NATURE AND DYNAMICS OF STUDENT ACTIVISM
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

BY

FORTUNE NEGOMBWE

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Science
Degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is submitted for the Master of Science Degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology at the University of Zimbabwe. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____________________________________________

(Fortune Negombwe)

_______________ Day of ___________________ 2012
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This study would not have been possible without the assistance and dedication of many people. I remain eternally grateful to Dr R. Jaji, my supervisor, for her analytical mind, excellent guidance and motivation that she offered me during the period of this study. You are the epitome of what supervision should be.

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To God be the Glory.
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mum and dad.
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<tr>
<td>AIPPRA</td>
<td>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</td>
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<td>CIO</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Organization</td>
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<td>ESAP</td>
<td>Economic Structural Adjustment Programme</td>
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<td>MDC</td>
<td>Movement for Democratic Change</td>
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<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>Movement for Democratic Change led by Tsvangirai</td>
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<td>NCA</td>
<td>National Constitutional Assembly</td>
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<td>POSA</td>
<td>Public Order and Security Act</td>
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<td>SST</td>
<td>Student Solidarity Trust</td>
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<td>UZ</td>
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<td>www</td>
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<td>ZANU-PF</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front</td>
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<td>ZCTU</td>
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<td>ZESN</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Election Support Network</td>
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<td>ZINASU</td>
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ABSTRACT

This study explores the nature and dynamics of student activism at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) and explains why there has been increased silence at a time when the number of student grievances has increased. Historically, increase in the number of student grievances provided fertile ground for student activism. Findings established that student activism at the UZ since independence in 1980 can be classified into phases. These phases were created on the basis of information obtained from former and current student leaders/activists and students. The study presents the causes, reasons and nature of student activism for each phase. Findings from the study show that university authorities and students have different perspectives on student activism to such an extent that accusations and counter-accusations between them characterize their viewpoints. The study also explores the nature and dynamics of student activism and university and state responses to student activism. It uses Ralf Dahrendorf’s contributions to conflict theory and Michel Foucault’s analysis of power to explain the encounter between students and authorities. The study also identified the factors that incapacitated student activism in the 2009 to 2012 phase in such a way that there has not been a corresponding intensification of student activism in relation to students’ increasing grievances.
Introduction and Background to the Study

Student activism is a highly complex, multi-faceted phenomenon (Altbach 1989). This study seeks to explore the nature and dynamics of student activism at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ). Students in several universities have adopted student activism as a way of articulating their grievances. Omari and Mihyo (1991:14) observe that universities lack sense of urgency and caring and thus students feel that, “the only way to get things done and attract attention to their plight is to protest, demonstrate, boycott classes, and attack significant figures”. Omatsu (2002) and Recabar (2008) note that mass actions are the most visible means of collectively mobilizing those affected to confront issues that affect them. Commenting on the UZ, Chikwanha (2009: 92) asserts, “The nature of political socialization and the political culture in Zimbabwe are such that violence is perceived and accepted as the only language understood by authorities and opponents alike”.

The UZ which is located in Harare is the oldest and largest university in Zimbabwe. It was founded through a special relationship with the University of London and opened its doors to its first students in 1952 as the University College of Rhodesia. The Chancellor is the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe. The current Vice-Chancellor is Professor Levy Nyagura. He became the Vice-Chancellor in 2002. The main campus of the University is located in Mount Pleasant, north of the Harare city centre. The UZ has a student population of 11 200 undergraduates and 500 postgraduates. It has 34 professors, 35 associate professors, 435 lecturers and 155 teaching and research assistants1.

1 [http://www.uz.ac.zw/information/uz.html](http://www.uz.ac.zw/information/uz.html)
Student activism at the UZ can be traced back to the struggle for independence. The Chimukwembe demonstration of 7 August 1973 is said to be “[...] the most violent demonstration in the pre-independence history of the University [of Rhodesia]” (Mlambo 1995: 473). The demonstration, which lasted barely an hour, resulted in damage to the University's property adding up to R$7, 000. In the early 1980s, the state and students had cordial relations. However, in the late 1980s relations turned sour as the government advocated the one-party state system, adopted structural adjustment policies that affected the education sector among others and introduced the 1990 UZ Amendment Act which curtailed students’ freedom (Sithole, 2001 cited in Chikwanha, 2009; Zeilig, 2007). This compelled students to organize and reclaim political space they had had prior to these changes and expressed their disenchantment through radical activism (Melucci 1996). The wave of student movements increased during and after the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) period from 1991 to 1995 (Zeilig 2007).

To capture the nature, dynamics and complexities of student activism, this study considers student activism at a global level before it scales down the discussion to the Zimbabwean context. This provides a broader context within which key issues in student activism are situated and understood.

**Problem Statement**

Most of the studies that have been conducted on student activism have focused on the nexus between student activism and politics (Emmerson 1968; Cefkin 1975; Hanna and Hanna 1975; Altbach 1989; Omari and Mihyo 1991; Mlambo 1995; Zeilig 2008; Chikwanha 2009). This has resulted in a dearth of information on student activism and its role in articulating student
academic issues at universities. Zimbabwe’s decade-long (2000-2010) economic malaise and socio-political metamorphosis posed several challenges to the nation in general and to students at colleges and universities in particular. The paradoxical situation in which more grievances are not accompanied by agitation for redress motivated this study. If student activism managed to challenge such issues as the death of Samora Machel in 1986, the proposition of the one-party state by the ZANU-PF government in 1988 as well as corruption, scandals and crimes by ZANU-PF party and government officials in the late 1980s (Omari and Mihyo 1991) that were external to the university, why is it failing to challenge the ever increasing problems that university students currently face? Students at the UZ have suffered such problems as the closure of the halls of residence in 2008, high tuition fees, scrapping off of student grants, eating from the informal roadside caterers, high accommodation fees when the halls of residence were re-opened in 2011 and shortage of lecturers, computers and textbooks in the library. Yet, these challenges have been accompanied by an increasing silence of student activism in seeking solutions. This study was motivated by the need to understand and explain this paradoxical situation.

