

**THE POLITICS OF THE BODY AND
THE POLITICS OF CONTROL:
AN ANALYSIS OF CLASS, GENDER
AND CULTURAL ISSUES IN STUDENT POLITICS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE**

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Abstract

This article examines the social, political and cultural self-representations among students at the University of Zimbabwe, paying particular attention to the management of these representations and some of the significant social and political events engineered by and affecting students. These representations are important as a means of understanding the discourses of control between students of diverse gender, class and cultural backgrounds on campus. These representations are constantly being manipulated, contested and reworked in order to gain legitimacy in debates and discourses pertaining to student politics.

IT IS IMPORTANT to understand the historical background to some of the present student struggles and initiatives. Gelfand (1978) and Cheater (1991) have written about the state's relationship with the university in the pre- and post-Independence eras, respectively. This article focuses rather on the relationships between students of different class and gender and students' relationship with the state as reflected in their political interactions with it, pointing out some of the tensions and frictions that have arisen in the process of reconciling internal student politics with their interactions with the state at various times since 1980.

The following account is based on my experiences as a student at the University from 1976 to 1978, as a sub-warden of one of the female residences from 1979 to 1980, and as a lecturer since 1983.

**THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE**

The University of Zimbabwe was inaugurated as the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland under a Royal Charter in 1955. It became the University College of Rhodesia in 1966 (after Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965) and the University of Rhodesia in 1971. After Independence in 1980 it was renamed the University of Zimbabwe. Although originally intended by Whites in Southern Rhodesia for the education of

Whites only, the University was established as a non-racial institution, partly because of the influence of the British colonial government which offered to fund certain developments.

Student politics prior to Independence

During the pre-Independence period the student body espoused diverse political beliefs and indulged in certain political activities, organizing and expressing themselves on the basis of race and class. During the 1960s the student body was dominated by Whites. Most of the Black students were of peasant or working-class parentage and, as such, had few opportunities for higher education outside Southern Rhodesia. These students felt obliged to complete their studies so that they could secure employment and earn enough to help support their families. They were, therefore, in a dilemma: they were very aware of the disadvantages suffered by Blacks but knew that they ran the risk of losing grants and job opportunities if they participated in political activities on campus (most of the University College's finance for recurrent expenditure and student loans and grants came from government).

In the 1960s political protests against the racial policies of the government took the form of peaceful demonstrations, class boycotts, picketing, pamphleteering and protests through diplomatic channels to the British government. The Black students also demonstrated against right-wing politicians who visited the university. The political activists on campus were, generally speaking, some Black men and a section of the liberal White community comprising both male and female staff and students. Most of the White student body was not willing to commit itself to struggles against racism along with the Black male students and liberal Whites as many of them regarded these Black students as extreme nationalists, communists, haters of Whites, and so on. They were discomfited by those Whites whom they perceived to be breaking the rules of the White community in their campaigning for greater representation of Blacks in the select community of university students. Furthermore, most White students had no reason to question the politics of racial exclusion which guaranteed White privilege and reduced Black competition for places at the university.

Very few Black women were politically visible or audible. A few of them participated in student activities as secretaries or treasurers of student clubs and associations and they 'swelled the chorus' at demonstrations and boycotts, but they seldom occupied prominent positions. There was a small group of White, middle-class women who were political activists, most of whom had parents or spouses who were also politically active, but most White female students preferred to participate in clubs, societies, the Rag carnival and amateur dramatics.

Among both Black and White students, women were perceived to be useful supporting actors, an easily mobilized following who could be employed in writing pamphlets and turning out for demonstrations. Women did not generally feature as student leaders directing strategies and initiatives in encounters with university and government authorities.

Gelfand (1978, 241) points out that there were bitter differences within the Black student body on the basis of affiliation for the two nationalist parties, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo and the Zimbabwe African Nationalist Union (ZANU) led by Ndabaningi Sithole. These differences were sometimes transcended when students managed to co-operate in condemning government action in restricting some students, searching the homes of staff and students and deporting lecturers known or suspected to be sympathetic to the cause of Black nationalism.

The racial composition of the student body changed in the 1970s as the war of liberation escalated. Black and White men left the university, either because they were expelled or because they were dissatisfied with life under the repressive government regime. White men were increasingly likely to be called up for national service before as well as after their university studies and every year's intake of Black students was depleted by an exodus of Black men who went to join the guerrilla armies. As more Blacks qualified for university education, those Whites who could afford it opted to send their children to universities in South Africa, the United Kingdom or the United States. These changes in the student body also changed the tenor of student politics. The escalation of the war of national liberation also provided the impetus for more militant demands by Black students while polarizing the different racial communities on campus. There were more demonstrations by Black students against racism and against the conscription of Black men to the Rhodesian Security Forces after 1978.

