

## Ghosts Haunting Unions: Women Trade Unionists and the Struggle for their Rights, Mozambique, 1993–2000

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### INTRODUCTION

To be a woman and a trade unionist is still a challenge today, even if the present conjuncture—a Constitution guaranteeing equality of rights and the numerous international conventions of the UN and the ILO—seems favorable to women's full participation in civil and government structures. Unions, like other organizations, including political parties, show little transformation in their functioning, whether in response to the new demands of globalization or to incorporate women's claims (Bouchardeau, 1993; Osório, 2001). If the external pressure of regional and international union federations, along with the climate of so-called "democracy" in the country, leads to the creation of women's committees in unions and their central organizations, women now grouped in such new organs continue to have to struggle for recognition and acceptance.

This chapter aims to analyze the discourse of the union leadership in the women's committees and the possibilities and constraints delimiting action for women. It is important to understand how the discourses (re)establish gender difference, justifying discriminatory practices still in operation in the unions. On the other hand, what consciousness do women have about the constraints surrounding them and what are their points of reference for action? What are the individual and/or collective strategies used to get around the constraints imposed on them? Are today's demands based on the limits of a hegemonic women's identity, or do they in fact struggle against these limits? These questions will be studied on the basis of a multiplicity and diversity of practices, which is the only way to unveil the specificity of women struggling for their rights. What practices reveal contestation in spheres of action and in "représentations de soi"?<sup>1</sup>

When I began to work on the topic of women unionists,<sup>2</sup> what most interested and motivated me was the discovery of a feeling of strong combativeness that they conveyed, while defending the need for unity and

solidarity among all union leaders. Clearly, in the course of the work, I became aware of how idealized this image that they constructed for my benefit was, and this aspect itself took on great significance for the interpretation of the data. However, whether in solidarity or competition, whether courageous or "timid," in their own way, individually or collectively, these women struggled for affirmation and recognition.

I also worked with men union leaders who, without exception, recalled the history of the unions, today's "democratic challenges" and the long history of concern of their organization in relation to women. It was only at the end that I could ask the more penetrating questions on my list.<sup>3</sup> None of the secretaries or the secretariat members referred to conflicts with the committees, despite their obvious existence and their occupying much attention on the part of the direction. Only among the union members was I informed of such conflicts.<sup>4</sup>

The whole experience of seeing myself confronted as a researcher and as an actor—in a context full of tension and manipulation—led me to question the pertinence of my work, and the possibility of perceiving the complexity present in the internal logic of the committees' functioning and the modes of their integration in the unions. As a militant feminist, I was conscious of the power relations that can be established between researcher and object of the inquiry, given the realities and conditions of inequality affecting and surrounding all such work. It was necessary to respect the voices heard and attempt to construct a reciprocal relationship. I could not also prevent myself from feeling a certain empathy founded in common interests for, in the end, the struggle of unionists for equality is also my struggle as a woman and citizen. I attempted to turn this proximity into an asset enriching the perception and interpretation of what was said.

On the other hand, I have been told on various occasions that studying women unionists is of little relevance in a country such as Mozambique, where the number of workers is about a million in a total of about 17 million.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, when speaking of women unionists, the percentage among all wage earners is relatively even lower. According to data from one of the union federations, in 1999, in the various branches of activity covered by its member unions, there was a total of 175,293 workers, 103,957 (59.3 per cent) of whom were unionized.<sup>6</sup> The number of workers and their level of unionization, according to the direction of the committees of the same federation is the following: in a total of 174,866 workers, 43,953 are women, and there is an average level of unionization of 62.46 per cent.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly such telling information can leave no one untouched, but it has perhaps the value of helping us reflect on the purpose of the research being undertaken: we might say that such questioning has the merit of functioning as an antidote to self-indulgence, thus forcing reconsideration of the objective of what we do.

First of all, notwithstanding the low level of expression of the union movement in Mozambique, its internal struggles should be understood as a further manifestation of the multiple and complex forms of citizens' resistance before the state and against the growing and authoritarian liberalization of the economy. On the other hand, as a militant of women's human rights, I sought always to give my research an emancipating character, and I believe that this perspective can increase understanding of distorted, or at least not entirely visible, daily contradictions. It is thus that possibilities for social transformation are created (Lather, 1991: 52, cited by Humphries, 1997).

Although not subscribing uncritically to "women's ways of knowing," "women's experiences," or simply "women's knowledge" (Alcoff and Potter, 1993: 1), I take the view that research with emancipating objectives can be determinant for the integration of forms of knowledge and the experiences of the most excluded social groups. Thus conceived, it implies an active, interpretative and responsible position (Ardevini-Brooker, 2000; Williams, 1999).

In this chapter I begin by presenting the context in which the committees of women are formed in the unions, the "official" view of them given by the male union leadership and the perceptions of the union members who serve and work in them. I then briefly trace the career of three of these leaders, whose expectations and strategies are particularly illustrative of this specific period in the history of the union movement in Mozambique and of women's struggle for the achievement of their rights. In effect, individual perspectives are converted into biographical structures in the sense that "human beings cross frontiers between different groups, and in various situations and through time, accumulate diverse groups of experiences, orientations, competencies and likes" (Hannerz, 1997). It is a matter of taking individual social experiences as revealing culture as it is lived (Michelat, 1987: 199).

#### CONTEXTS FOR THE CREATION OF COMMITTEES OF WOMEN WORKERS IN THE UNIONS

The committees of women workers<sup>8</sup> were created in 1993, in a context of great transformations for the union movement, confronted as it was then with economic and political liberalization. The Mozambican government formally joined the IMF and World Bank in 1984 and the first readjustment program (PRE—Program of Economic Rehabilitation) was introduced in 1987. The objectives of PRE were to stop the decline of production, reduce financial imbalances, promote economic "efficiency," eliminate the informal market, and re-establish healthy relations with commercial and financial partners. The principal measures were the liberalization of prices—supposed to constitute an incentive for producers—the adjustment of the internal and external terms of trade, the reduction of public spending, and the privatization of state enterprises.

The raising of wages by 50 per cent was not sufficient to maintain the standard of living in the face of the immediate rise in prices. The overall result of PRE in the period 1987–89 shows that the chosen development strategy excluded the most marginalized strata, whose situation worsened (Cliff, 1991). The reaction of the government was to include an emergency program within PRE so as to reduce poverty. From 1990, a social component was introduced with the Program of Economic and Social Rehabilitation (PRES). In 1989, the government promulgated decree 21/89 concerning the alienation of state property. Two years later, law 15/91 established the rules for restructuring state companies through privatization.

These policies above all affected workers: in 1987 alone, 35,000 workers were dismissed. With the continued application of PRE measures, intensified by the privatization of companies, the number of dismissals increased, mainly of women workers.<sup>9</sup> The first alarm signals were given by national and international NGOs that maintained relations with the unions, and were at times the supporters of union programs (Bonni, 1995, Assis, 1997). Thereafter, the exclusion of women resulting from privatization became an unavoidable problem in public debate, which the unions could no longer ignore.

The accelerated degradation of living conditions led workers to react. In 1990 there was a series of strikes in Maputo city and province. Faced with the inertia of the unions, the strikes were directed by committees created *ad hoc* by workers. Union organizations were surprised by this unexpected development and were divided. Workers on strike did not get support from their union leaders.<sup>10</sup> The unions were then confronted with a situation that they had no means of controlling and that they now attempted to understand.<sup>11</sup> According to an evaluation of the Mozambican Workers Organization (OTM)<sup>12</sup> in 1996,<sup>13</sup> more than five hundred firms had been privatized since 1987. Meanwhile, privatization neither reduced poverty nor contributed to improving employment or economic growth. On the other hand, the OTM denounced the numerous infractions of the labor law, particularly dismissals without notice, delay in payment of wages, and the non-recognition of unions by the management of firms with private or mixed capital holdings. This last aspect interfered directly in the search for solutions on the part of the union movement. In general, the government was criticized for not having created an effective system for controlling privatization.

