Students' representations of campus policing during 2016 protests at South African
Universities

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**Abstract**

People protest to convey a message to their governments. Protests in South Africa transpire quite frequently. There is significant distress for the safety of lives in the course of protests. Hence, to make sure that protests remain serene, the police are often deployed. Sadly, however, in the course of so-called serene protests, lives are often endangered and even lost. Student protests in South Africa have been characterized by outbursts of police brutality, particularly the 2016 student protests across the country. Often portrayed by the media is an image of problematic student protesters only containable by severe force from 'justified' security forces. What we do not see is how the militarization of campuses is perceived and experienced by the student population. This study used semi-structured interviews and a thematic analysis, grounded in a social conflict theory perspective, to explore these representations as well as other relevant themes arising from the discourse. A sample comprising of 8 participants, activists and non-activists, who attended universities in South Africa (UFS, UCT, and UWC) during 2016, were interviewed. Findings indicate that students express a common theme of experiencing intimidation, from the mere presence of security forces to personal violent encounters with such forces. Moreover, students drew on the national Fees Must Fall movement and referred to racial and gender profiling when sharing their representations of campus policing and militarization. These themes unfolded in assorted ways and intertwined to form a specific story about the 2016 militarization of South African campuses. Additionally, these narratives revealed the mechanisms of post-apartheid South Africa's power dynamics. This study not only aims to obtain more profound conceptual understandings but further hopes to generate critical awareness, bringing to light underrepresented issues associated with the policing and militarization of South African campuses.

Keywords: students, security forces, policing, militarization, protests, Fees Must Fall, representations, race, intimidation, violence, inequality

**Introduction and background**

On August 16, 2012 the country witnessed the catastrophic termination of the Marikana mineworkers' protest (Iwu & Iwu 2015). This contention is based on media reports of police shooting and killing 34 mine workers. The public equates this incident with the Soweto uprising and the Sharpeville massacre which occurred during apartheid. Criticism against the South African police has accumulated power recently due to polices' continued use of unwarranted force against unarmed citizens. South Africa's constitution (Wortley, 1996) states that citizens are entitled to protest while law enforcement is compelled to ensure safety (Iwu & Iwu 2015). Hence, the public is entitled to expect a police force to provide security at times of protest. Forming part of the country's security services, a key function of the police is to protect the public, even in the course of protests. Sadly, our country is regarded an unequal society (Hearn, 2000; Ashman, Fine, and Newman, 2010) and persons who experience marginalization gather for demonstrations so that they can voice their opinions (Li, Liu and Li, 2012). Unfortunately, considerable literature verifies that relations between the police and the public are rowdy as a consequence of public distrust of the police (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003). Following is an evaluation literature on POP and police use of force to explain what these concepts mean we then turn to the literature on young people's perceptions of the police.

**Public order policing and police use of force**

Lightly put, the policing of public order refers to the supervision of a gathering in order with the purpose of preventing harm to members of the crowd as well as those deemed responsible for maintaining law and order such as law enforcement figures or the police. According to de Lint (2005), this is the use of police authority and capacity to maintain a legitimate balance between societal and governmental, individual and shared, interests and rights in protests of grievances. in several instances, however, POP has led to the endangerment and even loss of lives. South African instances include the Marikana instance (Iwu & Iwu, 2015) and numerous others. These cases are ascribed to the unwarranted use of force in the course of POP. A number of requests have been made for an evaluation of POP in South Africa as well as other parts of the world (Ndlovu and Bruce, 2011; Bruce 2012). These requests are surely based on the intensity of mass injuries and killings of citizens during mass demonstrations. In the United States of America however, public opinions on law enforcement have shifted in the period of counterterrorism which followed the assaults it witnessed (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003). While law enforcement figures are in agreement about

the necessity of POP, they nevertheless, have difficulty in distinguishing between when force should be used during POP and when it should not be used. This is a difficult question bearing in mind that the lives of civilians and officers are endangered during POP. To lessen or prevent this, particularly from the side of the police, force is applied. Thus, the question is, what is the reasonable degree of force to use in POP? This is challenging to decide as the term reasonable, in justifying force, is challenging to interpret (Iwu & Iwu, 2015). Although usage of force is inescapable in police work, we have to consider determining the reasonableness thereof by a mistrusting public with negative perceptions of the police. That said, perceptions of what the public regards as reasonable are very crucial. This leads to the question, what is required in the course of POP? (Iwu & Iwu, 2015).

**Enforcing use of force during protests?**

Section 205 (3) of the South African Constitution states that the roles of the police include: preventing, investigating and combating crime; to uphold public order; to safeguard the citizens of the State and their property; and to maintain and implement the law. Considering this, in several instances of protest, it is sustainable that law enforcement failed to comply with its purpose to maintain public order by guaranteeing the safety of this country's citizens. This is in relation to the lives which are endangered and lost in the course of protests. The Ministry of police (2011) states the right to public demonstrations which was enacted to manage conducting public demonstrations at specific places. This Act distinctly points the right of the public to protest and convey grievances to draw the attention of the government and consequently get them to react to their grievances. The act similarly states that its fundamental premise is that each individual possesses the right peacefully partake in demonstrations-with the police's protection. This reiterates the police's directive to safeguard individuals during demonstrations, which has been violated in some cases, as demonstrators have been shot fatally and even killed by law enforcement. According to the SAPS Standing order No. 262 stipulates that using force must always be evaded and those called for an operation must show a high degree of tolerance. This proposes that using force and dispersing crowds ought to obey Section 9 (1) (2)'s requirements of the SAPS Act which mentions the claims of misconduct by officials. Moreover, the rule sets the procedures to be executed by law enforcement if dialogues do not work in a protest which may endanger people's lives and property. The rule also puts forth what is to be done by law enforcement when using force becomes inevitable. The police have not performed this function appropriately during

instances in which protestors have been injured. Rather, the police's resort to force as a way to disperse protestors endangered protestors' lives.

A typical trend of protest policing is the victimization of minority groups. Several intellectuals have documented that a civilian's race has an impact on police-civilian interaction irrespective of the officer's race (i.e. Flowers 2001; (Kane & White, 2009); and (Lersch & Mieczkowski, 2005), and a great deal of experiential research maintains evidence of law enforcement injustice toward racial minorities. For instance, a study conducted by Buckler and Unnever (2008) discovered that people of color had more interactions with law enforcement as opposed to white people. Accordingly, they view greater inequality and injustice in their associations with law enforcement officials as obvious minority associates. Moreover, Fry and Berkes (1983) assert that police institutions have implemented paramilitary models to combat offenders viewed as racial minorities. Additionally, the law enforcement profession is mainly white-male dominated in racially segregated counties such as America, specifically, in the highly ranked positions (Hickman et al. 2001).