During this period the leading political roles were the prerogative of Black male students who mobilized the Black women and non-militant men to participate in political activities directed against the colonial regime. White and Asian students moved out of the political arena and the Students' Representative Council became the preserve of Blacks, as did certain clubs and societies on campus. During the 1970s White students continued to control Rag activities which included soliciting money for charity from the White and Asian communities. This situation continued until the early 1980s after which Rag was discontinued until 1993.

Student politics after Independence

Black male students were firmly in control of both the Student Representative Council and student funds by Independence in 1980. The

first few years of Independence saw a continuing exodus of White students to universities in South Africa and a massive increase in the number of Black students. The ethos of the university changed as greater numbers of poorer Black students qualified to enter. The dominance of the Black and White middle-class students waned as the poorer students occupied more positions in the student governance structures in halls of residence, the departments and faculties and the SRC. The University also strove to overcome its élitist bias and traditions in the curriculum and in academic life. The politics of the SRC also changed: a 'honeymoon' relationship existed between the students and the majority-rule government. The students perceived a mutuality of purpose between themselves and the ZANU(PF) government. They adopted the language of the liberation war which ZANU(PF) was using, with some success, to censure and intimidate those Whites who were not in favour of majority rule and to silence those Blacks who had reservations about ZANU(PF)'s interpretation and implementation of the post-Independence agenda in the economy, polity and society in general.

However, Independence also brought about greater class differentiation between students. The Black advancement initiative instituted by Presidential directive had an effect on the student body. By the middle of the first decade of Independence the children of the new Black middle class were attending university with the children of the peasantry and working class who had benefited from the expansion of primary and secondary school facilities. Blackness remained a potent factor in uniting students across the class divide although in the absence of a White resident student population which could be used to counterpoise and illustrate Black misery the racial discourse on campus became more muted.

THE BASES FOR DIFFERENTIATION AMONG STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY

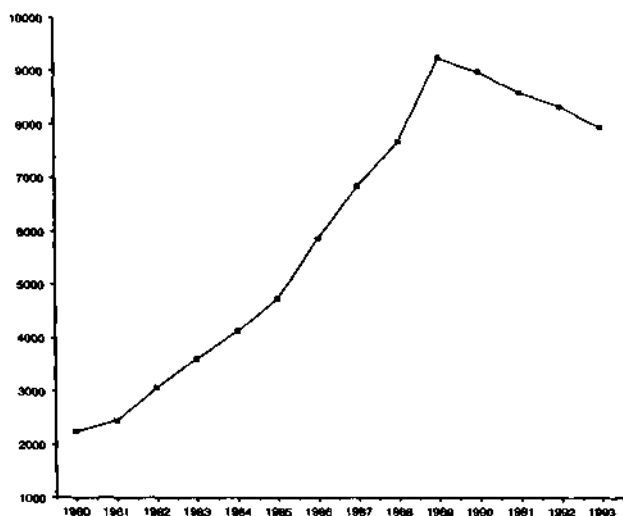
Class and residential status

From 1984 onwards the student population at the university was already showing signs of subscribing to different social and moral worlds, although these worlds coalesced at specific times over particular issues.

As a result of the rapid increase in student numbers, which was not matched by a corresponding increase in financial resources (see Fig. 1 and Table I), most students suffered as a result of a severe shortage of books and journals. In addition, lecture rooms and the library became increasingly over-crowded. (In 1980 student numbers stood at 2 240 and the library could seat 500 readers. In 1983 extentions to the library increased its seating capacity to 1 200 users but there were 4 000 students and staff requiring those facilities. The library's capacity has not been increased

Figure 1: STUDENT NUMBERS AT AND GOVERNMENT GRANTS TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE 1980-1993

Student numbers



Government recurrent grants

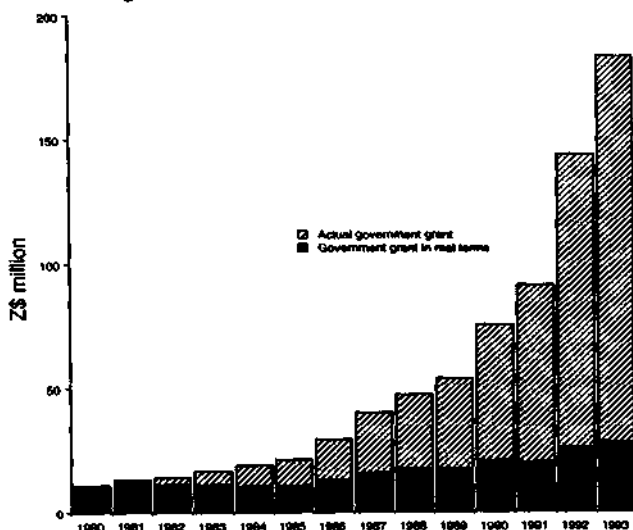


Table I

UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE RECURRENT GRANT ANALYSIS, 1980-1993

