# Unsettling the Settlers:
# The Impact of the #RhodesMustFall Student Movement on White Student Consciousness at the University of Cape Town


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## DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Date:05/08/2021

## Abstract

In March 2015 UCT student Maxwele Chumani hurled faeces at British Imperialist Cecil Rhodes' statue at the University of Cape Town in South Africa as an act of protest against institutionalised racism and lack of transformation since apartheid. Chumani's action sparked a wider student protest movement, calling for the decolonisation of UCT and higher education in South Africa more broadly under the banner of #RhodesMustFall (RMF). RMF brought large-scale disruption to UCT's academic year and the lives of its students with a range of peaceful, disruptive and violent methods of protest.

Previous scholarship on #RhodesMustFall in the South African context focuses on the ideologies, student leaders and strategies of the movement, leaving a gap in the literature with regards to its impact, especially on white students. This thesis therefore, through semi-structured interviews with white South African UCT students, explores the impact of the RMF movement on white racial consciousness at UCT. The study has a particular focus on white students' attitude towards the movement and how it influenced their understanding of, and attitude towards, race, racial injustice and their own white racial identity.

White students' responses to RMF vary and while largely progressive included some reactionary elements. White student membership of racially diverse social groups was found to facilitate performative attitude change through iterative dialogues provoked specifically by the RMF protests. All respondents reported that they subsequently conformed to new campus norms regarding 'acceptable' attitudes and race more broadly. The extent to which new values were meaningfully internalised remains uncertain, but the persistence of performative change over a four-year period suggests that expression of support for RMF and its ideologies, while performative, can be considered a form of identity change and therefore be seen as part of a conscientisation process.


Key Words: White Consciousness, White Privilege, #RhodesMustFall

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## List of Acronyms

African National Congress (ANC)
Black Academic Caucus (BAC)
Institute of Justice and Reconciliation (IJR)
Institutional Reconciliation and Transformation Commission (IRTC)
South Africa (SA)
South African Police Service (SAPS)
State of the Nation Address (SONA)
State Security Agency (SSA)
Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)
University of Cape Town (UCT)
Vice Chancellor (VC)
White Racial Consciousness (WRC)
#FeesMustFall (FMF)
#RhodesMustFall (RMF)

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# Chapter 1: Introduction and method

## 1.1 Introduction and research aims

> Aidan: *'So RMF was about recognising what it means to be white. It's a hard pill to swallow, like being hit by a brick wall… No one wants to talk about it, confront it, but it's true. Growth is hard… I'd argue something, or support something and realise "oh shit, I'm actually racist".'* Extract from participant interview

Aidan was born in 1994, the same year as South Africa's new democracy. The Afrikaner Nationalist Party's apartheid regime of race-based segregation had been dismantled and replaced by a democratic constitution, internationally heralded as one of the most socially progressive in the world (Meshoe, 2017) (Oechsli & Walker, 2015). South Africa's first black democratically elected president Nelson Mandela took office and committed to a: 'common offensive against racism' (Mandela, 1994), assuring the population that in this new era 'all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts' (Mandela, Inauguration speech, 1994). The dominant political narrative at the time, first proposed by Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and later popularised by Nelson Mandela (Ahmed, 2019;23), branded South Africa as the 'Rainbow Nation', where difference is embraced and forgiveness, diversity and unity are championed; the idea is often associated with peacebuilding, transformation, and dialogue (Ahmed, 2019;23).

So why, for the first 21 years of his life in the Rainbow Nation, had Aidan remained unaware of the now self-declared *racist* nature of his views? Why did reflections on his white racial identity, prompted by #RhodesMustFall in 2015, hit him *like a brick wall* if Mandela's *common offensive against racism* had been going on for 21 years prior?

Despite the fact that South Africa's new democracy of 1994 brought an end to the explicitly segregationist white supremacist state, there are those who argue it did not bring an end to white domination in South Africa (Matthews, 2012; Mamdani, 2015; Chikane, 2018). While one must avoid dividing historical and contemporary forms of racial injustice too neatly, Sullivan (2006) differentiates between the explicit white supremacy of the apartheid era and

white privilege, which is widely considered characteristic of post-apartheid South Africa (Hook, 2011; Hill, 1997). White privilege can be understood as a residual feature of the power relations that functioned under the apartheid state.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the focal point of post-apartheid restorative justice, promoted forgiveness, granting amnesty in exchange for truth-telling. Mahmood Mamdani (2015;77) argued that the TRC's narrow focus on individual perpetrators of apartheid violence, as opposed to the beneficiaries of mass violations of rights, allowed the vast majority of white South Africans to move into a democratic South Africa thinking they had little connection to apartheid atrocities. Mamdani (2018;77) argued that the TRC 'had access to state resources and could reach right into South African living rooms during prime time' and that it failed 'to educate ordinary South Africans, black and white, about everyday apartheid and its impact on the life chances and circumstances of generations of South Africans'.

Despite the heterogeneous nature of the African National Congress and the many schools of thought within the party, a key tenet of the apartheid resistance movement turned ruling party since 1994, is non-racialism – a desire to build a society which is not skewed by racial (dis)advantage (Steyn & Foster, 2008). The ANC promoted inter-racial unity and solidarity to unite the various oppressed racial groups against white minority rule (Ahmed, 2012), as opposed to becoming an anti-white, anti-colonial, African nationalist struggle (a credo employed elsewhere on the continent); South Africa's white population being in the millions made this an impractical approach (K. Ahmed, 2012).

The combination of the TRC's narrow focus on apartheid perpetrators, a lack of education for white South Africans on the full implications of apartheid, and a political emphasis on racial unity and forgiveness, have resulted in a lack collective focus on racial consciousness among the white South African population in post-apartheid South Africa. According to Melissa Steyn white South Africans possess a socially programmed 'instinct' to resist conversations about race (Steyn, 2012); 'The continuing economic and symbolic subjugation of the majority of black South Africans is exacerbated by an unwillingness to reflect on privilege and inequality' (Schwartz et al, 2014; 345). This socially programmed instinct will be discussed further in Section 2.1.

The importance of understanding White Consciousness among white South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa is based on Paul Gilroy's assertion that the historical recurrence of racial terror and barbarity 'communicates more than a lapse from more exalted standards of rational conduct', rather it communicates exactly the nature of contemporary standards of rational conduct (Gilroy, 2000; 17). Following the introduction of democracy in 1994, little was done in white communities to interrogate the circumstances or 'standards of rationality' that allowed (and currently allow) them to sit, often comfortably, as the beneficiaries of a racially hierarchical societal structure. Rene Albertus asserts that some of the 'born-free' generation, the youth born after apartheid, whose parents were the 'struggle generation' had their awakening in March 2015 and were previously being perceived by their parents as unaware of their historical struggle (Albertus, 2019; 2). Did this 2015 awakening extend to white students? This is a central question for this thesis.

This research explores South African White Consciousness by focusing on the 2015-2016 #RhodesMustFall (RMF) student movement and the impact it had on white South African University of Cape Town students. Through RMF as a case study I examine how white UCT students responded to the novelty of a direct confrontation, or challenge, regarding colonial and apartheid legacies which they continue to benefit from; how did they respond to the opportunity to reflect upon their racial privilege in the university space, as well as their white racial identity more broadly?

The overarching objective of this research, to understand the impact of the RMF movement on White Student Consciousness at UCT, is framed by the following research questions:

- How did RMF impact white South African students' understanding of race at UCT and in South Africa more broadly?
- What influence did RMF have on respondents' understanding of their own racial identity?
- What circumstances facilitated white conscientisation at UCT during RMF?

#RhodesMustFall was a 2015/2016 student-led protest movement which initially focused on the removal of British imperialist Cecil Rhodes' statue from the University of Cape Town's upper campus in March 2015. It was however, never just about the statue; as the movement

evolved and spread across the country, students were calling for decolonised higher education and an end to institutionalised racism in universities more broadly. UCT RMF's Mission Statement explains: 'At the root of this struggle is the dehumanisation of black people at UCT. This dehumanisation is a violence exacted only against black people by a system that privileges Whiteness' (UCT RMF, 2015a).

Existing literature on the RMF movement at UCT and beyond, focuses primarily on the leading actors in the movement, their ideologies and how the protests played out (e.g., Nyamnjoh, 2016; Chikane, 2018; Habib, 2019), leaving a significant gap with regards to the impact of the movement. This research aims to explore if, and if so, how RMF unsettled Whiteness at UCT. How far were white South African students willing to go to reflect upon, and interrogate their privilege? In other words, did RMF result in White Conscientisation and was this impact transient, or ongoing?

This thesis focuses on RMF at UCT, running from March 2015 to February 2016, rather than #FeesMustFall which ran from October 2015 into 2017 and focused on stopping student fee increases and increasing government funding to universities. Though there was significant overlap regarding the ideologies, methods and demands of RMF and FMF and both movements were inextricably linked to the history of colonialism and white supremacy, RMF presented a more clear-cut focus on race or racial injustice symbolised in a tangible colonial statue. While FMF did also problematise racial inequality, apartheid and colonial legacies, this was positioned more as the background context for the primary focus, which was fees and funding. This differing focus, along with the fact that RMF began at UCT, rather than the University of Witwatersrand (as was the case with FMF) makes RMF a potentially more productive subject for studying white Conscientisation in UCT students.

Nevertheless, any study on race and racial injustice can present difficulties, due to the sensitive nature of the topic. The below response, received when recruiting interview participants, could be interpreted as an example of the aforementioned 'instinct' of white South Africans (Steyn, 2012) to avoid conversations about race:

> Josh (interview respondent): *'I'm going to be honest, I asked quite a few people and, shame man, the majority of reactions were something along the lines of "I'm not*

*touching that with a ten-foot pole", "over my dead body" etc.'* (WhatsApp voice note post-interview, cited with permission)

Why would some white South African UCT students not touch research on 'RMF and white students' *with a ten-foot pole?* By exploring the understandings and attitudes of white students who were willing to participate, this thesis sheds light on potential explanations for why others are vehemently unwilling to do so.

## 1.2 Chapter outline

In Chapter one, White Consciousness in post-apartheid South Africa, and RMF as a disruption to the status quo of non-racialism are introduced as central concepts for this thesis (Section 1.1); The research objectives and area of focus are then presented (1.2). Section 1.3 defines the key terms and in Section 1.4 the research method is described and discussed, including ethical considerations and the limitations of the research.

Chapter two provides the academic and sociopolitical context for this research. In section 2.1 I present literature on *Whiteness* and its implications, both in general and then in the particular context of South Africa, in order to understand the meaning and significance of the categorisation of the 'White South Africans' of the title, and the origins of prevalent (but not universal) white socialised socio-political attitudes. Section 2.2 briefly discusses the literature on White Consciousness and the debates around the role of white people in anti-racist struggle. In Section 2.3 the social, economic and political backdrop against which RMF occurred, is presented with a particular focus on post 1994 and UCT's past attempts at transformation. In Sections 2.4 and 2.5 the timeline of events regarding RMF at UCT and white responses to RMF are discussed respectively. Section 2.6 briefly presents the complexity of the relationship between protest movements and attitude change.

The next two chapters present and discuss the research findings and relate it to literature presented in chapter two. Chapter three focuses on *how* RMF prompted changes in attitudes and understandings among respondents; through racially, politically and academically diverse, iterative relationships intersecting with RMF as the catalyst. Chapter four examines the nature of these changes in attitude which include respondents' reflections on Black

student experiences at UCT as well as their own experiences, complicity in Whiteness, and the implications of their white racial identity. Sections 4.5 and 4.6 explore some barriers to white conscientisation among respondents and in Section 4.7 the changing social norms on campus and respondents' attitude towards them, are examined. Chapter five then provides a concluding discussion including the role of performative attitude change within the process of white conscientisation.

## 1.3 Key definitions

Professor Shannon Sullivan defines *white supremacy* as conscious, explicit and deliberate forms of white domination, and *white privilege* as an often invisible, intractable 'constellation of physical and somatic habits formed through transactions with a racist world' (Sullivan, 2006:5). The definition of *Whiteness* engaged with in this analysis is as follows: a political ideology of racial hierarchy, based on white supremacy or superiority. This is distinct from *whiteness* used as a noun referring to a white person's racial identity (Andrews, 2020). Having a white racial identity does not automatically mean an individual subscribes (consciously or otherwise) to the political ideology of Whiteness, just as not being white does not exempt you from it (Andrews, 2020). *Institutional Racism* which supports or maintains *Whiteness* is defined as racism which, 'covertly or overtly, resides in the policies, procedures, operations and culture of public or private institutions - reinforcing individual prejudices and being reinforced by them in turn' (Institute of Race Relations, 1998).

This research uses the term *Black* as it emerges from South Africa's Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s: Steve Biko positioned 'Black' as a political identity for anyone discriminated against by the South African apartheid regime, which includes those classified as African, Indian and Coloured (Ramsamy, 2010; 56; Hassim, 2006; 286). While racial terminology is historically and contemporarily complex in South Africa, this research refers to Black South Africans and white South Africans to reflect apartheid classifications of racial oppression (Orton, 2018;12). The word *black* with a lowercase *b* is refers to those with a black African racial identity.

## 1.4 Method

In-depth, semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 1.5 hours, were carried out from October-December 2019 with 12 white South African students, in various secluded locations on UCT premises. The sample consisted of six men and six women, with a mix of first language English and Afrikaans speakers, who have been studying at UCT across the full range of faculties, from 2015 to 2019. The interviews began with general icebreaker questions about where the respondent is from, why they chose to study at UCT and what living in Cape Town is like for them. The next set of questions focused on their experience of, and engagement with RMF, as well as their understanding of what the movement was problematising and demanding. Questions focused on their conversations with others about RMF in various settings. This moved into questions about their attitudes towards RMF with regards to e.g., the various methods of protest and the change the movement was demanding.

The final set of questions focused how respondents had been impacted by the movement and its ideologies with regards to: their academic life, the information and perspectives they were exposed to, and their understanding of institutionalised racism and race more generally. The interviews then explored how RMF impacted respondents on a personal level, particularly with regards to how they understand their own white racial identity. While this was the basic structure of interviews, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed for them to take the interview into other directions, before returning to this structured approach. Interviews were recorded and transcribed; full transcriptions along with completed ethics forms and the interview question schedule are available upon request.

A qualitative research method was appropriate when exploring the impact of a student movement on white consciousness, as it allowed for a holistic approach to interrogating complex issues; when analysing qualitative data, the contextual nature of knowledge and action can be recognised (Draper, 2004; 642). A crucial aspect of this research was understanding the data as situated knowledges resulting from particular racial positionalities, rather than disembodied or universal experiences.

A factor to consider, when collecting primary data through interviews, four years after the RMF movement, is that the data collected will be different from that which would have been

collected during, or immediately after the protests. The interview data collected was entirely dependent on respondents' memories of events, which can evolve over time: autobiographical narrative transforms autobiographical memory because 'when memories are narrated, they are transformed in stories (verbal language) and socialised' (Smorti & Fioretti, 2016; 296). Respondents' memories of RMF will have evolved to fit into their personal narrative of themselves during that time period and will therefore not be viewed as necessarily accurate at the analysis stage on this research.

Furthermore, as respondents are 'telling something within a communicative situation', Smorti & Fioretti (2016;296) assert that 'the relational situation of the narrating act, by modifying the story, modifies also memories.'. Respondents telling of events and therefore memory of events will be affected by the setting, in this case a white British UCT politics student interviewing them about a decolonisation movement which occurred on our shared campus. If they were being interviewed by a Black UCT student for example, there could be a difference in how they retell events. It is important to state that the objective of this research was not to put together an accurate picture of the RMF movement at UCT, but rather to understand how white students experienced the movement, and how they view it as having impacted them in the short term and in the longer term.