**Perception Themes: age and gender; and race**

An inadequate number of studies focus on young people's perceptions of the police. These few studies indicate that both college students, as well as teenagers, have negative perceptions of the police as opposed to older individuals (Brandl et al., 1994; Hurst & Frank, 2000; Hurst et al., 2000; Mbuba, 2010). Studies show that adolescents have little confidence in the police and viewed the police as ineffective in executing their duties. Additionally, they discovered that undesirable attitudes toward the police were exacerbated among black and female adolescents compared to white and male adolescents (Hurst & Frank, 2000; Hurst et al., 2000). In studies involving young adults, less desirable perceptions of the police have been documented. Another study by Mbuba (2010) on attitudes toward the police among college students discovered that marginalized students had more negative evaluations of the police as opposed to white students.

Most research on peoples' attitudes toward the police indicates that negative attitudes toward the police are more common among black individuals compared to individuals of other racial groups (Brunson, 2007; Jefferson & Walker, 1993; Wortley, 1996; Weitzer, 1999; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). Research involving other ethnic/racial groups frequently discover that Asians and Hispanics have experiences similar to those black individuals have with law enforcement (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2009). Personal

and vicarious encounters with police officers best explain the discovery that negative perceptions of police officers are most common among black individuals (Brunson, 2007; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011). Due to black individuals being more inclined to experience police instigated encounters, they are consequently more likely to have negative perceptions of the police (Harris, 1999). Contemporary studies on people's insights into contemporary police encounters discover that black individuals are more inclined to report unfair and disrespectful treatment by police officers than individuals belonging to other racial groups (Gabbidon, Higgins & Potter, 2010; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011).

**Suspect race and police misconduct**

Inconsistencies have been discovered in research focusing on the impact a suspect's race has on a police officer's decision to use force (Garner et al., 2002). A number of studies have discovered that black suspects experience more physical force (Garner et al. 2002). Additional studies, however, discovered that police were more likely to employ physical force against black and Hispanic males than against white males (Schuck, 2004). Previous research indicates that black and Hispanic males being stereotyped as dangerous criminals add to variations in police using force against marginalized suspects (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Welch, 2007).

There is scant research on student representations of campus policing and militarization during student protests, particularly in relation to students mobilizing and resisting oppression by dominant groups in society. Consequently, a gap exists in this arena of representations within South Africa, where historically, student demonstrations and social movements played a significant role and currently remain a part of our social fabric.

In conclusion, it has been noted that South Africa has a reputation for tumultuous protests. This appears due to how police use force in the course of public order protests. The concepts 'use of force' and 'public order protests' were unpacked. A review of the literature indicated that due to negative stereotypes attached to certain groups, police misconduct puts these groups at risk of undesirable encounters with the police. These encounters, in turn, have a negative effect on how these groups perceive the police. This relationship between the police and marginalized groups appear to perpetuate the cycle of police misconduct. Drawing from the literature, race and gender dynamics underlie instances of police misconduct and, these dynamics together with age underlie how people view the police and how the police treat suspects.

## Aims and Objectives

### Aim

The general objective of this research was to explore how students' represented the presence of security forces on campus during 2016 protests at South African Universities. This is an occasion to reveal the underrepresented issues involved in the policing of campuses during the recent protests. In this way, we are able to gain insight into how a young population, whose knowledge is undervalued in political issues, represents policing.

### Main Research question:

- How do students portray the presence of security forces on campus during the 2016 protests?

### Sub-Question:

- Were students' representations of security forces mediated by racial and gendered dynamics?

## Theoretical Framework

### Social Conflict Theory and Law Enforcement

Social conflict theory proposes that the dominant and affluent embody the elite and powerful class in a society (Marx, 2000). This view posits that law, as well as law enforcement, are used by the ruling class to reduce intimidation to their interests. Systems such as the justice system are unfair and geared at protecting the dominant class (Marx, 2000). Authorising laws permits the ruling class to coerce a domestic order permitting their interests to be advanced and preserved (Marx, 2000). This view believes that society is in constant struggle for resources and that social change is driven by conflict. For instance, theorists of this view may describe that activists of the 1960s' civil rights movement were contesting the racially imbalanced distribution of political rule and economic assets (Marx, 1972). As with this example, theorists of the conflict perspective view social change as unexpected, sudden and even revolutionary. Thus in this view change is acquired through a conflict between contending interests (Marx, 1972). Hence, during the Fees Must Fall activism when security forces are employed to police this activism, with the majority being

black activists, at a predominantly white university such as UCT it portrays a struggle between two groups.

Social conflict theory is employed in this research, as in addition to race, resources and power also motivate the maintenance of inequality.

## Methodology

### Research Design

Students are a subservient population group whose opinions are often undervalued. They do not usually have the power to voice their opinions on issues such as policing, and historical research has not focused much on the opinions of students generally ((Hadfield & Haw, 2001). Hence this study is a qualitative exploratory investigation seeking to gather information about students' representation of protest policing in an effort to challenge what is exaggerated about protest policing among dominant groups.

### Sampling Strategy

To best complement the qualitative design, this study employed a purposive sampling method. Instead of randomly selecting a sample, participants were sought out individually according to the research aims (Babbie, & Mouton, 2007). As this research sought to explore students' representations' of the presence of security forces during student activism, a purposive sampling strategy was well matched to the research at hand. Once the proposed research obtained ethical approval as well as permission from the Department of Student Affairs (DSA) to access UCT students as participants, students at the University of Cape Town were approached to participate in the study. The sample comprised of 8 participants. One participant attended the University of the Western Cape while two attended the University of Free State, during 2016. The remaining five participants attended the University of Cape Town during 2016. The study was open to students from diverse racial and gendered identities. Participants were be included on a voluntary basis.

### Data Collection tool and Procedure

Access to the sample of students was gained from UCT's Department of Student Affairs.  Once participants were sampled one on one semi-structured interviews followed. The duration of these interviews was more or less one hour long. The interviews were conducted at the University of Cape Town's Psychology Department in room 3C or 3D. A

voice recording device was used to record the interviews (with participants' permission) and notes were made during the interviews.