Justification

This study is expected to provide understanding of the reasons, nature and dynamics of student activism and its metamorphosis. The study analyzes how student activism functions as a channel for articulating students’ concerns at the university. Outside the studies that have been carried out, much of the information that is available on student activism in Zimbabwe is based on media coverage. This warrants the need for a study which sheds more light on student activism by providing a systematic analysis and interpretation of student activism beyond the stereotypical
perspectives that tend to portray student activism as a manifestation of hooliganism and university student masculinity among other explanations.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

- identify reasons for student activism at the university
- explore the nature and dynamics of student activism at the UZ
- present students’ strategies/means of articulating their concerns and the rationale for these strategies
- interpret student activism within the definitions provided by students and authorities

Definition of Terms

Key concepts used in this study are defined as follows:

(a) Student Activism: Fletcher (2005) defined it as works done by students to effect political, environmental, economic or social change. Jacks (1975:13) defined it as, “the sum total of actions of students individually, collectively and organizationally that are directed for change in students’ own circumstances, and for educational and wider social change”. This term is used interchangeably with the term “student movement”. In brief, student activism entails students challenging the socio-political and economic issues that affect their academic life.

(b) Activism: policy of taking direct and at times militant action to achieve a political/social goal.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=activism](http://www.wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=activism)
(c) Student Union: is a federation of student unions from different universities in a country, giving corporate and political expression to the student body at a national level (Jacks 1975:13).

(d) Protest: expresses a strong reaction against an event(s) or situation(s). A protest publicly and forcefully makes opinions heard in an attempt by participants/protesters to directly enact changes themselves (Barned-Smith 2007).

(e) Demonstrations: a form of activism, usually taking the form of a public gathering of people in a rally/a walking march. Demonstrations can be violent or non-violent or can begin as non-violent and turn violent depending on the circumstances (Bryan: 2006).

**Literature Review**

There has been a considerable amount of research on the nexus between student activism and political activism across the globe (Zeilig 2008; Chikwanha 2009; Omari and Mihyo 1991; Cefkin 1975; Hanna and Hanna 1975; Altbach 1989; Emmerson 1968; Mlambo 1995). Research and analysis on student political activism dates from the turbulent 1960s when most universities were introduced (Hanna and Hanna 1975). However, Altbach (1989) dates it to the period before 1960. Omari and Mihyo (1991) observe that political processes and issues include protests against imperialism, neo-colonialism, political murders, corruption, government inadequacies, and prioritization of national issues and investment paths. Students were an important force in the revolutionary movements of 1848 in Germany and later towards unification in Germany and Italy in the 19th century (Altbach 1989). Almost every nationalist and struggle for independence had a strong component of student participation in Africa and Asia (Altbach 1989). Students in countries such as India, Kenya, Vietnam and Burma (now Myanmar) were involved in efforts to free their countries from colonial rule (Douglas and Bachtiar 1970). Early protests in Tanzania,
Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe were, indeed, directed against external forces and colonial rule (Omari and Mihyo 1991). Cefkin (1975) and Mlambo (1995) present a long tradition of UZ student protests against racism and minority rule before independence in 1980.

Besides the involvement of students in the broader political events, students have also been involved in effecting academic-related changes. Such academic problems as noted by Omari and Mihyo (1991) include protests against difficult examinations, incompetence of lecturers, shortage of books, introduction of new courses, and favouritism in teaching and examinations. For instance, at the University of Dar-es-Salaam, students have vigorously participated in the definition of what is legitimate knowledge since the late 1960s. At the UZ, students protested in 1989 against shortage of books and surcharge for late return of library books (Omari and Mihyo 1991).

Some of the issues students articulate through student activism include welfare matters such as bad food, congested dormitories, shoddy catering services, freedom in residential halls, and access to recreational and guidance services. Management issues within the university centred on administrative inadequacies, debates regarding the allocation of resources, discipline matters on campus, and disputes on management styles are also some of the problems that students protest against (Omari and Mihyo 1991). Zeilig (2007) provides a graphic account of the problems affecting students in Africa’s higher education institutions. These range from physical decay of buildings to slashing of library books and journal stocks. Issues of major concern, as noted by Zeilig (2007), include spiraling student fees, high living costs, overcrowded classrooms and inadequate teaching.
Student activism has received varied responses from governments and university authorities in different countries. Government responses to student activism range from ignoring student protests entirely to violently repressing demonstrations. Violent repression of student activism has been said to be mainly a feature of developing nations though it was also witnessed in industrialized nations. For instance, in France and West Germany in the 1960s, repression of student movements resulted in deaths of students at the hands of the police (Fraser 1988, cited in Altbach 1989). Student demonstrations have been repressed by police in a number of countries (Altbach 1989). For instance, clashes between students and the police in Mexico City in 1968 resulted in what became known as the Tlateloco massacre. In China in 1989, brutal government crackdown culminated in the Tiananmen Square massacre (Hong 2002). In Indonesia, students were killed by security forces in 1998 during demonstrations (O’Rourke 2002). During the Iranian student riots of July 1999, several people were killed in a week of violent confrontations (Robin 2004). There are many examples of violent repression of student movements, with leaders being jailed, tortured and sometimes killed.

Some governments, for example, in Nigeria, Myanmar and Zimbabwe, closed down universities and sent students home in response to student demonstrations (Altbach 1989; Omari and Mihyo 1991). In many instances, campus authorities have sought to negotiate with student activists and reached a compromise with them. In the Zimbabwean context, student activism has been subjected to systematic attack either through government policies, authorities at learning institutions or police being part of a bigger, systematic and strategic plot to tame or contain student activism (Student Solidarity Trust 2011). Arrests, torture, suspension and expulsion of student activists from universities and abolition of the Student Representative Council (SRC)
have been some of the reactions by authorities to student activism in Zimbabwean state universities (Students Solidarity Trust 2011).

**Theoretical Framework**

This research is guided by conflict theory with specific reference to contributions by Ralf Dahrendorf. This study also borrows from Michel Foucault’s analysis of power. Given that student activism is a highly complex phenomenon, Altbach (1989) asserts that there is no overarching theoretical explanation. As such, this study employs this theory and concepts to capture the dynamics of student activism in the case of the UZ without necessarily claiming that student activism can only be understood within these theoretical/conceptual framework. Gill and De Fronzo (2009) reveal that theoretical systemization of student movements has rarely been attempted as many studies of student movements conducted between the late 1950s and early 1970s were limited to an examination of activists backgrounds and psychological characteristics.

For Dahrendorf, the distribution of power and authority is key to understanding social conflict. Dahrendorf (1959) adopted Max Weber’s (1957: 152) definition of power as:

> the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which its probability rests.