As a result of the context of economic liberalization, the unions were obliged to alter their character and their functions.<sup>14</sup> Workers demanded intervention of a different nature and more democratic functioning. The unions then attempted to prove to their members that they were capable of acting on their behalf and of negotiating with the government and the owners,<sup>15</sup> and of abandoning the old practices now thought to be very authoritarian.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of 1991,<sup>17</sup> legislation on the freedom of union activity (Law 23/91) was passed, allowing union associations to acquire juridical sanction without being associated with a central congress. This law sparked off claims of functional autonomy among some union leaders. In 1992, three unions declared themselves independent of the OTM and constituted a provisional association called Free and Independent Unions of Mozambique (Sindicatos Livres e Independentes de Moçambique—SLIM).<sup>18</sup> In 1997, SLIM was constituted as a central congress under the designation National Council of the Free Trade Unions of Mozambique (Conselho Nacional dos Sindicatos Livres de Moçambique—CONSILMO). This schism produced internal change within the OTM and a change of leadership capable of dealing with the new situation.<sup>19</sup>

Under pressure from the union movement, in 1994 the government created a “Tripartite Labor Commission” (also called the “Tripartite Forum on Social Conciliation”).<sup>20</sup> In the same year, there were for the first time face-to-face negotiations between the government, the employers and the unions (OTM and SLIM). Matters brought to the negotiating table by the unions were the increase of the minimum wage, the reduction of taxes on wages and the insufficiency in public transport as well as deficiencies in the area of health services.<sup>21</sup>

It was in this context that there arose in the debate the need to act on the “problems of women,” which privatization had made more visible. On the other hand, Mozambican unions are members of the Southern Africa Trade Union Co-ordination Council (SATUCC), which, in 1991, approved a Workers’ Social Charter, reformulated in 1996 on the basis of observations made by member countries. In the later version, one of the most important aspects emphasized is “the equality of treatment for men and women” in relation to employment, remuneration and careers, and its application was encouraged.<sup>22</sup> In 1993, Mozambique was the only country in SATUCC not yet to have created women’s structures within unions and which showed low levels of women’s representation in their leadership organs. Even in 2000, in the OTM-CS, women’s representation in leadership was the following:

- Presidium: 0%
- Coordinating Council: 15%
- Executive Secretariat: 25%
- General Secretaries of National Unions: of 13, only one woman
- Members of the Secretariat of the National Unions: of 52, only seven are women
- National Councils of the Unions: between 10 and 15%.<sup>23</sup>

As can be appreciated, women union functionaries occupy lower-rank posts in the staffing structure.

It was in this context that committees were created to represent women workers in all the central union organizations of the OTM and SLIM. In the case of SLIM, a "National Committee of Women Workers" (CONMUT) was constituted in 1994, and the "Committee of Women Workers" of the OTM in 1996.<sup>24</sup> These organs are exclusively for women, and their leaders are elected by assemblies of unionized women. In the two national organizations, the processes were different, but the debates and meetings that preceded these were partially effected in common.<sup>25</sup>

#### DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES IN RELATION TO COMMITTEES OF WOMEN WORKERS

It is unquestionable that the creation of the committees occurred above all through pressures external to the union movement in Mozambique and that this aspect was decisive in their integration and functioning. The already existing tensions, in large part the result of dismissals owing to privatization, were not in themselves sufficient to originate a movement of women unionists demanding more equality and serving as a means of developing pressure to respect the founding spirit of the committees. If, later on, the women unionists who directed the immediate process of constituting the new organs and others who subsequently adhered to the project took over the initiative, it is clear that they had no role in the initial conception and definition of its sphere of action. The limits and frontiers were delineated, at the level of discourse and of practice, by the top union leadership.

Once the national union leaders had decided to create the committees, the first priority was to ensure the support of provincial and workshop union leaders, and also that of women members, groupings until then excluded from the discussions. In each of the two union federations, "Commissions for the Creation of Committees" composed of women were established in order to mobilize women workers to support the project. National union leaders took on the responsibility for the mobilization of officials at the various other leadership levels.

As the creation of the committees was a project common to both federations, the unionist discourse appeared in public to have a certain uniformity. It was explained what the committees were, their objectives and the place of women in the union movement. The press was regularly invited to participate in seminars for women union members or to the founding meetings of committees. Each national meeting for the creation of committees was presided over by a national secretary or his representative. Training seminars for women unionists also took place in the presence of leaders, who gave opening or closing speeches or even conducted their operations.<sup>26</sup>

One of the more salient aspects of the discourses on the committees was their clear demarcation from the Mozambican Women's Organization

(Organização da Mulher Moçambicana—OMM),<sup>27</sup> which from 1976 to the end of the 1980s had created groups in all companies. The main criticisms were that this organization had overstepped its competencies in the workplace by interfering in questions that were not strictly to do with "labor," such as the domestic violence to which some women workers were subject and the control of "morality." This refusal to consider the OMM in the workplace as the predecessor of the Women's Committees can perhaps be seen as the clearest indication of how their action—despite strong party oversight—was considered subversive of existing male powers. In a seminar organized by the Committees of the OTM-CS at the end of 2000, a provincial union leader declared: "Before, one heard: women are equal to men at work and at home, but that has all changed. We no longer speak of emancipation but of gender. That is acceptable."<sup>28</sup> But this position is never explicit in the official discourse, which makes it understood that, as the unions are establishing themselves as independent of the political party in power, the OMM cannot serve as a model because it is a party organization.

Thus, in their speeches, union leaders underline above all that the Committees are the result of the democratization of union organization and insist on the priority given to the problems and interests of women:

We feel deeply the need for the participation of women alongside their male companions and for the struggle for the equality of rights in our sphere. Only in this way will it be possible to find the most secure way for coordinated and united action, enabling Mozambican unionism greater strength to defend union and labor rights, accompanied by women—the inseparable companions of men.<sup>29</sup>

No union dared to contradict this position, which represented the new image union organizations give themselves. Indeed, union leaders insist on the antecedents of this project of "the emancipation of women," giving the impression that they were always involved in it and that unions have fought for a long time on behalf of women's interests. During a seminar entitled "Possible strategies to encourage women to accept positions of leadership and sensibilization on gender,"<sup>30</sup> one leader emphasized: "After national independence, women, as mothers, wives and workers, were engaged in widely different sectors of production, in socio-professional training, according to the orientations of the new Constitution and Labor Law." He went on to say that equality is not constructed only through laws, for "the social, economic and political foundations of discrimination against the woman worker are very deep"; however, "women *also form part* of Mozambican society."<sup>31</sup>

On no occasion is there contestation of the concept of "women's emancipation," borrowed from FRELIMO social theory. The discourses state that

women are oppressed by "traditional" society, which considers them as inferior to men; that the emancipation of women must be effected through their integration at work; that women must be supported and oriented in overcoming the beliefs and attitudes of the system of domination in which they were educated.<sup>32</sup> This last aspect is essential to understand the status of the committees in the union structure. At the opening of one seminar for women workers, one general secretary said in his speech that, in coordination with the union leadership, the committee "will guide and justify the destinies, objectives and socio-economic and professional interests of the women worker, so that women can confront their problems without complexes."<sup>33</sup> This reference goes back to what is designated "women's inferiority complex," which FRELIMO described as "the alienation of women."

Finding the origin and justification of this position requires an incursion into FRELIMO social theory on "women's emancipation." If it is clear that the equality of women is established as a universal right in the stated principles and written texts of the law, difference is (re)established from FRELIMO social theory referring to "the alienation of women." Long oppressed and humiliated—say the discourses—women assume the position of being dominated and reproduce it. Emphasis is therefore required on the need to combat this female passivity and resignation so as to recruit women to the cause of struggle. Although it is admitted that men also have "prejudices" as regards women, the "alienation of men" is never mentioned. Difference thus constituted justified an emancipation different in time and under male orientation,<sup>34</sup> rather than giving them autonomy to decide and act in function of their own interests. Difference is thus continuously redefined in the production of discourse, always magnified to legitimate renewed exclusion (Riot-Sarcey, 1993b). This ambivalence, already visible during the armed struggle (Arthur, 1998a), reproduces itself in each new context (Kruks, n.d.).