**Data Analysis**

Students' representations of policing were analyzed by taking power relations into account. This means a method of analysis which allows for identifying themes, particularly relating to power dynamics, was needed to uncover in which context student place their representations. Thematic analysis is a data analysis method which allows for the identification of themes of raw data such as that obtained from interviews of representations (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Social conflict theory was employed as it offers a valuable theory of meaning to contextualize the praxis of thematic analysis when investigating themes produced in social conflict contexts (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

The thematic analysis aims to recognize patterns of meaning across a dataset which affords a response to the undertaken research question (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Thematic analysts are interested in what these patterns are. For instance, this research was interested in which themes emerged and which themes did not (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Essentially, the emphasis was on the role of themes in the productions of representations. Such themes may be utilized to generate under-valued representations of policing.

As with all methods of data analysis, thematic analysis is also subjected to criticism. Thematic analysis has been criticized for being a subjective method in which meaning can be construed differently from researcher to researcher (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Being a student analyzing student representations of policing, there emerges a likelihood of bias or misinterpreting of representations. Then again, having been exposed to some of the issues faced by university students may help with interpreting and understanding the data. It might contextualize the analysis, which is essential to thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Thus, reflexivity and self-criticism is an important part of a thematic analysis. It has also been criticised for being too flexible as this may cause difficulty in focusing on which characteristics of the data to focus on.

On completion of all the interviews, a thematic analysis of the raw data was conducted. Thematic analysis is typically used for qualitative research (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This form of analysis allows for an easy and concise interpretation and description of

the developing patterns and themes within a data set. This method was employed as a thorough thematic approach offered a profound analysis which fulfilled certain research questions' (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Moreover, such an approach suited the research questions through aiding the investigation of the interview data (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

**Ethical considerations**

A set of rudimentary ethical concerns apply to participants in qualitative research. For instance, in the case of this study, privacy concerns emerged when dealing with delicate information and obtaining consent and ensuring no or minimal harm was done to participants was paramount (Willig, 2001).

### Reflexivity

Reflexivity is intimately connected to ethics, as it is the investigator reflecting on the way in which their positionality (assumed the quantity of power they possess as the researcher) may have influenced the research process (Durrheim, Painter & Terre Blanche, 2006). An essential consideration for the research at hand is the problem of interpretation. The researcher ought to reflect on how the research is significant to them personally, and their positionality as well as their personal predetermined thoughts and prejudices that might impact the discoveries (Willig, 2001).

Conducting research on student presentations of the 2016 protest policing, driven by an outcry at undercurrents of colonization, as a student of color in a former exclusively white university has its implications; therefore the researcher is required to actively acknowledge their part in the analysis of their data. A key consideration, especially for conflict research is to think about how the interpretation itself is a specific representation of reality (Reference).

### Limitations of the Study

The main shortcoming of this study was its small sample size – 8 participants and only one interview will be conducted per person. A sample of greater magnitude with recurrent interviews would have enhanced the data, however as this is only an Honours thesis, the scope of the project was rather restricted.

It is important to note that the participants in the study, might not represent all relevant students. Relevant students may have different experiences and perceptions of law enforcement presence during student activism. Nevertheless, this research has not intended to

generalize outcomes to an extensive population or make rigid inferences, instead, it intended to explore the experiences and portrayals of participants.

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## Results and Discussion

A common gist emerged from students' representations of campus policing during 2016. Students drew on the protest movement, policing and social inequality when sharing their representations of campus policing. In the discussion below various interconnected themes about campus policing are set out to convey stories about the 2016 policing experience across South African universities. Moreover, these representations will be reflected on through a social conflict theory lens where possible.

**Policing**

*Police presence, the movement, and disruptions*

Students expressed contradictory responses to the presence of security forces. While explaining the presence of campus policing and militarization they all clearly expressed support for the Fees Must Fall Movement. Furthermore, students acknowledged disruptions by protestors.

> *"I'm sort of against policing because we've time and time again seen how police abuse their power."*

> *"I believe we needed to have some kind of security to calm the situation."*

> *"It was scary because you came onto campus and there are people (not mostly police but security) in riot gear and padded clothing with weapons and helmets and batons and everything. It's like you are going to a place that's not safe.'*

> *"...it was an uncomfortable feel. In a tertiary learning institution, the last thing you want is to be seeing policemen and securities. Just being there man, is not a good feel, it's hard to describe but it just feels so foreign and you feel unwelcome in your own learning institution which is quite troubling."*

*"I think protests were monumental. It was great to see students rallying together and fighting for a common course, fighting for the marginalized."*

*"They came in and protested, so we got woken up and we felt very intimidated because they were telling us to come out and join the protest so we felt kind of intimidated. It was interesting, kind of bitter-sweet."*

*"Without disruption or causing some type of chaos, there is no way we would have been heard."*

Regardless of whether students are accepting of the presence of security forces, they all express feeling intimidated by the presence of these forces. A common discourse among all participants was an expression of support toward the Fees Must Fall student movement. Some participants initially expressed feeling intimidated by protestors. However, discourses indicate that once they found out about the movement they began to understand and support the course.

Although participants all acknowledge that protestors were responsible for several disruptions and protest rituals, they convey that disruptions were an outcry to be heard as the protests were not gaining any support from the university management. This according to students, supposedly necessitated for police intervention.

In line with social conflict theory, it can be noted that there are groups with conflicting interests involved here, tertiary institutions/government and marginalized students. A social unrest was sparked due to the status quo which puts the marginalized at a disadvantage (Collins, 1975). To combat this challenge, the dominant group stationed police on campuses.

*Against police methods and force and general conduct*

Police violence is regarded as a measure for elite societal groups to control and suppress any groups which potentially pose a threat (Chevigny, 1998).

*"But, from what I have seen is that the police will abuse their power and they will abuse students and that I am totally against."*

*"Why must there be people with guns."*

*"Some of them had guns, rubber bullet guns, pepper sprays, weapons, they were fully armed. They had these shields glass or plastic, it's like they were prepared to go to*

*war like they were going to fight a battle between countries, but we were just students. But, we had no weapons, we had no guns, we had nothing"*

*"It was like we were back in those days, it reminded me of the 16 June and all those things, it was like a repetition of history. Especially the 2016 protest, it was the one that was chaotic. Not because of the students, I must underline that the chaos was not caused by the students. The chaos was caused by the military that was stationed within the campuses."*

*I don't agree with a lot of the force they used. It was brutal, they were shooting at people close range with rubber bullets, using tear gas in enclosed spaces and beating up students."*

*"As you approach them in passing, they would look at you in an uneasy way."*

*"They were very aggressive towards you without actually touching you, but their look and their behavior around you was very aggressive."*

*"They would also disguise as students or protestors themselves and listen to the protests and come to mass meetings with students and act like students themselves."*

There was a general notion of distrust toward the police. Students reported an array of brutal methods which heavily armed security forces, used on protestors. Even when protestors fled and were beat down, security forces continued to attack. These methods and force which the police used portray the violent management of protests known to South Africa since apartheid. A great deal of confusion was expressed regarding why unarmed students were monitored by heavily armed and shielded security forces. Students found the mere presence and general conduct of security forces to be intimidating. Many reported a sense of feeling uneasy when passing heavily armed security forces. These security forces appeared antagonistic to the students especially the militarized security. Furthermore, we see that security forces not only used direct forceful methods to try and demobilize protestors, they also used more indirect subtle methods to gain insights into protesting plans so that they could shut protestors down.