Year	No. of students	Actual government grant (Z\$)	Government grant in real terms (Z\$)	Actual per capita grant (Z\$)	Per capita grant in real terms (Z\$)*	Consumer price index base year 1980†
1980	2 235	10 985 000	10 985 000	4 915	4 915	100
1981	2 453	11 725 000	10 515 695	4 780	4 287	111,50
1982	3 080	13 947 000	11 366 748	4 528	3 691	122,70
1983	3 616	16 867 000	11 289 826	4 665	3 122	149,40
1984	4 131	19 208 000	10 671 111	4 650	2 583	180,00
1985	4 742	21 541 000	10 979 103	4 543	2 315	196,20
1986	5 866	29 472 000	13 104 491	5 024	2 234	224,90
1987	6 867	40 447 000	15 949 132	5 890	2 323	253,60
1988	7 699	47 789 000	17 537 248	6 207	2 278	272,50
1989	9 288	54 162 000	17 619 388	5 831	1 897	307,40
1990	9 017	76 071 000	21 019 895	8 436	2 331	361,90
1991	8 635	92 000 000	20 282 187	10 654	2 349	453,60
1992	8 385	145 000 000	25 888 234	17 293	3 087	560,10
1993	8 000	185 000 000	28 461 538	23 125	3 558	650,00

* Per capita grant in real terms is the discounted per capita grant on the basis of the consumer price index.

† The consumer price index is taken from Zimbabwe, *Quarterly Digest of Statistics* (Harare, Central Statistical Office, various years).

This Table shows that there has been a steady decrease in funding from government in relation to the number of students. Student intake increased dramatically up to 1989 and the per capita grant in real terms was at its lowest in 1989. The reduced intakes during 1990, 1992 and 1993 have resulted in an improvement in the per capita grant as indicated.

Source: University of Zimbabwe, Bursars' Department.

since 1983 although the number of users steadily increased to over 10 000 in 1989.) In the residences students were sharing rooms intended for single occupation, double rooms were occupied by three or more students and even the common rooms were converted into bedrooms. These conditions created an atmosphere conducive to the production of novel symbols of social differentiation as both affluent and poor students had to share the same over-crowded facilities.

In the first decade of the University College most of the Black students had been obliged to live in residence because they were legally barred from residing in the White suburbs surrounding the campus. The alternative was to live in the African Townships far away from the campus and commute every day to lectures. Many White students, on the other hand, lived off campus because they could obtain cheap lodgings nearby. It is also true that as the residences began to accommodate more Blacks those

White students who did not want to mix with Blacks any more than was absolutely necessary opted to live off campus. Thus the University College had a large resident population because it was a non-racial, federal institution within a racist and class-divided society. The University of Zimbabwe also has a large resident population because it is a national institution which draws its students from all over the country.

After Independence some of the factors that had led to the Whites leaving the residences also affected some Black students. The crowded residences were considered uncomfortable by those students who enjoyed a higher standard of living at home. Some of these students opted to live at home rather than endure mass-prepared food, inadequate ablution facilities and students whose standards of hygiene did not match their own. Those students who prioritized their freedom from parental control had to learn to cope with these discomforts. Naturally, the better-off students were among those who complained most about the residences and about those students who did not clean up after themselves. These issues became a cause of friction among students and more and more class differences were used to explain differences in habits.

Many students (both male and female) want to live on campus because they desire greater freedom from parental control, to be sexually active, to consume alcohol frequently, and to behave in a manner that would not be tolerated in their homes. Priority for residence accommodation is given to students who are in their first or final year of study whose homes are outside Harare, and to those who are disabled and have special needs. Therefore, students in their second year of study may find themselves forced to find alternative accommodation. Some students take cheap lodgings in the townships, thereby saving money to buy books, clothes, or, in some cases, to support needy family members. Students from wealthier backgrounds fare much better as their families, whether or not they are resident in Harare, can assist them materially. It is important to note that the university provides bedding and towels to students in residence, that the dining-rooms and ablution facilities are cleaned daily and meals are prepared and served by university employees. Though mass-cooking does negatively affect the quality of the food served in the residences, it is obvious that resident students 'get a better deal' than the non-resident ones.

In addition, resident students are much better represented than non-resident. There is only one full-time warden for all 6 000 non-resident students while there is one full-time warden plus nine part-time wardens, three part-time deputy wardens, and 33 part-time sub-wardens to cater for the needs of the 4 000 resident students. This staffing structure reflects the history of the University as an institution for resident students with a small number of non-resident students living at home or in lodgings.