Conducting the interviews in 2019, as opposed to in late 2015 for example, could have served to offer alternative insights. What respondents remember, or considered to be important about RMF, years later in 2019, may have revealed the longer term, or lasting impacts of the movement. The passing of time also allowed respondents to reflect on any changes that may have occurred between 2015 and 2019, from a distance, so to speak. If the interviews had been conducted at the end of 2015 for example, respondents would have been able to talk about the short-term impact of the movement, but less able to reflect on any potential long-term impacts. A lack of alignment between attitude changes reported to have occurred in 2015 and respondents' actions years later, could reveal a fading or superficial commitment to change.

Self-selection sampling and snowballing were the participant recruitment methods employed for this research. Respondents were self-selected as they volunteered in response to posts shared on social media; the researcher did not approach participants directly. The snowballing technique came into play when respondents used their social connections to

reach out to other eligible interviewees. A post was shared on Facebook outlining the research objectives and calling for eligible participants. This post was shared by 15 UCT students in total: six black South African students, five white South African students, three white international students (American, German and Norwegian), and one black international student (Zimbabwean). Only one of these five white South African students became an interview participant themselves, due to eligibility requirements.

The racial identity of these social 'gatekeepers' is an important factor to consider as RMF was focused on race-based oppression. While a social media connection does not necessarily equate to a meaningful offline friendship, this sampling method may account for the fact that many respondents reported a close relationship with a black student as a significant facilitator of their attitude changes as a result of RMF. For example, if all gatekeepers or 'post-sharers' were white South Africans, the sample may have been comprised of fewer respondents with close relationships with black students.

Furthermore, social connection and friendships can correlate with political viewpoints (Lazer et al, 2010:248). Online and offline social networks can reflect particular political communities: A study by Lazer et al (2010:248) into the convolution of social networks and individuals' political attitudes found 'significant conformity tendencies'. Individuals shift their political views toward the political views of their associates. This means that respondents are likely to share similar political viewpoints to that of the gatekeepers through which they were accessed.

It is important to consider that the relationships through which a proportion of the sample were accessed, have either survived RMF at UCT, or have formed in the years following. A study by Shelton and Thomas (2010; 83) on the interpersonal process of developing friendships across racial groups illuminated 'the importance of perceived acceptance, validation, and caring in an intergroup relationship'. It is therefore unlikely for a Black student and a white student to have sustained a friendship if the white student openly invalidated black students' experiences of oppression during RMF, or in the years following. This means that respondents who were accessed through a Black gatekeeper were less likely to have openly invalidated the claims of institutionalised racism which underpinned RMF.

Participants who maintained friendships or romantic relationships with black students are less likely to hold negative perceptions of black students, as social connections across racial identities: 'reduce people's anxiety and negative expectations' about the other racial group (Page-Gould et al, 2008; 1083). As the findings will later show, a number of participants claimed that their close relationships with black students had a significant impact on how they engaged with discussions of race and privilege prompted by the RMF movement.

The voluntary nature of the recruitment process is another factor that must be considered. Self-selection limited the sample to white students who were willing to express their viewpoints on RMF to a researcher. One of the social gatekeepers stated in an audio message:

> *'Honestly, just people are too scared hey, I think like at least four or five people that I asked, everyone but one person said "I'm not risking it, it's too dangerous, what if my name gets out" ... people are not really willing to speak out... there are severe consequences if your words get, quote on quote, misconstrued.'*
> Whatsapp Audio Message (Anonymous social gatekeeper, cited with permission).

The audio message above and the quote in Section 1.1, suggest that those who feared that their viewpoints could bring severe negative repercussions if exposed, were deterred from participating. This means the data is likely skewed towards those who perceive their views to be socially acceptable or politically correct.

Another factor to consider is that those who take a 'non-racial' approach, to social, political and economic issues, are unlikely to become self-selected participants. A response I received stating: '*I don't think race is an appropriate way to classify research subjects'*, suggests that the very premise of the research served to rule out anyone who did not consider 'race' a worthy, or appropriate lens through which to understand socio-political issues, or anyone who is uncomfortable with being labeled according to their white racial identity.

For the above reasons, this data sample cannot be considered to be a random cross-section of white UCT students and is by no means representational of the entire white student body. Rather this data affords us insights into the views of the white students who were: willing to engage in the RMF discussion; view race as an appropriate classification for research subjects; do not fear repercussions for expressing their views in an interview setting.

Due to the sensitive and often contentious nature of the issues discussed in this research, there are several ethical considerations to take into account. Bhambra (2017; 215) critically describes a phenomenon she refers to as 'methodological whiteness': a way of reflecting on the world 'that fails to acknowledge the role played by race in the very structuring of that world, and of the ways in which knowledge is constructed and legitimated within it'. This research critically reflects upon methodological whiteness by acknowledging how deeply race is implicated in the production of this 'knowledge', through my whiteness as the researcher, the whiteness of participants and the white supremacist 'structuring of the world' within which this research is being produced (Bhambra, 2017; 215). This research understands the white experience not as a universal perspective, but rather as a specific, embodied positionality and way of knowing, which occurs within the paradigm of white supremacist conditioning.

As research subjects responded to a call for white South African students, they self-identified as *white* and were willing to have their race acknowledged within the research context. Self-identification as white is relevant here because white perspectives have historically been positioned as racially neutral or the natural human 'orientation' from which the world is viewed; The 'orientation' which is privileged as 'normal and appropriate' (Steyn and Foster, 2008; 26). The most fundamental limitation of this research on white consciousness is that as a white person myself I sit in a particular position on what DiAngelo (2019) terms the 'continuum' of self-awareness; my social, cultural, political and intellectual conditioning means that I remain, to some degree, both a product and proponent of white supremacy.

Also, as a UK national, I do not share the identity or lived experiences of white South Africans, and was not present in South Africa during the 2015 RMF movement at UCT, I do not claim to fully understand the complexity of this particular experience. This research rather offers an understanding of the impact of RMF on white student consciousness at UCT, from my position as a relative outsider.

This particular asymmetry between respondents and myself, in that I am white British and they are white South African, could have meant respondents perceived me as seeing myself as less implicated than them, in the continuing racial injustice following colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. Regardless of the questionable nature of this assumption, this

could have caused respondents to feel judged or attacked when issues around complicity in historical/contemporary racial injustice arose during interviews. This potential defensiveness could have been countered by the fact that as a white British citizen, my racial, economic and cultural privilege is a direct a result of a history of colonial exploitation, which notably includes South Africa. A potential perceived distance between respondents and myself could also have been partially remedied by the fact that I am a white UCT student and have lived in Cape Town for several years; time I have spent living with the same daily privilege of a white South African.

The fact that I am less entangled in South African identity politics than respondents, may in fact have worked in my favor, in that my relative 'outsider' status could have allowed them to speak freely about their white South African identity without fear of offending me personally. If a fellow white South African had conducted the interviews, respondents may have felt restricted in how they spoke about South African whiteness, as the interviewer's identity would have been personally implicated in their answers. The answers to these possibilities are unknown but nevertheless important to reflect on.

Respondents were assured that their names and other identifying personal details would remain confidential throughout the research process, so as to ensure their anonymity; In the findings and discussion chapters of this thesis respondents were given pseudonyms.

This research took a grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis; the theory produced was grounded in the data gathered (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 1). A grounded theory approach requires the researcher to set aside theoretical ideas in order to let the substantive theory emerge: semi-structured interviews facilitated the flexibility or openness that allowed unanticipated issues to present themselves (Green & Thorogood, 2004;4). This allowed the data to generate the theory, rather than the other way around. Grounded theory focuses on how individuals interact with the phenomena under study (Urquhurt, 2013; 7), in this case, RMF. A thematic framework analysis was conducted and the data was analysed in relation to the following themes: experiences of, engagement with and attitudes towards RMF; understandings of race at UCT and beyond; and self-reflection.

Chapter two will introduce the key literature on Whiteness and RMF, so as to provide relevant context for the data analysis chapters that follow.

# Chapter 2: Context – Whiteness and #RhodesMustFall

This chapter begins by briefly outlining some of the existing literature on Whiteness and White Consciousness to provide an academic grounding for the data analysis stage. Next, in order to situate the RMF movement in a particular context, racial inequality in South Africa since 1994, as well as UCT's previous attempts at transformation, are presented. The latter sections of this chapter outline the main events of RMF, along with the key debates within the movement regarding ideological differences and the subsequent factionalism; a range of white responses to RMF and the role of white people in anti-racist struggle are then discussed, along with brief reference to literature on protest and attitude change.

## 2.1 Conceptualising Whiteness

Despite the discredit of 'biological' measures of racial character (e.g., Gould, 1981) and recognition of the 'rational absurdity of race' (Gilroy, 2000; 14) the political ideology of Whiteness remains based on the attribution of essential racial characterisations. Such conceptualisations are relevant for this work in that they may capture underlying questions of respondents' attitudes and responses to RMF, conditioned by socialisation into deep-seated psychological and political attitudes. As such they may provide some insights into attitudes at the individual level.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres asserts that the concept of 'race', which involves 'the codification of the differences between conquerors and conquered', was used to place colonial subjects in a natural position of inferiority, through supposedly different biological structures (2007; 244). According to Sara Ahmed (2007), while race is a human invention, Whiteness is: 'real, material and lived, in how it privileges certain bodies and restricts others' (Ahmed, 2007; 150). Ahmed asserts that 'doing things' is not necessarily determined by one's intrinsic capacity, but by 'the way in which the world is available as a space for action' (Ahmed, 2007; 150). Fanon (1967; 118) describes the effect living in a white world has on black subjects, by quoting a physically disabled veteran in 'Home of the Brave' a film about anti-black racism: 'Resign yourself to your colour, the way I got used to my stump, we're both victims'. This builds on Karl Marx's assertion that while humans do make history, this 'making' is shaped by what we inherit upon arrival (Marx & De Leon, 1898). The racial

identity one inherits upon arrival into this world is one powerful determinant of what the world 'makes available' to an individual (Ahmed, 2007; 150).

Paul Gilroy asserts that not only did European colonial powers racialise colonial subjects and subsequently deprive them of their humanity, they also perpetuated the still greater crime of 'despoiling humanity of its elemental unity as a species.' (Gilroy, 2000; 71). Gilroy further contends that: 'Black and white are bonded together by the mechanisms of 'race' that estrange them from each other and amputate their common humanity' (2007; 15). In capturing the different dimensions of colonial violence on the consciousness of both oppressor and oppressed, Fanon describe it as: 'a situation leaving no subject untouched or outside of its ambit' (Quoted in Reddy, 2015; 9).

Melissa Steyn and Don Foster conceptualise Whiteness as an *orientation*, which takes its perspective and relative privilege as 'normal and appropriate' (2008; 26). Understanding Whiteness as an orientation reveals it to be the 'neutral or default' starting point from which the world is viewed (Eddo-Lodge, 2018; 86); the lighter one's skin, the closer to full humanity one is considered to be (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; 244). This perception of 'neutrality' allows Whiteness to remain 'the primary unmarked and so unexamined 'blank' category.' (Chambers, 1997:189) which often allows white people's racial identity, and experiences beyond their white experience, to remain invisible to them.

While one's own white racial identity often remains invisible to oneself, Bonilla-Silva describes Whiteness as embodied racial power through the 'visible uniform of the dominant racial group' (2003; 271). An individual's white racial identity wields power in how it is recognisable for those who are not white – this functions to position those who are not white as the 'other' (Said, 1978); as divergent from Whiteness. For this to be achieved, the default 'starting point' must be demarcated.

Shannon Sullivan posits a key 'habit' of white privilege as 'ontological expansiveness'. This refers to an idea that white people possess a perceived entitlement to access any space they wish to occupy and feel a sense of comfort and belonging while doing so (Sullivan, 2006; 18). Similarly, Sara Ahmed explains that white bodies are comfortable or 'at home' as they inhabit spaces that 'extend their shape', emphasising that 'we might only notice comfort as an effect when we lose it' (Ahmed, 2007; 158). This relates to RMF disruptions affecting the

comfort of white students on campus – something they may not have noticed they had until it was disrupted in 2015.

Melissa Steyn asserts that 'the tacit agreement to entertain ignorance' – *The Ignorance Contract* – 'lies at the heart of a society structured on racial hierarchy' (2012;8). Steyn explains how both white and Black South Africans produced 'epistemologies of ignorance', although the terms of the 'contract' were set by white society – the power holders during apartheid (2008). Steyn sees ignorance not as a case of faulty cognition, or what is yet-to-be-known, but rather ignorance as a social achievement with strategic value of social regulation. Steyn's work builds on the work of Caribbean philosopher Charles W. Mills who was among the first to name White Supremacy as the dominant political system that has shaped the modern world (writing in 1997). Mills argued that individuals who are signatories of *The Racial Contract* (1997) are prescribed a 'pattern of cognitive dysfunctions' involving evasion and self-deception regarding matters of race, which protect them from the reality of the racially hierarchical system they created, actively uphold, or are complicit in.

Kehinde Andrews takes this strategic ignorance and self-deception further and conceptualises Whiteness as a state of psychosis; a set of delusional ideas 'which are beyond any rational engagement', designed to protect white people from the reality of oppression in a system that makes them wealthy and feeds them, '(Andrews, 2016; 43). In the context of this thesis white psychosis is of interest as it implies fixity of attitudes that, under other circumstances, would not withstand critical interrogation.

Andrews asserts that the white psychosis required for racial hierarchy is not just an issue of the past (2020), supporting Maldonado-Torres' assertion that *coloniality* and its ideological Whiteness is something that long survives colonialism (2007; 4). For Maldonado-Torres coloniality consists of long-standing patterns of power that continue to define our knowledge production (highly relevant for a student-led protest movement), long after nations have gained their independence from colonial rule. RMF at UCT for example problematised the disproportionately white composition of the academic teaching body and the Eurocentric nature of course curriculums and reading lists, at an African university.

Steyn contends that after 1994 with 'the buttress that held up the old white South African identity collapsed', white people had to find different frames of 'self' and 'other' within the

new South Africa (Steyn, 2003). According to Steyn and Foster (2008), the central question for Whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa was simply: How to maintain this superiority or privilege in a situation in which black people have achieved political power. Distiller and Steyn use the term 'Resistant Whiteness' to refer to discourses or habits white South Africans can engage in, in a conscious or unconscious effort to maintain white domination, often through maintenance of white privilege (2004: 2). They argue that the ongoing 'performance of 'race' in the everyday culture of post-apartheid South Africa' must be recognised and interrogated (Distiller and Steyn 2004: 2).

In her popular 2018 paperback *White Fragility*, the white USA academic Robin DiAngelo examines common defensive responses employed by white Americans to resist uncomfortable reflections on racism and their potential complicity in it. She asserts that socialisation engenders a common set of racial patterns: A lack of racial humility and unwillingness to listen to people of colour; being dismissive of what one doesn't understand or what brings discomfort; a lack of authentic interest in perspectives outside of the white perspective; guilt that paralyses or allows inaction and a focus on intentions over impact (DiAngelo, 2018; 68).

American journalist Matt Taibbi criticised DiAngelo's book for the perceived implication that it facilitates the 'Corporate Diversity Industrial Complex' and treats a deep structural problem as if it can be solved by corporate human resources departments hiring high priced consultants such as DiAngelo herself (*Television Interview*, 2020). DiAngelo's work has been further criticised as an individualised focus on self-improvement rather than structural change (Jackson, 2019). Whatever the merit of these criticisms of the popular literature, they do at least illustrate the level of acrimony and contention that issues of Whiteness can generate.

## 2.2 White Consciousness

White Consciousness, commonly referred to as white racial consciousness (WRC), is defined by Carole Barlas, writing in a North American context, as a 'transformative change in consciousness about white privilege' (1997; 2) through which white people become aware of their embedded-ness in a white cultural perspective. Rowe et al's WRC model is based on 'characteristic attitudes held by a person regarding the significance of being white,

particularly in terms of what that implies in relation to those who do not share white group membership' (1995; 225).