Thus the discourses of the unions, elaborated in new contexts, reproduce ambivalence concerning "women's emancipation," contain contradictory representations of women, and articulate the idea of a "tradition of passivity" for women, which both support and legitimate male power. As another general secretary stated, "women are very timid and slow in everything. They bring with them the domestic ideal. They are vulnerable to many temptations: for this reason we seek to integrate them."<sup>35</sup>

Union discourses should be read in terms of two main registers. The first, public, addressed both internally and externally, present what the committees are and their importance for the union organization. At a second level, the less official, exclusively internal discourse relates above all to the ways in which the committees function. It is here that representations operate about women in the workplace, where they have a real as well as a legitimating function. Common social representations about women in the labor sphere are real discourses in the sense of fixing the limits of women unionists' action,

reinforcing the systems of control on the activity of the committees. The partial character of women's citizenship is thus reproduced in the unions. The tension between the stated principles and the execution in practice of the project is permanent. The articulation of the two discourses rests on the implicit connection between them: the ideal situation it is necessary to reach and the real situation that needs to be considered in order to reach the defined goals. Thus is justified the supervision to which the committees are subjected: the need to create conditions for women "to develop the knowledge and strategies to uphold and struggle for their rights in the world of work."<sup>36</sup> Full participation will only be possible "if women shake off traditional prejudices, which limit them to maternity, obedience to spouses and to domestic labor, etc., contrary to the Mozambican Constitution."<sup>37</sup>

The identity of working women is held to be indissoluble from their functions as mother, wife, and educator, materialized and made worthy as female contributions to society and the country.<sup>38</sup> This position conjoins with that of FRELIMO on female roles and constitutes the basis on which the first Labor Law (8/85) was elaborated.<sup>39</sup> If unions defined as a high priority the full application of laws protecting women, at the same time they limited the struggle of the committees simply to that of upholding "the specific rights of women." Thus, the committees are constituted as "the specific structures of women, so that they can participate in the taking of decisions on specifically women's questions,"<sup>40</sup> which limits not only their sphere of intervention but also the competencies they are attributed. Based on this logic, many more or less open means are put in place by the union leadership to control the committees' activities. The general tendency taking shape is that of maintaining the exclusion of women in the centers of union decision-making.

Until 1998, one of the central debates was conducted around the status that should be accorded to the committees at the national level: should they constitute an "area" or a "department"? The secretaries of "areas" are part of the national executive secretariat and fall under the general secretary. On the other hand, the heads of "departments" are subordinated to an "area," and thus have more limited autonomy, with no independent budget.<sup>41</sup> In the unions affiliated to SATUCC, the committees are considered as "areas" and the first proposals of the OTM and SLIM were similar. However, this position was much contested, mainly at the provincial and company level, where union leaders were kept somewhat apart from the debates that preceded the creation of the new organs.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, at the time of the founding of the committees, the unions had already held their national conferences, which take place every five years, and which are the only meetings with the legal competence to alter statutes. Thus the committees began their working on the basis of provisional regulations and the decision on the type of statute they would have in the union structure was postponed until 1997.

At the end of 1997, 15 of the 17 unions had already held their national conferences and the results were as follows: twelve maintained the status of "area" for the committees, while three changed their position and integrated the committees as "departments." Despite this result, the committees are still not considered "areas" similar to others. This is apparent from the National Council of the union for the textile industries: "The representatives of the Women Workers Committee only participate in meetings of the Secretariat when necessary."<sup>43</sup> Or, as explained by a provincial secretary of the same union, the women leaders would only be called to intervene "if the problems relate to women."<sup>44</sup> This position is shared by other unions, which justify it by referring to the definition of the committees as having to treat only the specific interests of women.<sup>45</sup> This problem has yet to be resolved and the situation of the committees in the union organization remains imprecise. Thus the recognition of the existence of problems specific to women workers, considered by everyone to be an achievement for women, is used to distance them from discussion and intervention in other levels of union functioning. Through a kind of conjuring, women find themselves set apart exclusively with the "female problems" that are the competence of the committees, and for this reason, distant from "real" union problems. Even if the discourses seem to favor full participation of women in the unions, in reality they exclude them and sustain discriminatory practices. One of the first acts of interference by the union leadership occurred during the elections of the secretaries of the committees, with the aim of keeping out those thought to be too independent. This critique was never formulated publicly, even in the seminars for the membership. These cases were mentioned in interviews<sup>46</sup> or in informal conversation.

Another form of control is through avoiding the committees' financial autonomy: most of them cannot have independent bank accounts, even when dealing with donations given specifically for committee programs. These are controlled by the union leadership, which frequently use them for their own needs. In most of the criticisms made on this question, what is at issue is not the principle of sharing the means at disposal with other sectors of the unions, but the fact that they are excluded from control of the resources. This matter was discussed in a seminar attended by 23 members of the committees.<sup>47</sup> In some cases, it was revealed, there was even the diversion of union funds for the personal use of the union secretary.<sup>48</sup>

Most of the union leaders control the visits abroad of the members of the committees. Invitations for meetings and seminars are never given directly to the secretaries of the committees, and the union leadership decides who should participate.<sup>49</sup> In the case of Esmeralda M., each time conflicts arose with her superiors, the latter prevented her from going abroad, such visits being considered as rewards.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, such forms of control are also employed with other intentions.

In the process of constitution of the committees, there is always a common underlying fear—of the "autonomy" of these organs. Various union leaders have spoken of women's organizations that they know about in other union federations that, according to them, have such a large field of responsibility that they seem to constitute unions independent of those that created them. We can say then that one of the specters that haunts them is the possibility that the committees, by means of foreign support, will come to distance themselves from the unions and acquire an autonomous logic and dynamic. Hence the hierarchical dependence, the limitation of the sphere of action and above all the control on visits abroad. With the exception of a few militants, well known or of confidence, union leaderships ensure that participation in outside events is done by rotation. They justify this on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunities among members of the union, from top to bottom, and between the various regions of the country. Thus it is not uncommon that a woman unionist is in Maputo only to catch the plane and on her return has no time to share and discuss the results of the meeting or conference.

Women among the union leadership attempt to counter this policy so that there can be continuity in contacts with the other federations to which they are affiliated, which would enable a more consistent relationship as well as participation by the country in debates important in the making of the respective policies and programs. On the other hand, they also want permanence of representation in groups that participate in thematic seminars (such as the informal sector, collective bargaining, globalization), in order to keep up with the development of the discussion and contribute actively to it.<sup>51</sup> However, the populist character of the leadership's position meets support among the militants on the ground and those who, residing outside the capital, consider themselves discriminated against in relation to such opportunities.

The fear of autonomy of women's committees in reality hides fear of the growth of an independent dynamic of struggle for women's rights, which would threaten the existing hierarchies. The demonization of feminism is a process initiated with the creation of the OMM in 1973, still during the liberation struggle: "The ideological offensive which, disguised as the struggle for the liberation of women, seeks [...] to divide men and women. [...] This ideological offensive is an offensive of capitalist society to confuse women and divert their attention from the real objective" (Machel, 1974: 83). Feminism is thus seen as a foreign, bourgeois project, driven by women who do not share revolutionary ideology (*ibid.*: 82).