Ethnicity

Apart from the issues relating to residence, students are also divided on the basis of ethnicity. Ethnic alliances, often coinciding with the ZANU/ZAPU divide, are strong, especially among those students who aspire to political office at University and after graduation. During student elections there is a section of the politically active student population which mobilizes potential voters by appealing to their ethnic identities. Staff who have acted as returning officers in student elections have observed student politicians herding their constituents to polling booths to vote for them on the basis of ethnic solidarity. Before proxy voting was prohibited it was not unusual for student politicians and their campaign managers to bring in piles of student identity cards from their ethnic 'kin', particularly women, who did not feel strongly enough about the elections to bother to vote themselves but were not averse to passively supporting their ethnic candidate by allowing him to vote for them by proxy.

Class and gender

The 'nose brigade' students: In terms of social presentations of self, there are many differences in the ways in which students present and define themselves. The middle-class students, most of whom have attended the Group A schools (formerly White-only schools), have access to the local and foreign media through television, radio and cinema and have disposable income which enables them to wear both locally-produced and imported clothing and to enjoy local and foreign music and other cultural products. It is common for middle-class female students to wear custom-made 'African' clothing or jeans, shorts or skirts and casual but expensive sneakers and to sport fancy hairstyles involving imported lengths of artificial hair. The middle-class male students also wear colourful, expensive clothes and experiment with hairstyles, such as the square cut (locally referred to as *bhibho*) and dreadlocks popularized by radical Black artists in the West.

These middle-class students do not normally participate in SRC elections and politics because they feel uncomfortable in the company of the type of male student who is at the forefront of SRC activities. In addition, the female students are subjected to hostility and harassment in the Students' Union. Instead, middle-class students tend to be more active in the clubs and societies that allow them to express their individuality and to further their academic and future professional careers. One such example is the International Association of Students in Economics and Management (AIESEC) which attracts a very active group of men and women students, mostly those from the Group A schools. This society has a board of advisers who are industrialists, financiers and managers and it organizes tours of other countries and exposes students to business and

professional environments so that they can make useful contacts. These students are also active in 'non-traditional' (for Black Zimbabweans) sports such as hockey, basketball, volleyball, tennis, swimming and badminton. These students are stigmatized by the majority of students who call them the 'nose brigade'. This is because their accent is said to resemble that of White Zimbabweans whom Black Zimbabweans consider to speak through their noses. (In fact, these students have different accents depending on the nationality of their teachers and the nationality and preferred languages of their parents.)

'Severe rural background' students: In contrast with the middle-class students there are those students who are the children of peasant farmers or working-class parents who have been educated in the Group B schools (schools run by the government, missionaries or local authorities for Black pupils). There is some stratification within this group: those students who normally reside in the rural areas with their families are referred to as having 'severe rural backgrounds' and are called 'SRBs' for short. Most of these students do not have much disposable income and rely on their loans and grants to survive. They can afford only simple and inexpensive clothes, usually Western in pattern and design, available in the chain clothing stores. Many of these students, especially the women, are very retiring and shy and both sexes are considered unpolished, unsophisticated and lacking in social graces by both the 'nose brigade' and the students from urban working-class backgrounds.

The SRB men tend to divide into two camps: those who keep to themselves and concentrate on their studies; and those that participate with gusto in campus life and politics. The politically-inclined 'SRBs' capitalize on their status by presenting themselves as authentic Africans, unpolluted by urban norms associated with dishonesty and hypocrisy. They use this gambit to assert their legitimacy in campus politics as well as in student struggles with the state.

'Born location' students: The students from urban working-class backgrounds form a third bloc on campus. They do not suffer from the diffidence of the 'SRBs' or the social stigma of the 'nose brigade' precisely because they have not been incorporated into either of these groups. They aspire to the material symbols of wealth possessed by the 'noses' but are not comfortable with the cultural 'pollution' which they perceive to have afflicted them. The 'born location' (so called because they were born in the Black locations) students might have attended either Group A or Group B schools but were born and/or brought up in the townships. They have adopted aspects of urban culture with regard to their dress, choice of music and food and social habits. Most of them lack the means to join the middle-class until

they secure employment after graduation. These are the type of students most prominent in SRC activities and who, together with the 'SRB' men, tend to monopolize the struggle against the state and the university authorities. However, many students (who are not SRBs) have privately indicated that the majority of the hooligans who form the core of the University Bachelors' Association (UBA), which describes itself as 'the military wing of the SRC', are SRBs from mission boarding schools rather than 'born location' types.

Relations between men and women of the same class background: Questions of gender also feature strongly on campus among students with different class backgrounds. There is a large representation of female students in the religious societies of the 'born-again Christian' type and both the men and women in these societies tend to be drawn from the SRB and 'born location' groups. They have very co-operative relationships with each other although the men tend to take the lead in these groups. The 'nose' men and women also get on fairly well with each other and the 'nose' women support each others' efforts in societies and clubs. The most egalitarian relationships between male and female students tend to be between men and women of the 'nose brigade'.