Nnawulezi et al (2020; 365) criticise the reduction of white racial consciousness to a false dichotomy: racist or anti-racist; arguing that the convoluted nature of the journey to anti-racism in practice, is rarely acknowledged. Furthermore, Wildman and Davis (1994) criticised the blaming of the individual when it comes to racism, rather than the forces that shaped that individual. They contend that an individualised approach to racism results in white people becoming concerned with avoiding the label 'racist' rather than worrying about systemic racism and how to change it (1994; 888).

Nnawulezi et al (2020; 367) explain how the expectation of white ally perfection may lead to 'ambivalent racial consciousness performances' that could hinder the development of white consciousness. 'Ambivalent' white racial consciousness refers to white individuals who 'may acknowledge whiteness and begin questioning racial myths, and yet continue to centre whiteness as the norm and view people of colour as responsible for changing' (2020; 368). Nnawulezi et al provide the example of a white person afraid of being labeled racist who may subconsciously avoid interacting with people of colour or situations that might increase their own awareness of their privilege. This challenges Hook's argument that silence from white people in times of anti-racist protest is a 'self-aggrandising gesture' in which self-exemption implies 'superiority and exceptionalism' (2011; 497).

Similarly, Case and Hemmings (2005; 606) understand white distancing strategies, such as silence and social disassociation, as a way to avoid situations which may led them to being labeled racist, rather than a manifestation of perceived superiority (Hook, 2011). While white people remain uncomfortable being labeled as racist (DiAngelo, 2019) (Nnawulezi et al, 2020) Mandisa Haarhoff reports a phenomenon she has noticed in South Africa, whereby progressive white liberals have become comfortable acknowledging, or sitting within, their white privilege (Haarhoff, 2020). This may be explained by the fact that acknowledging one's privileged position in a racially hierarchical system, allows one to appear aware of racial injustice without having to take individual responsibility.

Additionally, framing one's white experience as racially *privileged* conversely frames those who are not white as simply *less privileged*. This is a more comfortable position to sit in,

within a system of racial injustice than for example identifying as the *oppressor* in relation to the *racially oppressed*. The word *privilege* creates an image of something extra, above and beyond, and therefore frames the less privileged experience as an acceptable baseline; concealing the destructiveness of racial oppression for those who diverge from Whiteness.

While the reasons behind white silence or avoidance are contested, the appropriateness of white participation in anti-racism protests is also a long-contested topic in South Africa. Clinical Psychologist Suntosh Pillay equates white silence with violence in relation to the RMF movement: 'Silence, theorised as a form of quiet, slow, psychological violence, invisibly inflicts harm on those categories of people most often in need of advocates' (Pillay, 2016; 157). Pillay contends that for white students: 'to do nothing is to remain in denial of one's complicity in racial oppression'. This supports Wildman & Davis' (1994; 885) understanding of silence as crucial in the maintenance of systems of power: 'What we do not say, do not talk about, maintains the status quo.'.

In the USA context, Mike Hill (Hill,1997,71) argues that white people have the privilege of choosing what, how and when they will respond to occurrences around them. Dominance has historically given whites a powerful luxury: the choice, or the right, to intervene or ignore events as they see fit (Wildman & Davis, 1994; 888). This is supported by Rekgotsofetse Chikane, prominent and controversial RMF activist and son of ANC politician Frank Chikane, who described the endemic response of white UCT students to issues that affect black people as 'distant and disinterested' (2018; 77), characteristics which are described as making them complicit in the perpetuation of racial injustice. This fits in with DiAngelo's aforementioned characterisation of White Defensiveness as 'a lack of authentic interest in perspectives outside of the white perspective' (2018; 68).

Steve Biko (2004), the man at the forefront of the 1960s and 70s Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, building on the work of Robert Sobukwe, problematised the premature integration of white people in anti-racist movements arguing that white people will bring their superiority complexes with them. Biko's condemnation of traditional white liberals is considered by Mabel Maimela (1999; iii) not to be 'anti-liberal' or 'anti-white', but rather a strategic move in the liberation struggle designed to 'neutralise gradualism', which asserts that racism could be defeated by continuous improvement of education for black people. In line with Biko's Black Separatism, Vice asserts that white South Africans should

be focused on 'inward-looking, non-political moral progress' (Vice, 2010; 338) so as to prevent perspectives from a position of white privilege from distorting political spaces.
Dialogues and confrontations between Black and white students in the South African university space, play out within a complex dynamic of social integration: Nhlanhla Ndebele observed that if white university students attempt to socially integrate with black students, they 'risk being shunned, or accused of imposing and patronising behavior'. If black students make an effort to make social connections with white students, they risk being seen as 'seeking proximity to their 'superior' colleagues' (Ndebele 2013; 1). It must be emphasised that Ndebele has observed there to be a 'risk' that these responses occur, meaning this is not always how attempts at integration play out.

RMF activists at UCT criticised the existential and physical exclusion that manifested itself through the culture of the university which: 'creates comfort for white, middle-class, heterosexual students and great discomfort for students who do not fit that mould' (Ramaru, 2018; 149). Politician Janet Smith, wife of Ian Smith, Prime Minister of 'Rhodesia' from 1964 to 1979, asserted that anti-apartheid activism for the majority of (but not all) 'well-to-do people' was limited to 'verbal condemnation' as those who held a privileged position within the regime were 'unwilling to entertain discomfort as a consequence of their stance' (Smith, 2017; 58). The issue of white comfort brings up a key question for this research: Did RMF function to disrupt white comfort at UCT?

### 2.3 The 'new' South Africa and past transformation attempts at UCT

Over two decades after the end of apartheid the citizenry at large remains starkly divided: 'One part lives in a world of comfort, fear and guilt. The other, the vast majority, survives in a world of squalor, frustration and anger.' (Reddy, 2015;1). Dr. Shepherd Mpofu (2017; 353) frames RMF as one of the various 'manifestations of apartheid' in the sense that it is an expression of resistance to the vestiges of the regime; RMF disruptions prompted conversations about the oppressive systems that remained long after 1994. Mpofu states that pre-1994 Apartheid (Capital 'A') has simply 'mutated', since independence in 1994, to a different form of apartheid (lowercase 'a'): 'manifesting itself as violence, poverty, socio-economic exclusion and racism.' (Mpofu, 2017; 352).

According to Jamieson et al (2017), of South Africa's 18.1 million children, 61% of them lived below the Statistics South Africa poverty line, as of 2015. Economic deprivation remains largely along racial lines: 70% of Black children live in poor households compared to just 4% of white children (Jamieson et al, 2017). Even if in 2019 South Africa, a black person has the same salary as their white counterparts, according to Niq Mhlongo: 'they will have more financial responsibility to their family, who are often still trapped in poverty due to the inequalities engineered by the apartheid system' (Mhlongo, 2019;8). According to Professor Achille Mbembe, with regards to the RMF movement spreading across South Africa: 'Mandela's Rainbowism and its most important articles of faith – truth, reconciliation and forgiveness – is fading' (Mbembe, 2015; 1). The general disillusionment with South African democracy and dissatisfaction with the lack of transformation at UCT, combined to create fertile ground for the RMF movement to emerge in 2015 (Nyamnjoh, 2016; Ramaru, 2019; 150).

At UCT, the years leading up to RMF were marked by students' growing impatience with the university administration for its lack of transformation. While the student body became increasingly representative of the country's demographic, the composition of the teaching staff and upper management remained disproportionately white and male: For example, as of 2016, middle and senior management positions comprised of 238 white males and 181 white females, compared to a total of 109 African, Coloured and Indian males and 58 African Coloured and Indian females (UCT Employment Equity Report 2016;3).

UCT's Institutional Reconciliation and Transformation Commission (IRTC) was set up in 2016 following the Fallist protests to look into: 'institutional culture and practices, including decolonisation and any that entail unjust discrimination, domination or violence' (IRTC, 2019;1). According to the IRTC's Final Report: 'racism does exist at UCT… it is beyond attitudes and beliefs but aided and abetted by poor management systems which administratively manage to discriminate on a racial basis.' (IRTC, 2019;36). A black UCT staff member asserted: 'Professors [names withheld] want to teach me a lesson by continuing to act as gatekeepers as to who may be staff or associates (majority young and white) and who may not (this outspoken older black woman) ….' (2019,35). This is supported by similar testimony from students which indicated that 'while UCT opens its doors to black students it does so on the condition that black student assimilate into whiteness' (2019;31).

According to the IRTC, Black staff at UCT have been silenced when raising challenges regarding transformation (2019), and other proponents for change have resigned in the absence of 'appreciation for their efforts' (Naidu, 2020). A black staff member reports: 'They [named professors] exclude me for the very reason I was appointed – to shed light on these invisibilised issues from the standpoint of the oppressed' (IRTC, 2019;36). To summarise the IRTC report: appearances may have changed at UCT but the power structures predicated on Whiteness remain in place; Transformation has become a smokescreen for assimilation.

In April 2021 there was controversy surrounding the temporary appointment of white British, retired historical archaeologist, Professor Martin Hall to the position of Deputy vice-chancellor and head of transformation at UCT, replacing Professor Loretta Feris, a black woman. In a statement from UCT's Black Academic Caucus they assert that: 'recycling retired white colleagues into positions of power… symbolically endorses patriarchy and celebrates Whiteness at UCT' (BAC,2021). UCT's Convocation president Eddy Maloka then resigned, stating in his resignation letter that he has not been able to explain to himself how a black female has been replaced by a white male. In this letter Maloka referred to Rhodes' statue as a representation of a mind-set that is colonial and that for Rhodes to truly fall 'our mind-set must change' (Maloka, 2021).

Vice Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng has since doubled down on UCT's decision stating in a campus communication: 'It is deeply problematic to suggest that the ability of members to serve the university for a limited acting period can only be on the basis of their race, age and gender. It is a skewed and incorrect view of transformation' (news.uct, 2021). Critics of Hall's appointment do not suggest that he does not have the ability to do the job, but rather that the appointment of a white British man in a position of such power in an African University, even temporarily, is a powerful symbol of colonial power dynamics.

The above series of events highlights that transformation or decolonisation at UCT remains a highly contentious issue in 2021 – Maloka asserting that Rhodes is yet to truly fall. Phakeng's response to the criticism of Hall's appointment arguably supports the IRTC's assertion that the power structures predicated on Whiteness remain in place as more radical approaches to decolonisation are unwelcome at UCT.

## 2.4 RMF at UCT: Timeline of events

In the following section, which discusses the evolution of RMF over time, non-academic sources such as newspaper opinion pieces are referred to in order to show the debates that surrounded the movement at the time. When using media sources, political, as well as other biases, shape the way events are portrayed; lack of peer reviewing also means information cannot be assumed reliable. While the biases and potential unreliability of media sources is difficult to remedy, I will nevertheless attempt to situate authors' standings within the debate at hand, particularly when citing journalistic opinion pieces, and corroborate their statements using other reports of the same events. I use these sources to fill in the gaps left by UCT news, UCT RMF statements, and published academic articles, as the complexity of RMF requires a range of perspectives be considered.

On the 9th of March 2015 UCT student and political activist Chumani Maxwele hurled human excrement at Cecil Rhodes' statue which stood at the centre of the University's Upper Campus in Rondebosch, overlooking the Southern Suburbs and the Cape Flats Townships. According to Mandisa Haarhoff, UCT English literature lecturer and post-colonial theorist, the bringing of human excrement from the township to UCT was symbolic in shattering the illusion of a gap between the grandeur of 'one of Africa's leading teaching and research institutions' (UCT, 2020) and the reality of the living conditions endured by the majority of South Africans: 'UCT must no longer refuse to recognise where it is located and who the students are.' Haarhoff (2019;1).

Professor Achille Mbembe describes Maxwele's act of protest as South Africa's 'Fanonian moment' (Mbembe, 2015), referring to South Africa's spell of disillusionment being broken, with no turning back. Tasneem Essop, secretary general of University of the Witwatersrand Student Representative Council at the time of the protests in 2015, similarly asserts that Maxwele's act of defiance 'came from a place of rage against the forms of institutional racism that students have been told to live with' (Essop, 2015; 1). With regards to how institutionalised racism shapes black students' experiences at UCT, Mandisa Haarhoff describes it as: 'swimming in a pool of hostility and violence' (2020). For many, Rhodes' statue was a silent re-affirmation of the colonial project and they wanted this form of 'resilient colonialism' to be ruptured (Nyamnjoh, 2016).

Sizwesandile Mnisi, RMF activist and co-creator of 'The Fall', the South African production centered around RMF at UCT, recalls: 'For me [Rhodes'] statue had to come down because it reminded me of what Cecil John Rhodes had in mind when he built the university. He didn't have me in mind, and seeing it every day made me uncomfortable' (Mnisi, quoted in Smith 2018; 1). Mnisi problematised UCT in how it accommodates white comfort and white belonging, whilst perpetuating black discomfort (Mnisi, quoted in Smith, 2018; 1). This research therefore understands RMF's novel disruption of this white comfort on campus as the potential basis for its impact on white student consciousness.

Around 1,000 students gathered on UCT's upper campus, days after Maxwele's defilement of the statue in March 2015; the gathering was chaired by Rekgotsofetse Chikane, but a number of speakers rallied support for the movement (Ahmed, 2019;24). Although RMF did not want leaders, but rather a horizontal organisational structure, society and the media required figureheads and the individuals who were positioned as such, were primarily, but not exclusively, men. This included individuals such as Chumani Maxwele, Masixole Mlandu, Brian Kamanzi and UCT SRC president at the time, Ramabani Mahapa, among others. This served to obscure the significant contributions of female student leaders such as Alex Hotz and Wanelisa Xaba.

After two weeks of protests on campus, 300 students, staff and contract staff gathered at the [then named] Bremner building demanding a statue removal date (news.uct, 2015a). 'Large numbers' of students then lived and slept in Bremner for nearly three weeks; protest was peaceful and dignified, with numerous educational activities taking place in the Mafeje Room at all hours of the day and night' (news.uct, 2015b). The RMF UCT Facebook page's *Bremner Occupation Statement* reads: 'it is absurd that anyone besides those who experience the statue as a violent presence should have any say in whether the statue should stay or not... White students in particular cannot be consulted in such a process because they can never truly empathise with the profound violence exerted on the psyche of black students.' (UCT RMF, 2015b).

Following UCT's Senate vote, the statue was removed on the 9th of April 2015. This event was reportedly attended by 10,000 people (Ramaru, 2019; 153) and the banners held by on-looking students read: 'We have only just started' (Nyamnjoh, 2016; 146). The statue became a starting point for RMF as it called for decolonised education and an end to institutionalised

racism at UCT (Bosch, 2017; 221); For many, Rhodes' statue represented the white supremacy which sat at the heart of UCT's upper campus (Knudsen & Anderson, 2019).
While RMF protests continued intermittently into early 2016, in October 2015 #FeesMustFall emerged demanding an end to rising tuition fees and the outsourcing of support staff, as well as decolonised education; 'there is consensus that the events found their major antecedent in the RMF movement' (Booysen, 2016; 2). This is supported by prominent Fallist activist Alex Hotz's assertion that: 'we took the pillars of RMF and made it the pillars of FMF.' (Interviewed in Ahmed, 2019;36). In October 2015 in response to #FeesMustFall emerging at University of the Witwatersrand, UCT students led by RMF, joined the protests against fee increases. On 19th October 2015, UCT students declared Bremner occupied once again. UCT responded by calling riot police who deployed stun grenades and tear gas, with 23 students being arrested (IRTC, 2019;13).

