

Balancing Security and Freedom at Universities

Three Case Studies

The conflict between keeping campuses safe and supporting
the right to free expression in transitional democracies

Brazil, South Africa, and Tunisia

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Edited by David L. Wheeler

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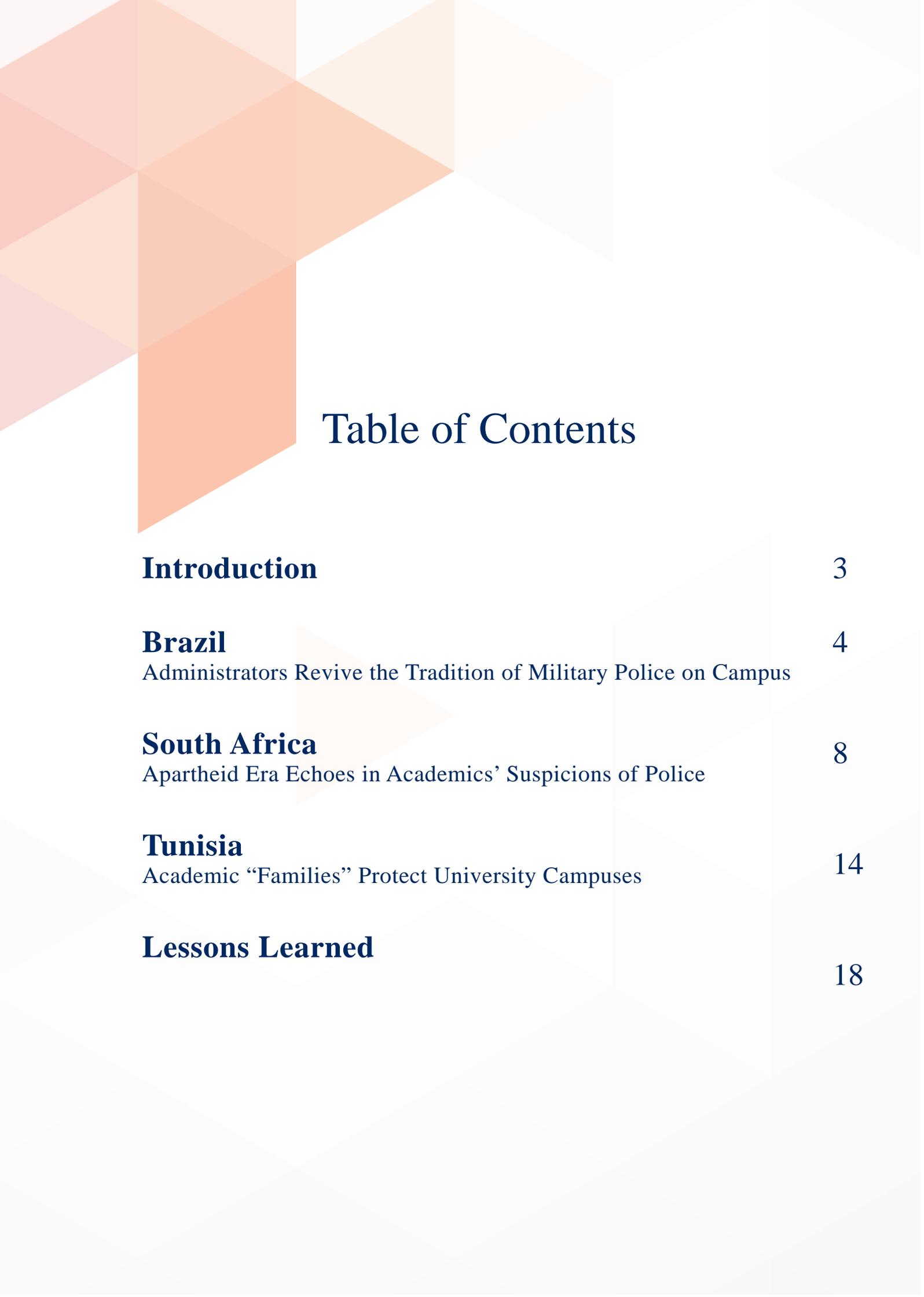


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Introduction

When protests in South Africa were rising against apartheid, one university president visited students in jail and linked arms with them at protests to try to minimize police violence. But he was also trying to keep classrooms open and education moving forward.

The students called him “president on a tightrope.”

That president, whose portrait can still be seen in a prominent mural at the University of Cape Town, personifies the key issues behind three studies here of conflicts between academic freedom and campus security in Tunisia, Brazil, and South Africa.

Universities are fundamentally driven by the belief that free speech is necessary for learning and are filled with young people discussing new ideas and rebelling against authority. In South Africa, Stephen Bantu Biko, a medical student, began the Black Consciousness Movement, which became a powerful political force that encouraged psychological as well as social liberation for those suffering under apartheid.

As a result of the tendency of universities to foment rebellion, repressive governments often heavily monitor campuses. In the articles that follow, a Tunisian student tells of routine interrogations under the old dictatorship, South African historians tell of outspoken academics being targeted for assassinations, and a Brazilian professor recalls the era when students were tortured and “disappeared.”

When democratization arrives, the government authorities that previously monitored universities have to adjust. Operations that spied on students and teaching staff for state security are shut down, and university administrations often need to start up their own security operations, targeted more at preventing crime, promoting safety, and eliminating disruption of teaching.