STATE INTERVENTIONS AND UNIVERSITY STAFF AND STUDENT REACTIONS 1990-1992

The University of Zimbabwe Amendment Act

Despite all the class, religious, ethnic and gender differences between the students there was some unity over specific issues such as government accountability to the people; opposition to corruption in government and state officials; the need to campaign for an increase in grants and loans; and the need to repeal the University of Zimbabwe Amendment Act (No. 21 of 1990) and the National Council for Higher Education Act (No. 32 of 1990). Cheater (1991) has documented some of the issues and events surrounding the protests against state politics in Zimbabwe in general and at the University in particular. However, the issues pertaining to the two Acts need to be outlined here since they formed the context of state-student confrontations on and off campus in 1991.

The University of Zimbabwe Amendment Act gives the Chancellor, instead of the University Council, the power to appoint the Vice-Chancellor (after consultation with the Minister of Higher Education and the Council). It gives the Vice-Chancellor the power to discipline staff and students (with the ratification of Council). The Minister of Higher Education now has the authority to appoint over 65 per cent of the Council instead 33 per cent as previously. The Act also removes representatives from Convocation

and from the technical and clerical staff from Council, reducing their representation from two to one, and makes the presence of three academic, administrative and workers' committees' representatives on Council conditional on the Vice-Chancellor's approval: thus effectively questioning their status as elected representatives.

The National Council for Higher Education Act established a Council for Higher Education which includes all vice-chancellors of all universities in the country but the majority of whose members will be appointed by the Minister of Higher Education. The functions of the Council are: to determine standards of teaching, examination and qualification in institutions of higher education; to determine admission procedures for these institutions; to advise the Minister on the standardization of degrees and qualifications; and (most contentious of all) to advise the Minister on all applications to establish private universities or to revoke their governing charters. This council, the majority of whose members are ministerial appointees who may or may not know much about higher education and who are able to outvote the vice-chancellors, is in a position to determine who shall be admitted to university, who shall be taught, and how they shall be taught and examined in all institutions of higher education in Zimbabwe. It is not surprising, therefore, that the whole university rejected this legislation totally and unreservedly.

Before the Bills became law they were denounced by both staff and students of the University. In October 1990 members of the academic staff held an illegal but peaceful demonstration at Africa Unity Square in Harare opposite Parliament buildings and handed a petition to the President's Office rejecting the Bills and recommending their abolition. Students were specifically excluded from this demonstration in order to avoid the violence that had been manifested in 1989 and 1990 and was becoming customary in student demonstrations. Staff dispersed without incident after their demonstration. In November 1990 students boycotted lectures which resulted in examinations being postponed. After the examinations had been written and the students sent home on vacation government hurriedly pushed the two Bills through Parliament. This was a great disappointment to the University community and created a great deal of apprehension as it was clear to all that 1991 was going to be a turbulent year.

This was the context in which state-student confrontations took place on and off campus in 1991. The politics of gender, class and ethnicity were played out within the same context so there were many struggles and confrontations that were necessarily subsumed in the state-student struggle. At times these other conflicts overshadowed the confrontation with the state, while at other times the internal strife added fuel to the external conflict or changed its dimensions and its direction. It is to the gender and class dimensions of this struggle that this article now turns as

both gender and class issues have been major contributing factors in shaping student politics, both among the students themselves and in their conflict with the state.

Hooliganism and gender politics among students

By early 1991 University of Zimbabwe students had earned themselves the reputation of hooligans among members of the public because of specific violent incidents both within and outside campus. In April 1991 an editorial in the government-controlled daily newspaper, *The Herald*, referred to an internal, confidential, proctor's report which had been leaked to the press. In the report reference was made to the aggression exhibited by the students towards each other, the sexual harassment of women on campus, the conduct of demonstrations, drunkenness, alcohol abuse, and an incident in which University of Zimbabwe students damaged property worth \$10 000 while on a visit to Mutare Teachers' College and the subsequent expulsion of the Mutare Teachers' College SRC President because of his refusal to name the culprits. The response from the University authorities is significant in that it did not attempt to deny the truth of the report but protested that *The Herald* had not sought comment or reaction from the University before publishing the editorial and an accompanying cartoon. There were several letters to the editor after this editorial describing indiscipline, drug abuse and disobedience at the University but, in the context of the contentious University of Zimbabwe Act and National Council for Higher Education Act, the University authorities were reluctant to give more ammunition to the government press by publicizing or admitting the extent of student violence on campus.

Boycott of classes, April-May 1991

Students launched a boycott of classes at the end of April 1991 to protest against the passing of the two Acts against the will of the University community. The boycott lasted well into May after which dissension among the students crept in. The boycott was surprisingly peaceful and was confined to the campus. By May some students wanted to go back to classes, especially final-year students who were apprehensive about their career prospects if the boycott should precipitate a closure of the University or otherwise jeopardize their chances of graduating.

