long strike they started in January 2014 which laid down the platinum industry completely. Something that has to be kept in mind here is Duncan's notion of 'pack journalism' which might also be applicable to the situation of the strike, despite the fact that there is no evidence for this argument. By putting emphasis on the financial losses of the platinum industry for instance, the story of the mineworkers might be sidelined.

The next chapter is in some ways closely related to this one, since it involves the media and the public perception of the union as well. The apolitical status of the union has been discussed in all kind of ways but remains an interesting aspect about the union. Multiple leftist organizations have started to surround not only the AMCU mineworkers but, as it seems, the union too. In order to understand the larger political economical context of AMCU, a closer look has to be taken at the political touch of Mathunjwa's policies.

## Chapter 5: A ‘non-political’ context of AMCU

*“We are not aligned to any political party.”*

This sentence has been used frequently by several people I interviewed about the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union.<sup>206</sup> President Joseph Mathunjwa, the other leaders and the members all seem to support the statement that their union is apolitical. However, the question remains what this apolitical status involves. Being apolitical in the political and economical spectrum of the contemporary South African mining industry can mean for instance not having a political program, not being aligned to a specific political party or movement or not wanting to be associated with the current ruling ANC government. Furthermore, there is the question of whether being apolitical also means being non-ideological. This chapter tries to give more insight in the matter of AMCU’s apolitical status. Furthermore, attention will be paid to the political leftist organizations that seem to have started to surround not only the mineworkers of Marikana but also AMCU. The question is in which way the apolitical status of AMCU is affecting the union itself, its members and those organizations involved and if there are signs that AMCU is part of a larger political move to the left.

### **§1. The meaning of an apolitical status**

According to the chief researcher of the Bench Marks Foundation, David van Wyk, AMCU will become marginalized if they stay apolitical.<sup>207</sup> For Van Wyk, it seems as if being apolitical is the equivalent of not being found important enough by mineworkers and not being able to change anything in the labour landscape. Matthews Hlabane, national organizer of the Democratic Left Front (DLF), on the other hand stated that the apolitical status of AMCU is a challenge for the union: *“Capitalists are exploiting workers, the union has to pronounce itself ideologically and unite with the people for a common problem and not sleep with the management.”* In his eyes, being apolitical is remaining the status quo and keeping the union alive while not improving the lives of workers.<sup>208</sup> However, it can also be a question

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<sup>206</sup> Interview Gaddafi Mdoda, 14-10-2013, Rustenburg and Interview Lazarus, 19-10-2013, Rustenburg.

<sup>207</sup> Interview David van Wyk, 26-11-2013, Johannesburg.

<sup>208</sup> Interview Matthews Hlabane, 03-12-2013, Emalahleni.

of semantics says political scientist Roland Henwood: “*It is not possible to be apolitical but one can be depoliticized. This way, one is not part of a political party, program or process; one is delinked from a specific political program.*”<sup>209</sup> This way, AMCU could be called a non-partisan actor. It could also be that apolitical is a word that is just not meant to be for South Africa. Some people were convinced that politics is everywhere in South Africa, just as labour unions are everywhere and of great importance to the people. Sociologist Sakhela Buhlungu: “*In naming themselves apolitical, they try to please a non-existing audience.*”<sup>210</sup> However, the apolitical status of AMCU is something that has been emphasized by both the union itself and their members and seems to be an important feature of the union instead of a flaw.

What Mathunjwa means by the apolitical status of his union is not certain in this sense but it will be a challenge since AMCU is deriving from the heavily politicized NUM. By actively distancing AMCU from the NUM, Mathunjwa seems to take a political standpoint against the union that is so strongly aligned to the currently ruling ANC via COSATU. Furthermore, AMCU is affiliated to the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU). NACTU originates from the Pan African Congress and the Africanist and Black Consciousness Tradition. These movements all demand room for the black African voice in politics and are thus carrying out a political message.<sup>211</sup>

## **§2. ‘Talk left, walk right’**

According to Professor Patrick Bond, the outcome of the ideology of neoliberalism under President Mbeki and the political power associated with the late 20<sup>th</sup> century economic crisis has been the so-called ‘global apartheid’. This refers to: ‘*an international system of minority rule whose attributes include differentia; access to basic human rights, wealth and power.*’<sup>212</sup> Bond states that the neoliberal approach to state policy exacerbated the underlying contradictions of capitalism.<sup>213</sup> At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new South African left opposition emerged as an important social force against this ‘global apartheid’ while the

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<sup>209</sup> Interview Roland Henwood, 01-10-2013, Pretoria.

<sup>210</sup> Interview Sakhela Buhlungu, 30-09-2013, Pretoria.

<sup>211</sup> <http://www.biznews.com/thought-leaders/2014/06/amcus-hidden-agenda-first-a-socialist-state-then-well-worry-about-jobs/>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

<sup>212</sup> Patrick Bond, *Talk Left, Walk Right. South Africa’s Frustrated Global Reforms* (Scottsville 2004), 5.

<sup>213</sup> Bond, *Talk Left, Walk Right*, 5.