In this transition to democracy, crime can be surprisingly difficult to separate from politics. In 2011 at the University of Sao Paulo, in Brazil, administrators called the military police onto campus after the death of a student in an apparent robbery attempt. But the continued police presence troubles students, who call it “symbolic violence” and part of an attempt to stifle political opposition. In South Africa, crime waves have made university administrators bring in trained security guards. But when political conflicts arise, those guards are also expelling students protesting over issues such as the lack of financial aid. Some Tunisian students say they would welcome properly trained security guards, and feel that they have to band together to protect each other from outsiders who want to provoke trouble on campuses.

Administrators who have to walk the tightrope between keeping universities functioning and guaranteeing essential freedoms do not have an easy task. But the authors hope they have provided useful recent history that could lead to sounder decisions. Following the case studies is a synthesis of what other administrators have learned about these difficult decisions.



Brazil

Administrators Revive the Tradition of Military Police on Campus

By Marion Lloyd

MEXICO CITY—Thousands of striking professors and students took to the streets of Sao Paulo starting in May, in the latest in a series of protests against university policies in Brazil's most populous state. In the process, the protesters were risking violent confrontation with an old adversary: the military police.

For decades after the end of military rule in 1985, Brazil's military police force—like its civilian counterparts in other Latin American countries—largely refrained from intervening in university affairs. The policy responded to demands for university autonomy in the newly democratic era. However, amid rising violent crime in many countries, administrators from Brazil to Mexico are increasingly turning to the police for help in ensuring campus security—and in squelching opposition.

In 2000, the rector of the National Autonomous University of Mexico called in the police to end a 10-month strike at the region's largest institution of higher education. Similarly, in Chile, the government has deployed police with water cannons since 2006 to put down protests by students demanding free higher education, crimes against students and professors, most recently in May. Often acting at the request of university officials, police have also entered campuses in recent years in pursuit of criminals or to quell student and faculty protests in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela, Honduras and Puerto Rico, according to news reports.

The University of Sao Paulo, Brazil's premier research institution, is perhaps the most significant example of the shift in policy. In September 2011, amid a rash of violent crimes against students and professors, the university called in the military police to help provide security on its 7.4-square-kilometer main campus, in the western part of the city of Sao Paulo.

Within weeks, the police arrested three students for marijuana possession—a move that sparked further protests and culminated with the arrests of another 70 students.



Brazil

“It’s a clear political tactic on the part of the government and university officials to crack down on the protests and discourage opposition,” Guilherme Mongeló, an archaeology graduate student at the university, said in a telephone interview.

Mongeló, a representative of the university’s main student federation, took part in the recent strike by the three, state-run universities against government-mandated austerity measures.

Among the institutions affected by the budget freeze is the State University of Campinas, ranked the country’s no. 2 institution of higher education. A proposal to set up a military police base there in 2013 was rejected due to student opposition. The administration pledged not to turn to the military for “interventions of any kind in the union or student movements or for any other type of monitoring on campus.” Mongeló argued that in the case of the University of Sao Paulo, the administration was seeking to adjust the “balance of power” amid escalating protests at the institution.

The university, Latin America’s top-ranked institution of higher education, has 90,000 students spread across 10 campuses in Sao Paulo state, including four in the state capital.

In 2007, the university called in the police to oust striking students, who had seized the rector’s building for 51 days. The students were protesting alleged efforts by the state governor to seize control of the university’s finances.

Then, in 2009, the military police broke up a month-long strike, in which students were demanding direct elections for the rector and other reforms they viewed as being pro-democratic.

In the resulting confrontation, the police bombarded protesters with rubber bullets and tear gas, wounding several students and arresting dozens, according to television footage and news reports.

“We don’t want the coercive presence of a police force that already has a history of violent crackdowns on peaceful protests,” a group of political-science students wrote in a manifesto posted on the online blog Cirandea in 2011. “The presence of the military police on campus represents another type of violence—symbolic violence.”

Administrators at the University of Sao Paulo, however, defended the decision to set up a mobile military police base inside campus, arguing that the unarmed campus security guards were ill-equipped to cope with soaring violent crime.

“Like in much of Latin America, universities in Brazil are becoming violent,” said Emmanuel Nunes de Oliveira Jr., a political science professor and security expert who helped draft the agreement with the military police in 2011. “We are no longer an island apart, nor are we immune from what is happening outside campus walls.”

Brazil

Indeed, in the months leading up to the decision, there were dozens of reports of campus muggings and “express kidnappings,” in which victims are held until they withdraw money from cash machines.

Then, in May 2011, accounting student Felipe Ramos de Paiva was shot dead in an apparent attempted robbery attempt as he left class in the late evening.

De Oliveira argued that for many, that murder was a tipping point. “In Brazil, five years ago, if you said the police should take charge of campus security, people wouldn’t believe it,” he said in a telephone interview.

However, he noted that 58 percent of students surveyed by the polling firm Datafolha in November 2011 said they approved the deployment of the military police on campus. And 73 percent disapproved of the student protests, which included seizing the rector’s building earlier that month.

For many, however, the decision to bring in the military police opened old wounds.

During the worst years of the 1964-1985 dictatorship, hundreds of Brazilian university students and professors were arrested on suspicion of subversion, tortured, jailed or “disappeared”—a history that repeated itself in varying magnitude and horror throughout the region. The University of Sao Paulo, which was both a hotbed of opposition and a bastion of support for the regime, was particularly hard hit by the oppression, leaving emotional wounds.