A high-profile group advocating an end to the boycott was the women's hockey team which wanted to compete in a hockey tournament in the United Kingdom. Their chances of competing were severely affected by the boycott as it meant that they could not raise funds or prepare their coursework before their departure. Hockey is played mostly by students from the Group A schools and the hockey team was identified as being composed of 'nose' women. They petitioned Council to institute an end to

the boycott through calling a referendum but before they could collect sufficient verifiable signatures Council itself called for a referendum. After a rowdy Union meeting, the SRC, recognizing that a referendum by secret ballot might show the majority of students to be against a continuation of the boycott, called an end to the boycott. Another sign of student dissension was the suspension of the SRC President during the boycott. He was subsequently reinstated.

It is perhaps important to note in this context that there has been significant student apathy with respect to SRC elections in the last five years (see Table II). Whereas prior to Independence the racial schism led

Table II

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENT BODY VOTING IN SRC ELECTIONS

<i>Year</i>	<i>Percentage voted</i>
1989	26,1
1990	27,3
1991	33,1
1992	25,8
1993	38,1

to block voting along racial lines, after Independence many students do not feel obliged to vote at all as many of the day-to-day issues affecting students cannot necessarily be resolved by the SRC. For example, hall committees deal with issues affecting life in the residences and departmental boards deal with academic issues affecting students. Students are represented at faculty level by their faculty representatives. It is only at Senate and Council levels that the SRC represents the whole student body. Thus students feel more able to influence decisions affecting their academic development at departmental and faculty level rather than through the SRC which is associated with 'macro-politics', that is, students' relationship with the state. There has also been a differentiation of student associations by degree specialization in order to facilitate the effective representation of academic concerns by students within their departments and faculties. A good example of this phenomenon is the Faculty of Medicine whose students live on a separate campus, have their own newspaper and even their own student association. In addition some non-resident students who have to deal with transport and accommodation problems and a soaring cost of living feel that their concerns are not adequately addressed by an SRC whose members automatically qualify for residence. All these developments have led to the dilution of SRC power and control over the student body and a corresponding increase in students acting independently of the SRC.

The aftermath of the boycott was characterized by intense discussion and dissection of events. Many students were unhappy about the intimidation that they had been subjected to by the pro-boycott group. In a letter to *The Herald* on 27 May 1991 a student chronicled the terror-tactics directed at the anti-boycott lobby by the pro-boycott hooligans. He also described drug-selling, rape and theft as being prevalent on campus. Divisions among the students were increasingly pronounced after the boycott with some students vowing not to take part in collective political action in the future as a result of their experience of intimidation by the pro-boycott faction. The second term of 1991 started on a grim note with students working hard to catch up on coursework. The University authorities had decided that no allowance would be made for time lost because of the boycott. In July 1991, during the graduation ceremony, the Vice-Chancellor announced his intention to retire, citing too much unprofessional interference in the affairs of the University as his reason. This announcement came as something of a bombshell to the University community: many staff feared that he had been forced out by the government and that he would be replaced by a party stalwart.

Disruption of beauty contest, September 1991

In September 1991 drunken students disrupted the Miss University of Zimbabwe beauty contest in the Great Hall and caused \$8 000-worth of damage to University property in the process. Their reason for doing so was an objection to the \$15,00 entry-fee and they alleged that this fee had been deliberately set by the predominantly 'nose' organizers in order to exclude SRB students with little disposable income. This incident fuelled the antagonism between the 'nose' and the 'SRB' students and alienated many of those members of staff who had supported the boycott. The same month the SRC President issued a statement denying knowledge of rapes committed by students on campus and alleging that 'external agencies' had been sent to the campus to disturb the peace. In October the students clashed with police when the police barred them from demonstrating against the government's human-rights violations during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting being held in Harare at the time.

Disturbances, May 1992

The antagonism between students and government erupted yet again in May 1992 when students tried to march into town, demanding a 45 per cent increase in their grants, the repeal of the University Amendment Act, the trimming of cabinet posts, and the resignation of the Ministers of Lands, of Trade and Commerce, of Home Affairs, of National Affairs and of National Security. After three days of being confined to campus and harassed by the police the students were allowed to leave because food

supplies had been looted — allegedly by both the police and the students. It is true that some students destroyed cooking utensils, electrical appliances and food that was not immediately edible. The stores of wine in the Senior Common Room were looted and students were observed using onions for footballs, pouring away cooking-oil and throwing away meal-meal (which was in very short supply because of a disastrous harvest). Senate condemned both police and student violence. Staff condemned the violence and were denounced by the SRC as reactionaries. On 16 May students were granted a 25 per cent increase in their grants and lectures resumed. On 26 May administrative personnel were held hostage by students because of delays in the pay-out. The next development was an announcement of a 25 per cent increase in academic, registration and boarding fees which so enraged the students that they marched into the city centre, chanting war songs. The demonstration turned violent when negotiations with the Ministry of Higher Education took longer than expected and some students sexually harassed women in the streets of Harare, hi-jacked trucks and cars demanding to be taken back to campus, assaulted members of the press and overturned government vehicles. By this unruly behaviour the students alienated a wide cross-section of the populace.

