



Chapter 4

A Pressured Manhood? The *Chi-UBA* ‘Antics’ of Male Students

The subject of concern of this chapter is masculinity as ‘performance’. I examine two senses in which the dominant form of masculinity at the UZ, which is referred to as *chi-UBA* by students, is a ‘performance’. First, it is a performance in the everyday sense of ‘putting on a show’. Second, *chi-UBA* is a performance in the Goffmanian sense of being ‘all activity [by] an individual which occurs during a period marked by continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers’ (Lemert 1997: 97). In the first sense, performances exist in the realm of play-acting (Edwards 2006) whereas in its second sense, performance is about how individuals ‘highlight the common, official values of the society in which [they] belong’. In drawing on Goffman, I deviate slightly from Butler’s notion of performativity, as discussed with regard to female students in chapter two. Instead of focusing on the largely unconscious performance of gender roles, as she might, I examine how the self-conscious performances of *chi-UBA* constitute a key aspect of male gender roles at UZ. Goffman’s reading of performance resonates closely with Butler’s concept of performativity, which was discussed in chapter two. In this chapter I deviate slightly from Butler’s concept, which focuses primarily on the (unconscious) performance of (gender) roles in order to focus instead on how self-conscious performances like *chi-UBA*, constitute a key role for male students at the UZ campus.

The performances that constitute *chi-UBA*, that is, the state of being a male student or *UBA*, mark two particular states of manhood that are available to male students at the institution. On one hand, *chi-UBA* performances are meant to distinguish male students at the UZ from other young men in the country, including male students from other universities. In this way, male students can be said to be defining themselves as liminal figures who exist somewhat ‘outside’ mainstream Zimbabwean society, and for whom certain societal rules do not apply. This is why most *chi-UBA* performances entail physical and verbal confrontations with authority figures and are normally enacted when male students are in interaction with these authorities. Herein lies the first key idea: that the *chi-UBA* performances enacted in the context of relations with outsiders represent an oppositional or militant masculinity, which is intended as a challenge to a gerontocratic social order that dominates the country’s politics and economics. This oppositional, or militant, masculinity enables male students to articulate and embody their frustrations with the ‘failed promises of modernity and democracy’ (Ferguson 1999) under a geriatric leadership as well as to express their discontent at the manner in which the ZANU-PF led government has ruined the country’s economy. There is no doubt that male students at the UZ consider themselves to be political actors who have an important role to play in public life (Zeilig 2007; Mlambo 1995; Gaidzanwa 1993). A large part of male student militancy can therefore be read as a response to what they see as attempts by authority figures on and off campus to exclude them from active participation in the political system. As will become apparent, student activism, or militancy, is a decidedly male territory at the UZ campus, and is central to notions of *chi-UBA*. It is for that reason that I have chosen to examine it through the lens of performing masculinity.

When, on the other hand, *chi-UBA* is performed in the context of male students' interactions with each other and in their interactions with their female counterparts, it serves to distinguish '*UBA chaiyo*' (i.e. real, authentic, unadulterated) from 'those who are *UBA*'s by virtue of being enrolled at the UZ', as one of my male informants put it. This is done in much the same way that many societies distinguish between 'real men' and 'lesser men' (see Niehaus 2005; Gutmann 1997; Heald 1994). Herein lies the second key idea: namely, that male students display a 'complicit' masculinity in their interactions with fellow students (Connell 1996), which in turn serves to reproduce male domination as well as reproduce class and ethnicity-based hierarchies at the institution. Indeed, more often than not, *chi-UBA* masculinity reflects an ethnic *chi-Shona* masculinity and is not, in this case, as unique to the UZ as male students paint it.

The last major idea that I explore is the fact that, regardless of where *chi-UBA* is enacted—on campus or off-campus; in a female residence room or in a public taxi—and regardless of the reasons for its enactment—to challenge a gerontocratic national politics or to reproduce gender, class and ethnic hierarchies—*chi-UBA* is not just about *doing* masculinity, but is also about *speaking* masculinity. By this I mean that *chi-UBA* is a speech-based masculinity, largely predicated on 'intellect', and mediated through the spoken word. What is spoken and how it is spoken is central to its performance; cleverly constructed sentences and the creative use of specific words separate '*UBA chaiyo*' from the generality of the male student population.

The first half of the chapter focuses on male students' confrontations with authority figures, such as security personnel on campus, the university administration and state officials, especially the riot police. I trace the specific things that male students do

and say during these confrontations and I draw extensively from two student publications, *Vision Magazine* and *Campus Magazine* in order to show the important role that speech plays in *chi-UBA* masculinity. In the last half of the chapter I focus on how gender, class and ethnicity-based tensions are played out, particularly during Student Executive Council (SEC) elections as well in students' everyday interactions with each other. This material provides the necessary background information for understanding *chi-UBA* sexuality, which is the subject matter of the next chapter. As I will show, the militancy that underpins *chi-UBA* masculinity, for instance, greatly influences male students' views and approaches regarding love, sex, intimacy and romance.

Student Activism and the Shaming of Authority Figures

As alluded to in the previous chapters, all male students who are enrolled at the UZ are said to belong to an imaginary 'University Bachelors Association', hence the acronym *UBA*, pronounced as 'you-bah' by students. Manwa (1995:77) traces the origin of the term to the year 1993/4 and states that it originally referred to 'any male student who did not have a girlfriend on campus or was shy about proposing love to women'. Over time, she argues, it came to refer to 'all campus hooligans who abuse alcohol...and have no respect for women' (ibid). Manwa goes on to note that these 'hooligans' were active in student politics on campus and that 'because of student apathy, they [*UBA*'s] alone participate in [student council] elections' (ibid). Manwa's description, despite its disapproving tone, highlights two important *UBA* characteristics that will be explored in this chapter and the next. The first relates to male students' sexuality (e.g. their lack of

courtship skills) and will be discussed extensively in chapter five, while the second points to male students' militancy (or 'hooliganism' as Manwa calls it) and political activism, which is the main subject of discussion in this chapter.