Tripartite Alliance maintained a self-reinforcing bloc.<sup>214</sup> Because of dissatisfaction with Mbeki's economical policies, South African activists started to seek allies and networks abroad, among which left community groups, environmentalists and non-governmental organizations, according to Bond.<sup>215</sup> Patrick Bond: *'Mbeki has generated rising left-wing opposition in the course of replacing racial apartheid with 'class apartheid.'*<sup>216</sup> As a reaction, the government and the ANC attacked the new 'ultraleft' social movements, or 'left sectarian factions' as Mbeki labeled them. Bond states that the ANC 'talked left', while oppressing the poor and the working class:

*'ANC officials were so afraid of being defeated that instead of trying to reverse unequal power relations, they became an accomplice to global apartheid. Their reform proposals ('act right') were frustrated, because they were ameliorative, notwithstanding claims to great virtue ('talk left').'*<sup>217</sup>

According to political analyst Ralph Mathekga, the populist agenda of Zuma proved to be an alternative for the neoliberal policy of Mbeki at that time. The shift from Mbeki to Zuma in 2009 can be seen as a response by the South Africans to the perceived shrinkage of democracy and the increasing inequality rates under the pro-capitalist agenda of President Mbeki.<sup>218</sup> Furthermore, the rapid implementation of market-friendly policies under Mbeki has led to the characterization of Mbeki's leadership as non-responsive, technocratic and illiberal.<sup>219</sup> According to Intelligence Bulletin<sup>220</sup>, a so-called 'palace revolt' concerning the neoliberal policies of Mbeki brought Jacob Zuma to power. However, it did not take long before the Tripartite Alliance was under attack as well for having gone into alliance with capital and selling out the working class and the poor.<sup>221</sup>

However, some nuance is needed here concerning the neoliberal policies of the ANC and for that we are going back to 1994. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which was implemented by the Tripartite Alliance in that year, was supposed to meet the objectives of freedom and improve the standard of living and quality of life for all South Africans by addressing needs such as housing, land, health, education and services. A few

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<sup>214</sup> Bond, *Talk Left, Walk Right*, 9.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibidem*, 10.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibidem*, 13.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibidem*, 180.

<sup>218</sup> Ralph Mathekga, 'The ANC 'Leadership crisis' and the Age of Populism in Post-apartheid South Africa', in: Joellen Pretorius (ed.), *African Politics. Beyond the Third Wave of Democratisation* (Cape Town 2008), 131-149, 131.

<sup>219</sup> Mathekga, 'The ANC 'Leadership crisis' and the Age of Populism in Post-apartheid South Africa', 132.

<sup>220</sup> South African magazine that reports on all kinds of different news items, concerning South Africa.

<sup>221</sup> <http://www.theintelligencebulletin.co.za/articles/political-watch-1587.html>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

years later, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy reversed this direction by aiming at the strengthening of market-driven development. According to Sociology Associate Professor Pillay, these two policies left South Africa in a ‘schizophrenic limbo’ between two conceptions of the state. On the one hand a neoliberal conception and on the other hand a substantively democratic developmental and intervening state. GEAR was necessary for macro-economic stability just after the ending of apartheid, but after 1999 there has been a rapid growth of the social security system.<sup>222</sup> In order for the ANC to address poverty and the growing social inequality better, the Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) was introduced. This initiative promised more decisive state intervention to boost growth and employment.<sup>223</sup> Thus the ANC cannot be accused of solely conducting a neoliberal policy nowadays when there is also strong state intervention. Furthermore, the National Development Plan (NDP) has been developed. This plan contains a high level of social welfare strategies in balance with developmental strategies. These strategies include the reduction of poverty and unemployment through job creation in labour-intensive economic sectors and social safety nets, improved governance through a professional public service, improved education and health services, infrastructure development and lastly environmental sustainability.<sup>224</sup>

Despite that the state is also trying to act in a more interventionist way, the ANC pursues a ‘talk left, walk right strategy’ these days while at the same time, the political left has been predominantly associated with the Tripartite Alliance during the post-apartheid era, according to Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the Oxford Brookes University Stephen Hurt. However, despite the fact that the ANC seems to be a little less left oriented than they present themselves, COSATU is starting to divide since NUMSA, COSATU’s largest affiliate, removed its electoral support from the ANC in December 2013 and argued that COSATU should leave the Alliance.<sup>225</sup>

The range of self-identified leftist forces in South Africa are united by their broad agreement on the challenges that contemporary South Africa is facing, namely unemployment, rising inequality and poverty. According to Hurt, COSATU has been the most consistently critical member of the Alliance in the post-apartheid era but it has evolved from

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<sup>222</sup> Devan Pillay, ‘The stunted growth of South Africa’s developmental state discourse’, *AFRICANUS Journal of Development Studies* 37:2 (2007), 198-215, 201.

<sup>223</sup> Pillay, ‘The stunted growth of South Africa’s developmental state discourse’, 204.

<sup>224</sup> Daniel Francois Meyer and Herman Van Der Elst, ‘The Interventionist Role of the State In Socio-Economic and Political Development in Democratic South Africa’, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5:7 (May 2014), 78-84, 82.