In the wake of this violence the University authorities expelled all students and suspended the entire SRC. All students had to apply for readmission, accept the 25 per cent increase which had already been absorbed by the increase in fees, and pay a fine of \$80 towards repairing University property. A very chastened student body returned to campus in July 1992. One member of the SRC was expelled and two were suspended by a Student Disciplinary Committee. However, student hooliganism continued and tempers flared again in November in what has been called the 'mini-skirt incident'. This incident occurred just after the election of a new SRC and just before the start of the examination period. The new SRC was, therefore, forced to deal immediately with problems inherited from its predecessor and with disruptive student behaviour while it was itself disunited and disorganized.

The 'mini-skirt incident' and its significance

This incident occurred on 9 November 1992 when a Black Zimbabwean model visiting campus was attacked by a mob of about a hundred male students ostensibly because she was wearing a mini-skirt. She was rescued by University security personnel, an official from the Students' Affairs Office and two members of the SRC. The incident horrified most staff and some students and was widely reported in the local and international press. Two days later a general Students' Union meeting took place which did not even mention the attack on the woman. This deeply angered

women students. At the Union meeting some students attempted to pass a vote of no confidence in the Dean of Students on the basis that he had not satisfactorily articulated student grievances to the University administration and had not issued a statement regarding the expulsion of the SRC members. The Dean was defended and physically protected by a group of students who disagreed with the proposed vote of no confidence. Blows were exchanged between the two factions and the meeting refused to pass a vote of no confidence. The Dean was escorted from the meeting under student protection.

On 14 November the medical students issued a press statement expressing disgust at the attack on the model and disassociating themselves with it. On 18 November the opposition newspaper, *The Daily Gazette*, condemned the violence of the male students in a feature article and linked it to the continuing abuse of women on campus. On 20 November about 20 female students dressed in shorts and mini-skirts staged a demonstration after signing a petition asking the Vice-Chancellor to take drastic action to protect female students on campus. These female students were mobbed, verbally assaulted and threatened by a mob of over 500 male students who accused them of being prostitutes. The demonstrating women were protected by four members of staff and a few male students as they marched around campus. Many members of the local and international press who were covering the demonstration expressed fears that the women would be lynched or raped given the mood of the mob following them. It is to the credit of the few male students protecting the women that the demonstration ended without a riot. These incidents unleashed a flood of correspondence to the newspapers and much public debate about gender relationships on campus. They also fuelled public hostility towards male university students.

Contributions to the newspapers were aligned on both sides of the issue. Most letters supporting the attack on the woman were written by men, and most letters denouncing it were written by women. Students supporting the attack defended the action saying that mini-skirts were un-African, indecent and inappropriate. They considered the action to be 'public justice' undertaken to correct an erring Black sister. One contributor to *The Daily Gazette* went so far as to write 'UZ is not a fashion venue, thus it must be respected and that respect includes following our customs (tradition)'. On 21 December another contributor, writing under the *nom de plume* ZIBA-UZ (ZIBA being the acronym for the Zimbabwe Bachelors' Association), considered mini-skirts immoral and lamented that such dress could not be legislated out of existence without the government risking the loss of support from women who constitute the majority of 'misdirected voters in Africa'.

Some Deans issued a joint statement condemning the attack in strong

terms and the University authorities also issued a statement condemning the attack. The SRC, however, conspicuously avoided the entire issue. An editorial in *The Herald* pointed out that the very students who clamoured for autonomy and academic freedom were the ones who were most willing to curtail other people's freedoms as evidenced in the attack on the woman. The students had taken the law into their own hands and had inflicted their choice of punishment upon her — despite the fact that she had broken no law. It is important to investigate the discourse within which the attack is being condemned and defended.

A question that first comes to mind is: why should wearing a mini-skirt be seen as immoral in 1992? After all, mini-skirts have been around since the 1960s. Most of the 'born location' students have lived with female family members who wore short skirts, tight jeans and shorts. Even on campus, many of the 'nose' women regularly wear similar attire without being physically or verbally attacked. Secondly, why should the attackers have considered revealing Western clothing as incompatible with decency in a Black woman? It is quite clear that the woman would not have been attacked if she had been White. The Black men students, therefore, seem to have resented a Black woman's presentation of herself as a sexual being in Western fashion (that is, by displaying her legs).