“When the police came in, it brought back to a lot of people really bad memories of the time when the military police were there,” said Eduardo Góes Neves, a prominent archaeology professor at the university, who was an undergraduate in the final years of the dictatorship.

Among the victims of the repression were figures who have since risen to prominence: the Brazilian president, Dilma Rousseff, and the higher education secretary, Paulo Speller.

Rousseff was tortured and jailed for three years in the early 1970s after participating in leftist guerrilla movements while Speller was imprisoned for a year in 1969 after leading a student-protest movement at the University of Brasilia.

The 1979 Amnesty Law pardoned both anti-government activists and military officials involved in the repression. However, many legacies of the military era remain, such as the continued use of a military police force to oversee security operations in much of the country.



Brazil

“The fact that we never had a truth commission created a culture of impunity in the police, that I really think is at the roots of the violence that we see in the military police today,” said Neves, during a visit to Mexico in May. He argued that the police’s heavy-handed tactics did little to improve its image at universities. “They didn’t come in saying ‘Hey, excuse us, we came here to hang out with you guys,’” he said. “They came across as violent, and beating people up.”

More than the physical safety of the students and faculty is at stake in the debate. University autonomy is also at risk, many believe.

In much of Latin America, “there is a general consensus that the police and the military don’t have a place inside the university, particularly in the case of political confrontations,” said Imanol Ordorika, director of institutional evaluation and a former student protest leader at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

The principle, which he said has its roots in the colonial period, gained strength after the 1918 university autonomy movement at the University of Cordoba, in Argentina. Since then, the prohibition against police intervention has been a rallying cry of student movements throughout the region, particularly in countries that suffered military dictatorships.

However, Ordorika acknowledged that that principle is not always upheld, such as in the case of the police crackdown at the Mexican university in 2000.

In Brazil, where 77 percent of university students study in private institutions, university autonomy is a somewhat less visceral issue, said Neves. However, he added,

“People like to think of themselves as living in this place beyond the reach of the state, a place where people can think more freely.”

De Oliveira denied that the military police presence threatened intellectual freedom at the university. “This doesn’t affect university autonomy in any way,” he said. “The police cannot interfere in the administrative, intellectual or pedagogic process of the university. Rather, it is their job to assure the safety of the university community, just as they must guarantee safety for all Brazilians.”

So far, the goal of secure campuses remains elusive. Between January and April of this year, there were 94 cases of robbery and 31 assaults on the main campus, according to a report in the newsmagazine *Carta Capital*.

The university’s new rector, Marco Antonio Zago, has sought to respond to concerns over the presence of the military police since taking office in January. In May, he named a respected anthropologist, Ana Lúcia Pastore Schritzmeyer, as the superintendent in charge of campus security.

Schritzmeyer argued that the university had little choice but to rely on the police to stem rising crime. “There are groups that don’t want the police and there are groups who do,” she said in a telephone interview from Sao Paulo, where the university strike had merged with the even larger protests against the World Cup. “We have to arrive at a consensus.”

She said she would be holding talks with police officials in the coming weeks to discuss strategies for providing security, while respecting the rights of university members. However, she acknowledged that changing the culture of the military police wasn’t something that would happen overnight.

“The police should not be repressive in any way ... nor should they be frisking people on campus,” she said. “We need a police force that helps the university, a truly community police force.”

South Africa

Apartheid Era Echoes in Academics' Suspicions of Police

By Henk Rossouw

More than fifty years of history are stirred into the strong feelings of students and professors today who are leery of a police presence on South African campuses.

In 1957, as the apartheid government prepared to segregate universities, students from the University of Cape Town protested outside parliament by extinguishing a homemade kerosene torch—the “torch of academic freedom.” Soon, the extinguished torch was a symbol in scores of student-led apartheid protests.

The penalty for students who took a stand was often high. In 1960, Philip Kgosana, one of the few black students at the University of Cape Town, led 30,000 black residents of a segregated neighborhood in a march into the city. He was forced into exile.

By the 1970s, spies had infiltrated the National Union of South African Students. “Students’ conversations were recorded, their letters opened and in some cases their passports were even confiscated,” write Bruce Baigrie and Zackie Achmat, researchers at Ndifuna Ukwazi, a nonprofit social-justice organization.

At the same time, Stephen Bantu Biko, a medical student at the University of Natal, formed the influential Black Consciousness Movement, which encouraged psychological liberation from racism as well as political liberation.

Despite the ban on his teachings, black school children in Soweto, inspired by him, staged a protest on June 16, 1976. The apartheid police shot dead hundreds of pupils. Soon after, the police arrested Biko and he died from prison beatings.

His death became a turning point. Into the late 1980s, protests in the streets and at universities increased in fury. Campuses were battlegrounds. The apartheid government declared a state of emergency in the mid-1980s.



South Africa

In 1987, as University of Cape Town students staged a protest against apartheid beside a highway near campus, Daniel Pretorius threw stones at passing cars and incited other students to copy him. In reprisal, police armed with whips chased students onto campus. Later, Pretorius admitted that he was a police spy, recruited to instigate violence.

He was supposed to justify proposed legislation that would cut funding to universities where administrators failed to quash on- and off-campus student protests.

The bill, written by the education minister, F.W. de Klerk, had the reverse effect of its intent. Academics gathered in mass protests at campuses across South Africa.