Here the exploitation of marginalized groups is portrayed.

*Encounters*

Certain policies exist in relation to police conduct and functions of public order policing (POP); however, whether such policies are followed is questionable, as frequent and intensive riots are and as injuries and fatalities have occurred in the past (Iwu & Iwu, 2015).

> *"I remember there was a security that threw something. I tried to dive and these two security guys got hold of me..."*

> *"They treated us like criminals. I wasn't sure if I was even supposed to breathe. I almost got arrested once, we just started hearing guns out of nowhere and as we ran, police waited on the other side, and it felt like it was a trap of some sort to just lure us into their hands, like they had to find criminals to arrest as if they were mandated to arrest a certain group of people."*

> *"It happened last year, to a friend of mine, I was with, he actually got arrested we were all striking and they literally randomly selected people and they just chucked them into the police vans. That was quite scary to take in, I mean it could have been me."*

> *"I was beaten by a police officer and then the sexualizing."*

Most participants had encounters with security forces. Other participants witnessed friends or other protestors having encounters with the security forces. These encounters ranged from threats to manhandling, beatings and arrests. We can see that in this tense atmosphere students' run the risk of having a violent encounter with security forces by merely making sudden seemingly suspicious movements. Students of different gender categories all mentioned some sort of sexual harassment by security forces toward females. A notable portion of students witnessed that police were randomly arresting and manhandling students especially those they suspected to be leading activists.

This is indicative of police playing a paramount role in social control, they possess an enduring monopoly on force and legally authorized violence against individuals of the society.

*Residence policing*

A compelling discovery was that of students experiencing policing in their living spaces. Not only were students traumatized in their academic space, they were also exposed to intimidation and trauma inside their living spaces.

*"We were never safe, you never felt safe. Especially those who were living on campus, they never felt safe."*

*"There were like two vans of these scary buff guys just like standing out there waiting. Was quite intimidating, as if it's not bad enough that they were on your campus, but now they are also in your residence. It was quite traumatic."*

*"They searched students and rooms. They did not care if you were naked. It did not occur to them to knock. They kicked the doors down, they did not care that they were violating privacy."*

*"You cannot as a large group of men, men who are already sexualizing us when we are outside and dressed, you can't come kick down doors in a female residence. How am I supposed to feel?"*

*"I remember between the residence- Chris Hani and the student admin, there was an open fire and it was televised on CNN. It was like a violent movie, students vs the police. The police were just shooting at us."*

At campuses such as UFS and UWC police were reported to have kicked down student's doors, searching for protestors, questioning students and making random arrests in student's rooms. At UCT students reported that an excessive amount of armed police was stationed both inside and outside their residences. This conveys how students could never feel safe. Students were not scared of other students or protestors, they could not see why fellow students would want to attack them. Students were scared of security forces. And, in the end, these forces were the ones inflicting harm. Security forces that could and have hunted them down till in their safest spaces. One can only imagine the terror of being a student trying to seek cover in your room while hearing gunshots and screams and eventually having your door kicked down and eventually being ambushed by a group of buff, armed and antagonistic security searching your room, questioning you and possibly arresting you for being a man, specifically one of colour, or even just for wearing a political t-shirt. This becomes quite stressful as you cannot run to friends or be in groups, this causes isolation and increased fear. This indicates a clear violation of privacy and safety as students were left with doors which could not lock, once again this created utter fear, especially affecting female students. A student mentioned an all-night incident with security forces. Were students even able to sleep? Or leave their rooms to use ablution facilities or access food? These students

represented an atmosphere of constant intimidation and fear, an atmosphere created by 'protectors'.

*Self-defense against those supposed to be protecting us*

SA's constitution states that POP is employed as a means ensuring safety for all and preventing violence (Iwu & Iwu, 2015). South African protests, however, despite past failures of managing protests with violence, continue to erupt into chaotic violence as a result of police using excessive unwarranted force on protestors.

> *"So where are our students supposed to be getting safety from if the very people who are supposed to be ensuring safety are now the ones inflicting pain on the students. It leaves most students horrified and it's terrifying and scary to be in such a position as a student."*

> *"...these private security and military forces were armed, not only armed but they were firing their weapons at unarmed students, forcing these students to protect themselves and fight back"*

> *"It's fair to say that students were pretty dangerous as well, they were burning buildings, throwing officers with stones and threatening their wellbeing but I think that only started to happen when police officers started to get brutal with them and they saw their peers get ambushed and they retaliated, so they reacted to the harsh methods that the police were using."*

Students acknowledge violence by protesters, however, according to students, protestors resorted to violence as a defense mechanism against police brutality. Mention was made of students or protestors being shot while they were down or running away from security forces to escape injury. Should security forces not be aiding injured individuals? This is quite a conflicting question given that the police were inflicting injury. According to students, protestors started getting violent when police started using brutal force, especially when they saw their peers being ambushed. Students did convey the notion of security forces protecting, protecting property…

*Police versus non-policed scenarios*

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It is likely that when protests start off no policing is present. When protests grow and attempt to gain attention, through disruptions, for instance, this is when institutions call in security forces. A difference in the atmosphere of these two scenarios was certainly noted by students.

> *"I would feel 100% safe at protests but as soon as police arrived I knew that we weren't safe anymore and things were going to go bad. They were there to protect private property rather than human life."*

> *"After they militarized the institution, then we had violence."*

> *"It was definitely more violent as more security was employed. And I believe it was merely students retaliating against force. Because it's threatening so you are bound to react in a certain way. But it also worked the other way, the more violent it got the more security was needed. You need more security because it's violent but it's violent because there is a lot of security."*

> *"The atmosphere was very different the protestors were more settled, comfortable and confident to protest whereas when there was policing everyone was so tense, trying to guard themselves and it was very unnerving and awful."*

All students noted that in instances before protests were policed, there was no tension, protests were peaceful and the atmosphere was more comfortable. However, participants felt that once security was stationed on campus, it created a tense atmosphere where protestors could not protest freely. This caused volatility and students had to monitor their behavior to avoid setting off security forces. Students felt that the environment ultimately turned violent due to the security forces which were present on campus. Once campus was militarized it turned into a vicious cycle.

