

RHODES UNIVERSITY

*Transformativity: recognising melancholic power, and renegotiating vulnerability.*

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree  
MASTER OF ARTS

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December 2010

## **ABSTRACT**

South African universities are embedded in an unequal society. Transformation strategies and interventions in the sector attempt to address this, but arguably, the policies and practices which aim to bring about transformation are merely platforms for potential change and do not guarantee the achievement of their aspirations. This study engages with the notion of transformation in one university, looking at how an organisation for women has contributed to transformation in individuals and in the institution. It explores the idea that vulnerability is the starting point of transformation, and must be recognized and incorporated into how an organisation, institution or individual regards vulnerable groups, in order to build a more equitable society. The reframing of vulnerability is a process of acknowledging the way power works, and arguably, power's melancholic nature and expression in society and in universities has particular challenges with regard to how vulnerable groups experience their vulnerability. If the framing of an individual as vulnerable does not also provide that individual with the conditions that shelter the vulnerability they experience, leading to a renegotiation of whom they can become, their "vulnerable" status is entrenched. The study explores ways in which an organisation for women uses its legitimized platform for renegotiating subjectivities, norms and performances, and the potential this has for transformativity.

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## Acknowledgements

*to womb it may:*

handmaiden of our common purpose  
i will bring what i have brought all along:  
my belly  
my ankles  
my tongue  
every finger, with traces of geranium  
and ash

(you may speak me metaphorically  
and I will ooze between  
the toes of the feet that have walked  
many miles  
in my shoes  
while i have learnt to tiptoe naked)

but i cannot, will not, lower the eyes  
of my curiosity and care.  
i will become you  
with a curtsy.

To SOAW, particularly the generous participants in interviews and questionnaires;

To Prof Louise Vincent, inspiring supervisor;

To SUSA, particularly the vice chancellor;

To Henriette van Zyl, proof reader and editor extraordinaire;

To Injairu Kulundu, role-model and hip replacement;

To family and friends who have indulged my lack of attention or theoretical rambling;

Thank you. You are part of my transformation, and the promise of unpredictable, transformative futures.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

How does transformation happen? In South Africa where multiple translations of what it is to be human are being performed, transformation is an aspiration and a strategy to bring about a society which recognises people equally, regardless of the identity categories of race, sex, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity and so forth. In order to include a wide spectrum of people in how we recognise, nurture and inspire each other, we have aspirations and ideas around transformation, which shift with curious responsiveness to a changing environment. But transformation as a notion has also come to imply policies, quotas, strategies, and similarly rigid expressions, which resist fluidity, and attempt to make institutions and leaders accountable for behaviours according to predetermined criteria. And thus the term assumes a fixedness, which then also opens itself to multiple translations. So transformation has acquired associations and meanings, inspires interventions and policies, and is inserted into the discourses of, amongst other sectors, universities in South Africa. But transformation is not only concerned with shifting societal structures and institutions: it happens in people, in individuals, whether they are part of the dominant group or not, and whether or not they are adequately recognised and supported by transformation strategies. As will be argued, it happens because of *and* despite transformation policies, with unpredictable consequences. Transformativity, or the possibility for transformation, exists in the dynamic between subjects and the norms which they perform and perpetuate. While much of recent research into gender transformation in South African universities identifies the barriers to and challenges for transformation more broadly (for example Mabokela (2003), Perumal (2007), amongst others) this thesis explores instances of transformation in an individual context, drawing on the dynamic relationships between the norms of a university and an organisation for women, and the fluid subjectivities of individuals within these.

In order to examine how transformation happens in a particular context, this study engages with the work of an organisation, the Solidarity Organisation for Academic Women (SOAW), at a small university in South Africa (SUSA), where, it will be shown, transformation happens. It happens as a result of a number of relationship dynamics and processes, and the thesis considers imagined and constructed identities between members of the organisation, the organisation and the institution, and the researcher and researched. The aim of the research is to examine if and how SOAW contributes to gender transformation at SUSA, and in the lives of individual women, where the paucity of women in powerful positions, publications, or PhD programmes renders them a vulnerable group in the institution. It will be argued that not only does transformation have a particular language in the university sector, but transformation is experienced by individuals (for

example, in SOAW) because of a variety of factors – some of which are built into how the institution (SUSA) and the organisation (SOAW) conceived and conceives itself through the interaction of its members. At SUSA, transformation is arguably and partially achieved through individuals or groups who claim agency because of SUSA's stated transformation policies and strategies. This agency is not necessarily given to women at SUSA, but, as will be shown, is claimed by them because their status within the university is considered vulnerable or precarious, and the university is thus compelled (for example, by the annual Labour Law reporting requirements) to attend to the situation. It does this, for example, through policies and protocols which enshrine gender and race equality. But on their own, these policies do not necessarily effect change – change happens when individuals assert their right to be recognised and nurtured in terms of these policies and statements of intention, arguably because they have access to and understanding of them. This access and understanding is facilitated by working as a collective and sharing insight, amongst other strategies which SOAW employs, as will be shown in the thesis. SOAW arguably exists on the margins of the organisation, is independently funded, and is autonomously run by democratic elections and according to their own evolving capacities and ideologies.

At SUSA, women's acknowledged vulnerability in the institution was the impetus for the formation of SOAW. Vulnerability is a starting point for examining transformation in this setting, and has overlaps with how vulnerability is perceived more broadly in South African society. In this thesis, the notion of vulnerability is explored by means of empirical data as well as the adaptation of theories, particularly of Judith Butler, with reference to Homi K. Bhabha and others. So the thesis examines the context of the emergence of SOAW (in the South African university sector, and of SUSA) through analysis of oral history, institutional and organisational texts and documents, auto-ethnography and the relationship between the authors of these. It uses Butler's theory of subjectivity, performativity and normativity to develop categories in which to interpret and analyse these, and offers an animation of the moments and circumstances in which, arguably, transformation happens. The moments of transformation which are selected for analysis are precarious moments, held together by a number of causal and contingent threads, drawn together by insider research and a subjective perspective; as such, the thesis presents threads to follow without necessarily providing a blue-print for all transformation, and without necessarily fitting neatly into a predetermined format.

The power relationships between societies and members are the ultimate focus of transformation strategies, and this thesis looks at power from the perspective of a consequence: vulnerability. Providing a theoretical, as well as a national and specific context for this perspective on vulnerability, the thesis furthermore explores a reading of the personal transformation of the researcher in

relation to these – so while this thesis might not provide a general view of transformation or transformativity, it is through demonstrating the effects of particular dynamics on the researcher, as an insider, that the work of transformation becomes visible.

The state's focus on equity and non-discrimination as a transformation strategy provides a framework in which "vulnerable" groups and categories are identified, and live their vulnerability in institutions and societies which deal with this in ways which could, arguably, exacerbate their vulnerability. The fact that "women" are in a category along with "children" and "disabled", means that women are identified in South Africa as part of a vulnerable group, requiring special approaches. But has this identification of their vulnerable status led to a decrease, for instance, in incidents of rape and domestic violence? Has it provided women, individually and collectively, with greater access to resources and power? Has it helped women to regard themselves as valuable, and men to do so? Perhaps the recognition of vulnerability is only the first step in the possible transformation of individuals and structures. Perhaps if recognition is not also accompanied by the renegotiation and expansion of what is understood as "woman" and by opportunities to perform a version of being a woman where vulnerability is sheltered and accommodated, women will continue to be constructed as potential victims and survivors, entrenching their vulnerability in society.

South Africa's ongoing status globally as one of the most violent societies, especially against women, suggests that vulnerability as a status of certain identity categories has merely provided a descriptive language. The struggle against imperialism, colonialism, apartheid and patriarchy have shaped the norms and experiences of women and men, black and white, in South Africa, and these legacies have a particular embodiment in the way in which power is understood and vulnerability is acknowledged. Despite our progressive constitution, our histories and presents are infused with expressions of power which damage and dismiss people who are constructed as inferior, and who then become vulnerable. Perhaps when this happens, power is the acting out of a fear of vulnerability, rather than recognition of it. It can only then perform in terms designed with fear and vulnerability as founding but unacknowledged principles. If I fear vulnerability, I cannot admit to being vulnerable, because that would make me vulnerable, which I fear. I could then assert power, using whichever claims of superiority are available, and behave in violent and oppressive ways to those I have constructed to be less important than myself. Across race, class and country, women have been deemed inferior in multiple sites of practice, or they have been managed and dominated without their input, and are thus a vulnerable group in South Africa.

Co-existent with women's vulnerability in South Africa is the slow but steady increase of women appointed into senior positions in state, society and institutions, as will be explored in this thesis. Equity policies, quotas, and various transformation imperatives and strategies have helped to secure this increase in women appointed to powerful positions, including one of the highest representations of women in government in the world. In a patriarchal society, women achieve power by strategies and efforts which have not necessarily grappled with the factors which excluded them in the first place. The bureaucratic and organisational frameworks which define their experiences as managers and leaders, have also traditionally defined them as women in particular ways which limit their success. These frameworks were founded without, necessarily, their inclusion, and so arguably only legitimise portions of who they are, while rendering other parts of them as deviant or invisible. The normative frameworks which govern a society will only ever perpetuate vulnerability if they are not also destabilised and subverted, and if they themselves do not transform.

As mentioned, this study engages with the question of transformation at a South African university. As will be explored, South African universities function within a particular context which could facilitate or inhibit transformation. Women, particularly black women, have been identified and constructed as a vulnerable group in the sector. So in universities, this identity category entrenches both the site of oppression, and potential transformation. The recognition of a particular identity group, deserving of specific strategies to stimulate their progress, is only the start of a transformation process, and the very identity category must be open to expansion in order to bring about substantive change.

So the identity categories of "women" or "black" are problematic binaries in an environment which has traditionally regarded men and whites as superior. Arguably, transformation strategies aim ultimately at minimising the distinctions between identity categories. Perhaps the achievement of equity on individual as well as structural levels would see different distinguishing features emerging to differentiate between one group of people and another – such as for example capacity, potential, experience or interests. Or perhaps what is currently understood as an identity polarity (between, say, white and black, rich and poor, man and woman, young and old) would be recognised instead as a continuum of common consciousness, expanding the notion of the self to include the other, and leading to a new accommodation and respect for difference. The thing about transformation, the idea beyond the policies, is that we cannot necessarily predict where it goes. Just as identity categories *per se* have problematic histories which work against the removal of polarities and hierarchies in their embodiment, the term "transformation" implies change, from an unsatisfactory

present to an idealised future, and this will always insert the possibility of unpredictability. Many humans resist change, and the thought of it inspires fear and uncertainty. While being defined and living as a woman in South Africa today might assume a status of vulnerability, transformation aspirations which define strategies and interventions to assist women to equitable status inherently destabilise the known present in order to explore an unknown future, which could also be seen as *creating* vulnerability. Perhaps our fear of vulnerability is partly why we feel the need to map an uncertain future in terms which are destined to perpetuate our vulnerability, because we resist submitting to uncertainty by clinging to definitions and identity categories and meanings that fix and limit our possibilities and imaginings.

Transformation happens when we reconfigure vulnerability, when we recognise it, acknowledge it, and incorporate it into how we reframe who we are and can become. This can happen anywhere where identity categories are felt to be oppressive, because it is in the resistance to limiting categories, in the acknowledgement that individuals in that category have different notions of who they are and how they could be, that opportunities are found to renegotiate meanings.

At SUSA, a group of women recognised their vulnerability in an institution which both identified them as a vulnerable group, and treated them in ways which perpetuated their vulnerability. They formed SOAW, which, I argue in this thesis, shelters the vulnerability which women experience in the academic environment, and uses a new normative framework in the century old institution to do so. In the relationships between members of SOAW, and in the relationship between SOAW and SUSA, there are opportunities to expand frameworks and experiences to be more inclusive- not only of women, but of all “othered” groups considered to be vulnerable because of their reluctant assimilation into senior positions and the relatively small number of scholarly articles or post-Master’s degrees accomplished by them.

In order to explain the perpetuation of discrimination and violence, we need to examine the conditions and dynamics in which it operates. If the site of oppression is also the site of liberation, what is the spark which inspires the transformation rather than perpetuation of inequitable conditions? How do oppressed groups find and use agency to transform the frameworks which dominate them? There is a way to view agency as an effect of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed which is explored in the thesis: if I am framed as being part of a vulnerable group, and especially if I am so described in order to legitimate strategies to transform inequity, I am already provided with a language to renegotiate the conditions of my oppression and liberation, and with a platform to change my performance as a “woman”. In many ways SOAW has provided such a

platform in SUSa, which has developed the language. As I argue in the thesis, SOAW has been able in some instances to contribute new translations of SUSa's language, in order to expand what is meant by the notions of vulnerability and inclusivity.

Transformativity is the capacity for transformation which exists in the particular relationships between a subject, the norms which frame her experience, and other members of that community. If vulnerable individuals or groups are able to perform new and different versions of themselves in the same environment which also fails to acknowledge their difference, they are provided with a new dimension for experiencing not only themselves, but all others: their own possibilities for more than one version of themselves in one environment destabilises other fixed identity categories, which then opens up the possibilities for transformation.

My intimate involvement with SOAW and SUSa is explained in the next chapter, as well as a discussion of the methods which have framed this research. The conditions of the SUSa environment which gave birth to both the alienation of women, as well as the inclusion of women in an organisation to support and represent them, are contextualised in the South African university environment in Chapter 3. Judith Butler's theoretical concepts have provided a categorising lens through which to view transformation and to generate the idea of transformativity, and Chapter 4 explores these concepts and how I understand, use and adapt them. Chapter 5 explains SOAW's emergence, and individual members' stories and contributions help to highlight aspects of the organisation that lend themselves to theoretical analysis. In Chapter 6, the theoretical concepts explored and explained in Chapter 4 are used to discover and illustrate how and where transformation happens, and how precarious and unpredictable transformation can be, through an analysis of SOAW's emergence and development, in the dynamic between the organisation and the institution, and between individual members. Chapter 7 draws together the conclusions of the thesis, and suggests some of the limitations and potentials of the study.

Ultimately, the thesis exposes some of the tensions and considerations in how we frame and perform gender and its transformation, acknowledging that the category and the aspiration have the potential to take us in directions we should not and cannot anticipate.

## Chapter 2: Methodological concepts and framework

Gender transformation in higher education is increasingly a focus of research, especially feminist research, in post-apartheid South Africa. Hassim (2001, 2004), De La Rey (1999, 2005), Potgieter (2002), Shackleton (2006), Perumal (2007), Mabokela (2001, 2003) and many others have written about gendered relationships in South African higher education, employing a range of styles, perspectives and methods, all broadly fitting into the “feminist” research category. Though this thesis would also fit into that category, it could be argued that the methodology of the study (as is often the case with feminist research) uses epistemologies and methodologies from different paradigms, troubling, as is its purpose, known and acceptable ways of doing things.

Marjorie DeVault argues that ‘feminists make decisions about how to respond to institutional contexts that sometimes welcome and sometimes resist feminist insights’ and that they choose their foci based on the material and intellectual resources they have at their disposal. For this reason, she claims, ‘feminist methodology will not be found in some stable orthodoxy but in an evolving dialogue’ (DeVault 1996:31). Feminist researchers, then, use a range of methodologies, though these are, argues Juliet Perumal, ‘identifiable by [its] preference for qualitative research strategies and processes’ (Perumal 2007: 19). Traditionally, and especially in political rather than sociological research, feminist methodology tends to use data which might only illuminate one or a few individuals’ perspectives, rather than provide the broad perspectives of bulk statistics which quantitative research tends to employ; and, as is the case in this thesis, could use this perspective to apply a principle with broader applicability. It strives to access these perspectives using one or more of a variety of methods, including focus group discussions, oral history, in-depth interviews, auto ethnography, and open-ended questionnaires – not necessarily to apply broadly, but to illuminate unvoiced individual experience. Not everyone agrees with the validity of using these methods – for instance, Mats Alvesson warns that users of these kinds of research interviews sometimes naively claim to capture experience, while in fact they might merely allude to a reality which is constructed by the researcher and researched, following guidelines established by research traditions. He suggests five ways to overcome this, particularly where the researcher is an insider – including self-irony, challenging common-sense theoretically, having a broad ‘interpretive repertoire’, using a meta-level position to use one’s own choices and research practice as a target for interpretation, and the shifting of positions and orientations in order to avoid bias. He concludes that ‘the researcher needs to engage in an ambitious struggle with his/her personal and cultural framework’ (Alvesson 2003: 189). While this thesis did not set out deliberately to follow these guidelines, the nature of the theory, and the process of my engagement with it, in considering the focus

organisation and my involvement in it, meant that these guidelines were used to shape the thesis as it evolved.

In justifying her use of autobiographical essays and individual interviews in her research, Perumal asserts that feminist research methodologies aspire to 'acknowledge the subjective, emotional and biographical factors that shape the researcher and the researched', and that establish 'non-hierarchical, dialogic, mutually educative encounters' between them (Perumal 2007:190). Feminist researchers confront power in society, as well as in the research process, and try to make it visible as well as to limit power from expressing itself in inhibiting ways. So the methods of data collection in feminist research and in this study are used in order to make visible what has tended to be invisible by giving "voice" to women's voices in order to illuminate and legitimate *their*, if not others', lived experience.

But while feminism tends to use similar (qualitative) methods, and as a discourse and paradigm has some common features, the ways of knowing and being as a feminist researcher are varied. Arguably, feminist research could draw on methods associated with a number of paradigms in order to bring about a number of outcomes – to gain understanding or explain phenomena, and to bring about change, through troubling given understandings. In many ways, this has been the process of this research, inspired by using methods of data-collection and analysis in which narrative, text and auto-ethnographic accounts, phenomenology and the relation between symbolic meanings, and some deconstruction are used.

This way of thinking and of doing research assumes that we construct reality between us, and that there is not necessarily an objective reality out there. Its methods of conducting research include exploring the realities that people create for and between themselves (through, for instance, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, situational or contextual analysis, and reflection) based on society's construction of how things should be, and perpetuated by its subjects. This thesis fits into the critical theory paradigm, but has strayed into social constructionism and even interpretivism at times, displaying, as Alvesson suggests, an 'intellectual curiosity' which is essentially risky (Alvesson 2003:190).

The challenge in a critical theory approach is in its application to empirical research. This thesis has tracked the development of SOAW through its minutes, documented and lived events within the university, discussions on the SOAW listserv, and focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Through this process, the reality constructed between members of the university, between university and SOAW structures, and between members of SOAW is explored and troubled,

highlighting non-congruence; phenomenological theory has been applied to the data in order to demonstrate principals of the theory which help to transform the empirical data into an evolving dialogue. Because the research has been undertaken by an active SOAW member at the time that the focus organisation has continued to function, the insights have helped to shift the relationship between the researcher and the researched and vice-versa– in other words, the research process itself has had a transformative effect on the researcher, through applying theory to the spoken and written experiences of others and herself, and insights have been gained which in turn have developed the theory – all as the thesis has developed.

Feminist praxis involves this kind of dialogue between theory and practice. This “third space”, evocative of Bhabha’s hybrid space and Butler’s work on performativity, leads to what DeVault describes as ‘consciousness raising or decolonisation (for the researcher, the reader, *or* participants in the research), to producing *data* that will stimulate or support political action or policy decisions’ (DeVault 1996:34 emphases added). What this kind of research produces is a resource for activism, which in turn provides material for research. Whether this has influence in those researched, the theory, or in the researcher herself, that influence and the change it effects is valued as a part of transformation. By highlighting ways in which transformation has taken place because of the dynamic between researcher and researched, the thesis ‘privileges sharing, subjectivity, personal knowledge’ and ‘uses experience as a criterion against which to measure meaning and truth’ (Denzin 2008: 460).

Buch and Staller claim that feminist ethnographers find and analyse the ‘systematic connections between domains of social life’ and they do this by ‘using the self as much as possible’ (Buch and Staller in Hesse-Biber and Leavy (eds) 2007: 188). Where the researcher is an insider in the community in which she conducts the research, her other roles in the community shape the kinds of responses she could solicit amongst research participants (ibid: 202-204), aligning with Alvesson’s warning regarding the constructedness of the research interview. So an important aspect of feminist research methodology entails making visible the biases and interests of the researcher, and the power dynamics inherent in her relationship with research participants and the research question. Ultimately, Buch and Staller claim, feminist ethnographers select materials which ‘reflect their feminist theoretical and ethical positions’ (ibid: 216). This chapter is an attempt to explore my own biases and involvement with regard to SOAW, and to make explicit the ways in which my personal experiences and questions have framed the study.

A feminist researcher often builds knowledge and meaning from the unique perspective of women as a starting point, in order to understand all identity constructions. SOAW provides the site for this kind of research. In a patriarchal environment such as SUSA, women sometimes develop 'double consciousness', as they are required to survive and advance in an environment which is alien to them. This double consciousness, argues Abigail Brooks, is an advantage for feminist research methodology, in that women are more likely to see reality from their own *and* from men's perspectives: which is less likely in the dominant group. She claims that 'knowledge gleaned from women's double consciousness can be applied to diagnose social inequalities and injustices and to construct and implement solutions' (ibid: 66). Some of the forum discussions used in this research demonstrate the active workings of women immersed in a patriarchal framework, and explore the tensions inherent in the double consciousness which women employ in the institution.

Male feminist researchers perhaps could invert this double consciousness, in that they use research methods designed to subvert the inherent power embodied in men's hegemonic perspectives, in order to understand the world from perspectives different to their own. Perhaps Ian Maxey is one of these, and he argues that there is a false binary between activism and academia, which feminist research can illuminate. He argues that for him, the research process does not fit neatly into discrete sections such as 'literature review', and 'fieldwork'. He claims that because he was involved in the communities he researched prior to and during his research, the boundaries between his role as academic and activist were blurred, especially given that reflexivity as a condition of both activism and academic work encouraged him to acknowledge many of the relationships and identities in and around the research process and to destabilise the boundaries between researcher and researched (Maxey 1999: 203). So while Butler's work, which is the theoretical lens I use for the study, destabilises notions of gender, the boundaries between researcher and researched in this study are also destabilised, making it a potential site of new understandings and fresh knowledge. To use Butler's notions further, it becomes the site for the negotiation of new subjectivity: my own as an academic and activist, and SOAW's as an intervention aimed at reducing gender inequity in the university.

Geoff Walsham calls the relationship between researcher and researched a form of 'intersubjectivity' rather than objectivity, and claims that the 'involved' researcher can gain positive benefits from this kind of relationship, because the 'field participants see the researcher as trying to make a valid contribution to the field site itself' (Walsham 2005: 321). Turid Markussen takes this further, to argue that 'all research is performative, in the sense that it helps enact the real' (Markussen 2005: 329). She argues that it is the performativity of research that can achieve

transformation, entering a public space where it is 'accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity' (Markussen 2005: 330). "'Doing" performativity', she argues further, 'not as a theory but as a mode of working, requires an openness within the research process to the possibility that the researchers and their practices themselves must alter, in response to the situations in which they find themselves' (ibid). She notes that academic feminism is a site for 'methodological innovations', where one is challenged to balance 'the pull towards professionalization with a continued willingness to open up to the often troubling challenges of the present moment' (ibid: 332). She argues that the methods we choose for our research inevitably produce, and are produced, by 'political implications' (ibid: 333). This implies that if we are transformative researchers, we recognise that the researcher and the researched co-produce a reality as well as the research, which is then open to new imaginings (ibid: 342).

Auto-ethnography is a methodological tool which works for research where the researcher is a complete member of the site she is researching, and where she 'helps to form and reform the constructs that he or she studies' (Anderson 2006:382). It has the possible consequence of self transformation – Anderson claims that 'the autoethnographic interrogation of self and other may transform the researcher's own beliefs, actions, and sense of self' (ibid: 383). He also notes that auto-ethnography 'demands enhanced textual visibility of the researcher's self' (ibid 384). So the researcher while drawing on her own experiences and insights, should have a text trail which grounds her research externally, in order to explore the 'connections between biography and structure' (ibid: 390). A danger of auto-ethnography is to lose sight of the critical distance one requires in order to illuminate the relationships relevant to the research, and a failure to 'make sense of complex social worlds of which we are only part' (ibid: 386). So the dangers for auto-ethnographers include getting stuck in their own emotional responses to a situation, falsely claiming that their experience of the situation has broader applicability, and failing to notice and analyse broader relationships and dynamics in the field. Anderson recommends orientating auto-ethnography analytically – in other words, using insider status for its access to data and experience, but with 'clearly analytical goals' (ibid: 391).

These methodological insights and limitations have informed the methods I used in this study. As an active executive member of SOAW, Butler's theory has been a necessary tool in helping to achieve some distance between me and my lived experience, other SOAW members, and the institutional culture into which we are embedded. Working with the theory and with the data has generated new ways of thinking about the theory and the organisation. SOAW, and this research on it, has been instrumental in my own transformation: from a graduate, administrative employee to an academic

researcher and teacher; from a passive to an active social justice advocate. It has exposed me to ideas and relationships which have challenged and liberated me, and honed my activism, as well as providing a platform for articulating it.

Like Maxey (Maxey 1999), my engagement with the site of the research precedes and will continue after this study. My interest in transformation saw an engagement with SOAW as an opportunity to get to grips with the inhibitors and facilitators of gender transformation, and to understand how transformation can happen more broadly, and this perhaps ensured a reflexive and analytical rigour, espoused by Anderson (Anderson 2006). The research question around how transformation happens thus inspires both my engagement with SOAW as well as with this study. In the years preceding my decision to apply to do my Masters degree, I engaged with research around women in higher education in order to understand what was possible in SOAW. The SOAW feminist reading group and many relationships which were established through SOAW have continued to inform my understanding of the power dynamics at play in an inequitable environment, and shape how I understand both my own power and systemic, institutional power. This role which SOAW has had in shaping my scholarship is thus incorporated as part of this thesis' epistemology and methodology.

My intimate engagement with SOAW, and access to the diligent records (particularly in the early years), alerted me to an opportunity to document the organisation while it was around, particularly as the first Andrew Mellon funding cycle drew to a close. In 2008, I used SOAW as a focus of research to present a paper at the 'HELTASA: Higher Education as Social Space' conference in December 2008. The three questions I asked in a voluntary questionnaire for this purpose and the 15 members' responses are included as Addendum 4. Although I have used some of the responses in this thesis, the need for the deeper engagement that interviews and focus group discussions would offer became apparent. Before I had decided on exactly how to do this, in 2009 I was accepted as a laureate at the CODESRIA Gender Institute concerning Gender in Higher Education (Dakar, 2009), to work on a similar paper which I had presented at the conference. The month that I spent with 15 participants from across Africa sharing ideas and research, and the exposure to the work of African feminists, activists and scholars, was invaluable in showing me that SOAW was something quite unique, contingent on context, and with expandable possibilities in the African higher education sector. During this time it became clear that research using SOAW as a focus had a number of potential benefits: it could help me to understand the past, present and possible future role of an organisation to which I am committed; it could contribute to a national and even continental conversation about gender in higher education; and it could possibly explain transformativity in a way that could affect how I, and others like me, perform our activism in the university. While these

ambitious aspirations might not be feasible or realised, the CODESRIA Gender Institute was an important guide, and influenced whose voices I chose, and how these could be portrayed and interpreted in the thesis. The engagement with HELTASA and CODESRIA inform the circumstances around data choices. Opportunities offered through engagement with SOAW – firstly as a research focus for a paper, and secondly as SOAW’s listserv had alerted me to the CODESRIA conference – have guided the access I have to the research field, and to some extent the political investment into generating new knowledge through this engagement – which will contribute to the future sustainability and relevance of SOAW.

A way to separate my own memory from the organisation was to consult the records, minutes and forum discussions. But while a chronological framework using this data would help to provide the material for analysis, we construct history according to political frameworks (Markussen 2005: 333). And certainly, as the story of SOAW emerged from the records, political themes and possibilities began to develop – qualitative situational and discourse analysis is broadly employed to select moments from the history and interrogate them more closely, using Butler’s matrix, in order to find meaning. Rich as it was in developing chronology and themes, I needed more than this material to find a cohesive way to think about SOAW. The process of the research was steered by questions I was asking and opportunities that were made available specifically because of my engagement with SOAW. As much as I aimed at trying to find a critical distance from the site of my research, I was constantly engaged in its development and platforms, in keeping with Anderson’s claim that auto-ethnography ‘helps to form and reform the constructs that he or she studies’ (Anderson 2006:382). While there was a broad possibility of who could be interviewed regarding SOAW, funding and opportunity were the main motivation for selecting these three members (for the focus group discussion, and for the in-depth interview) in particular, and as all three were part of SOAW’s initial manifestation. While further interviews were discussed with other potential participants (living in other centres), they failed to materialise. Once I had transcribed the interviews and listened to them extensively, and found a theoretical lens through which to view them, the material seemed rich enough to use without further interviews. The transcripts of the focus group discussions and the in-depth interview with the founding members are available, but I have resisted providing them as addenda to this study, because of the sometimes deeply personal nature of the discussions, and in order to protect anonymity.

The SOAW listserv is a communication tool, accessible to all SOAW members, where individuals can post ideas, opportunities and questions, and where, from time to time, valuable discussions are held. It is a way to provide ongoing conversations for women who don’t necessarily attend SOAW

meetings in person. While the focus group and in-depth interviews provided a reflexive take on SOAW, the material from the listserv discussions and personal emails could expand this if I applied a reflexive and analytical lens through which to view them.

My engagement with SOAW has had some difficult moments, which include some hard personal lessons. My own relationships in the university (and in fact in my personal life) have been affected by my relationship to SOAW, and there have been times of extreme exhaustion, as well as acute vulnerability. There remained some unresolved questions for me going into the research, and the process of the inquiry for this study has had a transformative and even healing consequence for me, in keeping with Markussen's claims (Markussen 2005: 342). Butler's theoretical concepts of subjectivity, performativity and normativity helped me to complete processes which had been left hanging in listserv discussions, and through this research process I have found resolution for some of the questions I continue to ask around the possibilities of a feminist organisation in a patriarchal context. In particular, SOAW's responses to events or processes in the university regarding race and rape were unresolved for me – in both of these I was an active participant, and was left with tensions once the conversations had moved on. It was therefore a questionable indulgence to include exactly these conversations as a site for analysis, because the process of reflexive analysis, and given the distance which time, theory and other interviews provided, helped me to understand what had happened, and how I personally could explain my own responses as well as the responses of those engaged in the conversations. I have anonymised myself in the conversations I have used, in order to apply theoretical insights uniformly to all participants, and in the process of writing up could better understand what went down. I have anonymised the university, the organisation and all participants, in order to protect their identities; and also because this study ultimately illuminates an *idea*, of transformativity, and how it works, through the particular dynamics and relationships relevant to this study.