John Higgins, author of *Academic Freedom in a Democratic South Africa*, had at that time started lecturing at the university. When the apartheid government declared another state of emergency, he says, the streets emptied overnight, except for armored vehicles. Students made frantic phone calls to find out who was missing—the government crackdown had legalized mass detention without trial.

By then, the university had begun defying segregation laws and admitting more black students. One such student, Keresemose Richard Baholo, created a series of paintings to commemorate the turbulent events of the time. In one of his paintings, vice-chancellor Stuart Saunders embodies the difficulty of balancing campus security and academic freedom.

Up on the steps, amid the melee of student protesters and police, the vice-chancellor—in academic cap and gown—has a megaphone in one hand and the other is raised in the universal gesture for "Stop!"

Saunders was described by students as "a vice-chancellor on a tightrope" for trying to balance his ardent support for their right to protest apartheid with his often-futile attempts to keep them safe. He would even visit students held in detention and attempt to defuse police attacks by linking arms with the protesters.

The police and the military could not, ultimately, put down the massive protests, as union workers and high-school pupils joined the university students. F.W. de Klerk became prime minister and, in 1990, released Nelson Mandela from prison.

Over the next four years, as the country inched toward the first multiracial elections, clandestine figures within the security police and the military, dubbed the Third Force, instigated violence meant to derail democracy. When Nelson Mandela was elected president in 1994, the new government inherited the police and military personnel who had engaged in such tactics.

The new constitution, which came into effect in 1997, protected freedom of expression, including academic freedom. Spying on campus became a thing of the past. At the same time, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission offered state security forces amnesty from prosecution if they revealed the full extent of their human-rights abuses.

During the commission's investigations, the government's targeting of students and academics came to light. The spy Craig Williamson, who had infiltrated the National Union of South African Students in the 1970s, received amnesty from the commission for numerous atrocities, including the killing of leftist scholar Ruth First with a letter bomb.

Ferdi Barnard, a member of a top-secret hit squad, refused to co-operate with the commission and was sentenced to life imprisonment for the assassination of David Webster, a prominent social anthropologist at the University of the Witwatersrand.

South Africa

Twenty years into democracy a new wave of student protests has escalated on South African campuses. This time around, university finances and crime are blended into the causes of the protests. Universities now generally have private security guards, but some institutions have recently called the police—who have kept off campus since the advent of democracy—back on campus to arrest students protesting the lack of financial aid.

At the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, graduate students say they face academic discipline for making public the discrepancy between increased campus security during student protests and lax security when it comes to rape and theft. Leading academics, like John Higgins, have also criticized new legislation that they believe gives the government too much power over South Africa's publicly funded universities.

"University administrators want to please those governing the country," says Na'eem Jeenah, of the Afro-Middle East Center and who has lectured in political science at the University of the Witwatersrand and previously led the Freedom of Expression Institute. "I'm not saying the government is putting institutions up to it, but they do try and prevent too much criticism."

Crime, along with university autonomy, is part of the campus-security debate. "Suddenly, in the late 1990s, you had this massive crime spike, which happens in most transitional societies as the state relinquishes tight-fisted control," says Guy Lamb, who leads an effort at the University of Cape Town to make use of new research on safety and violence.

According to Lamb, it took the crime wave in South Africa to transform the police force from a tool of repression, trained to control, into a public service, trained to protect. Overwhelmed with fighting crime, the police are no longer a common sight on campuses, and universities have hired private security guards.

Many younger students are focused on freedom from crime and poverty, not academic liberty. "I was born into freedom," says Bulelwa Jordan, a black student at the University of Cape Town, who was born in 1991. "I don't know what it is like to be oppressed. On the other hand, we still have the baggage of our parents that we have to carry."

The government-supported financial aid system struggles to keep its existing promises to help poorer students, many of them the children of the victims of apartheid who couldn't get a decent education. While legalized racism ended in 1994, the inequality that many South African students experience has become a flashpoint. "Poor, disadvantaged, mainly [black] students are marginalized and face financial exclusion," says Shira'h Jeenah, a student at the University of Johannesburg who was arrested in a January protest.

University administrators face a conflict. The shortfall in financial aid is not their fault, they say, yet students have been staging their protests about the issue on their campuses, where they feel responsible for security. In January, the government owed the University of Johannesburg \$10.8 million in promised financial aid. Even more is owed for the current year.

Over 2000 eligible students at the university did not receive their aid on time. When the government money came through, many had lost their places in university courses. When registration began in January without any sign of the financial aid, the South African Students Congress (SASCO), which formed in 1991 out of the merger of black and white student organizations, called for nationwide protests.

Over 100 students disrupted registration at the University of Johannesburg. Security guards escorted many of them off-campus and stopped them from entering again. Staff is not placed in jeopardy".

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FOR USE BY WHITE PERSONS

South Africa

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The next day Shira'h Jeenah and several other students lodged a complaint at the campus protection services office that one of the security guards had yelled a racist epithet at them. Mr. Jeenah said he had not intended to re-ignite the protest but other students gathered in support. The administration ended up calling the police, who arrested 27 students. In an official statement, the University of Johannesburg said that it "respects the right of students to protest peacefully, as long as academic and administrative activities are not disrupted and the safety of students and staff is not placed in jeopardy".