In October 2015, 'thousands of students' marched to parliament under the banner of both RMF and FMF (Washington Post, 2015). In response to police violence against protestors including the use of stun grenades, riot shields and batons, 'Black student activists called particularly for white women to move to the front of the crowd' (Mail&Guardian, 2015). It was argued that the efficacy of the white human shield against police violence was predicated on a system that privileges white bodies as it does violence to black bodies (Mail&Guardian, 2015).

At the #Shackville protest in February 2016, which involved just 200-300 protestors (Constitutional Court of South Africa, 2017), a shack was erected on upper campus, under both the RMF and FMF banner, to draw attention to the lack of student housing for incoming students (Ahmed, 2019;40). The peaceful protest became more violent as the day progressed as paintings, a UCT-owned car, and a university shuttle bus were burned, and VC Max Price's office was petrol bombed (news.uct, 2016). UCT banned protestors Alex Hotz, Masixole Mlandu, Chumani Maxwele, Slovo Magida and Zola Shokane from campus – this was later overturned by the Supreme Court Appeal case *Hotz v University of Cape Town* on the grounds that an original order 'was effectively aimed at restraining the applicants from committing unlawful acts at the UCT campus. That order does not… preclude any of the applicants from entering any of UCT's campuses' (Constitutional Court South Africa, 2017). After #Shackville many RMF activists began to distance themselves from the movement. As Brian Kamanzi, a prominent student leader, stated in an interview: 'After #Shackville

[February 2016] for all intents and purposes there is no more #RhodesMustFall.' (Interview in Ahmed, 2019;45).

In the early stages of RMF in 2015, the movement garnered widespread support among students, staff and the public, receiving 10,000 'likes' on Facebook: 'an expression of the digital activism through which the group has flourished' (Hodes, 2015;1). Zamayirha Peter, a University of Witwatersrand student at the time, explains how RMF and FMF successfully ignited the public imagination in 2015, but this changed in 2016 and 2017 as: 'people went back to their survival mode and reliance on student loans and scholarships, neglecting the idea of "no student left behind".' (Peter, 2018;1). This is reflected in the aforementioned number estimate: In March 2015, 10,000 people attended the statue removal (Ramaru, 2019; 153), in October 2015 'thousands' (Washington Post, 2015) marched to parliament, but by February 2016 only 200-300 protestors were present at #Shackville (Constitutional Court of South Africa, 2017).

In a journalistic opinion piece Professor James Myburgh argued that although the initial RMF protests attracted broad support: '…it soon narrowed down, especially at UCT, into an ultra-nationalist grouping that fed off the anger and frustrations of often middle class (even elite) black youth at the failures of the African National Congress government to achieve its African nationalist goals' (Myburgh, 2020;1).

While there were those who criticised the more violent methods of RMF (Davis, 2016;1) (Hodes, 2015;1), on the other side of the debate, RMF activist Wanelisa Xaba claimed that the protests started out in a peaceful manner, with marches, occupations and university shutdowns and that it was state violence and university brutality, that caused students to retaliate (Xaba, 2017;95). Similarly, Kamanzi indicated that it was only after the police became involved that things turned violent (Interview in Ahmed, 2017; 25).

At the #Shackville protest police attempted to remove students physically, when they refused to disperse (Mahali, 2018; 3). In numerous videos published by various news sources including Eyewitness News (2016) and the Daily Maverick (2016b) police can be seen to fire rubber bullets and stun grenades at students, as well as physically man-handling them; echoing the police tactics employed at the October 2015 march to parliament where white protestors formed a human shield to protect Black protestors from police violence.

Kamanzi stated: 'From about, March to October [2015], that is six months, we had been having this debate on violence… before a tire gets burnt at UCT. So, things have to be put into perspective' (interview, June 27, 2017). Kamanzi emphasises that RMF only employed more violent methods after months of peaceful protest, internal debate and police brutality.

This is supported by Von Holdt et al's (2011) assertion that use of aggressive crowd control methods of the police can often provoke otherwise peaceful protestors into responding with violence. According to Student activist Wanelisa Xaba, when students responded to the state sanctioned violence, the dominant South African discourse (including discourses produced and replicated by the media) labeled them as 'violent and unruly' (Xaba, 2017; 96). Bohler-Muller et al argue that South African state responses to protest today are: 'in many ways a reflection of the state response to protest in the apartheid era' (2017:83). While positive changes have been made within the South African Police Service since 1994, their response to protest remains highly securitised and continues to be characterised by paramilitary tactics that disregard human rights (Newham & Faull, 2011; 67).

Over the course of RMF there was much contestation regarding who was shaping the movement in an ideological and practical sense; According to Francis Nyamnjoh, factionalism and divisions emerged shortly after its inception (2016). UCT student at the time, Anye Nyamnjoh (2017; 272), emphasised that to treat RMF as a homogenous movement, or a 'monolithic structure' is to be 'oblivious to the multiplicities of interests and dispositions within the movement'.

## 2.5 Conflict and factionalism within the movement

The key issues of contention which resulted in conflict or factionalism within RMF were class, colourism, gender and sexuality. Judge Davis describes predominantly privileged activists who engage in this violence as: 'a new form of predatory elite' (2016;1). Rekgotsofetse Chikane (2018) reflects on his position as a self-declared 'Coconut' within the RMF movement: 'Should we be skeptical of the motives of the coconuts who are embarking on this form of politics?'. Chikane appears to be reclaiming the controversial or derogatory term 'Coconut' (February; 2018;1). According to Zimbabwean journalist Panashe Chigumadzi 'Coconut' refers to a person who is 'black on the outside' but 'white on the

inside'. Chigumadzi has also chosen to appropriate the term and self-identify as a coconut because she argues 'it offers an opportunity for refusal. It's an act of problematising myself – and others – within the landscape of South Africa as part of the black middle class that is supposed to be the buffer against more "radical elements".' (The Guardian, 2015).

In a review of Chikane's 2018 book 'Breaking a Rainbow, Building a Nation' Zamayirha Peter warns that: 'we must be wary of the reality that it is the privileged, the struggle royalty, the coconuts, who are able to secure the book deals that will write our history' (Peter, 2018; 1). However, RMF's aforementioned alliance with contract workers (news.uct, 2015a) counters somewhat the criticism that it was an exclusively an elite movement.

Adam Habib, University of Witwatersrand Vice Chancellor at the time, based on his involvement in negotiations with students, university management and government during the protests, asserts that the movement was high-jacked by some as an opportunity to further personal interests: 'You come here, create mayhem, develop a reputation and then you get appointed by parties so that you can get votes and land up in Parliament, immediately earning more than a R1m salary.' (Habib quoted in Ngqakamba; 2019; 1). Zamayirha Peter on the other hand, asserts that: 'In the white-owned media there had been a divisive picking of student idols and nonchalant citizens dismissed us as disruptive, ungrateful, privileged and misdirected' (Peter, 2018; 1).

According to Fatima Moosa, during the Zondo State Capture Commission in January 2021, Former Minister of Safety and Security Sydney Mufamadi said the State Security Agency (SSA) panel was told that 'Project Academia' was created to intervene in the Fallist protests and influence their direction (Moosa, 2021). Thulani Dlomo, who was the SSA general manager at the time, told the panel the purpose of Project Academia was to 'support "young bright minds" to be patriotic and to be strategically deployed to institute countermeasures and ensure stability and peace in our universities.' (Dlomo quoted in Moosa, 2021;1).

Another point of contention within the RMF movement is highlighted by RMF activist Ameera Conrad: 'Colourism… Lighter-skinned black people or coloured or mixed-race people were sort of extradited from the movement for not being "black enough".' (Conrad, 2018; 1). This gave rise to the question of what blackness is and 'what is the difference between being [Steve] Biko black (being from any sort of oppressed and marginalised group),

and being black African.' (Conrad, 2018;1). Coloured and Indian voices were seen to be marginalised in favour of black African voices, with the majority of student leaders being black African. According to Ahmed, within the RMF movement: 'invoking Fanon or Biko was not only a way of determining strategy and tactics, but may also be used as a mechanism for privileging certain voices above others' (Ahmed, 2017; 9).

Serah Kasembeli (2019) argues that the Fallist movements, while in some ways echoing the pan-africanist trajectory, in other ways failed to 'reconcile their agitation with that of the xenophobia against black foreigners' which were taking place at the same time (2019; 324). Kasembeli asserts that 'layers of racism aimed at the black African *Other* existed within the Fallist movements' (2019;325). This supports Anye Nyamnjoh's argument that: 'while the movement [RMF] emerges from the experience of alienation, certain behaviours internal to the movement can also proceed to cause alienation' (2017; 256).

Mpofu (2017) asserts that there were numerous accusations of sexual violence and also tensions between male and female figures, queer and straight activists within RMF (2017; 353). Maxwele, for example, is for some the hero that started the RMF movement, for others, the embodiment of the sexism, anti-women, anti-LGBTQI, and "big man" politics within the movement (Chikane, 2018; 99) (Mthonti, 2016). Kealeboga Ramaru highlighted a problematic dynamic whereby radical black feminists brought up the issue of gender and were told that feminism is 'un-African' and to stop appropriating Western ideals if they were serious about decolonisation (Ramaru, 2018; 152). Ndlovu asserts that the 'facade' of an inclusive, intersectional movement… '…masked the narrative of an ultimate matrixed oppression and further revealed pervasive positivist attitudes of hyper-masculine privilege within society' (Ndlovu, 2017; 127).

RMF Activist Amira Khan asserts that many members of RMF problematised the androcentric and cisnormative literature on black liberation that was 'aggressively pushed in the space, and even used as a weapon of defending problematic and patriarchal viewpoints' (Khan, 2017; 16). As a result of the violence and erasure claimed by various marginalised groups within the movement, forms of resistance began to emerge. The UCT Trans Collective, for example, disrupted a photographic exhibition in March 2016, hosted by RMF commemorating one year since the start of the movement. As a gesture of resisting the erasure of black trans bodies from official narratives of the movement (Ndelu et al, 2017)

they ‘smeared red paint over photographs and physically blocked the entrance to the exhibition hall’ (Hodes 2017:145).

#PatriarchyMustFall emerged as a response to RMF leadership’s not including hetero-patriarchy in their calls for decolonisation; while there were those within RMF who valued an intersectional approach to decolonisation, there were those who used violence to try and suppress this new campaign (Castro & Tate, 2017; 210). The Intersectionality Auditing Committee (IAC) was formed after a group of black men left the RMF space, claiming that they joined the movement ‘to organise against institutional racism, not to be distracted by petty gender issues’ (Ramaru, 2017; 153).

Issues such as this are relevant to this research as it shows the potential for inner conflict among white students regarding their support of the movement; how to support RMF and be sure they aren’t supporting the further marginalisation other intersectional identities.

### 2.6 White responses to RMF

While there exists an extensive literature on RMF, published literature on white student resistance to RMF is relatively sparse. This could mean either that white student resistance was very limited, or that resistance was not something that was expressed in a public context. This thesis aims to shed light on whether white student resistance to RMF was non-existent or concealed.

Due to the contentious nature of RMF protests at UCT (Peterson, 2016; Ndelu et al, 2017), they prompted a range of responses from the media, the public, and UCT students and staff. Of particular relevance to this research is the heterogeneous response of white South African UCT students and staff. To employ a binary of ‘for’ and ‘against’ to understand responses to the movement would be reductive and would not account for the complexity of reconciling a lived experience of an, at times, violent movement with one’s ideological or political stance and personal identity. Nor does that binary account for the evolution of the RMF movement over time. While the following section focuses on the sympathetic and critical responses of white students and staff, it must be acknowledged that criticism of various aspects of the movement was by no means exclusive to white students and staff.

Rekgotsofetse Chikane describes a tactic he witnessed being used by white students to invalidate the experiences of black students and therefore undermine RMF, in the context of conversations on campus during 2015 and 2016: A typical discussion would begin with a black student voicing a race-related frustration, a white student, uncomfortable with the comment, would reject it seeking to raise the conversation 'above race' (Chikane, 2018; 92). The black student then reaffirms their position and receives support from other black students/colleagues. The conversation then fails to reach a resolution - the white student speaks of collective responsibility for change or non-racialism: 'refusing to engage with racial difference and its consequences' (Chikane, 2018; 93).

The above 'tactic' reported by Chikane aligns with Steyn & Fosters' (2008) 'Repertoires for talking white' in post-apartheid South Africa. Steyn & Foster assert that white South Africans, in a public context, can employ a number of resistant white discourses or 'white talk' in order to maintain privilege and resist transformation, all whilst maintaining positive self-representation (2008; 25). Chikane's aforementioned anecdote falls into Steyn & Fosters' category of 'New South Africa speak': A discursive repertoire stressing the importance of non-racialism and reconciliation. Non-racialism, or Colour-blindness, allows for an individual to conceal profound ongoing inequalities, while appearing as a true advocate of tolerance and rationality (2008; 32). Similarly, Mike Hill (1997) contends that the Culture of White Confidence in South Africa, by placing its emphasis on democracy, constitutional 'Equality' and 'rights', privileges a liberal discourse that does not attend to the issue of material redistribution.

Director of UCT's AIDS and Society Research Unit, Rebecca Hodes, condemned RMF's Jameson Hall spray-paint protest which read: 'Max Price for Black Lives?' labelling it 'an insult on the integrity not just of the university's figurehead but of the institution as a collective' (Hodes, 2015; 1). While Hodes was notably critical of various aspects of the movement there were white staff members who marched with the protestors and were amongst those being criticised for being 'Fallist-apologists' (Herbst, 2018; 1).

In relation to an article by Judge Dennis Davis, condemning RMF's disruptive and violent methods, along with the academics who supported it (Davis, 2016;1), 31 academics who were members of UCT's Staff for Social Justice in Education group, signed a response defending their position (London, 2016;1); this included a number of white academics. This response

argued, among other points, that protestors' methods (blocking roads to campus, setting off fire alarms etc.) were not disruptive for the sake of disruption, but rather disruption with a strategic goal of bringing various faculty's management to a point of negotiation (2016;1). While they do not condone physical assault and property damage, they argue that the 'politics of the disrupters' is 'too often presented by the media as a homogeneous single entity' and emphasises that there are many strands and arguments within the movement (London, 2016;1).

In a Cape Town café in May 2016, South African RMF activist Wanelisa Xaba, at lunch with RMF Oxford (UK) activist Ntokozo Qwabe, wrote 'We will tip you when you return the land' on the bill (Freeman, 2016; 1). Qwabe later posted online that white South African waitress Ashleigh Schultz 'burst into typical white tears' and that 'he was unable to stop smiling after the incident' (Freeman, 2016; 1). Qwabe's post drew a furious response online, resulting in Schultz's defenders setting up a GoFundMe page which raised 94,000ZAR. One online commentator stated: 'the young lady was declined a tip for being white' (Freeman, 2016; 1). Other online commentators highlighted the fact that this incident and the online and media response does 'throw into strong relief the different responses to white and black pain' (Staufenberg, 2016; 1).

While the racial identities of the online commentators and donors are not known, the donation of 94,000ZAR, shows that *white tears* hold currency in the context of voicing racial injustice. While not a direct response to RMF protest action, this example provides insight into how 'White Solidarity' (DiAngelo, 2018) can function to resist transformation by prioritising white tears. In the analysis stage of this research *white tears* as a form of resistance to RMF will be examined.

While there were white students who criticised aspects of the movement or were 'distant and disinterested' (Chikane, 2018; 93), there were those who actively participated in protest. At the protest on the 20th of October 2015 outside of parliament's gates in Cape Town, the aforementioned 'white human shield' protected black students from police violence which involved use of stun grenades, riot shields and batons (Wesi, 2015;1). For some, this was 'heartwarming and encouraging', for others it was saddening that a 'black human shield was not human enough' (Wesi, 2015). Omarjee (2018; 40) argues that those white students understood their privilege and responsibility as allies to Black students.