<sup>225</sup> <http://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2013/12/20/numsa-cuts-political-ties-with-anc>. Last visited on 23-08-2014.

an organisation that sought links with community groups during the struggle against apartheid into an organisation that has focused on collective bargaining within the economic policies of the ANC. As a consequence, COSATU has distanced itself, to some extent, from the rise of popular struggles.<sup>226</sup>

### §3. The breakaway of NUMSA

One union that decided to follow a different, more leftist, path away from COSATU is NUMSA. In 1987, four unions merged to form, what today is known as, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). These four unions were the Metal and Allied Workers Union, the Motor Industry Combined Workers Union, the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union and the United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa. According to Masondo, NUMSA played a crucial role in the South African national liberation struggle and is well known for its ‘epic’ militancy and ability to influence policy direction of COSATU. In 2011, NUMSA was the biggest metalworkers union in South Africa and the second biggest affiliate of COSATU.<sup>227</sup> Above all, NUMSA has always been known for being against the Alliance, despite being affiliated to COSATU.<sup>228</sup>

NUMSA stated on their website that the ANC has been reluctant to shift the South African economy in a more left-wing direction after refusing to ban labour brokers and sped up the privatization of roads through tolls. Furthermore, the union argues that COSATU has been moving more towards the ANC from 2013 onwards and away from a more radical stance. NUMSA states that it finds the right-wing trends in the ANC and COSATU worrisome.<sup>229</sup> These issues resulted in the first months of 2014 into the breakaway of NUMSA from COSATU, and with that, the Tripartite Alliance. At the NUMSA Special National Congress in December 2013, there was not only a break visible with the governing President Zuma, but also with the idea of the ANC as ‘a vehicle for pursuing the interests of the working class’: *‘There is no chance of winning back the Alliance to what it was originally*

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<sup>226</sup> <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2014/04/23/south-africa-at-20-the-re-awakening-of-the-left-in-post-apartheid-south-africa/>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

<sup>227</sup> Masondo, ‘The sociology of upward social mobility among COSATU shop stewards’, 117.

<sup>228</sup> Liv Torres, ‘Labour and Politics in South Africa’, in: Peris Jones and Kristian Stokke (ed.), *Democratizing Development. The Politics of Socio-Economic Rights in South Africa* (Leiden 2005), 55-76, 71.

<sup>229</sup> <http://www.numsa.org.za/numsas-policies-and-principles/>. Last visited on 23-08-2014.

*formed for, which was to drive a revolutionary programme for fundamental transformation of the country.*<sup>230</sup>

Besides the fact that both the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and NUMSA are seen as leftist organizations, NUMSA stated that it is wary of Julius Malema and his party. According to news site IOL, the military command structure and lack of clarity on socialism have been some of the factors that made the union decide not to consider the political party as an ally. Furthermore, the union stated that it would not align itself with leftist organizations such as WASP and DLF, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. According to NUMSA, these organizations: *‘were opportunists trying to benefit from the union’s decision to break with trade union federation COSATU.*<sup>231</sup>

#### **§4. Reclaiming the South African dream with the DLF?**

*‘The underbelly of contemporary South Africa is a place of fractured hope, desperation, uncertainty and alienation. It is a place in which apartheid patterns of exclusion and degradation spawn shack settlements, where hunger stalks as the link between wage earning and social reproduction has been broken, and where basic needs such as healthcare, education and clean drinking water are an uphill battle.’*<sup>232</sup>

One organization that has been present in the political left spectrum the last couple of years is the DLF. South African activist Vishwas Satgar wrote an article in December 2011 about the so-called ‘reclaiming of the South African dream’ in which he looks at the 17 years of post-apartheid South Africa and the role of the political left. A more nuanced vision on the neoliberal policy of the ANC has already been given in paragraph two. However, a small part of Satgar’s argument has been published here in order to explain his viewpoint. According to Satgar, the ANC-led liberation movement decided to take on a policy of not only reconciliation but also appeasement. This meant that the ‘white monopoly capital’ did not have to take responsibility for their actions under apartheid and they did not have to commit to a serious transformative program. Instead, capital was given what it wanted in terms of

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<sup>230</sup> <http://www.amandla.org.za/amandla-magazine/current-issue/1821-from-durban-to-marikana-a-new-trajectory-of-the-workers-movement>. Last visited on 23-08-2014.

<sup>231</sup> [http://www.iol.co.za/news/special-features/numsa-wary-of-capitalist-malema-1.1627179#.U\\_jrg\\_1\\_uin](http://www.iol.co.za/news/special-features/numsa-wary-of-capitalist-malema-1.1627179#.U_jrg_1_uin). Last visited on 23-08-2014.

<sup>232</sup> <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/reclaiming-the-south-african-dream/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

neoliberal reforms which included corporate social responsibility, tax payments and black economic empowerment to stimulate a new black bourgeoisie.<sup>233</sup>

However, the transformation that South Africa went through, referred to by Satgar as ‘the great globalization leap of national liberation’, has produced a country with one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, namely 40%, a high level of inequality, a deepening ecological crisis and a growing number of inhabitants that are suffering due to a lack of food. According to Satgar, these issues are all caused by the deepening of the South African economy’s immersion into global financial, production and trade structures. Satgar argues that the ANC represented a democratizing force during apartheid for many people worldwide. However, the activist states that the ANC-led liberation movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century looks more like a left that has lost its way. One reason for this tendency has been the strategic choices that the government has made, namely the choice not to struggle for more but to capitulate to neoliberalisation.<sup>234</sup>

The activist states that the ANC has evolved from a broad liberation movement to an electoral machine whereby the emergence of a new generation of black economically empowered politicians has firmly embedded the ANC in patronage politics, state-led class formation and widespread corruption. Various attempts have been made to undermine the independence of the media, the criminal justice system and the constitutional court. Nowadays, the ANC is suffering from a battleground of factional interests whereby the gap between leaders and the voters is widened. Electoral wins are increasingly about an electorate that is focused on the status of enrichment through ANC patronage rather than transformative societal change.<sup>235</sup>