Thus, this research takes the form of a multi-methods approach to qualitative enquiry, particularly utilising the key concepts central to auto-ethnographic research. The interviews and questionnaire provided a range of SOAW members with a space to reflect on SOAW, in order to explore the transformative effects of SOAW in the institution. While the SOAW listserv discussion, minutes and reports provide significant data for analysis, I am embedded in these, and my analytical and reflexive engagement with them has helped to resolve personal questions as well as to lead to answering the research questions associated with this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: Background and context**

### *Introduction*

The Solidarity Organisation for Academic Women (SOAW), the focus of this study, emerged under specific conditions in a small university in South Africa (SUSA). These conditions form a background for the kinds of performances which were and are possible for academic women at SUSA, and will be explored in the thesis. In addition to this, the university itself is embedded in founding principles and a particular socio-political environment which establish these conditions, including apartheid and patriarchal legacies which continue to imprint themselves in university practices, as will be shown in describing how SOAW emerged later in this chapter. And more broadly, universities in South Africa are fashioned in part by a transformation agenda which continues to take shape in post-apartheid state and academic discourse.

The broad and specific transformation agendas in the university sector in South Africa influence how identities are defined and shaped, and how academics and women are framed in particular ways. These agendas are informed by, amongst others: the local and global academic community through research, funding and alliances; the state through funding, policy and legal requirements; and by the societies in which they are found and are founded. As will be shown, the conditions around which academic women's subjectivities are formed and performed; the norms which prescribe and are perpetuated by these performances; and the relationship between and conditions of these contribute to an understanding of how and where transformation happens, if it does. The concepts of subjectivity, normativity and performativity (Butler in Salih 2004: 334 - 346) enable a way to understand SOAW, and where and how the organisation participates in transformation at a specific university, and in the lives of individual academic women in that context.

### *The South African university context*

Universities are embedded in a particular set of circumstances in the higher education sector in South Africa. The Constitution of the country asserts equal rights 'to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible' (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Section 29(1)). The former "white" universities in South Africa date back to colonial apartheid foundations. They have inherited decades of privilege based on race, gender or class, have constructed and informed their practice; success has been biased towards particular identity groups, rather than on academic merit or capacity. Despite governmental transformation policies and processes put in place since 1994, these South African universities continue to be sites of exclusion,

hierarchy, and elitism with exclusionary practices based on categories of race, class, sexual orientation, religion, language, age, and nationality or ethnic group. Slow progress is attributed to a variety of factors (see Soudien 2009; De la Rey, 2005; Potgieter, 2002), which together exclude or fail to nurture the people who were not traditionally recognised as valuable in university systems. Arguably, one of the aims of any university transformation project should be to recognise and transform the ways in which its discourses and practices discriminate against individuals and groups, based on identity categories, rather than on equal performance, on opportunity, or on capacity.

The transformation agenda of the state, educationists and academia in South Africa over the last 16 years has engineered a number of radical and state imposed changes, including the merging of some institutions in an attempt to redress the unequal conception of former “white” and “black” institutions. They also perhaps missed important opportunities to bring about substantive transformation in the process (Hendricks seminar, 2010). Arguably, the legacy of apartheid has foregrounded race as the primary focus of the transformation project (Mabokela 2000: 204), and state imperatives and in particular at former “white” universities, have informed strategies which have seen an increase in the access of black students to former white universities, as well as in a slow increase of black appointments to the academic and administrative staff (Potgieter 2002: 2). Despite these efforts, racism and sexism continue to blight university spaces. In May 2008 a student-made video emerged into the public domain from a historically “white” university, and prompted the then Minister of Education to commission an investigation into discrimination in all universities. In the video, a group of young white male students stand before four middle aged black cleaners from the residence (three women and one man). The employees are in uniform, and the young men serve them food into which it appears they have urinated. The video won the internal competition vote, and was made public on YOUTUBE, to national and international outrage (for the media story and video, see <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/africa/article6867176.ece> ).

Apart from pervasive racism found to be still evident on most campuses, the commissioned report on the ‘Ministerial Committee on Progress Towards Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions’ exposed pervasive sexism, which ‘[L]ike racism, [it] is an ideological phenomenon, based on unequal relations of power between men and women and underpinned by the ideology of patriarchy’ (Soudien 2009: 5). The investigation saw a Ministerial committee visiting each university, and each university submitting required documents which defined and described their university’s state of transformation and equity. The report encourages ongoing research and monitoring by universities in future, and this thesis is, in part, a contribution to this process.

Arguably, universities operate in the interests of the “public good”, in service and response to the demands and opportunities of their social contexts (Badat and Singh in Higher Education Discussion Series, 2001). But who is the “public”, what is the “good”, and who deems it to be so? Individual universities have different understandings of these concepts, and “public good” is translated and performed by each according to various considerations of the purpose of universities<sup>1</sup>, and the constraints and possibilities of their own governance systems. Balancing their national contextual responsibility against the global academic and economic definitions of the purpose of universities, South African universities are compelled to engage in a complex array of obligations emanating from, for instance: the Department of Labour’s Equity requirements; National Student Financial Aid Services conditions; the Constitutional Court; the Department of Higher Education’s transformation agendas, policies and funding requirements; and in response to its own individual broad and particular social responsibility agenda as an institution for the public good.

This study is based on the premise that a possibility for transformation is presented when fixed or limiting identity categories, including gender identities, are destabilised, so that they can be renegotiated and expanded to be more inclusive – particularly in an environment which claims to want to transform inequities based on identity categories. Identities are imagined and supported by the cultures and structures of an institution, as well as by the work of individuals and groups as they are given or claim agency within their particular contexts. In addition to this, identities can shift for a variety of reasons – specific incidents, new appointments, media attention, protests, processes and relationships can all change how a community defines people, for instance according to their sex.

Limiting gender categories exist in the university sector. Policies and interventions continue to attempt to address this, informed largely by a transformation agenda which holds the Bill of Rights and Constitution of the country, as the overt ideal. This agenda and ideal provide a language and legitimacy to institutional transformation interventions in individual institutions. The people in, and the mechanisms of, power in the institution define what is acceptable, what is rewarded, how things are done, and how humans are recognised, supported, protected, heard and accommodated (Butler 1999: 173-175). A homogenous group (traditionally white males) in these positions of power is problematic for social transformation. As Amina Mama points out, ‘the gender profile suggests that the majority of the women who work in African universities are not academics and researchers, but rather the providers of secretarial, cleaning, catering, student welfare, and other administrative and

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<sup>1</sup> for example, the SUSA Centre for Higher Education, Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL) Roundtable Series held their second roundtable from 27-29 October 2010, where philosophers and scholars debated “The Aims of Higher Education”.

support services' (Mama 2003: 109). At the small, historically white institution where the SOAW was first mooted in 2004, the equity figures illustrate Mama's claim (see figure 1 and 2), despite a total student and staff population of slightly more women than men.

|                     | MALE   |         |          |       |         | FEMALE  |        |         |          |       |                     |
|---------------------|--------|---------|----------|-------|---------|---------|--------|---------|----------|-------|---------------------|
|                     | Indian | African | Coloured | White | ♂ total | ♀ total | Indian | African | Coloured | White |                     |
| PROFESSOR           | 3      | 0       | 2        | 48    | 53      | 9       | 0      | 0       | 0        | 9     | PROFESSOR           |
| ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR | 1      | 0       | 0        | 31    | 32      | 10      | 0      | 0       | 1        | 9     | ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR |
| SENIOR LECTURER     | 4      | 0       | 1        | 35    | 40      | 27      | 3      | 2       | 1        | 21    | SENIOR LECTURER     |
| LECTURER            | 14     | 2       | 3        | 41    | 70      | 54      | 7      | 1       | 2        | 44    | LECTURER            |
| JUNIOR LECTURER     | 3      | 0       | 0        | 7     | 10      | 6       | 1      | 0       | 0        | 5     | JUNIOR LECTURER     |
| OTHER               | 0      | 1       | 1        | 10    | 12      | 13      | 1      | 1       | 0        | 11    | OTHER               |
| TOTAL               | 25     | 3       | 7        | 172   | 207     | 119     | 12     | 4       | 4        | 99    | TOTAL               |

**Figure 1: SUSA 2008 academic employment figures**  
**University Digest of Statistics 2009**

**Figure 2: SUSA Equity Statistics 2005-2009**

|      | MALE   |        |        |       |       | FEMALE |        |        |        |       |
|------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
|      | INDIAN | AFRICN | COLORD | WHITE | TOTAL | TOTAL  | INDIAN | AFRICN | COLORD | WHITE |
| 2005 | 5      | 19     | 3      | 179   | 206   | 111    | 2      | 17     | 5      | 87    |
| 2006 | 6      | 21     | 2      | 181   | 210   | 113    | 2      | 16     | 5      | 90    |
| 2007 | 7      | 22     | 3      | 181   | 212   | 118    | 2      | 15     | 4      | 97    |
| 2008 | 7      | 25     | 3      | 172   | 207   | 119    | 4      | 12     | 4      | 99    |
| 2009 | 8      | 33     | 3      | 174   | 208   | 136    | 7      | 13     | 6      | 110   |

That women make up the majority of this university community's population, but only occupy such a small percentage of the senior academic and administrative hierarchy, suggests that for whatever reasons, their own or those imposed on them, women resist assimilation into this layer. The figures might indicate an environment which is disempowering of women, or at least failing to nurture women into positions of power. As will be argued though, universities *can* be, and are, sites of transformation and progress in terms of substantive gender equity. Moya Lloyd, using Butler's theory to explore identity, notes that 'for Butler ...political transformation, change and alteration are all possible without the presumption of agency as the mechanism that enables these changes. Conceptually, agency can be recast as the political effect of these changes' (Lloyd 2005: 95). In a

context which traditionally defines women in ways which have limited their success, this very constraint can be the site of their agency. For women in the university sector, the state's current framing of academic women as a vulnerable group, provides legitimacy to develop transformative opportunities.

There have been a number of interventions at different universities over the past decade to address gender inequity in South Africa. These include, for example, the WITS Wonder Woman project (Shackleton 2006); conferences such as the annual HERS-SA Leadership Academy which aims to support the promotion of senior women through a variety of ideologically engaging lectures and practical workshops; funding such as the National Research Foundation's Thuthuka Grant programme which is aimed at supporting emerging women researchers by providing mentoring and reduced teaching responsibilities during their PhD's; mentoring programmes such as the Mellon programme which exists to support the progress of women academics through dedicated mentoring; and programmes in certain universities where women are fast-tracked through normal promotion hurdles, or provided with other opportunities to develop. These have all contributed to an increase in the pool of women eligible for promotion to senior positions in the sector, while not necessarily ensuring that they achieve it (Morley 2003:12).

Despite these efforts, women form only 23% of university leadership, according to data supplied at a national conference in March 2008, entitled 'Institutional Cultures and Higher Education Leadership: Where are the women?' The patriarchal nature of higher education institutions and its effect of inhibiting the progress of women forms the basis of a number of studies, especially in the last decade (see Shackleton:2006, Mabokela:2003, Perumal:2003 and De La Rey:2005). There continues to be a dearth of women leaders attracted to, promoted to and retained within the senior management and professorial sectors within the academy, despite overt explicit equity policies and transformation agendas of the institutions themselves. There are a number of possible causes for this – including the fact that gender inequalities are embedded in the society in which higher education functions. In South Africa in particular, where the representation of women in government is, at 44%, amongst the highest in the world (according to IPU statistics updated regularly on their website <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> ), the country also has amongst the highest global incidence of rape and domestic violence (for media commentary, see <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2009-07-09-in-south-africa-rape-is-linked-to-manhood> ), demonstrating the distinct gap that exists between policy and practice in the lives of South Africans.

While current national strategies and imperatives signify that transformation in the higher education sector requires rethinking<sup>2</sup> to become more effective, transformational moments do happen, indicating an alternative set of dynamics at work. This transformativity could be seen as a result of the relationships, conditions and opportunities in the dynamic between subjectivities, norms and performances, in each individual institution. This research focuses on transformativity in one such institution, looking at the specific conditions which precipitate transformation.

### *SUSA*

The university which forms part of this study, in arguably the poorest province of South Africa, is a formerly “white”, century old institution. It is the smallest university in South Africa, and its equity profile has been the second worst in the national equity register (vice chancellor address to the M-Schools Project, 2007), cutting through location, economics, history and other demographics relevant to equity figures that distinguish between the kinds of universities in South Africa today.

In 2004, when the SOAW was initiated, SUSA was celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. One hundred years of history was presented in various visual forms at the time (including books, website, poster displays, and photographic exhibitions). A particular energy at that moment provided the impetus for an informal conversation between women friends to become the SOAW organisation. This could be interpreted partly to be a reaction to the patriarchal institutional culture which was emphasised and exposed through the centenary events and presentations at the time. How and when women entered the history of the institution, and the role they played in its centenary manifestation established two things: SUSA had, admittedly, come a long way since 1904; but more importantly, the founding fathers established the foundations for a particular kind of institution to emerge. Specific kinds of subjectivities and power relationships were imagined and secured by them through priorities, policies and processes throughout SUSA’s history, and perpetuated by a starkly homogenous group of white male university vice chancellors right up until the appointment of the university’s first black male vice chancellor in 2006. SUSA has not yet had a female appointment in the 5 most powerful organisational positions<sup>3</sup> of the university after more than a century of existence, and 16 years of democracy.

Apart from the efforts of individuals in the institution, SUSA’s institutional efforts to address equity and transformation over recent years have included a gender imbizo (November 2007); an HoD

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<sup>2</sup> In April 2010, the Minister of Higher Education, Minister Blade Nzimande, convened a conference in which all universities were required to send representatives to discuss transformation policies and practices at universities (<http://www.cepd.org.za/files/Eduvision2.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> Arguably, these include the Registrar, Registrar of Finance, Vice-chancellor and two Deputy Vice-chancellors.

equity imbizo (June 2008); a number of public lectures (e.g. ISER, SOAW, etc 2007-2010); various senior appointments of women and blacks, which have seen a slow shift in the demography of senior positions; public statements of anti-racism (2009); a public apology by the university to the family of slain anti apartheid activist Steve Biko's family for past actions, amongst which was the prevention of Biko from staying in the university residences during a NUSAS conference in 1967 (2009); diversity training run by the HR department (2006-2008); and greater emphasis at departmental and institutional levels to shift employment practices towards being more inclusive. These have all contributed to a slow changing of attitudes to diversity and slow progress in equity figures. Figure 2 illustrates that despite these transformation strategies, between the years 2005 and 2008, the number of black female academic staff members dropped from 25 to 22 before a sharp rise to 26 in 2009, indicating an environment that is clearly struggling to assimilate black academic women despite the intention (supported by policies and protocols which have been developed during this time) to achieve gender and race equity on the staff. Chapter 4 explains more clearly ways in which SUSA's transformation strategies contribute to its slow progress, contrasting with moments of transformation which occur in individuals through the work of SOAW.

Women who have assumed leadership positions at SUSA could be seen as being in a position to contribute to the shifting environment – but they are also challenged by the same environment which fails to attract, facilitate and retain other women leaders, particularly black women, in top leadership positions. While they have a valuable contribution to make to conversations about how SUSA could provide the necessary conditions for diversity to thrive, especially in leadership positions, this is not necessarily or always possible, or claimed in the institution. Shireen Hassim notes that '[R]epresentation...is not conceived as an end in itself, but as part of a broader agenda of redistribution of social and economic power... and may be a necessary first step to the institutional transformation that is required if 'substantive' representation is to be achieved' (Hassim 2003:5). While a female Dean and Deputy Dean of Students, Dean of Teaching and Learning, Director of Human Resources (since 2004, women have been appointed into these positions for the first time at SUSA) might contribute to shifts in gender perceptions, individual women in senior positions often have slender opportunities to broach or affect changes in institutional culture and substantive equality if there are not also other ways in which gender inequity is being challenged and subverted in the institution. Louise Morley warns that transformation interventions and policies do not necessarily serve the collective and long-term interests of women aspiring to management positions. She argues that '[I]n the context of the neo-liberal political economy and the rise of audit culture, the token inclusion of women as managers accompanied by the absence of feminist politics may

stand in the way of more profound equity transformation. It can be seen that what writing exists on women's aspirations for senior positions and work at this level stresses how difficulties with the gendered nature of the institution are not overcome as women move up the ladder' (Morley 2003:16).

At SUSU the mechanisms of power arguably include committees who make recommendations to Senate and Council, the decision-making bodies of the university. While these latter bodies are structured in such a way to provide the appearance that all university stakeholder groups are represented, the bulk of the work of these is to approve or veto issues put on the table by various university and Senate sub-committees, rather than substantively proposing or debating new issues affecting these various represented groups. An executive group of Senate effectively controls, within protocols, the agenda for Senate and Council. There is ongoing and rigorous attention given to the overhaul of practices in committees, including attention to issues of representivity, and over the last few years protocols have been developed to prescribe an equitable democratic process (for example, SUSU Recruitment And Selection Policy And Procedure) generated largely by the Director of Human Resources.

However, much of the negotiation work undertaken by committees is steeped in patriarchal practice as will be argued in this thesis. Hierarchical gender and race relations embedded in institutional and individual structures and attitudes affect how committees work. They are the bureaucratic apparatus, the normative architecture, in which subjectivities within SUSU and SOAW are performed.

Not all individuals or groups respond to these defining limitations with compliance or regard, or with perpetuation of inequitable conditions. Some committees, and certainly those which have specific transformation agendas or which have members who do, are able to feed their ideas for change into the institutional machinery. For example: recently, a two year battle, originally put on the table by a SOAW representative, was successfully argued by the chair of the Academic Freedom Committee on behalf of GENG, a (recently former) Senate subcommittee, (GENG email: 23/10/2009). Before restructuring this year tellingly relegated it to a sub-sub committee, GENG met in the Council Chamber, a formal space where most Senate subcommittees, and Senate itself, meet. Until June 2010, the walls of this chamber were lined with large portraits of the previous vice-chancellors, all white males, all looking down imposingly on the proceedings. Prof S- succinctly argued for their removal, on the grounds that their presence affected the space, and inhibited identity groups who were not accommodated or welcomed by the gaze of previous leaders, some of whom had actively

supported apartheid and colonialism (GENG letter of motivation, 23/8/2008). The proposal, following protocol, went from GENG (2008), to the vice chancellor (2008), to the Senate executive (2009), to the faculty boards (2009), to a university Colloquium for Institutional Culture (2009), back to the vice chancellor (2010), and implemented after a follow-up enquiry by GENG. Despite using institutional structures which have traditionally perpetuated a particular culture, a contribution has thus been made to Hassim's 'substantive' institutional transformation (Hassim 2003:5), albeit a slow and laborious process. A committee has been formed as a result to oversee future art possibilities for the Council Chamber, taking more careful consideration of diversity and inclusivity. As will be argued, every change that happens at SUSU, unless it includes the expanding and transformation of identity categories and understandings, runs the risk of becoming a limiting framework. So for instance, if the committee formed to oversee the university's future art possibilities does not also transform the way decisions are made, it runs the risk of perpetuating a patriarchal framework of doing things that inhibits substantive transformation, even though it was formed out of a process of transformation.

Individuals or groups affect changes in inequitable practices at SUSU not necessarily or only through university structures and processes. The structural environment and the unequal gender and race representation in positions of power within the university can have a destabilising effect on those not included or consulted in the configuration of how things are done. For SOAW, the prevailing conditions prompted the establishment of a legitimate alternative space to explore doing things differently, building a new community based on different principles to the traditional patriarchal mode of operation that was perceived as being dominant. SOAW is just one example of a number of ways that individuals at SUSU affect or are affected by inequitable practices. The environment at SUSU in 2004 and today defines how individuals perceive themselves as successful women in an academic institution; and how they respond to their environments, which determines the way in which they are participants in gender transformation in the institution. The relationship between the subjects of SUSU and individuals (especially women in this thesis) is not static, and though people take up fixed positions, their interpretations and translations of the norms is varied.

#### *The effect of the institutional context on subjectivities at SUSU*

Chesterman et al, drawing on Foucault, has proposed 'that gendered social practices become so normalised that the injustices they perpetuate are utterly transparent' (Chesterman et al 2004: 2). At SUSU in 2004 the institutional culture was perhaps more visible because of the centenary events and paraphernalia, and additionally was embedded in institutional and departmental practices.

Despite the inherently raced and gendered nature of SUSA's institutional culture, a number of changes were imminent at the time: the vice-chancellor was coming to the end of his tenure, along with a number of other white males in key positions (including Dean of Students and Director of Human Resources). Change was in the air, but the SUSA systems and traditions were such that this change was imagined within a particular framework of possibility. What has come to be seen as gendered social practices more recently within the institution was, in the years leading up to 2004, rendered transparent and invisible by a century of practice – for example, under-representation of women and blacks to positions of power or in institutional committees; a lack of attention to domestic, parental and child-care support, which inhibited the participation of women in particular, especially if events and committee meetings took place after hours; a maximum age limit for awards, such as the vice-chancellor's junior research award, which discriminated against women who had had careers interrupted by children, parent or partner concerns; slow, unhelpful and under-resourced responses to sex and race discrimination and harassment, including public rudeness, and rape (SOAW funding reports 2008; 2009).

Women in the institution who were strategically advancing towards inclusion into senior management roles did so in a context that traditionally favoured men, and with enormous challenges. Blackmore and Sachs claim that the context of women's potential in higher education is where 'they experience conflict between personal ambition, professional identity and institutional authority' and where they have 'learned strategies to cope with the personal and institutional practices which positioned them as women' (Blackmore and Sachs 2000: 95). At SUSA in 2004, different women were experiencing this positioning in different ways which played out over the next few years. The range of this difference is illustrated by one set of contrasting experiences: women were appointed for the first time as Director of Human Resources and Dean of Students (2006); and a sociology professor, in a note mistakenly publicised on the university's listserv, declared in her farewell message to the university that she had 'hit the proverbial "glass ceiling"' and was leaving academia, admitting defeat and an unwillingness to remain in a place where she felt excluded by promotion practices (Z, SUSA toplist message, 27/3/ 2007).

While Z was in a position to leave in 2007, this was not an option for many women at the time of the centenary who were eager to complete postgraduate degrees, or to establish their academic careers. Not surprisingly then, SOAW was first imagined by women who felt a lack of recognition and understanding, as a response to what was perceived to be an unwelcoming and unhelpful space. Butler argues that 'to ask for recognition, or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is. It is to solicit a becoming, to investigate a transformation, to petition the future

always in relation to the other' (Butler 2004: 44). Arguably, in SOAW, individual women who were vulnerable to unaccommodating institutional practices, through relationships to each other, found a way to transform how they knew themselves at SUSU, to solicit a becoming that sheltered and maintained their academic lives collectively, and individually. According to its first chairperson,

[SOAW], without meaning to, became an experiment for doing things differently (D, focus group discussion, 2009).

## **CHAPTER 4: Theoretical concepts, and an introduction to Judith Butler's theory.**

### *Introduction*

Judith Butler's concepts of subjectivity, performativity and normativity provide a way to understand how transformation can happen in contexts which privilege and exclude groups and individuals unjustly (Butler 2004). As a mechanism to create distance between the insider researcher and the researched, her theoretical lens provides a matrix to apply to selected situations, in order to understand how and where transformation happens. This chapter explains the matrix, and shows how it can be adapted to apply to events and dynamics in SUSU and SOAW.

Gender is just one of the identity categories which is a focus of social justice and transformation, and Butler provides a framework for understanding power relations and their implications for undoing systems which perpetuate inequality based on gender, race, religion or any other potentially discriminatory category. As Salih points out, '[H]er theories effectively reveal the "contingent foundations" of *all* identity categories' (2002:141, emphasis added). These contingent foundations, or conditions, form the theoretical focus of this study.

Transformation in South Africa has a language of race, class and gender, which in turn are informed by centuries of embedded stereotypes, hierarchies and assumptions, and hidden and explicit translations of these. The way in which identities, and subjectivities within identity categories, have been conceived, asserted, assimilated and subverted is not only dependant on or in response to social, economic and political policies and institutional structures. Concepts drawn from the work of Butler will be employed here to provide a way of understanding gender equity interventions, such as SOAW, as part of a larger picture: what transformation means, why it is necessary and how it is possible across a range of differences.

Butler's thinking is influenced by a number of key philosophers, including Hegel, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida and de Beauvoir (for more details, see Salih 2002: 7). Showing her Hegelian grounding, she is interested in subjectivity – how we become who we are, what limits and defines this, and how to recognise and respect beings and ways of being beyond these definitions – and this has implications for considering transformation in South African higher education today.

While Butler's theory encompasses a range of ideas, foci and applications, there are specific ideas and theories that apply to this study. They help to explain how SOAW came to exist, and provide a way of understanding the role SOAW might play in transformation at SUSU. The ideas specific to this study will be explained under the broad categories of: (i) subjectivity, (ii) performativity, (iii)

normativity (all of which are Butler's terms), and (iv)transformativity, which is a new term, developed through this theoretical engagement.

*(i) Subjectivity*

If we talk about a something residing in the individual and even perhaps internal to or beyond the body which houses it, we move beyond structures and systems to a fundamentally individual perspective. Butler is concerned with the "subject" – the "I" who perceives and experiences an external world from an internal and unique point of view. She contends that the individual subject is constructed and therefore has the potential for re-construction and new identities (Salih 2002: 10, 30), without being concerned about whether there is a seamless self beyond all the constructions (Butler 2004b: 154).

There is inherent tension in considering subjectivity in a constructed world. If meaning is a subjective experience with the subject as the starting point, and the subject is also constructed by her relationship to the world, this casts doubt on the potential for a collective, cohesive reality external to the subject. Phenomenologists since Husserl in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century have debated this relationship, and Butler's ideas are grounded in this way of explaining human life. The implication is that there isn't a cohesive and external reality, but that each subject should be considered as having a reality that exists for her. But if scholars examine subjectivity, it is no longer from one subject's perspective, and instead tries to form a *notion* of subjectivity which applies to all subjects – inferring then that there is some kind of cohesive externality. The concept of a self in terms of other is a theoretical tool with which to understand power dynamics between individuals and groups which are based on identity binaries (male and female, black and white, rich and poor, boss and worker, lecturer and student, donors and beneficiaries, dominant and vulnerable).

Existential phenomenology then, is a way of understanding human life from an individual perspective, without assuming that there is a metaphysical or cohesive external reality. Butler and others then use this starting point to look at relationships between a subject and her world, and for theorising about a subject's relation to an other – whether this is another subject, or the world which both constructs and is constructed by her identity. Butler uses this to consider subjectivities which are not part of a heteronormative world, including gay, lesbian, intersexed and drag subjects, and more recently those who are "othered" in a political framework, particularly since the 9/11 attacks in the USA (Butler 2004). Where she deviates from an exclusively feminist framing of this consideration is that where feminism is particularly concerned with the structures which limit and oppress women (Butler 2004c: 8-10), Butler is particularly interested in the conditions in and by

which I both experience, construct and perform my gender identity. The implication is that it is not so important whether or not there is an essential self or subject prior to structures, or whether there is no subject but merely so many societally regulatory categories through which I become known and acquire my subjectivity. More importantly Butler asks, how do I understand the conditions of my relationship with how my subjectivity is formed, and how does this affect how I do and am done by my gender? It provides the conditions for considering further: how can an understanding of subjectivity's limits and possibilities become part of a transformative energy to imagine and construct a socially just world?

The view of self in terms of gender as an identity category suggests a being that is brought into being by an already gendered world, but a self which is in addition to the one brought into being by language and acts. Butler asks us 'to consider that sexuality [as an aspect of self] always exceeds any given performance, presentation or narrative' and 'is never fully "expressed" in a performance or practice' (Butler 1999: 25). This self, this sexual identity, is larger than the body which expresses it and more than the expressions themselves. The relationship between the self (as an inherent sexual being) as a constructed, gendered subject and the structured world in and by which it is brought to existence becomes the key concern.

The constructed, fluid self finds its being and lives its life in a structured world and group, which shapes the kind of life anyone is able to lead. A scholar of Butler, Iris Marion Young explains that 'a structural social group is a collection of persons who are similarly positioned in interactive and institutional relations that conditions their opportunities and life prospects' (Young 2000: 97) This view of structure takes attention away from an essential individual to explore a reality that is fundamentally constructed outside of the individual, and ultimately this destabilises the idea of individuality, or subjectivity. If everything I am is in response to and as recognised by structures and definitions beyond my control or desire, it might seem that there is no separate cohesive self with agency, autonomy, and responsibility. Noting the tension within theories which look at the relationships between subjects, or individuals, and structures, Spivak explains that '[D]econstruction does not say there is no subject, there is no truth, there is no history. It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have *the* truth' (Spivak in Hughes 2002: 66, emphasis added). While structures play a role in the lives of individual women at SUSU, rather than deconstruct this, my thesis looks at what the founders of SOAW saw to be *a* truth, if not *the* truth, and which led to a *re*structuring. While Butler's notion of the subject is one which is not only unstable, but undone by the identities it assumes as part of the gendered world, she sees this undoing and instability as an important feature of the subject's subjectivity (Butler 2004c: 16).

As I enact or perform anticipated acts assigned by a gender framework, I come into being, am given a face, become part of a legitimate category within a framework which has been established by many specific acts by women and men over time (see Lloyd 2007:107-133; Butler 2004b:159). This legitimising framework provides me with a language for articulating myself, and so it is that conditions are established where these norms determine who I am permitted to be, and I suffer the loss of those aspects of myself which are not recognised or brought into being within this framework. I could then perform my gender under conditions of 'duress', and 'with punitive consequences' (Butler 2004b:157), as was the case with the unrecognised professor, Z, discussed earlier. I become trapped in and by categories which deny aspects of my being that are rendered unintelligible within this framework (ibid: 172). My performance of my gender reproduces and anticipates itself, and so is complicit in a gender culture which oppresses me. Butler exposes this tension in her argument that the 'tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production' (ibid: 137). This understanding of gender implies that only recognised and legitimised portions of our individual gender constructions are provided with ways and laws to express themselves, and that by expressing our genders within this context we become complicit in practices which deny portions of ourselves which are not named or lived.