University students in Africa have always been at the forefront of agitating for political change and for better governance in their countries (see Zeilig 2007; Byaruhanga 2006; Lovell 2006; Abdullah 2005; Ivaska 2005; Amoa 1979; Burawoy 1976). University students generally consider their role in society to be that of holding national leaders accountable to democratic principles; they also see themselves as the 'voice of the voiceless' and the 'conscience of the nation' (Byaruhanga 2006: 76). At the UZ, students were instrumental in resisting colonial rule and in building nationalist movements throughout the seventies (Mlambo 1995; Cefkin 1975). They also challenged the one-party state proposed by President Mugabe in the early nineties and exposed rampant corruption in the government. As a result of protests following the 'Willowgate scandal', a guilty minister committed suicide (Gaidzanwa 2007). In the mid-nineties, student activism was largely fanned by dissatisfaction with the government's mishandling of the economy. During this period, students aligned themselves with the workers movement and participated in protest action against the privatization of various social services (Zeilig 2007). From 2000 onwards, UZ students were no longer just questioning state policies, but were actively supporting the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

According to a number of male students I spoke to, *chi-UBA* masculinity is predicated on the following three principles: rebelliousness, radicalism and non-conformity to authority. It is these characteristics that most male students exhibit in their

interactions with particular authority figures on and off campus. Consider an incident that happened one evening during the 2006 orientation week. The UZ hosted a cultural event to celebrate a twinning project between itself and a South Korean university. The event was intended to be a big public affairs undertaking and was thus held in the New Lecture Theatre, which sits a maximum of five hundred people. The event was graced by a number of dignitaries, including the Vice Chancellor, University Council members and the South Korean Ambassador, among others. The press was also in attendance. The event was open to the public, hence hundreds of students also attended. This was somewhat surprising: university authorities are usually wary of inviting students to such official events because of the latter's unpredictable and volatile behaviour.

The students in attendance behaved relatively well during the main event (perhaps because most of the audience was made up of the new students). However, when the event ended and an announcement was made that food would be served outside, there was pandemonium. Students ignored the directive to remain seated until all the dignitaries had exited the venue; instead, they rushed outside and headed for the tables where the food for the dignitaries had been laid out. The organizers of the cultural event had set up two separate eating areas: one for the important guests, which included expensive wines and fancy cocktail food and another for students, which, as could be expected, had less glamorous food and drink. I stood off at a safe distance and watched as the private security firm that had been hired for the night tried, unsuccessfully, to control the crowd of students. I quickly made my exit as soon as the campus security arrived with their baton sticks in tow, ready to beat up the students.

Although order was eventually restored, the male students I spoke to the following day informed me that the ‘damage’ had already been done as a large part of the dignitaries’ food and drinks had been consumed before the security officials restored order. Amid much laughter, the male students talked about how they had stuffed food into their pockets and students who had grabbed bottles of wine. When I asked why students had behaved that way, Thula, a third year male student, explained that the looting of food had been a ‘typical *chi-UBA* moment’ [*chaive chi-UBA chaicho*]. Other students described the event as a *UBA* ‘performance’: *UBA raka pefoma nezuro*, literally translating to, ‘Yesterday *UBA*’s performed’. According to Thula, the looting was initiated by older male students as a way of drawing attention to the poverty on campus as well as to the mismanagement of limited resources by university authorities. Thula also explained that students were unhappy with the fact that the UZ was willing to host ‘expensive parties’ and yet was unwilling to fix the plumbing system on campus or assist cash-strapped students. In brief, they did not see any immediate or direct benefits of the twinning project with the Korean university.

It must be noted that there was also a misunderstanding about which Korea was sponsoring the event. Many students—and indeed, many Zimbabweans—do not readily distinguish between North and South. The problem is, three years after Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980, the government unleashed soldiers who had been specially trained in North Korea to ‘stifle’ political dissent in the southern parts of the country. These soldiers were notorious for their brutality and thousands of people were killed, maimed and beaten up (*Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Report 1997*; Lindgren 2003). More generally, North Korea has been very vocal in its support of ZANU-PF. ‘Korea’ is

therefore looked at rather suspiciously by many Zimbabweans as is the government's current 'Look East' policy, which seeks to strengthen trade relations with countries like China, Malaysia and Korea in an attempt to reduce Zimbabwe's reliance on the West.

At first glance, the looting incident might appear to have been mere clowning around by a group of young men (and indeed might have been so for the majority of first year students present), but on closer inspection, it is not. Looting of the dignitaries' food and behaving disgracefully was intended to shame the authorities in two ways: first, it would give the foreign dignitaries the impression that students at the institution were generally rowdy and badly behaved, thus reflecting on UZ authorities failure to instill the necessary discipline in their students. Secondly, and much closer to the reality at the institution, the looting of food was meant to inform the 'wider world' of the poverty existing in the country as a whole, and on campus specifically. Poverty in this sense can also be read as a form of shorthand referring to the national economic crisis that had been caused by poor policies and rampant corruption at the top echelons of government.

The excessiveness of the looting incident, such as stuffing of food into pockets, is just one way that the *chi-UBA* principle of radicalism is applied in practice. As many male students told me, radicalism is about being unpredictable and engaging in the most shocking ways when people least expect it. Shaming authority figures is a carefully thought out and deliberate *chi-UBA* strategy that male students use to hold university and national leaders accountable. It is certainly not a sign of immaturity, which is what some scholars have suggested is the case with the 'amusements' and 'pranks' that young men engage in, particularly in their dealings with adults and other authority figures (see Pace 2004; Moffat 1989). Shaming authority figures allows university students to cut national

leaders down to size, so to speak, and to demarcate the UZ as a supposedly democratic and egalitarian space that operates along a totally different set of rules than the rest of society. In fact, male students often argue that the UZ is a country in itself as it has its own constitution and electorate. *Chi-UBA* thus enables male students to perform what they consider to be their most important role as university students: that of being the ‘conscience of the nation’. *Chi-UBA* performances can also be viewed as representing everyday forms of resistance or what Scott (1985) termed the ‘weapons of the weak’. Scott argued that this form of resistance is often covert and does not lead to open revolt.