Some attention is also being paid to the role of COSATU in this bigger context. According to Satgar, COSATU is facing serious dilemmas since its influence has been undercut by the neoliberal restructuring of the South African economy. Because of the high, and still growing, unemployment rate, COSATU’s presence in key sectors of the economy has thinned out and reduced union influence. Furthermore, COSATU has been pulled into internal ANC battles because many COSATU leaders have been seduced by the possibility of rising into government positions through the ANC while union investment companies have also taken several unions into shady deals. Furthermore, Satgar states that the loss of worker control in COSATU, increasing bureaucratization and a sense of being politically

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<sup>233</sup> <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/reclaiming-the-south-african-dream/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>234</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>235</sup> Ibidem.

compromised in the ruling Tripartite Alliance has widened the gap between rank-and-file workers and trade union leaders. As a result, workers are more hesitant to vote for an ANC government of which they know is not representing their interests.<sup>236</sup>

Satgar argues that a new democratic left activism has emerged in contemporary South Africa as an expression of the crisis of the national liberation project whereby left activism seeks to reclaim lost ground. One of the organizations that can be seen as responsible for the development of a political left basis is the Democratic Left Front. According to Satgar, who has been active for the DLF since the beginning, the process of developing a strong left voice started in 2008 when disaffected members of the SACP, independent anti-capitalist social movements and left activists began a conversation about the crisis of the national liberation project and the need for a different way forward.<sup>237</sup>

The DLF is only one of the other parties that have sneaked their way into the Rustenburg area and into the heads of the mineworkers under the motto of wanting to bring change and, specifically, wanting to bring a political sound to post-apartheid South Africa. Notwithstanding the fact that, at least not every member of, the DLF is overly enthusiastic with the presence of AMCU in the Rustenburg area, as already mentioned in Chapter three, the organisation supported the strike that the union started in January 2014. On their website, the DLF placed an announcement in which they stated that they supported the struggle and saluted AMCU for keeping up the fight. They argued that the demand made by AMCU is not only a demand for a better wage but also a demand against the capitalist system and exploitation of mineworkers by 'capitalist bosses'. Furthermore, the DLF stated that the striking mineworkers and communities should struggle together and that a United Front for Socialism should be build to take forward the demands of the working class.<sup>238</sup>

## **§5. The opinions of the WASP**

The Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) is another politically left oriented organization that tries to get a grip on the South African political system. The party claims to point the way forward to a socialist construction of society and to represent solely the interests of the

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<sup>236</sup> <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/reclaiming-the-south-african-dream/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>237</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>238</sup> <http://democraticleft.za.net/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

proletariat.<sup>239</sup> In December 2012, WASP was initiated by the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), a Trotskyist organization, in Limpopo. In a statement by the DSM Executive Committee, the future plans of WASP were presented:

*‘The WASP will be a fighting party that will unite service delivery protests, student struggles against unaffordable tuition fees and workplace struggles against short time, retrenchments and labour broking as the bosses try to make us pay for the crisis of their system in SA and worldwide.’*

Furthermore, the committee emphasized that:

*‘...the party will have to put as one of its key demands the nationalization of the mines under direct ownership, management and control of workers in the process leading to the socialist transformation of society, the only basis on which a lasting solution to the problems of the mineworkers and the working class as a whole can be found.’<sup>240</sup>*

From its start in 2012 onwards, it seems as if WASP has been eager to join forces with other left oriented organisations and parties. On the website of WASP, a statement had been published in October 2013 about a possible relationship between WASP and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) on the basis of a ‘principled fighting unity’. WASP stated that the birth of both parties had presented an historic opportunity to advance the struggles of the working class and to deal with the ANC government and its capitalist masters and to give them a major blow in the 2014 elections. However, a collaboration between the two parties has not proven to be fruitful so far since it seems that both parties are not willing to concede too much to each other’s program.<sup>241</sup>

Ultimately, WASP went into the elections of 2014 on its own but, as argued by the party itself, they had to face the enormous challenge of organizing a general election campaign in the first year of existence and the party ended up with a low vote of 0,05%. The organization blames AMCU for not being able to consolidate its position amongst the mineworkers since the leadership of AMCU had done everything to remove the influence of WASP among the workers. The party argues that both DSM and WASP members and supporters have been victimized and expelled from AMCU.<sup>242</sup>

The statements by WASP can be called curious at the least since WASP has been actively involved in the support of the five month AMCU strike in the Rustenburg platinum

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<sup>239</sup> <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/02/04/wasp-f04.html>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>240</sup> <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71654?oid=347787&sn=Detail&pid=71616>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>241</sup> <http://workerssocialistparty.co.za/sample-page/an-opportunity-for-principled-fighting-unity-wasp-and-the-eff/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>242</sup> <http://workerssocialistparty.co.za/elections-2014-wasps-analysis/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

belt from January to June 2014. For example, David van Wyk, chief researcher of the Bench Marks Foundation, has actively campaigned not only for WASP but also for AMCU and their strike. Despite the negative comments about the way in which AMCU has been interacting with WASP, the political party kept on supporting their five month long wage strike. In one of their statements on their website, WASP calls on AMCU and on all mineworkers to mobilise the active support of all unions in the mining industry as well as in all other sectors. Furthermore, support from working class communities must also be rallied. According to WASP, this struggle for a better living wage must be linked to the struggle for the nationalization of the mining industry as part of the overthrow of the capitalist system and the creation of a socialist society.<sup>243</sup> It might be that WASP is not so much supporting AMCU but solely the mineworkers, which also seems to be the case with the Democratic Left Front. Unfortunately, this does not become clear in the statements made by WASP on their website. WASP makes very clear in their statement about the strike in Rustenburg that they have strong doubts over issues such as corruption, democratic workers' control and fighting strategy related to the AMCU leadership but they urge all AMCU members to stay inside AMCU and organize to investigate and correct any such wrongs as named above.<sup>244</sup>

WASP does not only have a negative view on the way in which AMCU is manifesting itself in the middle of multiple left oriented political organisations. According to the party, NUMSA has made the bold and historic decision to remove itself away from the ANC and COSATU but failed to develop this position into a positive alternative that goes beyond the sole promise to found a worker's party by 2016.<sup>245</sup> The question remains here however whether WASP solely wanted to build a large left front against the ANC ruled government by including NUMSA into their leadership or whether this strategy was aimed at getting as much votes as possible for their own cause. Maybe these two seemingly contradictory plans might even have been intertwined.