The RMF White Privilege Project (Bosch, 2017; 229) is an example of an active attempt by white students to collectively interrogate their racial privilege in response to RMF. The white student organisers held a meeting on the 18th of March 2015 in UCT's Robert Leslie Social Science Building, open to all but attended by majority white students. According to the white student chair: 'This is not about white students educating people on black struggles. This is about white students educating each other about their role in these oppressions' (Fitzhenry, 2015). This was based on Audre Lorde's assertion that: 'Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity' (Lorde, 1984; 1). The UCT RMF Facebook page expressed support for the White Privilege Project and encouraged white students to engage: 'They [white students] can contribute through conscientising their own community on campus' (UCT RMF 2015a). The impact of this initiative is difficult to ascertain as progress would have involved 'inward-looking, non-political moral progress' (Vice, 2010;338).

Evidence of RMF's impact on white student consciousness at UCT is shown by white South African UCT alumni and Photographer, Sydelle Willow Smith, who launched her multimedia documentary exhibition 'Un/Settled' in Cape Town's Company Gardens in November 2019: "a project exploring white South Africans' conceptions of belonging in relation to settler colonial histories" (Willow Smith, 2019a). In Smith's launch event speech, she described the exhibition as 'a response to the internal reflection the RMF movement prompted in her, as a white South African' (Willow Smith, 2019a). Smith commented that: 'many white South Africans seem to have taken the release of Mandela and platforms for redemption and healing like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as absolution' (Willow Smith, 2019b;1). This is supported by Mamdani's aforementioned argument that the TRC's narrow scope of perpetratorhood allowed white South Africans to feel disassociated from apartheid atrocities (2015;68).

A week after Smith's exhibition was installed in company gardens, it was vandalised; the faces of white photo subjects scratched out. While one cannot claim to know the motivation of those who vandalised the exhibition, it does show that the topic of white South Africans reflecting on their place in South Africa to be one which evokes a strong negative response for some.

## 2.7 Protest and attitude change

When exploring protest movements and attitude change, it is necessary to distinguish between attitude towards protest methods and attitude towards a movement more generally. Sweetman et al (2019) found that individuals can disapprove of particular methods of protest while simultaneously supporting the changes a movement is pushing for. Sweetman et al's 2019 study examining attitude towards protest as a predictor of political action, found that an individual's identification with a politicised collective identity is 'conceptually distinct' from their overall attitude towards protest methods.

Bohler-Muller et al (2017) explored changing attitudes to peaceful, disruptive and violent forms of protest in South Africa. The study analysed datasets from two nationally representative surveys conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) on perception of protest methods, from 1995 and 2016. Analysis showed that in relation to disruptive protest (e.g., blocking roads and occupying buildings), the rate of negative perception fell from 81% to 62%, and in relation to violent protest (e.g., injuring people and destroying property) the rate of negative perception fell from 71% to 51% (2017; 86). Bohler-Muller et al (2017) attribute this growing acceptance for disruptive and violent protest in South Africa to the fact that they are increasingly being perceived as effective political tools for change.

Bohler-Muller at al's work however, may not accurately reflect the attitudes of white UCT students to RMF's disruptive or violent methods due to their close proximity; their survey reflects increasingly positive perceptions of disruption or violence when witnessing it from a safe distance, UCT students were experiencing protests in their place of study and sometimes their homes (UCT residences). Schwarz (2016) describes protest as a 'double-edged sword'; while people may become enthusiastic and engaged when hearing of a protest through the news or social media, they may disengage when faced with an actual protest as a disruption to their daily life (2016; iv). Selvanathan & Lickel (2018) support this assertion, contending that physically encountering protest in public space, can have an immediate negative impact on perceptions of protests; a reactionary or backlash effect.

Selvanathan & Lickel (2019) contend that overall attitude towards a protest movement is primarily based on the individual's preexisting perception of the issue at hand (2019; 598).

In their field study on racial justice protest on a USA college campus, they explore the proximal impact of protests on the social change attitudes of bystanders. They found more negative attitudes towards racial justice protests among people who had 'relatively weaker perceptions of campus racism' (2019; 598). Low perceptions of injustice correlated with negative perceptions of the protests, as they are seen as unnecessary (2019; 600).

Kelman's (1958) work on compliance, makes us aware of a complexity of researching attitudes or attitude changes as a result of social movements. In his work on compliance and internalisation of attitude change, Kelman differentiates between superficial change on a verbal level, which disappears after a lapse of time, and a lasting change in attitude and belief which is 'integrated into a person's value system, manifesting itself in a wide range of situations' (1958; 51). Verbal, and even behavioral compliance with the values set out by a movement, does not necessarily mean an individual has experienced genuine changes in personal attitude (Kelman,1958). Kelman's work presents a key question for the analysis stage of this study: Firstly, did RMF produce public conformity on campus and secondly, did RMF then also result in private acceptance of the values of the movement amongst respondents?

As well as recognising heterogeneity within broad forms of protest, Schwartz (2016; 25) emphasises the need to recognise the heterogeneity of the 'audience' of a protest. Within the category of non-participants, some will have observed the protests and others will have avoided it all together. Of those who did observe, some will have encountered the protest through traditional media and/or social media, others through word-of-mouth, and others by physical confrontation. The heterogeneity in the nature of one's encounter with protest is important to consider in the analysis stage of this research as twitter and Facebook discourses played a key role in public perception of RMF, as well as acting as a 'vehicle to foster political participation' (Bosch,2017;229).

Within the above literature on Whiteness and White Consciousness there appears to be a consensus on how the prevalent, individualised framing of racism, and a subsequent fear of being labeled as racist, can lead to white people distancing themselves from conversations around race which in turn hinders improvements in white racial consciousness. It also serves to conceal the systemic nature of racism. What remains more contentious however, is the role of white people in movements regarding Black Consciousness or racial injustice.

The literature on RMF reveals the contentious nature of RMF's various methods of protest as there appears to be little consensus on which methods were justified and which were unjustified, as well as the responses to them from UCT, private security and the SAPS. The various ideological factions within RMF demonstrate the complexity of accounting for intersectional identities within a broader decolonisation movement. These complexities are taken into account in chapters three and four, which present the findings of interview data analysis, by allowing for difference and variation within respondents' experiences of RMF and subsequent gains in White Consciousness.

# Chapter 3: Results - The circumstances that facilitated attitude change

## 3.1 Introduction

Before analysing attitude changes or white conscientisation reported by respondents (Chapter Four), this chapter examines the circumstances that allowed for or facilitated such changes. The disruptive nature of RMF made it an almost unavoidable topic of conversation for UCT students in 2015/2016. RMF's disruption of respondents' daily lives brought issues of institutionalised racism, and race more generally, to the forefront of respondents' minds; some issues that they had rarely, if ever, thought about before. RMF prompted respondents to have conversations with their classmates, friends and family that they were not having prior to the movement.

As Chapter Four will show, RMF resulted in attitude change amongst all respondents: 11 out of 12 respondents experienced some form of progressive shift with regards to awareness of, or attitude towards, institutionalised racism at UCT, with only one reporting a conservative/reactionary shift in his political views. While the heterogeneity and complexity of respondents' changes in consciousness must be recognised, overall conclusions can be achieved on the basis of broad and recurring themes. Developments in white consciousness have been deduced from specific directional changes in reported understanding, attitudes and behaviors regarding race and racial injustice: Changes that represent an increased awareness and consideration of perspectives and experiences outside of their white racial identity group.

The interviews suggested that respondents' white consciousness developed when an iterative relationship, with someone of a different racial identity, political attitude or academic background, intersected with RMF as the stimuli, or prompt, engagement, specifically with issues of racial injustice and institutionalised racism at UCT. A brief explanation of this statement and key definitions are provided below before an analysis of the interview data is presented in the following sections of this chapter.

An iterative relationship is here defined as a relationship which prompts respondents to engage in: 'reflective processes which allow for more nuanced evaluations of stimuli' (Cunningham et al, 2007; 741); In other words, a relationship that encourages a reprocessing

of one's evaluation of an object, event or concept. The reprocessing of respondents' initial evaluation of RMF, the stimuli, which lead to attitude change, was prompted, within racially, politically or academically diverse relationships, through proximal witnessing of a friend or partners' experiences, the verbal communication of a friend/partners' experiences, or conversations which discussed RMF or race directly.

Crucially, this racially, politically or academically diverse, iterative relationship, needed to be with an individual who knew more about the ideologies behind RMF than a respondent did at the time. For a relationship to be iterative, it did not need to be a particularly close or intimate friendship/relationship per se, although this often was the case.

Through analysis of the interview data, it becomes clear that RMF was the necessary stimulus, which acted as the catalyst to white conscientisation. As will be shown in section 3.5, prior to RMF, respondents' various diverse relationships were doing little to further their white consciousness.

### 3.2 The role of racially diverse, iterative relationships in facilitating white conscientisation

Iterative relationships with Black students, that preceded RMF, were found to be the most common facilitator of white conscientisation among respondents, with RMF acting as the catalyst (to be examined in section 3.5). According to the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation's SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey: 2019 Report, just 27% of South Africans report trusting people from 'other race groups' (IJR, 2019; 66). While South Africans' place of work/study is the location with the greatest extent of interaction with other race groups (compared to at home, in public spaces, at social gatherings, commercial spaces etc.), this is still low, with only 24% of South Africans reporting that they often or always interact with people of another race group in this space. The above statistics explain why some respondents report having close relationships with Black students, and others report needing to diversify their predominantly, if not entirely, white social circle.

Conscientisation in the form of an increased awareness of Black student experiences occurred through a proximal witnessing of, and/or verbal sharing of, the experiences of a Black friend or partner:

> Sarah*: "The protests were stressing me out because I could have been academically excluded* [if she had failed her next exams due to RMF-related anxiety] ... *[black classmate] told me his side of the story, the costs to him of not protesting, and it made more sense to me."*

> Jessica*: "I was sharing a living space with people of colour, I think this meant I was able to understand* [why RMF was happening] *a lot easier and quicker."*

For Aidan, observing his black friend's experiences gave him a greater understanding of how systemic racism can affect black students:

> Aidan*: "Having* [X] *was really important to me in that I saw someone who was suffering from a white system.* [X] *explained to me why people are triggered by what they are."*

While an increased awareness of the experiences of a Black friend or partner did facilitate conscientisation for respondents, it was the explicitly political conversations with these friends/partners that were shown to deepen respondents' understanding of why RMF occurred. For Aidan, political conversations with 'X' shifted his understanding of the implications of his white racial identity:

> Aidan: *"[*X] *helped me understand that as a white person you are tied to colonialism as a process, regardless of your intentions, before I didn't understand this perspective."*

Thomas' conversations with Black friends, which were prompted by RMF, caused him to recognise how Whiteness restricts certain bodies (Ahmed, 2007), which subsequently led his attitude towards transformation policies to shift:

> Thomas*: "Chatting with friends who have been denied things because of their colour really changed my position on transformation policies."*

The capacity of iterative relationships with Black students to change respondents' attitudes towards race and racial injustice could be attributed to the fact that they are viewed as 'high-

credibility sources', which 'exert more persuasive influence than low-credibility sources' (Bednar & Howard Levie, 1993; 285). Bednar and Howard Levie assert that high credibility requires a perception of trustworthiness and expertise. Respondents' attitudes changing through conversations with their Black friends/partners is likely due to the fact that they view them as trustworthy, and relative experts with regards to their experiences of institutionalised racism. The interviews suggest that this perceived 'expertise' however, did not lead to conscientisation prior to RMF; the movement was needed to prompt conversations around race and privilege. The relationship between race and perceived credibility is discussed later in section 3.4.

Jasmin provides an example of how social media and the news became a low-credibility source for her, due to lack of perceived trustworthiness:

> Jasmin*: "I think social media and the news sensationalised it* [RMF protests], *made it look a lot more extreme than it was most of the time… it wasn't that extreme. They are just people who are expressing their justified anger."*

Jasmin explained that her understanding of the RMF protests was more shaped by conversations with her black partner at the time, than news or social media representations of the movement.

Laura reported a shift in her attitude towards RMF and racial injustice when she moved into a new, racially diverse friendship group, which she accessed through her black partner. Laura began dating her partner just before RMF began:

> Laura: *"It was mainly starting to date someone who wasn't white, becoming friends with his friends, I got introduced to a whole different world. That close circle who influenced me and my attitude, these were now people of colour."*

This supports Lazer et al's assertion that an individual's political attitude often shifts toward the political views of their associates or social group (2010).

Beyond close or intimate relationships/friendships with Black students that preceded RMF, listening to, or interacting with Black classmates, was also formative for some respondents.

For example, Jessica reported becoming aware that white people can unconsciously dominate conversations, through what a black student said in class:

> Jessica: *"In class some people complained that white people were excluded from conversations about RMF but a girl responded: "I know you are on our team but white people tend to dominate conversations". That was super eye opening for me."*

Emily reported a change in attitude towards RMF and institutionalised racism as a result of a conversation with Chumani Maxwele in class, with whom she had never spoken before:

> Emily: *"At first I was like what the f*ck, strikes are unnecessary, but I then met the guy that threw the poop on the statue, in one of my tuts* [academic tutorials] *and I asked him about it and when he explained the situation to me... That UCT doesn't acknowledge that this institution continues to stand for racism, then I understood it better."*

Testimony from black students in UCT's 2019 IRTC report supports what Maxwele told Emily, that a 'racist institutional culture' exists which imposes 'unreasonable academic demands' and creates an 'alienating environment' for those who are not white (2019,31). The fact that it had to be explained to Emily, that UCT still stands for racism, could be partially explained by Steyn and Foster's (2008; 26) conceptualisation of whiteness as an *orientation*, which takes its perspective and relative privilege as 'normal'. Emily had previously not considered how the experiences of those who are not white, differ from her own.

Andrew's (2020) understands Whiteness as a state of *psychosis*: a set of delusional ideas designed to protect white people from the reality that they benefit from the oppression, exclusion and explotation of black people. This understanding could also provide an explanation for why only when it was explicitly explained to her by a black student, that Emily realised that racism still shapes black students' experiences of UCT. An external intervention was required to make Sarah aware that her experience was not universal or 'normal' for all students.

Conscientisation as a result of racially diverse, iterative relationships, sometimes involved conflict and tension. According to Jessica, a perceived ambivalence towards RMF led a Black friend to cut ties with her entirely white, high school friendship group:

> Jessica: *"A school friend who is mixed race left our WhatsApp chat because we weren't outlandish enough in our support... she cut us off and I haven't really connected with her since."*

Jessica's use of the word *outlandish* implies that her mixed-race friend was requiring her and the rest of their friend group to support RMF to an extent, or in a manner, that was beyond the boundaries of what Jessica deemed reasonable. This word choice implies Jessica believes her friend was not justified in cutting her and her friendship group off. The fact that her friend chose to end the friendships, shows that from her perspective Jessica did not show a sufficient or acceptable level of support for a movement fighting racial oppression which affected her, and not Jessica or the others in the group.

Aidan reflected upon a social distance between himself and his close black friend that arose when RMF began:

> Aidan*: "I think at times we were distant because* [black friend] *didn't want to be that guy with a white friend. On social media I remember he called people out using their names. I do remember a time we were not in good standing because of this matter."*

Aidan's perception of his black friend not wanting to *be that guy with a white friend* may be consistent with Ndebele's argument that if black students make an effort to make social connections with white students on a South African university campus, they risk being seen as 'seeking proximity to their 'superior' colleagues' (Ndebele 2013; 1). It is possible that Aidan's black friend was anxious about being viewed as seeking proximity to white students, and therefore actively distanced himself from Aidan for periods of time during RMF. While Ndebele wrote about this campus dynamic in 2013, prior to RMF, the above quote suggests this dynamic was present during RMF. The fact that this was the first time Aidan's black friend had actively distanced from him, suggests that RMF only served to intensify Ndebele's preexisting dynamic.