***Chi-UBA* ‘antics’ and the performance of an ‘oppositional’ masculinity**

‘Non-conformity to authority’ is another key *chi-UBA* attribute that male students enact via their *chi-UBA* performances. Non-conformity enables students to safeguard those values that they believe are important in a democratic society, in particular the freedom of speech and association. This non-conformity plays itself out in male students’ interactions with campus security and the police, who are seen as the main agents that that the state and university authorities use to stifle students’ right to freedom of expression and association.

The following incident is illustrative. The second day of the 2006 academic year began like any other day during orientation week. The new students were going about their usual registration business, which involved standing for hours in a variety of long queues: a queue to pay one’s tuition and residential fees; a queue to attend a health briefing at the Student Clinic; a queue to collect or submit student loan forms; a queue to

collect the keys to one's room; different queues to see the many authority figures who were necessary to make one's stay on campus a bit more bearable, such as the Dean of Students, the Accommodation Officer and the Campus Counselor. That lasted until after noon, when a booming voice on a loudspeaker abruptly changed the tenor of the day, and indeed the tenor of the remaining week, with the following statement: 'Watch out! GBs [Green Bombers] going by! Clap for them! [*Chenjerai! Ma-GB ari kupfuura. Omberai*]' The speaker was a member of the Students Executive Council (SEC) and he was informally addressing 'the Union', as the general student body is called. Within an hour of uttering the statement, the student council tent, which it had pitched as part of its orientation week display, had been violently torn down by the 'green bombers' and the Vice Chancellor had issued a directive prohibiting the student council from participating in the rest of orientation week activities. A cloak of tension enveloped the university for a couple of days following this incident and there were real fears that the student council would organize a violent demonstration in retaliation. However, nothing happened.

The term 'GB' refers to campus security personnel, who have been nicknamed 'green bombers' because of the green uniforms that they wear. The name also has derogatory overtones, as a 'green bomber' is the name used by most Zimbabweans (and not just students) to refer to a large fly, which, as one student magazine described '[has] green eyes [and] which love[s] rubbish dumps and dirty public toilets' (*Vision Magazine*, April 2001 Page 13)⁹. More significantly, the term has deep-rooted political connotations. Unemployed youths who undergo 'national youth service' training in

⁹ The magazine was the initiative of the Catholic Chaplaincy at the UZ. In 2001, the editor of the magazine was a female student, although the majority of articles were from male students, particularly members of the student council as well as politically active male students. Few female students ever contributed articles, although the magazine was popular among both female and male students.

camps that are managed by the ruling party—ZANU-PF—are also widely known in the country as ‘green bombers’, again because of the colour of their uniforms and because ‘like greenflies, they destroy everything living’ (Lindgren 2003:6). These national youth training camps were established in 2001. According to Zeilig (2007:144), they were an ‘attempt to politicize sections of unemployed and rural youths and should be seen as only one part of the regime’s effort to confront a social base to confront the emergent opposition movement’. For many students, therefore, the term ‘green bomber’ denotes a traitor as well as a government stooge. Green bombers have been implicated in many cases of politically motivated violence, particularly during the 2002 and 2007 elections.

The council member’s remark represents a typical *chi-UBA* instance and also points to the intergenerational tensions and anxieties that exist between male students and older male authority figures, both at the institution specifically, and in the country as a whole. In the incident above, the student council member was expressing disdain for the type of authority represented by the green bombers, which is seen as repressive and undemocratic in ways that mimic broader politics in the country. As the full story behind the incident unfolded, it emerged that the confrontation was indeed political: earlier that morning the student council member had apparently been playing music whose lyrics derided the ruling party while promoting the opposition party. At the time of the incident, national elections were only six months away and political tensions in the country could already be felt. By playing the song in question, the student council was publicly voicing its support for the opposition in a place that, over the years, has increasingly come under the direct influence of the ruling party.

In fact, the government had intensified its efforts to stifle student activism at the UZ by immediately serving suspension letters to presidents of the student council as soon as the election results were announced. A student council member that I interviewed explained that suspension meant that a student was not allowed into campus until a disciplinary hearing is held. The council member further noted that letters of suspension were sometimes served to all those students who were elected into the three most powerful student council positions, namely the president, vice-president and the secretary-general. Furthermore, according to the council member, in the past three years the Student Executive Council had not been allowed to hold general meetings with students even though the student constitution required the council to hold two general meetings every semester.

“The communication channel has been closed out for us. For instance, when you approach the Dean [i.e. the dean of Students] for help he will tell you that he is busy. The VC [i.e. the vice chancellor] will not entertain you at all, so there is no link between students and the administration. This is a deliberate and calculated move by the authorities.”

The council member observed that this situation had left student councils greatly weakened and unable to function effectively. He further noted that this situation had also affected the quality of students who campaign for positions in the student council. This was because many students had come to associate the student council with suspension and expulsion and were therefore reluctant to participate in student activism at that level.

Green bombers have played an active role in enforcing repression on campus. They often do this by spying on the activities of the student council, particularly sniffing out any talk of a student demonstration. It is not surprising therefore that the two green

bombers who happened to walk by the student council's tent that afternoon, with their baton sticks visibly displayed, were immediately suspected of spying on the student council on behalf of the university authorities. The statement was therefore uttered in order to provoke and to expose the duplicity of the green bombers.

Part of the students' disaffection with them stems from the view that they not only inform the UZ authorities of planned demonstrations, but also go on to inform the riot police and by so doing align themselves with what the majority of Zimbabweans consider to be an autocratic government. The brutality of the riot police is legendary and has, in the recent past claimed some students' lives and accounted for many serious injuries. Another dimension to the incident was the fact that students were unhappy with the fact that university authorities had dedicated a daily bus service to ferry green bombers (and other workers) to and from the city centre and yet the same authorities had refused to do the same for non-resident students. The student council was piqued by this preferential treatment in favour of green bombers.