Another organisation that strongly supported NUMSA was the DLF, but they abstained in giving any clear direction to voters by stating:

*'...support those wanting to spoil their ballot paper, save their ballot for a future mass workers' party and/or vote for anti-capitalist forces as a first step towards the building of an anti-capitalist electoral platform for the 2016 elections.'*<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> <http://workerssocialistparty.co.za/general-strike-now-for-r12-500-victory-step-up-and-unite-the-struggle-to-win/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>244</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>245</sup> <http://workerssocialistparty.co.za/elections-2014-wasps-analysis/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>246</sup> Ibidem.

While you can argue that there are a number of similarities between this message from the DLF and the message from SWAP, the latter organisation thinks differently about this statement. WASP argues that the statement of the DLF is talking about anti-capitalism instead of socialism and about platforms instead of parties. Furthermore, WASP accuses the DLF of blocking their members to support or campaign for WASP. The DLF, according to WASP, are so-called 'arm chair socialist leaders' who cannot be taken seriously with their self-fulfilled prophecy while standing aside and look at others that are actually acting. But WASP concludes with the words that many DLF members overcame the vacillation of their leaders and campaigned for WASP anyway.<sup>247</sup>

The WASP also seems not too happy about the upcoming EFF and the party argues that the organisation led by Julius Malema is complicating the path towards a mass workers' party on a socialist programme.<sup>248</sup> Furthermore, WASP sees the EFF as serious competition. The left-populist party with a left programme of nationalisation and land expropriation has a membership that consists for the most part out of youth and poor black South Africans. WASP states that it urges EFF members not only to be open to discuss the programme of EFF but also to examine the role of the EFF leaders as they enter parliament where they will be faced with the pressure of the 'capitalist class'. In August 2013, WASP proposed to EFF to form an electoral bloc and standing joint lists of candidates in order to unite the anti-ANC vote which is a key strategic objective of both parties. However, opinions on issues regarding nationalisation and socialism were not in line and EFF rejected WASP's proposal of an electoral alliance and even demanded the effective liquidation of WASP.<sup>249</sup>

After reading several statements by WASP, it seems as if the policy of the party has a couple of contradictions such as the issue of the AMCU strike. Furthermore, WASP states that NUMSA is openly criticizing EFF while they are doing the exact same thing. On the one hand it looks like WASP wants to unite all the left oriented political parties and organisations in order to build an anti-ANC bloc which has to be taken seriously. On the other hand, WASP is criticizing every organisation in such a matter that the original programmes of organisations such as AMCU and EFF will have to be adjusted severely to meet the ideas of WASP. From this perspective, it almost seems like there is the possibility of WASP wanting to build a socialist unity with other parties but solely based on the terms and conditions of WASP. The

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<sup>247</sup> <http://workerssocialistparty.co.za/elections-2014-wasps-analysis/>. Last visited on 07-07-2014.

<sup>248</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>249</sup> Ibidem.

question is how much space for different ideas and interpretations WASP seems to be willing to give the other left parties in the bloc.

## §6. Julius and Joseph

Another possible leftist collaboration that I heard many times is the one between Julius Malema and Joseph Mathunjwa. The relationship between AMCU and EFF has been frequently discussed since both parties have gained popularity over a short period of time and are both strongly protesting against the current state of affairs in South Africa's political system and over issues such as the 'Marikana Massacre'. Despite the fact that AMCU has rejected every offer to cooperate with any kind of political organisation, including EFF, so far, the membership of AMCU and EFF is overlapping.<sup>250</sup> According to political scientist Roland Henwood, AMCU and EFF have at least one thing in common and that is the fact that they are both being portrayed by the ANC as the opposition, as a bad and aggressive element in South Africa. However, it must be stated that this also accounts for parties such as the DA.<sup>251</sup>

EFF describes itself as 'a radical, leftist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movement that draws inspiration from the broad Marxist-Leninist tradition and Fanonian school of thought.' Its policy includes the call for expropriation of land, nationalisation of mines and banks without any form of compensation.<sup>252</sup> According to Mail&Guardian, the formation of EFF will probably not foster a wider collaboration among the left. The EFF is not drawn from the ranks of the working class but drawn from the youth and has no strong footing in the union movement. However, unlike other left-wing oriented formations, EFF has been completely uncritical towards AMCU, states the newspaper, in the hopes of gaining reciprocal support.<sup>253</sup> In a press release of EFF in March 2014, the party even stated that they stand in solidarity with the mineworkers that had been striking for a better living wage since January 2014, led by AMCU.<sup>254</sup> Furthermore, EFF donated R50,000<sup>255</sup> to the strike fund that AMCU had set up to fulfill the needs of the striking mineworkers.<sup>256</sup> But despite the fact that EFF

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<sup>250</sup> <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2013/10/15/eff-amcu-colours-on-display-at-marikana-commission-of-inquiry>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

<sup>251</sup> Interview Roland Henwood, 01-10-2013, Pretoria.