Omari and Mihyo (1991) assert that “When it comes to the less politically motivated student protests, it is the power structure and the way things are done in universities which seem to incite students to overt protests”. Authority is not located within people but within various positions. Authority is part of social organization and not individual personalities. Dahrendorf (1959: 166) states that authority is a form of legitimate power and defines authority as power that is “always
associated with social positions or roles”. In the context of this study, power and authority rest with the university authorities. For instance, it is vested in the Vice Chancellor, the student disciplinary hearing committee, Registrar, Dean of Students and chairpersons of different university departments. These offices implement the UZ Act which defines how students should behave. Students’ activities are sanctioned or censured by varying contextual rules as defined in the UZ Act. It is against this background that Omari and Mihyo (1991:48) note that most African universities,

While they have Rules of Student Conduct and Discipline, they have no statements relating to students' fundamental rights such as freedom of expression in the classroom, freedom of association on campus, citizenship rights, disclosure of personal information, and autonomy of students' publications. The standards of discipline are similarly flawed due to bureaucratic circumvention and intolerance.

The concept of a university as a “village of priests” or a conglomeration of an intellectual oligarchy as noted by Omari and Mihyo (1991) results in university authorities expecting students to comply with university regulations. Thus, Dahrendorf reveals that authority is created through the expectation on actions associated with particular positions, including subordination of others and subordination to others. However, students are not objects or passive entities. They at times resist authority with this resistance manifesting itself as student activism.

This study also employs Foucault’s (1972) analysis of power to analyse institutional and students’ perspectives on student activism. Foucault traces the role of discourses in wider social processes of legitimating power, emphasizing the construction of current truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them. Foucault (1980) argues that power
and knowledge are interrelated and therefore every human relationship is a struggle and negotiation of power. Foucault further states that power is always present and can both produce and constrain the truth.

This study also makes use of Foucault’s (1995) analysis of how power functions in order to explain the dynamics of student activism at the UZ. In his analysis, Foucault (1995) uses the Panopticon as an instrument of surveillance in order to illustrate what he refers to as the automatic functioning of power. Central to Foucault’s analysis of how power functions is the systematic ordering and controlling of human behavior through subtle means by which power is felt even in the absence of those who embody it. Foucault draws attention to Bentham’s Panopticon and describes how the equipment used for surveillance creates within inmates a state of consciousness and permanent visibility of power. Students police themselves by not demonstrating/protesting to avoid clashing with the police even if the police are not based at the university. The police act as a form of “disciplinary gaze” (Foucault 1995) which shapes the behavior of students. Foucault (1995:202-3) argues that power functions not through visibility but through previous experiences when he asserts,

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.

**Methodology**

This study employed the qualitative research approach. This methodology was chosen over the quantitative methodology because it captures the attitudes, feelings and values of the research
participants from their own frames of reference or in a particular social setting (Burgess 1984, Leedy 1997). Qualitative research entails subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior (Kothari: 2004). In this study, views of university authorities, students, and former and current student leaders were obtained using qualitative in-depth interviews and techniques. The researcher gained access to student leaders by making appointments via the telephone. He also booked for appointments with several university authorities but was, however, referred to one respondent. The researcher requested students in tutorial groups to participate in focus group discussions and individual interviews.

**Sampling Procedure**

Purposive sampling was employed for this study. As Kothari (2004) asserts, purposive sampling entails deliberate selection of particular units of the universe with specialist knowledge of the research issue. Purposive sampling was used to select students as well as former and current student leaders. However, this was not the case with the official from the student affairs department who was interviewed because the researcher was referred to him by the Deputy Academic Registrar, Mrs. Takawira. Some previous studies on student activism have a bias on certain faculties particularly the humanities and social sciences faculties. This is true of a study by Chikwanha (2009) at the UZ and also of other studies as asserted by Altbach (1989). This study sought to capture diverse views on student activism and did not restrict the research sample to the faculties of humanities and social sciences much as many student activists/leaders are said to come from these faculties. The UZ has ten faculties and all the faculties were represented in this study. For former student leaders, the first respondents that were contacted referred the
researcher to other student leader thus providing respondents through the snowballing technique. This reference helped the researcher to locate former student leaders easily.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured Interviews

These were used to obtain information from seven former and two current student leaders. They were also used to obtain information from an official in the Student Affairs Department. Former student leaders interviewed were drawn from as far back as 1988. A total of ten students participated in individual interviews. Two students were interviewed from each of the following faculties and departments: the Department of Mechanical Engineering in the Faculty of Engineering, the Department of Agricultural Engineering in the Faculty of Agriculture, the Department of Teacher Education in the Faculty of Education, the Department of Biochemistry in the Faculty of Science and the Department of Hematology in the Faculty of Health Sciences. The researcher selected every fifth student in a row in a lecture or tutorial group for participation in the study. Third year students from these departments were interviewed because they have been at the university and exposed to university life for a longer period than first and second year students and were thus in possession of the information useful for this study. Semi-structured interviews gave the interviewer the latitude to probe and ask for clarification. With the consent of respondents, all the interviews were tape recorded. This allowed the researcher to capture all the information and this would not have been possible had he taken down notes during the interviews. This also enabled the researcher to establish a rapport with the respondents since, as asserted by Fontana and Frey (1994), jotting notes detracts from the development of rapport.
Focus Group Discussions

Five departments in five faculties were selected for focus group discussions. Focus group discussions were conducted with students from the following faculties and departments: the Sociology Department in the Faculty of Social Studies; the Department of Clinical Veterinary Studies in the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences; the Department of History in the Faculty of Arts; the Department of Constitutional Law in the Faculty of Law and the Department of Accounts in the Faculty of Commerce. Each group had students from the same department. There were five 3rd year students in the History group, six 2nd year students in the Constitutional Law group, four 3rd year students in the Clinical Veterinary Studies group, eight 3rd year students in the Sociology group and five 2nd year students in the Accounts group. In some of the focus group discussions, some respondents dominated the discussions to the extent of not affording others the chance to participate. The researcher countered this problem by moderating the discussions and encouraging all the participants to speak.