For some respondents, a Black partner/friend was willing to help further their understanding of RMF and racial injustice, however in some cases it appears pressure was put on Black students to make their opinion known and justify it to white students. Sarah reports an instance where four white classmates, herself included, and one black classmate were having a conversation about RMF:

> Sarah: *"A white friend who was sceptical of the movement suddenly got frustrated and says: 'what's it like* [Z]*? Tell us what it's like being a black student at UCT?', they wanted to be backed up.* [Z] *had been deliberately trying to stay out of the conversation."*

In that moment, according to Sarah, 'Z' said that racism does exist at UCT, but that their department was 'pretty cool'. In this scenario a white student put a black student on the spot amongst a group of white students. While the white friend was ostensibly harmlessly asking for 'Z's opinion, it was clear to Sarah that they were looking for support on their assertion that racism is not a big problem at UCT and that RMF is therefore either entirely or partially unjustified.

'Z' giving, what Sarah perceived to be, an appeasement, could be interpreted as him negotiating Whiteness (Haarhoff, 2020); making a conscious manouvre to avoid the social cost of breaking the 'ignorance contract' (Steyn, 2012). Another possibility is that 'Z' did not want to endure the discomfort, or do the emotional and mental labour of attempting to convince someone of his experiences of racism, who was coming from a place of skepticism. It must be noted however, that while Sarah did not perceive 'Z's answer to fully reflect his true opinion, it is possible that he did in fact state how he really felt; the wider context and dynamic of the conversation however, suggests that he likely held back, or made more palatable, his true opinion.

A sign that respondents themselves viewed relationships with students of colour as an important part of their conscientisation was revealed when a number of respondents reported a desire to racially diversify their social circle:

> Jessica*: "My friendship group in first year wasn't very diverse so I didn't really engage* [with RMF]. *I want to diversify my friendships."*

> Sarah: *"I think the next steps should be building close relationships with people of a variety of racial backgrounds."*

Jessica and Sarah making these statements three years after RMF has passed, implies they are yet to diversify their friendship circles. This begs the question: Why have they still not done this? This casts some doubt on the authenticity of their claimed intentions to form friendships with Black students.

Josh problematises the lack of racial diversity in his social circles and attributes it to the demographic of the community he comes from:

> Josh: *"The reality is that the vast majority of my friends are white because that's the community I grew up in. I don't know many Black people and that is part of the problem."*

The majority of Josh's friends being white is unsurprising given that 54.7% of South Africans report never or rarely interacting with people of another race group in a social setting, and 61% reporting never or rarely at home (IJR, 2019; 67).

While a more racially diverse social circle could allow for the iterative relationships that can function to facilitate developments in white consciousness, this does create more opportunity for emotional or mental labour to be demanded of Black students, by white students. It also could require Black students to enter into, and navigate, predominantly white spaces, or accept white students into Black spaces.

Thomas for example, reported 'broadening' his friendship group as a result of RMF, by simply entering a black friendship group regardless of whether or not his presence was welcomed:

> Thomas: *"A lot of my* [black] *friends just don't like white people, and rightly so. I sort of just inserted myself. I've got a domineering personality so I just go sit with them."*

While Thomas' friendships with black students did facilitate conscientisation developments for him, his insertion of himself into a black space reveals the complexity of forming new relationships with Black students. Befriending Black students, without carefully considering the impact of one's white racial identity on one's Black counterparts, could simply mean one is extending Whiteness into previously Black spaces. Black students may not want white students to bring their white privilege and its various implications, into certain spaces.

Furthermore, the fact that Thomas inserts himself into Black students' social space while simultaneously acknowledging that they don't like white people shows either a lack of self-awareness, or that he simply does not care about their feelings on the matter.

### 3.3 The role of politically diverse, iterative relationships in facilitating white conscientisation

While not as significant as racially diverse iterative relationships, relationships with other white students with a more progressive stance on RMF and racial injustice, also facilitated developments in consciousness among respondents. Jake and Sarah reported an increased understanding of RMF through their conversations with white friends who were actively participating in protests:

> Jake: *"I had white friends who were on the frontline of the protests so I'd ask them about it."*

> Sarah: *"So my friend* [white student] *was really involved in the protests. He told me his side of the story and we chatted for quite a while."*

For Aidan, his relationship with a fellow white student who was more 'politically informed' than he was, prompted him to engage with dialogues regarding RMF:

> Aidan: "*Being with someone like* [white student], *these kinds of conversations were common in our everyday dialogue because that's the kind of person she was."*

Brad reported an argument between his sister and their flat-mate, a fellow white South African student; it exemplified how politically diverse relationships are not sufficient in facilitating white conscientisation if the relationship is not iterative:

> Brad: "*My roommate had a debate with my sister and she got very upset. He was kind of liberal, she was clearly very anti-protests, she felt like the country was going backwards, blaming the failing economy on the protests. He didn't convince her of anything. It wasn't very constructive, and we never spoke about it again."*

Brad's flat-mate and Brad's sister had diverging political views but did not have an iterative relationship - both of their viewpoints remained the same after debate - and as a result her attitude towards RMF remained unchanged.

The above example emphasises the importance of the iterative nature of relationships in furthering conscientisation. A racially or politically diverse relationship itself may not be sufficient to bring attitude change; the relationship must function to prompt a reprocessing of respondents' previous evaluations of the stimuli, RMF.

### 3.4 The role of academically diverse, iterative relationships in facilitating white conscientisation

Academic diversity within an iterative relationship also resulted in white conscientisation for a number of respondents. Aidan explains how his white girlfriend's academic background allowed her to educate him on the political concepts underpinning RMF:

> Aidan: "*I was dating a white girl who was studying politics, from her I gained a theoretical understanding of what it means to reconcile injustice... before I didn't understand what was going on conceptually."*

For Brad it was his white South African roommate's academic background that helped him understand *what RMF was about*:

> Brad: *"My roommate and I talked about it* [RMF] *quite a lot, he studied history and sociology, so through that he helped me understand a lot of what RMF was about."*

However, it seems likely that academic diversity is a secondary effect of some level of political diversity as the causal facilitator of change. In any event, attitudes towards RMF changing as a result of conversations with other white people speaks to a dynamic in which white people are more likely to trust the opinions of other white people, than those of black

people, even when the topic is racial oppression, which neither white person experiences (Eddo-Lodge, 2017) (DiAngelo, 2018). This is consistent with the perception of neutrality or impartiality that Whiteness affords to white people (Chambers, 1997:189), which is not extended to those who as seen as divergent from Whiteness.

With regards to Aidan however, earlier analysis shows that most of his reported attitude changes resulted from conversations with a close black friend, it therefore cannot be said that he trusted his white girlfriend any more than his close black friend regarding matters of institutionalised racism. Similarly, the lack of racial diversity within some respondents' social circles could also account for why some white students had their attitudes towards RMF changed by other white students, as opposed to Black students.

Overall, the data suggests that attitude change with regards to RMF, or white conscientisation, can be facilitated through any one, or combination of, racial diversity, political diversity and (probably as a secondary factor) academic diversity within an iterative relationship - close or distant. This diversity was important in exposing respondents to new understandings and perspectives regarding RMF and the issues of racial injustice it raised; respondents being exposed to alternative interpretations of the catalyst is what aided changes in their own evaluation of it.

### 3.5 RMF as the catalyst for white conscientisation

A number of responses suggest that racially, politically or academically diverse and iterative relationships are not in themselves sufficient for conscientisation. Sarah's experience suggests that these relationships would not have functioned to develop white Consciousness, without RMF as the necessary prompt, or catalyst.

Sarah attended UCT from 2011 up until the date of interview in 2019 and only reported experiencing significant attitude change regarding race and institutionalised racism, in 2015, as a direct result of conversations prompted by RMF:

> Sarah: *"I was really ignorant about politics before RMF, social justice was this new thing to me and suddenly it exploded into my world."*

Only when RMF prompted conversations about institutionalised racism at UCT, did Sarah's diverse iterative relationships function to change her understanding of racial injustice.

The reported large-scale and disruptive nature of the RMF protests seems to be what made them effective in prompting dialogue around institutionalised racism:

> Aidan: "*Conversations just gravitated towards it, the movement was everywhere, everything you did. You were in the thick of it."*

> Jessica: *"I think RMF opened up these discussions and created more openness to protest culture..."*

Jasmin and Mia both reported having conversations with friends and family that they had not been having prior to RMF:

> Jasmin: *"My two best friends from primary school* [Black, now UCT students], *we had never had conversations about this* [race] *before, but we did when the protests started."*

> Mia*: "Without RMF I probably wouldn't have had these realisations. Unless these topics are thrown onto you, forcing you to engage, you don't engage. I had very heated discussions at the family dinner table... we never had these conversations before 2015."*

The above data is interpreted as Steyn's 'Ignorance Contract' (2012) being at least partially disrupted by RMF. RMF prompted all respondents to engage with issues of race and racial injustice, where before they had reported very little, to no engagement at all. The movement sparked conversations about the lived experiences of black students on campus, the relative privilege of white students and the institutionalised racism, or Whiteness, which shaped these divergent experiences. RMF prompted discussions in which respondents acknowledged, and reflected upon their whiteness, which had thus far not been occurring within their family and various social circles. The nature of attitude changes will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four.

All respondents reported the RMF protests as having some disruptive effect on their daily lives. The nature and extent of this disruption depended on various factors such as living situation and mental health. According to respondents' reports of the nature of protests, RMF's methods ranged from peaceful to disruptive, with instances of violence (Runciman et al, 2016).

Some respondents had negative responses to the disruptive and violent methods characteristic of 2016, which is when the burning of vehicles, petrol-bombing of buildings, and intimidation of non-participating staff and students occurred (Konik, 2018; 575). Jessica reported severe distress and anxiety as a result of the protests, which focused on her upper campus residence. Jessica refers to the February 2016 #Shackville protest which involved RMF protestors erecting a shack between two residence halls to highlight a 'pressing need for more on-campus housing at UCT' (Petersen, 2016;1). According to media reports, that same day, RMF protestors petrol-bombed the Vice-Chancellor's office, and set fire to multiple vehicles and historical UCT paintings (Furlong, 2016).

> Jessica: *"A girl let people into Fuller Hall who took the paintings and burnt them. It became really nightmarish; people would come into your bedroom. It was a little scary."*

Thomas reported increased levels of stress as a result of his residence being shut down:

> Thomas*: "When my res* [student residence hall] *shut down it really started affecting me. I was an incredibly stressed 19-year-old"*

Sarah, who struggled with depression and suicidal thoughts prior to RMF, described UCT and the people in her department as her lifeline and so campus roadblocks and exam disruptions caused her anxiety and panic:

> Sarah*: "When protestors started blocking roads to campus, UCT was my lifeline so I freaked out."*

Negative responses such as fear, frustration or anxiety, to certain disruptive or violent methods of protest were by no means exclusive to white students and did not necessarily equate to condemnation of these methods. Jasmin for example states:

Jasmin: *"I found the burning of tires quite alarming"*

And also, then states:

Jasmin: *"I think the methods of protests were multi-faceted and that's where it's tricky… I personally lean towards non-violence, but I recognise that obviously people felt pushed to the point of violence."*

Similarly, Emily states:

Emily: *"I thought exam disruptions were a nuisance"*

And went on to state:

Emily: *"I wouldn't say I was fully on board, but I could understand why they were doing it."*

Support for the movement as whole, and resultant conscientisation did not appear to be hindered by negative perceptions or experiences of particular protest methods. Among respondents, level of distress and disruption experienced as a result of RMF, was distinct from openness to RMF's underlying ideologies. This is consistent with Sweetman et al's claim that a person's identification with a politicised collective identity is 'conceptually distinct' from their overall attitude towards protest (Sweetman et al, 2018; 117).

A number of participants did condemn particular methods of protest while still recognising the broader injustice and need for change advocated for by the movement. Jessica, for example, did not support the setting off of student residence fire alarms:

Jessica: *"Pulling the fire alarm puts everyone at risk, puts other students at risk*"

Jessica did nevertheless support the broader goals of the RMF movement:

Jessica: "*It's about institutionalised racism… it's what Rhodes symbolised and it's not right for him* [Rhodes' statue] *to be here*."

This finding supports Mpofu's characterisation of RMF's disruption to respondents' university lives as an: 'effective communicative strategy' (2017) through the disruption of the 'status quo'. The 'status quo' referring to the non-racial rainbow nation rhetoric, which Mpofu claims commits violence against victims of Apartheid as it masks deeper violences: 'the unrepentant structural problems of Apartheid that still hold sway in South Africa.' (Mpofu, 2017;252).

While for the majority of respondents, negative reactions to particular protest methods did not prevent them from engaging with, or supporting, the broader RMF movement, Nathan explained that his emotional reaction to RMF's protest methods, pushed him into a more conservative ideological stance:

> Nathan: *"Before RMF I felt a lot more ambiguous about left wing radicalism in South Africa, I'd say I almost had a slight socialist streak in me, but after RMF, I couldn't anymore… My political attitude has become the opposite to that of the movement, because of their methods. It wasn't an ideological thing that pushed me here, more an emotional reaction."*

Nathan's (2016) response to RMF's methods supports Schwarz's assessment of protest action as a 'double-edged sword': how direct encounters with protest through disruption to their daily lives can cause individuals to engage and support, but also to disengage and resist. Nathan's above response to RMF's methods of protest provides an example of Selvanathan & Lickel's (2018) backlash effect. The backlash effect occurs when an individual has a perception that the injustice a movement is fighting against, is not particularly prevalent:

> Nathan: *"Change is always needed, but I don't think that much change is needed. It's easy to poke holes in things."*

Nathan's views on RMF's methods of protest align with the media, investors and political elite's framing of 'peace, civility and quiet' as the *preferred set-up* in South Africa (Mpofu, 2017;351):

> Nathan: *"The methods were not something we would want to have in normal political discourse. It's unpleasant to be involved in."*

Nathan expresses a desire for 'normal' politics (Kalyvas, 2009), in contrast to the 'extraordinary politics', in which high levels of popular mobilisation are characteristic (Reddy, 2015).

Among the sample, RMF was overall an effective and important catalyst for attitude change and white conscientisation. However, multiple respondents viewed it as possible to experience RMF at UCT without engaging with the issues it raised:

> Jake*: "It was very easy for white people to turn a blind eye."*
>
> Josh*: "I'm sure that a lot of people were persuaded by the RMF rhetoric if they chose to engage with it... I think a lot of people who didn't care before, continued not to care."*
>
> Mia*: "If you didn't want to hear the message you could avoid the message. Especially those with the most privilege, with their own cars and private flats, you can escape the discussion. Which is ironic because they're the ones who need to hear it most."*

The above quotes remind us that this research sample is comprised of white students who voluntarily participated in a study on RMF. White students who did not engage with RMF in 2015, those mentioned above by respondents, were less likely to respond to calls to be interviewed. The strong negative responses, by some white South Africans, to the prospect of being interviewed for a research project on white students and RMF, mentioned in the opening paragraph of this thesis, along with the above quotes from respondents, suggest there were white students who were entirely unwilling to engage with RMF dialogues.

Chapter Four will now present and discuss the attitude changes or consciousness developments that respondents reported experiencing as a result of their diverse, iterative relationships intersecting with the catalyst, RMF. Chapter Four will also examine the complexity of the conscientisation process; for example, when race-based self-reflection takes a destructive rather than constructive turn.

# Chapter 4: Results - The nature of attitude change

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the following questions: How do respondents understand race and institutionalised racism differently, as a result of RMF and conversations surrounding it? How do respondents understand their own white racial identity differently, if RMF prompted self-reflection for them? When analysing respondents' reported changes in attitude or understanding regarding racial injustice or their white racial identity, they are considered in relation to the literature on White Racial Consciousness, outlined in section 2.4.

