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#Fees must fall at Wits: a discourse analysis of the #fees must fall movement at the University of the Witwatersrand in October 2015

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ABSTRACT

This paper applies a Critical Discourse Analysis to texts that were produced in October 2015 during the #FeesMustFall protests against rising University tuition fees; in particular, documentation produced by or about the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). The data consisted of a sample corpus of mainstream South African newspapers, email statements sent out by Wits Management during the course of the protest, the Wits Workers Solidarity Committee (WWSC) blog, a pamphlet from protesters and author-taken photographs of the campus during its occupation, which were considered from the perspective of Geosemiotics research into space, place and ideology. The analysis of discourse, ideology and identity revealed both intersections and diversions between these different texts, and presented the protest as an untenable conflict between the protesters, the university, and the government. Media coverage tended to adopt the tropes of 'War Journalism' as a reporting style (Galtung, 2000; Lynch & Galtung, 2010; Duncan, 2014; Rodny-Gumede, 2016), though the marginalising effect of this style was mitigated by offering a more significant voice to protesters in the discourse – contrasting with previous examples of South African media's reporting on working-class protests, namely the Marikana Massacre (Duncan, 2014). Official bodies such as Wits and the Government deflected accountability and managed their public images by signalling sympathy for the protesters. The #FeesMustFall narrative also drew from a pool of discourses rooted in South African history, especially anti-Apartheid activism, indicating a desire by protesters to follow in a 'legacy' of social change, especially in order to decolonise Higher Education and challenge 'Rainbowist' ideology in South Africa.

Key words: *CDA, MDA, geosemiotics, protest, higher education, media, South Africa, #FeesMustFall*