<sup>252</sup> Peter Alexander, 'Marikana, turning point in South African history', *Review of African Political Economy* 40:138 (2013), 605-619, 616.

<sup>253</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-11-04-the-effs-wave-from-the-left>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

<sup>254</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/201403251047.html>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

<sup>255</sup> Approximately €3400,00.

<sup>256</sup> <http://efffighters.org.za/eff-will-donate-r50-000-to-the-amcu-strike-fund/>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

seems to support the strike by AMCU, it does not mention the union in its statements but rather elaborates on the dignity of the mineworkers and the way in which they are being abused by the capital system.

According to another article from Mail&Guardian, AMCU might have had an apolitical standpoint in the recent elections of 2014, the alignment of AMCU and EFF, both splinters from the Tripartite Alliance, is beginning to grow from below. An AMCU branch leader stated: *'People cannot be members of AMCU and not vote EFF.'* The newspaper concluded that mineworkers thus represent one constituency that is shifting from the ANC towards EFF.<sup>257</sup> This tendency is most visible in the Rustenburg area since many mineworkers joined both organizations after Marikana. EFF is as popular as AMCU in the platinum belt and Marikana was not only the starting point for a spectacular growth of AMCU but it also attracted many other parties that wanted a piece of the cake. Marikana is a hot issue and a place where votes can be collected if parties and their leaders are acting smart. This is something that Julius Malema seems to be fully aware of since he launched his party at the Wonderkop Stadium next to the field where the 34 miners were shot down in August 2012. Furthermore, Malema has visited the Marikana Commission of Inquiry more than once to support those involved in the massacre.<sup>258</sup>

## **§7. AMCU's political side?**

The Daily Maverick stated in January 2013 that, despite the fact that AMCU has made the headlines numerous times, the politics of the union have remained elusive. However, the online newspaper reported in the same article that Joseph Mathunjwa had suggested that the government should nationalise mines that had been shut down. This message seems to be not only political, but also socialist and contradictory to the way in which the union first handled the press by largely trying to give them as little information as possible. Mathunjwa seemed to have thought about his statement carefully since he brought his message modestly and with a solid underpinning. At the beginning of January 2013, Anglo American was planning on cutting 14,000 jobs. The reaction of the president: *'If Anglo persists with the retrenchments, it's a window for government to take those mines and nationalise them... See if*

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<sup>257</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-05-15-is-the-eff-the-calm-before-a-real-leftist-storm>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

<sup>258</sup> <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2013/10/15/eff-amcu-colours-on-display-at-marikana-commission-of-inquiry>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

*nationalisation will work on a small scale.*' However, a few days after this comment, Mathunjwa stated that he never called for nationalisation but rather for the government to take over the mines in order to save jobs. It can be stated here that, whether the words have a political undertone or not, Joseph is much more careful in arguing than Julius on this matter. The latter is rather clear about its demand for the nationalisation of the South African mining industry.<sup>259</sup>

Gideon du Plessis, General Secretary of Solidariteit, wrote an article for the website BizNews about the political character of AMCU. According to Du Plessis, Mathunjwa has been able to deliver many inciting, and ideologically tinted, speeches due to the labour unrest of the past two years. In the speeches, employers are regularly referred to as 'exploiters' and 'oppressors' of the working class and the 'white mining bosses' are the main target of Mathunjwa. A bridge can be made to the way in which EFF's Julius Malema encourages workers to fight against the so-called 'white capital'.<sup>260</sup> Furthermore, Du Plessis states that the president and its union are going down the socialist path with these kind of speeches and fits well with NACTU, to which AMCU is aligned. Above all, the General Secretary argues that the union finds itself in close company with groupings to the far left of the political and economic spectrum because AMCU has often shared a stage with the African People Convention (APC) which is known for its socialist, Africanist and Pan Africanist character. Moreover, NUMSA made overtures to AMCU.<sup>261</sup> I was not aware of the fact that AMCU allegedly would have shared a stage with political parties and it seems rather contradictory to their general apolitical policy but it might be that Du Plessis is telling the truth here. Daily newspaper Business Day confirms this statement by arguing that AMCU has often shared platforms with the EFF and the central-left United Democratic Movement. However, this was a choice of community organizers rather than AMCU.<sup>262</sup>

The Mail&Guardian reported that the Workers' Day rally that was held in Marikana was organised by AMCU, as was largely believed. The newspaper continues by stating that the apolitical status of AMCU is not as continual as they claim because of the presence of

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<sup>259</sup> [http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-01-18-amcu-the-champion-of-nationalisation-sort-of/#.U58Wavl\\_vfJ](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-01-18-amcu-the-champion-of-nationalisation-sort-of/#.U58Wavl_vfJ). Last visited on 08-07-2014.

<sup>260</sup> <http://www.biznews.com/thought-leaders/2014/06/amcus-hidden-agenda-first-a-socialist-state-then-well-worry-about-jobs/>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

<sup>261</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>262</sup> <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/2014/07/04/amcus-brand-of-unionism-rests-on-wise-and-wily-moves>. Last visited on 23-08-2014.

multiple left oriented parties at the rally. It remains uncertain though which parties had been invited by AMCU and which parties had just showed up on their own initiative.<sup>263</sup>

## **§8. Summary**

This chapter elaborated on the apolitical status of AMCU on the one hand and their public appearances on the other hand which might suggest that the union is not as apolitical as they preach. It is a discussion that many people seemed to have undertaken but a clear answer has not been found yet and the union itself is certainly not contributing to that. Joseph Mathunjwa and the other leaders seem to try very hard to stay away from the leftist organizations that have been surrounding the union and are denouncing very loud how they feel about a possible political standpoint.