Butler is not only interested in the way in which gender is constructed and how the subject then is both defined and "undone" in the structure, but in the conditions which precipitate and legitimise subject formation and recognition. In *Gender Trouble* Butler explores the contradictions which might occur given that society's framing of gender might not work for an individual who has desires which are not legitimised. How am I, the subject, determined by a gendered society, and how does the gendering which society requires of me give life to my subjectivity? How do I respond to the conditions and contingencies of this subjectivity?

Butler's unpicking of gender relationships happened at a time when other philosophers were considering other struggles in a dichotomous world. At the same time that Butler was troubling gender, Homi K. Bhabha was troubling notions of culture and assumptions of colonisation, explaining the relationship between the coloniser and colonised (Hubbard et al 2004: 52-57). Bhabha speaks of the colonising project as one which requires and facilitates 'mimicry'. The colonised both desires and resists the coloniser's culture, and in mimicking the culture in accordance with the coloniser's wish (which is also a fear that the distinction of superiority between coloniser and colonised is undone if the project is successful), a new subjectivity is forged which is a 'hybrid' - neither the culture of the coloniser nor the colonised, but something which retains aspects of both while developing new

aspects (Hubbard et al 2004: 55, Bhabha in Bial 2004: 279-86). While there is some resistance to this work and the criticism that it avoids political and social engagement (Hubbard et al 2004: 56), Bhabha provides a theoretical framework for culture which resonates with Butler's work on gender. He examines the conditions in which the identities and subjectivities of coloniser and colonised are developed – an in between space – where there is an appropriation of behaviours and a redoing of these which becomes the context for a relationship between coloniser and colonised, as well as between individuals in either category. Butler's concept of gender performance has overlaps with Bhabha's mimicry, particularly when considered in terms of transformation. Both see the potential for subversion in how the subject acts (or Bhabha's mimicry, Butler's performance) in accordance with contextual and constructed norms. These notions of mimicry and performativity are explored in the following chapters to highlight moments of non-congruence between policy and experience. Butler's arguments, and her notion of subjectivity, have a fluidity that draws variously from her previous arguments and those of others with some loose boundaries, and it is this instability that speaks to the application of her theory to the subjectivities within SUSA which gave rise to SOAW.

#### *(ii) Performativity*

In a collection of works on performance, editor Henry Bial introduces the book with an explanation that performance is a broad category of study, and while it has application in theatre, it is not limited to this (Bial 2004: 1-4). In Butler's chapter in this book, she explains that the 'acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts' (Butler in Bial 2004b: 155). But in *Bodies that Matter* written a decade previous to this, she notes that '[P]erformativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-representation; nor can it be equated with performance' (in Salih with Butler 2004: 344). The complex rhetoric and interplay between performance (with its theatrical associations) and performativity is an important one to unpack, in order to understand agency, and the possibilities for transformation.

The notion of performativity opens an important aspect of the relationship between subjectivity and gender: if I am born into a gendered world and my subjectivity is established as I conform to prescribed practices, where is agency? Am I predetermined and without any possibility of intentional action outside of the gendered framework? As Butler notes, '[T]he act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene' (ibid: 160). To feminists, this supports an imperative to confront the structures which determine and limit gender categories – or the gender script. But Butler asks us to go beyond this level of a gendering framework in order to find out how to transform it and broaden its possibilities. Because the self is

constructed, and performed, both the performance and the performative-ness or performativity are unstable and are therefore vulnerable to the conditions between the subject and her world. If we understand these conditions, we can navigate our subjectivities agentially through the constructions, structures and performances with more freedom and with less anxiety.

The theatrical context provides a metaphor for understanding gender. Assume the script is a workshopped piece, with input from both men and women based on their experiences and expectations over time. If we consider the feminist movement – or in fact any movement which addresses concerns about the script- often these engagements with the script are off-stage, with little or no attention from the main “stage” where life happens. Feminism continues to be marginalised – a voice from the wings – rather than accepted as part of the dominant interpretation of our culture. Is Butler suggesting that by learning my lines, my power derives from my performance? We know that the same script can be more or less adequately performed depending on the nuances of each performance. Butler is not unconcerned with the “rightness” of the script, but her performance rhetoric is often interpreted as one which sees the *performance* as the moment which can in fact change the reaction to the script, and thus, in time, the script itself. In this interpretation, I have a modicum of choice: in order to be recognised as having a valid role on life’s stage, I could learn the lines, and then perform them with my own nuances and interpretation; or, I could reject the script, and be doomed to live an unrecognised and even ‘unlivable’ life (Butler 1999:8; Butler 2004:19-49). This also explains how script-changing performances are not necessarily those undertaken by actors who are convinced by the rightness of the script and brilliantly perform these, but by those who know, from a place internal to themselves and external from the script, that there are more nuanced ways of being. If the actor, while performing according to the script, can bring in her or his own perspectives through a quirky portrayal that emphasises and de-emphasises aspects of the script differently, she or he is given a life beyond the script. Bodily gestures, facial expression, costume and other elements of theatrical expression provide sub-scripts with metaphorical application which are more subtle and complex performances, sometimes only for the more discerning audience.

For many people, the script that dominates their everyday experiences is written entirely by and for people unlike themselves. In the South African apartheid regime, ‘whole categories of people were positioned below those who counted most’ (Gordon in Mngxitama et al 2008: 83) and could make sense of their existences politically, economically, legally and socially only through their position as non-being (or non-white in this regime). How would Butler approach an understanding of such a script and the subject’s performativity? I believe that Fanon, Biko and Bhabha provide a bridge for

understanding a Butlerian application to this kind of subject and her performativity. Fanon was concerned with 'the paralyzing inferiority complex of blacks and their abject idolization of whites as their role models' (Ranuga 1998: 182). For Fanon it was important to reclaim what was lost, to revalue cultures and roots which had been fragmented by colonisation, and to find pride in a way of being dating from before colonialism. For Biko, Fanon's message was key to imagining a subjectivity that was based on a positive (blackness) rather than a negative (non-whiteness). He saw Black Consciousness as 'the determination by the blacks to rise and attain the envisaged self [as an alternative subjectivity]. At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realisation by the blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed' (Ranuga 1998: 191). While Biko's careful framing of Black Consciousness was exactly the ideology which gave the liberation struggle its successful momentum in South Africa, the fact that subsequent democracy has failed to liberate many from ongoing racial, economic and gender oppression points to the need for deeper understandings and wider imaginings of how power works, and where transformation takes place.

Bhabha describes the colonial subject as having a partial presence which confounds the colonial project. The colonial subject's imitation of the coloniser's behaviour and beliefs is never quite perfect, and the thin line between 'mimicry and mockery' and even 'menace' is an inevitable consequence of imperialism's limiting purpose (Bhabha in Bial 2004:280). Bhabha helps us to see the space between coloniser and colonised, a 'third space', which is both a space between cultures as well as 'the non-coincidence of a *single* culture within itself' (Hubbard et al 2004: 55). And in this in-between space, which is outside of Biko's consciousness, is where Butler's theory has resonance.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler looks at the cultural practice of drag to illuminate this space, claiming that in the act of imitating, 'drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency' (Butler 1999: 175). She asserts that drag is no more or less performative of gender than a man dressing as a man or a woman as a woman (Butler in Salih with Butler 2004: 254). A decade later, in a published interview with Olsen and Worsham (ibid: 344) she explains the difference between performance and performativity, which allows us into a more theoretical and nuanced space than the theatrical metaphor, and relates to Bhabha's third space. She acknowledges that her theory of gender performance is taken up as an opportunity by radical students to perform gender differently, to claim an agency in the performance of gender which destabilises a fixed gender framework. While she celebrates this interpretation, and the freedom to act differently that it inspires, Butler makes the crucial distinction between the performance and the intentions of the actor, explaining that 'what are being performed are cultural norms that condition and limit the

actor' (ibid: 345). Even a quirky performance is externally defined by individual context, script and audience. She particularly notices the "audience" reaction to performance. She explains that 'reception' is also governed by cultural norms, and that this is not necessarily a response to the actual performance but a repetition of cultural norms which limit responses to performances (ibid). Given that the actor and audience have a level of subjectivity which might be constructed differently to the cultural norms which constitute these practices, a process of 'cultural translation and cultural misunderstanding' provide the kind of productive problems which are the opportunity of transformation (ibid: 346). Both the performance and the reception (and actor and audience) are constructed by cultural norms, and when these are produced by those who perhaps have a different internal script, there is a different construction – the third space to which Bhabha refers. This exposes performativity as a notion which encompasses all performances and reception, and this is the space which illuminates the "scriptness" of gender, and which destabilises identity categories, such as gender, as a given, as a cohesive reality and truth.

This illumination of performativity has implications for feminism, particularly in the problems which feminism has in Africa. African feminists have long struggled with a western ideology which claims to speak on behalf of all women, ignoring contradictory and conflicting realities within that broad group. The intellectual battle to free Africa of the educational colonisation of the West, and the struggle to find appropriate feminist discourse that is not articulated by American or European scholars on behalf of all women, or which problematises '...Africa as the "sick man" of the world' (Kisiang'ani 2004:22), has influenced a wariness to speak on behalf of anyone. Oyèrónkè Oyěwùmi's discussions on the case of Nigerian Yoruba hierarchies provides alternatives to a Eurocentric notion of gender relations in the family, and sheds light on the dangers of using Western definitions and language embedded as they are with particular assumptions to describe and analyse the gender conditions of African women (Oyěwùmi 2004:1-8). Bibi Bakare-Yusuf's critique of Oyěwùmi's work in the same volume demonstrates reservations on some of her assertions, and illuminates some of the ironies and contradictions in African and indeed all feminist discourse (Bakare-Yusuf 2004: 61-81). Oyěwùmi's earlier work warns that 'women are not just women; factors of race, class, regional origins, age, and kinship ties are central to the understanding of inter-gender and intra-gender relations, local and globally' (Oyěwùmi 2003:40).

Butler's theory of performativity provides a way out of these apparent contradictions of ethnocentric feminism: what interests Butler is not a specific culture's treatment of women and their response to it, but the fact that all culture, and all women's responses to it, is constructed. Her theory then is in a sense acultural, as it applies to the *notions* of culture, performance and

subjectivity. As with Bhabha, rather than an engagement with specific cultures she asks us to examine the dialectic and specific conditions between the subject – any subject – and the world, and in so doing provides a schema for examining oppressive cultures anywhere without dictating a universal notion of womanhood, and regardless of the individual and contextual acts of oppression. Young tracks the development of the problematising of the framework of the sex/gender as well as the material/ideal dichotomies proposed by Butler and developed by Moi and herself (Young: 2005). She notes that ‘by destabilizing categories of both biological sex and gender identity, recent deconstructive approaches to feminist and queer theorizing have opened greater possibilities for thinking a plurality of intersecting identities and practices’ (Young 2005:12).

Because she disrupts heteronormative assumptions and explains the performativity of subjectivity, as a “lived body” (which ‘is always enculturated’ *ibid*: 17), Butler provides a way forward to legitimise individual perceptions and performances as a research practice, where biological sex, socialised gender and how we perform these are only starting points and not foci of theoretical engagements. Because she illuminates the notion of performativity, it is possible to use her theory to understand the social and political dynamics which define any country or institution’s gender culture, conditions and opportunities.

### *(iii) Normativity*

A key point of Butler’s argument is that societal and cultural norms determine our terms of being and engagement, and are strengthened by our performances. Whether in Bathurst or Berkeley, Butler is concerned with notions of normativity, subjectivity and performativity, whatever the specific contexts of the individual.

Society consists of a collection of individuals who arrange themselves according to behaviours and hierarchies which are developed over time and nurtured in specific ways. My identity within a particular society is prescribed in particular ways, based on beliefs and taboos, performed in rituals, dress and language. Because who I am is always more than how you interpret my behaviour, or perhaps only visible because of your particular interpretation, Butler is concerned with trying to imagine a society in which as many people as possible are included in the norms which define us, and are provided with the range and scope to be included in the norms and ethics which govern our society’s behaviour. Butler then is not so interested in the particular norms which might or might not oppress women or other identities, but in the notion of norms, and the normativity of society.

There are parts of self or sexuality which are not recognised or legitimised and those that are, by the gendered framework which conditions our subjectivity. Our gender performance and subjectivity is policed by societal values which normalise some behaviours and render others invisible or deviant. If gender definitions and expectations animate a particular set of conditions and experiences, norms provide their societal glue. In order to understand the role that norms play in subject formation and transformation, Butler adopts a Freudian starting point to a number of layers which concern the content and notion of norms.

While fiercely critiquing much of his theory and assumptions, Butler uses Freud's "mourning" and "melancholy" states to explain, amongst other things, how 'melancholic identification is crucial to the gendering of the ego' (Salih with Butler 2004:244). Butler's incorporation of grief, mourning and melancholy into her early theorising in *Subjects of Desire* (1987) as well as her later critique of the USA's response to the 9/11 attacks in *Precarious Lives* (2004) are crucial to understanding where and how transformation happens.

Freud's subject is eternally defined and trapped in taboo desires. Taboo implies a societal restraint on a desire or activity that forms a strong internal compass to the development of our sexual personas. Butler argues that Freud not only fails to problematise his own and society's glib heterosexual tendencies, he also uses these assumptions to build his theory. Butler nonetheless uses Freud's rubric to explain the inherent, contingent and perhaps problematic relationship between the binaries of hetero- and homosexuality and their various permutations (Butler in Salih with Butler 2004: 251-2; Lloyd 2007: 82-86). While these are important and complex theoretical developments of Freud's ideas, what are relevant to this research are Butler's explanations of loss, grief, mourning and violence which use Lacanian interpretations of Freud's theories as a backdrop.

As Butler rather conversationally in more recent work admits, '[L]et's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something' (Butler 2004:23). However intricate Freud, Lacan and others' theorising was about exactly what happens when we experience love or loss, our individual and collective experiences demonstrate that we are deeply affected by each other, consciously, subconsciously, and unconsciously, and this has particular impact on gender relations and formations. I become "scrutable" through you, and losing you makes me inscrutable to myself. The more I like who I am with you, the greater the loss when you're gone (ibid). The norms which govern human relationships in any given society define the level to which I know and am known, and the vulnerability or power which is animated by this knowing.

How I manage my and our human vulnerability is crucial in determining whether I respond in harmful or healing ways, to myself and others. How my society articulates and manages vulnerability fashions my response, and rouses a particular version and possibility of survivor or victim. Here Butler's theory has profound implications for understanding and transforming society. Using the lens of "vulnerability" rather than "power" to understand systemic, collective and generic violence in this country, from a perspective of gender subjectivity, we are able to conceive new ways of legitimising subject possibilities and imagine a world where many more of us have liveable lives. So what is important in South Africa in the struggle for gender, race and class equity is to understand the importance of broadening the conditions which determine who can grieve, what is lost, and what constitutes a 'livable' life – in other words, an expanded range of subjectivities, facilitated by norms which include them. Vulnerability is a terrifying thing to those who haven't survived exposure to loss before, and its memory is traumatic to those who have experienced violence. If we see the conditions of violence as a fear of vulnerability, power can be interpreted as a melancholic notion of vulnerability and domination, in that vulnerability is not actually recognised and protected, but instead is internalised and the fear of it informs the definition of power. Freud explains that melancholy emerges differently from mourning – melancholy is a refusal to accept loss, so that the lost is incorporated into a fixed and idealised notion of who was, and who we were or could have become without losing. The level to which the lives of South Africans are defined by shades of personal and structural violence can be seen to be a refusal in South African to acknowledge vulnerability, even though it names "vulnerable groups", and instead acting out a melancholic version of power which increases the vulnerability of all. What conditions could provide both those who fear vulnerability and so react violently, and those who are dehumanised by violence to themselves or those like them, with the kind of space where the norm of mutual recognition and respect could reframe the conditions for subjectivity, for performance, for vulnerability itself?

Butler argues in *Undoing Gender*, that 'the necessity of keeping our notion of "human" open to a future articulation is essential to the project of a critical international human rights discourse and politics' (Butler 2004c: 222), and that while norms are (as Habermas argued) essential to providing a sense of community (ibid: 220), their limiting potential should alert us to the need for reinterpretation, and to 'learn from the various ways and means by which it is defined across cultural venues' (ibid: 222). Our 'established conventions' are not ever broad enough to nurture all versions of individual within any one culture, and they should be 'expanded to become more inclusive and more responsive to the full range of cultural populations' (ibid: 224). Butler is interested in the conditions of normativity which give rise to both transformative and oppressive

uses of norms, using as examples anti-apartheid strategies in South Africa and fascism in Germany, both of which united people in a fight for their norms (ibid: 224-225). Key criteria for establishing a framework of norms, says Butler, are questions about the kinds of violence and exclusion that have determined a community.

The norms which determine who lives, who dies, who can be grieved, how loss is managed, how we should behave and how we do behave are not fixed. They can in fact be very unstable, even in one person, and especially in a South African context of constitutional democracy. If humans in South Africa, diverse as we are, live lives that are guided by an overt norm framework (the Constitution, or SUSU University's institutional culture), how we translate this "universal" moral guide into the specifics of our own lives is open to interpretation or translation. Given our apartheid history, as well as centuries of various versions of patriarchy in most societies in South Africa, this translation is open to a range of different meanings, and not all of them open to transformation. Butler contends that 'the task of the postcolonial translator...is precisely to bring into relief the non-convergence of discourses so that one might know the very ruptures of narrativity, the founding violence of an episteme' (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 37). The fact that norms, like performances, are open to different translations or interpretations allows us into a "third space" – of normativity, rather than norms. Understanding the South African gender context then is made possible by looking beyond this context at the relationship between subjects and norms, and at the *notion* of norms which define a community. Being able to see this further dimension of norms is not necessarily transformative in itself. But an understanding of the subjectivity, performativity, and normativity as third spaces makes it possible to notice the conditions and the dynamics within and between these that trigger transformation.

#### *(iv) Transformativity*

In a conversation with Žižek and Laclau, Butler asserts that '[P]ower is not stable or static but is remade at various junctures within everyday life' (Butler in Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000: 14). The three philosophers exchange questions and answers around the issue of contingency, hegemony and universality at a time of post structuralism, post colonialism and post psychoanalysis. While the framework of the project limited the debate to specific philosophical conundrums, Butler's arguments around transformation are clearly defined here for exploration in this thesis.

The notion of universality is key to a human rights or social justice discourse. But who determines the definitions and trajectories of social justice, and what shape of human does it include and exclude? Given that specific contexts have particular interpretations and translations of what is

considered universal, South Africa's constitution and SUSA's equity policies are not necessarily the only norms governing their communities – as Butler contends, 'societal norms that work on the subject to produce its desires and restrict its operation do not operate unilaterally. They are not simply imposed and internalised in a given form'(Butler in Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000: 151). Each subject, based on individual histories, beliefs and communities, will translate these and/or live these differently, and have different epistemological access to them. Žižek sums up Butler's argument by making a distinction between 'on the one hand, the "dead", "abstract" universality of an ideological notion with fixed inclusions/exclusions and, on the other, "living", "concrete" universality as the permanent process of questioning and renegotiation of its own "official" content' (Žižek in Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000: 102). Building on her assertion, he goes on to recommend that progressive politics should undermine and exploit this possibility, and 'should precisely openly practise performative contradiction, asserting on behalf of the given universality the very content this universality (in its hegemonic form) excludes' (ibid: 103). Arguably, SOAW, a result of individual women's progressive politics, emerged as an organisation which 'openly practise[d] performative contradiction' as a feminist organisation in a patriarchal culture.

Before examining how moments within this schema open up to transformation, it is important to consider the role of agency in providing individuals with the choice to perform roles differently or to exploit these moments. As mentioned earlier, Lloyd notes that Butler's theory dismantles a transformative role of agency, because, for her, 'agency is not related to a theory of the self but is an effect of the operations of discourse- power through which subjects are produced '( Lloyd 2005:107). Lloyd suggests that transformative change is not guaranteed by Butler's definition of agency, but her broader theory gives us opportunities to find conditions that 'bring about alterations in the systems of domination that structure the world' (ibid). Shireen Hassim, in considering the role of women and feminism in South African political mobilisation, agrees that 'the task of feminism is to examine the particular ways in which power operates within and between the political, social and economic spheres of specific societies – in effect, this is a political project of transformation' (Hassim 2004:3). Both of these scholars imply that it is the particularities of the relationships which are important rather than the sense of agency one individual or group might have within it. For Butler, agency as an operational effect of particular politics embedded in the conditions of constructed subjectivities is seen to be part of the power and domination discourse, and not a condition to be attained in order for transformation to happen (Lloyd 2005:95).

Notwithstanding the constructedness of agency, it is possible for vulnerable individuals to be agents of transformation. In South African politics, "transformation" has a particular set of meanings that

work against its occurrence: having been part of the political conversation since before democratic elections in 1994, it has acquired a fixedness, with terms, outcomes and rhetoric, which make it a part of the framework in which we find and live our subjectivities either as a particular identity group, or as agents of transformation. Within this definition, “vulnerable groups” are identified as requiring particular strategies, such as funding for women academics by the Andrew Mellon Foundation at SUSU University. But do these vulnerable groups necessarily find transformation through these efforts? Because women have special funding to try to bring about academic equity goals, are they transformed by the process, and are men? Does the funding and opportunities it offers change beliefs and behaviours in the institution? I argue that this is not necessarily the case, and that transformation happens despite transformation strategies and not because of them.

Using the constructedness of subjectivity as a starting point, Butler sees flawed performances, mastery and vulnerability in this framework as opportunities for transformation. For SOAW, the subjectivity of individuals within the normative SUSU context, the performativity of members and the organisation within this, and ways in which they comply with, fail to fit, or subvert systems, provide opportunities for moments of transformation and new constructions. In keeping with Butler’s theory, transformation agendas are not the key to social justice in themselves, but the transformativity of moments, despite these agendas, is what we must look for in order to progress. Transformativity refers to the conditions of the relationship between subjectivity, normativity and performativity, which bring about transformation. It requires the recognition of vulnerability in the renegotiation of subjectivity, and is most possible when identity categories are destabilised or have non-convergent translations in how they are expressed.

In the chapters which follow, these Butlerian terms, as well as the notion of transformativity, are used to examine the emergence of SOAW, and then to highlight individual moments where the matrix is visible in practice.

## **CHAPTER 5: The Emergence and development of the Solidarity Organisation for Academic Women (SOAW).**

### *Introduction*

At SUSU in 2004 when SOAW was conceived, imminent changes in the life of the institution were juxtaposed with the celebration of its centenary. These conditions provided an opportunity for change in a variety of spaces, and the advent of a new vice chancellor (mid 2005) heralded the possibility of renegotiating definitions and categories which framed and limited academic women in the institution. This chapter describes the emergence of SOAW, and how it established itself in the institutional context. It explains how the organisation developed in particular ways, highlighting particular processes to illustrate the possibilities of transformation which SOAW presented and continues to present in individuals, and as a collective platform in SUSU. SOAW's early years are tracked through documents and oral history from those founding members; and until its current manifestation is tracked through minutes, listserv discussions, emails, reports and autoethnography. SOAW has provided women with the opportunity to renegotiate their subjectivity within the university, and this has effect not only on them, but also on SOAW and SUSU. For the purposes of this exploration in the next two chapters, SUSU fits largely into the normative framework of Butler's matrix, in order to demonstrate how the matrix works. It should be noted though that SUSU's norms are not necessarily or always fixed, and that the matrix could in fact demonstrate the fluidity of SUSU's normativity if that were the focus.

### *From conversation to organisation*

During the course of 2004, a group of women friends bemoaned to each other their frustrations with what they perceived to be a patriarchal SUSU system and culture. D and M were lecturers and T was a Masters student in the humanities faculty, and all felt that their needs were not being understood or met within the available academic and administrative systems. Informal conversations between the three women and their friends led to a decision to invite similarly minded women to a gathering at D's house on a cold and windy afternoon early in September 2004 to discuss ways in which they could support each other (Focus group discussion 2009). Of that meeting, D says

it didn't grow slowly, the first meeting was a mass meeting (laugh). So we decide we're going to have this little thing, and oh god, it's in my house, that 16 A Street – in the university house, so we invite the women on a Sunday afternoon – that room was packed! and we wanted to do everything! L came, and we had like people who hadn't been invited, people brought another person, that person brought another person, and they wanted to take on everything related to gender – from sexual harassment to rape to confidence funding, you

were there, right? it was, I mean, I don't know about you, but I was like, holy shit, is julle mal dat julle kom – gaan huis toe! we have started a mass organisation met julle wat kom op my stoep! (D, focus group discussion, 2009)

Of the original list of 19 mail recipients of the minutes of this meeting, most were black academics (SOAW Minutes, 6 September 2004). There was one white lecturer included in the group. In the first minutes of the group, one of the identified goals of SOAW was 'to counter the alienation that one feels at a white and male-dominated institution' (ibid). In the context of SUSU's poor equity figures at the time, and the white male-dominated history celebrated in the centenary year, it was black women who felt most alienated in the institution – exactly the group where SUSU equity figures showed the least progress. SOAW offered something different for this group. According to Master's student, S,

it was the space of support and learning and engagement and encouragement... you had a sense that this was meant to be a safe space (S, focus group discussion, 2009).

The individuals who gravitated to SOAW at this stage felt the constraints of the institutional setting, but used a collective vision to establish a productive and supportive alternative space, suggesting a Butlerian petitioning of the future 'always in relation to the other' (Butler 2004:44). While many nameless Z's continue to be casualties of their academic and professional aspirations, SOAW provided (and continues to do so) a space to be recognised, and to be included.

Initially, the group called itself OFYAW (Organisation for Young Academic Women). Although it wasn't strictly speaking only young women who were members, the group felt that the organisation could provide a space where emerging researchers and professionals would find intellectual and administrative support. It grew rapidly, and by the end of 2005, the 60-member strong group decided to become an officially registered university organisation. The Solidarity Organisation for Academic Women (SOAW) was the name they felt reflected more closely their diverse membership and range of activities, asserting a slightly renegotiated character. The organisation had established itself with a clear academic focus, and with a political, collective aspect suggested by "Solidarity".

The ambitious dreams and strategies of the initial group were expressed in the minutes of the first meeting as: academic/intellectual support; funding support for entry level researchers; institutional transformation through the visibility of women; providing academic mentorship for individuals within the group; and social events which would counter the white, male homogeneity (SOAW Minutes, 6 September 2004). The academic focus, rather than a feminist or activist one, was deliberate, despite the founders regarding themselves as feminists. D explains how this came to be:

Why was it the core activity? Because we wanted to help them finish their doctorates, successfully, because we felt they lacked support, they lacked mentoring, they lacked so many things that allowed them to self-tuition, and that's a different kind of feminism. There's a feminism that says I hate rape and I must march about that. There's a feminism that says the self development, the self actualisation of people is the most liberating moment in life, not -if you can help to do that, then you've made your most profound feminist statement. So you might be talking a very crass, professional objective like a thesis.. (interruption). (D, focus group discussion, 2009)

The decision to keep core activities centred on academic work was perhaps most important to the early members because it was precisely in this area that they felt a lack of recognition. T described an instance where she, a young Master's student, was called into one of her (white, male) professor's offices, and congratulated on her degree, and told that she would make someone a very proud husband (T, focus group discussion, 2009). This was not the academic recognition she was hoping for, and OFYAW provided an alternative.

Over the next few months, OFYAW's aspirations were articulated in a number of ways. Meetings were held, on weekend afternoons, and

...we started off with seminars. A raw chapter of your dissertation, someone else's chapter – N, Ca- everybody had chapters, we went through L's chapter—we all had touched each other's dissertations. For like two thirds of that membership. (D, focus group discussion, 2009).

For the initial group, this focus on each other's work meant that an interdisciplinary intellectual space was established, which was not common practice at the time at SUSU. The positive regard the women had for each other added a dimension that gave the group impetus, perhaps unconsciously, to grow into more ambitious projects such as mentoring. But certainly the friendships that were developed and established, on the grounds of intellectual support, added the kind of value to their academic life that was not there before. At first this was expressed in hospitality:

People were so good and so generous – J gave her place - and it would be this warm welcoming environment, coffee would be steaming, you know, I'm telling you, it was the closest people like us could get to church actually. (D, focus group discussion, 2009).

More than this though was a sense of shared values, values that were not present in the academic spaces available to these women in their departments. D goes on to explain,

...what is interesting is that we didn't become feminist when we got there, actually the core of SOAW was feminist before they got there ...conscious or less conscious, so because that was a feminist space that was challenging patriarchal ways of doing academic work at the university, is that, immediately then, there were those kinds of people, as Ca would say, my people, would be happy there, you actually find such a moment of lovely spontaneous, exhilarating bonding that if we were at some public venue, they would have to shut us up

because we were so happy to be together (laughter, shouting). (D, focus group discussion, 2009).

From the start, a non-hierarchical structure infused the gatherings with a shared sense of responsibility. Each meeting was held at a different person's house. At each meeting, a chair and minute-taker would be selected for the next meeting, and the next presenters chosen. This became the basis for how the group operated. While some members were more experienced and further along their academic paths than others, there was not a sense of anyone being superior or in control. People could express themselves in ways that the formal institution had inhibited or failed to nurture (focus group discussion, 2009) amongst others who were positively inclined towards them.

Members were encouraged to express themselves freely, and soon, instead of being defined by the university space, they were defining their own space, and were noticed when they sat together at university gatherings. My own introduction to the group was as a university administrator attending a public lecture at SUSA. This group of vibrant women engaged with the lecture, and with each other, in ways that were quite different to what I was used to in the institution. I wanted to be part of it.

In July 2005, a document was generated which outlined SOAW's intentions, and gave a report drawing on the diligently maintained minutes and records since its first meeting the previous year. The first item mentioned in the SOAW report of 2005 is group meetings. These happened once a month rotating on Saturdays and Sundays. Women would present papers or chapters, and provide feedback and discussion. A rotating chair and minute taker shared the administration of this. The second item in the first report is an address by Prof N, a highly respected scientist, in which support and interest from this key academic was established. Thirdly, attendance at the NEWSA (North Eastern Workshop on Southern Africa) by four of the members who presented papers, funded by NRF and SUSA, is reported. Fourthly, a mentoring programme is mentioned as due to launch – an informal mentoring programme had been in operation since the organisation started. A final activity reported as significant for SOAW was the representation of women's interests in formal university structures. 'Collaborative efforts and negotiating' were considered key to meeting their objectives (SOAW report 2005).