It is this complicity as well as the role of the green bombers in brutally beating up students during demonstrations that led a student magazine to liken the green bombers to 'Green Iscariots'. This was a play on the biblical Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus with a kiss; the label was applied to the green bombers after a particularly brutal demonstration in November 2000, which saw them beat up female students *and* students with disabilities during a demonstration. According to the magazine, until then, 'they [green bombers] had never been as brutal, never wantonly destroyed property before and never looted students' property before' (*Vision Magazine* April 2001:13).

It is with this broader political background in mind that the confrontation between the student council member and university authorities should be interpreted. Why did a seemingly straightforward statement elicit such a violent response from the authorities? Among the Shona, juniors traditionally greet their seniors by shaking hands followed by the clapping of one's hands in a deferential manner, as one enquires after the health of the senior (Jacobson-Widding 2000; Schmidt 1996). By calling on students to engage in an action that one typically performs when greeting elders and other important people, the student council member was indexing the power-hungry nature of campus security and challenging a patriarchal masculinity which is based on the unquestioned authority of one's seniors (Cornwall 2003; also Bourdieu 2001 and van den Berghe 1977). The irony of the student council member's statement was not lost on the green bombers, hence the resulting confrontation.

A second major group that male students target via their *chi-UBA* performances is the police force. Male students interact voluntarily with members of the Zimbabwean police during weekend soccer matches and involuntarily during campus disturbances. According to Thula, who was an avid soccer player and one of my key informants, the *chi-UBA* performed for the police typically takes the form of songs. In one of these songs, which is sung specifically during soccer matches with the police, the lyrics go: 'Our claim to fame is our intelligence...we were not recruited on the basis of our height, running ability or ugliness'. It juxtaposes the ostensibly superior intellect-based masculinity of male students to the inferior physique-based masculinity of the police. UBA's make fun of what are widely held to be police recruitment criteria, emphasizing the correct height (the taller the better), athleticism (the faster the better) and

fearsomeness (the uglier the better) and downplaying the importance of education or academic intelligence. Both colonial and post-colonial governments used this criterion. Although students are aware that allegiance to the ruling party is perhaps a more important criterion for being recruited into the police force nowadays than one's physical attributes, they still refer to the latter because the police find it particularly upsetting (see Zeilig 2007). Given the ever-increasing levels of political repression in the country, the police-force has almost become synonymous with irrationality and an inability to think logically in many Zimbabweans' minds, but nowhere is this idea expressed more forcefully than at the UZ. Members of the police force are seen as blindly following orders given to them by their superiors and it is this unquestioning attitude that male students strongly despise and poke fun at via their *chi-UBA* performances.

In perhaps the worst incident of police brutality ever witnessed at the UZ, the riot police invaded the university on the evening of 8 April 2001 in order to stifle a demonstration. Ironically, the demonstration was not directed at national or university authorities, but rather at 'NABA's', the non-student suitors supposedly robbing UBA's of the female student population.¹⁰ A first year male student was beaten to death as he tried to flee his tear-gas filled room. According to the student-run *Campus Magazine*¹¹, 'the police knock[ed] down doors [and] teargas[ed] halls of residence [and] wait[ed] for those bold enough to jump from the first and second floors through the windows' (*Campus Magazine*, October 2001, p4). In a rare show of solidarity with students, the Acting Dean of Students at the time was moved to boldly comment, during a memorial service in

¹⁰ This conjunction of the sexual and political is not incidental, as will become clear in the next chapter.

¹¹ *Campus Magazine* was started by two male students in 1998, who were also its editors. Unlike *Vision Magazine* which was run by the church, *Campus Magazine* was an independent publication and relied extensively on its sales in order to be self sustaining. Most of the contributors to the magazine were male.

which the Vice Chancellor and the Minister of Higher Education attended, that ‘I can only be a Dean of Students when there are [actually] students [on campus] and not when [students] are killed in such cold blood’ (*Campus Magazine*, October 2001, p7). The secretary-general of the then student council was reported by the magazine to have ‘failed to contain his anger’ during the memorial service and to have jumped on stage and, grabbing the microphone away from the Dean of Students, informed the Minister of Higher Education who was at the memorial service that ‘he [the minister] was no longer regarded by students as their minister, but [as the minister] of the National Parks and Wildlife since the UZ had turned into a game park where police came to kill’ (*ibid*).

Police brutality intensified after 2001, and although there have not been any more student deaths to date, it is commonplace for the riot police to invade the campus at night and fire teargas directly into student residences. Indeed, during my fieldwork, I was surprised one morning when some of my female research participants informed me that fully armed riot police had visited campus the previous night—well after 10pm—after a fire had broken out in one of the female residences. University authorities suspected that the opposition party, via some male students, was behind this act of arson¹². The residence in question was evacuated and, according to my female informants, all the students in it were herded off to an open field nearby where they were detained, under heavy police guard for at least an hour, while the cause of the fire was investigated. Guns were pointed at them the whole time and no one was allowed to get up or leave. A police helicopter was even called in and it hovered above the group of female student for a while.

¹² The opposition party has regularly been accused, by the ruling party, of using university students to commit various acts of violence around the country.

It is these excessive displays of brute force, meant to stifle freedom of expression, which *chi-UBA* performances challenge. All three principles of a militant *chi-UBA* masculinity—rebelliousness, radicalism and non-conformity to authority—were coded into the actions of the student council member described above. His impatience (grabbing of the microphone) and the rude and mocking manner in which he addressed the latter symbolized his own frustration, and that of the students he represented, with state bureaucracy and societal duplicity which required him and other students, as juniors, to act deferentially towards political elites simply because of the symbolic and economic capital that the latter wield (see McKittrick 2003). The comic nature of some of the *chi-UBA* performances—such as the student council member’s analogy that the UZ has been reduced to a zoo and must therefore fall under the ministry of wildlife, not education—belie the larger political project that such flippant and seemingly childish comments mask¹³.