Ethical Considerations

Research ethics were observed from gaining entry through the research process up to compilation of findings. The researcher sought informed consent from participants and disclosed the nature and aim of the research prior to their participation. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured through the use of pseudonyms for those who preferred anonymity. A 1988 student leader is identified by the pseudonym Mhaka while a 1989 student leader is referred to as Karima. Similarly, a 1992 student leader is identified by the pseudonym Bodzo, a 2008 student leader by the pseudonym Mhizha, an official from the Student Affairs Department by the pseudonym Mr. Shumba and the two current student activists as Tendai and Brian.
Limitations of the Study

Locating some of the former student leaders was difficult because they live outside Harare. The university administration constantly referred the researcher to one informant and this deterred the researcher from gathering diverse views from the university administration. Some of the current student activists feared arrests as they assumed that the researcher was a Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) agent especially considering that first contact intended to make appointments was made via the telephone. Follow up interviews with both Mr. Shumba and the SRC leaders who were elected on 12 March 2012 on issues that required further clarification failed to take place because in most instances, Mr. Shumba was unavailable while some of the SRC leaders were indefinitely suspended for “defamation of character” of the Vice Chancellor after their picture with him appeared in a newsletter published by unknown activists. Some SRC leaders who were not suspended declined to be interviewed on suspicion that the researcher was a spy for the university. For purposes of feasibility, the sample size was small. As such, the findings cannot be generalized to the wider student population.

Research Findings

This section presents the research findings. It synthesizes views expressed by the sampled respondents.

Student Activism: Students’ Perspectives

Former and current student leaders and activists observed that student activism entailed representation of student concerns through the Student Representative Council (SRC). They noted that student activism also involved addressing the social, political and economic issues that
negatively affect the academic life of a student. For instance, Bodzo, a 1992 student leader, asserted, “It’s all about fighting and challenging anything that corrodes the pillars of academic life including politics [...].” Student leaders observed that students constituted part of a critical mass because of their enlightenment and exposure. They are the voice of the voiceless. For instance, Sendisa Sandura, a 2004 student leader, revealed that students were at the forefront of challenging the government’s adoption of structural adjustment policies in the early 1990s, the proposition of the one-party state by the ZANU-PF government in 1989 and the sudden pull out of the Commonwealth by the government without consulting the nation in 2003. Both the former and current student leaders and activists and Mr. Shumba, an official from the Student Affairs Department, revealed that the UZ Act legalized the existence of the SRC which also has its own constitution. They noted that the duties and responsibilities of each SRC leader were clearly enshrined in the SRC Constitution. Their overall duty was to represent student concerns in the university council and senate.

This study presents student activism in phases for purposes of coherence in view of the changes in the history of the country and how these changes are reflected in the nature of student activism. Student activism is organized into phases on the basis of data obtained from the respondents.

*Student Activism: 1980-1989*

Student leaders of the 1980s observed that during this period, the university authorities had cordial relations with students and timeously addressed their grievances. This situation, as
Mhaka, a 1988 student leader explained, ended in 1990 with the 1990 UZ Amendment Act. This marked the watershed between the 1980s and the post-1990 period.

Respondents noted that during this phase, student activism was mainly motivated by political and welfare matters. Mhaka revealed that student activism challenged political issues such as the death of the Mozambican president Samora Machel in 1986 in a mysterious air crash, the proposal by the ZANU-PF government to have a one-party state as well as corruption and scandals committed by government officials and government reluctance to arrest them. Mhaka revealed that students challenged issues such as censorship of student publications, poor prioritization by government in which it prioritized party officials over students’ demand for the government to increase their loans. He also noted that issues such as shortage of textbooks, high fines for returning late library textbooks, dirty halls of residence, insufficient food and the demand by students for the control of their own affairs were some of the factors that spurred student activism. Karima, a 1989 student leader, observed that students wanted to ensure that there was good governance in the country and on campus as well as political space for them to freely express their views.

Reasons for student activism were mainly challenging political issues which had the likelihood of affecting the nation in general and students in particular. Mhaka observed, “All [that] we wanted was good governance, peace and an enjoyable learning environment”. Respondents observed that they used both engagement and demonstrations to articulate their issues. Mhaka recalled, “We mainly engaged the university and they addressed our issues. We demonstrated only when they did not address our grievances”.
Student leaders of the 1980 to 1989 period revealed that their concerns were addressed immediately after either dialogue or a demonstration. Several factors enhanced student activism during this period. One of these factors is that student leaders worked with external organizations to champion their concerns and they were successful in calling the university to address their concerns. These organizations included Zambuko Izibuko which shared their Socialist ideology. Karima noted,

We worked with external forces to advance our interests. These organisations were very supportive and helpful, gave us advice and financial support. They enhanced our capacity to address our problems.

Respondents also boasted of having a strong, united, organised, radical and brave leadership. Karima reminisced, “We were a brave SRC, very radical and we could confront whosoever we thought was causing our suffering”. The cordial relations that existed between students and the government compelled the government to address the concerns of the students. Mhaka observed,

[the university authorities] were quick to address our grievances because they knew the consequences of another demonstration, particularly the costs of repairing the destroyed university infrastructure.

The state also felt that it had the responsibility to address students’ concerns since the university was state supervised. Karima explained,

The government was a key component in our struggle, they chipped in to address our problems, in fact, it was there for us and we worked together very well.

In emphasizing the relationship that existed between students and the government, Mhaka also observed, “We had a cordial relationship with the government and there were no harsh policies
on activists. The university addressed our problems without delay”. Mhaka further noted that in as much as there was police intervention to suppress protests, the police of the day was “not as ruthless as they are today”.

Student Activism: 1990-2008

This phase was created on the basis of data obtained from both former and current student leaders/activists. Respondents revealed that the 1990 UZ Amendment Act ushered in a new era in the history of student activism in contrast to the pre-1990 period. This Act ended the honeymoon period students had enjoyed with the state and the university authorities. For instance, Mhaka pointed out,

It is at this period in 1990 that was the turning point in the history of student activism. The government introduced an Act in 1990 that clipped the wings of students’ activities and activism to an extent that they could not fly anymore.

The way the state and the university responded to student activism in the 1990-2008 phase made this a unique phase as explained later in this section. Respondents revealed that student activism was motivated by academic, political and welfare issues. They observed that through student activism, they challenged such political issues as bad governance and demanded democracy, accountability and transparency in the utilization of state funds as reports of corruption increased. Respondents further stated that they also challenged low government prioritization of education by adopting structural adjustment policies which resulted in privatization of education and removal of government subsidies. According to Bodzo, a 1992 student leader,

Our demonstrations were indirectly directed to the government’s adoption of ESAP as it was the source of all this untold suffering of students, particularly economic hardships notably late
disbursements of grants, removal of subsidies on meals and commuter fare hikes [which] were a result of the adoption of ESAP.