#### *Early Membership patterns and roles*

Between 2004 and 2005, the membership of the group steadily increased, showing a concentration in the humanities faculty. Fourteen members wrote brief profiles of themselves at the start of

SOAW: six were busy with their PhD's, four with their MA's, and four had completed their PhD's. Their stated interests were in finding support for writing and publishing, contributing to and finding support for women at SUSU, a safe place to present work/fears, challenges. Three of them stated that they were activists. They came from departments of Sociology, History, Education, Journalism, Politics, and Mathematics (SOAW files).

At the end of 2005 it was decided by the group to formalise the organisation to become an officially registered university organisation called SOAW. An elected executive committee oversaw the running of SOAW for a six month term, with some members overlapping to provide continuity. This was a conscious effort, inspired by the first chair, D, who explained:

in a way I was almost reacting to a lot of learned experiences from the male dominated left wing organisations, and SOAW without meaning to became an experiment for doing things differently...and some of the lived feminism – there was no script that said if you're in a feminist organisation never have a chair that serves for more than six months –nothing told us so I followed a lot of instinct in relation to, how do you try to keep power fluid, and the one thing is, don't get a president for life, so the moment I left it destabilised my centrality in the organisation and created another centre of the locus of power, and before that one could get too dominant, whoops, there was another one, you know, so there were a couple of things that I thought were really important, and the principle of non-patriarchal organisation (D, focus group discussion, 2009).

By the beginning of 2006, there were 69 members. 23 were lecturers, 5 were senior lecturers, 17 were Masters students, there was 1 honours student, 4 administration staff, and a number of researchers and junior lecturers, as well as three women not at SUSU, but working in town. The members came from an even broader range of disciplines, including Physics, Environmental Education, Pharmacy, Law and Economics.

### *Funding and patronage*

SOAW made good progress in establishing sources of funding within SUSU, demonstrating a way in which a collective group could navigate the bureaucracy of the institution drawing on the strengths and experience of older members. SOAW members initiated access to the NRF Thuthuka funding programme, which specifically targets women, but requires matched support from the institution. By early 2006 conversations had begun about further funding possibilities – for instance contingency funding from the Dean of Research. This provided the funding for four women to attend the NEWSA conference in Vermont in 2006, an international conference for women on Southern Africa, which inspired what is now an annual conference run by SOAW at SUSU, SEWSA, where editors are invited to respond to papers written by women with a view to increasing publishing. Because the women were pooling their knowledge of administrative systems and networks which usually would be

hidden or complicated, the early organisation began to see the individual benefits of collective thinking. They could not only read the SUSA systems more legibly, but also exploit or create areas where they saw opportunities for the renegotiation of policies, processes and subjectivities. An early ally of the organisation was the vice principal of the university - the first black person in his position. In a farewell letter to SOAW in 2007, his wife laments 'you are the ONE reason I am unhappy to leave' (C1, personal email to SOAW chair). Arguably, this couple did not feel understood, recognised or accommodated in the white-dominated regions of power in the institution, and felt ostracised by the institutional culture of the time. The early overt support from this layer of power, and perhaps because of how this individual was challenging and challenged by attitudes to race, prompted SOAW to engage opportunistically to access first financial, then political support in a variety of ways. The strong feminist agenda of the beginning became systematically more systemised. The current dispensation of SOAW attests to D's early strategy of keeping power fluid by six-monthly terms of office, but the conditions at the time of the OFYAW/SOAW reconfiguration both within and without SOAW saw a strengthening of SOAW's relationships with anti-fluid structures of the institution.

By now, in early 2006, it was felt that funding for the sheer bulk of administration, as well as writing breakaways and conference attendance, should be secured in order to sustain the development of SOAW. D had made contact in the course of her university work with MS, director of a large international funding organisation's South African operation. His interest was stirred by D's accounts of SOAW, and he agreed to look at a proposal and make recommendations. A fundraiser for the SUSA Development Office, I got myself invited to explain the institutional fundraising process and provide advice on options and proposals. The executive and other interested members formulated potential programmes and budgets, and a proposal was drawn up.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (Mellon)<sup>4</sup> was recommended by MS as being a suitable donor to SOAW (SOAW email, SOAW files). The Mellon Foundation was highly esteemed in the university as generous donors with rigorous criteria. According to fundraising protocol, individuals or groups within the university did not approach these funders directly, but would be invited to submit proposals by the vice-chancellor who managed the relationship with this donor. Using collective knowledge of how the system and how networks worked, provided women of SOAW the opportunity to claim agency on a collective basis. And through well placed individuals, access was found to resources to develop their ideas further. Arguably, the space that SOAW had created for women meant that they had developed a sense of recognition and value, necessary to claim what

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<sup>4</sup> While names in this thesis have been changed, this donor's name remains, as it is a global donor funding a number of South African university projects.

they needed and to renegotiate a more inclusive future – no longer defined by the patriarchal culture, no longer limited by gatekeepers within the university.

The vice chancellor, newly appointed in 2006, was invited to a welcoming party by SOAW in the first months of his arrival. A SOAW committee took him to lunch. Individuals introduced themselves to him, and synergies (and occasional differences) were found in our notions of transformation, specifically of gender. He supported SOAW's application to Mellon, and tweaked the final, successful, proposal. The Mellon funding provided around R300 000 per annum for three years, and the donation was provided in full at a time when the exchange rate was good, with interest earned each year added to the initial amount.

Formalising the organisation, along with funding (which required specific accountability to the donors with prescribed criteria) affected the fluidity of the organisation. Further analysis of this will demonstrate how this affected the relationships within SOAW, and between SOAW and the university.

#### *SOAW's emerging relationship with SUSa from 2006*

SOAW, in line with its feminist principles, began to establish in 2006 a working relationship with SUSa based on the strengths and interests of its members. Remembering this early relationship of building on what and who they knew and combining their strengths, D notes that

one of the [core strategies of SOAW] was issue based subcommittees- because again, if you have an institutionalised structure, then again that sort of power that people can abuse, but if you have if you have issue based committees then people can get excited about their issues and the ones who want to do something at that point, the organisation must have that flexibility and the fluidity...to respond immediately. (D, focus group discussion, 2009).

Partly by invitation by, for instance, the vice chancellor from 2006, and to promote and protect the interests of their members, SOAW began to secure representation on university committees. The committees on which SOAW was invited to or chose to serve were not necessarily or always in line with the interests or values of the SOAW representatives. Ordinary members, particularly in the shifting foci of SOAW by 2006/7, did not necessarily have the same feminist grounding which D describes in this way:

because they were feminists, there was a second kind of order- its work was underpinned by a very strong gender consciousness, all the way, and that's what sort of united us...and I think, do the, do the [SOAW] subcommittee way, get three other women who feel like you, and start dragging other women through what you're doing, and canvas and get [SOAW]

support for your statements or your interventions or whatever (D, focus group discussion, 2009).

University committees do not function in the same fluid way, with shared values, that SOAW meetings did, and the committees on which members served arguably and potentially challenged SOAW's fluidity.

From as early as 2005, SOAW members discussed and served on the new vice-chancellor selection committee, and pledged to support an appointment that was pro-transformation. SOAW members were also invited to serve on a Housing Task Team in 2006. The representatives met with SOAW members to find membership issues with housing, and these were represented on the committee. GENG, a Senate committee at the time, monitors and recommends gender sensitive issues on campus. Since 2006, SOAW has been represented on this committee, and GENG has been responsible for driving a number of policy changes – including a progressive parental policy, an anti-harassment policy, and other institutional changes. NTESU, the academic staff union, agreed to include a SOAW member on its executive team. This was never taken up until 2008 when a SOAW member was elected onto the executive, but later resigned for ideological reasons. The Remuneration Task team, which considered the findings of Support and Academic staff remuneration task teams, included a SOAW representative from 2007 in its two year deliberations which led to a remuneration policy. The Naming committee oversees, vetoes or approves renaming or the naming of new buildings – an SOAW member was invited by the vice chancellor to serve on this in 2007. Each year there is an opportunity to vote for additional members to serve on Senate. SOAW tries to ensure that one SOAW member is nominated for this and that they are voted in by eligible members. Having a gender sensitive representative on this important university body is considered to be an important aspect of challenging gender stereotypes and representing women's interests in the formal SUSA system. Furthermore, SOAW members are encouraged to join their faculty boards in order to raise issues regarding women and equity in these meetings. In this way, SOAW members are able to contribute to discussions regarding e.g. promotions criteria, and ways in which the university culture permits or perpetuates sexism.

In addition to these formal committee structures, there were university processes which SOAW used as opportunities for inclusion and for renegotiating subjectivity. In 2007, the vice chancellor and Director of Human Resources called a meeting to which SOAW members were invited, to discuss a mooted Gender Imbizo. The SOAW chair at the time ended up chairing the imbizo planning committee, which culminated in a three day university colloquium to alert representatives from a wide range of university departments and sections to issues of gender and discrimination. A number

of SOAW members presented at the imbizo. The imbizo generated discussion as well as ways to move forward – a number of these were fed into the GENG committee which was tasked to drive the implementation of issues. The policy changes – for instance, the parental policy, child-care facilities and the anti-harassment policy - are partly and part of the result (<http://www.ru.ac.za/humanresources/supportstaffmatters/leave/parentalleave> ).

In 2008 the then minister of education tasked each university with a comprehensive document assessment of transformation on each campus, resulting in the Soudien report mentioned earlier. SOAW was represented on the SUSA Ministerial task team to coordinate inputs from the university. SOAW members met intensively to go through each policy, scrutinising its wording and effectiveness, especially in terms of gender awareness, but also for other forms of subtle discrimination. SOAW made a comprehensive submission to this process after meeting collectively over two weekends to solicit and combine responses, and also met with the ministerial task team to discuss issues of discrimination and to acknowledge areas of progress. Because this was a national process, a SOAW member was invited to write a response to the Ministerial task team report for the Mail and Guardian (<http://www.mg.co.za/article/2009-06-24-thanks-for-nothing> ), and was part of an on-air panel discussion on SAFM and 5fm.

Their inclusion in university committees and processes had the effect of ensuring that SOAW interests were represented, but also that SOAW became influenced by this formal structuring. T describes this conflict:

how did you navigate an institutional structural element that was forcing an organisation to play a particular role, that was very, kind of, formal committees – we all had to be on a committee, and there were discussions around who was going to be on which committee. In terms of trying to keep it issue based, but also having to complement the mainstream in some way (T, focus group discussion, 2009).

A number of SOAW documents attest to member's experience of SUSA's patriarchal culture. The report on the Promotions workshop of September 2007, which was also included in SOAW's admission to the Ministerial Task Team on Transformation in June 2008, states that an institutional obstacle to women's success at SUSA was the

Male dominated environment and culture which perpetuates the male success in academia while contributing to the ejection of women out of the system or staying stagnant in their chosen careers. One of the Deans mentioned that the statistics are a fact of life which hinges largely on societal choices like having more females as nurses than men. It was pointed out that the societal choices are not the only contributing factor to patterns like not having a female academic Dean at SUSA University. A patriarchal culture sure did play a role (SOAW Promotions report in the Ministerial report 2008:12).

At the workshop in which the Dean in question made his statements (in response to a question regarding his faculty's equity strategy) in the presence of about 30 SOAW women, the Human Resources director and 5 Deans, women were no longer willing to allow this positioning of women to go unchallenged. Demonstrated in minutes and Mellon reports, SOAW was determined, consciously overtly or covertly, to renegotiate the script, and to challenge institutional practices. They did this (and do this) in committees of the university, and in events, responses and committees they organised, in order to ensure that a different voice was included in the university deliberations.

Despite the of the progressive success in establishing a SOAW identity and recognition within the university system and power networks, the founders in retrospect acknowledge that even then, they had underestimated the extent of the difficulties for the organisation. T notes that

I think if we had a more significant understanding of the kinds of ways in which an institution like SUSU, and its history, was perpetuating issues around men or black men in that institution and support, and the understanding, the way that men will support men so you'll have the dean ... supporting a male prof not being supportive in the same way of a black woman in that department, so there were ways in which, in hindsight or experience, or being able to spend time with the women that we spent time with at SUSU, and then the subsequent readings that we were exposed to, in my experience, the kinds of people I have now read since being part of SOAW, is the understanding that it's a far more complex way that we need to look at the SUSU environment, and ways in which we as women, or black women or black men are experiencing that environment(T, focus group discussion, 2009).

### *Challenges in SOAW*

By 2007, SOAW was a funded organisation, and the natural attrition cycles in universities through graduation and promotion meant that some of the founders were no longer at SUSU. Six-monthly changes of executive members meant that 'Each chair of SOAW has brought unique leadership focus, and as the active SOAW constituency has shifted as women move on or focus on individual careers or research, new members have developed and found voice' (First SOAW Mellon report, 2007). SOAW funding had been well advertised both within SOAW and without. As soon as funding was approved, in March 2007, a group of 25 members met for a full Saturday workshop to decide on programmes, and to draw up how they should be run, along with a 3-year budget (SOAW minutes, March 2007). A programme booklet (Addendum 5) outlining these was launched at an open meeting, where the donors and vice chancellor were thanked for their support.

Funding provided a number of opportunities and challenges. By the end of the first funding year, SOAW had hosted and organised a SEWSA conference for two years running; four women went to conferences; visiting speakers were invited to the institution; mentors and a mentoring coordinator

were receiving honorariums; workshops had been run; two writing breakaways, involving about 30 women, were held; equipment was bought, which could be borrowed by members to complete work; a part-time coordinator was funded to try to keep on top of the daily administrative tasks associated with spending R300 000 a year. The executive committee, coordinating the funded programmes, was required to do administrative work themselves, as the demands were often too much for the assistant. The chair in particular had enormous responsibilities.

Funding not only affected the role and definition of the committee, but attracted women to SOAW who were interested in funding and not necessarily or only the collective project. It became increasingly difficult to attract members to serve on the committee, and in 2008, the chair was elected to serve a second term because no one else was willing to pick up the reins.

But the platform which SOAW provided for women to voice their concerns collectively, established by institutionalising the organisation and obtaining funding, meant that women could begin to renegotiate how the university regarded them.

#### *Finding voice and choosing battles*

Moving beyond a role of representation on committees and processes, from 2007, SOAW began to critique processes and events in the university system, with particular emphasis on issues of equity. This involved collaborating with other members, and had effects not only in the university, but amongst the membership of SOAW itself.

The first example of this regards a press article in a leading South African newspaper dealing with allegations of racism at SUSA (Race row heats up – *City Press*, 19 November 2007). The newspaper article provided sketchy information dealing with a case of a black female academic and her alleged victimisation by and of students, her department, and the university; in so doing, it put possibly problematic race relations at SUSA in the public domain. The vice chancellor, in one response to the article, wrote a letter to all SUSA alumni in which he quotes from his opening address to first year students and their parents earlier in 2007:

Conduct, relationships and responsibilities at SUSA are guided by the values of our Constitution and Bill of Rights – respect for human dignity, human rights, equality, non-sexism and non-racialism. Everyone at SUSA - other students, academics, house and hall wardens, technicians, secretaries, messengers and ground staff - deserves respect and dignity. SUSA is a home for all! (vc's letter to alumni, 27/11/07).

On the listserv, SOAW members collaborated on a SOAW response, which was sent to the vice chancellor, deans and senior management. The response asserts that

[T]he university's mode of dealing with racism and sexism on campus is not a clear and transparent process, and this poses a threat to its fairness and justice. We understand that the issues involving discrimination are often complex and more often than not, are intertwined with personal and workplace concerns. However, these layers should be peeled off and complexities unpacked where necessary so that discrimination is not rendered invisible. Thus while it is not within our scope to comment on the validity of the claims in the recent press, it provides us with an opportunity to voice our dissatisfaction with SUSA's handling of incidents of discrimination, and with the gap that exists between policy (such as the Equity Policy) and practice (SOAW's response to the management of transformation, racism and sexism at SUSA University, 28 November 2007).

The response further alleges that 'overt and subtle forms of racism and sexism are experienced by some staff members at SUSA and this presents serious challenges to our transformation agenda' (ibid). In effect, SOAW was highlighting a situation rendered invisible by the vice chancellor's letter to the alumni, and his opening address.

As a result of SOAW's letter, the vice-chancellor invited SOAW to a meeting with the director of Human Resources and himself to discuss it further. In preparation for the meeting, SOAW again met to unpick their letter and come up with 12 action points which were suggested as possible ways to deal with discrimination (SOAW listserv 3/12/07 and Addendum 3). These included the appointment of a full time staff member to deal with equity at the university; a transparent process of dealing with discrimination; accountability of deans and HoD's for equity and non-discrimination in their departments; monitoring of incidents; and more opportunities for the university community to discuss issues of discrimination and equity. A SOAW delegation then met with the vice chancellor and director of Human Resources, and put these ideas on the table in a spirit of support and cooperation.

While SUSA slowly moved towards a fairer process – which included developing a protocol for dealing with discrimination which was transparent and fair– in 2009 another explicit racial incident affected the campus. This time a senior black male lecturer was taunted by a drunk, white student who called him a “nigger”( SUSA toplist, 08/09). Arguably, the public nature of this offence, and the immediate contact the victim made with the vice chancellor, were some of the reasons why the university response differed widely from the previous racist accusation. This incident was taken up in full force by the vice chancellor, and the university was encouraged to respond to the incident through public statements, and through displaying specially made stickers (“SUSA rejects racism”) as visibly as possible (ibid) .

Again SOAW collaborated to come up with a statement, and felt that the work they did to make suggestions in 2007 still applied. Certain SOAW members saw the university's loud response to the

second racist incident as having sexist overtones: the first incident involved a junior black female academic, and to date the incident has not yet been resolved between the academic concerned and the university (B interview, August 2010); the second incident (dealt with swiftly and loudly) involved a senior black male academic and was construed by some SOAW members as an example of men looking after men (SOAW emails, August 2009). Others felt that this was perhaps a form of progress, in that the response was an improvement in terms of including the whole university in an effort to assert non racist norms. The vice chancellor's and the university's response to the second racist incident was not simply to idealise an anti-racist norm, but to assert it, and inviting all to raise their voices. SOAW's statement (Addendum 3) argued that

Eradicating racism, or at least providing a space where racist assumptions are deeply challenged, will require financial and human resources from the university, and we support a progressive commitment to this issue. We drew up a list of recommendations which we presented in December 2007 which need no revision, and are pasted below this statement. All that needs to be added at this stage is the acknowledgement that the university has failed to deal with racism in the institution and in individuals, and that racism continues to infuse relationships at all levels on this campus as in society (SOAW statement re racism, toplist 26/08/09).

The statement included below it the twelve points which had been presented two years earlier. Where previously the twelve points were presented to the vice chancellor and director of Human Resources, they were now put up on the university's listserv for all staff to see. The wider university community was thus privy to SOAW's framing of the incident and the university's response. Some members of the university community commented on the statement and points, congratulating SOAW on their careful thought on the matter (SOAW emails August 2009). Letting the wider university know that SOAW had engaged the university two years previously with good suggestions, most of which had not yet been applied, was an important moment in SOAW's relationship with SUSU and its membership of that community: individuals, men and women, who were not part of SOAW but also felt uncomfortable with university norms and practices, could engage in a conversation which didn't merely pay lip service to a 'dead...ideological notion' (Žižek in Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000: 102) but could renegotiate the content of SUSU's anti-racism slant. A Forum for Institutional Transformation and Anti-Racism (FITAR) was started by a small group of staff and students, and SOAW was invited to be part of it. While the institution's slow process might not see all twelve of the points on the list applied, these have become part of the university's ongoing discussions on equity at individual, institutional and departmental levels (including a so far unsuccessful attempt to employ a staff member dedicated to equity and transformation), and has formed the basis of an alliance between SOAW and FITAR.

In 2007 the first poster on the SOAW list, regarding an SOAW response to racism as reported in the City Press, was the newly elected chair, C. She put together a first draft of a statement regarding SUSA's process of dealing with discrimination. C was the fourth SOAW chair since its emergence. Despite D's early concern regarding the fluidity of power and greater inclusiveness ('do the hierarchies correspond to the paid professional bureaucracies in that institution' D, in-depth interview, 2009), the first three chairs, including D, were black, senior academic women (two were senior lecturers and one was a senior researcher), and had husbands who held powerful positions (Head of a research institute, HoD, and Dean). The fourth chair broke this mould: C was white; her partner at the time was not part of SUSA in any way; she worked in an administration department; and she had yet to register for her Master's degree. While she had served on the executive committee as ad hoc member and treasurer for the previous year and as such had demonstrated her allegiance to SOAW's norms and aims, her capacity or willingness to address the concerns of the constituency had yet to be proved. At this stage (November 2007), SOAW was well into its first year of funding, and the SOAW constituency had expanded to include women who wished to access funding rather than for ideological reasons. There was also a shift in the racial mix – expanding the SOAW membership through funding opportunities and formalised programmes had brought many more white women to the organisation. So at this point, SOAW's strength seemed focussed on women's vulnerability in accessing funding from SUSA, rather than their vulnerability as gendered and raced beings in a patriarchal institution.

When C first posted her draft statement on the listserv for discussion in 2007, she was experiencing certain levels of inadequacy as chair: she had noticed the difference in race and status between herself and previous chairs, and was tentatively negotiating a new subjectivity as chair. By now, the work of the committee was centred on ensuring that funded programmes worked well in order to keep donors happy, as well as keeping the ideology of SOAW alive. Many of the SOAW founders had moved on – either to other places of employment, different cities, or to focus on their other priorities. Serving on the SOAW committee can be draining and exhausting, and few of those who had put their energy into founding the organisation, had any left at this stage. From 2007, it became increasingly difficult to find SOAW members willing to serve on the committee. D described the difficulties of leading the organisation in an in depth interview:

One of the demoralising things about the organisation, you can't get the hang of why the hell can't they work harder. They are passionate about their own things. I came from a socialist background, and that's the kind of friction that you run up against [in middle classes]. ..You don't expect everybody to have the same [socialist] competency, but at a certain level that's a real limit on the organisation. Dedicated people get worn out. They wear you out. And that's why the six month thing is good. Because by the time we instituted

the six month thing the founders had been carrying the organisation for eighteen months and we were utterly drained, and I think some of us were angry also, you know, angry at the burden that we were bearing, you know? (D, in depth interview, 10 September 2009).

What D was expressing was the inherent difficulties of leading a feminist organisation. The kinds of women drawn from SUSAs, where individual effort was rewarded institutionally and departmentally, were not necessarily collective in their thinking. The tension was in keeping fluid, keeping inclusive, while managing and sheltering a variety of subjectivities looking for new ways to be.

The accusation of racism described in the City Press was an opportunity for C, as chair, to engage the SOAW constituency in its founding principles – sheltering vulnerability, and collectively negotiating expanded subjectivity at SUSAs. Five posters to the listserv contributed to the discussion in the first story – all black, all previous executive members, two of them previous chairs. They debated the content of the SOAW response, honing it until it articulated the aspects that SOAW felt qualified to address: regardless of the intricacies of the particular case, it was felt that SUSAs's method of dealing with instances of discrimination was weak, opaque and inconsistent.

The effect of the challenging support (there was some vehement disagreement with how the response was framed, and it was reworked a number of times) of these founding members of SOAW on the initiative of the chair was profound: it affirmed her right to be chair and her place in important conversations with SUSAs. At the end of 2007, C chaired an institutional gender imbizo, was serving on 4 university committees, and had found her voice as an active and outspoken member of the university community. In a context where there is often a division between the academic and administrative staff on university campuses (see for example Dobson, 2000; Bramble, 1996; Thomas, 1998), SOAW provided a platform to do things differently. Being selected as SOAW chair was an important bridge in her personal development as an academic and as an activist.

Another example of SOAW responding to a university issue occurred more recently. In February 2009 during SUSAs's first year orientation week, SUSAs once more made headlines, this time around an alleged rape. While the first year orientation week is meant for first year students, older students filter into the town during this time and the pubs do strenuous trade during orientation week. An outdoor party for all SUSAs students formed part of the university's welcome and was the final of a week's activities. The incident took place in one of the pubs, where first year students in large numbers celebrated the start of their academic career, and where older students mingled with them, sometimes with predatory intention.

The incident which took place caused heated debate, not, as certain SOAW members would have hoped, around the problem of rape, consent, violence and alcohol abuse, but around the fact that the alleged rapist, a 3rd year white male student, was pictured and named in the local newspaper before the case had gone to court (*G- Mail*, 18 February 2009). This picture formed part of the newspaper's marketing page – in effect, the identity of the alleged rapist was distributed throughout the town and campus. The furore which emerged (in the newspapers, and through the communications via toplist and student listservs from the Dean of Student's office, the vice chancellor and individuals) expressed outrage at the disregard of the young man's rights. A SOAW member expressed her outrage at what she saw as a skewed institutional response. Her email to the SOAW listserv sparked an online discussion. The discussion serves as a good example of the kinds of processes (and material) which were possible on the SOAW listserv, and in the lives of individuals and the relationships between them. The discussion provides a more in depth look at particular workings within and around SOAW in its engagement with gendered practices at SUS. What follows is a fairly long excerpt of the online discussion to illustrate the way in which the listserv was used to develop both individual and collective responses:

I am putting this out there. I am concerned that the university has withdrawn all charges against the male student noting that there was insufficient evidence, and that yet [a student gender organisation] is saying that the female student is a 'rape survivor'. If there was insufficient evidence why translate this into saying that the female student is a 'rape survivor'? (J, listserv discussion, 23 February 2009)

The point is: the female student has reported the incident and called it rape. Therefore in her eyes she is a rape survivor. Whether this is one of the 4% of all rape cases that gets to court, in her eyes, and in the eyes of those who dealt with her after the event, she was raped. And yet, just as in most of society, our university has chosen to say that she is a liar until proved survivor, and he is innocent until proved guilty. I don't want to oversimplify this, but is this not a clear case of patriarchy? siding with the perpetrator by defending his rights to a "fair" trial, while her "story" is treated with disbelief until she submits to the traumatic legal system? where her morals, her dress, her intentions, her previous sexual history, her body all will be scrutinised, and if the case runs its course, will probably be thrown out or found to have insufficient evidence. I am saying that I am outraged that this campus has chosen to defend the male's rights, and deny the female rights, showing that men's rights and normative behaviour is privileged over women's. Is there something I am not getting here? Because I just don't understand how progressive people in a day where rape is such a CRISIS of our society, are okay with this??? (C, listserv discussion, 23 February 2009)

I completely understand the frustration, but I am also of the opinion that fairness, justice etc. is to be accorded to all. (J, listserv discussion, 23 February 2009)

I totally agree with you J-. The way our societies construct men need to be redefined. My assumption too is that it is in the way our societies socialises them. It is deeper than what we see in the surface. These however are long term processes. In the mean time we can express our sorrows and concerns using short term strategies that will help initiate and

speed up these long term processes. Hoping, of course, that someone out there is getting the message and doing something about it. I guess what you and every woman out there is asking is; "is someone listen? is someone getting the message? if no one is, how else can we get them to listen?" (L, listserv discussion, 23 February 2009)

What was happening on the listserv in the days following the rape was an expression of ideas and emotions in what was considered a safe space, a space which recognised the emotional, political and physical vulnerability of women in a patriarchal environment. This safe space allowed members to discuss this incident, as well as the issue of rape more broadly. Because the rape of a student also evokes high emotion, the SOAW listserv was a space where these emotions could be sheltered, away from the institutional arena where emotions are considered an inappropriate response, and in order to work through emotions until a rational response is garnered. The listserv was an inclusive space, in that any SOAW member could post there or read the postings, and so it became, in this instance, a site where subjectivities were contested and articulated.

The first poster in this conversation went on to write an open letter which appeared on the listserv, and was also sent to the vice chancellor, the Dean of Students and senior management, which articulated her concerns more circumspectly. Having vented her emotion, she found support through individual email responses as well as the challenging and divergent views on the listserv. The open letter is long, addressing her perceptions of SUSU's bias and providing some suggestions on how the university could prevent similar incidents in the future. It ends with

I believe that a great injustice has been committed, and that as an institution we have the opportunity to address this injustice with vigour, creativity, fairness and leadership - exposing the supremacy of male actions and attitudes is key to this, and it is my sincere wish that both concerned men and women will take this further. I hope that I can contribute to this process. (C, Group email, 25 February 2009)

At this stage, conversations between SOAW executive members regarding the alleged rape, and regarding the opinions expressed on the listserv, led to one executive member feeling uncomfortable with the vehemence of the original poster. Unbeknown to C, this member then resigned from the SOAW committee, feeling that she wasn't "feminist" enough. While this situation wasn't made public to the SOAW list, the co-chairs thought it would be appropriate to warn posters on the listserv that their opinions and the way that they expressed them could be intimidating. Addressing the members as 'we, the chairs,' their message included:

Yes, let's be passionate about the important issues that affect us as women and let's openly express our passion. Let's too remember that SOAW is made up of a group of different women with different opinions and different ways of processing and expressing these opinions, and our diversity is what makes us rich. This doesn't mean that we can't be activists, but let's allow everyone's differences within SOAW to be respected as we all work

towards a better working environment at SUSa. We therefore encourage ALL members to feel free to contribute towards these and other discussions. (R, listserv discussion, 27 February 2009)

The original poster expressed her confusion as to how to respond to the message from the chairs, and went on to say that she took it personally. Her fairly long response includes:

I regard the SOAW listserv as the one safe place on campus where we can express our feelings and frustrations, especially outrage when there are blatant gender issues to address on campus. I realise too - unfortunately in retrospect - that this can sometimes have a silencing effect. I therefore appeal to all the SOAW members who access this list to recognise that I, for one, am genuinely open to being challenged - especially on this list - but that I would hate to see the conversation so sanitised that only acceptably gently expressed thoughts are permitted. Society already requires this of us, and I consider the SOAW list as an opportunity to do things differently. (C, listserv discussion, 27 February 2009).

What followed was, firstly, a number of emails to her personally, or to her and the chairs, as well as an ongoing discussion on the listserv. On the listserv, a member noted that

Either way we look at it the expressing of words, and therefore one's self is always difficult, especially if it seems to be 'against' the natural order of feeling. However, when one practises speaking one's truth (understanding of course that that truth is always partial and perspectival) and coming to grips with the further understanding that your opinion might not be a shared opinion, you come into your own. I know that this might sound strange -- but in order to feel less intimidated you actually need to speak your truth when the burning desire to do so threatens to consume you. And of course while we might argue that we are 'silenced' by people's strong emotions we can never forget that we also have a responsibility and accountability to ourselves -- ultimately when we don't speak, we have chosen not to speak. (J, listserv discussion, 27 February 2009).