Thula, my male informant, described *chi-UBA* performances as ‘antics’. The term is quite apt because it does not simply reference wanton playfulness, but a planned playfulness that is intended for a specific audience. ‘Antics’ are not random acts but carefully thought out performances that put a lot at stake for the performers. It can be argued that male students deliberately enact *chi-UBA* in comic ways as it allows them to get away with comments and actions that they otherwise would be prevented from enacting or uttering, given state repression of all forms of dissent. Again, this type of protest action is not unique to the UZ, but is a common in the other universities in the continent, especially during periods of autocratic rule (see Sichone 1999 on Zambian

¹³ See Sichone (1999) and Mbembe (1992) for a detailed discussion on how vulgarity is used to shame pompous politicians.

students; Lovell 2006 on Togolese students). *Chi-UBA* performances that involve direct confrontation with political and university authorities also involve a logic of grabbing opportunities as they present themselves. UZ students, like most Zimbabweans, do not have easy access to these authorities, hence when they find themselves in the presence of these authorities they will make the most of their chances. The seriousness of *chi-UBA* antics is further evidenced by the fact that a large number of *UBA*'s who have gone on to hold key decision-making positions in the opposition as well as in influential civil society movements. Former student leaders like Tafadzwa Musekiwa and Job Sikhala were elected as parliamentarians a few years after graduating from the university, while many other former student leaders are heading key civil society organizations.

It must also be noted that contemporary student activism has a high commercial value for some students. Many student activists are assured of jobs in the burgeoning non-governmental sector in the country. A student council member that I interviewed observed that a sizeable number of council members who have been suspended or expelled have been offered scholarships to study abroad in European universities, by sympathetic countries. He was of the opinion that some students were only interested in using their positions in the student council to 'get exposed and make connections' with regards their professional development. Zeilig (2007:255) refers to this phenomenon as the 'commodification of resistance in Zimbabwe'. The economic crisis contributed to a situation where the government lost its hold on students since it could no longer guarantee them lucrative jobs upon graduation. In fact, if anything, most students I spoke to during fieldwork looked forward to finding employment with non-governmental organizations as these paid better salaries, usually in foreign currency, and offered better

working conditions. This is perhaps one of the many contradictions in contemporary Zimbabwe. From 2000 onwards, and despite repressive state policies, there has been an upsurge in the number of non-governmental organizations whose main agenda is the promotion of human rights, social justice and good governance in the country (see also Zeilig 2007). Many student leaders and student activists have secured jobs with organizations like Crisis Coalition in Zimbabwe, the Student Solidarity Trust, Bulawayo Dialogue and the Combined Harare Residents Association. The Kubatana Trust of Zimbabwe, an online-based organisation, contains a list of at least thirty Harare-based non-governmental organizations that are working on good governance issues in the country.¹⁴

Homosociality and Induction into *Chi-UBA* Masculinity

This last half of the chapter focuses on students interactions with each other. I argue that the *chi-UBA* that is performed within the context of students' interactions with each other has vastly different meanings than the *chi-UBA* that is performed in male students' interactions with outsiders (i.e. non-UZ students). An investigation of intra-*UBA* relations reveals some interesting departures from commonly held views regarding the construction of masculinities among young men. While a number of scholars have observed that young men often display their masculinity through acts of physical violence against each other, and not just in their relations with women (see Edwards 2006; Abdullah 2005; Morrell 2001; Gilmore 1980), this is not the case at the UZ. In fact,

¹⁴ Visit (http://kubatana.net/html/sectors/sector_cont.asp?sector=DEMGG).

physical confrontation among male students is quite rare, and when it does occur it is often almost always linked to excessive alcohol consumption. Occasionally, though, physical violence does break out during student demonstrations, as part of the student council's 'mobilization' strategy. Here, students who are seen going about their daily business, rather than joining a planned protest action, are 'geologised', that is, stones are thrown at them initially as a warning and eventually as a direct assault. While physical violence among male students is rare, verbal confrontations, on the other hand, are much more common in male students' everyday interactions. The low levels of physical violence among male students can be explained in a number of ways.

According to most of my male informants, in addition to being made aware of the three *chi-UBA* principles of radicalism, rebelliousness and non-conformity to violence, first year male students are also informed that they are now part of a 'brotherhood' and that, as such, they have an obligation to look after each other. The concept of a 'brotherhood' also draws students' attention to the fact that they are now part of a 'community', which must defend itself against a common enemy: that is, the government and other authorities. Male students are also taught that 'an injury to one is an injury to all', which is the slogan that has been adopted by workers movements around the world. Although female students are exposed to these ideas during orientation week, when they attend a 'compulsory' hour-long political education session offered by the student council, it must be noted that politics is largely considered to be a 'male' activity. Furthermore, the courage to confront violent repression is a valued masculine attribute. This is why political education for male students continues throughout the year and is typically offered either at night in a male residence or on weekends at the soccer fields.

Male students admitted that these sessions were not ‘female friendly’ because of the intensity of *chi-UBA* ‘antics’ displayed there. Many male students laughed when I enquired what would happen if a female student attended these meetings. They explained that she would probably never attend such meetings again because of the ‘raw and vulgar language’ that is used at the meetings.