While the nature of respondents' changes in awareness and attitudes as a result of RMF were not homogenous, there are recurring themes that emerge: White belonging and black alienation at UCT, unsettled white positionality, complicity in Whiteness, constructive and destructive self-reflection and social norms on campus. Alongside developments in white consciousness, complexities of the conscientisation process are examined, including an unwillingness to engage with RMF and, where there is willingness, uncertainty on the appropriate vocabulary.

## 4.2 White belonging, Black alienation

As a result of discussions prompted by RMF, 11 out of 12 respondents reported an increased awareness of student experiences beyond that of students who shared their white racial identity; mostly referring to 'Black' students, with one respondent referring to 'those whose parents were oppressed under the apartheid regime'. The recurring themes that emerged centered around issues of white student belonging and Black student alienation. Emily speaks about her increased awareness of Black discomfort on campus:

> Emily: "*I didn't realise Black people felt so uncomfortable at UCT… the movement opened up a whole new way of understanding and seeing for me.*"

The discomfort Emily refers to echoes RMF activist Sizwesandile Mnisi's (2018; 1) assertion that UCT accommodates white comfort, while perpetuating black discomfort. Mnisi explains that seeing Rhodes' statue every day on his university campus made him uncomfortable as he

saw it as reminder that the university was not built with him in mind. The majority of respondents recognised that Black student discomfort and alienation were central aspects of RMF, supporting Nyamnjoh's (2017) claim that the RMF movement emerged primarily from Black student experiences of alienation.

Similarly, Thomas speaks about how the *coloniality* (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) of campus space prevents Black students from feeling a sense of belonging or ownership at UCT. Maldonado-Torres (2007,243) uses 'coloniality' to refer to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism and that continue to shape the lived experience of modern racialised people. Thomas reflects on how the coloniality of UCT, which is partly maintained through buildings being named after colonial figures, functions to reaffirm to Black students that the space is oriented around Whiteness.

> Thomas*: "I think RMF was good because I didn't give Smuts Hall or Jammie* [Jameson] *Hall a second thought, but if your parents had been oppressed under apartheid and Rhodes looking out over your parents in a shack... you'd think this isn't my university."*

Thomas posits that campus buildings named after colonial leaders Jan Smuts[1] and Leander Starr Jameson[2], and Cecil Rhodes' statue looking out over the Cape Flats townships, while previously going unnoticed by himself, prevents racial groups who have been historically oppressed by these figures from feeling a sense of ownership over the university they attend.

Thomas demonstrates an understanding that UCT remains 'oriented' around (Ahmed, 2007; 150), or designed to accommodate, white students and staff, at the expense of Black students and staff. Thomas' words *Rhodes looking out over your parents in a shack,* pertains to an alienation felt by Black students as a result of Rhodes' statue in how it symbolises continued racial injustice as a result of an 'incomplete transformation project' (Ndelu, 2017; 1).

[1] One of UCT's upper campus student residences was named after Jan Smuts, prime minister of the Union of South Africa from 1919 to 1924. Smuts is widely considered by contemporary standards to be a racist imperialist (Lentin, 2010, 13).
[2] UCT's main hall on upper campus, now named Sarah Baartman Hall, at the time of RMF was named after Scotsman Leander Starr Jameson. Jameson was Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1904 to 1908 and is associated with the disastrous 1895 Jameson Raid.

Sarah explains that she observed a need for Black students to feel more emotional support from UCT lecturers; specifically, lecturers who they can identify with and feel a close, even family like, connection with:

> Sarah*: "There did seem to be a strong emotional need from Black students, to feel a better sense of belonging. To feel like they have lecturers who can be like parents, who will look after them and not make them feel alone when they come here* [to UCT]*."*

All respondents reported a previous lack of awareness of experiences outside of their own white experience at UCT, which RMF, or discussions it prompted, made them aware of. This is likely due to the fact that in spaces shaped by Whiteness, such as UCT (Haarhoff, 2020), the white perspective is positioned as 'normal and appropriate' (Steyn &Foster, 2008; 26), which in turn allows whiteness to remain 'the primary unmarked and so unexamined 'blank' category.' (Chambers, 1997:189).

The interview data suggests there has been a general increase in understanding among respondents regarding various ways in which Black UCT students are expected to negotiate (Haarhoff, 2020), and assimilate to (Matebeni, 2018), Whiteness and Coloniality at UCT:

> Mia*: "UCT celebrates colonial Whiteness, instead of Africa and people of colour... institutions and systems must transform away from a Western Colonial view."*

> Laura*: "Our education system… It should be Afrocentric rather than Eurocentric… we are in South Africa."*

The majority of respondents showed an awareness that: 'the meaning of RMF extends beyond the colonial architecture of UCT, to the medium of instruction, the composition of the teaching body and more generally the value given, and privilege afforded to Whiteness' (Matebeni; 2018; 1). Black South African students having to assimilate to a culturally white institution and studying a Eurocentric curriculum requires them to experience a form of 'social death' (Mararike and Vengeyi, 2016) at the hands of settler colonialism's continuing legacy at UCT. As Indigenous people often regard assimilation to the culture of their colonisers as 'culturally genocidal' (Short, 2016, 25), Short, writing in the Australian context,

contends that for as long as decolonisation fails to occur in countries affected by settler colonialism, the genocide is a continuing process (Short, 2006; 128).

Along with an increased awareness of how UCT's Whiteness, or Coloniality alienates Black students and requires them to assimilate, the majority of respondents conversely reported an increased awareness of how being white has given them a *privileged* experience at UCT, which required minimal assimilation:

> Mia: "*Privilege comes from being white… my accent privileges me in university, being able to ask lecturers questions and they respond differently to me… until this movement I didn't understand how deep my privilege is."*

> Thomas*: "My first language is English. My lecturers are pretty much always white so I can relate to them whereas for my Black friends it's completely alien."*

Nathan was the only respondent to be openly dismissive of RMF activists' experiences, stating that the movements' arguments were not grounded in logic or based on *actual ideas*:

> Nathan: *"A lot of the arguments people make for the movement are not fully rational and logical… I never felt that we* [white friend group] *actually took anything that anybody said in the movement seriously... It was all just kind of political awareness."*

The above statement could be interpreted as a form of what Steyn and Foster term 'New South Africa Speak' (2008); Nathan may be engaging in a common trope of 'resistant whiteness' (2008) in how he is resisting progressive transformation on the basis of being a 'true advocate of tolerance and rationality' (Steyn & Foster, 2008; 32), where he suggests RMF supporters are often not. Nathan is implicitly positioning himself as the arbitrator of logic and rationality.

While the increased awareness of white comfort and Black discomfort on UCT's campus is viewed as evidence of white conscientisation in the form of an increased understanding of the implications of being white and conversely, not being white (Rowe et al; 1995), further data analysis reveals how the RMF movement functioned to disrupt this white belonging on campus, in the short term:

Nathan: *"I felt really uneasy being on campus, I really hoped people weren't upset with me being there."*

Sarah*: "I was afraid of protestors; afraid they might call me a racist or tell me I'm a bad person... I felt awkward going to campus."*

This data is interpreted as evidence that the RMF protests disrupted any ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2006) respondents may have previously had on campus. Sullivan positions *ontological expansiveness* as an unconscious habit of white privilege and describes it as a perceived entitlement to occupy, and be comfortable in, any space one wishes to – in contrast to Black people feeling uncomfortable in, or having to assimilate to, spaces shaped by Whiteness.

Due to the RMF protests, respondents no longer felt comfortable on campus, in the way that they had prior to RMF. However, from the interviews it becomes clear that this disruption to respondents' sense of comfort on campus only lasted as long as RMF, and then FMF, protests, and so cannot be seen as a long-term or sustained change. Aidan, for example, states that his sense of belonging on campus was only affected by RMF 'at a point in time'. The way in which RMF unsettled respondents with regard to their positionality is explored further in the following section.

### 4.3 Unsettled white positionality

For the majority of respondents, RMF prompted them to implicitly, and at times explicitly, racialise themselves, reportedly, for the first time. The term *racialise* is here understood as a process by which respondents recognised and/or acknowledged their white racial identity as something with meaning beyond simply the colour of their skin.

Eight respondents reported instances of inner conflict and confusion regarding how to appropriately position themselves as a white student in support of the RMF movement. The majority of respondents grappled with a key question: What are appropriate and inappropriate ways for a white person to support a black struggle, against a system that they as white students benefit from? Where do I belong in this struggle?

> Aidan: "Y*ou're trying to get involved but how do you support this, and how do you not support this? What's really my position in the protest? Do I know enough to actually say anything? How do I defend a struggle I have never experienced? Where do I stand?"*
>
> Laura: "*It was a bit confusing as to where I belonged because I was in support of the movement, and that was mainly by people of colour"*

This reported confusion and uncertainty was based on respondents understanding their positionality as different from that of Black students; it required an understanding that their white racial identity framed the meaning of their presence, words and actions in the RMF space. These inner dialogues/conflicts reveal thoughtfulness amongst respondents, on the implications of bringing Whiteness into a space of black struggle:

> Jasmin: *"I was slow off the mark because I didn't know what my place was. What does involvement look like without taking over? Trying to position yourself was complex, reflection was needed individually and collectively."*

It is worth noting at this point that while the majority of respondents did not participate in the movement, Josh participated in a march to parliament and Emily and Jasmin both actively supported on one occasion by bringing food and water supplies in responses to calls from RMF activists participating in an occupation.

Do these findings support Chikane's (2018,77) description of 'the endemic response of white UCT students to issues that affect black people' as 'distant and disinterested'? The above quotes from Aidan and Jasmin, which were echoed by the majority of respondents, suggest that while the respondents in this research sample were somewhat distant, they were not disinterested.

On the one hand, the majority of respondents expressed a desire to actively support RMF, as they did not want to remain passive or complicit in institutionalised racism. Some respondents demonstrated an understanding that their political silence can inflict harm upon those who are fighting their own oppression, in line with Pillay's theorisation of white silence as a form of quiet, slow, psychological violence (Pillay, 2016; 1570):

> Brad*: "We felt almost ashamed that we weren't joining in but I almost felt like it wasn't my place to say anything."*

On the other hand, this reported desire to support the movement, which drew respondents towards protest participation, was countered by a concern or nervousness that their contribution or presence might be unwelcome by, or harmful to, Black activists. Respondents also reported some reluctance to engage in protest action or dialogue, based on a perceived risk that their actions or words might be viewed as dominating or performative:

> Mia*: "White students were not sure what to say and when. I learned that white people tend to dominate in class, or in a black space so I didn't want to dominate the conversation when it might not be our place."*

This aligns with Ndebele's observation in a South African University context, that when white students attempt to integrate with black students, they 'risk being accused of imposing and patronising behavior' (Ndebele, 2013; 1).

The reported confusion and uncertainty regarding respondents' role in the RMF movement provides evidence of respondents' self-racialisation. This is based on recognition of their whiteness, and the potential connotations of bringing this racial identity into RMF spaces and dialogues. For context, RMF activists did try to accommodate white involvement by specifying what should be Black only forums and which ones would be more inclusive.

Another reason for nervousness or reluctance to participate in RMF protests or surrounding dialogues is confusion regarding the appropriate language with which to talk about race. In response to increased scrutiny of white student's views and language choices around issues of race on campus, which will be discussed further in section 4.6, Brad stated:

> Brad: *"As a white person this is a dangerous space for you to be in* (pause)*… it was slightly hostile, you had to tread very carefully"*

If *white person* were to be replaced with *Black person,* Brad's above statement echoes that of Black students and staff regarding the navigation of, and assimilation to Whiteness, upon entering the university space (IRTC, 2019). RMF unsettled Brad to the point he began using

language such as *dangerous* and *hostile*, words sometimes used to describe the experiences of Black people in spaces shaped by Whiteness.

### 4.4 Complicity

The ways in which respondents interpreted, and responded to the "F**k White People" messages spray painted on campus during RMF in early 2016, gives an insight into whether or not they see themselves as complicit in, or outside of, racial injustice at UCT. A number of respondents, either immediately, or after initially defensive reactions, interpreted "F**k White People" as justifiably targeting their own complicity in racial injustice. When asked: "What was your response, at the time, to these messages around campus?" the below responses demonstrated receptiveness to the message:

> Jasmin*: "'F**k white people', that was hard for a lot of people, but like it's not personal and like how can I use that narrative to be better and not take offence to it."*

> Jessica: *"At first I thought it was a hectic anti-white thing. I used to be one of those 'I have friends who are black so I can't be racist' kind of people, but it made me realise that in SA* [South Africa] *us white people have all these underlying racial prejudices, we all do."*

Other respondents reported more defensive responses to the message, claiming it was irrational and unnecessarily generalising of all white people:

> Brad: *"That's just people being angry and focusing it on the wrong thing... It's just an irrational hatred towards people of a certain race."*

Josh does not question the legitimacy of black anger, but criticises this specific way of expressing it:

> Josh: *"I won't lie, I've never felt comfortable with the 'F**k white people' thing. I've never liked it. People say 'don't police black rage' but I just don't think it's a good way to express anger."*

Another type of response within my sample was indifference; this rested on the perception that either they themselves were not the target of this message, or if they were, they did not care:

> Jake: *"I tried not to overthink it. I don't take this message personally."*

> Brad: *"It was stupid, I didn't really have a response to it."*

In terms of Chikane's 'distant and disinterested' assertion quoted in 4.2 above (Chikane, 2018; 77), the receptive and defensive responses of Jake and Brad's statements suggest again that disinterest was not endemic in responses to RMF protest.

The diverse range of responses to the "F**k White people" message among respondents, demonstrates 'the powerful luxury of choice' (Hill, 1997,71) that white students have regarding a black struggle against institutionalised racism; the choice to listen and be receptive, to be defensive or resistant, or ignore it completely. However, as will be discussed below, (4.6 *Shift in Political Norms on Campus)*, the option to be *openly* defensive or resistant to RMF on campus became less of an option as the movement progressed, and in the years since.

While for the majority of respondents, reflecting upon their potential complicity in Whiteness was uncomfortable and confronting, it did appear to result in a greater appreciation for the implications of their white racial identity:

> Josh*: "I am now more critical of my own behaviour… more aware of the sensibilities of people concerning questions of race."*

> Thomas*: "I don't think I understood how much my whiteness benefitted me. RMF contextualised my place in history and the country."*

Sarah admits that she has only recently seen herself as having a white racial identity:

> Sarah*: "I didn't used to think of myself as white at all and now I do."*

Sarah's previous lack of consciousness of her white racial identity is consistent with Steyn's (2020) assertion that white individuals in a racially unjust system are socialised into 'strategic ignorance' so as to maintain the status quo. When questioned further on why she previously didn't think of herself as white, Sarah reflects: *I didn't want to acknowledge the realities that now I know need to be acknowledged, for things to get better*. Similarly, Aidan, in the context of the alienation claimed by Black students at UCT, admits that he was previously out of touch with reality:

> Aidan*: "It was a major shock realising how out of touch with reality I was. Really confronting. It was super eye opening for me."*

When questioned further on what Aidan meant by *out of touch with reality*, he explained that he had previously assumed that his experience of UCT was a typical *student* experience, which he later realised, as a result of RMF, was more of a typical *white student* experience. Sarah and Aidan's above quotes support Andrew's (2020) theorisation of Whiteness as a set of delusional ideas designed to protect individuals from the reality of racial hierarchy. The majority of respondents reflected on how their whiteness and subsequent social conditioning into Whiteness, had previously kept them from seeing the reality of the implications of one's racial identity.