In terms of feeling intimidated by protestors, students mentioned that during violent chaotic altercations between protestors and students there is an unease because you become scared of other students as they shoot and a stampede occurs where it's everyone for themselves.

These representations indicate that these security forces were put on campus to intimidate students and demobilize the movement as it posed a threat to the normal functioning of the university.

*Racial profiling*

For years society has acknowledged the existence of discrimination against marginalized members of society The marginalized are those, who are not "in charge" or "in control" of society and its resources. Through racial profiling, those in power such as the elite, the government or law enforcement use their power to predict who is most likely to commit a crime (Petrocelli, Piquero & Smith, 2003).

> *"I'm black and things are not great for us. Like I said, you can't start whispering or looking weird as a black student, you can't walk in a certain way because already just being black makes you like a threat to them. Whenever anything happens it's always the black students that are targeted. In a group of 100 students, they would only be arresting the black students and letting go of the white students. For some reason, they equated that with not being a part of the movement or protests."*

> *"...this happens a lot in South Africa where white people would just be treated differently to black people that's just how it is."*

> *"I think I was let go because I was white and foreign."*

> *"There was a lecture and black students were not allowed in. I think that this was racial profiling and that was very wrong."*

> *"The police and security had a tendency of criminalizing all students of color, but white students were not even labeled as protestors."*

> *"With white protestors policing was so nice, security forces interacted with them like they were actual humans and accepting their protest, whereas people of color protesting there was always some sort of violence toward them either they were getting hit or sworn at."*

> *"They were more hesitant to use violence when white people were there. When white people were at the protests, they did not use brutal force. No white student was arrested at UFS, but coloreds and black people yes."*

All participants had witnessed racial profiling. Students expressed that black students were always targeted and suspected by security forces. All participants only witnessed black students being arrested. One white participant reported being let go by police because she was white and foreign. There was also frequent mention of incidents of black students not

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being permitted into certain buildings. Students reported that police conduct was very aggressive and violent toward black students whereas white students were sort of protected.

These findings show how security forces, after 22 years of democracy, still act under constructions of racism. This displays that the marginalized black population of South Africa are regarded by the police as having no power and are consequently largely exploited by law enforcement whereas the dominant white population possesses the power to escape law enforcement. The findings of this study are also consistent with existing studies on racial profiling which indicate a definite difference in how police perceive white individuals and black individuals (Schuck, 2004; Garner et al. 2002).

*Race of security forces*

Numerous researchers have indicated that police-citizen interactions are affected by the race of the citizen (as just noted above) - regardless of which racial grouping an officer belongs to (i.e. Flowers 2001, Kane and White 2009, and Lersch & Mieczkowski 2005).

> *"Even with black cops, they will treat white students differently."*

> *"The police were mainly black, it doesn't come as a surprise when they treat the white people differently to how they treat the black people. I know maybe it's considering the history of the country. Maybe they still scared of white people but I would definitely say the treatment of policemen to white students is completely different to how black policemen treat black students."*

> *"They were mostly black officers. But there were some officers who were white and when they came they were very violent and brutal. There was a difference in how they handled us. When white officers were there, they were always ready to fight, ready to disperse 5 people in a group as though something has been done when it's just friends standing in group"*

> *"I have only seen black officials shooting. The ones doing the dirty work, I guess. And a very old white man ordering the whole security force. He was in charge of the whole thing. I think there were other police officers at the top. But the police officers that were working and doing the shooting and guarding were black."*

> *"The police they sent were white Afrikaners. They came with a mission that they will beat up the students especially white officers. But the black officers were hesitant in beating up the students but the white ones were not hesitant, they were at the forefront."*

> *"It's really very difficult, it's like oppression by the oppressed. These black officers are being influenced and ordered by white superintendents to shoot at us. I'm sure there are also black people at the top giving orders. And some black officers may have also believed in using force."*

> *"There were white officials and black protestors who more often than not had encounters with these officials. I think that it just adds a different dynamic because of the power relations which lie in their different races."*

Students all mentioned that the majority of security forces were black men. There were a few white security forces. Although they mentioned that there was a difference in treatment toward black and white students from all security forces, they also later expressed that some black security forces were more hesitant to attack black students than white security forces who were also generally more brutal. Students portrayed that many of the white security was in charge and giving orders, however, some did acknowledge that a good deal of black security forces was okay with using force. More altercations between black students and white security forces were also commonly reported. Contradictory to the reviewed literature (Brunson, 2007; Jefferson & Walker, 1993; Wortley, 1996; Weitzer, 1999; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006), all students, black, colored and white; and from all gendered categories, had negative perceptions toward the police.

Here we can see the power relations not only between white officers and black protesting students but also between white officers and black working class security forces, and black officers and black students. This is evident of the power relations within our society, where in addition to the dominant exploiting the marginalized, marginalized members are also used by the dominant to exploit other marginalized members, or upper-class marginalized members have

*Eye-opening incidents and spared injustice*

A topic expected to emerge in how students represent campus policing was white privilege. A concept related to white privilege is spared injustice. Spared injustice refers to people of color undergoing unjust treatment while white people do not (Blum, 2008).

> *"I don't know if you recall the "white wall" where part of the black activists were surrounded by white students to protect them. That really goes to show how crazy it is, that you would have a "white wall" to surround black people because we seeing white people as being untouchable. Because they know that if anything happens to them, their fathers are involved in high positions, they will move mountains and they would sue the hell out of the police and it would just be hectic. But, there isn't such prejudice against black people, yeah, you're probably just seen as another regular black person with no power so I can exploit you. But that does not happen to white people, they have that privilege, I guess it is what it is."*

> *"...it's funny how a lot of students at UFS were arrested during the protests, but when the Shimla park incident happened white students have not been arrested. (Rugby incident). Those people felt that their right to entertainment was being infringed on and felt they had the right to attack the protestors. The students were just singing on the field, but they came down and they attacked the students. To this day, none of them were arrested, if anything they arrested, after that, the students who were beaten up."*

> *"While there was a FMF protests there was also a protest where people said they want to study they don't want the protests. And those were mostly white students. I remember this particular day they were sitting around a statue and they had boards, and there were no police officers, no vans. It was a group of like 30 students, there were two security guards not even paying attention to what they were doing they were just standing there. Whereas soon after a group of black students congregated and a van came, this always happened, especially at mass meetings. Why wasn't there security around them as there would be for us?"*

Some of the participants used well-known incidents of the protests to explain the unjust operations of security forces. From these representations, we see how power dynamics, especially regarding race, save the dominant group from instances of injustice. As white people are spared injustices in the case of public order policing they are simultaneously benefitting from those who do suffer injustice (Blum, 2008). For instance, as security forces

are too focussed on black individuals, they become less attentive to white individuals who could be guilty of something too but escapes detection, or their conduct is simply avoided because of the power they possess (Blum, 2008).