The second possible explanation why physical violence among male students is rare is that *chi-UBA* masculinity is predicated less on physical strength and more on intellect. Therefore, even though sport, particularly soccer, occupies an important role in the social lives of male students, *chi-UBA* is not necessarily based on sportsmanship in the same way that sports are typically used as tests of ‘real’ manhood in other contexts (Majors 2001; Messner 2001). At the UZ, it is active participation in student politics and regularly displaying the three *chi-UBA* qualities of radicalism, rebelliousness and non-conformity to authority that make one a *UBA chaiyo*. Soccer matches, while entertaining, are important in so far as they provide male students with safe spaces in which to meet *as males* and learn about *chi-UBA*. As one male student explained:

“The sports fields are the breeding ground for *chi-UBA*...When you attend soccer matches, that is where you get all the current information...that is where all the planning takes place, such as whether there will be a demonstration or not. That is where everything is done, because the chances of the CIO [Central Intelligence Office] following you to the sports fields are very low”.

Another male student I knew had a slightly different take on the role of the soccer fields in nurturing *chi-UBA*. He explained that the process of becoming a ‘*UBA chaiyo*’ started long before one even enrolled as a student at the institution, and that this process

culminated in one's first attendance to a soccer match. He likened this culmination to a 'baptism':

“You get to hear from the people who have been at the college [i.e. UZ] that *UBA*'s are like this and like that. And the first day that you come to the college, during orientation, even the Senior Proctor and the Dean when they address you they tell you that *UBA*'s are like this and this. And then you think [to yourself] that, even someone as big [i.e. important] as the Senior Proctor knows what *UBA*'s are like? Then the SEC addresses you too: ‘Ahoy *UBA*! Etc’. and all they do is fill you up with all this information that we are against everyone, especially the *GB*'s because they did this and that. We as *UBA*'s do this and we do that. Then you begin to realize that this is what they [other people] meant when they said *UBA*'s are like so and so. So, somehow you bring the memories and all the things you were told...eventually, you are a *UBA*. And when you go to soccer matches, ah, you are now going to be baptized. That's like the baptism of fire. There will be lots of other *UBA*'s there singing vulgar songs, harassing people and yelling [at them] ‘you are not learned’ [hamuna kudzidza]”.

Despite their different takes on the subject, both male students are in agreement on the importance of the sports fields as a site for the production of a *chi-UBA* masculinity.

In the exclusively male spaces of the soccer fields, members of the student council address *UBA*'s, and it is here that the latter, especially first year males, pick up the appropriate ways of doing and saying *chi-UBA*. In this sense, the UZ sports fields approximate the Shona *dare*. In his highly influential paper on Shona masculinity, Shire (1994: 147) explains that the *dare*, defined as the traditional meeting point for men, is a place ‘in which men can show their prowess through the skilful use of language and embellish particular masculinities’. Likewise, it is indeed during these all-male meetings that male students show off their linguistic creativity, by either coining new words (or ways of speaking) or composing new songs to be sung at student demonstrations and during soccer matches. Just as in the *dare*, where adolescent boys learn how to be men from their elders, at the sports fields, *UBA*'s learn how to be ‘*UBA chaiyo*’ from the

student council and from older male students. *Kutaura zvinyadzi*, which translates to ‘being vulgar’, is one language skill that male students get to perfect in these all-male spaces, which they then make use of in their daily interactions with each other, and with female students and authority figures.

Consider the following comment by the vice president of the student council, made during a forum organized by SHAPE Zimbabwe Trust as part of its World AIDS Day commemorations on campus. The student council member contributed to a debate on condom negotiation:

“I like to drive a point with passion alone... I think that it is of *much paramount importance*, especially at this *highest pinnacle of modern* education...there are some ladies who are so *erudite* and eh, who think above board to make it a sure case that when the guy wants to *screw* them without a condom they always object. But there are those ladies who are so down to earth and they cannot reason around with guys, eh, you know, to deny *peremptorily and vehemently* [sex without condoms]...I think that men should be gentlemen enough to make it a sure case that they have condoms in their rooms provided that they have the *sexual propensity of screwing ladies*.”

The student council member, who was a final year law student, spoke with great aplomb and ceremony. His speech pattern was a typical *chi-UBA* performance: the use of ‘big’ words, such as *peremptorily* and *erudite*, which few ever use in everyday conversation as well as his verbosity were meant to show off his command of the English language. His use of the word ‘screw’ was intended to shock those present because of its vulgarity and unexpectedness. In fact, the first time that he used the word ‘screw’ there were a few gasps of surprise, and when he used it a second time, students (mostly male) erupted into laughter. The student leader’s comments were also tinged with a thinly veiled sexism—‘ladies who cannot reason’—that is a common feature during interactions between female and male students.

Contrast this to the less verbose, but no less shocking, comment made by a different male student in another typical instance of a speech-mediated *chi-UBA* performance. The setting was similarly a SHAPE discussion forum: here, students were debating why female students prefer dating older men and not *UBA*'s. A female student commented that the problem was that 'there are very few gentlemen on campus'. A male student immediately responded: 'Eh, I think that what this sister is saying is **disorder** [*Eh, zvirikutaurwa nasisi ava ndinofunga kuti madhisinyongoro*]'. The male student responded in Shona and he spoke very slowly, enunciating each syllable and pausing for effect just before he used the unexpected word, *madhisinyongoro*. As expected, the comment elicited laughter and deafening applause from the other *UBA*'s present. The word *madhisinyongoro* is a combination of English and Shona: the prefix 'ma' denotes the plural; 'dhis' is derived from the English prefix 'dis', which denotes a negation, while 'nyongoro' is a Shona word which means 'not straight'. The word is difficult to translate, but is generally used by Zimbabweans to denote a chaotic, disorderly and even nonsensical state. An older male academic informed me that the word that was frequently used during the liberation struggle as part of nationalist protest songs aimed at denouncing the colonial government. UZ students sometimes sing these nationalist songs during their demonstrations, and one of the songs in which the word is used goes: *hatidi zve madhisinyongoro*, which means, 'we do not want disorder/chaos/nonsense here'.