The leaders of AMCU are striving for an apolitical agenda but the question is whether their members are doing the same. Despite that the enthusiasm of the mineworkers for an apolitical union seems real; they go along with movements such as the EFF and the DLF. The mineworkers in the Rustenburg area seem to be very responsive to the leftist organizations, movements and parties that arrived there after the ‘Marikana Massacre’. The workers have suffered deeply because of the massacre and seem to be very determined in following whoever is going to bring change and AMCU is only one of these organisations.

The ANC has shifted to the centre of the South African political spectrum, thereby leaving an open space on the left. This left wing has been filled up with the populism of the EFF, the breakaway of NUMSA and the rise of leftist social movements and Marxists. Organizations such as WASP, and especially the DLF, have been very present amongst the mineworkers during my research in South Africa and they are trying their hardest to gain support. At the same time, it must be stated that both movements do not have that much support and, especially WASP, seem to be too orthodox and too Marxist to attract the general mineworker.

Then there is the role of the EFF and AMCU in this so-called ‘pond’ of leftist organizations. The membership of AMCU and EFF is overlapping and many AMCU members in the Rustenburg area have contacts with organizations such as the DLF who are there to support the local communities. What all these organizations, including AMCU, seem

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<sup>263</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-05-03-00-amcu-rally-has-analysts-guessing>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

to have in common is that they are standing up against the current challenges that South Africa is facing, namely unemployment, rising inequality and poverty. Furthermore, the same type of rhetoric is being used by all of these organizations, namely that the ANC is no longer listening to the South African electorate and that nothing has changed for the poor black South African since the ending of apartheid. Leftist movements are pushing themselves in the direction of both Marikana and AMCU, whether it is because of their standpoints or merely to get more votes, which makes it look as if AMCU is involved in the same leftist tendency as the organizations themselves.

On the surface it seems as if Joseph Mathunjwa can uphold the notion of an apolitical union and not being influenced by, or involved with, any of the other leftist organizations. AMCU received much attention after the ‘Marikana Massacre’ but that does not mean that the union is part of a large breakaway to the left. At the same time, it is hard to speech in a completely non-political way while being involved in politics in some kind of way. Furthermore, whether Mathunjwa wants to be apolitical or not, it might not be in his hands anymore. AMCU is stationed in a situation where multiple organizations with a very clear and heavy political program are at work. In this larger whole, AMCU is not being considered as an outsider or as a neutral partner but as a big player in the field. Looking at it in this way, it might be that AMCU is part of a larger political movement, not because they fully support the other organizations, but because they are part of a tendency which is bigger than they are and of which they are part because they want the same thing for South Africa, and the mineworkers especially, namely a better future without the Tripartite Alliance. An event that occurred at the beginning of February 2014 might be a slip of the tongue on Mathunjwa’s side or a sign that AMCU is starting to change his status slightly. The negotiations during the large strike in the Rustenburg area are very difficult since both AMCU and the mining corporations are not withdrawing. After a rumour that the Department of Labour was going to deregister AMCU to end the strike, Mathunjwa suddenly declared that the Department was pushing AMCU to form a political party.<sup>264</sup> How serious this comment on the formation of a political party should be taken is something that has to be taken into consideration very carefully, but the word has been mentioned now.

An organization that should not be forgotten here is NUMSA. In this leftist ‘pond’, this union is not only the largest organization, but also the most powerful one with a long left-wing tradition and strong institutions. Since NUMSA broke away from the Tripartite

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<sup>264</sup> <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/1776208042e63d8799899f895990ad13/Amcu-threatens-to-bring-the-mining-sector-to-a-standstill>. Last visited on 08-07-2014.

Alliance, the union did not step up to take the lead in the left political spectrum but it might be possible that it will happen in the future. If one organization can be a catalyst for a new party formation on the left, it is NUMSA. AMCU might not be up for that task and it does not seem as if Joseph Mathunjwa is aiming for that to happen as well.

## Chapter 6: Summary and conclusions

Labour unions are organisations of workers and established to protect employees, not only in South Africa but all over the world. However, the term ‘labour union’ is often being used as an abstract notion or in an abstract way but it should not be forgotten that there are people behind this abstraction, namely leaders and their followers. The history of South Africa teaches us that good working and living conditions are not available for everyone and is something that has to be kept fighting for by the unions. AMCU is only one of these unions but one that relatively recent started to dominate the political and economical landscape of the South African mining industry. Mineworkers decided to join AMCU hoping that Joseph Mathunjwa would improve their lives. At the top of every labour union are just ordinary men and women and if those leaders are seeking to achieve the best for their workers, they will do everything in their power to protect the interests of the workers. History teaches us that this not always happens and whether AMCU is truly a union ‘for the people, by the people’ remains a question for now but many black mineworkers have put their faith in the hands of President Mathunjwa and his union. The title ‘Mortal Men’ stands for all those people behind the abstract notion of a labour union, both those on top and on the ground. This research has tried to give both parties a voice and a face. Furthermore, mortality is a concept that many AMCU members and their families know all too well, especially after the ‘Marikana Massacre’ but also because of their dangerous work underground. Moreover, the title refers to the leadership of Joseph Mathunjwa. After the massacre, the president stated, while crying, that he had done everything he could ‘as a mortal man’ to protect the Marikana mineworkers. Those 34 killed mineworkers proof that his mortality was not enough in this case. At the same time, this massacre has been one of the main reasons for the phenomenal growth of AMCU.