*Mental health and Counselling*

What is often highlighted following violent protests is the destruction of property while the destruction of students' mental health is silenced.

*"Just to see how people suffer, especially black bodies, and their mental health was quite in shambles. A lot of us even to me personally, I ended up having to defer half of my exams, because I was like, I can't handle it anymore."*

*"In the midst of all the intimidation and trauma, some lecturers still expected us to attend classes"*

*"A lot of people were getting breakdowns and a lot more needed counseling services but the same number of such service providers were available, no provisions were made to deal with the rise."*

*There was a belief in mental health services that students are seeking counseling in order to avoid exams, so people then avoided these services."*

*"Yeah, UCT has student wellness services, which is very poorly run, it's pathetic, to say the least. There is so much more that needs to be done with student wellness. I know I was actually trying to contact student wellness for something, but they kept sending me up and down."*

All students mentioned that the whole experience of police brutality was very traumatizing, whether they witnessed brutality or experienced it. Students reported that at times they were pressured to attend lectures despite the intimidating atmosphere on campus. Many of them also reported that they were affected by the violence to the point where they experienced difficulty finishing their exams. They reported that despite counseling services being offered on campus and for this specific trauma, the services were poorly managed and in many instances, they became discouraged to use these services. Other participants also noted that there was a stigma attached to consulting these services, that being that students were trying to avoid exams by consulting counseling services.

There is a great deal of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among students because of their experiences of the campus space, in addition to police interventions and private security ("Reflecting on the psychological impact of student protests", 2017). At most universities, there are mental health services. Those who possess the resources (money) are able to access mental health services immediately be it on campus or off campus, while a certain group has to make use of free services which are understaffed and under-resourced. A great deal of the marginalized group in the South African society need mental health assistance on a regular basis and this need becomes intensified during protest policing and militarization, however because of the underlying inequalities of our society some of our marginalized students are still waiting to be aided with the trauma they experienced during last year's protests.

Given our knowledge of protests, especially protests in South Africa and the violence that characterizes it, we have once again seen the marginalized traumatized when challenging the status quo. At times we still hear the parental generation echo what they went through under blatant exploitation let alone the consequences faced when they challenged the order of the day. Back then it was the white man executing force and today our very parents have a hand in maintaining social inequality through excessive force. The stigma referred to above is not only held by certain university personal but also by a considerable amount of the parental generation. This puts mental health at a greater risk as the parental generation hold the views of the dominant despite knowing that police use extreme force on students during students protests. This makes it hard for students to reach out following exposure to trauma as a consequence of police brutality.

*The police are not to blame*

According to conflict theorists' law enforcement are used by the ruling class to reduce intimidation to their interests. Systems such as the justice system are unfair and geared at protecting the dominant class (Marx, 2000).

> *"We obviously know that orders must have come from somewhere and my initial response is its management. Police wouldn't just abruptly do as they please unless they get a call from management or from the government to say, go do that. I highly doubt they will spontaneously start shooting out, they must get a call."*

> *"I have only seen black officials shooting. The ones doing the dirty work, I guess. And a very old white man ordering the whole security force. He was in charge of the*

*whole thing. I think there were other police officers at the top. But the police officers that were working and doing the shooting and guarding were black."*

*"...the police are just tools in the hands of the politicians. They are just people who take commands, I do not blame them per say because they are given orders and they have to follow those orders, that's the problem of being in such a profession. Throughout train in a defense profession, you are trained to obey commands, you can't question them, even if you see these commands are not moral or ethical because you are trained to obey commands then you have no choice. I have encountered (actually a group of us) police who have said to us; we were sent here to protect the institution and to beat you up but we know the course of your movement, continue."*

*"In terms of police. They were much better than the security forces. When things were calm and everyone was just singing, they would sit with us and talk with us. Some of them actually did believe in the movement and they supported the movement. But, it was obviously a job that they had to do. They were there to work. They were deployed to go in. Things obviously changed when they had to contain us, other than that, they were much nicer."*

*"I don't understand the whole rational of getting so much security especially the UMALUSI who is known to be violent. But you still book them."*

*"The never portrayed stories of us having conversations with police officers, they never portrayed the peaceful sides where we had conversations with these people and them divulging that they are for the movement."*

*"As brutal as they were, there was also an element of care among some of them."*

*"We need to not that these people are primarily doing their jobs. They have families to feed and care for. It's a very difficult topic."*

The above opinion was held by all the participants. They all expressed that police acted on orders. They saw police as instruments used to maintain oppression. Even oppression by the oppressed. They all identified management and government has the reason for allowing police to brutalize students. They conveyed that management was employing excessive, heavily armed security forces who were trained to fight. They also expressed that these security forces were not trained to deal with protests.

The majority of the protestors mentioned having conversations with certain security forces, particularly the police. They report that despite all the brutality some of these officials expressed support for the Fees Must Fall movement, and even an element of care, however, they had to act on orders given to them.

From these representations, we can see how students are conflicted. Although they witnessed and/or experienced police brutality they eventually acknowledge that these forces were acting on orders from those who stationed them on campuses. Although the police have power, they are not supposed to use force as they please they act on orders from higher forces in their organization, who get mandated by the institution which employ them. Conflict theory explains this as a means of demobilizing threats to the dominant groups' interests in order for them to maintain unequal distribution of resources and power (Chevigny 1998).

*Alternative ways to deal with protests*

As noted in the literature, it is a constitutional right for people to protest in South Africa, thus the need for the right approach to deal with protests.