Mhizha, a 2008 student leader, revealed that after 2006 they challenged the scraping off of student grants by the government. Students also sought to address welfare issues such as shortage of accommodation and unhygienic conditions in the halls of residence. For instance, Sandura recalled that they had the “Faeces Demonstration” when the toilets blocked in the halls of residence and against being served poor quality food. Respondents also mentioned academic issues such as demand for academic freedom and shortage of lecturers, computers and latest editions of textbooks. They observed that academic freedom and freedom of association and assembly was curtailed by the 1990 UZ Amendment Act and state laws and policies such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA). Lovemore Chinoputsa, a 2008 student leader recalled that in 2008, they also demonstrated against the demand by the university for them to top up tuition fees for the extension of the semester which was a result of lecturers having gone on strike.

Washington Katema, a 2006 student leader, noted that students supported the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) demonstrations mainly because “Parents had to have their problems resolved for them to be able to cater for the welfare of their children at the university”. It is again for this reason that students were critical of bad governance and demonstrated against the adoption of structural adjustment policies as was noted by Bodzo. Student leaders revealed that they resorted to demonstrations and protests after the university failed to address their concerns and at times when the channels of communication between students and the university
were blocked. For instance, Mhizha charged, “Even Nyagura does not address us or our grievances; he says he does not speak to monkeys”.

In brief, student activism focused on students’ rights and academic freedom, challenging the socio-political and economic issues that negatively impacted on educational life of students and creating a desirable learning environment. Student respondents and Mr. Shumba, an official in the Student Affairs Department noted that student activism through the SRC was a platform for communicating students’ issues. The rationale behind the establishment of the SRC was to link the university with students. Chinoputsa, observed,

Basically, the SRC is the interlocutor between the administration and students on issues on which an ordinary student cannot have audience with the administration. The SRC is the voice of the voiceless.

**Demonstrations Strategies**

Students devised several strategies to make demonstrations successful. Former and current student leaders revealed that they strategically distributed notices, posters and fliers with the date, time and venue for a demonstration indicated. Students were thus aware of the demonstration and the cause they were fighting for. Sandura noted that they had the Chiutsiutsi student group that was not part of the SRC but was responsible for distributing posters and fliers and mobilizing students for a demonstration. Even when it came to confrontation with the police, Sandura noted that they used the Cow-horn formation to encircle the police officers and then attack them.

**Challenges and Successes of Student Activism in the 1980-1989 Phase**
Unlike the 1980s, this period was marked by different responses. Respondents noted that at times their concerns were addressed and at times they were not in correspondence with factors that either enhanced or crippled student activism. Respondents revealed that that the support they received from external organizations enhanced their capacity in calling the university to address their concerns. Bodzo explained,

> We worked with organizations that championed democratic and social change and they were our allies and helped us with financial support for us to arrange meetings with other students.

Even post-1990 student leaders received support from external organizations and cited the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Student Solidarity Trust (SST), ZIMRIGHTS, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) and the ZCTU as organizations that supported them. The support which these organizations provided were captured by Mhizha who pointed out,

> The role that was played by other organizations strengthened student activism. These organizations included the SST that provided food for arrested students, ZIMRIGHTS helped [with] the printing of T-shirts and fliers, [the] NCA on constitutional matters and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights provided legal support for arrested and suspended students. In short, these were the organizations that shared the same ideology with students.

Respondents also revealed that student activism was strengthened by the existence of a united SRC and weakened by the introduction of the 1990 UZ Amendment Act and repressive state policies and laws that were introduced. They observed that the university and the state introduced the 1990 UZ Amendment Act with the aim of crippling student activism because
students were criticizing some state policies and actions such as the proposition of the one-party state by ZANU-PF in 1988.

Respondents portrayed the UZ Amendment Act as having curtailed institutional autonomy and academic freedom and vested power in the hands of the Vice-Chancellor and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. Bodzo noted that the Vice-Chancellor became the administrative and disciplinary officer of the university with powers to dissolve or suspend indefinitely or for such a period as he would specify, any activity or function of students’ union or any of its committees or organs. Katema pointed out that, the “UZ Amendment Act and the Ordinance 30 turned back the clock of academic freedom […]. The university was surrendered to the executives”. For Bodzo,

This Act, I suppose, was crafted in hell by the devil himself with the support of his angels and was given to ZANU-PF with the full instruction not to revise it and ZANU-PF duly instructed the University to implement it to the last note.

All post-1990 student leaders observed that the state responded by systematically using repressive state policies and laws to silence student activism. Respondents noted that state agents like the police, CIO operatives at the university and courts systematically crippled student activism. Sandura presented this situation as follows,

Student activism was crippled by the forces of state repression like the CIO operatives, army and police. There was freedom of speech but no freedom after speech as forces of state repression tracked down student leaders after inciting students to demonstrate.
Cases of police brutality that were cited by respondents included that of More-Memories Chawira who was shot and seriously injured by a police officer when students were demonstrating against the late disbursement of student grants in 1998 and that of Batanai Hadzidzi who was assaulted to death by police during a demonstration in 2001. Some of the respondents complained about pieces of legislation which were used to suppress student activities and activism such as the POSA and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) which they described as draconian and abusive. What seemed to have changed about the police was the gravity of its brutality when compared to the 1980-1989 phase. The severity and gravity of police brutality have intensified in the post-1990 period compared to the former phase. Bodzo explained,

The state unleashed terror on us, the police was brutal and unfriendly even for a justified cause. We were enemies of state police […]. The university became state-controlled instead of it being state supervised.

Respondents revealed that the university employed the divide-and-rule tactic which weakened student activism. This tactic was mainly used in the dispatching of student grants and also on the rules and conditions for those who were on the cadetship scheme which was introduced in 2007. Katema noted that the university would disburse grants for half of the students and promise to disburse grants for the other half later. This divided the student as those who would not have received grants were unable to stage a demonstration without the support of the others who were no longer willing to support them. Mhizha alleged that students on the cadetship scheme were warned not to demonstrate on any issue as this would result in their withdrawal from the scheme once they were caught. According to Mhizha, “About three quarters of students were on this scheme. This meant that some would participate [in demonstrations] and some would not”.
**Student Activism: 2009-2012**