This male student, just like the student council leader, was applying the *chi-UBA* principle of radicalism through his speech act. It is the ability to casually throw in such an extreme, and totally unexpected word, which defines most *chi-UBA* performances. A whole *chi-UBA* lexicon, comprising of big words and clever sentences has been

developed over the years at the institution. Aspiring members of the student council typically show off their command of the English language, and hence their *chi-UBA* masculinity, by employing hyperbole, verbosity and imagery in their campaign posters, manifestos and speeches. In 2000, a few male students worded their campaign messages in the following ways. One student promised to be ‘the force of logic not the logic of force’. He made it into the student council and was the president that year. Another poster read: ‘The hour has come to deliver the Union from **decadent** governance; **revitalize** students’ dignity and **grandeur**. No more compromise’. In 2007, a student who was campaigning to be the student council president used the following motto in his posters: ‘Propagation of the negation of the negation’.¹⁵ Other words and phrases have been immortalized by successive student leaders, including the following: *adumburate* and *expagorate* (i.e. to clarify a point); ‘Comrades, we have two options available to us: to demonstrate or to demonstrate!’ ‘Comrades, the administration/government is masturbating on us!’ ‘Comrades, we have been reduced to political condoms: we have been used and carelessly discarded [by the administration]. It is important to also realize that, in addition to denoting *chi-UBA* performances, these forms of oratory also have political currency and enable students to exercise some form of power¹⁶.

As an undergraduate at the institution, a classmate of mine made it into the student council and he never addressed students without throwing in his signature phrase, ‘political harangue’. He always pronounced the word ‘harangue’ in three syllables, as ‘ha-raa-ngoo’. It is through these various performances that first year male students get induced into *chi-UBA* and learn what is expected of them. Let me point out that simply

¹⁵ This is a reference to the philosophy of Hegel, likely picked up from readings in Marxist literature.

¹⁶ See Maurice Bloch’s (1975) edited volume on Political language and oratory in traditional society for a detailed discussion of the role that political language and oratory plays politically.

being a good orator without exhibiting the other key *chi-UBA* attributes is considered elitist, and does not win one too many admirers. In fact, those male students who usually made it into the student council were those who were not only creative in their use of language but who also displayed a willingness to directly confront various authorities as and when the need arose. This brings me to the next key idea that I explore in detail in the section that follows, which is that while in their interactions with campus security and the police, *chi-UBA* performances are tinged with some level of elitism in their interactions with each other—‘we are intelligent and you are not’—elitism among students is viewed as an undesirable trait.

Chi-UBA, Ma-Nose and Class Anxieties

The ‘disorder’ incident described earlier highlights another key point regarding those *chi-UBA* performances: they often also reflect thinly veiled gender, class and ethnic anxieties at the institution. For instance, the female student who made the comment about there being no ‘gentlemen’ on campus belongs to a category of students who are classified as *ma-Nose*, which was explained to me as ‘the lowest thing one can be on campus’ by a male student. *Ma-Nose*¹⁷, which literally translates as ‘the noses’ are despised for not being ‘black enough’. The label derives from the fact that these students are said to speak very nasally—through the nose—in an attempt to sound British or American (see Pattman 2005). The typical *mu-nose* has an upper middle-class background and attended high school at either a private school or a former ‘Group A’ school. The latter refer to

¹⁷ In Shona, the prefix *ma* denotes the plural while *mu* denotes the singular. *Mu-nose* therefore refers to one individual while *ma-nose* refers to more than one individual.

schools that catered for affluent middle-class whites during the colonial era and are thus believed to have higher educational standards than other schools. These were the schools that Zimbabwe's upper middle-class families sent their children to after independence.

Over the years, however, the term *mu-nose* has come to encompass not just an affected accent, but also comportment and any bourgeois tendencies, whether one actually has an affluent middle-class background or not. Therefore, being fashion conscious and preferring designer labels, subsisting on non-campus meals, especially fast foods like pizza and chicken and chips and a preference for American hip hop are just some of the more prominent markers of the *mu-nose* identity. However, UZ students do distinguish between 'real' *ma-nose* and 'fake' or 'wannabe' *ma-nose*: the latter merely pretend to be from well off backgrounds and they often fail to give an authentic *mu-nose* accent.

Turning back to the 'disorder' incident described earlier, the male student's response in Shona was deliberate and was intended to serve as a stark contrast to the '*mu-nose-ness*' of the offending female student. The male student's speech pattern enabled him to not only dismiss and belittle the female student in her capacity as a female, but also in her capacity as a member of a particular social class. Although all female students are stereotyped as materialistic, it is the female *mu-nose* student to whom the label is especially applied. A *mu-nose* female is said to have expensive tastes and very high standards to maintain; she is also said to only prefer a man who has the proverbial 'four C's: car, cash, cellphone and charm, which most *UBA*'s lack.

The silencing of this group of students is therefore a widespread phenomenon at the institution: their opinions are often rudely dismissed in the manner described above or

they are made the objects of scorn in everyday campus conversations and interactions. For instance, a student who is considered to be a *mu-nose* will not make it into the student council and labeling opponents *mu-nose* is one of the most common strategies that is used to de-campaign them. It is also not uncommon for campaigners' posters to be defaced with the words '*mu-nose*'. In fact, in the history of student politics, only once has a *mu-nose* made it into the top student council position of president and this was largely because, despite his nasal accent and good oratory skills, he exhibited the *chi-UBA* traits of radicalism, rebellion and non-conformity to authority. In short, his class airs were limited to his speech and did not affect how he related to other students.

The use of Shona by the male student in question, further reflected unresolved ethnic tensions at the institution. For all their claims of one-ness, the UZ remains deeply divided along ethnic lines. In many ways, *chi-UBA* mirrors the chauvinism of the country's largest ethnic group, the Shona. Others, like the minority Ndebele, exist on the fringes of the university in ways that mirror national politics. Relations between the Ndebele and the Shona can best be described as 'politely civil' following the brief, but bloody, civil war that erupted between 1983 and 1987 and in which Ndebele speakers were accused of being insurgents. The ruthlessness with which this revolt was suppressed has never been forgotten. In 1997 the Catholic Church produced a report, which was promptly banned, cataloguing the atrocities committed by the state between 1983 and 1987 (See the *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Report 1997*). For a while, too, some Ndebele politicians have been lobbying for a federal system of government in the country, as this would give them the autonomy to manage the Matabeleland region, where the Ndebele population is mostly located. However, even though ethnic tensions

gingerly resurface during national elections, they are never violent or lasting. They merely simmer away under the surface.