Implicit in the administration's rationale is a bit of recent history. In 2012, a large crowd of potential students at the university desperate for the promise of higher education and hoping to register for classes stampeded. One person was crushed to death. Still, the students protesting in January said they did not cross the line into violence. The criminal charges against them did not hold up in court, although they still faced university disciplinary charges.

In order not to get expelled from the university, Mr. Jeenah says, he took a plea bargain for 50 hours of community service and a ban on him ever serving again as a student leader.

Luzuko Buku, the secretary-general of SASCO, views that ban as part of a wider phenomenon. "There is a serious attempt to kill student political activism in higher education," he says. "Institutions compete for wealthier students. It is preferable for them to create a protest-free environment in order to attract students who can pay".

Na'eem Jeenah, executive director of the Afro-Middle East Center, a private research institute, says the arrest of his son, Shira'h Jeenah, during the protest forms part of a disturbing pattern.

"The space for student free expression has certainly been constrained in the past few years," Mr. Jeenah says. "Students have less freedom and more control from above than in the 1980s. They need permission for everything, and permission can be turned down".

When balancing campus security concerns and academic freedom, in his opinion, the scale should tip on the side of protests: "The university is the space where confrontation should happen and be allowed to flourish," he says. "Not violent confrontation. But anything short of that sharpens the intellectual capacities of students and develops them into political beings."

Like some other public intellectuals, Mr. Jeenah remains concerned about the state of South African academic freedom. As the former director of the Freedom of Expression Institute, he compiled a dossier on how, he says, "the University of KwaZulu-Natal imposed sanctions on academics who have been publicly critical of the institution".

South Africa

Recently, outspoken graduate students there have also faced institutional ire.

Amidst the wave of student protests about tuition, Lukhona Mnguni, and three other master's degree students, published an open letter to the vice-chancellor criticizing a double-standard: "The university has no desire to see protests, even peaceful protests.

Our campuses are littered with security guards clad in riot gear, which we view as nothing but a paramilitary intended to store fear in the souls of students.

Yet during normal times our campus has poor security presence even in known crime hotspots." (A spokesperson for the university, Lesiba Seshoka, told the Daily News that "the allegations in the letter are grossly inaccurate.")

Mr. Mnguni and the other students then received a university summons to appear before a disciplinary court.

The threat of suspension or expulsion for publishing the letter was a "direct infringement on freedom of expression and academic freedom," Mr. Mnguni told the Mail & Guardian. The university later backed down. Still, any student gathering remains fraught.

Since 2012, Mr. Buku says, any student organization must report to the administration before meeting, to assure them that protest marches are not on the agenda.

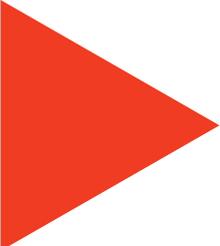
The push for control extends upward into government. The current education minister, Blade Nzimande, has pushed through legislation enabling him to bypass the council that represents South Africa's higher-education institutions and intervene directly on campuses.

According to Ihron Rensburg, the vice-chancellor at the University of Johannesburg, whose institution has struggled to handle student protest when government financial aid doesn't materialize, the bill "undermines the careful balance struck between university autonomy and public accountability."

The minister's argument for the new legislation, says John Higgins, the author, rests on the fact that at "some universities there are real problems—there's corruption, there's student protests—and he wants to act instantly."

That makes universities nervous. "Obviously, there has to be a sense of accountability between universities and the state which is funding them," says Mr. Higgins. "It's just really about the balance."





Tunisia

Academies “Families” Protect University Campuses

By Sarah Lynch

TUNIS—After months of political and religious upheaval at the University of Manouba on the outskirts of Tunis, a protester lowered a Tunisian flag from its perch above the campus gates and replaced it with a black one that is viewed as a symbol of Islamic fundamentalism.

But he was interrupted.

On that day in early March two years ago, a university student confronted the hardline Islamist to protect the Tunisian flag. “The students who go to the university are the ones defending it,” said Habib Mallakh, a retired French professor and secretary general of the Tunisian Association for the Defense of University Values.

Tunisia’s revolution three years ago that ousted the longtime dictator, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, brought an end to years of police presence on university campuses that curbed political freedom. Since then, university administrators have grappled with the challenges of a subsequent security gap with police mostly staying off campuses.

Although risks posed by security incidents sometimes overwhelm universities, members of higher-education institutions across the capital said they have largely relied on networks of students and staff to monitor and address campus security concerns, prompting students like Khaoula Rashidi to act in defense of the Tunisian flag.