This same mechanism for disqualifying certain forms of struggle by imputing to them designs that are strange, foreign or non-indigenous has also been directed at the union movement itself quite recently by the government. From May to July 2000, during negotiations in the Council for Labor Conciliation, there was a dispute over the adjustment of the minimum

wage. Faced with the combined resistance of government and employers to the unions' proposal of a 30 per cent increase, the unions called a general strike for 26, 27 and 28 July. Although doubtful of the organizational capacity of the unions to mobilize, as a result of public adherence to the proposal the government gave way and the strike was avoided.<sup>52</sup>

The government reacted as if feeling discredited: on 29 July, at a meeting in Xai-Xai, Joaquim Chissano, president of the republic, revealed that during the negotiations of social conciliation "there were foreign specialists in strike organization in the country, but they had been discovered before they could act in conjunction with the unions." Out of "prudence"—in his words—names were not divulged, but he warned that interference in internal matters from the outside would not be tolerated and that this was not the first time that such events had occurred.<sup>53</sup> In a note directed to the government, the union leadership denied any involvement by foreign unionists and assumed full responsibility for their conduct of the process.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, in the era of globalization, it is clear that only the circulation of capital is acceptable and that international solidarity between workers is something "strange" and dangerous. This same mechanism is used in relation to the committees: there is always present the accusation of "foreign manipulation" each time more autonomy and expansion of the limits of action are demanded.

#### UNIONIST REPRESENTATIONS OF THE COMMITTEES OF WOMEN WORKERS

Some of the union leaders have begun to have a greater presence in the public arena. They are interviewed by the press, speak in seminars and meetings of the committees and give presentations in regional colloquia on labor and unionism. It is important to see how the committees are presented and whether the women share the conception of the union leaders. On the other hand, in what way do they explain the subordination of women and what ways do they propose to guarantee equality of rights? How do these leaders interpret the difficulties that the committees confront in union organizations?

The meetings preceding the creation of the committees afforded women unionists space for the exchange of ideas and experiences at different levels, which, in part, enabled the building of a platform of understanding, considering that formerly there was no organized movement. The debates were organized around "problems of women in the world of work" and solutions were proposed. The conclusions were compiled into a training manual,<sup>55</sup> the objective of which was to make known to women unionists the state of analysis and the proposals. This practice had the result of creating a common, official language, used in the public arena, even where the militants have

divergent conceptions and experiences, and also served to motivate activism of the unionists. Indeed, consciousness that the qualities of a group form the basis of its discrimination justifies the struggle in defense of its rights (Burn, Aboud, Moyles, 2000).

In the manual, the committee is defined as "a structure created in the union federations at all levels, from the national unions to the base, to pursue the problems specific to women in the labor market" (OTM *et al.*, 1995: 26). The Committees must "serve as a forum for the creation of support and assistance strategies among working women" (*ibid.*: 61). These two aspects, the existence of "specific problems" and the need to develop solidarity among workers are also emphasized in the paragraphs dealing with the objectives:

To organize working women in the common struggle for the attainment of equal rights and opportunities for all; guarantee that the union takes responsibility for the specific problems of women; mobilize women so that they engage in the union movement; uphold the specific rights and interests of working women; promote respect of laws protecting working women; train and educate working women in matters relating to labor and union legislation (*ibid.*: 26–7).

The obligations of women unionists are presented as: participate in the union movement, "assume the effective execution of their work," "actively show their capacities and interests," uphold their interests, "make the best use of their personality, dignity, labor and capacities" (*ibid.*: 36–7).

These proposals reaffirm in part the discourses of the union leadership, namely the question of "specific women's questions" and the protective measures that must be undertaken. But they go further in certain aspects, such as the emphasis given to the solidarity necessary between workers, the denunciation of double work shifts and the principle of cooperation with other women's organizations that struggle for women's rights. It can be noted that this type of cooperation is based on the recognition that the constraints workers confront are not restricted to relations in the workplace. Although, in other ways the committees are widening their action, as formerly occurred with the OMM.

However, the emergence of new positions occurs in a tense climate, as witness the numerous contradictions in the discourses of the committee leaders. The starting tableau may be defined by the union leadership, but it is then upset by the words of the women. Thus the affirmation of the idea that "the working woman is naturally given to the caring of children, the elderly and the husband,"<sup>56</sup> is followed by a denunciation of the double work shift.<sup>57</sup> Or, reference to the full realization of the "mission" as mother and wife is frequently accompanied by an exhortation to women's combative spirit.<sup>58</sup>

Other discourses constitute true cleavages, perhaps not immediately recognizable because care is taken to moderate the language. Thus, when power is demanded, this is justified by the preoccupation of imposing more justice and of making the best use of female qualities. This was the argument defended during one of the seminars for women unionists:

Why power? We, women, we like power very much. We want it because we know that with it we can influence society so that there can be more justice and fewer conflicts. We want power, but also the division of labor in the union, in the workplace, at home [...]. We want to contribute with our knowledge, our experience as women, as mothers, as professionals. Our experiences as women are different from those of men. Thus we can create a more complete union. We wish that what we are and represent be fully valued. We do not want to imitate male attitudes. We want to be female also in power.<sup>59</sup>

In the analysis of "women's problems," the basis of all the programs of the new organs, while apparently adopting the viewpoints of the leadership of the unions, the militants of the committees develop their own position, revealing a "viewpoint from within." These problems are considered the result of "sexual discrimination": here are included the dismissals *en masse* as a result of PRE and privatization, discrimination in evaluation and promotion, exclusion from leadership positions, discrimination in access to professional training, low status given to certain jobs and categories considered to be women's, lack of respect for laws protecting women, particularly during pregnancy, wage discrimination, sexual harassment, and "women's inferiority complex and other negative behavior."

While "sexual harassment"<sup>60</sup> is minimized by the union leadership, women unionists consider it revealing of power relations and place it among the priorities for action. With respect to the "women's problem" called the "women's inferiority complex," all the union leaders see this as one of the main obstacles to equality between men and women in the sphere of labor.<sup>61</sup> Members of the committees characterize it thus:

Women have inferiority complexes; they are not at ease in speaking in meetings and do not defend themselves amongst their colleagues. For this reason, we must develop courses giving them confidence in themselves and the instruments required to assert themselves as women workers and even union leaders.<sup>62</sup>

Yet, "women's inferiority complex" is at times presented as a "natural trait," which means that women are individuals it is necessary to control and watch over:

At the same time, women contribute to the worsening of their problematic situation. They fight among themselves, they waste their time in malicious gossip, real psychological terrorism. Thus, the project cannot go forward and women cannot demand a just wage owing to poor labor relations and poor behavior.<sup>63</sup>

This interpretation, which is similar to the viewpoint of union leaders and justifies the measures the latter design to prevent greater autonomy of the committees in the union structures, has effects in the practice of the committees and their militants consequences (Arthur, 1998b).

In the committees' programs, training is defined as a priority, the "means to improve the quality of all activists and to stimulate participation of women workers."<sup>64</sup> Training courses are organized through the Union Training Scheme common to all unions. Their declared objectives are the training of union leaders and of women workers in the companies (the "ground level"). Here, the intention is to improve knowledge on what constitutes a union movement so as to widen the base of adherence to the unions. Training directed toward women unionists contains four main modules: the place of working women in the union movement, their problems, the legislation that protects them, and the tasks of the committees. Great attention is paid to study of the legal texts guaranteeing equality between the sexes (the Constitution) and protection of women workers (in the Labor Law).<sup>65</sup>

The training also seeks to prepare militants of the committees to participate in collective bargaining through study of the law defining these (33/90), discussion of the importance of this type of instrument so as to enforce women's rights, and the presentation of ways of elaborating an inventory of the main problems to bring to collective bargaining. Demands already identified are the creation of crèches, social centers, and transport,<sup>66</sup> all showing a concern to harmonize family responsibilities with working life.

If the militants apparently share the conceptions basic to the creation of the committees as well as the priorities established in the plans for action, divergences are visible in the practices and positions in relation to the control exercised by the union leadership. There are open criticisms about the mechanisms operated by the latter. The militants are divided around these criticisms, depending on the type of relations that they maintain with the respective leadership. Some are accused of being "informers" in the service of the secretaries of the committees. This subject has never been openly discussed and the accusations are vague, with no names given and no proof of such "collaboration."<sup>67</sup> What is important to note is the climate of suspicion that has gradually emerged.