When the university re-opened in 2009 after a demonstration which resulted in the university being closed in 2008, student activism was marked by increased silence at a time when the numbers of student grievances were increasing. Respondents observed that unlike in the pre-2008 era where the university would at times addressed students’ grievances, from 2008 the university did not address their grievances and there was no SRC as the university cited lack of funds to organize SRC elections. Student activists and students revealed that 2009 marked a new phase in the history of student activism at the UZ. When the university re-opened after the 2008 closure, there was a negative correlation between student concerns and student activism in that the increase in the number of student concerns during this phase was accompanied by increased silence on the part of student activism. This phase did not have notable student leaders but activists because of the absence of an elected SRC. The causes of student activism at the UZ during this phase included high tuition fees, high late registration fines, demands for student grants, semesterisation of student identity cards (IDs) closure of the halls of residence, high accommodation fees (when the halls of residence were re-opened in 2011) as well as shortage of lecturers, computers and textbooks in the library. Students were also unhappy about the continued closure of the Student Union Building by the university and its renovation which they saw as taking place at a snail pace. They were also aggrieved by the drafting and imposition of university policies such as restrictions on inter-hostel visits between males and females without being consulted and demanded academic freedom of assembly, association and expression at the university.
Reasons for student activism during this period included fighting for academic freedom and addressing the socio-economic and political issues that negatively affected their academic life. Students felt that channels of communication, both formal and informal, were closed by the university. Respondents observed that the university did not address their concerns at a time when they were experiencing many problems. For instance, Tendai, one of the current student activists noted,

The Nyagura administration has taken student activism to the graveyard, we have several problems that require urgent attention, we try to relay them to the university but they turn deaf ears to them. Even in the very few demonstrations that we stage, they seem not amused and don’t rectify our problems.

Respondents revealed that they articulated their concerns through the private media and demonstrations. They also conducted their demonstrations within a short space of time since they feared arrests. Tendai observed that,

We once wanted to resort to demonstrating but there are clamp-down policies here and we have never been successful and we have resorted to communicating our issues through the private media. Student activism has not been successful here.

**Factors that have Crippled Student Activism in the 2009-2012 Phase**

Respondents observed that student activism was never successful in articulating student concerns during this period and highlighted factors that incapacitated student activism. The majority of students cited the absence of a clearly defined SRC leadership as the major cause of the silence of student activism. Respondents criticized the UZ administration for blocking students’ efforts
to organize elections for an SRC citing lack of funds. Tawanda, one of the current student activists, observed,

We have been denied our right to have a democratically elected representative of the students to sit in the UZ council. The last election was held in 2007 when Chinoputsa was elected president and since then the administration has frustrated every move the students have made to elect their representatives.

Respondents indicated that they approached the ZCTU and Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) for financial and logistical support to organize elections but the UZ administration blocked the initiative. Political affiliation weakened student activism during this period. Respondents noted that the birth and success of the MDC killed student activism as student leaders were seen as MDC apologists. The SRC was viewed by the government as an appendage of the MDC. Neutral students failed to join student activism thus killing it. Student activists were split along political party lines especially between MDC-T and ZANU-PF. Respondents noted that the split along political party lines made it difficult for student activists to convene meetings to discuss the problems that students were facing and even to speak with a united voice to university authorities. Factionalism along political party lines was also witnessed in ZINASU. This point was raised by Tendai and Law and Sociology students in focus group discussions. Some of the respondents noted that within ZINASU, students’ representatives were no longer representing students’ interests and were instead aligning themselves with political party positions. Respondents noted that it was difficult for ZINASU to agitate for SRC elections at the UZ since the organization was divided.
Respondents also noted that student activism was also weakened by university and state policies. For instance, Tendai noted,

We plan a demonstration but the efforts are frustrated by the police, in the morning you would see police all over campus holding guns as if [the] campus has become a war zone […]

The increase in state repression in this phase which became notable in the 1991-2008 phase was aptly portrayed by a 1988 student leader who asserted that the police of their time “was not as ruthless as they are today”. Forces of state repression during this period made it difficult for students to protest and demonstrate thus destroying student activism’s capacity to articulate students’ problems. Tendai noted that he went and sought police clearance for a demonstration against high tuition fees at Harare Central Police station but was referred to Avondale Police station which refused to grant the clearance.

In what seemed to have been a significant milestone in the history of student activism during this period an SRC election was held on 12 March 2012 but on 4 April 2012 some of the SRC leaders were indefinitely suspended for defamation of character of the Vice Chancellor after a picture they were taken with him appeared in a newsletter published by unknown activists. Some respondents who were not suspended assumed the researcher was a spy of the university and declined to be interviewed. However, Simbarashe, a 3rd year Political Science student who had some knowledge of what happened up to the SRC election who professed ignorance of who funded elections but confessed divisions along political party lines by activists observed that:

The UZ was ashamed that they had been blocking SRC elections for years and they decided that they be held. They did this just to maintain a clean image that now at UZ there is an SRC only to find fault in some of the leaders in less than 3 weeks and suspend them. This
[suspension] was a deliberate plot to instill fear on leaders and ensure their limited numbers in the university meetings so that their decisions sail through without much criticism.

Institutional Perspectives and Responses to Student Activism

Having presented students’ perspectives in the preceding sections, it is important to present institutional perspectives and responses to student activism. Mr. Shumba, an official from the Student Affairs Department to whom the researcher was referred by other university officials for information that was required for this study, defined student activism as “toyi toying”, a term which is associated with militant action. He revealed that demonstrations were staged by a minority segment of the student population which he labeled “hooligans”. He stated that in most instances, students demonstrated against the university on issues that could not be addressed by the university but by the government instead. He cited as an example a 2008 demonstration against high tuition fees. He explained that the university proposed a figure and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education considered it low and raised the figure. He noted that students were supposed to demonstrate against the government and not the university. He recalled that the last demonstration was staged in 2008 and revealed that since then there has not been student activism and explained the absence of student activism in terms of the university having created enough platforms for students to communicate their issues such as the UZ Blog. He stated that the university had an open-door policy at both faculty and administration levels. He further noted that the university was helping students to secure funding for holding SRC elections.

Mr. Shumba noted that in most instances, the University and the government responded by addressing student grievances once they were communicated to them. He observed that the
bureaucratic nature of the University would at times make it take long to address student concerns since a number of offices had to be consulted and a number of meetings had to be convened. He pointed out that the university addressed student concerns that it had the capacity to address since certain issues demanded the attention of the government rather than just that of the university. However, Mr. Shumba revealed that in certain instances, the University and the government failed to address student grievances. For instance, he noted,

Not at all times are the university and the government in a position to address student problems. For example, in the past few years the economic woes that affected the nation did not spare the university. They crippled the capacity of the university in addressing student problems and that’s why the university had to be closed in 2008 because we were not in a position to quickly address the water problem and the conditions in the halls of residence because the university had no money.