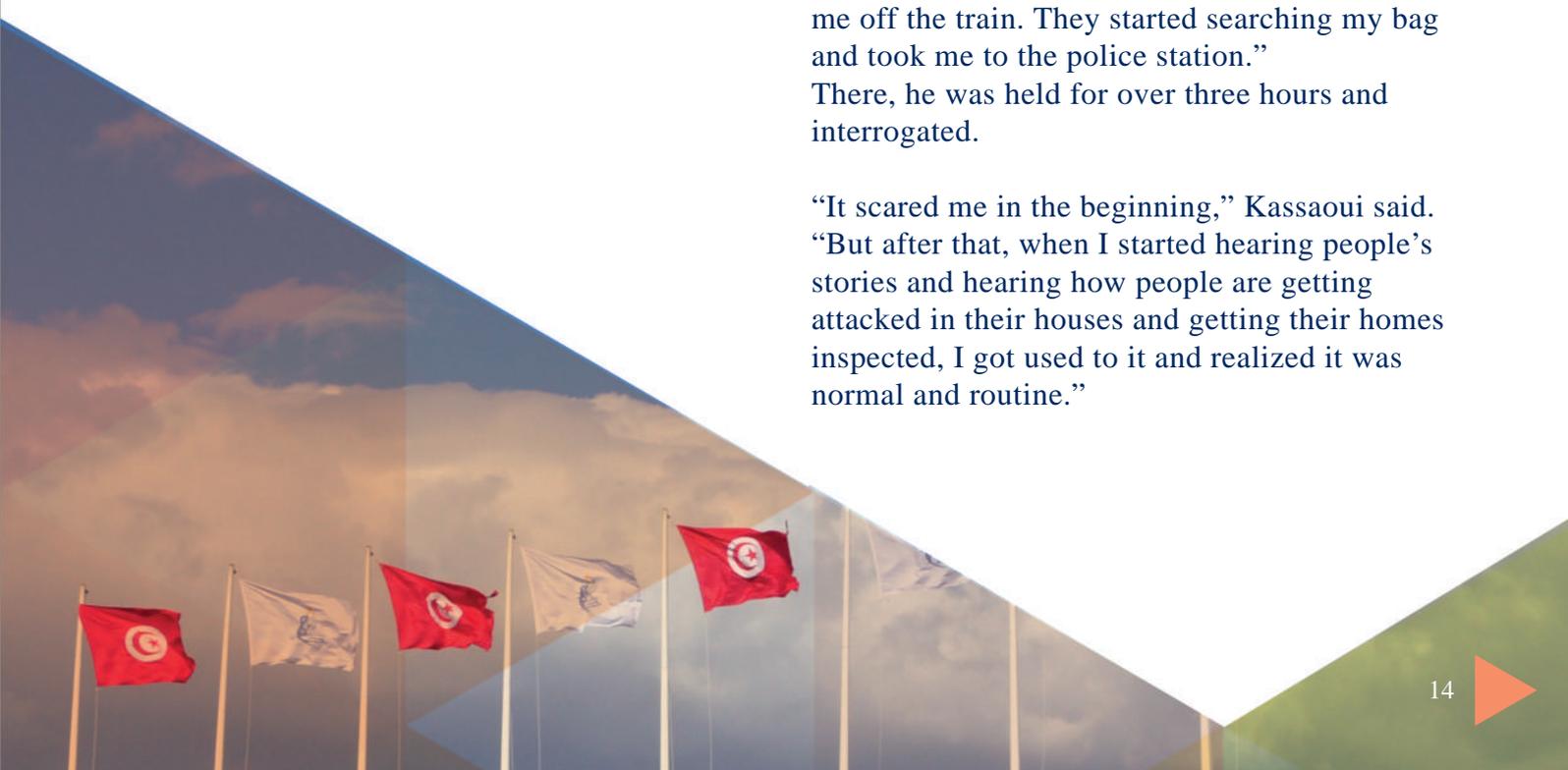
“It’s a family working together in harmony trying to protect the campus,” said Habib Kazdaghli, dean of the Faculty of Letters, Arts and Humanities at the university.

Under the rule of Ben Ali, who governed Tunisia for more than two decades, students like Chokri Kassaoui faced interrogation and arrest. As an undergraduate five years ago in the coastal town of Bir El-Bey, he was followed one afternoon after attending a student union meeting.

“I took the train home and the police followed me,” said Kassaoui, who is now a master’s degree student at Manouba University. “At one station, they grabbed me by the arm and pulled me off the train. They started searching my bag and took me to the police station.”

There, he was held for over three hours and interrogated.

“It scared me in the beginning,” Kassaoui said. “But after that, when I started hearing people’s stories and hearing how people are getting attacked in their houses and getting their homes inspected, I got used to it and realized it was normal and routine.”





Tunisia

That changed when Ben Ali was overthrown in 2011 and a new government cleansed universities of police and stopped them from entering campuses without a court order.

“Everyone [inside the universities] was made responsible for protecting himself and protecting the property as well as—of course—faculty and students,” said Slim Choura, director general of international cooperation at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. “This is the high level of maturity that we achieved and we reached three years after the revolution.”

The post-revolution wave of social unrest, however, has sometimes threatened academic life and led to uncontrollable violence on campuses.

Some of the fiercest unrest has taken place at Manouba’s Faculty of Letters, Arts and Humanities, including the most-publicized incident, beginning in late 2011. But many of the descriptions of the incident do not extract its potential lessons for other universities.

The conflict began after a university governing board banned women from wearing the conservative face veil known as the niqab in class. According to students and reports, students started a protest movement that administrators said attracted outside demonstrators including Abou Iyadh, the leader of Ansar al-Sharia, designated by the Tunisian government and the United States as a terrorist group. Hardline Islamists protested the niqab ban in front of an administration building. Clashes broke out between the Islamists and secular students, which has happened several times since 2011.

“In case of a conflict what we usually do is make a human chain to prevent the groups from getting physical and conflicting,” said Mallakh, of the Tunisian Association for the Defense of University Values.

But during the dispute over the niqab policy, altercations between protesters, students and administrators couldn’t be stopped. On December 6, radical Islamist demonstrators blocked the door of the administration building, witnesses said.

“I tried to run fast and go between them and open the door but they blocked me between the two doors and pushed them closed so I was asphyxiated,” said Mallakh, who was eventually released and taken to the hospital.