Women unionists do not all have the same positions, although there is a common perception of the need to deal with the problems of working

women and recognition and that until now the unions have marginalized this aspect. In the meantime, if solidarity exists, there are also conflicts and rivalries dividing the militants. These disputes, frequently called "intrigues" by the women themselves or by the union leadership, are thus bereft of all political content even when in reality they are about struggles for power. Considered incapable of playing the political "game," women are thought to bring "small" domestic quarrels with them to the unions. In this way, importance is taken away from the struggles of women unionists between themselves and with the union hierarchy, while justifying at the same time the intervention of the union leadership so as to conduct the committees in the "right direction" (Arthur, 1998b).

The common platform of action, based on the identities "woman" and "unionist," is weak because of the constraints of meaning of these terms. The category "woman" is linked to images of mother, wife and sister, while "unionist" is identified with images of worker and combatant. On both sides, militants have as point of reference practices of subordination in relation to men and the leadership. In this context, daring to think any differently is not without risk. The dilemma equality/difference is very present in collective and individual strategies, even if it is not conscious.

As soon as a woman engages in the struggle for women workers' rights, she speaks in the name of "women," although what is similar to women does not stem from a common identity but from discourses available in societies (Charles, 1996: 9-13). Rarely are the constructions about what "woman" means contested. On the contrary, there is always a tendency to accompany each claim with justifications, so as to make clear that the demands are made on the basis of the category "woman"—the matrix for action, never questioned. There is always present the fear of exceeding the limits of what is considered convenient. There are tensions between the norm to respect and the need to live according to one's wishes, "between what should be and what is, with the risk of being nothing" (Riot-Sarcey, 1988: 36). Imprisoned in this logic, women have difficulty in harmonizing their activities and their conformity to female types considered "normal." To what point can confrontations go without the risk of being trapped in a stigmatized image?<sup>68</sup> We are faced with a relation of forces that does not directly imply coercion, but rather a kind of "existential violence," exerted through the authoritarian attribution to each person of an individuality whose principles are external to it. These are procedures inspired by morals and reason, which impede a human being from constituting the self as a subject according to its own inclinations (Foucault, 1992; Riot-Sarcey, 1993a).

Faced with a limited choice of possibilities of action, women unionists have few alternatives: accept these conditions, challenge them openly, or seek to change them. Women's strategies and options are diverse. An apparent

acceptance of the "rules of the game" established by the union leadership may hide a strategy to achieve personal objectives and to reach a seat of power. On the other hand, examples of direct confrontation show how difficult it is to succeed that way.

Through the experiences of three women unionists presented below it is possible to perceive the diversity of motivations and interests of the women in the committees.

### THREE WOMEN, THREE EXPERIENCES

The three women whose careers we trace below all occupy or occupied positions of leadership in the committees. The challenge is to identify what constitutes the specificity of these individual life stories and comprehend the ways in which wider social forces act on the individual, profoundly shaping subjective experiences (Bozzoli, 1985).

Luisa M. is one of the leaders of the committees of the OTM-CS. Like many others, she began work in the unions as a staff member, before becoming known after independence for her political activity in the neighborhood-dynamizing groups. She is well known as a senior activist in the unions and for having fulfilled various leadership roles before the formation of the committees, having participated at crucial moments in the history of the movement—for example, taking a position in favor of the conservative wing during the internal struggles of 1992.<sup>69</sup>

As a committee leader, Luisa M. has a highly centralized and authoritarian managerial style, observable in seminars and in day-to-day relations: union members stand up when she enters the room, as is the practice with general secretaries of the unions. This imposition, however, may also be motivated by the search for recognition by the union hierarchy, considering that these are the unwritten norms guiding interactions and relations within the group—as has been observed in other situations when women are nominated for positions of authority (Hackney and Hogard, 1999).

Apart from this, the members address her using the term "mama," which denotes distance and great respect. In the meetings in which I happened to be present, once Luisa M. had given her opinion, the discussion was closed, which showed the authority she has over the other important members of the committee. I asked myself on what this was based.

Luisa M. maintains close relations with the union leadership consistent with her seniority and long experience, which make her trustworthy, and perhaps because of this she is accused of exercising vigilance in its favor.<sup>70</sup> The members of the committee complain that all their opinions about the functioning of the unions expressed during the internal meetings are transmitted to the union leadership. Although there is no proof, it is suspected

that Luisa M. is the informant,<sup>71</sup> which may be justified by the affirmation that her relations with the leadership constitute a special means of getting them to accept the committees and to remind them constantly that they are also part of the union organization and as such they must be taken into account by the movement.

One of the aspects characterizing the leadership of Luisa M. is the rigorous control in the management of funds, including the definition of strategies for their use. By these means the possibility of acting in conformity with the policies of the leadership of the committee are conditioned. Thus criticisms made of her are discreet.

Luisa M. upholds a strategy of unity between the unions and refuses on principle a division between committees of the two federations. She justifies her position affirming that at the level of women workers the commonality of interests should lead to the overcoming of all differences. Although attractive, because it appeals to solidarity in struggle, in reality this discourse retraces very real power strategies: being part of the OTM-CS and close to the central leadership of the committees, the subordination of those affiliated to CONSILMO is a means of widening her area of influence.

Luisa M. cultivates the appearance of modesty, which hides her determination, for she is a woman of power. Through the work of the committees, she seeks to impose herself and assert her authority through her knowledge of formal and informal networks in the union organization. Having no particular competencies, she chose these means to affirm herself.

Ana A.<sup>72</sup> was the coordinator of a Committee in a national union and executive secretary of the committee in the OTM-CS. She is 39, is married and has four children. Ana A. finished secondary school (including training in accountancy) after starting work. Later she also did professional training in laboratory techniques and informatics. At the age of 16 Ana A. began her working life as a clerk in a company that had been nationalized. Her union activities began in 1982 and in 1990 she was elected deputy secretary of the OMM in the company. As a result of this activity, through having become known by the women in the company and the union, Ana A. was chosen in 1993 to preside over the commission to set up the committee in her union, and was elected secretary of it in 1996. From 1994 she was a member of the National Council of her union and in 1995 was elected president of the Control Committee at the provincial level. Ana A. is also active politically at the local level: she was elected to be part of the political and decision-making organs, respectively, in 1988 and 1986. Her position in these posts was confirmed in elections in 1997.

It was Ana A. who took the initiative to contact me, because she was at the center of a conflict that put her against the leadership of her union. According to her version, problems began when she was directing the prepara-

tions for the creation of the committee: her attitude was considered very independent. The secretary-general of the union accused her of being disrespectful, aggressive and "confusionist."<sup>73</sup> The leadership of the union tried without success to prevent her being elected to the committee. Almost at the same time, Ana A. was also elected to the secretariat of the committee of the OTM-CS. Some months later Ana A. was informed of the withdrawal by her firm of the authorization enabling her to be away from work to attend meetings of the committee in the OTM-CS. She then learned from the company management that the decision stemmed from an unfavorable report given by her superiors in the union.

In this situation, Ana A. perceived that she was facing organized hostility and sought to obtain justice in the higher structure of her union organization and with the leaders of other committees. Although there was the verbal promise of support, there was also a certain hostility from some of her more influential women colleagues, who commented that she had made some mistakes, that she had "spoken too loudly." These attempts did not produce any result and the case was never resolved. Ana A. recounts:

I was desperate. During the whole process of the creation of the committees in the OTM, there was much insistence on the need of women to struggle to achieve their total emancipation so as to enjoy liberty and equality of rights in relation to men. There was also emphasis that all the strategies had to be based on solidarity among women. Even more, one of the functions of the committees was to serve as the base for the development of solidarity. If I was suffering harassment in my union as a result of my positions in defense of women, the other committees should help defend me, above all the committee of the OTM-CS! So where is this solidarity? What is happening is that union leaders officially accept the creation of the committees, but at heart are fearful of allowing women to take positions of greater importance in the unions. In most cases it is clear that they think that women cannot have the same rights as men, perhaps because they consider them inferior.