However, he strongly emphasized that in most cases the University and the government addressed student grievances. Mr. Shumba also pointed out that the University would call the state police to quell student demonstrations. He observed that students had the democratic and legal right to demonstrate/protest once they sought approval and clearance from both the police and the University but had no right to destroy university infrastructure or disturb or disrupt lectures and administrative processes during demonstrations. He noted that it was only when students did not have approval and clearance from the police and the university to stage a demonstration or when students became violent during a demonstration that the university sought assistance from the police to bring order at the university. Expressing the violent nature of students during demonstrations, he asserted,

These sieve-like burglar bars you see are not for aesthetic beauty to decorate this building. Students would group outside and start throwing stones into offices [that are] this side. Stones would fill this
office. We would then call the police to come and bring order here. So we decided to put such burglar bars to protect ourselves from students throwing stones during demonstrations.

Mr. Shumba noted that some students would get injured during clashes with the police and some even lost lives. He revealed that students who were caught by the police were arrested and at times fined or tried by the national courts of law. Mr. Shumba also noted that the university would use the Rules of Student Conduct enshrined in Ordinance 30 to deal with students caught inciting demonstrations or demonstrating illegally. He revealed that the Student Disciplinary Committee would pass the verdict on whether a student had to be suspended or expelled or be cautioned against such a behavior.

Mr. Shumba also noted that the university responded by crafting regulations to contain student activities in general and student activism in particular. He revealed this when responding to the complaints by students against the 1990 UZ Amendment Act and its negative impacts on student activities. He noted that in the late 1980s, students became violent and the university decided to contain and manage student activities by revising the 1982 UZ Act. He also revealed that the university responded by closing the university in 1989, 1998 and 2008. According to Mr Shumba, the authorities would close the university when they had budget constraints and financial problems that would incapacitate their position to address student grievances.

**Discussion of Findings**

*Dynamics of Student Activism*

This section critically analyses the findings of the study and explains the sudden culmination of student activism into a scenario where student activism has become silent in expressing the
discontent of students. Factors such as inconsistencies and contradictions in the viewpoints of students and university authorities; state repression and police brutality; power, resistance and conflict and political affiliation of student activists are discussed in an effort to comprehend the nature and dynamics of student activism.

The causes and nature of student activism varied with each phase as students employed various strategies to articulate their concerns. However, continuities and discontinuities in terms of causes, nature and strategies of student activism can be noted across the phases. Altbach (1997) observes that student activism is dynamic and asserts that continuities and discontinuities are products of changes in both the outside campus environment and the inside campus environment. Continuities indicate that the present does not have a complete break with the past. Involvement of students in the broader political events is noted in all the phases. Students tend to be aligned to a certain political ideology on the basis of which they challenge political issues that affected the nation at large and their academic life in particular. Discontinuities can be noted in the changing relations between students and the government in the various phases. Outside campus factors as noted by Altbach (1997) include socio-political and economic changes that had an impact on student activism. Inside campus factors include the caliber of SRC leaders in terms of their unity and bravery in relation to university policies.

Since the 1980s, student activism at the UZ challenged the socio-political and economic issues that had negative effects on the educational life of students. Conversely, in certain instances the socio-economic and political issues students challenged also shaped and informed student activism. For example, changes in the political situation in Zimbabwe which students challenged
led to government enactment of what students and student leaders’ referred to as “draconian” laws such as the 1990 UZ Amendment Act, AIPPA and POSA which weakened student activism. Changes in the economic system of the country since 2000 saw student activism and activities being underfunded by external organizations that worked with students. Organizations like the NCA and political parties like ZANU PF and MDC that had the capacity to fund student activities ended up dictating conditions to student leaders and this resulted in student leaders serving the interests of donors and not those of the students they were supposed to represent. In this case, there was interaction between student activism and the external environment with changes in the outside campus environment bringing about changes in the causes, nature, strategies and purposes or goals of student activism.

**Contradictions and Inconsistencies between the University and Students**

Students and the university presented different opinions and interpretations of student activism. Both sides claimed, considered and defended their assertions and opinions as true. Accusations, counter-accusations, contradictions and inconsistencies were heard as each side presented and defended its viewpoint. Accusations and counter-accusations between students and the university have roots in their interpretation of what student activism is. Contestation over legitimacy of narratives shows that there is no single truth. It is against a backdrop of the existence of these different “truths” or what Foucault (1995:207) terms “regimes of truth” that postmodernists like Baudrillard (1993), Lyotard (1984) and Rorty (1989) contend that truth and knowledge are plural, contextual and historically produced through discourses. Truth becomes plural as each side proclaims its assertions to be true. For instance, the university portrayed students as hooligans and used this portrayal to justify police deployment on campus. On the other hand,
students’ narratives portrayed and dismissed this description as a myth. Students asserted that they only became violent in response to attacks by police which they blamed for destroying doors and windows. In such a situation, truth becomes a fluid concept in terms of the party that started the violence.

The accusations and counter-accusations can be understood using Foucault’s (1972) concept of discourse. Foucault traces the role of discourses in wider social processes of legitimating power, emphasizing the construction of current truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them. Foucault (1980) argued that power and knowledge are interrelated and therefore every human relationship is a struggle and negotiation of power. Foucault further states that power is always present and can both produce and constrain the truth. At the UZ, power lies in the hands of the Vice-Chancellor, Students’ Disciplinary Committees, Dean of Students and the Faculty Deans and the Chairpersons of various departments and, as such, the accusations that these various offices level against students carry weight as they can implement policies to deal with situations which they perceive as going against the university’s expectations. The UZ also uses institutional memory of past behavior of students to back up its arguments as illustrated in its preemptive deployment of the police on campus very time students try to stage a demonstration.

State Repression and Police Brutality

As students demonstrated against the ruling party in the late 1980s particularly on the proposition of the one-party state by the ZANU-PF government and on reports of corruption by government officials, the state decided to silence mounting criticism against some of its policies by using
repressive state laws and policies as well as amending the 1982 UZ Act in 1990. This curtailed academic freedom, institutional autonomy and weakened student activism.