Tunisia

It was then that Dean Kazdaghli—with support from teachers and students—halted classes as the sit-in continued. The classes were stopped not only due to security concerns but also to pressure the government to issue a national policy regarding the face veil, said Amel Jaidi, head of the English department and a member of the university’s scientific council, a governing board.

“We were divided over inviting police inside the campus because we have a history of police violations,” Jaidi said. “We also feared the reaction of the students.”

Secular students and faculty also claimed the police lacked political will to intervene since they supported hardline Islamists in their ideological battle. That accusation, like the broader conflict over the niqab ban, reflects the political fight between liberals and Islamists that has flared in Tunisia since Ben Ali was ousted. Indeed, many on campuses say that religious dogma is the biggest threat to academic freedom.

But in early January, after the sit-in continued for several weeks, the administration called police to break up the sit-in. They arrived overnight and no one was hurt in the dispersal, administrators said.

Two years later, some students and professors said the biggest threat to security on campus is that outsiders—like those who protested at Manouba—can still easily enter the university. “The problem is that even a small fight can turn into a big fight where everyone brings his friends onto campus,” said Wassim Oueslate, 20, a first-year student at Manouba University. “The problem is that the guards aren’t even checking IDs,” he said. “It bothers me a lot because it influences the life of the students. We feel insecure.”

Yet Oueslate, like many other academics and students of varying political and ideological stripes, doesn’t want police on campus. Even some police disapprove of a state security return.

“We don’t support university security interfering in affairs,” said Houcine Saidi, head of a police union. “Student syndicates such as UGET [General Union of Tunisian Students] and UGTE [General Tunisian Union of Students] have to deal with themselves and deal with their own affairs,” he said, referring to opposing student unions.

There are, however, specific procedures in place to call police on campus if they are needed, Choura at the higher education ministry said. If there is a threat at an institution, the director should call the president of the university who would then call the minister of higher education, Choura said.

If the minister decides to act, authorities within the education ministry or governing officials on the local level would contact the court so police can be permitted to enter campus. In the event of immediate threats, a local governor will call for security to act rapidly and inform the court of this decision, Choura said.

Tunisia

“In general this does not really happen,” he said. “But in a few cases it was true that the police interfered, with permission from the court.”

To improve campus security, some seek private, independent security forces that would answer solely to deans or other top university officials.

“Their job would not be to repress university values but to defend university values,” Mallakh said. “Security should exist to... allow the existence of freedom and that happens in all democratic universities where security is there to give people the right to express themselves and be free.”

While a few guards sit at the entrance of Manouba, they are largely incompetent, administrators said, and do little else but watch events on campus.

“We need people who are trained and physically able and have the competencies to protect the campus,” said Kazdaghli, who has an interior ministry-assigned guard with him 24 hours a day because he has received death threats, presumably from fundamentalists who see him as a symbol of liberal values.

Yehya bin Abdallah, who belongs to an Islamist-dominated student union at Tunis El Manar University, agrees that real security guards would be helpful. He said university employees sometimes work as mediators when student disputes erupt into more physical conflict. Official security would be more effective, he said, but only if administrators ensure protective measures don't become repressive.

Houcine Boujarra, a professor at the University of April 9 in Tunis and general secretary of the General Federation of Higher Education and Scientific Research, a union, said the former Minister of Higher Education promised a year and a half ago that he would assign 500 independent guards to Tunisian universities. But that has never occurred.

Regardless, not all university members support such an approach and instead prefer to rely on the existing campus networks of professors and students.

“There is solidarity among students so in case of an outside attack or assault happening on students by criminals surrounding the university, we have witnessed solidarity among all of the student bodies,” said Othmen Amor, a leader of a liberal and leftist-leaning student union at Tunis El Manar University.

That strategy of looking inward to handle security concerns recently proved effective at Manouba University, when students reported a campus policy violation: Hanging posters without permission.

“This morning, some people from Ennahda [a moderate Islamist party] came here to stick posters on the walls,” said Manouba's Kazdaghli, referring to the nation's leading Islamist party.

It was a student who informed him of the incident, through a call.

“And the people hanging the posters were two outsiders,” Kazdaghli said. “They were not from the university.”

Lessons Learned

If people or property on university campuses are at risk or protests turn violent, state security forces may appear to be the only option for responding. But if the presence of state security forces on campus offers a short-term solution, it also increases campus volatility in the long term. Professors and students alike view police presence at universities negatively. “Police are viewed as unfit to enter and patrol campuses due to a perceived lack of proper training and a history of using repressive and violent measures to address political and security issues,” wrote Sarah Lynch, the reporter who visited Tunisian campuses. A South African reporter, Henk Rossouw, called the presence of state security forces a “barometer of academic freedom.”

But, particularly after national transitions to democracy, universities should develop private security forces as soon as possible. Campus police take a different role than government police—and should be trained appropriately. Campus police can sustain the university atmosphere of encouraging discussion and dialogue, although it may require a great deal of patience on their part. The campus police force should be trained in avoiding and minimizing the use of force, in deterring crime, in aiding victims of crimes, and in taking the time to listen to students and faculty members. Campus police should refer minor student infractions for campus administrative discipline and not for external criminal prosecution. Students and faculty members should have an easy and efficient way to report crimes, such as a hotline. Feeling safe is an essential part of keeping protests themselves from turning excessively emotional or violent.