Ana A. had other, more open, conflicts concerning the management of funds of the committee of her union. The secretary general had diverted part of the donations given for training seminars. Ana A., deprived of resources to develop the planned activities, brought up the situation inside the union and also with the donors, for which she succeeded in organizing proof.<sup>74</sup>

The end of the process was the dismissal of Ana A. and her husband, who was also an employee of the company. According to her, the decision was suggested to the firm by the leadership of the union, so as to exclude her definitively from the committee. In fact, having lost her waged position in the company, her affiliation in the union lapsed. What seems to confirm

Ana's version is that the dismissals related to the readjustment of privatized companies are mainly of unqualified workers, which is not the case of Ana and her husband.<sup>75</sup> Ana A. sought to defend herself by directing letters to the higher structures of the union and of the federation, and to the "Women's Forum," the NGO that coordinates the activities of women's organizations. Here she produces proof of the bad faith of the union leadership: approval of her discharge by the company union committee was made before the company itself was aware of the matter. As the secretary-general of the union is the cousin of a manager of the company, Ana A. suspects that her discharge was effected through him. She also denounces the absence of transparency in the taking of decisions. The secretary-general is the only one with the right to an opinion and intimidates other members of the secretariat.

Ana A. has never received replies to her letters and, still very shocked, accuses her superiors—and in some cases produces evidence—of compromises with the male leadership of the unions, using as a pretext for non-intervention the autonomy of the national unions.<sup>76</sup>

Ana A. struggled and did not keep quiet. One of her strategies was personally to inform most of the committee secretaries of her situation, which resulted in their raising the problem in a seminar and demanding the adoption of a position. This reserved protest was immediately silenced and did not go forward.

On the other hand, Ana A. obtained funds and traveled more than 800 kilometers to meet with the president of the National Control Council of her union and to demand that the irregularities in the process be investigated. He agreed with her, but confessed to not having sufficient courage to challenge the executive of the union. Once again, there was no result.

This example seriously poses the question of the application of a policy of equality between men and women in the unions. Ana A. emphasized with a certain fatalism that the difference between the reality and what is written is enormous: "The unions struggle against the committees of women in various ways. They seek to manipulate and intimidate women unionists who say no. Notwithstanding all the democracy that is proclaimed, the unions operate in an autocratic, authoritarian and anti-democratic manner."

Between 1997 and 1999, with the help of international aid agencies, Ana A. conceived and directed a continuous training project—not affiliated to any union—for women unionists, which involved all the militants of the committees, and organized temporary paid work for the participants. This project closed in 2000 as a result of lack of financing, and at the moment Ana A. is unemployed.

Esmeralda M. was the secretary of the committees of CONSILMO. She is 42 and is a widow with two children. Her family invested much in the

education of their children; she was able to attend secondary school in the Swiss Mission and trained as a primary school teacher.

Esmeralda M. was one of the first women unionists I interviewed; she was very reserved and opened up only after the fourth meeting. When we became closer, she made an enormous contribution to the work. Esmeralda M. knows the case of Ana A., but could not intervene because she does not belong to the OTM-CS.

Esmeralda M. began her professional career in 1974 as a primary school teacher in a district in Maputo province. Interested in the great political changes of the period, she returned to the capital city, Maputo, even before independence. She began work in 1975 as a wage earner in a corporatist union surviving from colonial times. With the dissolution of the union, she kept the same job in the recently created production councils and later, when unions were created according to sector, she was employed in one of the three that subsequently formed CONSILMO.

In the union, Esmeralda M. began as a cashier and progressively advanced in her career. She finished secondary school and attended night courses in accounting. When I came to know her, she was the highest-qualified wage earner in the accounting section. She trained other staff members, including her boss, the secretary for administration and finance of the national union. Esmeralda's professional capacities have never been recognized and she complains: "I am the most senior of the women workers in my union, even in relation to those in office. The only sign of recognition is reference to this seniority during meetings, as if I were the historical archive of the union."<sup>77</sup>

Esmeralda M. describes herself as "honest" and states that this has not helped her in the organization. In 1997 they demoted her by two points in her category. This decision originated with the leadership, which justified it by saying that she was overworked and needed to rest. Esmeralda believes this attitude was motivated by vengeance and with foresight. In practice she controlled almost all the finances of the union and did not allow fraud in the operations for which she was responsible: "They called me the 'block' because I only paid properly accounted expenses."

She was appointed to direct the commission to create committees when SLIM was formed, which later converted into CONSILMO. At that time Esmeralda M. was very close to the person who came to be secretary-general of the union. She knew of the existing corruption and thought that the new candidate would improve the situation of the organization. She therefore gave her support and as she was better educated than the others, participated actively in the elaboration of the new statutes of SLIM. But as soon as "her" candidate took over the direction of the union, she was sidelined. Apart from this, after being elected secretary of the committees, she encountered new struggles, which did not contribute to the improvement of her relations with the leadership.

Esmeralda complains that she received numerous amorous suggestions from the secretary-general and other members of the secretariat. During visits abroad for conferences, when there were mixed groups, it was quite usual "in the middle of the night for your colleague or chief to knock on the door." At that time they were usually drunk, she adds. Esmeralda says she never acceded and this resulted in a surprised reaction, her colleagues accepting with difficulty that a woman alone as she was could refuse their proposals. Indeed, for this reason, she began to be called "woman-man," and other epithets. She states she attaches no importance to such attitudes.

An important problem for Esmeralda M. continues to be corruption, which she considers to be the use of means and goods of the organization for personal ends, without respect for the fundamental objectives of the union. This corruption takes diverse forms: diversion of funds, improper use of the budget, and favoritism. Authoritarian methods are the result of this situation, as they are necessary to silence critics and dissidents. The male opponents to the present direction of the union—also called the "silent opposition"—(Rosserat, 1991: 64) tried to recruit Esmeralda M. to their ranks, but she remained on the sidelines, although she shared some of their positions. She thinks that beyond the critique is the ambition of supplanting the present leadership "so as to be able to do the same thing," as had happened before. She does not want to be instrumentalized again.

In respect of the relations between the leadership and the committees, Esmeralda is conscious of the control that is exercised over their activities and the militants:

Internally, the committee is ignored, except when delegations come. Women are then invited, just for show. On these occasions, the least word is minutely analyzed, so they will know who to marginalize. For example, when there was a training course organized by a Brazilian union federation, for the first time the women were invited. The teachers said to us: "We do not have a program. You must raise the questions to be debated and then attempt to reach solutions." One of the women present indicated the absence of democracy in the union and the weak participation of workers from the firms. She also mentioned that there were only three people who took decisions, contrary to statutory principles. As a result of this contribution, she was called to a closed meeting to analyze her behavior. She received much criticism and her name was put on the blacklist. [...] A curious fact is that no one dares to do anything to change the situation.

The committee has no budget of its own, and does not even have the simplest equipment, such as paper or a typewriter (not to speak of a computer). Esmeralda M. regrets that much money is spent uselessly, such as in the exaggerated quantities of food and drink each time there is a reception.

Consumption is always high and what is left (whisky and beer) is divided among the members of the leadership and their cronies.

Esmeralda does not believe in female solidarity. Although she has good relations with women militants of the unions, she has no particular friends. She judges women harshly who, she says, are fearful and dread repression and at the same time are proud of their reputation as "rebels." Esmeralda M. is a little cynical about the situation of the union, which she thinks is "hopeless." She thinks that if she were a man her career would have been different, but that she would certainly not have been on the side of the leadership, because the cause of her exclusion does not reside solely on the fact of being a woman, but also on her attitude: "The leaders like to have their boots licked, but this I cannot do."