The listserv contributions continued, including one from the resigning executive member explaining her perspective and concerns, and soon the furore over the alleged rape died down. The alleged rape survivor left the university before her academic career had even begun, and the alleged perpetrator continued his studies with all charges dropped. The university has laboured over more transparent and accessible reporting and supporting protocols for victims of sexual or other harassment and abuse ( SUSa HR webpage), and members of the university have been invited to serve as supporting and reporting officers in order to ensure swift responses to such instances. A number of SOAW women, including C, have agreed to serve in these roles, and have undergone hours of training in order to be prepared for future incidents such as those described here.

Specific conditions, throughout SOAWs existence, have shaped the subjectivities of individual members, as well as the relationship between the organisation and SUSa. The negotiation and renegotiation of subjectivities in SOAW, and the space that SOAW provided and provides for a

different kind of performance of subjectivities, were and are what shaped the organisation and individuals within it.

In the two year space between the race and rape incidents, C had moved from an administrator with an undergraduate degree, to a chair of SOAW, junior lecturer, and Master's student. These facts alone indicate that large shifts had happened in her relationship with the university – the political, ideological and emotional shifts, though less visible, were also massive. She had broken up with her life partner, who was uncomfortable with her increasingly feminist stance and SOAW activities; her son had returned from the UK to start his academic career at SUSU and had moved back home; she was immersing herself in feminist literature and research which was new and exciting to her. At the same time though, there was an increasingly heavy burden of applying her tentative and intuitive feminist principles in an organisation where individuals were reluctant to run or attend programmes which were ideologically based rather than funding based. By the end of 2008 the reading group had all but stopped, and internal seminars were dwindling, and for her year as chair she laboured to keep the ideology alive which had attracted her to the organisation in the first place. By the time the new committee took over at the end of 2008, she was drained and exhausted, and her now established feminism was honed to notice patriarchy very starkly. The alleged rape in 2009 caught her at this stage: she felt liberated from her responsibility as chair, liberated from the more limiting context as a university administrator, and was eager to draw on SOAW strengths as an ordinary member and emerging academic. Her original, passionate and angry posting on the SOAW listserv in February 2009 was a request for shelter, and for a feminist recognition of the patriarchy inherent in the circumstances surrounding the alleged rape. The anger she felt could quite likely also have had its roots in what D described as a consequence of leading a feminist organisation in a middle-class setting ('angry at the burden we were bearing' *ibid*).

This story, weaving as it does the development of subjectivity in an individual who initiated SOAW's responses to SUSU in both of the stories, demonstrates the complexities of subjectivity negotiation based on the key aspects of SOAW's founders (inclusivity and the fluidity of power).

Particular challenges and moments of vulnerability can demonstrate ways in which the relationship between the subjectivity, performativity and normativity of individuals within SOAW within SUSU become part of a transformational process. When SOAW emerged, some academic women were feeling vulnerable, and responded to this in ways that led to SOAW's establishment. But vulnerability is a shifting possibility, and as one is sheltered, others emerge. SOAW, by establishing itself on the basis of a vulnerability women were experiencing, opened up the possibility of perpetuating this, or

renegotiating and destabilising power and identity. There are opportunities for transformation, whether in an individual such as C, an organisation such as SOAW, and an institution such as SUSAN. The stories and experiences discussed in this chapter will be explored and analysed in more depth in the next chapter, using Butler's theoretical insights.

One of the first members of OFYAW described the process of an organic feminist process with the following narrative, given in full for its evocation of the unpredictability of feminist praxis:

you start off with this intention when you bring a group of people together, when you start off, and as one of the key people who drive this intention, you have an idea of what it is you want to focus on and where you want to go and where you want to steer this to. But it never stays there, it gets away from you, um, and you shouldn't have to or you shouldn't be able to control it completely. And it's very difficult to let it go. Especially if you've had an idea of it, you've visualised it, and you articulate it in a certain way. But you can't forever have control of it. And sometimes it's frustrating when it goes in different directions from what you had intended that are different from when it started..., there's been a conscious, there seems to be a specific conversation about asking what is the role of the particular network. And if we have it, who are the voices, the dominant voices and ideas, a... I was only involved in SOAW for what, two, one and a half years before I left? ...but by the time I left there was a sense that things were changing... as time went on it did change. Things began to change, when you realised that you also have to give up the rest of it, had to let it flow, but you can't control that flow. And then there's the frustration and the disappointment that the river didn't go where you intended it, and the river branches and off and different things happen (S, focus group discussion, 2009).

## **CHAPTER 6: Transformation happens: discussing transformativity in an institution, in an organisation, and in individuals.**

### *Introduction*

Transformation happens, sometimes despite rather than because of transformation policies, interventions and agendas. It happens when individuals or groups find or make an opportunity to renegotiate the conditions for their recognition in a particular society.

Examining the conditions for transformation within a particular culture such as SUSU University, we need to ask, firstly, what, in their conceptions, was the ideal human that policy makers used as their starting point in drawing up policies and equity strategies, and related to that, how did (and does) this conception of humanity structure the limiting or facilitating framework of their policies? How are policies, practices and protocols interpreted and translated more broadly in that community, and how are new normative frameworks legitimised and realised? Transformation happens in the dynamics of the relationship that a vulnerable group or individual might have with the university structures in terms of subjectivities, performances and translations of norms. These terms do not necessarily translate into distinct categories of explanation – in fact it is the interplay between them that is significant in transformative moments. In this chapter, the emergence and work of SOAW is examined from the position of subjectivity, normativity and performativity and their interplay, in order to describe and to demonstrate how it is that certain conditions can be transformative; how agency is claimed or opportunities found; and how these affect both members and the institution more broadly.

### *Subjectivity*

The country's Constitution and institutional equity policies are guiding frameworks for determining what is liveable, grievable and preferable in South Africa and at SUSU – in turn this informs the kinds of subjectivity that are possible and experienced. But if these defining principles are drawn up in a hegemonic gender framework which excludes certain subjectivities at their starting points, they will only ever engage difference within a limiting framework which does not have the language to articulate the dreams, fears and desires of those excluded. The excluded can only fight for their rights in the terms provided for someone else. Colonialism and imperialism are then inherent in the social justice project, in 'that what is named as universal is the parochial property of dominant culture, and that "universalizability" is indissociable from imperial expansion' (Butler in Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000: 15).

In the SUSA environment, some academic women felt limited by how the subjectivity of academic women was prescribed and supported, and they used the disjuncture of understandings to launch SOAW, where new subjectivity could be imagined and negotiated. Arguably, there are numerous ways in which the renegotiation of subjectivity takes place in any given situation – as claimed earlier, opportunities for change are presented through individuals, events, crises, policies, relationships and processes etc. Not all of these opportunities present possibilities for sustained or sustainable change. As Morley has noted for instance, even the appointment of women to senior positions does not guarantee transformation if there are not also other ways in which patriarchy is being addressed and transformed (Morley 2003:16). Unless the category of woman comes to mean something broader and more inclusive and more valuable, the presence of women in a patriarchal environment, even in influential positions, remains limited by a definition and subjectivity that will only animate externally legitimised portions of themselves, leading to strain and attrition, and ungrievable losses.

That women were experiencing the polarities of experience indicated by Z's farewell to the university at the same time as women were gaining key positions within the university hierarchy indicates not only that they are not a homogenous group; but that SUSA's responses to women were not necessarily consistent or transparent. The conditions in which subjectivities are nurtured, defined, excluded or protected are, argues Butler, established both internally and externally by a particular context. Butler argues that 'what we take to be an "internal" feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalised gestures' (Butler 1999: introduction). The anticipated and produced features of promotion to senior positions at SUSA were not manifested and experienced in the same way by all women.

It would seem that Z, uncomfortable with the conditions in which subjectivities were formed and performed at SUSA, felt no recourse but to leave, in order to find a space where unacknowledged parts of who she was could be expressed. Butler claims that the process which brings about new subjectivities begins when, though I need to be recognised in order to live, 'I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognised make life unlivable' and critique serves 'not to celebrate differences as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation' (Butler 2004c:4). The juxtaposing of Z's experience and those of women advantaged by promotion practices at the time imply that certainly for some women, particularly perhaps academic women, conditions at SUSA were not inclusive of all.

In a patriarchal environment, as the founders of SOAW described SUSU in 2004, the emergence and development of a feminist organisation could be seen, in part, as a transformative progression in the life of the institution. It opened up a conversation regarding new subjectivities, and became 'an experiment for doing things differently' (D, focus group discussion, 2009). The political framing of women as a vulnerable group provided the agency that women needed to find a voice in this conversation. SOAW became, for some women, an alternative platform and means of support for aspects of themselves which were not recognised and supported, and this strengthened their capacity to renegotiate their subjectivity more broadly in the institution. In the experiences of individual members, and in the ongoing relationship between the organisation and the institution, there are numerous opportunities for transformation, especially, but not only, with regard to influence on policy and practice involving women at SUSU. Exactly because it is a patriarchal environment in an arguably misogynist society, women are uncomfortable with the limits of their framing, and they are thus provided with the opportunity to critique and expand the possibilities of who they can be. Finding new subjectivity in SOAW had profound effects in the lives of individual women in a multiplicity of contexts – so not only did the organisation facilitate a broader engagement with SUSU, but women could express and experience themselves differently in the range of their life circumstances, leading to the renegotiation of subjectivity in a number of situations.

It was the discomfort that the founders felt as academic women in the institution that allowed them to act. Butler declares that 'subjection by power produces the possibility for agency'; the category of "woman" then is both the site of oppression and potential liberation (Butler in Lloyd 2005: 65, 66). It gave the founders of SOAW the conditions for transformativity. The relationships between the founders of SOAW, their departments, the institution, their communities, and the normative environment of SUSU, were the conditions for them to consider the instability of all gender identities.

In recognising our own vulnerability, we can recognise the vulnerability of all, and strive to 'petition the future always in relation to the other' (Butler 2004: 44). This recognition of ways in which women are vulnerable in the institution, particularly in relation to institutional aims of academic achievement, was necessary in order to begin to renegotiate an expanded subjectivity in the institution. I argue that because an important articulation of the organisation was one which was shared and thus legitimated by the institution, the progress of a feminist organisation on campus was facilitated more sustainably. The possibility of new subjectivity forged by SOAW rested on a context of mutual recognition with SUSU *and* between its members- including a mutual recognition

of vulnerability. As discussed, Butler uses vulnerability as a starting point for a process of transformative renegotiation of subjectivity. She contends that 'vulnerability must be perceived and recognised in order to come into play in an ethical encounter' (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 43). Once vulnerabilities are recognised, new subjectivity can be negotiated which protects this vulnerability. The new subjectivity will aim to *not* reproduce the conditions which led to vulnerability and a lack of recognition in the first place (Butler 2004: 30). Butler's notion of vulnerability emerges from acknowledging and mourning loss in a way that helps us to recognise vulnerability in all others, and thus to build a society in which vulnerabilities more generally and variously are sheltered. She claims that 'perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submitting to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance' (Butler 2004: 21). Rather than internalise a melancholic response to loss by idealising a self we imagine by our relationship to others, Butler suggests that by recognising and submitting to that loss we can let go of the dreams that tie us to our pasts and face instead an unstable but nurturing present and future. (ibid: 23-27).

Not all women feel vulnerable in the same ways, whether at SUSa or in their immediate societies. We all have multiple versions of ourselves performing our subjectivities for a range of audiences within various cultures. Our individual gender understandings and experiences overlap and intertwine, and even within the position of "woman", as many differences appear as between it and the binary opposite of "man". What conditions are necessary for an organisation to emerge and develop with a common understanding of what it is to be "woman" in the complex context of SUSa? Is it necessary to have a common understanding? Within the patriarchal framework of society and SUSa, would it be possible to nurture, collectively, a way of relating that was not necessarily recognised in the institutional setting?

In order for an organic organisation to emerge and develop specifically for women, it was necessary that the SOAW founders' sense of vulnerability was first articulated in the context of their academic environments – acknowledging that their vulnerability was contingent for the new subjectivity they wished to forge. While they may have felt parts of themselves unrecognised and unaccommodated in SUSa's social history and current experience in 2004, it was in the academic arena that they saw an opportunity to initiate something new. Their potential academic "products" were highly valued at SUSa and in the increasingly neoliberal university context in South Africa. Not only is there financial reward for SUSa when articles are published and PhD's graduate, but the rhetoric at faculty level included a language for legitimising academic aspirations. Butler claims that we are 'constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies – as a site of desire and physical

vulnerability' (Butler 2004:20). If women who are serious about achieving academic goals are being told that they would make someone a 'very proud husband' (T, focus group discussion, 2009), their raced and gendered bodies are obstacles to their academic success. So the university's legitimising rhetoric of academic achievement became a framework for a different kind of translation and renegotiation of how it could be achieved by making it a collective feminist project. If their bodies were sites of vulnerability, but their intellectual products were favoured in the university, a space needed to be created where they could nurture and protect their vulnerable selves in order to achieve academic goals. D's description of the kind of feminism,

that says the self development, the self actualisation of people is the most liberating moment in life (D, focus group discussion, 2009),

found overlaps between the academic aspirations of early members and SUSA's recognition of and value for academic outputs. The challenges in achieving equitable success in terms of PhD's and published articles in South African universities has been the subject of a number of studies (see for example Shackleton 2006; De La Rey 2005; Perumal 2007; Mama 2003). To the SOAW founders, this research along with their own experiences, helped to frame a particular vulnerability in terms that were already recognised within the university framework, albeit on the margins. Each university in South Africa is required to report on their achievements (articles and books published, PhD's and Master's degrees achieved); these published results are the data used to frame research and notice inequitable trends (in research such as Shackleton, De La Rey etc); policy advisors, such as the Council for Higher Education (CHE), use this research to inform their input into both policy adjustments as well as funding practices. And in individual institutions, such as SUSA, this process of recognising and legitimating vulnerability as academic women provides individual subjects with an opportunity to renegotiate their subjectivities.

Using feminist principles, the founders of SOAW could incorporate the vulnerabilities they recognised into how they configured and framed what was possible in their own organisation. So, while a patriarchal academic culture promotes independent thinking and working, a feminist agenda recognises that self-development and self-actualisation are authentically gained in relation to others (Butler 2004: 43). When we realise our own vulnerability, and reach the place of being able to name what we have lost, what is not recognised, then 'grief...may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself' (ibid: 29). We become aware of vulnerability as a human and perhaps as an academic condition that insists that we consider the other in how we express ourselves. So vulnerability in the academic environment became an opportunity for women members to reframe subjectivity, using the platform of SOAW.

The legitimising academic aspiration, mixed with feminist thinking, defined their early aspirations and vulnerabilities thus:

we felt they lacked support, they lacked mentoring, they lacked so many things that allowed them to self-tuition (D, focus group discussion, 2009).

So, SOAW's feminist founders recognised, consciously or unconsciously, how the vulnerability they experienced within the academic environment could be a new basis of power in the way they formulated the new space. Hospitality and generosity ('this warm welcoming environment, coffee would be steaming' *ibid*), exposing and sharing intellectual ideas ('we all had touched each other's dissertations' *ibid*), were some ways of being and knowing themselves differently. New subjectivity within the group ('a feminist space that was challenging patriarchal ways of doing academic work' *ibid*) had a socially transformative effect on individuals ('there were those kinds of people, as Ca would say, my people, would be happy there, you actually find such a moment of lovely spontaneous, exhilarating bonding' *ibid*). Perhaps transformativity is possible when the recognition of vulnerability compels an accommodating response, rather than alienation or denial, which is what SOAW provided for early members. One of the early SOAW members, when asked why she thought SOAW was relevant in the SUSA context, confirmed that in her opinion,

SOAW provides a haven for women and womanly thoughts in a male dominated academic environment. It allows me to voice my opinions, thoughts, concerns, plans in an open arena. This arena is (in theory) non-threatening, non-judging, honest, supportive (M, voluntary questionnaire, 2008).

A more recent member enthused,

I found it very supportive to women to have such a space where they meet, discuss issues pertinent in their academic life and relate in so many ways. In the first place, being a woman, one is often subjected to prejudice, sexism, and all sorts of judgement whether we can do as required whether in our studies or workplaces. For me, I found a home in SOAW, because it's a space I feel free to say whatever I need with comfort. I can relate to the women in SOAW in many ways (L, voluntary questionnaire, 2008).

For SOAW, the aim was to express vulnerability in ways that could be appropriately sheltered, in order for vulnerability to be included in a new kind of recognition. The vulnerability women were allowed to feel, acknowledge and recognise, became the opportunity to imagine new subjectivities that protected this, and avoided perpetuating similar conditions – despite not knowing what to expect (Butler 2004: 30). Mourning what was lost in the SUSA environment was, as Butler claims, 'to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation' (*ibid*:21). But providing a new platform where vulnerability in individuals was recognised and transformed into strength, was essential in providing

academic women with the expanded notion of themselves that they required in order to progress in the academic environment. L goes on to say

So, such a space is of high necessity to have at university for women to provide room for their independency, nurturing of academic relationship, for their life mentorship and professional coaching. Above all, the interaction of women on various levels is just what is needed by every woman entering Varsity (L, voluntary questionnaire, 2008).

Their first step, then, was to build a new community with core academic ideals (like SUSA), but based on feminist principles. The relationship between subjectivity and norms is part of the dynamic of transformation, and the framework in which new subjectivity could be negotiated was established by the norms, as they began to be articulated. Founding members of SOAW could develop a group along the lines of shared values and a strong sense of their relationship to each other – in line with Butler’s proposition ‘to solicit a becoming, to investigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the other’ (ibid: 43). Realising that the SUSA systems of support did not recognise parts of them that needed different conditions in order to succeed as academic women, they negotiated new ways of recognition within SOAW. Because SOAW was then recognised by SUSA especially once donor money was involved, it legitimised their expansion of this subjectivity to suit not only who they were, but who they could become both in SOAW *and* at SUSA.

When an identity category, such as “woman”, is expanded to include a greater possibility of versions, transformation does not automatically follow. Subjectivity is part of the process, but the possibility to expand what was meant and regarded as academic women, particularly black academic women, in the broader institution would take more than a few individuals knowing themselves differently. SOAW provided a platform, and from there performances were and are facilitated which could be transformative not only for individuals but also for the institution.

### *Performativity*

Because the SOAW they had founded was an alternative space, separate from the university apparatus, it provided, like Bhabha’s third space (Bhabha in Bial 2004: 279-86), a context where aspects of the academic imperial project could be reworked to suit specific academic women. Precisely because of non-recognition (at SUSA), and because of an alternative defining framework (SOAW), individuals were provided with a stage for different performances to what was expected of, or provided for them, as women in departments and committees at SUSA. Humans, who had not been included in the founders’ framing of SUSA’s possibilities, claimed for themselves a platform which was legitimised because of its mimicry of the institution’s aim. This new way of knowing provided a sense of new subjectivity, recognition, growth, on one hand, while showing that, in fact,

*all* subjectivity is vulnerable. This vulnerability is the condition where new subjectivities are forged, and vulnerability itself can be reworked into new ways of performing, nurturing and knowing (Butler in Bial 2004: 160).

In many ways the individuals who brought their excitement and interest and social responsiveness to the first SOAW meeting had already founded something feminist. It was an unusual space in the academic environment. It liberated, almost spontaneously, values that were exuberantly expressed in group meetings – for example mutual care, interest, respect, curiosity, generosity and humour (Focus Group discussion 2009; voluntary questionnaire 2008). Looking back, it is clear though that SOAW's progress was made possible by a combination of practice *and* principles which would solicit a particular kind of becoming – one that was feminist in principle and action. Feminist praxis provided the stage for different performances that were established through a framework of academic support which let them know and perform themselves in a more expanded way than was experienced in individual departments. While this included their seminar presentations where interested SOAW members from a variety of disciplines commented and critiqued a presenter's research, more important were the guiding principles which framed the *spirit* of the presentations and their responses – the performance, the audience, and the rules of engagement. Where women previously had felt inhibited or unrecognised as academics in their departments, they had the opportunity to perform the role of academic woman in a very different way, and with a different audience and response, in SOAW.

Transformation happens because of particular dynamics in the relationship between subjectivity and normativity. This dynamic plays itself out in performances which could be transformative. If women are given the opportunity to reframe how they are permitted and encouraged to be, new subjectivities can be forged and accommodated. SOAW's early work was in deciding on the norms which would frame their new subjectivity and performances. So, for instance, SOAW provided the opportunity to act in accordance with more democratic principles amongst people who had felt noticed in particular ways and ignored in others because of their gender and race at SUSU. Young, in defining deliberative democracy as a preferred route to social justice, argues that 'a democratic decision is normatively legitimate only if all those affected by it are included in the process of discussion and decision-making' (Young 2000: 23). SOAW founders did not feel included in the decision-making around appropriate conditions for the progress of academic women at the institutional level. They wanted to be sure that they did not perpetuate these conditions in their own organisation. Deliberative democracy espoused by Young requires an awareness of the complex webs of domination and oppression, including the 'hegemonic terms of debate' (Young 2000: 6). So

a key aspect to building a feminist organisation was to be inclusive of those who had different terms of debate, and different debates. Recognising that ‘everybody has something to contribute’ (D, in-depth interview, 2009) and that the patriarchal nature of the institution had excluded them in various ways, they were determined to ensure that SOAW operated as inclusively as possible. Their experience of inclusivity was facilitated by, and facilitated, performance possibilities in the broader SUSU environment, as well as in the lives of individual members. In other words, performing their expanded roles of academic woman in SOAW provided opportunities for transformation both individually and institutionally.

Because exclusionary practices defined their experience in the academic environment, they used the notion of inclusion to define the SOAW space – in other words, they performed a different notion of university “membership” to what they had experienced in their departments or in the institution. How the SOAW membership was constituted, and membership protocols and practices established, alludes to this performance. In the early days of OFYAW, people were members by knowing the founding members or by strong affinity to the commonly held feminist norms at the time. Members report that the inclusiveness as it was performed in SOAW at that stage, contingent on their expanded subjectivity, was a strength, despite its challenges. If performance demonstrates not only the individuals understanding of their subjectivity, but also the audience which applauds particular kinds of performances, the inclusionary membership protocols would prescribe both the performance and the audience reception. The performativity of roles in a given society destabilises the idea of a fixed identity category – and in SOAW, the way in which they performed being an academic woman was different to how they performed this in their departments, which meant that SOAW helped to establish the fact that different possibilities for being academic women co-existed – and essentially this possibility meant an awareness of the vulnerability of others. Rather than the more alienating environment of the independent thinking encouraged in the institution, SOAW invited participants to consider their own progress as inclusively of others as was possible, with uncertain consequences. M, one of the early members, noted

[I]t was such a privilege to chat to lovely women on a social level or in the case of a serious issue, on an official level. We could discuss any and all thoughts and issues and ways to address them. With *the diverse women in the organization*, I often got a number of thoughts and opinions that I had not even considered (M, voluntary questionnaire, 2009; emphasis added).

W, a more recent Master’s student, said

It functions as a space for Women only – and this is important in any Academic environment - particularly due to the fact that patriarchy can be acute especially at a ‘staff’ level. It also creates a space where *women who would not normally cross paths* can meet

and this may contribute positively not just to them as individuals but even to the University itself – especially in the long term (W, voluntary questionnaire, 2009; emphasis added).

So inclusivity, meaning a way of ensuring that everyone could contribute in an accommodating and encouraging environment, was a feminist praxis; members negotiated their new subjectivities, recognising their vulnerability and transforming it into strength in a state of perpetual renegotiation. The normative framework of inclusivity at SOAW was the stage for particular kinds of performances by academic women, which asserted and renegotiated these norms. Hassim et al, claim that 'Central to this practice [of acknowledging vulnerability as foundation for practice] is the building of exclusively female organization. This autonomy for radical feminists means creating "safe" spaces for women, from which men and masculinist political practices are excluded' (Beal, Hassim, Todes, 1989: 31). While the versions of feminism professed (or not) amongst its early members differed widely, the organisation was exclusively female. This was the sole articulation of exclusivity in the early SOAW, and one which framed and frames the performativity of women in new ways. For the most part, their aim to be inclusive as far as possible kept leading to adjustments in their constitution and membership admission practices – which arguably became part of the conditions for the ongoing renegotiation of subjectivity in SOAW.

SOAW's performance of inclusivity constantly destabilised a single notion of inclusivity. Since its earliest minutes in 2004, SOAW records show regular discussions around inclusivity and membership (SOAW executive and general meeting minutes 2004-2009) – tracking the challenges associated with the renegotiation of subjectivity. Two membership problems became part of the struggle. Firstly, while the constitution stated that membership required attendance at meetings, increasingly over the years this has not been enforced, and this clause was dropped from the formal constitution in 2007. Women, already balancing numerous roles in public and private, were not necessarily able to attend meetings, and this was acknowledged and accommodated, despite the fact that meetings were and are important aspects of renegotiating subjectivity through performance. Young argues that 'democracy cannot function well unless there is freedom of association and civic culture that encourages people to meet in small groups and discuss the issues that press on their daily life' (Young 2000: 45). It is through these discussions, she claims, that 'values, norms and insights' can be applied. Failure to meet regularly hampered discussion which could have been inclusive of all members in establishing norms. So an early and ongoing challenge to the renegotiation of subjectivity to provide an expanded and yet nurturing environment for academic support, was the difficulty women experienced in attending meetings, which were sites for women to experience their subjectivity in relation to specific norms which were being established. For those who could

meet, their performances of their subjectivity as academic women were expanded and potentially transformative.

Until 2008 (when it was dropped as a programme due to lack of interest), a weekly feminist reading group became one such small meeting group, along with internal seminar presentations and writing retreats. These regular events were and are opportunities for women to meet as intellectual colleagues but also in other human ways – friendships are forged and alliances discovered across a range of ways of being. Women come to know themselves in relation to others who are similar in some ways and different in others – a rich site for learning and transformation. The reading group would sometimes have only 3 or 4 members in attendance, quite often with a baby included, but the conversations which emerged loosely prompted by the selected reading, were sometimes life-changing (SOAW report 2007). But for many members, much of the renegotiation of subjectivity happened over the listserv instead – especially as the years progressed.

Over the years the programme emphasis in SOAW has been less on the ideologically motivated gatherings (seminar presentations and the reading group) and more on the funded programmes (writing retreats, conference funding and time relief) (SOAW Mellon Reports 2007 -2009). The constitution, which could have guided membership practices, has had, in fact, little impact in determining how SOAW operates at SUSU. The vulnerability of women in the academic and institutional space was recognised by members (leading to the discussions around membership), but membership patterns and performances which are made possible in part by the constitution and membership protocols, along with meeting attendance trends, suggest that SOAW's development post- funding underestimated their understanding of the vulnerability of women in the academic environment. If "normal" university practices were not working to encourage more women to advance academically, SOAW could only succeed if attention was given to protecting this vulnerability. Funding provided women with access to more opportunities, but this could only be transformative if individuals also expanded how they thought about themselves – in other words if the process led to an enlarged subjectivity and expanded performances as academic women aside from their "products". Only this would help to ensure that the conditions of their vulnerability in the institutional environment were not repeated in SOAW – particularly when another key principle was fluid power, and thus transient organisational memory. In the light of the instability of the meaning and performance of inclusivity, it would be important to find ways to rise to the challenge of a changed membership constituency and initiate practices which acknowledged the vulnerability that a broad and diverse interpretation of inclusivity will bring.

If members are attracted to SOAW by funding opportunities rather than feminist ideology, how can they be provided with the opportunity to experience an aspect of inclusivity that transformatively expands their notion and performance of subjectivity within the institution? There are those who would argue that the opportunities which funding provides to do field work, to attend conferences, to take time off to complete PhD's, have a transformative effect in themselves. Certainly in the SUSa environment, an increase in the number of women who achieve degrees and publish articles would comply with institutional goals in this area, and "equity" can certainly be facilitated by these practices. But the individual and institutional transformation required in order for women to establish new conditions for their progress, and to expand how the university frames and supports women more generally, requires more than quantitative increase in "products". It requires the inclusion of expanded subjectivity, the accommodation of different performances, and the establishment of different norms.

While SOAW membership patterns, and the meaning of inclusivity were shifting from 2004-2007, their relationships with SUSa, as individuals and as an organisation, were developing simultaneously. As discussed, through the support of the vice principal and the vice chancellor SOAW was invited to serve on various committees. In this way, from its earliest days, the organisation provided SUSa with a way to be more inclusive, and opened up a stage for women to perform their new SOAW subjectivity in an institutional setting. SOAW, as an organisation for under-represented and under-recognised individuals in the university context, became, for SUSa, a collective which could represent the needs and perspectives of women in the academic space, and also perform their notion of being an academic woman, differently. Arguably, the conditions in SOAW had strengthened individuals' value and perception of what they could contribute, and affected the kinds of opportunities they began to find in order to renegotiate subjectivity in SUSa and perform their citizenry of the institution. As A explained more recently of her experience of SOAW,

SOAW is has been an extremely beneficial academic, administrative, and personal resource to me while at SUSa. It has made me *more aware of the various happenings at SUSa* and in that way, I have felt, through SOAW, *more involved in my SUSa community* (A, voluntary questionnaire, 2009, emphasis added).

The norm of inclusivity within SOAW then, provided the opportunity for SOAW members who served on committees to bring their translations of "inclusivity" into the university space where previously they had felt alienated – SOAW, in this way, mediated and legitimised new performance possibilities in SUSa for their members, through their organisational translation and performance of academic women under the SOAW normative framework of inclusivity.

This translation came about with the founders' early emphasis on feminist principles. It was D's ideal to keep SOAW's relationship to SUSa "issue based" (D, focus group discussion, 2009). If women, who were already busy, could put their energy into causes or processes affecting SOAW members and SUSa women that they felt passionately about, it was a way of keeping the organisation sustainable through using energy that was already present. But the passion required to do advocacy work can be bewildering and draining, especially for women already balancing multiple roles. T asked

how did you navigate an institutional structural element that was forcing an organisation to play a particular role, that was very, kind of, formal committees – we all had to be on a committee, and there were discussions around who was going to be on which committee. In terms of trying to keep it issue based, but also having to complement the mainstream in some way (T, focus group discussion, 2009).