The cultural argument was a convenient one for those defending the attack, despite its questionable validity. In pre-colonial Shona and Ndebele culture women wore very short coverings and went bare-breasted, but how can this mode of dress be resumed when ideas of sexuality have changed? It is important to point out that in Western countries women wear revealing clothes without being attacked. Obviously something has occurred to make the hooligan men bold enough to blame their lack of self-control on the women they molest. In addition, the students did not question their mode of protest against the state as being 'untraditional'. They used Marxist and Maoist slogans popularized by ZANU and ZAPU during the war of national liberation, and even mimicked ZANU structures by calling the UBA 'the armed wing of the SRC'. It is puzzling to find out what military tradition 'the military wing' was following since in both Shona and Ndebele custom men fought other men and not women in battle.

But perhaps the issue is not one of morality *per se* or of traditional values but rather of one of control. The UBA was quite aware of its declining control over the student body, the women's hockey team being a case in point, and resented that fact. The 'debate' on suitable female clothing was, therefore, an attempt to reassert control over one of the recalcitrant sections of the student population, the 'nose' women. These women have a high profile in student life out of all proportion to their actual numbers. They belong to the social class aspired to by the majority

of the UBA although they affect to despise it. It was not so much what these women wore but their self-confidence, their independence and their unreliability as UBA supporters that had to be dealt with. The 'reclamation' of Black women did not mean including them in the moral community of the UBA and the hooligans but rather the reclamation of UBA power which was being broken by students who refused to participate in boycotts and demonstrations. Those students who refused to co-operate with the UBA were stigmatized as wanting to be like Whites: authentic Africanness, at least among women, was equated with submission to male authority. Dissenting female students were to be forced to obey if they did not yield to persuasion.

It is ironic that the hooligan element and their supporters have adopted many of the characteristics of the ruling party that they have criticized. For example, the intolerance of dissent, organized violence, and particularly the subordination of women. Female students are expected to be militant in confrontations with the state but docile and submissive to male students on campus, wearing attire that is acceptable to the UBA and the hooligan fringe. Could it be that Union women will soon have to wear their president's face on approved parts of their anatomy? What is noticeable is that while ZANU(PF) seems to be moving towards more openness and tolerance the student union (or rather the violent element that influences its agenda) is moving in the opposite direction. Instead of dealing with the complexities of difference in gender, class and culture the dominant group in the union has chosen to deny these differences and has attempted to enforce an artificial uniformity on all students.

However, the conflation of this discourse on sexuality and difference into that of control has muted a potentially useful debate on the management of sexuality on campus. Unscheduled pregnancies are common, as is sexual harassment and rape, sexually transmitted disease is prevalent and a significant number of male students are dependent on the sexual services of prostitutes. Instead of discussing these issues in the various appropriate forums on campus, the problems have been displaced on to that of 'cultural purity' and conformity to old-fashioned, Western ideas of modesty.

CONCLUSION

While the issues of control preoccupy certain factions of the union, it is also clear that those who dissent are not necessarily traitors to the student struggle with the state. At present the Union is in crisis because of drunkenness, hooliganism and violence within and outside campus. The public has a negative image of university students which means they are reluctant to employ University of Zimbabwe graduates. This knowledge also fuels antagonism between men and women students. Many students are

questioning the validity of the Union's insistence on cultural labels since many of the students are of mixed ethnic and class backgrounds. In addition, Union slogans such as 'an injury to one is an injury to all' ring somewhat hollow given the Union's reluctance to deal with the verbal and physical injuries inflicted by the hooligan element on other students. Similarly, as the Minister of Higher Education (himself a student activist in the 1960s) pointed out to the students in 1993 at a leadership seminar in Kadoma, their use of the slogan 'the voice of the voiceless', which was coined during the days of the University College before Blacks were enfranchised, is no longer appropriate now that the majority of Zimbabweans have the vote and other forms of representation at local government and other levels. It is ironic that the voice of dissenting students is increasingly being drowned or silenced through violence and intimidation.

The politics of intolerance and disrespect have pervaded many different aspects of University life and this has led to the development of discourses and struggles for control over the Union, the University buildings as well as over social and political norms relating to dress and behaviour. The results are not heartening. The refusal of many young men to discipline themselves or to accept discipline, their lack of interactional skills, their intolerance of other points of view and their refusal to concede their 'rights' for the common good all create severe problems among the University community. Somehow the University must address this problem and persuade all students that tolerance and respect for those of different gender, class, ethnic group, religion or political opinion is a desirable quality. Unless these politics and control and intolerance are transcended students cannot hope to be taken seriously by the majority of Zimbabweans for whom they claim to speak. They cannot occupy the 'moral high ground' in their encounters with the state as long as their internal politics imitate those of the government they so trenchantly criticize. It is only those students who can understand and respect the complexities of identity, allegiance and existence in a community of scholars that can lead the student body into a more defensible position in its debate with the state and to a more peaceful co-existence with the rest of Zimbabwean society.

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