Up until this day, not only the international community, but also the South African population and most members of AMCU have fragmented knowledge of the history and character of the union. The subject that has been written about mostly is Marikana and the current growth and struggles of AMCU without mentioning any historical background or a more in-depth analysis of the union. The apolitical standpoint of the union, with a thorough analysis of political parties and organizations that are surrounding AMCU, is also being mentioned seldom. For this reason, the objective of this research was to gain more insight in the history of AMCU, its leadership and its current position in broader political economical contexts.

Furthermore, the main argument of this research was that, despite the fact that the union is known for its apolitical standpoint, AMCU seems to be part of a larger breakaway to the political left which includes many different political parties and organizations. In order to achieve these research objectives, the research question was how AMCU is being perceived in various layers of the South African society in the context of an emerging political leftist movement. In an attempt to answer this question, four sub questions have been asked concerning the history and political and economical context of AMCU, the personal history of Joseph Mathunjwa and the characterization of AMCU's members, the relationship between the union and the media and the role of AMCU in a larger leftist movement.

Answering the research question remains difficult because so much is still unknown about the union, its leadership and the path that AMCU will be taking, but at least a couple of issues have become more clear. AMCU filled up a gap that slowly opened between the NUM leadership and its members. Changes in the political and economical environment of the NUM made many mineworkers look at their union in a different way. As a result, AMCU was founded due to labourers who wanted to be unionized in order to fight for better working and living conditions, of which they felt deprived by their former union. After a difficult start in Emalahleni, AMCU tried to gain a foothold in the platinum industry which was mainly established in the Rustenburg area. The shootings in Marikana proved to be the turning point for the union.

As the president of AMCU, Joseph is seen as a very religious man who not only preaches but also speeches in a powerful way. Furthermore, insiders claim that he is an emotional, but also charismatic and friendly man, despite the fact that he distrusts many and tries to keep people at a safe distance. There is some evidence that suggests that AMCU is mainly being ruled by Mathunjwa. For this reason, it remains the question whether people mean the entire organization of AMCU or specifically Joseph Mathunjwa when talking about the union. The AMCU members that I have spoken to have been solely positive about Mathunjwa and sometimes even almost seemed to worship him. The union is recruiting mostly disgruntled NUM members and the living and working conditions of many mineworkers, with the emphasis on those people in and around Marikana, seem to have made them so desperate and angry with the NUM that they moved to AMCU.

One of the AMCU's struggles included the media. Since 2012, AMCU has been filling the newspapers on a regular basis whereby the shootings at Marikana and the six months long strike at the beginning of 2014 were the so-called 'big stories' of the union. Mathunjwa

proved not the easiest person to communicate with for the press and it seems as if the president lacked support from the public opinion due to his icy relationship with the South African media. Moreover, the NUM and his allies targeted AMCU at any possible moment, just as AMCU was doing the other way around. On the one hand, the media did not always bring nuance into their articles. On the other hand, there has been much attention as well for a more nuanced, or even positive, view of Mathunjwa and AMCU during the massacre and in general. Both views have been influencing the public perspective but the question remains to what extent this happened and which image of Mathunjwa and AMCU is predominant among the South African population.

One aspect of AMCU's image contains the apolitical status of AMCU on the one hand and their public appearances on the other hand which might suggest that the union is not as apolitical as they preach. It is a discussion that many people seemed to have undertaken but a clear answer has not been found yet. Joseph Mathunjwa and the other leaders seem to try very hard to stay away from the leftist organizations that have been surrounding the union and are denouncing very loud how they feel about a possible political standpoint. The leaders of AMCU are striving for an apolitical agenda but the question is whether their members are doing the same. Despite that the enthusiasm of the mineworkers for an apolitical union seems real; they go along with movements such as the EFF and the DLF. What all these organizations, including AMCU, seem to have in common is that they are standing up against the current challenges that South Africa is facing, namely unemployment, rising inequality and poverty. Furthermore, the same type of rhetoric is being used by all of these organizations, namely that the ANC is no longer listening to the South African electorate and that nothing has changed for the poor black South African since the ending of apartheid, which is without a doubt a political statement. Looking at it in this way, it might be that AMCU is part of a larger political movement, not because they fully support the other organizations, but because they are part of a tendency which is bigger than they are and of which they are part because they want the same thing for South Africa, and the mineworkers especially, namely a better future without the Tripartite Alliance. However, if one organization can be a catalyst for a new party formation on the left, it is NUMSA. AMCU might not be up for that task and it does not seem as if Joseph Mathunjwa is aiming for that to happen as well.

What will be interesting to see is how AMCU is going to evolve in the coming years. After the 'Marikana Massacre' and the six months long strike, which were connected to each other and attracted many new members, it might be that the popularity of this 'new kid on the

block' is eventually going to fade away, for example when Mathunjwa does not develop the institutional structures of the union more or when the union stays too wary of leftist sentiments. Many mineworkers took the brave decision to leave the powerful NUM and join the relatively new union. If Mathunjwa and his union in the end point out to be a disappointment for these workers as well, the workers can abandon their president relentlessly as they did with the NUM.

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