SOAW members, who were already members of the SUSa community, were part of the university's renegotiating of subjectivities – and in institutional committees, this was on the university's terms which prescribed their performance, but gave some opportunity for expanding these. SOAW women who served on committees could perform the subjectivities they had discovered in the SOAW environment. They could perform their citizenship of SUSa with the kind of accommodation that they had failed to experience as individuals in their academic departments, but this was not always and necessarily so.

New subjectivity at SUSa, as progressive a step as this was, was not without its challenges, and required regular renegotiation or translation. How members performed their new subjectivity, and the relationship they had with the normative framework, meant that they could look at problems in different ways and so expand and legitimise their performances. So, for example, in a general meeting in February 2007 there was a discussion about serving on university committees. SOAW had identified staff housing as an important problem needing attention at SUSa. A SOAW committee was established and met to thrash out ideas and principles with regard to the university's policy and practice. A member of this team was selected to serve on the university's Housing Committee, set up to establish protocols and policy (SOAW exec. minutes, 2007). The SOAW member selected was employed at the time at a SUSa affiliated research institute, and worked 8-5 hours. All the Housing Committee meetings were set up during the day. As she could not attend meetings not associated with her work during office hours, she resigned from the committee, and nobody in SOAW could volunteer to replace her. Other members of the SOAW housing committee were either too busy on other committees or processes, or were away. Minutes of that meeting note as an action item:

Email SOAW list noting the fact that, despite raising Housing as a key issue, we have been unable to find members to sit on the Housing Comm. Ask members to please step forward if this is a burning issue for them (SOAW General Meeting minutes, 17.02.2007).

So, being included in the SUSA institutional committees and conversations was both an opportunity and a burden, and brought into tension different performances expected of academics and women. Arguably, this provided the conditions for the recognition of the role performativity in transformation – if the performativity of gender is understood to be a limiting framework with expandable possibilities, these tensions provide opportunities for transformation. The opportunity was to include the perspectives of the SOAW constituency in university policy shaping, and the burden was to do this in a context that did not necessarily make allowance for difference (meetings within work hours) or consider other multiple roles. The SUSA norm of inclusivity, expressed through inviting SOAW to be represented, had more rigid ways of living out, of embodiment. SUSA's norm of inclusivity was embodied in a patriarchal framework and way of doing things that meant that it performed its inclusivity in a way that excluded, because it failed to recognise the vulnerabilities of the range of individuals who did not fit the heteronormative definition of academic. Butler warns, regarding norm formation, that we need to 'learn from the various ways and means by which it [a norm] is defined across cultural venues' (Butler 2004c: 222). This was perhaps an unconscious learning, and one that happened between SOAW members on committees *and* in the organisation's relationship with SUSA University, and one that continues to provide the possibility of transformation through ways in which performances are facilitated.

One approach to performing SOAW's new membership of SUSA was to try to expand the way in which the university operated to become more inclusive – in other words, provide *their* translation of inclusivity, which included making specific allowances for busy members by having meetings at times when all could attend – often during lunchtime or over weekends. This was perhaps a consideration for some committees already, but in SOAW an important step happened which expanded how women could frame their performances as citizens of the university. The meeting (ibid) included a discussion on this:

It was proposed that we suggest a set of alternative times for the meetings to take place and motivate for these times. This will enable S (head of Housing Task Team) to realistically evaluate whether there is sufficient need for meetings to be rescheduled (SOAW General Meeting minutes, 17.02.2007).

The discussion on this matter in the SOAW general meeting and executive meeting indicates that SOAW acknowledged members' vulnerability in the university context which had failed to recognise aspects of their being related to the gender framework of being a woman. Expanding the stage for transformative performances not only includes the ambiguous essentialising of women with, for

instance, progressive parental and child care policies, but by giving women, with a range of different cultures, expectations and experiences (including around the societally constructed roles of women as mothers and carers) the opportunity to determine for themselves how they like to and need to operate. By acknowledging their relation to the other and to vulnerability itself, women can and must open up spaces in the university where not just one, but a range of differences can be valued and accommodated. It is within this environment that the performances of women can achieve and sustain the academic aspirations evoked by SUSAs faculty and institutional equity goals. SOAW emerged as a safe space where members could operate differently, recognising their vulnerability. If their full participation in committees was made vulnerable by a lack of inclusion or lack of recognition of difference, in SOAW they could rethink this vulnerability without being judged. In other words, different norms in SOAW and different translations of similar norms in SUSAs gave them the perspective they needed to problematise university practices rather than problematise their challenges as workers, academics and women which limited their performance in the institution. This had to be a continuous process, because in their daily lives as academics and staff, women were confronted with rules that problematised them or failed to recognise them (for example, setting up meetings at times which do not suit, for instance, women who have domestic or work responsibilities; failing (in their award criteria which specified age) to make allowances for womens careers to be interrupted by domestic responsibilities; inadequate processes to deal with race or gender harassment and abuse). The space SOAW provides for conscious and unconscious renegotiating of subjectivities, and the opportunity for this renegotiation to expand into how they perform these subjectivities in SUSAs institutional culture as a result of SOAWs relationship with SUSAs, is a continuing site for transformation and should not be underestimated by its members. SUSAs norms can be deliberately translated, using the language of new subjectivity within SOAW, to expand the universitys understanding and performance of inclusivity in, for instance, committees. SOAW members perform their revised subjectivity on a stage which is legitimised because of the SUSAs ideal of inclusivity, and which is in turn expanded by the performances of SOAW members.

The relationship between SOAW and SUSAs opens up opportunities to challenge and critique how SUSAs operates – an important aspect of a mutually recognising relationship, where different translations of events and processes can be incorporated into how SUSAs articulates its policies and protocols. On a number of occasions SOAW has collated a response to an incident or process at SUSAs, and has contributed an alternative way of looking at things. These performances are facilitated by the universitys legitimising of SOAW as a voice for women, and are sites which allude to the performativity, or the unstable notion of performance, as a transformative opportunity.

At times these performances have had a unifying effect in SOAW, but at others, the differences between ideologies of members was emphasised, and SOAW's membership then has the opportunity to renegotiate their subjectivities within SOAW. So performativity serves to initiate and establish new subjectivity and new norms. Incidents which provoke responses from women in the organisation and institution can be opportunities for SOAW to be a platform for transformation. Depending on the way in which individuals navigate the dynamic between subjectivity, normativity and performativity, there is the possibility of transformation, a transformativity, which can open spaces for critical renegotiation of subjectivities in the institution.

### *Normativity*

Normativity is understood as the relationship between subjectivities and the norms which define them and which they anticipate and perpetuate (Butler 2004b:159). Whereas performativity can be seen as the enactment of the relationship between subjectivity and norms, normativity refers to the unconscious and conscious, dead or transformative, space where all transformation is articulated. As SOAW's relationship with SUSU developed, normativity could be recognised, which not only destabilised patriarchal norms, but asserted the precariousness of all seemingly entrenched or newly transformed norms. SOAW women were not only living their relationship to social norms and SOAW norms, but to SUSU norms which were not developed necessarily with their inclusion. For SOAW members, the SUSU norms were evident in committees and departmental practices that did not represent them, and failed to recognise or support them. Butler claims that norms are not necessarily explicit and that while they often operate invisibly, their effects are dramatically clear (Butler 2004c: 41). As SOAW became an alternative community, it inevitably developed its own norms. Subjectivities in SOAW were framed and founded in the feminist principles of the initial members, and then through practices which became SOAW's way of doing things. So the norm of inclusivity became a foundation of SOAW. Arguably, because the vulnerabilities in how subjectivities were framed in the SUSU institutional setting were perhaps not sufficiently recognised by the founders of SOAW, inclusivity held the danger of bringing people and practices into the safe space which could disrupt other aims, such as the sharing of ideas openly and honestly. If however, inclusivity as a norm was based on what was excluded in the SUSU environment with more depth, it could provide adequate insurance against inequity as well as sheltering the vulnerability of its members.

SOAW, while establishing new norms through their constitution and practices, was nevertheless functioning within the framework of an established institution, SUSU, where different norms defined the performances of its subjects. Members of SOAW brought with them lessons learned and

vulnerabilities animated in this framework, and debated how to do things differently at SOAW. These intentions to do things differently were challenged by desires and demands and understandings which existed in members who were attracted to SOAW, affecting the unity to which the group might have aspired. Young, in critiquing deliberative democracy, claims that 'either theorists assume such commonness [unity] as a prior condition of deliberation, or they see it as a goal' (Young 2000: 40). She goes on to say that both of these approaches are flawed. She recommends 'enlarged thought', where a spirit of cooperation functions, and agreement is found for specific problems which are not necessarily transferrable to others (ibid: 43). This at least ensures that those who feel excluded by one decision could be included in the next. So inclusion as a recognised norm strategy to counter exclusion was open to a number of interpretations, a continuously contested site, demonstrating Butler's contention that normativity is a site of 'iterable temporality' (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 152). In the conversations around inclusivity and membership, members debated their concerns, in a process which tried to balance cooperation, inclusivity and striving for unity.

Part of establishing inclusivity as a norm required articulating who they were in relevant spaces at SUSU. Early documents articulated the norms and values of the developing organisation, and they indicate how the founding members formulated and defined the terms of their new subjectivity, especially with regard to inclusion. During the time of its formalisation from OFYAW to SOAW, its leaders were straddling at least two conversations within the university, and were required to speak different languages, depending on their audience, to legitimise and explain SOAW's operation with the patriarchal institution. Early in 2006, SOAW held a launch, and developed an information brochure for the event (Addendum 1). It outlines SOAW's history, constitution and programmes. A second document (Addendum 2) developed at around the same time is an amended constitution, produced in April 2006 in order to become a recognised organisation within the institution. While both are formal documents which articulate the emerging norms of the organisation, they are quite different in tone – the brochure is unapologetically feminist and includes a clear recognition of patriarchy in the institution, while the constitution is a legal document and keeps within the boundaries of legal language at SUSU. Both mimic acceptable practice and use the platforms they have to acknowledge vulnerability, and in order to assert something new. Davies et al claim that 'the subject submits to the fictions of self and gains mastery through them. And that mastery – of language, of the body – provides the conditions of possibility for investing something new, of seeing afresh, of creatively moving beyond the already known' (Davies et al 2001:181). In a way, the brochure and the constitution were bringing a language of mastery into the new ways that the

academic women of SOAW knew themselves, and articulating norms which would frame how SOAW could stage the performance of women – both in the organisation and in the institution.

Normativity is the transformative space where norms are acknowledged as unstable while asserting themselves. The dynamic is defined by the recognition of vulnerability. In the brochure, for instance, the conditions academic women were experiencing in the SUSA context and which gave rise to SOAW are explained thus:

The [Solidarity Organisation for Academic Women] started off as the [Young Academic Women's Group (OFYAW)] and was established in August 2004 by women who felt that their needs as young academics and senior students were not being met at SUSA University. They had gained access to a reputable, historically white institution that was male dominated and had a culture that many found alienating. It was decided that additional support and guidance (outside of conventional guidance by supervisors or colleagues) was needed to allow them to fully realize their potential (SOAW information brochure, 2006).

The constitution articulates the aims and objectives as:

2.1 The Association's main objectives are to provide academic, intellectual and professional support to developing women senior students and academic staff at SUSA University, Grahamstown, with special emphasis on previously disadvantaged women. (SOAW amended constitution, April 2006).

The reasons for the establishment of SOAW are expressed in the first document quite clearly as an alienating SUSA environment, recognising their vulnerability or alien-ness as women. While the formal constitution, following and limited by a traditional constitution format, merely concerns itself with what SOAW will do, and not why it needed to do this, it none-the-less incorporates vulnerabilities in these intentions. Obviously, the purposes of these documents is different, but they allude to the expanded way in which SOAW members could articulate their norms outside of the more rigid institutional voice, and how they could incorporate vulnerability in the academic environment into their assertions of SOAW norms. The role of the constitution in SOAW's development was to fulfil requirements to institutionalise the organisation, whereas the brochure was their articulation of themselves for people like them. As the document which proclaimed their organisation at their launch, the brochure could express their vulnerability ('needs...not being met', 'alienating'), in order to include this in how they defined themselves. Copies were made of the brochure to be made available to anyone who was interested in the organisation, while the constitution remained as part of the available public record, but seldom referred to.

Given that the brochure was not a permanent document (further brochures were produced in the following years to suit specific gatherings, for example the programmes booklet produced in 2007), and that the constitution was a more permanent if unnoticed aspect of their organisation, SOAW

founders had to ensure that through the founding constitution as well as other means, their feminist principles formed part of the foundational norms of the organisation. D explains that

Inclusivity would definitely be part of the feminist praxis – sharing of knowledge, sharing of resources, which is what I think is the transformative moment in feminist practice, that's where it becomes evolutionary, where you can say this is how patriarchy limits inclusivity and the collective project, and this is how consistent feminist practice disrupts that, so it's also dealing with the issue of assimilation of feminists (D, in-depth interview, 2009).

The norm of inclusivity needed to be enfolded into formal documents as well as everyday practice in order to be established as praxis. This process is evidenced in both documents, and in the way the documents (especially the constitution) changed over the years to reflect how practices had changed – in other words, demonstrating the dynamic relationship between subjects and norms. The constitution declared that 'Membership shall be open to all women academics, students and researchers based at SUSU University who identify with the aims and objectives of the Association' (SOAW Constitution 2005). Just over a year later this was expanded to include *all* women staff at SUSU who identify with the aims etc (SOAW email, 28 March 2007). The process of recognising vulnerability and renegotiating their subjectivities was an ongoing process: the 'alienating' environment of the institution, and their vulnerability in it, became a reason to establish an organisation where no-one felt alienated – or where those who felt alienated before could feel included.

Inclusivity as a norm does not necessarily mean that something is feminist, or is equitable. An inherent inclination to be inclusive in as many ways as possible meant that SOAW members brought with them an increasingly wide range of ideologies and understandings. As SOAW established itself, this range included those who were not necessarily the same kinds of feminists as the founders strove to accommodate, complicating the process of renegotiation. Founding an organisation on principles of inclusivity would be unpredictable, despite being a transformation, as Butler claims (Butler 2004: 27). Indeed, in the months leading up to and following Mellon funding, membership patterns were shifting, and the principle of inclusivity provided opportunities and challenges. But more than that, it demonstrated the precariousness of new subjectivities, and the instability of norms and the unpredictability of their effects and development, in ways that continue to play themselves out.

Before Mellon funding, members were attracted to SOAW through friendships and in the belief that there was value in the group's engagement with academic work. So inclusivity as a norm at this stage (March 2007) meant that SOAW was welcoming new members who were drawn to an ideology of mutual acceptance, encouragement and support.

Once funding was approved, SOAW was required to spend around R300 000 per year. For an organisation that had emerged without funding, had had weekly executive and monthly group meetings with no funds, this was a lot of money. SOAW could offer writing retreats in luxurious settings; it could provide conference funding to women who were unable to find funding from SUSA, or who didn't fit the criteria for funding within their departments (for example, foreign students, or Masters students). The need to spend R300 000 per annum in order to ensure favourable relations with the donor diluted membership protocols while firming up funding and institutional ones. People became "members" of SOAW in order to access funding, and not because of any ideological reasons – their performance as academic women in the SOAW framework then was staged in the bureaucratic terms of the university's financial and employment systems. So, for example, by late 2007, writing retreats included individuals who had heard about this SOAW programme from colleagues or fellow students, and were accepted as members at the same time as their applications for the writing retreat; the time relief programme, where members are awarded funds to pay for teaching relief while they finish their PhD's, was recommended to individuals through the Human Resource division or the Research office, regardless of whether they were members of SOAW (2008, 2009); furthermore, every treasurer of SOAW attests to the draining process of bureaucracy which institutional financial transactions entail (interviews, 2010). So the norm of inclusivity, functioning within an environment which had acquired wealth, was experienced and performed by a range of women who were not necessarily individually normatively feminist. Because of funding, a different set of women would be attracted to SOAW, and this precipitated a discussion on how this, and their inclusive approach, would affect the organisation. The conversation around inclusivity, as well as the practice of it in SOAW, continues to evolve, and the conditions which precipitate transformative responses not only indicate the dynamic relationship between subjects and norms, but can be clues to future transformativity. The process of developing new norms in an inclusive way is challenged by the notion that norms are not understood or lived in the same way by all actors – a process of translation further complicates the notion of commonality and unity.

While SOAW debated SOAW conditions, it was also engaged in a developing relationship with SUSA. In this relationship, the possibility for transforming the institutional norms was an important opportunity, and required different subjectivity or "translation" to how they knew themselves in SOAW. Butler argues that 'the task of the postcolonial translator...is precisely to bring into relief the non-convergence of discourses so that one might know the very ruptures of narrativity, the founding violence of an episteme' (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 37). SOAW's participation in SUSA's

institutional life was an opportunity to highlight non-convergence, and by doing so, adjustments could be made to both SOAW and SUSAN normative frameworks.

The norm of inclusivity in SOAW was arguably a Butlerian evocation of 'petitioning the future always in relation to the other' (Butler 2004:44), and can be tracked in how the membership patterns of SUSAN continued and continues to shift. Inclusivity, and broadening the range and participation of members, was a norm which informed their definitions and strategies in particular ways. So for instance, in March 2007 there was some debate about membership at a group meeting and in the executive committee. This resulted in a change to the constitution, not only to expand the criteria for members to include all women staff and not only academic staff, but also to distinguish between 'members' of SOAW and 'friends' of SOAW (SOAW emails, March 2007). Butler suggests that new subjectivities are formed when vulnerabilities are acknowledged, and 'from where a principle might emerge by which we vow to protect others from the kind of violence we have suffered' (Butler 2004: 30). So the tension at this stage was to be inclusive, while also protecting members from the kind of scrutiny or judgement that they had experienced in departments, and which they wished to avoid. At that stage, SOAW's daily communication via a listserv, was available to anyone who wished to be part of it. As has been mentioned, individuals could post funding, employment, postgraduate or conference opportunities that they knew of, as well as start discussions on things that interested them (SOAW listserv 2006-2010). It was also a forum to advertise meetings coming up, or alert members to departmental talks, and faculty or institutional processes which SOAW members were encouraged to attend. At this stage, there were about 150 people signed onto the listserv, and there was some uneasiness about who was accessing it:

M also explained that one of the problems with the current SOAW list is that it is public. There are documents in preparation which go out on the list currently which need to be kept within SOAW (at least in the planning stages). She gave the example of the Imbizo response document as one which caused problems because people read it prematurely (General Meeting Minutes, 24.4.2007).

The normative framework of inclusivity was showing itself to be unpredictable – when we 'submit to a transformation', we cannot predict the outcome (Butler 2004: 21). The relationship between individual members of SOAW and the norm of inclusivity was increasing rather than sheltering their vulnerability. This led to the distinction between 'friends' and 'members', and new criteria were discussed to access membership. These included attending monthly meetings, and that new members should be invited to join SOAW by existing members – in other words, membership was to be limited to those known by current members (ibid). It is possible to see why this point came up – there was a sense that SOAW's renegotiating of subjectivities in the organisation would be

compromised if the process was too permeable to those who held patriarchal power in the institution – so for instance, two of the male deans had access to the listserv, and some members felt exposed by this. The separateness between SOAW and SUSA made SOAW a safe place, and this was threatened by unconditional access by “outsiders” to the workings and thinking of individuals in SOAW. So it was founded on a principle of excluding men from the organisation, in order to achieve a norm of inclusion which operated amongst its women members. The feminist rhetoric of the organisation made inclusivity an important component of its new articulation of itself – inclusivity became one of SOAW’s norms for how it operated in terms of the patriarchal and male-dominated space. At this point, it would have been useful to acknowledge more carefully their vulnerability as a feminist organisation, and how this inclusivity could be shaped to suit the specific needs of its members. T indicated this when she alluded to ‘a far more complex way that we need to look at the SUSA environment’ and things they might have done differently ‘if we had a more significant understanding’ of the patriarchal nature of SUSA (T, focus group discussion, 2009). The norm of inclusivity is limited if it fails to frame the vulnerability of women as a constantly negotiated subjectivity. If norms provide the kind of shelter which academic women need in order to perform transformatively, these norms must surrender to their own ‘iterable temporality’ (Butler in Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000: 152). At the meeting where membership was discussed, the minutes reflect that

J cautioned that SOAW is starting to sound exclusive. She noted that when SOAW started as OFYAW, we were more fluid (less stratified and structured). It was felt that we experience exclusion everywhere else on campus and it was questioned whether we need to stratify SOAW in the same way. In this regard, it was felt that members may not wish to be excluded on the basis that they do not attend meetings (General Meeting Minutes, 24.4.2007).

“Inclusivity” is part of the rhetoric of transformation. It has gained fixedness through multiple documents, evocations and processes in state and institutional politics. So the word itself is loaded with a normative framework. For the academic women who became part of the discussion around inclusion, their daily experiences were in a context where different norms to those of SOAW governed their identities and practices. Norms assume a fixedness through multiple gestures and performances which reproduce and anticipate them (Butler 2004b:157).

For many SOAW participants their engagement with members on the SOAW listserv and at meetings was (and has continued to be) dogged by time constraints as many women balanced multiple roles at work and home (SOAW voluntary questionnaire 2009; SOAW minutes, 2005-2009). This meant that there were sporadic intense engagements for some members, and rare consistent contributors the rest of the time. For many women at the time, inclusion and agency were daily struggles in many different ways – their personal relationships, their communities, their families, their individual

networks, and their living and working conditions challenged their sense of recognition apart from their subjectivity as academic women. Knowing exactly what inclusivity entailed, who defined it, how it operated and why, might have assisted the conversations and decisions at the time. A lack of inclusivity had framed their vulnerability in the university, but perhaps within SOAW, the norm of inclusivity opened new ways of being vulnerable, and often could not include them because of their multiple societal roles. The nature of their engagement on the inclusivity of listserv membership (over the listserv and in a general meeting) defined and perhaps limited the depth to which they could come to terms with the meanings and effects of inclusivity as a collective. Butler, in conversation with Žižek and Laclau, unpacks the relationship between norms and subjects. She argues that '[N]orms are not only embodied...but embodiment itself is a mode of interpretation, not always conscious, which subjects normativity itself to an iterable temporality. Norms are...incorporated and interpreted features of existence that are sustained by the idealisations furnished by fantasy' (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000:152). She also explains that norms do not function on a separate plane to actions, but that actions and norms continually affect and are 'constituted' by each other (ibid:155). So the norm of inclusivity, accepted by SOAW members as an "ideal" (which had different meanings for different women), was lived and performed variously by them contingent on their relationship to the norm – through how they conducted meetings (ensuring that everyone felt included by the way they related to each other); how they thought about the listserv (with some differences about who should access it); how they thought about membership (and distinguishing between "friends" and "members"); and how they conducted their relationship with SUSA (gaining places on university committees in order to be included in decision-making). But for individual women, this ideal of inclusivity had different meanings which were not necessarily clearly or consistently recognised.

While the founders and early executive members established and amended the constitution as they negotiated their subjectivities in the SOAW normative context, SOAW's normative development continues to establish itself in 2010 after six years of existence. Norms are 'incorporated and interpreted features of existence' which are repeated through bodily gestures and acts and idealised by a group (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 152). Even though inclusivity became a norm, the meaning of the term is a constantly contested site. The debates in 2007 around inclusivity in SOAW were influenced by individuals and specific conditions at SUSA at the time. SOAW provided a platform for different performances of academic women. Norms were debated and established through policies (such as the membership clause in the constitution); interpretations of these norms were performed by SOAW members translating the norms (such as J's call to inclusivity in the

general meeting debate (General Meeting Minutes, 24.4.2007); these performances helped to establish the norms. But, as has been observed, interpretations of norms subject them to 'iterable temporality' (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 152).

Individual members experience and construct inclusivity differently. For J, it meant fluid membership criteria and the accommodation of members who did not attend meetings (General Meeting Minutes, 24.4.2007); for others it included considering the possibility of men as members (General Meeting Minutes, 2007); for M, it included learning to tolerate different kinds of people. She remembers that

Through SOAW I met some incredible women, strong, intelligent, honest, role models and friends. It has been a pleasure to work with these women, associate with these women, learn from them. Through SOAW I also met some wet insipid creatures. I have had to learn to tolerate these individuals that have as much right to their opinions as I do to mine. I have also had to learn to work with these people, and while I found it very frustrating it was a very important learning curve (M, voluntary questionnaire, 2008).

The transformative conditions for renegotiating subjectivity, for expanding identity categories and sheltering vulnerability are contingent on the relationship between SOAW members (influenced as they are by SUSA's institutional norms and their emerging new subjectivities in SOAW) and the norms they articulate – the relationship between SOAW members and their constitution and information brochures influence what terms like "inclusivity" mean in praxis – and how this was affected by, and affects their membership of SOAW and of SUSA.

### *Transformativity*

Butler contends that societal norms 'are not simply imposed and internalised in a given form' (Butler in Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000: 151). She explains that a process of cultural translation brings into focus ways in which various translations of a norm do not converge – providing an opportunity for greater inclusion and new subjectivity (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 37). As has been discussed, SOAW's early work was to establish new norms (e.g. inclusivity, and the fluidity of power), use the vulnerability they experienced in SUSA as a starting point for their new subjectivity, and providing a platform for new performances of themselves as academic women. The interplay between subjectivity, normativity and performativity is the site for transformativity.

To illustrate the transformativity of this interplay, in the instance of SOAW's response to the two incidents of race at SUSA discussed in chapter 3, the vice chancellor's assertion that SUSA is a home for all in the light of a situation where clearly a particular black female academic was experiencing racism, alienation and exclusion shows a non-convergence of norms, which SOAW exploited.

Arguably these engagements of the organisation with the institution were opportunities for transformation – in the lives of individuals and in the institution. Transformativity is the inspiration and effect of a moment or relationship, which brings about the distinction between the “‘dead”, “abstract” universality’ and the “‘living”, “concrete” universality as the permanent process of questioning and renegotiation of its own “official” content’ (Žižek in Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000: 102).

SOAW’s online collaboration to draw up a statement which contradicted the vice chancellor’s address and letter to the alumni was a performance facilitated by SOAW’s place outside of the formal university discourses or methods – and was an invitation to provide new content to the ideological notion of a home for all. In SOAW’s letter to the vice chancellor (SOAW’s response to the management of transformation, racism and sexism at SUSU University, 28 November 2007) it was asking for an opportunity to notice and recognise ‘ruptures of narrativity, the founding violence of an episteme’ (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 37). SOAW saw an opportunity for the vulnerability of one of its former members to be turned into a possibility for renegotiating subjectivity, with this vulnerability as a starting point, besides and despite the specific and ongoing content of that particular incident and process. The invitation to engage with the vice chancellor and HR director, accompanied by the members’ commitment to strategising solutions – articulating their norms – in preparation for that meeting, was an important point of connection for future engagements. In other words, it provided the conditions for transformativity, with unpredictable outcomes.

The vice chancellor’s response and SOAW’s engagement with the second racist incident described in chapter 3, shows an expanded response. Arguably, the way in which the university responded to this incident showed progress from the previous press allegations of racism. Whereas the vice chancellor’s public statements on the previous occasion (2007) tended to defend SUSU’s anti-racism stance, this one sought to involve the whole university community in asserting statements of anti-racism. As a technique then, this offered the university community a chance to collaborate on asserting and articulating their translations of a particular norm – and by these assertions via public statements from a variety of groups and individuals on campus to remind the community of its expanded norms.

Žižek’s description of Butler’s take on universality – which is used here for its relevance for understanding normativity and the vice chancellor’s evocation of the Constitution- distinguishes ‘on the one hand, the “dead”, “abstract” universality of an ideological notion with fixed inclusions/exclusions and, on the other, “living”, “concrete” universality as the permanent process of

questioning and renegotiation of its own “official” content’ (Žižek in Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000: 102). He suggests that one should undermine and exploit this possibility, and ‘should precisely openly practise performative contradiction, asserting on behalf of the given universality the very content this universality (in its hegemonic form) excludes’ (ibid: 103). In SOAW’s relationship with SUSa, transformativity is possible when the dynamic between subjectivity, performativity and normativity allows an expanded notion of what it is to be human. In the SOAW responses to this incident and the second incident, SOAW’s collaboration attempted ‘to bring into relief the non-convergence of discourses’ (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 37). Since these two incidents, as well as the rape incident discussed in chapter 3, a number of changes have taken place in gender, race and harassment policies and protocols. These changes (for instance policies and protocols in the reporting of rape, sexual and race harassment and discrimination; in selection committee protocols; in the training of reporting and supporting officers to deal with harassment and discrimination; and in more attention to equity strategies across the institution) are transformative only if they result in expanded ways in which women and men, and the institution, frame and experience the possibilities of women on the campus.

In SOAW, transformation happens when the inspiration and effect of a moment leads to the expanded notion of how women experience and express themselves in relation to the other. On the SOAW listserv, the ‘non-convergence’ of opinions was experienced in a particularly accommodating and nurturing way for those who used it to compile a response to the first incident of racism in 2007. Because of a feminist grounding of inclusion and accommodation, the group could find consensus in how they framed their non-convergence with the SUSa response to the incident. Their common feminist ideals could provide a platform for non-convergence with SUSa ideals, arguably sheltering a kind of vulnerability by supportive behaviours. C’s email to the listserv which accompanied the final version of this response notes:

I have attached the final version, which reflects our collective concerns, and removes any specific details of individuals or departments. After our online discussion, we agreed that it would be unfair to use the situation of particular staff or departments for our own political ends, especially without their consent (SOAW listserv 28/11/2007).

Because their vulnerability was sheltered on the listserv, they in turn could shelter the possible vulnerability of others, in this case the personal and contested details concerning a specific former member. They did in fact use her situation to legitimise their engagement with the university, but in a way that de-emphasised the content of the particular case, and aspired to solutions which would prevent similar instances from happening again for future selves – not only in terms of institutional response, but in the institutional culture which gives rise to incidents of racism. While the

transformativity of this moment is animated by records such as SOAW's toplist response to the second incidents of racism, as well as their listserv discussions concerning all the incidents, transformativity is an ongoing possibility which requires an ongoing recognition of vulnerability and instability – at individual, organisational and institutional levels.

Despite the fact that SOAW was a platform for an alienated group within the university, the notion of universality within this group is also unstable and various. Butler claims that the notion of universality can be reached through translation, implying that the individual versions of, say, freedom of expression, pay homage to an ideal, while being expressed or performed according to individually interpreted ways. She argues that '[W]ithout translation, the very concept of universality cannot cross the linguistic borders it claims, in principle, to be able to cross... without translation, the only way the assertion of universality can cross a border is through a colonial and expansionist logic' (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 35).