State repression and its impact on student activism can be understood using Althuser’s analysis of what he terms “Repressive State Apparatuses”. Althuser (1970) observes that the state is organized around the specialized structure of coercive agencies and mechanisms. The state uses its repressive apparatuses like the police, the army and the courts to silence student activism at the UZ. In several universities as was noted in the literature review by such scholars as Altbach 1989; O’Rourke 2002; Hong 2002; Robin 2004; Zeilig 2007, student activism was crippled by police brutality. Activists were jailed, tortured and sometimes killed during clashes with the police. Respondents revealed a long history of clashes between students and the police that had such consequences as deaths of students and students sustaining serious injuries. This was accompanied by jailing of activists and the torture they experience while incarcerated discourages them from participating in demonstrations. Althuser (1970) reveals that the basic function of the repressive state apparatuses is to intervene and act in favour of the state and since the UZ is a state university, the state intervenes in favour of the university administration by repressing students through violent and coercive means. The impact of previous memories in shaping the behavior of students can be understood using Foucault’s analysis of the automatic functioning of power. In the Foucauldian framework, the state apparatuses like the army and the police act as a form of “disciplinary gaze” (Foucault 1995) which shapes the behavior of students. These apparatuses become a diagram of power which acts by means of general visibility (Foucault 1995). Past memories of police and army brutality restrains and constraints students from demonstrating even in the absence of the police/army. This is particularly true in
light of Sandura’s assertion that, “There is freedom of speech but no freedom after speech as forces of state repression track down student leaders after inciting student to demonstrate”. Foucault (1995:202-3) argues that power functions not through visibility but through previous experiences when he asserts,

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.

Students police themselves by not demonstrating/protesting to avoid clashing with the police even in the absence of the police. The knowledge that the police can be called onto campus gathered from past experience is enough to deter them from demonstrating. At the UZ students have decided not to demonstrate as they fear being arrested and being expelled/suspended after paying hefty amounts of tuition fees. Such a situation as respondents revealed deterred them from engaging in student activism despite their increasing grievances as it engenders a high degree of self-policing on the students’ part.

It should also be noted that the use of state repressive laws to silence student activism and activities particularly criticisms of government policies and programmes by students is not a new phenomenon in the history of student activism at the UZ. The colonial government of Ian Smith used the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act and the compliant system of courts against students (Mlambo 1995).
The positive relationship that existed between the state and the university stems from the fact that the university is state supervised. This grants the state, through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, some powers to determine students’ activities and events at the university. As Dahrendorf (1959) contends, the distribution of power and authority is the key to understanding social conflict. Lukes (1978) adds on to this by observing that it is mainly the asymmetrical distribution of power and authority conceptualized in terms of control, dependence or inequality that is the source of social conflict. Both the state and the university expect students to conform to the set standards. Dahrendorf (1959) refers to this as role expectation. The university defines how students should behave through the UZ Act. The university and the state on one end and students on the other have conflicts of interests which can be defined in terms of role expectations. Students revealed that they expect the university authorities to create an environment that allows academic freedom and freedom of association, expression and assembly and, above all, to create an environment that is conducive for learning whereas the University authorities expect students to comply with university regulations.

Dahrendorf (1959) states that role expectations are not internalized but that an individual or group is simply confronted with them. Groups or individuals can decode whether to accept or reject the role bestowed on them. Dahrendorf (1959:180) further states that individuals form “real interest groups” to resist and challenge roles bestowed upon them. For Dahrendorf, interest groups are the real agents of group conflict. Students at the UZ resisted some of the university’s policies by engaging the university authorities and, when engagement failed, by demonstrating/protesting. Dahrendorf (1964:6) comments that, “The rejection, however, is
sanctioned negatively. The normative is however replaced by coercion of sanctions which are to guarantee conformity with expectation”. The university and the state devised policies to coerce students to conform to their expectations.

The university and the state introduced the 1990 UZ Amendment Act with the aim of coercing students to conform to their expectations. For instance, Sandura’s period of suspension which was passed by the Student Disciplinary Committee was considered small by the Vice Chancellor and he extended it. Cheater (1990) observes that while there were several cases of students misbehavior on campus, this alone did not justify amending the law governing the university as this could have been dealt with through existing university disciplinary structures. Mlambo (1995) argues that offices of the Dean of Students, Registrar, Student Disciplinary Committees and Faculty Deans were compelled to support the decisions of the Vice-Chancellor because the majority of them were appointees.

The 1990 UZ Amendment Act and other government legislations such as AIPPA and POSA were considered by students as “draconian” and intended to cripple and silence student activism through facilitation of dramatic increase in government interference in the daily activities of the university. Government functionaries increasingly treated the university as if it was a state-controlled institution. This is not peculiar to Zimbabwe as studies by Omari and Mihyo (1991) indicate that this is the case in most African state universities. There is a mixture of state laws and university Codes of Conduct in punishing students. Omari and Mihyo called such a scenario “double jeopardy” or “double jurisdiction” as students are often punished by both the state
through detention, imprisonment and loss of scholarship and the university through expulsion, rustication and withholding of examination results.

The asymmetrical distribution of power and authority with the university and state wielding much of the power has been the greatest source of conflict between the university and students. Dahrendorf (1959) sees social conflicts as being the provision of the opportunity for social change and progress. He observes, “Conflicts are not so much the cause of change but merely determine its course and its morphology”. As students demonstrated and protested against the university and the state, the state and the university crafted stringent measures to curb student activism. Respondents explained that increased silence of student activism at a time when students were facing numerous problems in the 2009-2012 phase was mainly because of the increased use of “draconian laws” by both the state and the university in contrast to the first phase in particular.

**Conclusion**

This study explored the nature and dynamics of student activism at the UZ and explained why there has been increase in the number of student concerns which has ironically been accompanied by increased silence on the part of student activism. Student activism at the UZ since independence in 1980 has three distinct phases. These phases were crafted on the basis of the responses that were given by respondents. The causes, nature and purpose of student activism varied with each phase as students encountered varying challenges and correspondingly employed various strategies to articulate their concerns. This study also interpreted student activism within the definitions that were provided by students and university authorities.
Accusations and counter-accusations characterize students and authorities’ narratives as each side defends and considers its definition of student activism and viewpoint as true.

This study explained student activism within the framework of Ralf Dahrendorf’s conflict theory and Michel Foucault’s analysis of power. Using this theory and concepts, the study established that the asymmetrical distribution of power and authority was the cause of conflict. The study revealed that the various university offices vested with power define how students are expected to behave using the UZ Act. Conflict becomes inherent as students resist some of the university’s policies that are advanced by these offices.

Student activism influences political, social and economic changes and is also affected by these factors. Different phases of student activism were shaped by changes in the environment outside the university and also conditions at the university. The study identified such changes in both the external and internal environment and presented the factors that incapacitated student activism from 2009 to 2012 to such an extent that there was an increase in the number of student concerns which ironically was accompanied by increased silence of student activism in challenging these issues. SRC elections were held on 12 March but the researcher failed to interview SRC leaders since some of them were suspended on 4 April 2012 and others declined to be interviewed fearing that he was a spy of the university.
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