As has been seen in the recent rise of unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, following the police shooting of an unarmed man, suspect behavior on the part of the police themselves needs to be followed by swift, fair, transparent and neutral investigation. The “militarization” of police forces is getting a critical look in the United States and elsewhere as a factor that may escalate conflict and increase the risk of harm to the public, not as a beneficial change that increases the chance of restoring order.

Indeed, even if universities have no police at all, Tunisian universities appear to have shown that members of the university community themselves can keep the peace. “A sense of purpose and a collective sense of responsibility among students and staff,” writes Sarah Lynch, “can effectively enable university communities to internally monitor, report and address security concerns in the absence of police presence.”

Investments in crime prevention pay off both in reducing crime and in student respect for administrators. Such investments might include better nighttime lighting of pedestrian routes, patrolled pedestrian routes inside a campus or escort systems—in which students are able to ask for escorts at night from one place to another. A key issue for students is often getting to public transportation safely. If it is possible, administrators may want to bar uninvited outsiders from a campus, as at times tribes (as in Jordan for example), political factions, and other outside groups may rush onto a campus to take sides in student disputes.



At the same time, universities need to invest in the safety of surrounding communities. “Universities, particularly large public ones, cannot be islands apart,” wrote Marion Lloyd. “Rather than putting up more walls—which the University of Sao Paulo recently did between the campus and a nearby slum, where a student was killed—they should increase extension programs that make neighboring communities feel invested in the university, and in its security.”

Making a campus feel safe in every way—including reducing crime—helps to keep down violent student protests, our research found. Crime often rises in transitional democracies, as the state’s role in maintaining security drops, and emotional student reactions to feeling unsafe on campuses fueled protests in both Brazil and South Africa.

University administrators should establish roots in the campus community—contact with leaders and respected members of a variety of student, faculty and political factions and have regular forums or channels for listening to concerns. Listening is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength. Indeed, when possible students and faculty members should be participating in decisions, not just consulted about them. When times of conflict arise, those student and faculty leaders become administrative allies, getting out accurate messaging and adding credibility to administrative viewpoints. Consultation of students, faculty members and academic leaders prior to administrative security moves—such as mobilizing police—lessens the chance of escalating conflict.

Keeping order on campus while maintaining academic freedom turns out to be inextricably linked with many other factors that are part of an intellectually healthy, democratic campus. Students and professors want to feel safe, listened to, and part of decisions. Administrators who exhibit tolerance for a variety of political and ideological beliefs set a harmonious tone that keeps peace and promotes academic freedom. University administrators who create a true sense of community—even a sense of “family”—have many allies they can turn to in times of conflict and strife. Government police or army forces on campus should be avoided at all costs, and trained, campus-friendly police should take their place.

The details of campus security should be part of larger questions. How do the citizens and the government of a country view universities, professors, and students? Are they viewed as a simmering threat or as a source of intellectual energy for the society? The attitudes embedded in a country’s thinking may be as important as what uniforms the police on campus wear.



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The Authors



Marion Lloyd is a higher-education researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and a former foreign correspondent in Latin America and South Asia for The Boston Globe, Houston Chronicle and The Chronicle of Higher Education.

In 2011, she joined UNAM's General Directorate for Institutional Evaluation as chief project coordinator, overseeing comparative higher-education policy studies.

She is working toward a Ph.D. in sociology at UNAM, with a dissertation on affirmative action in Brazilian higher education, a topic that she has covered as a reporter and columnist since 2004.



Henk Rossouw was a foreign correspondent for The Chronicle of Education, from 2001 to 2005. Based in South Africa, he traveled on assignment to countries such as Rwanda, Uganda, Liberia, and Congo-Kinshasa.

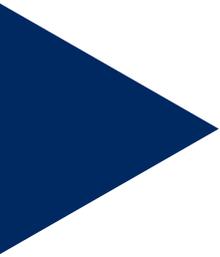
He also wrote on the arts for Newsweek International and covered the 2005 Zimbabwean election. After graduating from the University of the Witwatersrand, he was awarded the 2005 Ruth First fellowship for investigative journalism.

A 2005-2006 Saave Scholar at McGill University, Henk is currently working toward a Ph.D. at the University of Houston. His poems have appeared in The Boston Review and The Paris Review.



Sarah Lynch is a Cairo-based journalist covering the Middle East and North Africa for leading American and international publications.

She has reported from Libya, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, the Gaza Strip and the United Arab Emirates. Her work focuses on political transitions, human and women's rights, and higher education.



Captions

Brazil

Strikers from the University of Sao Paulo and other state universities meet on September 3, 2014 (Agencia Estado via AP).

A metro station near the University of Sao Paulo suffered vandalism during a 2013 march of staff and students (Agencia Estado via AP).

South Africa

The scenic University of Cape Town campus was the home of a great deal of conflict at the end of the apartheid era (Creative Commons).

The complicated legacy of the apartheid era still drives much of South African students' frustrations (Creative Commons).

The Black Consciousness Movement founded by Stephen Bantu Biko, a University of Natal student, had global influence. Here, a statue of Biko in East London (Creative Commons).

Tunisia

The campus of the University of Manouba, which has been the center of much friction between hardline Islamists and moderates (Sarah Lynch).

Graffiti supporting UGET, the General Union of Tunisian Students, which opposes police interference in campus affairs (Sarah Lynch).