The SOAW listserv attempted to open up a space for women to voice their concerns, sheltered from the gaze and practices of the alienating environment. But this space was also vulnerable, because norms established in the university (of hierarchy, and of certain voices carrying more weight than others) meant that there were complex sets of vulnerabilities within the SOAW space. This was not always easy to manage or shelter, and stretched members' notions of subjectivity and normativity. But it was (and is) in this stretching, in the ruptures of discourse that rich opportunities exist for ongoing transformation. These processes of transformation continue long after the precipitating event, and if they are provided a space or stage where they can perform.

The online discussion provoked by the O-week rape in 2009 became a site for considering a set of different vulnerabilities, and was an important opportunity for SOAW participants to realise their ongoing vulnerability, even to each other. Members could articulate their frustrations and 'non-convergence' as well as convergence with SUSA norms, in order to develop an alternative set of norms. So the differences expressed on the listserv before the intervention of the chairs were opportunities to question not only the content of their own passionate responses, but also to critique the way in which the university responded.

Arguably, the chairs' evocation of hierarchy at a key stage of the online discussion was in response to a particular border which had emerged – between an angry feminist, and an executive member who "didn't feel feminist enough". So in the SOAW conversation about non-convergence with SUSA norms and various translations of these, non-convergence in SOAW norms were exposed. In order to

be transformative, the conversation needed not only to shelter these vulnerabilities and tensions, but also not create the conditions which would increase vulnerability.

At this point it should be mentioned that the conversation on the listserv was being followed by a number of members who were not contributing, but vicariously participating in the debate. Northedge refers to this kind of learning and participation as one with 'blurred boundaries', where the participants might generate debates that are accessed by non-participants – he goes on to assert that vicarious learners sometimes have a better grasp of the concepts than those who generate discussions (Northedge 2003: 19,20). The imminently resigning executive member was perhaps one of these vicarious learners, and in her process of translation, she found herself uncomfortable with the content and means of expression on the listserv. Her subjectivity in the SOAW space was threatened. Because she had shared her vulnerability with the chairs, they rallied to include her vulnerability in how the discussions continued. But the listserv at that point was being used by members who felt vulnerable in the *SUSA* space. Participants in the SOAW online discussion were seeking the safety they had come to expect from SOAW in order to assert and expand their subjectivity, and finding vigorous debate and alternative views. The message from the chairs noticed the vicarious learning taking place (consciously or unconsciously), and provided participants in the discussion with an insight that could shelter different kinds of vulnerability and could acknowledge the effect of their discussion beyond the listserv.

The conversation which followed then became a metaconversation. As noted earlier, J, in this conversation and in response to the note from the chairs, stated that

in order to feel less intimidated you actually need to speak your truth ...And of course while we might argue that we are 'silenced' by people's strong emotions we can never forget that we also have a responsibility and accountability to ourselves -- ultimately when we don't speak, we have chosen not to speak.. (J, listserv discussion, 27 February 2009)

Butler contends that when new subjectivities are being negotiated, the new possibilities are a result of translation, and what needs then to happen is not a 'metalanguage', but 'the labour of transaction and translation which belongs to no single site, but is the movement between languages, and has its final destination in this movement itself' (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 179). The metaconversation allowed those who participated in it the opportunity to find ways to engage in the actual conversation with more insight, and the movement between these conversations provided the space for new subjectivities to emerge. The metaconversation is a demonstration of what is possible in the labour of transaction and translation, opening up the transformativity of

individuals and processes. The individual who resigned from the executive as a result of the incident explained that

in order to be an open discussion forum we all need to be self-reflexive. Perhaps, had I been so, then I may have felt that I could have contributed or at least declared how I felt more openly, earlier.

My question is HOW DO WE, TOGETHER, overcome this difficulty so that the space does feel more inclusive? It isn't enough to say to people, "you shouldn't be scared of a backlash or what others say, it's an open space." People need to FEEL confident that in making comments they aren't alienating themselves and that their views will be welcomed. There are power dynamics at play here that we may not be conscious of. I don't know how we negotiate this but I do think, especially if we want to encourage more women to engage in the listserv discussions, we need to at least think about it. (G, listserv discussion, 3 March 2009)

It is possible that the chair's evocation (described earlier) to recognise different vulnerability provided the framework for the kind of labour which encouraged G to put her thoughts onto the listserv. By evoking a hierarchy, using the logical framework of the institution, they not only reminded members of power relations as structured in the university, but they also demonstrated how this hierarchy could function to expand how women could engage with an expanded notion of subjectivity and power. The double consciousness which women sometimes employ (Brooks in Hesse-Biber and Leavy (eds) 2007: 66) operated concurrently with feminist ideals in SOAW's membership, and the insights some women had into how power operated in the institution influenced the version of "woman" they performed on the SOAW stage, and exposed different vulnerabilities to those who felt radical feminist rage at male supremacy embodied in rape and perceived as part of the university's response to it. Those who identified with G's response could then find shelter in the idea that there is a range of possible norms and translations of these.

Using subjectivity as a starting point for her political philosophy, Butler legitimates the use of individual experience as research practice. In SOAW's response to institutional engagements with racism and rape, individual members were further sites for transformativity.

As Salih points out, Butler's 'theories effectively reveal the "contingent foundations" of all identity categories' (Salih 2002:141), and the contingent conditions of how people relate to each other are important when we think about vulnerability and violence, in order not to reproduce them (Butler 2004:18). As has been discussed, she argues that we do this in order that we 'might critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain lives are more vulnerable than others...from where a principle might emerge by which we vow to protect others from the kind of violence we have suffered' (Butler 2004: 30). So, by a constant travelling between subjectivities, languages,

translations and performances, we discover not merely expanded ways of defining what it is to be human, but also discover that understanding is a process and not an event. SOAW has negotiated a role to play in the university's transformation. By responding collectively or individually SOAW members have become actively involved in university processes which are geared towards a more inclusive notion of subjectivity, and have transformative intentions.

By looking even more closely at the contingent conditions surrounding the renegotiation of subjectivity, it is possible to see, through the further analysis of an individual subject, how the subtle effects of collective actions have individual consequences and vice versa – in other words, it exposes the journey between translations and languages argued by Butler (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 179). Providing more detail for one subject's performance and normative development, it is possible to see how performativity, normativity and subjectivity, as multiplications of a single case, play themselves out.

So the effect of SOAW's engagement with race and rape in the stories above on individual members is a further site for transformativity. It also illustrates a conclusion which Butler argues when she asks, 'Who occupies that line between the speakable and the unspeakable, facilitating a translation there that is not the simple augmentation of the power of the dominant? There is nowhere else to stand, but there is no "ground" there, only a reminder to keep as one's point of reference the dispossessed and the unspeakable, and to move with caution as one tries to make use of power and discourse in ways that do not renaturalize the political vernacular of the state [or university] and its status as the primary instrument of legitimating effects' (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 178). She goes on to explain that what is important is not to incorporate the unspeakable in the domain of the speakable where dominant norms exist, but to 'shatter the confidence of dominance' (ibid 179) and by recognising the instability of norms and power, to provide alternative versions of universality which exist in translation. The journey between subjectivity, performativity and normativity, is what SOAW explored, particularly in the online conversation regarding the rape, and should continue to explore. For C, the online conversation on the rape in 2009 became a shaky middle ground, leading her to recognise the instability of all subjectivities, even one that had been established in SOAW. Her acknowledgement that the listserv was 'the one safe place on campus where we can express our feelings and frustrations' (C, listserv discussion, 27 February), needed to be challenged in order to provide a more nuanced view of the ways in which subjectivities are nurtured and perform within the boundaries of the norms which are maintained by these. In terms of the metaconversation which continued both online and in personal emails to her, she could find the affirming support she required for some of her expanded performances of herself as an

academic woman and outspoken activist, at the same time that her particularly passionate response to the rape was animating other kinds of vulnerabilities in the organisation, and this facilitated a transformativity. One member said in a personal email to her:

You are absolutely allowed to have strong views, voice those views and invite discussion on those views. As I understand, that is what SOAW is about. And that is what the SOAW list is about. And if people think that your views are radical, feminist, extremist, ...then they must express their views. Clearly, I would have thought that was only fair. ... you said what SOAW should have said, you sent out a letter that brought tears to my eyes, and you should be congratulated and loved (M, personal email, 27 February 2009).

The listserv discussion opened a space where a variety of women could consider not only the issues regarding the alleged rape, but how they could or should talk about it in order to provide a wide range of responses and input. Individual relationships, forged through other processes within SOAW, allowed individuals the opportunity to change, to find their strengths and manage their power *and* vulnerability. By evoking hierarchical structures in their email to the listserv, the chairs, made visible the structures of power in the larger context of SUSU, and as such allowed the inherent power structures in the feminist SOAW to be exposed. Keeping power fluid and being inclusive might be the abstract ideals of SOAW, but in order for them to be 'living' and 'concrete' requires a 'permanent process of questioning and renegotiation of its own "official" content' (Žižek in Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000: 102). Clearly the SOAW executive was experiencing a dilemma – one of their members was about to resign, and they wanted to protect her and those like her, while protecting too the space which the SOAW listserv provided to SOAW members. Recognising that relationships between members in SOAW were affected by relationships between SOAW members in departments and hierarchies in the institution, the chairs' contribution to the discussion was as chairs, and not as ordinary members. Evoking a hierarchy, even though the SOAW executive committee from the start worked hard not to act in a hierarchical way, inserted an element into the conversation that alerted members to the layered way in which subjectivities are formed, and the various kinds of recognition which SOAW members had as members of SOAW and members of the institution. SOAW tried both consciously and unconsciously, deliberately and involuntarily, to be inclusive of as many views and persons as possible. Despite their carefully framed argument which tried to include the wide spectrum of opinions being expressed, the email from the chairs framed this argument as chairs, which was, arguably, using the kind of logic which dominated the university's culture. While the posts on the listserv up until this point had included a variety of positions, and was, in effect, a process of multiple translations, the note from the chair had a particular effect on those engaged in the discussion.

The chairs evocation had a transformative effect on C, in that the friendships and commonalities she shared with them was not the only aspect of their relationship: their role as chairs was a reminder of both visible and invisible dynamics at work in any given engagement. It was a warning ‘to move with caution as one tries to make use of power and discourse in ways that do not renaturalize the political vernacular of the state [or university] and its status as the primary instrument of legitimating effects’ (Butler in Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000: 178) – and ironically, it did this using the political vernacular. But the political vernacular was accompanied by a personal history and future of friendship and mentoring, which put their note in a particular individual context for C. This shows that transformation happens whether there are hierarchical structures or transformation agendas, and it is possible that both of these can be facilitators and inhibitors of transformation. Arguably, SOAW provides a platform where a variety of opinions, some sharing SUSA norms, and some subverting or challenging these, are given the space to express themselves. Transformation, whether in an individual or an organisation such as SOAW or an institution such as SUSA requires this complex fluidity in order to manifest. The unpredictability of feminist praxis, and embracing vulnerability, are key to how SOAW has evolved, and should continue to inform its future. Butler suggests that ‘[T]o foreclose that vulnerability, to banish it, to make ourselves secure at the expense of every other human consideration is to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way’ (Butler, 2004: 30). Mellon reports, brochures and institutional documents do not do justice to understanding the potentially transformative effect of the relationships, performances and subjectivities which are made possible by SOAW. The contingent conditions of the relationships between subjectivity, normativity and performativity which lead to transformativity are not measured quantitatively only. Transformativity can be understood by recognising individual effects in the context of organisational and institutional transformation conversations, and the effects of the conversation as discussed here attest to the broader transformativity of moments in the lives of individuals which are facilitated by the existence of SOAW.

### *Conclusion*

As an organisation recognised by the university, SOAW provided (and provides) opportunities for individuals to become legitimate members of the wider SUSA community – from which they had felt alienated before SOAW’s existence. So as an organisation, it facilitates ongoing conversations between the institution and previously excluded staff and students. But the SOAW organisation also facilitates the negotiation of subjectivities amongst its members. The founding norm of inclusivity and the practice of keeping power fluid have meant that there are regular opportunities provided

for SOAW members to explore expanded ways of being. G's evocation in her email to the SOAW listserv to 'use the space reflexively' was an important moment in the conversation regarding inclusivity— it was her translation of a conversation which she had accessed vicariously up until this point, broadening the range of those who were engaged in the conversation to those who were using not only the listserv as their method of engaging with the questions raised by the incident and responses, such as G's face to face discussions with executive members. And her points to be reflexive and aware of the power of words is a challenge to the organisation as it continues – the listserv is a sheltered space from SUSU, but even within this space, vulnerabilities exist that need to be sheltered, and each renegotiation of subjectivity has at its foundation the notion of new vulnerability .

Arguably, the recognition of vulnerabilities and the renegotiation of subjectivity in SOAW would need more than a listserv conversation in order to be transformative for all participants. If SOAW members also met in person at, say, seminar presentations and reading and discussion groups, or even informal gatherings, these vulnerabilities could be noticed and expressed in different and more helpful settings. In G's case, the small group which supported her included the chairs with whom she served on the executive. For C, the friendships and mentorships she had with the chairs already framed her response to their email on the listserv, and individual responses from a range of other members recognised and nurtured vulnerabilities she was experiencing as a result of the rape. The relationships C and G had with the norms of SOAW and the norms of SUSU provided the possibility for individual transformativity, with unpredictable outcomes. That a wariness to express passionate, radical outrage was inserted into C's use of the listserv meant that in the midst of her outrage and vulnerability, the vulnerability of all others could temper her passion, and build new practical and intellectual ways of understanding and expressing ideas. The journey between languages and translations, facilitated even by the process of this research thesis, became and becomes a way of being, rather than a space between beings. The uncertainty of knowing how to respond, and the acknowledgement that there are a variety of ways different people respond to things, becomes what we know, and this can encourage an ongoing reflexivity and travelling between translations, in order to expand limiting identity categories transformatively.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

We are, as Butler claims, undone by each other. Our subjectivity is precarious, our norms and performances are translations, and we have the capacity to make each other's lives unlivable. And yet, if we can accept this precariousness as a starting point, there is the possibility of renegotiating who we are with each other, to accommodate those who have been previously excluded or discouraged, and to turn vulnerability into strength through recognising and reframing it. Our relationships with each other can be valuable opportunities to stimulate, support, inspire, challenge and understand each other. In the patriarchal context of SUSA and the higher education sector more broadly, power's melancholic expression of itself with regard to women makes them vulnerable to the perpetual tragedy of their own vulnerability. In this context, vulnerable groups, such as women, will inevitably need additional ongoing support in order to ensure their questionable inclusion in the university, especially in senior positions, if they remain othered by a problematically idealised normative gender framework, and where women, for instance, could perform their 'gender under conditions of duress' (Butler 2004b:157).

While Butler has used the framework of subjectivity, normativity and performativity to expose the USA's relationship to tensions in Israel, Iraq and Afghanistan (Butler 2004), it has arguably just as well been used to critique the violent personal and structural conditions in South Africa today, which shape the lives of, for instance, academic women. Even the more pristine conditions of an elite university such as SUSA are infused with shades of this violence. There are versions of masculinity and femininity in South Africa which are, using Butler's frames of reference, melancholic. Individuals performing these versions have suffered loss (whether this is of their homosexual or bisexual selves, or through societally inscribed and prescribed taboo, or of those whom they loved and the relationship's possibilities for themselves), and have not grieved. Instead, they have internalised a fixed notion of a possible self anchored in a lost past, which includes the loss of the collaborative dynamic in that relationship. Because they will not give up this notion of self and other, there is no loss, no grieving, and lives that are lost in this process are not grievable, nor can they live 'livable lives' (Butler 2004: 33-38). SUSA, as a fragment of South Africa's broader context of patriarchy and gender violence, has the potential to perpetuate notions of gender which limit women's equitable progression in the institution. As has been argued, SOAW has established a legitimate platform to engage with these melancholic perceptions and performances of power and gender, and reframe vulnerability as something to be recognised and supported. This provides individuals with new ways to discover themselves as academic women. These new ways of being include their potential engagement with SOAW programmes- for instance, seminar presentations, conference attendance

and mentoring. But it is also through the ways in which individuals are encouraged to act in response to each other and in response to the often limiting gendered environment of SUSU and South Africa, that SOAW has the potential for transformativity.

Butler claims that 'we only reach the disposition to get to the "root" of violence' when we notice its precipitating conditions, in order not to reproduce them (Butler 2004:18). In the South African environment in which individuals in SUSU experience themselves as women or men, individual subjectivities are brought to life by social conditions which permit and prescribe the performance of gender in particularly chilling and terrible ways. Our progressive Constitution, laws and policies are articulated aspirations that utterly fail to materialise in many of the day to day behaviours and responses of South African inhabitants. But Butler's explanation of vulnerability in terms of gender provides an alternative response to loss and potential loss than violence, which can be seen as a kind of melancholic acting out of a fear of vulnerability, and which could limit gender's performativity. As has been argued, if loss, which violence perpetuates, is recognised and grievable, and if vulnerability from this loss is sheltered, and if this leads to a reframing of the vulnerable person in a way that nurtures and inspires her to perform differently with an expanded normative framework, then transformation happens. This thesis explores some of the experiences of women in SOAW which have provided them with opportunities to reflect on their own vulnerabilities, collectively and individually, and to participate in imagining and establishing new ways to be academic women. These experiences demonstrate how the performativity of new subjectivities in SOAW has led to moments of transformation. The thesis explores how the dynamic between subjectivities, how the relationship between subjects and norms, and how the performativity of norms informs the conditions in SOAW and SUSU for ongoing transformativity.

What makes moments transformational or merely historical? As has been explored, Butler argues that agency is an effect of a political encounter and not a condition for transformation (Lloyd 2005: 95). She encourages us to recognise power and vulnerability in particular ways, as a necessary first step to renegotiating the conditions which create or perpetuate unhelpful vulnerabilities.

Interventions to combat unfair discrimination and transform cultures of exclusion are perhaps developed in order to bring about transformation in how we regard each other, but they can only succeed if they are willing to transform themselves. In any institution, and in SUSU for the purposes of this thesis, transformation agendas and interventions are platforms for transformativity rather than guaranteeing substantive transformation. SUSU's foundational framework arguably has the potential to continue to generate vulnerability, unless it expands its conception of what it is to be an academic and what it is to be a woman. SOAW is an attempt to operate within this framework using

different, feminist norms to establish who academic women can become, and in so doing has contributed, and could continue to do so, to the realisation of SUSAs transformation aspirations through destabilising fixed notions of how things can be done.

As has been shown, SOAW has been able to claim the agency required to bring about new subjectivity in some instances, because of a particular relationship to SUSAs. The language of academic support and achievement, as well as equity transformation, has already been established in the policies, reports and protocols developed in SUSAs and the South African higher education environment over the last five years. This language is expanded every time there is a public assertion of norms, because language, in a diverse environment, is open to multiple translations. SOAW has created a platform which can be a site for the translation of norms and a travelling between languages. By providing an environment which recognises vulnerability in the institution, it renegotiates subjectivity in a way that shelters this. By noticing moments of non-convergence with institutional responses to things, it is the platform for debate and the renegotiation of subjectivity. As has been argued, SOAW has used the legitimised platform of the organisation to translate and mimic institutional aims, norms and processes, demonstrated for instance through how they have debated, negotiated and performed the norm of inclusion. The emergence of SOAW facilitated the development and legitimising of new platforms for women members of an alienated, and thus vulnerable, group, and this could (under certain conditions) continue to provide women with the opportunity to establish friendships, recognition and alliances with each other across disciplines, ages, nationalities and classes. The opportunity to develop their strengths in a supportive environment can have a profound effect on the quality of the renegotiations of subjectivity which must take place in order to achieve gender equity at an institutional level. And arguably, it can do this only if it retains a reflexive and unpredictable capacity. It is the intentional journey between languages, as Butler explains, which expands how many translations and versions of “academic women” are accommodated and inspired in a given setting.

SOAW, the site (and perhaps the process) of this research, has the ongoing potential for transformativity for individuals and the university, in that it is an arguably safe platform for recognising that there are multiple intertwined ways in which we experience who we are and what we can become; that one persons assertion or translation of agency can render another vulnerable; and that for each vulnerability that is recognised and sheltered, another is exposed. If SOAW can continue to be a reflexive space for individuals who must and do explore new ways of being in the institution, and can continue to facilitate performances in the institution which renegotiate who women are and can be, it has the potential to be transformative individually, organisationally and

institutionally. It can perhaps only do this effectively and sustainably if there is continual and ongoing recognition of vulnerability- not as an identity status, but as a human condition- in how SOAW runs its programmes and performs its agency, and how SUSA enables it to do so. SOAW's ongoing engagement with the vulnerability of women could continue to be a transformative space if individual members are given and claim opportunities to reflect on different norms and performances to animate their expandable subjectivities, and how they renegotiate these in SUSA.

Transformation happens, as has been argued, in individuals, in organisations and in institutions, when new subjectivities and new norms provide a space for performances which contradict and expand traditional notions of what it is to be human, and an academic woman. The experiences which women have had as members of departments, citizens of the institution, and in SOAW, show that there are multiple possible performances for even one academic woman, and a variety of potential responses. The daily life of a university, such as SUSA, provides moments where non-convergence can become public – this happens in committees, in responses to events, in invitations to participate in processes and even, as has been discussed, on the SOAW listserv. Where differences in how we experience events and processes are recognised and accommodated, we can begin to acknowledge not only the vulnerability of ourselves, but the ongoing vulnerability of all, and this will continue to establish sites for transformativity. Each act we do generates the norms which shape our individual and collective futures. Despite the care we take to build a framework to support vulnerability, it is necessarily not stable or predictable, and it is in the non-convergence of norms at many particular sites that is the potential spark for transformation. This is where what and how we know transformatively, submit to not knowing, in order to generate new knowledge, ways of knowing and kinds of knowers.

The particular individuals, documents, stories and events explored in this thesis have been selected for the way in which they are open to the lens which Butler's theorising offers. But they are also indicative of my own interests and experiences, embedded as I am in both SUSA and SOAW. While this might signify limitations and questions of broader validity, it also provides potential direction for future research and practice. There are many other stories of women in SOAW, and many other experiences of women in other universities in the country and continent. These are all open to the possibilities provided by reconfiguring vulnerability and exposing how melancholic power exacerbates it. SOAW could, arguably, continue to provide a platform for members to reflect, and to perform in ways which expand how the university frames and supports "vulnerable" groups and individuals. The stories and dynamics at work between other women in other universities, societies and countries are unexplored inspirations for ongoing research.

Arguably, there are many layers to how SOAW is perceived by women in the organisation, and men and women outside of the organisation. SOAW has gained a particular reputation, but the particularity differs according to specific performances and norms in the diverse SUSa environment. There is much to be gained in exploring perceptions of SOAW from “outsiders”, internal and external to the organisation. Butler’s theoretical concepts lend themselves to be used to understand the dynamics between polarised groups, however broad or subtle the polarity. For the purpose of this thesis, mostly insider views were accommodated, which gives the research its optimistic tone. This would perhaps be necessarily diluted by more rigorous exploration of other dynamics at work. As Butler argues, ultimately the recognition of vulnerability destabilises all known identity categories, and an awareness of the precariousness on which subjectivities are recognised and sheltered helps to guide possibilities for further research, and possibilities for how SOAW develops in the future.

Butler’s theoretical concepts, and the selection of these used in this thesis, have been used to animate the conditions of transformation in SUSa and SOAW. The dynamic between vulnerability and power which her ideas illuminate is explored in particular contexts. But how useful is this lens in exploring other contexts? Does the lens hold up, can it illuminate other situations helpfully, can it be applied more broadly? Certainly her ideas have worked to explain the emergence of SOAW and the work it does in ways which help to tease out aspects of the organisation which are worth considering carefully as SOAW plans its ongoing strategy in the institution. But as Markussen suggests, our construction of history, and research, is politically motivated (Markussen 2005:333), and Butler’s theoretical ideas have been applied here with deliberate and political intentions. Using Butler’s ideas to explore different contexts, or different aspects of the same context, could add layers to the ways in which to understand vulnerability and power, and more specifically could expose aspects of SOAW and SUSa that are currently invisible. Her ideas also have unpredictable outcomes, and this initial engagement with them compels using them to frame other questions, for instance about violence against women in this country and on this continent, in other studies.

Transformation’s trajectory is not predictable, and our notions of what we want to transform from, and transform into, are shifting sites of renegotiation. This has implications for SOAW going forward. While an awareness of the necessary conditions for the facilitation of transformation which this thesis explores is helpful, vulnerability as a human condition will continue to challenge both SOAW’s and SUSa’s responses to vulnerable groups or individuals and how they are framed and asserted, and this might happen in ways that lead them to places they cannot predict. Butler recommends a ‘submitting to transformation’ as a process, and a travelling between languages and translations, without being certain of the outcomes. While equity targets and strategies are helpful signposts in

the university's transformation aspirations, a reflexive uncertainty must be acknowledged and accommodated if they are to be realised.

Our resistance to change and our fear of vulnerability can be reconfigured to be the foundations of how we know ourselves and each other in SOAW and SUSAN. The subjectivity-ness of my own experience must and does compel me to acknowledge that I can only exist if I am engaged in a shifting relationship to and with you, and if we both are open to different translations and the journey between them. Transformativity is an ongoing possibility if SOAW can anticipate how powerful recognised vulnerability can be as a site for liberation, but only sustainably through an ongoing acknowledgement that we are who we are in relation to each other, with inevitable unpredictability.

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## ADDENDUM 1



# SOAW

Solidarity Organisation for Academic Women

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO SOAW

### 1. Introduction

Women in South African institutions of higher education face numerous obstacles in achieving their true potential within their working environment. Under-representation in both decision-making structures and research processes in higher education institutions is an ongoing challenge for women academics. Furthermore, women experience career advancement limitations due to child rearing commitments, domestic responsibilities, family nurturing requirements, relocation of spouse / partners etc. Thus women in higher education need specific attention in order to address and overcome the above limitations.

Despite these constraints, a number of women have achieved greatly within the sector of higher education, and a significant number are entering the arena with the aim of obtaining PhDs and occupying senior positions in departments and institutions. These women need to be supported and encouraged to make their contribution felt within the institutions, and the wider South African society. They also need to be applauded for their persistence, often in the face of explicit discouragement and disapproval.

### 2. Background to SOAW

The Women's Academic Support Association (SOAW) started off as the *Young Academic Women's Group (YAWG)* and was established in August 2004 by women who felt that their needs as young<sup>1</sup> academics and senior students were not being met at Rhodes University. They had gained access to a reputable, historically white institution that was male dominated and had a culture that many found alienating. It was decided that additional support and guidance (outside of conventional guidance by supervisors or colleagues) was needed to allow them to fully realize their potential.

Predominantly black<sup>2</sup>, senior, women<sup>3</sup> students and young female academics were invited to attend the first official meeting that was held on 5 September 2004. It was agreed that a need existed for a forum in which young women academics at Rhodes could support one

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<sup>1</sup> Young in this instance means women academics who are newly embarking on a career in academia.

<sup>2</sup> Black in this document is an all-encompassing concept which refers to the old apartheid categories of black/African, coloured and Indian. It should be noted that some of our members are from African countries other than South Africa and they, as well as some South African members would identify as African.

<sup>3</sup> The conventional spelling of 'women' is used in all SOAW correspondence but it should be noted that some of our members prefer to actively challenge existing language structures and would usually use 'womyn'.

another in various ways to achieve a number of aims. By encouraging the advancement of their research careers these women would not only contribute to academia, but also be in a position to actively address issues of representativeness in academic structures because of increased capacity. In short, women academics would eventually be able to move from the periphery to the centre-stage of research processes. *YAWG* became an official collective at this meeting.

By the end of 2005, *YAWG* had grown to a group with well over 60 members. It was decided that the group should become an officially recognised university association in order to better achieve the group's goals. It was also decided to change the name to better reflect the diverse nature and activities of the group. At the end of 2005 the group obtained official recognition as a Rhodes University association and changed its name to *SOAW* – the *Solidarity Organisation for Academic Women*.

Between its initial inception and now, *SOAW* has undertaken a number of ground breaking initiatives and projects (detailed below) and continues to grow in membership and ideas. *SOAW* now has a dedicated office and a series of short, medium, and long-term projects and plans to ensure the Association's objectives are met.

## 1. Aims and Objectives

As defined in the *SOAW* Constitution the objectives of *SOAW* are:

1. To provide academic, intellectual, and professional support to ensure the personal and professional development of women senior students and academic staff at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, with special emphasis on previously disadvantaged women.
2. To work in collaboration with other like-minded organisations to promote women's development in the Higher Education Sector

*SOAW* seeks to assist members in the following areas:

- Writing and publication
- Completion of post-graduate degrees (Honours, Masters, PhD)
- Promotion within their fields
- Conference attendance and presentations in their respective fields

To achieve these objectives, *SOAW* aims:

1. To improve the qualifications of the group members by:
  - a. encouraging members to register for postgraduate degrees and diplomas, and
  - b. disseminating relevant scholarship and bursary information.
2. To provide support and resources to enhance the publication profile of members by:

- a. discussing each other's research material with the intention of improving both writing and presentation skills,
  - b. establishing networks with the key role-players in the publication review process,
  - c. identifying and accessing sources of funding to facilitate research activities, and
  - d. encouraging group members to attend and present papers at local and international conferences.
2. To provide developmental opportunities for our members by:
- a. identifying potential academic mentors in the appropriate fields,
  - b. inviting academic women role models to address the group on pertinent issues,
  - c. disseminating relevant information regarding training programmes, vacancies, etc,
  - d. providing efficient career-path guidance for our members, and
  - e. creating links with active women's organizations with similar goals;
3. To create a social support network.

## 1. Expected Outcomes

1. Increase in the number of publications of group members.
2. Improved career prospects for group members.
3. Existence of linkages with similar institutions/organisations to engage in mutually beneficial activities.
4. Establishment of a network of mentors who are willing to provide academic guidance and support to young women academics in the early stages of their careers.
5. Existence of an informal social network on which women at Rhodes University can rely for support and assistance relating to personal and work related issues.

## 2. Activities

The group initially met monthly on a Sunday combining administrative and academic inputs. At each meeting, volunteers presented articles that were going to be submitted for publication, conference papers, or chapters from MA or PhD thesis. The work was then discussed amongst the group providing valuable feedback to the academics.