> *"Yes, unarm the officials, the students aren't armed, we are not allowed to have knives or guns or anything, so why are they allowed to do that. It sends a wrong message, it sends an antagonistic message and creates an antagonistic relationship between the students and these officials."*

> *"...the moment they were armed it changed the story and it completely changed the dynamics because now it was no longer a peaceful protest, now it basically become a battlefield"*

> *"I think if last year they didn't learn then they should have reflected on how to deal with such a situation because I don't want to fully blame the police on the way they reacted. I just saw that they clearly not trained to deal with such situations. So I think going forward it just needs to be more clear that you have no power over other students or other human beings. There is a certain way to treat people and violence is not the way. So I just wish the police/private security would be taught how to deal with students)."*

> *"Send people to keep control over the protesting environment and better yet to protect, these students needed to be monitored. Yes, they could be monitored and also to an extent to be protected from any kind of violence that may erupt from outside of UCT. Not for these students to be hunted down and brutalized by these officials."*

*"Management was supposed to sit down with students and come up with solutions, it was very easy."*

*"So I feel like if management from the beginning decided to listen to your demands and have a meeting with protestors, then I think we would not even need private security or police. But even if it got to a stage where they needed security maybe they should have briefed them better like you know, for violence and stuff because I mean in some cases it got to like physical altercations which are traumatizing for everyone."*

*"There may have been dialogue, but clearly they did not come to a resolution and people had to find other ways to put forth their demands. The only thing they could have done was agreeing with students demands, that's all they could have done to stop things from happening because dialogue was not working anymore. They kept trying it but it just kept collapsing then they employed security who is bound to us force to a certain extent. I guess did the only thing they knew to do – bring in policing."*

All the students felt that security forces being present was the reason for violence erupting. However, they felt that it was not necessary for security to be armed as if they were prepared for war, while they were dealing with university students. Consequently, students felt that if security forces are to be employed they should be there to monitor the situation in a manner which respects human life. Certain participants felt that police should not have been present and that management should have done better at negotiating and meeting with protestors.

It is clear that the policing and militarization of campus was conducted very badly and unfairly. Although related protests before the 2016 protests turned brutal as a consequence of how institutions decided to manage protests, the same measure of protest management was employed and countless students were victimized again. Conflict theorists posit that the privileged need not directly request that police become more brutal, but merely overlook the harm done to "dangerous" groups for the sake of public order, thus eliminating the limitations that diminish otherwise inescapable police violence (Chevigny, 1998)

**External factors**

*Mass media, Family, and Social media*

A few noteworthy factors also emerged when students explained their representations of campus policing and militarization.

> *"A lot of things were exaggerated, especially by the media. I mean we are at the institutions, we see exactly what is going on."*

> *"So the real, real stuff you will get from twitter, but what they get fed is what they see on the news- the 7 o'clock bulletin that's what they see and immediately after they see they call and they like what is going on there. You need to come back its hell over there. And I'm thinking oh no its propaganda, what you are seeing is propaganda.*

> *"Some were showing police being brutalized by the students, which is nonsense because the police had bulletproofs, they had shields and they had guns while students had nothing. You cannot tell me of one policeman who was beaten by students and then you don't tell me about the thousands of students that were shot by rubber bullets."*

> *"Yeah, they actually liked it because we need to get rid of the protestors so the year can get finished. It was my final year so yeah they were like get the protestors out of the way so you can finish your degree."*

> *"I'm from a strict family so they believe in discipline, so to some extent, they were okay with policing and what the police did to warn students."*

> *"When they saw that on television. In fact, I briefed them before that, but when they saw it on national television they were not against it, they were for it. Because they know the pain of being marginalized, they know the pain of not having money to go to school."*

With regards to the media, participants felt that mainstream media was biased. They felt that being at the protest and seeing exactly what was happening was contradicted by what the media was conveying. Participants felt that the media portrayed the students as violent while police were the ones brutalizing students and inflicting harm and force.

As a result of what mainstream media conveyed, all participants reported that their families were extremely concerned about their safety. Their families felt that protestors were responsible for the chaos. Many participants mentioned that their families were in support of police brutality, while some did express that their parents understood the movement. This favorable perception of the police by the parental generation is consistent with findings of

literature which explore how different age groups perceive the police (Brandl et al., 1994; (Hurst, Frank & Lee Browning, 2000); Hurst & Frank (2000); Mbuba, 2010).Nevertheless, all families were concerned.

Most participants mentioned that social media, especially Twitter, portrayed incidents better because these social network platforms are dominated by the younger generation who uploaded videos of the protests events as they occurred. All participants mentioned that the parental generation is less aware of social media than mainstream media. According to students, social media expressed more of an outcry at the brutalization of students.

## Summary and conclusion

A scarce amount of research focuses on representations of campus policing. This study sought to fill this gap by trying to conduct a thematic analysis exploring how students portray the campus policing during 2016 in SA. Through the analysis of eight semi-structured interviews, a series of interconnected themes on policing were recognized. The most dominants ones being those related to racial dynamics of police brutality. Other themes included discourse about protests, police conduct, residence policing, self-defense, the absence of police, mental health and counseling, power relations and alternative measures to maintain public order. Other external factors such as the media, family and social media were also drawn on to further portray the experience of policing. These factors were not only interconnected with one another but they also had links to previous themes such as mental health and racial profiling. Policing was portrayed as intimidating, violent and traumatic. These portrayals of policing aid in uncovering the inequalities that exist in our society. Overall this research gives a voice to marginalized opinions which are not afforded much power in disproportionate society. It particularly highlighted the injustices faced by marginalized groups. This research has also shown the reaction of when power is challenged. It is evident that past systems of forceful oppression continue in contemporary life. Despite rights to protest and be protected while doing so, police violence remains the order of the day to control protests. Hence the findings of this investigation how the security services with strong links to the dominant group work to maintain inequity. As witnessed, the marginalized have been deprived of narrating their own stories. Therefore the study at hand was essential as it conveyed the raw student representations' of campus policing.

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**Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Shose Kessi, for her intellectual contributions to the project and immense emotional support throughout the year. I would also like to thank my course conveners Florreta Boonzaier and Taryn van Niekerk for their motivation and support. Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friend Bokang Methola for their continuous support.

**Appendix A**

**Ethical Approval Letter**

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**

Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town  Rondebosch 7701 South Africa
Telephone (021) 650 3417
Fax No. (021) 650 4104

08 September 2017

Nabila Ebrahim
Department of Psychology
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch 7701

Dear Nabila

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your study, *Activists' experiences of the presence of policing during student activism in 2016 at the University of Cape Town*. The reference number is PSY2017-044

I wish you all the best for your study.

Yours sincerely

Lauren Wild (PhD)
Associate Professor
Chair: Ethics Review Committee

**Appendix B**

**Informed Consent Form**

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**

**DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY**

**Students' representations of campus policing during 2016 protests at South African Universities**

1. **Invitation and Purpose**

You are invited to take part in this study which explores activists' experience of the presence of security forces during student activism. I am a research student from the Psychology department at the University of Cape Town.

