

Lisa Thelma Sidambe: Rising Fees and the Right to Protest in Zimbabwe

Activism and imagination

I have always been an avid believer in the philosophy that the most inspiring activism is modelled not from the clay of past oppressions but from the clay sourced from future foresights. This is the kind of activism that can animate a whole generation if driven by those who dare dream with much greater audacity and if steered by those whose ideas will stay relevant beyond a single generation's biological and chronological existence. Is the type of campus activism we have seen stemming from the Fees Must Fall movement in Zimbabwe a mirror of this philosophy? At this stage, I propose a hesitant yes.

I was tempted to echo that it is still too early to envision what the eventual outcome of this movement may be but I quickly had to face the reality that as a young Zimbabwean I simply lack the ability to dream beyond today and envision what structure tomorrow might assume. The socio-economic and political environment of my country has robbed me of imagination and the ability to dream and aspire to something greater than scrambling for any limited opportunity. This simply has been the greatest of all crimes against my generation. Even where I and others intellectualise due to a lack of imagination, we can only *think tragically*. A single phrase to capture this: devastatingly frightening!

An intersection of university spaces and imagination

University spaces are meant to be accessed as a matter of right not privilege. Their existence should be accompanied by rigorous intellectual dialogue that translates to action in the form of a demand for change, any kind of change. If we are unable to make that demand due to a non-existing imagination, then our education, acquired locally or abroad, is irrelevant. This is what one of my learned friend brands as a phenomenon of being educated in the wrong things and for purposes that serve a culture of submission and not of activism.

With that background in mind, the Fees Must Fall movement presents numerous opportunities. An opportunity to (re)define the sanctity and integrity of university spaces; a reawakening of an ability to dream, imagine and claim the right to have ambition that can be translated to reality; a restoration of authentic generational dreams that were stolen or were discarded by the wayside to be trampled on; an encouragement to receive education abroad and imagine the numerous ways in which it can translate to innovation and revolution at home. Most importantly, this presents an opportunity to revive the spirit of broader student activism that has, in previous generations, been a major contributor to democratic reform in the country. Embracing this spirit however, does not translate to singing the same tune other student movements have sung before and in the same voice. Our generation calls for relevance and leadership that will distinguish itself by mastering the art of "coping with new challenges and new opportunities."

To those of my generation who have not contributed by way of charged opinion, engaging in animated conversation or taking up the banner of activism on the ground due to indecision, keep this in mind – "the decision not to decide is a paradox that is equal to an idea that expresses nothing but then gives it dimension." Whose idea are you giving dimension?