As SOAW grew it became evident that a new cycle of meetings and gatherings was needed. For 2006, a variety of meeting options have been established that cater to both broader group needs and individual member's needs:

- **Sunday meetings** are held once a term around a central theme or issue of interest to the group including issues of women's rights; gender issues on campus and nationally; the needs of foreign students; and transformation within the university.

- **Mentoring groups** have been established and meet twice a term (or as often as requested by the group). The groups determine the nature of their interaction and these range from addressing practical issues, such as working and studying simultaneously, to reading and critiquing pieces of work.
- **Inter-disciplinary, cross-faculty presentations and seminars** have been organised to showcase SOAW achievers or report back on collective SOAW undertakings. These presentations are well attended and provide a meeting point for members from different faculties and departments. The results are not only lively debates, but regular contacts between members who may otherwise be isolated in their department or faculty.
- **Capacity building and training events** are being organised to meet the needs of the members. For 2006, a pilot initiative called **SEWSA** (the South Eastern Workshop on Southern Africa) is being launched. SEWSA aims to improve the publishing capacity of members and will combine workshops and training opportunities, with a rigorous yet supportive seminar environment in which participants will present new work. Editors and area experts, both national and international, have been invited to attend.

Participants will pre-circulate, present, and receive feedback on a piece of academic work. After the workshop, participants would have received sufficient feedback to ensure that, with minimal additional work, their final papers are at a publishable level. SEWSA aims to have facilitated the publication of 14 papers in accredited journals in 2007.

- **Collaborative relationships** – since its inception SOAW has entered into collaborative relationships with interested stakeholders. On the **campus** SOAW enjoys a good relationship with the offices of the Dean of Humanities and the Dean of Research.

**Nationally and regionally** SOAW is making contact with other women academics and academic groups. Representatives from other universities in South Africa, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Botswana have been identified as potential participants of SEWSA (mentioned above).

**Internationally**, SOAW is working to formalise a collaborative relationship with the North Eastern Workshop on Southern Africa (NEWSA). The workshop has an 18 months cycle and in April 2005 was held in Vermont, USA. Funding was obtained from Rhodes University, the National Research Foundation (NRF) and the NEWSA partners to allow SOAW members to attend. Four SOAW members (academic staff) travelled to Vermont to attend the conference, present their work and participate in a writing workshop to prepare their work for potential publication in accredited journals such as the *Journal of Southern African Studies*. The positive experience of the workshop formed the template for the SEWSA initiative.

- SOAW has a regular **Friday work and talk shop**. Members meet in the SOAW office for an hour on a Friday afternoon to assist in any administrative tasks that need doing or to talk about issues on campus or in member's personal lives.
- The SOAW **Executive** meet monthly or as necessary to deal with most of the administrative aspects of the group.
- **Ad-Hoc** seminars, focus groups, meetings and forums – SOAW both initiates, and is invited to, become involved in various ad-hoc events. To date these events have included NRF workshops and meetings, student media projects, meetings with funders, focus groups on transformation, research projects on women in academia etc.
- **Guest speakers** are invited to address the group on a regular basis. SOAW has been extremely fortunate to be addressed by the well-known science researcher and Shoprite-Checkers Woman of the Year 2004 (science category) Professor Nyokong. She is a SOAW supporter and serves as a valuable resource that the group consults whenever necessary. Other guest speakers have included Sarah Fischer (from the Rhodes HR Department) who discussed promotions and career advancement structures for academics within the University.
- Group members have also been active in representing SOAW's interests in **formal university structures**, and raising the profiles and concerns of women academics generally

## 2. Conclusion

SOAW is a dynamic and ever-growing group that has already made a substantial difference to its members. Collaborative efforts and negotiating are proving fruitful and the group is making good progress towards meeting its objectives.

## 3. Contact Information

If you have any further questions or would like more details about SOAW please contact one of the following Executive members:

## ADDENDUM 2

This is the amended constitution, as of 7 April 2006

### **The Draft Constitution of the SUSU University Women's Academic Solidarity Association (SOAW)**

#### **1. Name**

The organisation shall be officially known as the Women's Academic Solidarity Association (SOAW) and shall be an associate of SUSU University (RU).

Body Corporate

The organisation shall:

- Exist in its own right, separately from its members
- Continue to exist when its membership changes and there are different office bearers
- Be able to sue and be sued in its own name

#### **2. Aims and Objectives**

2.1 The Association's main objectives are to provide academic, intellectual and professional support to developing women senior students and academic staff at SUSU University, Grahamstown, with special emphasis on previously disadvantaged women.

2.2 The Association's secondary objectives will be to assist members in the following areas:

- Writing and publication
- To complete post-graduate degrees (Honours, Masters, Ph.D.)
- To achieve promotion within their fields
- To attend conferences and do presentations in their respective fields
- To work in collaboration with other like-minded organisations to promote women's development in the Higher Education Sector

#### **3. Membership**

3.1 Membership shall be open to all women academics, students and researchers based at SUSU University who identify with the aims and objectives of the Association.

3.2 Membership shall be granted by the Executive Committee and ratified at meetings of the general body.

3.3 The Association will seek to work in collaboration with other like-minded organisations to promote women's development in the Higher Education Sector.

3.4 The Association will seek to address gender issues affecting its members, and women and girls in all communities, in all spheres.

#### **4. Aims**

To achieve these objectives, SOAW aims:

- To improve the qualifications of the group members by:
  1. encouraging members to register for postgraduate degrees and diplomas, and disseminating relevant scholarship and bursary information;
  1. To provide support and resources to enhance the publication profile of members by:
  2. discussing each other's research material with the intention of improving both writing and presentation skills,
  3. establishing networks with the key role-players in the publication review process;
  4. identifying and accessing sources of funding to facilitate research activities, and
  5. encouraging group members to attend and present papers at local and international conferences
- To provide developmental opportunities for our members by:
  1. identifying potential academic mentors in the appropriate fields,
  2. inviting academic women role models to address the group on pertinent issues,
  3. disseminating relevant information regarding training programmes, vacancies, etc,
  4. providing efficient career-path guidance for our members, and
  5. creating links with active women's organizations with similar goals;
  6. To create a social support network.

#### **4. The Executive Committee**

The executive committee is the main decision-making body of SOAW and shall consist of the following officers:

1. Chairperson
2. Deputy Chairperson
3. Secretary
4. Assistant Secretary
5. Treasurer
6. Ex officio (Mentoring Groups)
7. Ex officio (SEWSA)

#### **5. Duties of the Executive Committee**

5.1 The Executive Committee shall oversee the activities of the organisation.

5.2 The Executive Committee must have an annual audit and financial report to the membership and the university.

5.3 The Executive Committee must liaise with the relevant university offices for assistance in the organisation of SOAW activities.

5.4. The Executive Committee shall co-opt ad-hoc portfolios if deemed necessary.

A) Chairperson:

Shall preside over both the general and the executive committee meeting and shall be the overall spokesperson for SOAW in consultation with the executive body.

B) Deputy Chairperson:

Shall assist the Chairperson in all official deliberations; shall assume the duties of the Chair in the absence or upon the request of the Chairperson; shall be assigned special duties by the Executive Committee.

C) Secretary:

Shall, in consultation with the executive body, prepare agenda for all general and executive body meetings; shall take minutes at both general and executive body meetings; shall be responsible for the general correspondence of SOAW.

D) Assistant Secretary:

Shall assist the Secretary to prepare agenda for all general and executive body meetings; shall take minutes at both general and executive body meetings; shall be responsible for the general correspondence of SOAW; shall assume the duties of the Secretary in the absence or upon request of the Secretary.

E) Treasurer:

Shall be responsible for collecting all dues; shall be responsible for the fund-raising activities; shall present bi-annual financial statements to the Association.

F) Ex officio (Mentoring Groups, South Eastern Workshop on Southern Africa (SEWSA) :

Shall coordinate the activities of the Mentoring Groups and the SEWSA as shall be determined with the Executive Committee

Shall be recruited by the Executive Committee on an ad hoc basis to assume overall responsibility for specific projects, initiatives or functions.

## **6. General Meetings and Quorums:**

1. A membership meeting shall be held at least once every academic term.
2. Emergency meetings shall be called by at least two of the Executive Committee members upon request of any member of the Executive Committee or of the membership.
3. A general meeting shall be held twice a year to address official issues and business relating to the association.
4. One third of the members of the membership shall constitute a quorum of any membership meeting.

5. The choosing of officers of the Executive Committee by the membership shall be done through secret balloting at a general membership meeting every academic semester.
6. All nominees for office should be present at time of election but, with prior arrangement, may be elected by proxy.

## **7. Meetings and procedures of the Executive Committee**

1. The Executive Committee shall hold office for one semester.
2. The Executive Committee must hold at least one meeting per month during the academic term.
3. Executive committee meetings shall be called by the Chairperson or, in her absence, by the Vice-Chairperson or Secretary.
4. Four officers of the Executive Committee shall constitute a quorum at any Executive Committee meeting.
5. The chairperson, or two members of the Committee, can call a special meeting if other members of the Committee are informed not less than 14 days before it is due to take place. Members also need to be informed of the issues that will be discussed at such a special meeting when the meeting is called.
6. The Executive Body can appoint someone to a vacant office until the next General Meeting. If a new Executive Committee members is to be appointed, then other members should be given 21 days notice. Elections must be held at the next general meeting of the Association.

## **8. Financial Transactions**

1. All financial transactions shall be signed by two of the three (3) Executive Committee members whose signatures are filed with SUSU University. In the event a check is written to one of the three signatories, then one of the two remaining must sign.

## **9. Constitutional Amendment**

1. The constitution may be amended upon petition by a member and on approval by a simple majority vote of the membership.

## **10. Dissolution**

1. In the event of the associations dissolution the remaining funds will be handed over to a like-minded organisation.

## **11. Fees**

- 1. The Association may seek membership fees from all members.
- 2. These membership fees should be on a sliding scale to ensure equity of contribution from members.
- 3. Additional fees for associate members, supporters or other institutional structures may be sought.



# SOAW

**Solidarity Organisation for Academic Women**

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TO: Senior Management and Academic Leadership, SUSU University  
FROM: SOAW  
DATE: 28 November 2008

## **SOAW's response to the management of transformation, racism and sexism at SUSU University**

The women of SOAW are dismayed by the tardy manner in which issues of discrimination are handled by the university structures. Race, class and gender prejudices have important commonalities, and SOAW is compelled to advocate for urgent attention to facilitate meaningful transformation on and consistent responses to all of these issues.

Notwithstanding City Press' shocking journalism over the last weeks, overt and subtle forms of racism and sexism are experienced by some staff members at SUSU and this presents serious challenges to our transformation agenda. While SUSU prides itself on research, staff-student ratios and throughput rates, it is evident that lack of proper attention to issues of transformation can bring it to its knees.

The university's mode of dealing with racism and sexism on campus is not a clear and transparent process, and this poses a threat to its fairness and justice. We understand that the issues involving discrimination are often complex and more often than not, are intertwined with personal and workplace concerns. However, these layers should be peeled off and complexities unpacked where necessary so that discrimination is not rendered invisible. Thus while it is not within our scope to comment on the validity of the claims in the recent press, it provides us with an opportunity to voice our dissatisfaction with SUSU' handling of incidents of discrimination, and with the gap that exists between policy (such as the Equity Policy) and practice. Victims and perpetrators of racism and sexism need effective assistance. They need to be provided with tools to manage their own responses, and they need to be informed of the processes, choices and consequences which are afforded by the SUSU and legal systems for handling these cases. Interventions that are swift, mandated and resourced should be applied if we are serious about implementing policy. We challenge SUSU Management to provide a transparent process for dealing with discrimination, and to ensure that the process is well communicated through a variety of means to all constituencies. Incidents of racism, sexism and other discrimination, their management and their resolution, should be

monitored, and reported to the university community on a regular basis so that we can track our progress as an institution.

We are outraged that on our campus, certain students and staff are so accommodated and affirmed by the dominant culture that they can make insensitive, abusive and degrading remarks with impunity. This is not going to go away quietly while we think about something else. The university needs to agree on punitive consequences for discriminatory behaviour, as well as helpful interventions such as diversity training and counselling, and these need to be made clear to all students and staff. If the institutional culture is such that people feel free to act out their prejudices, we need to oppose this vigorously, intentionally and holistically.

The recent press releases and the VC's response to them are good opportunities for us to think about racism and sexism with much more purpose and rigour, and to start sending a very clear message that it will not be tolerated on this campus.

The imbizos of the past 16 months, and the various fora provided for staff to express their interests and concerns, have been useful ways to include and act on diverse voices. They attest to a wealth and range of insight, experience, views and capacity. While this demonstrates encouraging progress from a previously loaded and limited institutional democracy, the structures for and reaction to individual instances of racism (and other discrimination) are unwieldy and exclusionary, in that there are not clear and accessible indications of what one should do and where one can go. The opaque nature of the issues protects a dominant culture which has chilling resemblances to a history from which we ought by now to have emerged with a clearer commitment to human rights, including a genuine desire to address racism and sexism on our campus. As long as individuals in the senior academic and management leadership drag their feet and are apathetic to issues of transformation and equity, SUSA' policies will not be effectively implemented, and its transformation agenda will be jeopardised.

#### **SOAW recommendation regarding SUSA' response to discrimination 4/12/07**

The following points were raised at a meeting with the VC and HR Director, after SOAW sent a letter to them in the light of the racism row put into the public domain (City Press et al).

1. **A permanent staff position** to manage racism, equity, sexism, prejudice: It is unrealistic to expect full time staff members to deal with these issues in limited spare time. Part of the university's commitment to eradicating acts of discrimination and prejudice should be to provide the resources for a qualified individual to handle this aspect.
2. **A transparent process:** The policies and processes for dealing with racism, sexism and other discrimination need to be clear, and communicated broadly to all constituencies. All departments and university groups (eg sports clubs, residences etc) must be made aware of these through a range of programmes, including training workshops, addresses, posters, as appropriate.

3. **Bold statements about discrimination:** All over campus there should be posters informing students and staff about discrimination; spelling out that racism, sexism and any form of hate speech or discrimination is an offence. This will help ensure that all constituencies at SUSA University are aware of the policies, measures of redress and processes for dealing with discrimination on campus.
4. **Accountability:** Deans, HoD's and Managers must be accountable for incidents of racism within their sections, and should be PROACTIVE in the way they address this; it will require them to ensure that the staff and students within their sections are informed of what constitutes discriminatory behaviour, and take responsibility for ensuring that staff and students understand this and are aware of the consequences. HoD's and Managers should include a transformational/anti-discrimination plan as part of their goal setting strategy for the year, and have peer review of these to learn from each other. Student evaluations should include an assessment of transformational practice.
5. **Punitive measures:** A range of punitive measures should be devised, ranging from community service to expulsion, for those who are found guilty of discriminatory language and behaviour.
6. **Recruitment and retention:** Politically conscious individuals should be actively recruited, and efforts made to retain them within the system. It is not sufficiently progressive to have a recruitment policy that merely number crunches to ensure the right quota from designated groups; more effort should be made to identify political consciousness, and the selection process should include questions which interrogate this aspect of potential candidates, and preference given to those who display evidence of a commitment to transformation.
7. **Programmes to address discrimination:** Diversity workshops as well as individual diversity "therapy" or counselling should be provided to groups or individuals who show poor transformational practice. It would be helpful for ALL members of the university system, but given numbers and time constraints, it should start with groups or individuals who demonstrate a lack of consciousness. The importance of tolerance and a respect for diversity should be themes that are explored during the orientation of new students and staff.
8. **Incentives:** Those who actively promote transformation should be recognised; perhaps a VC's award for transformation, for students, support and academic staff could be instated.
9. **Communication:** *Rhodos*, *Oppiepress* and *Activate* should be encouraged to report on incidents where there has been transformation success and progress.
10. **Research and Monitoring:** Statistics and data collection of incidents of discrimination, whether reported or not, should be kept, and used in order to inform an evolving strategy to address discrimination.
11. **Events:** Formal university events are good opportunities to demonstrate a culture of transformation, but further events should be encouraged, where staff and students can mix with a common interest despite diversity of sex, race, class and orientation. The recent staff tennis event is one such example, and this can be developed to include a greater diversity of cultural and sporting activities. These can help to break down barriers between individuals and groups. We applaud the VC's gesture of sending good wishes on all religious holidays as being an excellent example of a more inclusive culture.
12. **Imbizo type opportunities:** We all need opportunities to engage in constructive ways around transformation. Furthermore, senior leaders (eg deans and managers) should

be encouraged to be active participants in these as opposed to being merely present – their demonstrated support for transformation should be evident in these types of discussions.

## ADDENDUM 4

### Voluntary Questionnaire: SOAW members

#### Why do you feel a space like SOAW is relevant in the SUSU University context?

Me: SOAW provides a haven for women and womanly thoughts in a male dominated academic environment. It allows me to voice my opinions, thoughts, concerns, plans in an open arena. This arena is (in theory) non-threatening, non-judging, honest, supportive...I could go on.

Ly: I think it is a great space for women to interact and work together on an academic level. I found it very supportive to women to have such a space where they meet, discuss issues pertinent in their academic life and relate in so many ways. In the first place, being a woman, one is often subjected to prejudice, sexism, and all sorts of judgement whether we can do as required whether in our studies or workplaces. For me, I found a home in SOAW, because it's a space I feel free to say whatever I need with comfort. I can relate to the women in SOAW in many ways. So, such a space is of high necessity to have at university for women to provide room for their independency, nurturing of academic relationship, for their life mentorship and professional coaching. Above all, the interaction of women on various levels is just what is needed by every woman entering Varsity.

Li: Studying at SUSU can be difficult and frustrating. You find yourself questioning your ability and wondering if dropping out is not the best option. However, once you join SOAW you feel a sense of encouragement and acceptance.

Ja: I think we often do not realise how we are constantly dealing with patriarchy and sexism everyday because it is inherent in our society, and therefore, our institutions. An organisation for and by women provides a sanctuary and refuge as well as a safe platform from which to consider the structures of our academic environments

G: It provides postgraduate students and women staff members with a common space in which to seek/offer support to each other, source advice, find new friends and colleagues, tackle-collectively- issues that concern them and support each other in their continued academic/administrative endeavours. This type of support and community might otherwise be lacking in such an institution.

Ath: Women need to find a space in a male dominated to space, but this cannot be done without support. Mentorship with women who "have your back" is important for growth as opposed to a sterile cordial relationship with a (maybe male) supervisor.

Are: I feel SOAW is a viable space for women in academia to share their experiences of academia and to garner support from their peers. SOAW has been an extremely beneficial academic, administrative, and personal resource to me while at SUSU. It has made me more aware of the various happenings at SUSU and in that way, I have felt, through SOAW, more involved in my SUSU community. As an institution, my impression of SOAW is that it is growing from strength to strength. I would however, like to see SOAW extend itself to women in other sectors and assist in empowering them also.

Aa: As there is very little institutional support for young academics, especially those who do not curry favour with the right people, it is wonderful to find support and affirmation through a structure that helps those who want to do it for themselves. SOAW happened to be such a support structure, and its focus on women academics, and the unique challenges of their career paths, added to its relevance.

W: It functions as a space for Women only – and this is important in any Academic environment - particularly due to the fact that patriarchy can be acute especially at a 'staff' level. It also creates a space where women who would not normally cross paths can meet and this may contribute positively not just to them as individuals but even to the University itself – especially in the long term.

Tr: The academic context does not necessarily provide real support in general, and especially not for young women. It seems sometimes that many older women have forgotten what it is like to trudge through to a place where one is seen as credible and receives some kind of respect or recognition. Often once they have arrived many women have the attitude of "if I could do it so can you". By that time many women have bought

into the *status quo* or learned how to play the game and are as invested in it as everyone else. I feel that SOAW helps to bridge the generational divide that many younger women experience. Moreover, it provides a space where it is alright to speak about one's emotional reactions and experiences of things, a different way of being, that is so refreshing and so necessary. On a more informal level, it offers the opportunity to meet with women from similar backgrounds, who may also be committed to gender equity, and to discuss various issues that they may have in common and to commiserate, celebrate, express frustration or just hear how other do it. For instance, hearing about the ways that other women negotiate their childcare arrangements or conflicts with partners is helpful, but certainly not a topic of discussion with one's supervisor or at a departmental meeting.

Sa: SOAW provides a space for women to provide each other with support and inspiration. It also provides a relatively safe place to express our views – and to have them challenged by others! SOAW is one of only a few places (or maybe even the only place) at SUSA where one can be sure that men will not dominate the conversation or agenda.

Pa: It's very important in providing a nurturing and challenging space for mutual support, ongoing conversation and questioning and personal development, and a space to push gender issues and challenge the particular constraints on women in an institution and society that remains very patriarchal and sexist. It also provides a rare opportunity for women of different backgrounds ages and seniorities, both staff and postgrad students, to meet as equals, as sisters, in an extremely hierarchical

### **In what ways has SOAW formally or informally assisted your academic development?**

Me: Through SOAW I met some incredible women, strong, intelligent, honest, role models and friends. It has been a pleasure to work with these women, associate with these women, learn from them. Through SOAW I also met some wet insipid creatures. I have had to learn to tolerate these individuals that have as much right to their opinions as I do to mine. I have also had to learn to work with these people, and while I found it very frustrating it was a very important learning curve.

Li: I am being mentored by a SOAW Mentor and have also attended one Writing Breakaway.

All these have been rewarding experiences for me. I learnt how to face my fears!

Lip: SOAW has provided me with an opportunity to do my reading and writing in an environment that is conducive away from the usual distracting environment. Through SOAW I made friends I would not have made outside. These friends are special because they appreciate the value of a woman and have the interest of seeing every woman happy and succeeding with her studies. SOAW provided me with financial support to enable me to attend a conference outside South Africa.

Ja: It has made me more aware of being a woman at an institution, both in terms of the struggles that we face and in the ways we can overcome them. I am also looking forward to the supportive environment of the writing retreats which I think are a brilliant way to find time and space for oneself as an academic (something that is very hard to do in everyday life).

G: Friendship and support. By finding friends within SOAW who I was/ am able to discuss my work, my progress, challenges etc I have been able to think of new approaches, find new sources of inspiration and learn from my peers. When I first arrived at SUSA I felt very lost and isolated. SOAW helped change that and as a result, it gave me the confidence to (start) to believe in my own academic abilities. I learn a lot from other SOAWrians both in terms of my own field of work and also from other fields which is also very stimulating and rewarding.

Atha: So far it has given me a platform to share my experience as I'll be sharing during Africa week later this month

Are: I have been to Writing Getaways where members have come together to give advice on each other's work/ projects. SOAW has also given me the opportunity to access different academic/ career opportunities by way of its listserve. Through SOAW I applied to an international conference on feminism for which my abstract was accepted. And I am currently applying for assistance with a funding to attend an international conference.

Aa: Formally – financial support for conference attendance; seminar forum to present work to peers; reading group

Informally – informal encouragement and mentorship; forum to hear stories of the academic career-paths of other women

W: SOAW has assisted me formally via writing breakaways –they have been a great help and have always been constructive in so far as writing my thesis is concerned. Informally by providing me a network and access to other women in the University system - I have made friends, gotten access to mentors and advisors thanks to SOAW.

T: The mentoring programme has made a very positive contribution.

S: I have benefited a little from SOAW's formal, funded programmes, such as the writing breakaway and the mentorship programme. I've probably benefited more from just being involved (including on the exec), in that it's given me a space to be active in doing things I like and things I think important, and in that it's forced me to spend much more time thinking about issues like patriarchy, feminism, motherhood, etc. and helped me better define my views on these issues.

P: Wow – SOAW has had a huge impact in helping me develop the confidence to go ahead, trusting my scholarly interests and passions, providing me with an environment to share ideas and be inspired by very interesting minds from a range of disciplines. I knew inside that I could do my PhD and would probably have done it anyway, but without support it would have been much harder and would probably have taken much longer to go ahead – I might well have spent another few years thinking "I'd like to do this, but..." And being involved as a mentor on the mentoring programme has also been wonderful for my confidence and for making me realise that I'm not just fooling myself thinking that I may have some insights and experience to offer which could help others, but getting positive feedback in that regard. (I am still very in awe of Noma however, feel she towers above me in many ways, and it feels quite ridiculous that she wanted me to be the mentor and she the mentee – but I'm loving the ongoing friendship journey with her and she requested to continue with me this year. I also now have another mentee, based here, so a more conventional mentoring relationship this time – Elizabeth Motsa, who joined the programme late – we met for the first time this week so we're still working out the details...)

### **In what way has the friendship made a difference to your experience of SUSA University and to your personal academic development?**

Me: At SUSA, I had thoughts, ideas, frustrations that I could raise with the wonderful women of SOAW. It was such a privilege to chat to lovely women on a social level or in the case of a serious issue, on an official level. We could discuss any and all thoughts and issues and ways to address them. With the diverse women in the organization, I often got a number of thoughts and opinions that I had not even considered. A huge learning curve but a most useful one.

I believe that the presence of friends is always good for the soul.

It also makes one aware of other people's thoughts and opinions.

Being a part of SOAW has made me more open-minded, able to acknowledge other people's thoughts and ideas, take on board comments, suggestions and criticism.

On a very personal note, I can say that I tend to react in haste. And often, it is not the best reaction. Working with the women of SOAW, I have learnt to take some time, to think about the issue before reacting. And most importantly, making sure that my reaction is appropriate and effective and not easy to dismiss.

Ly: It made me to cope better with my studies. I know I'm not all alone! It's also inspiring when you listen to and learn from women who have achieved and continue to do so at all odds!

I have developed an interest in Higher Learning Studies. And currently I'm testing my writing skills for publication skills. I have also learnt fundamental lessons from my mentor within our first meeting. She pointed out what I will call as 'bad habits' of procrastination, self-undermining, etc and I'm working on how to better manage and prioritise important matters ...

Li: You know there are times when you are a student at SUSU when you do not know whether you are coming or going. At these times I would talk to my mentor friend and she would listen and provide advice where possible. That provision of a space to talk made a lot of difference. During the writing breakaway we would share ideas and concerns and that helped even when it was not my issue being discussed but most of these issues affected many of us. Listening and observing other SOAWrian women talk about their conference papers helped me learn a lot about writing and presentation.

Ja: *It is always good to meet women that you can relate to or women who give you something to aspire to as an academic.*

*I am constantly inspired by their strength and commitment and enjoy discussing our respective research areas. Often a discussion in a 'common' tongue between friends can help bring about new understandings of research that were invisible before.*

G: It has made it more welcoming. I like being sociable and sometimes when you arrive in a new place and there aren't the opportunities to meet people or you feel that the community is very 'tight' and it is difficult to break through then organisations like SOAW and the friendships you form, facilitate that process. I have made several 'significant' friends who made me feel welcome and part of the community.

I have been able to draw on their experience of the SUSU system, postgrad academia and lecturing when informing my own decisions and actions. I have learnt a lot from these friends in terms of how to go about lecturing, to overcome the challenges one may face both as a new lecturer and as a young women in the role. I have learnt about the process of attempting a PhD and the types of issues I might need to consider and challenges I might face and how to deal with them from these people because they too are in a similar situation.

At- I'm learning to see and appreciate the world from a different experiences. I'm learning to let go of my prejudice about people and ideas

I'm learning to trust my voice and ideas through support and encouragement

Are: SOAW has offered me an (alternative) support system of women concerned not merely with my academic career but with me as a person. It has also helped make me more aware of and responsive to issues in academia that affect women.

I have made some fairly close friendships in SOAW and personally feel it is an open space for women to agree and disagree. This has affected me in that it has helped me in my personal and academic confidence. That is, in an academic context, I am more confident to voice my opinion with regards to my academic career and within my own department as a result of regularly meeting and associating with the members of SOAW.

Aa: Without my SOAW community my RU experience would have been much poorer for human company! SOAW filled my professional world with like-minded people.

Time will tell, but knowing that other (women) have also engaged with such challenges gives me perspective – and hope.

W: I have made invaluable and inspiring connections and that has made for a better experience at SUSU particularly as a postgraduate student – it can get quite lonely at the postgraduate level.

It has enabled me to get advice from individuals that have done what I've done and therefore it contributes to a better product in the end in terms of my academic work.

Tr: ? I won't say that I would not have completed my current degree, but it certainly would have been more difficult than it was. When we met I was disillusioned and had taken my experience very personally (i.e., I felt that the treatment I had received might have been warranted in some ways). Having someone to hear me and to provide affirming feedback at that point was invaluable. She helped me to put into perspective what I could realistically take responsibility for, what was really unacceptable and to cope with things that I cannot change. I was also able to see how the challenges that I faced (feelings of loneliness, frustration, and inadequacy as well as lack of support) were not *necessarily* restricted to my unique context as she shared some of I feel much happier now, more resilient, and I believe that I am able to cope better with the situation.

I received the emotional support that was lacking at this stage of my academic career. I was able to discuss issues that had occurred in my department with a person who was knowledgeable of the context, systems,

processes, and so on (and in some cases even knew individuals involved) but was not currently a part of these. As an older/more experienced person, she helped me to gain some perspective on these and insight into my own responses. her own experiences in an entirely different context. well as making (some) practical suggestions as to how to deal with these.

Sa: When I arrived here I felt a bit lonely and, as someone who doesn't easily make friends and who is in a department not renowned for its friendliness (and staffed mainly by much older people), making friends in SOAW really was great. It made SUSU, and Grahamstown, a friendlier place for me and made me more likely to stay.

The friendships have challenged me and challenged my views on women and on gender roles. This has indirectly affected my personal academic development in that my change in perspective is likely to affect my future research choices as well as influencing what I choose to include in the courses I teach. Sometimes the friendships have challenged me (by making me reflect, for example, on ways in which I may be sexist or racist), and hence made me into, hopefully, a more reflective person. Also, at first I used to attend the reading group primarily because it provided me with a space to make and meet friends, but, of course, I had to do the readings! So, the friendships were actually forcing me to read on a whole number of topics!

P: yay – I know I'm not alone – there are others equally keen to transform this institution into a just, intellectually stimulating and enabling environment for all. I feel a lot more positive, a lot less discouraged, and I have a LOT more fun!

Friendships have been very influential – listening, offering suggestions, information about conferences etc – eg. R passed on the info about the ALA conference I went to in the US. Wonderful feedback on my paper. Just talking to people who have similar academic passions...