

## TRANSCRIPT

**Caro Rolando:** Hi, I'm Caro Rolando. Welcome to this IFEX podcast. IFEX is the global network of organisations, dedicated to defending and promoting free expression. To learn more about our work visit [www.ifex.org](http://www.ifex.org). That's www dot i-f-e-x dot o-r-g.

**Jamaine Krige:** It's happening in every single one of our nine provinces, and it is happening at the majority of our universities.

**CR:** In 2015, a student movement took South Africa by storm.

**JK:** I like to say it's our October Revolution.

**CR:** One year later, protesters continue to spill out onto the streets of Johannesburg and Cape Town, demanding free education.

**JK:** Their aim was not violence, their aim was not destruction. Their aim was to disrupt.

**CR:** But what happens when a peaceful movement is disrupted? Who tells that story? And how?

**JK:** We're faced with a lot of hostility. We're faced with hostility from the police – who feel that we're portraying them in a brutal manner. We're faced with hostility from the students, who feel that we're telling a one-sided story. And we're also faced with hostility – maybe not hostility – but a certain resistance from the official institutions. Because they also don't feel like the full story is being told. It's a very, very difficult situation to be in.

My name is Jamaine Krige and I am a reporter, I'm a journalist, with SABC Radio News. I'm based in the Johannesburg newsroom.

Fees must fall started up more or less this time last year. I like to say it's our October Revolution. This year I was covering exactly the same, exactly the same protests, exactly the same place, exactly the same issues, but one year later.

You have police standing, or facing off with these students who are demanding free education and decolonized education.

And these students, they're ready to fight for that. They're ready to fight and they've communicated that they're ready to die for that and I just hope that it doesn't get to that point.

When I was first assigned to the protest last year, I arrived at the destination that I was supposed to be at and there was not a soul in sight. The only thing that caught my eye was graffiti that had been scrawled in the dead of night on the wall, under this blooming jacaranda tree, saying "Run, Habib Run." Now, Adam Habib is the Vice-Chancellor of Wits University.

I thought "ugh, I'm in the wrong place, I've messed up the story, I don't know what's happening." And the next thing, I heard a police radio crackle, and they said, "please deploy extra resources to the medical faculty."

And I immediately jumped in my car and I drove through there, and as I arrived, hundreds of students had just blockaded the road. They were being denied access to the university, and they were protesting. And one of the protestors was standing with a sign, in front of the medical faculty, saying "You can jail a revolutionary, but you cannot jail a revolution."

Their aim was not violence, their aim was not destruction. Their aim was to disrupt. To disrupt every-day citizens to the point where they take notice of this cause. And where they take notice of the problems.

Now, if you know about South Africa, the way we protest here is we sing, and we dance. So, you had hundreds of singing, dancing students, in the road.

A lot of our former struggle songs from the apartheid era have been reinvented, along with popular music, to become songs from, for the new struggle, for our October Revolution.

One of the songs, "*Senzeni Na*" – there are a couple – if you translate them, it's "what have we done, what have we done, our only crime is that we are black."

If you go read up about what happened in 1976 in our country. There are a lot of comparisons being drawn. It's 40 years on, and we're sitting with a very, very similar situation in our country at the moment.

I remember, at that stage, the students were being barred out from the faculty, by private security and by police.

And when they tried to break through the gates and gain entry, some of my colleagues tried to record it. And they were told off. They had their cameras pushed down to the ground.

We're faced with a lot of hostility during these protests. We're faced with hostility from the police, who feel that we're portraying them in a brutal manner. We're faced with hostility from the students, who feel that we're telling a one-sided story. And we're also faced with hostility – maybe not hostility – but a certain resistance from the official institutions. Because they also don't feel like the full story is being told. It's a very, very difficult situation to be in.

The students have often said it's not the university that promised them free education. That was a promise made by the government. And they realise that it is not up to the university to offer them that. But at the moment the universities are almost blocking that dialogue and blocking that discourse. And the students and civil society at large feel like the universities are acting as guardians, as gatekeepers.

**Student:** ...graduate, undergraduate...We have a plan. The plan is simple: Habib close down the university.

**JK:** The students were demanding a university shutdown. The university was saying that they cannot do that. And that's why a lot of people were feeling that the universities are acting as a buffer. If they had given into students' demands, then the government might have taken notice. But Wits University was sitting and saying they did a poll, and I think it was 77% of students wanted to attend class.

I've got a statement here that the university sent. They say if they hadn't persevered in this regard, and if they had shut down the university, it would have had disastrous consequences for the 37,000 students and thousands of staff who desperately either needed to graduate or who needed access to the labour market, those on financial aid, those with scholarships or bursaries. And it also would've compromised the admissions for next year.

There has definitely been violence from the students. Although I still, I still struggle to believe that that is the mandate of the movement. I think it's isolated, and very select

groups. I also sometimes think that, that it's a frustration at not having their voices heard, that make a few people act out in a physical or in a violent way.

But, for instance, two weeks ago, I was on Braamfontein. And the student protests, they claimed, had spilled out onto the streets, in the central Johannesburg region. And we saw one of our outside broadcast TV vans torched, until it was only a shell.

**Observer 1:** They're burning an SABC van!

**Observer 2:** Where are you going?

**Observer 1:** They're burning it!

**JK:** Stones and bottles were being thrown at the journalists. If you have a look at the journalists at the moment, we're all working these protests in helmets. Some even in bullet-proof vests. Between the police and their rubber bullets, and students, or the protestors and their glass bottles and their rocks, you know, as a journalist, you're always on the wrong side, and you're always caught in the crossfire.

All of that said and done, and after all the chaos on Braamfontein, and I was there until about 3 o'clock that morning, where roads were blockaded off, fires were burning in the streets, and the police were rushing up and down, shooting rubber bullets and tear gas and stun grenades. After all of that, there were 9 arrests made. Of those, only 4 of them were students. And only 2 of them studied Wits university.

**SABC TV news clip:** ...ongoing Fees Must Fall action on campus. Many students have taken to social media to condemn violence and hooliganism in their name, or in the name of their cause.

**JK:** When you have a situation of chaos, you've got criminal elements taking advantage of that. The moment there's disorder, there are people who feel that can, they can almost just cash in on that.

It's very difficult to stay objective. And it also, it depends on which side of the firing line you're on. Because when you're with the students and the police have opened fire with rubber bullets and tear gas, your sympathy is with the students.

And when you're standing behind the police line, .and the police are telling you how they actually don't want to be there, or how their children can't afford varsity either, then your sympathy is with the police.

What you're faced with, the whole day, every day, is this absolute, raw, human emotion. And whether it is hope, whether it is fear, whether it is, it's a disappointment. There's just, there's so much going around, that yes, you don't necessarily stay objective. But your loyalties also shift the whole time.

You can tell this as a political story, you can tell this as an economic story. And you can tell this as an educational story. But at the end of the day, this a story that is made up of hundreds of thousands of human interest stories, regardless of which angle you take.

**CR:** This podcast was produced by Caro Rolando for IFEX, the global network of organisations dedicated to defending and promoting free expression. To learn more, visit [www.ifex.org](http://www.ifex.org).