In 1997, Esmeralda M. wished to begin studying again and later leave the union. This was in agreement with her family's opinion, which had pressed her for some time to look for another better paid job with fewer problems. However, at the end of the year she was dismissed from her functions as secretary of the committees in the union head office, by decision of the secretary-general, without consulting the assembly of women unionists that had elected her. Nominated in her place was a unionist who does not live in the capital, which leaves the committee totally inoperative.

In 2000, Esmeralda M. resigned and, with help of Ana A., competed for a post in a women's NGO, where she presently works.

## CONCLUSIONS

The inability of the unions to react to the new problems posed by liberalization since 1987 revealed their dependence on political power. It was internal struggle and workers' protest movements that led to the process of democratization of the organizations. However, in the OTM as well as in CONSILMO, the discourses and practices that define and guide the action of the committees show much homogeneity and at the same time insulation from the debate on the need for internal democracy. Leaders of the two union federations agreed to limit the actions of the new organs to "women's problems" and to maintain them in strict dependence on the existing structure of the union. Discourses on the participation of women and on the rights of women workers are similarly conservative and, although they do not contest the abstract principle of equality, they (re)create difference between genders that legitimates discriminatory practices.

The history of women's participation in the unions gained visibility with the creation of the committees, above all because prior to this period women's contestation was disqualified—because it was developed around the OMM—or because they did come to constitute themselves into organized pressure movements. However, the adherence of women to the project of creating

committees reveals a consciousness of inequality, and the process of their creation, centered on the general debate of "women's problems," contributed to the formation of a common platform between women unionists.

Women union militants recognize themselves as different, although this recognition does not always imply making the best use of characteristics considered female. The three women whose careers were recounted above reflect diverse discourses and strategies, all based on a presumed female identity. There is at least the appearance of a posture of acceptance of male protection, and of the application of dominant models of organization and management by the unions of the committees. It is an authoritarian model, which severely restricts participation of women unionists, but which can also be seen from other viewpoints. On the one hand, if the male leadership instrumentalizes a woman leader, it is equally, to a degree, instrumentalized in a markedly individual struggle for power. On the other hand, despite everything, the committees are increasingly "accepted" in a dynamic of acceptance/imposition that results from a negotiation of power spaces: they are seen to be centrally important for the union organization as a symbol or as the appearance of democracy but, at the same time, their potentially subversive character is removed and mechanisms are activated to make them inoffensive to the established order. The very imposition of authoritarian models of leadership contributes to this to the extent that the committees do not introduce new, more democratic, forms of participation that might come to empower protest movements within the unions.

In this search for power, the strategy of the first leader is necessarily through the reinforcing of the committees in the union structure, thus to create spaces that can come to enable new contestation. Clearly, the control exercised over women militants seeks to impede this possibility, but their existence is important for the emergence of other voices. The risk is that these spaces for discussion will themselves become subject to hierarchy.

We next have a discourse that argues for the solidarity that should be promoted and materialized in the practice of the committees. The strategies of this militant are based on the demand for the values implicit at the time of the founding of the Committees, and she does nothing more than require their full implementation in the name of the "true" nature of these organizations—which is echoed among other women militants. Unable to help their colleague, they nevertheless recognize that such would be the course most in keeping with the objectives that are said to orient the committees.

Finally, the third militant does not accept being different through being a woman and reacts when she is attributed women's characteristics and behavior, in which she does not recognize herself at all. Although struggling for greater transparency and participation, she thinks this should be developed within the union, failing which the committees would not have the

possibility of acting. If she does not believe in women's solidarity, it is because in the final analysis she does not recognize the difference.

In the struggle to effect their rights, various paths are followed by women unionists. Accepting or refusing the models that are imposed, contesting male domination in the union takes the form of demands for citizenship. In practice, the abstraction of the individual "before the law," bereft of social characteristics, which constitutes the legal basis of citizenship, is refused. This equality before the law is not a principle of social equality, but rather of neutrality and impartiality between the parts that appear before the law as equals—which omits the social causes of inequality, whether wealth, class, or sex, and treating individuals without the social characteristics of inequality (Cohn and White, 1997). However, while investing in "gender training" of women unionists and women union leaders, the strategies of the committees follow the line of "promotion of women" and rarely contest the power relations that form the basis of gender inequality. But to what extent does the isolation of the women's organizations, their financial weakness and the difficulty in obtaining help at the local and international level permit other options?

Five years after their creation, in assessing the functioning of the committees we can highlight the increasingly wide involvement of women unionists in their activities, at the national level and in the workplace, as well as their slow but progressive insertion in the national unions and federations. Although the dominant strategy is to avoid direct confrontation, in practice conditions are being created such that when women unionists decide to struggle in a more frontal and open manner for their rights they will have a forum and appropriate organs to make their voices heard.

But, to the present, the fairy-tale solidarity between women, a trap into which it is easy to fall—perhaps because we need to believe in it—only exists when conditions so permit and strategies coincide. Conflicts and tensions indicate the diversity of interests and spheres of action, but discontent exists and the union leadership shows knowledge of it. After all, ghosts have the power to terrify because at times they do interfere in the world of the living.

#### Notes

- 1 The expression of M. Foucault.
- 2 The research forming the basis of this chapter took place in 1997 in Maputo; some of the information was updated in 1999 and 2000. Twenty-four women's committee leaders and 15 leaders of national and provincial unions and workplace committees were interviewed. Observation was possible through participation in seminars and workshops organized by the committees and national union organizations. Informants are referred to in the text by

- pseudonyms. Most of the existing statements used in this chapter are unpublished, and were consulted in the archives of the OTM-Mozambican Labor Organization and the documentation center of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Maputo.
- 3 That this preoccupation was common to general and provincial secretaries prompted me to reflect on its significance, which is more than it appears at first sight. In fact, by giving me at the outset a key to understanding the creation and the place of the committees, my informants were establishing the structure within which the interview would be circumscribed. Speaking of women unionists, they referred to them as "others," as if I myself were not female. Implicitly, I was seen as an equal, as if I did not have the same femaleness as the militants of the committees. This attitude was important to understand the nature of the relations that they maintain with women unionists, whom they think they should guide and help, while at the same time limiting the action of the committees.
  - 4 With these members, relations were always much more cordial, based on mutual recognition. Although an "outsider," I was still seen first as a "woman." From the first interviews, my informants showed great openness and, despite knowing that I had regular meetings with the union secretaries, none thought it necessary to ask me to make sure that nothing of our conversation "escaped." However, they did warn me against doing so with other women I might still interview. It was as if it were thought in some way impossible that I might denounce them to the men while, through an excess of confidence, I might make known the subject of our talks to other militants. This attitude of confidence had a tendency to grow with some and diminish with others. As my contacts broadened and I began to see the conflicts between unionists, they became more prudent. There was always doubt as to what I might have been told and concern to give me their version of the facts. This situation was difficult to manage, the more so as some attempted to show they were closer to me than others. At the end of a certain period, I became aware that my presence was being used in the power games in play in the committees.
  - 5 According to the 1997 Census, 1,049,906 individuals are wage-workers. Of this number 233,641 are women. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing are not included in these statistics.
  - 6 OTM-CS, Departamento de Organização, 1999. There is no information on the sex proportions. It was not possible to obtain data relating to the three unions affiliated to CONSILMO.
  - 7 Comutra, OTM-CS, 1998.
  - 8 The expression "woman worker" means waged women, who represent the exception. Domestic workers or peasants are not included in this category. The expression "man worker" does not exist.
  - 9 Information from the "Seminar on privatization in the democratic process—political and social effects," Maputo, 1996.
  - 10 Today, however, some admit that these *ad hoc* committees arose because the union committees did not represent the workers and not only were divorced from their members but also did not defend them (PADEP, 1996, "Entrevista colectiva," Maputo).
  - 11 From 1992, the unions included in their training programs a module on PRE, its social and economic effects, and privatization.
  - 12 The single union created in 1983 and converted into a union federation in 1990.
  - 13 See "Seminário sobre as privatizações no processo democrático—efeitos políticos e sociais," organized by SLIM, Maputo, 4–5/11/1996.
  - 14 In their initial formulation, the Production Councils, afterwards transformed into the OTM, controlled by the Frelimo Party, had the function of mobilizing workers for the "battle of production" (Machel, 1976).
  - 15 The unions, supported by international union federations and NGOs, began analyzing unionism in Mozambique. Various seminars with this aim were held between 1992 and 1996. One union leader, asked to evaluate this transition, stated: "It was only then, with multi-partyism, that we began to see that we affirmed 'Viva Frelimo! Viva Samora!' instead of 'Viva Us!' We could not hold strikes, we could not make direct criticism of the government, even when we saw great wrongs being done, because the government was ours and our cooperation was only with socialist countries" (PADEP, 1996, "Entrevista colectiva," Maputo).
  - 16 On the analysis that the union members make of this period, see SINTIQUIGRA, 1997a.
  - 17 Frelimo officially abandoned Marxism–Leninism in 1990, at the time of the V Congress. However, from 1987, the OTM had not received state financial support.
  - 18 The OTM continues with 14 unions, while SLIM represents only three.
  - 19 According to one union leader: "This law gave new impetus to the union movement in Mozambique. However, there were different viewpoints about its application, content and perspectives for union action" (Simbine, 1995).
  - 20 Decreto 7/94.
  - 21 According to an evaluation made in 1997, there was still no real "Tripartite Forum" that might resolve rapidly and effectively the problems arising during the transformation process (SINTIQUIGRA, 1997a).
  - 22 SINTIQUIGRA, 1997b.
  - 23 Information disclosed at "Seminário do Comutra para Política de Género," OTM-CS, Matola, 11–13 November 2000.
  - 24 Given the similarity of these OTM and SLIM/CONSILMO bodies, to facilitate exposition we will use "Committees" to mean both COMUTRA and CONMUT.
  - 25 This cooperation is maintained today, through training and education programs.
  - 26 For example, the training seminar for the metalworkers-union, SINTIME, in 1996, the title of which was "The role of women in union activities." No