Male students have replicated this ethnic stratification at the institution. For instance, it is widely known—and accepted—that a Ndebele student can never be elected into the top post of student council president. When I first joined the university in the mid-nineties, there were stories going around that the then vice president of the student council, a very eloquent and charming character, had been cheated out of the post of president because he hailed from Bulawayo—the second largest city, which is also located in the Ndebele heartland of the country. Even though he was ethnically Shona, the fact that he grew up in Ndebele territory and spoke the language made him ‘more Ndebele than Shona’ as far as most students were concerned. As a result, another candidate allegedly sold his votes to the student who eventually became the council president, thereby giving him the majority needed even though he was an alcoholic who lacked any strong leadership skills. While many students, especially Ndebele speaking ones, were unhappy with this situation, outright physical confrontation was kept in check by two factors. First, was the fact that the leadership abilities of the vice president were undeniable and he in effect ran the student council. Secondly, he was an excellent strategist who could effectively negotiate with university authorities and government officials to resolve student grievances.

Towards the end of the nineties, there was another ethnic flare-up at the institution, but this time, it was very violently expressed and the institution was almost shut down by the authorities. A popular Ndebele student, Jethro Mpofu, ran for a position in the student council, and this time, after many foiled attempts at rigging the vote, he

was announced as the new secretary-general. This is considered the second most powerful post after the post of the president. Likewise, it was this student's ethnic identity that was under scrutiny and after he was announced as the winner, an angry mob stormed into his room with the intention of beating him up. He somehow managed to escape and for a whole week the campus was rocked by serious ethnic violence. Many students were injured in these disturbances and the new secretary-general had to lay low for a while. Eventually the riot police were called in and order was restored.

It is interesting to note that the male student who is Ndebele and the *mu-nose* who is male are both stereotyped as being too effeminate.¹⁸ This is in many ways the crux of the matter: *chi-UBA* is inescapably about masculinity, no matter how or to whom it is directed. Most tests of manhood, as a number of scholars have shown (Bourdieu 2001; Halberstam 1998; Gutmann 1997; Heald 1994), involve the rejection of the feminine and this is often achieved by feminizing other men¹⁹. At the UZ, this feminisation takes place within the context of class and ethnic tensions. Both *ma-nose* and Ndebeles are considered to be fashion conscious and to pay more attention to how they dress than typical *UBA*'s, who seem to delight in wearing a mishmash of whatever clothes are available. This lack of care is taken as evidence of their 'hardness' (Jacobsen-Widding 2000).²⁰ *Ma-nose* in particular are not 'hard': *UBA*'s claim that they have never wanted for anything in life and have lived a sheltered and comfortable life. They are perceived as weaklings who spend their time playing middle-class sports like basketball, tennis and

¹⁸ This is one area where stereotypes inside UZ are markedly different from those outside. Amongst most Shona-speakers, Ndebele men are thought categorized as uncontrollably violent.

¹⁹ Ritual homosexuality and male rape in the prisons are some of the more extreme forms that the feminisation of other men takes (see Gear 2005; Mosse 1996; Segal 1990) while accusations of homosexuality are a common strategy adopted by young men in order to feminize their peers (see Willis 1976).

²⁰ Zimbabweans often joke about the so-called 'hard Mashona type', i.e. an uber-masculine Shona man, who is compared (not necessarily unfavourably) to a popular breed of cattle.

cricket rather than so-called manly sports such as soccer (see also Pattman 2005). Finally, *ma-nose* are despised because they are seen to be less committed to the political struggles of the university. They can rely on well-off family members to secure jobs or graduate school opportunities locally or abroad. This lack of interest puts them in the same category as female students, and in many ways, *chi-UBA* is deliberately constructed in such a way as to discourage the participation of both.

Conclusion

Chi-UBA masculinity represented the dominant model of manhood on the UZ campus. This is not to say, however, that it was the only model available to male students. It is important to bear in mind Connell's (1996:164) observation that hegemonic masculinities merely reflect the 'culturally authoritative pattern of masculinity' rather than numeric domination. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinities never exist in isolation but are always surrounded by other types, such as subordinated, marginalized and complicit (ibid). The *chi-UBA* masculinity that existed on the UZ campus was hegemonic in precisely this way: it represented the dominant model of student masculinity even though only a small proportion of the student population engaged in *chi-UBA* performances on a regular basis. For the majority of male students, *chi-UBA* was a strategic identity that they donned and discarded at particular moments, such as during interactions with authority figures and other undesirable individuals, such as *ma-nose* and female students. *Chi-UBA* in this sense is therefore literally a 'performance', in that 'it involves taking on a role, which lives only for as long as the play that one is acting in (Edwards, 2000: 99).

The chapter has also illustrated how *Chi-UBA* masculinity was fraught with contradictions. On one hand, it was about militancy and resisting exclusion from the political process. On the other hand, however, the ethnic, gender and class tensions that were often played out during students' interactions with each other usually mimicked the type of Shona chauvinism and nationalist politics that ZANU-PF was well known for, and despised, by students.²¹ Furthermore, despite their acts of violence towards *ma-nose* students, male students who engaged in *chi-UBA* actually aspired to be members of the middle-class and saw their time at university as the process through which they would realize these aspirations (Pattman 2005). I argue that it is therefore not middle-class-ness per se that male students rejected as much as it was particular aspects of being middle-class. *Chi-UBA* masculinity was about being modern without losing one's 'blackness', and indeed one's 'Shona-ness'.

²¹ This chauvinism often targets Malawian migrant workers and the Ndebele minority, among others.