2. **Procedures**

• If you decide to take part in this study I will interview you about your experience of the presence of security forces on campus during student activism, asking you to share your experiences during 2016. By interviewing you I hope to find out how student's experience the presence of security forces on campus during student activism and talk about any aspects of this experience that you wish to add to the discussion.

• The interview should take about an hour; however, you are free to speak to me for a shorter or longer period.

• Participating in this study is voluntary. You are free to end the interview at any time with no penalty or any other consequences.

3. **Risks, Discomforts & Inconveniences**

• This study poses a low risk of harm to you.

• Speaking about your experiences as activists could bring up sensitive issues and could potentially be emotionally distressing. However, you will decide what you would like to discuss in the interview and you will not be obligated to speak about anything you do not feel comfortable speaking about.

• If you would like to contact a counselor to further discuss your experiences, you can contact the organizations listed on the referral list.

• You might be inconvenienced by having to give up an hour of your time.

4. **Benefits**

 This project gives you an opportunity to voice your opinions about and share your experiences of policing during student activism, thus raising awareness about a side of protest policing not usually seen.

**5.    Privacy and Confidentiality**

• Interviews will take place in the UCT Psychology department in room 3C or room 3D

• Any information you share is strictly confidential. You will remain anonymous throughout the research process. You have the right to request that any information you have shared be removed from the study.

• A tape recorder will be used to record the interview. If you would like the tape recorder to be switched off at any time you have the right to request this.

• No one but myself and my university supervisor will listen to or have access to the tape recordings.


**6.    Money Matters**

Costs may arise when participants are unable to utilize the Jammie Shuttle services. In such cases, participants shall be reimbursed for any traveling costs.


**7.    Contact details**

In the event that you would like to talk to the chair of the ethics committee, please contact:

Rosalind Adams at (0)21 650 3417 / rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za


If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study please contact:

Myself, Nabila Ebrahim at 0649097078 / ebrnab009@myuct.ac.za or

My supervisor Dr. Shose Kessi at 021-650-4606 / shose.kessi@uct.ac.za


**8.    Signatures**

{Subject's name}_____ has been informed of the nature and purpose of the procedures described above including any risks involved in its performance. He or she has been given time to ask any questions and these questions have been answered to the best of the investigator's ability. A signed copy of this consent form will be made available to the subject.


Investigator's Signature: _____          Date: _____


I have been informed about this research study and understand its purpose, possible benefits, risks, and discomforts. I agree to take part in this research as a subject. I know that I am free

to withdraw this consent and quit this project at any time and that doing so will not cause me any penalty or loss of benefits that I would otherwise be entitled to enjoy.
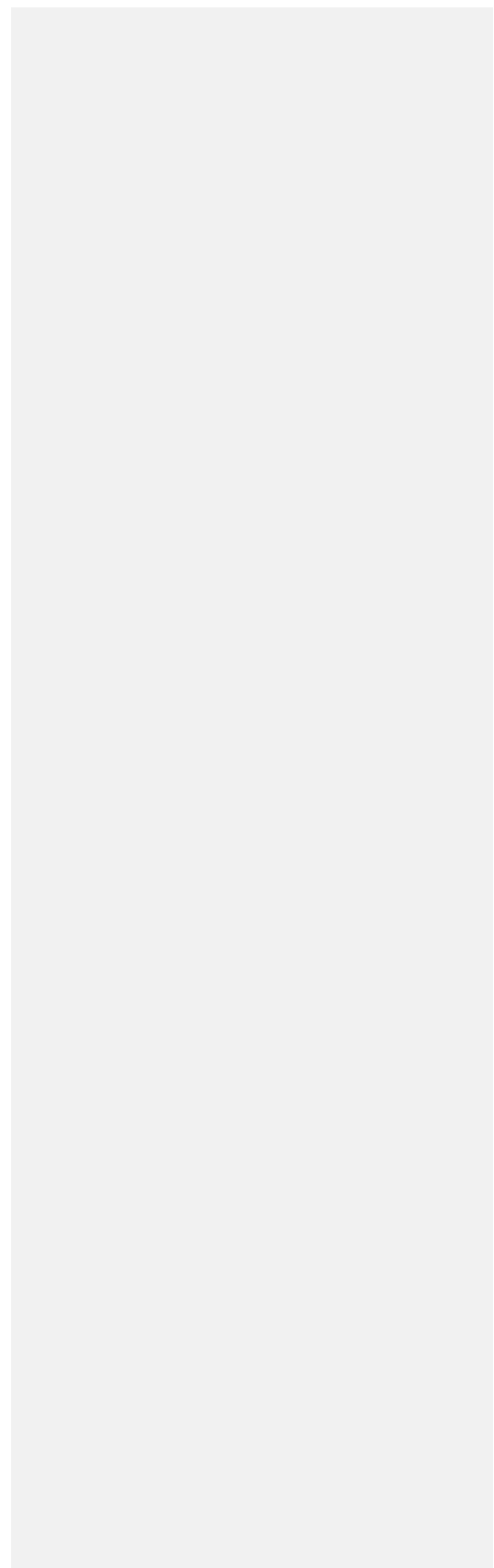

Signature _____ Date _____

 Research Participant


I consent to video/audio tapes being made of these sessions and to these tapes being used to aid the work.

Signature _____ Date _____

 Research Participant

**Appendix C**

**Referral List**

Should you feel that you require counseling or support, below is a list of organizations which could be contacted.

**LIFE LINE**

Services:

24-hour telephone counseling service

Trauma counselling

Face to Face counseling

Payment

Services free of charge

Contact:

Office: (+27 21) 461-1113

Crisis: (+27 21) 461-1111

Email: info@lifelinewc.org.za

**FAMSA**

Services:

Amongst other services, FAMSA offers individual counseling to survivors of trauma.

Payment:

Their services are charged on a sliding scale according to income.

Contact details:

Tel: 021 447 0174

Address: 9 Bowden Road, Observatory, 7925

E-Mail: famsa@famsawc.org.za

**Appendix D**

**Sample Questions for Semi-Structured Interview**

- What are your thoughts on the 2016 protests?

- Where did orders to police campus come from?

- In your view, why were security forces brought on to campus?

- Can you comment on the general conduct of security forces?

- What did you think about methods used by security forces?

- Did you have any encounters with security forces during the protests?

- Would you say that there were other ways that school management, as well as security forces, could have dealt with the process?

- Is there anything you would like to add that I have not covered in this interview