- woman unionist was asked to preside at the sessions, and of the six addresses given, only one was delivered by a woman.
- 27 Created by Frelimo in 1973, it had the juridical status of “mass democratic organization” (Organização Democrática de Massas—ODM).
- 28 “Seminário do Comutra para Política de Género,” OTM-CS, Matola, 11–13 November 2000.
- 29 Mula, 1996; the borrowing from the OMM song of the expression “inseparable companion” should be noted.
- 30 Tembe, 1996.
- 31 My emphasis.
- 32 See the following references: Cossa (1996), Manjaze (1996a, 1996b, 1997), Matusse (1996), Mula (1996), Nhaca (1995), Simbine (1995), Tembe (1996), Zunguza (1996).
- 33 Cossa, 1996.
- 34 “The party as the conscience of women” (Gadant, 1989: 211).
- 35 João T., personal interview, 1997.
- 36 Cossa, 1996.
- 37 Tembe, 1996.
- 38 See the intervention of D. Tembe (1996) above, and Júlio A., personal interview, 1997.
- 39 Lei de Trabalho, 8/85, Preamble: “All rights must be guaranteed to women workers, in complete equality with men, while adequate conditions must be created for their integration at work, enabling the simultaneous development of their creative capacity and the upholding of their superior function as mothers and educators.”
- 40 Tembe, 1996.
- 41 See “Estatutos da OTM-CS” and those of unions affiliated to SLIM.
- 42 Collective interview with the executive secretariat of SINTIME, 1997; Júlio A., personal interview, 1997; Alvaro M., personal interview, 1997.
- 43 SINTEVEC, 1997.
- 44 Luís B., personal interview, 1997.
- 45 Collective interview with the executive secretariat of SINTIME, 1997; Jaboco M., personal interview, 1997; Horácio E., personal interview, 1997; Santos M., personal interview, 1997.
- 46 Ana A., personal interview, 1997; Rita E., personal interview, 1997; Esmeralda M., personal interview, 1997.
- 47 Fundação Friedrich Ebert//Comités de Mulheres de Sindicatos Nacionais, 1997.
- 48 Ana A., personal interview, 1997.
- 49 Conclusions from the seminar “Estratégias futuras para os Comités de Mulheres Trabalhadoras” (Fundação Friedrich Ebert/Comités de Mulheres de Sindicatos Nacionais, 1997).
- 50 Esmeralda M., personal interview, 1997.

- 51 Alda B., personal interview, 2000.
- 52 For one sector of public opinion, the government’s position was suspect, and indirectly accused it of being on the side of the employers, seeing that one sector of its membership are also entrepreneurs (*Savana*, 28 July 2000, “Com o governo no meio do barulho, empregadores e sindicatos arrastaram-se”). Leaders of various political parties argued that the strike would have been justified and even inevitable, accusing the government of being unwilling to resolve labor problems at a juncture in which social differentiation was increasing and the gap between rich and poor wider than ever (*Notícias*, 26 July 2000, “Oposição acusa o Governo de faltar à vontade política”; *Savana*, 28 July 2000, “Apesar da aparente cedência do Governo, trabalhadores continuam desiludidos com salário mínimo”). There was also general praise for the union leadership—until then suspected of close connection with the party politics of FRELIMO—for having conducted the negotiations with firmness.
- 53 “Estrangeiros tentaram apoiar na organização da greve—disse Chissano em Xai-Xai,” *Domingo*, 30 July 2000.
- 54 Artur M., personal interview, 2000.
- 55 OTM-CS/Comité Nacional de Educação e Formação Sindical, 1995.
- 56 Taju, 1996.
- 57 Chemane, 1995.
- 58 Timana, 1996.
- 59 Almeida, 1996.
- 60 Also called “sexual persecution” in the manual.
- 61 The committee of the transport union defines as one of its objectives: “To combat superiority or inferiority complexes, which constitute the insuperable basis of discrimination against women” (SINTRAT, 1996).
- 62 Rita E., personal interview, 1997; see also, Esmeralda M., personal interview, 1997; Dora T., personal interview, 1997.
- 63 OTM-CS/Comité Nacional de Educação e Formação Sindical, 1995: 42.
- 64 OTM-CS/Comité Nacional de Educação e Formação Sindical, 1995: 5.
- 65 Articles 154, 155 and 156, of the first Labor Law (8/85) after independence.
- 66 OTM-CS/Comité Nacional de Educação e Formação Sindical, 1995: 85–86.
- 67 Marta M., personal interview, 1997; Ana A., personal interview, 1997; Dora T., personal interview, 1997.
- 68 This is a current debate for the feminist struggle. If the deconstruction of identity has a fundamental importance for the conduct of a policy of resistance, it can also provoke a certain instability: who are we and why are we struggling? If it is necessary to be critical about the concept “woman” they wish to impose, how do we discover what we are? Snitow puts this question in the following manner: “It may be a pleasure to be *we*, and it may be strategically imperative to struggle as *we*, but who, they ask, are *we*?” (1990: 10; author’s emphasis).

- 69 The former leadership was opposed for its authoritarianism, but persisted in blocking change. This crisis of the OTM led to the schism resulting in the founding of SLIM (see Moyana, 1995).
- 70 As was noted by Rita F, personal interview, 1997.
- 71 Rita F, personal interview, 1997; Aida B., personal interview, 1997.
- 72 Five interviews in 1997.
- 73 "Confusionist": neologism in national political parlance, used to stigmatize individuals who do not follow a politically convenient line and for this reason represent a malign influence on others.
- 74 The diversion of funds was confirmed by the agency that financed the committee's activities.
- 75 The latter had secondary level training in Cuba.
- 76 Other union members have confirmed to us Ana A.'s version (Marta M., personal interview, 1997; Esmeralda M., personal interview, 1997).
- 77 Quotation from the document Esmeralda M. wrote at my request, in which she presents her situation and her feelings in relation to the functioning of the committee and the unions.

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