Aidan's introspection was unique in that he reached the conclusion that he was *racist*:

> Aidan: *"So RMF was about recognising what it means to be white. It's a hard pill to swallow, like being hit by a brick wall… No one wants to talk about it, confront it, but it's true. Growth is hard… I'd argue something, or support something and realise 'oh shit, I'm actually racist'."*

When further questioned on what he meant by this, he explained that *no matter what you do, you are racist because you are white, that's just the way it is, that is the system we live in.* Aidan held the view that because he benefitted from a system of racial injustice and has been socially conditioned by a racially unjust system, he was inevitably, to some degree, racist. Aidan found this new understanding of himself helpful in alerting him to the necessity of constant self-reflection with regards to complicity in racial injustice.

A number of respondents reflected on ways in which race, though a social construction, is 'real, material and lived' in how it privileges certain bodies and restricts others (Ahmed, 2007; 150). Sarah reflects on her habit of bringing her large dog into spaces such as her departmental common room without forethought for how race has real implications for how dogs respond to, and are perceived by individuals:

> Sarah*: "Even with my dog, I'm now aware that a lot of black people have had bad experiences with dogs, and why that is. So now I am more careful with letting her approach people I don't know."*

It is worth noting however that Sarah brought her dog to the interview, which was conducted in her academic department on UCT's upper campus, and afterwards brought it with her into the common room.

While Sarah reported a number of instances of self-reflection, she also provides an example of how critical self-reflection can become destructive and counterproductive. For Sarah, who reported a history of struggle with mental illness and low self-esteem, her self-reflection at times evolved into self-hatred and even suicidal thoughts:

> Sarah*: "I started to read a lot of stuff about Whiteness and be like oh darn maybe I'm just fundamentally bad to the core and there's no hope for me, maybe I'm not supposed to be here anymore. Based on the anger I saw around me; it affected my sense of belonging in the world… I started feeling really bad about being white, sometimes even hoping I could just not be white so I could not feel bad about my race all the time... I'd feel guilty about making this about me and so I'd feel worse again, and I got into this horrible spiral."*

For Sarah her race-based guilt interacted with her reportedly low self-worth, and evolved into what she herself termed *victimhood*. This has a bearing on what Phipps (2021) terms *White tears*. Phipps argues that the political Whiteness (endemic to western feminism) has a complex affective landscape involving attachments to the self, often the wounded self: 'If anger is the main expression of white power in a masculine register, tears are its feminine equivalent' (2021; 6). DiAngelo's work on white racial fragility supports Phipp's

characterisation of white tears as exercising white power, contending that by making themselves the victims, white people are 'acting in white solidarity' (DiAngelo, 2018; 116).

However, Sarah's above response is not fully characterised by Phipps and DiAngelo's understandings of white tears, due to the fact that a recognition her own self victimisation is what caused her to spiral downwards mentally; Sarah demonstrates an awareness of her own 'white tears': *I'd feel guilty about making this about me*.

Sarah also reports:

> Sarah*: "I remember talking to* [white friend] *about all this* [RMF exam disruptions], *after I had been crying off somewhere alone and he was kind of annoyed that I was upset because I was white and I didn't really have any reason to be upset."*

Sarah's white friend challenging her 'white tears', could be interpreted as him possessing an understanding that to pander to her white tears would be to act in white solidarity (DiAngelo, 2018; 116).

When asked if self-reflection resulted in any behavioral changes for Sarah, she responded:

> Sarah*: I'd say it affects my interactions with people of colour. Which is why I'm thinking it makes me a shittier person because in a way it's making me a more racist person…sometimes I just want to be friends with someone* [a person of colour], *but it's really hard to let go of the anxiety of causing harm when you've obsessed about race. And that's partly why I am hiding away in* [hometown] *with my parents now because it's nice to start to not think about everything in terms of race all the time."*

The above response, when considered in relation to Sarah's previous admission that she was afraid of protestors calling her racist (section 4.2), supports Nnawulezi et al's (2020; 367) assertion that the expectation of white ally perfection can result in 'ambivalent racial consciousness performances'. Nnawulezi et al provide the example of a white person afraid of being labeled racist who may subconsciously avoid interacting with people of colour. Similarly, Case and Hemmings (2005; 606) understand white distancing strategies, such as

social disassociation, as a way to avoid situations that may lead white people to being labeled *racist*.

Sarah diverges from Nnawulezi et al's understanding to the extent that while the pressure of *white ally perfection* that she grapples with, does result in her shying away from interactions with people of colour, this is not only due to fear of being called racist, but also a fear of actually being racist unknowingly, and causing harm to a person of colour. Sarah further explained the above statement: *in a way it's making me a more racist person*, by admitting that she worries she can no longer act naturally and relaxed around a person of colour, due to the anxiety of causing harm through racial ignorance or insensitivity.

### 4.5 Lack of engagement

While the majority of respondents reported engaging in self-reflection regarding their white racial identity and their complicity in Whiteness, a number of respondents suggested this was not universal for all white students during RMF:

> Josh: "*Part of the problem is that white students resist or ignore this challenge to look at themselves.*"

Mia provides an anecdote of the *Race and Privilege* dialogue session she attended in 2015:

> Mia*: "In Medicine, there were mediations where we discussed race and privilege in small groups… it was very reflective… it wasn't compulsory though, I was the only white person in my group of eight and one of only a few at the session overall."*

Mia went on to state that attendance at the mediation session was low among white students; she suspects that white students did not see racial injustice as *their issue*, and therefore thought it was not their role to engage in these conversations. Nathan, for example, viewed his whiteness as exempting him from conversations about institutionalised racism at UCT:

> Nathan: *"The nice thing about being white is that you are already presumed to be the enemy so no one is wasting their time with you, you can go on living your life… white students weren't the problem, white students weren't mobilised, monolithic or like politically organised."*

Nathan argues that white students weren't the problem and therefore does not view RMF as something that concerns him. Clearly Nathan would not agree with Paul Gilroy's (2000,12) assertion that race is not something that Black people need to be liberated from, but humanity as a whole; Fanon (1963;37) conceptualises both colonial oppressor and oppressed as having psychological 'incompleteness'. Nathan's statement *you can go on living your life* suggests he views institutionalised racism as something which is only relevant to those who are suffering from it.

As section *4.3 Unsettled white Positionality* shows, respondents who identified as RMF allies, were uncertain about what their role was in relation to the movement. It is therefore possible that while some white students did not attend the aforementioned *Race and Privilege* mediation session because they thought issues of racial injustice did not concern them, others may not have attended due to a nervousness entering spaces where students of colour might not want them.

Another potential explanation for white distancing from RMF protests and dialogues could have been a lack of ability to speak an African language:

> Emily*: "Even though I know the leadership of the movement welcomed white people, they* [white students] *went to these meetings and felt excluded because obviously English was not spoken. It was very often not."*

The fact that the respondents in this research sample spoke only English and Afrikaans (Or other European languages), and no African languages beyond that, could have contributed to their nervousness regarding participation in protest or dialogues around RMF.

In contexts where English was the language being spoken, uncertainty on the correct vocabulary with which to engage in discussions of race and privilege, may also have led to white distancing. The majority of respondents either demonstrated, or explicitly expressed, an uncertainty regarding the language with which to talk about race:

> Emily: *"I don't know if I should say African people, people of colour, I never know what causes offence."*

Jake: *"I didn't know all of these politically correct terms, but my meaning was good."*

Josh: *"Normally people from…* [Pause] *who were like… Um… black students."*

This suggests that uncertainty regarding the appropriate language with which to speak about race is a result of respondents' socialisation into Steyn's 'Ignorance Contract' (2012). A key aspect of what Steyn terms the 'Ignorance Contract', which functions to uphold Whiteness in both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, is 'denying the child the language' (2012,14) with which to question, think, or speak about race. This subsequently denies individuals the ability to deconstruct systems of racial oppression. Sarah reflects on the difficulty she has when speaking about race, since RMF began to prompt these discussions:

Sarah: *"I went from like a weird state of innocence... to now very much second guess everything I am saying."*

The state of *innocence* Sarah refers to is here interpreted as 'ignorance as a social achievement with strategic value' (Steyn, 2012;8), the strategic value being the maintenance of Whiteness. The quotes below demonstrate how the ignorance contract dictates what is and what is not appropriate, comfortable or 'normal' to speak about:

Aidan*: "You know this isn't normal stuff to talk about, you don't just chill and have a beer and talk about race."*

Sarah*: "I used to feel super uncomfortable referring to myself as white."*

Respondents' uncertainty on appropriate racial language, and the learned discomfort of talking about race, or even acknowledging their white racial identity (Steyn, 2020), could be reasons for why white student engagement at the *race and privilege* mediation session mentioned by Mia, was minimal. It must be noted that the majority of respondents in this sample, though uncertain on how to approach it, did engage in dialogues around RMF and race, as shown in Chapter Three.

The nervousness or uncertainty among respondents when talking about RMF and race could be partially explained by new social norms on campus, which deemed certain arguments or ways of talking about race to be unacceptable.

### 4.6 Shift in socio-political norms on campus

All respondents reported two key social shifts on campus. Firstly, the open expression of arguments against RMF became socially unacceptable, and secondly how and when one talked about race became subject to increased scrutiny. Almost all respondents reported an understanding of, and support for, the new norm regarding increased consideration or awareness when speaking about race:

> Jasmin: *"I am trying to be aware of how much space I take up in class or otherwise, becoming more cautious of what I say."*

> Josh: *"Now it is more important to be conscious of certain things... ordinary things are still powerful, like language."*

The reported shift was considered to be a positive thing by most respondents who were glad to reduce the likelihood of harming black students, or dominating a space, through the use of particular language or arguments. This willingness to adhere to new political/social norms fits in with Lazer et al's (2010:248) assertion that individuals shift their political views toward the political views of their associates; their study into the convolution of social networks and an individuals' political attitudes found 'significant conformity tendencies'.

The interviews however also revealed that a minority of respondents viewed the shift in norms as a negative:

> Nathan: *"RMF made me very aware… I now know what is acceptable language, which I don't think is a good thing. I'm almost too aware when in a public setting, of using the wrong words."*

> Sarah*: "I am very much second guessing everything I'm saying, it's exhausting. It's made me more awkward, more hesitant when interacting with People of Colour".*

According to Nathan and Sarah, having to be more conscious of the harm or offense, expressing certain arguments or using certain language, can cause to Black students, is an *exhausting* and *awkward* process which has made them *too aware*; This links back to Steyn's point about white victimhood. As campus norms shift towards increased consideration of Black student experiences, 'White tears' (Steyn, 2008) function to re-center the white experience. Nathan and Sarah's above comments suggest they are resistant to unlearning harmful norms that the 'ignorance contract' (Steyn, 2012) has conditioned them into, and are subsequently resisting conscientisation.

What became clear through further analysis was that while conformity to the new social norms was universal within the research sample, adherence to the new standard of language idealism and progressivism on campus, did not necessarily correlate with internal progressive attitude change. Nathan, for example, stated:

> Nathan: *"I looked at a situation and I thought clearly it's not going to be a smart thing to say what I think."*

Nathan recognised the social cost of expressing his relatively conservative opinions, or *using the wrong words*, on campus, and a desire to avoid this social cost, caused him to adhere to the new social norms. This new dynamic is supported by the claims of a number of respondents that students with relatively conservative viewpoints no longer felt comfortable sharing their true views in a campus space:

> Josh: "*Over time it became less acceptable to express disagreement with progressive change, I'm sure a lot of people concealed their true views because their views are problematic."*

> Mia*: "At first no one was scared of being judged for being anti the movement, or being called out as racist. Now people who have conservative opinions are less inclined to make controversial statements for fear of being called racist… the social backlash. I'd argue they probably still think those problematic things, I think there are many white students behind closed doors who are like this".*

Similarly, Nathan asserts:

> Nathan: *"A lot of people would say things they didn't believe in, it was more of a fashion symbol or something… people held views they thought were fashionable."*

Nathan is suggesting that adherence to new norms was for some people, performative, rather than reflective of a genuine change in attitude. This supports Kelman's (1958) argument that behavioral compliance by the public, to new social or political norms, does not necessarily mean there have been genuine changes in personal attitude. Kelman therefore presents a complexity in researching gains in white consciousness: Did RMF result in private acceptance of white consciousness gains amongst the research sample, or were respondents simply conforming to new social/political campus norms within the interview setting? This will be discussed in the following final chapter, after a summary of the findings presented in chapters three and four.

# Chapter 5: Conclusions and Discussion

## 5.1 Summary of findings

Overall, chapters three and four offer insights into the conscientisation process of respondents, as a result of RMF. Learning about the lived experiences of Black students through iterative relationships with them, allowed respondents to begin to compare these experiences to their own; Comparing the differences in lived experiences was a crucial gateway through which respondents began to appreciate the real implications that race continues to have on the lives of individuals. The realisation that their experiences differed in various ways, prompted respondents to racialise themselves, often for the first time and reflect on the significance and meaning of their own white racial identity. Relationships with Black students or other white students with useful insights aided respondents' understanding of how institutionalised racism functions to oppress Black people while often remaining invisible to white people.

For respondents RMF was the first scenario, or series of events, which they had to navigate, or engage with, primarily through the lens of their own racial identity. The confrontational nature of RMF forced respondents to make decisions - whether to engage with the movement, whether to support it, whether to partake in protests, whether to be on campus etc. - with their own racial identity in the front of their mind and the minds of those who perceived them. On a number of instances, the unfamiliar territory of having ones' racial identity factor into their thought processes, led them to disengage and stay off campus (Some stayed off campus at times for physical safety concerns). Most respondents however, were open to understanding the implications of their whiteness and how to proceed with greater awareness and less complicity in racial injustice. The majority of respondents came to recognise the insidiousness of white supremacy and that they themselves are implicated in systems of racial justice in various ways.

Developments in white consciousness occurred where established social relationships provided a receptive context within which RMF could act as a prompt or catalyst. The evidence reported here suggests that social relationships were conducive to expressed attitude change when they included racial, academic or political diversity. In this social context RMF

could function as an instrument of attitude change by prompting iterative forms of discussion though which the expressed changes in attitude could emerge. Most respondents reported an increased awareness of Black student alienation at UCT, and how their own sense of belonging on campus was not universal. The majority of respondents also reported increased introspection relating to their white racial identity and conscious or unconscious complicity in Whiteness. While it should not be concluded that this is the only mechanism to which developments in white consciousness (during or post RMF) can be attributed, it can however be stated that this is one process through which significant gains can be, and are, made.

Beyond this general finding is a range of complex and varying types of response to RMF. In the first place, while RMF did catalyse attitude change in the context of conducive social relationships, this was not an inevitable outcome as even within a diverse social context RMF could provoke an emotionally reactionary response to the protests in which attitudes became entrenched rather than changed.

Secondly it is clear that conscientisation developments within the sample were not homogenous. In particular, variations in the nature of self-reflection demonstrated how the external stimuli (RMF), was not interpreted and internalised in a uniform way. While many respondents reflected constructively on their whiteness and considered how these reflections could inform their behavior going forward, for one respondent, these reflections took a destructive and unproductive turn due to the pressure she felt to meet a perceived standard of 'white ally perfection' (Nnawulezi et al 2020). As we have seen, her concern about not achieving some perceived standard of 'perfection' did not only come from a desire for positive self-representation, but also a fear of unknowingly causing harm to Black students.

Within the sample, diverse, iterative relationships, though crucial, were in themselves insufficient in facilitating the reported conscientisation, without RMF and its disruptions to campus life acting as the necessary catalyst to engage with issues of race specifically. According to respondents, prior to RMF, within their existing relationships, dialogues that furthered white conscientisation through critical self-reflection were scarce; topics of institutionalised racism, decolonisation and white privilege were rarely discussed, if at all, until RMF made these issues the topic of conversation across campus.

## 5.2 Performative adherence to new norms and internalised attitude change

A dynamic which could function to obfuscate the deeper level impact of the movement on white student consciousness, is that all respondents reported adhering to new campus norms with regards to acceptable views to express in relation to RMF and race. This will undoubtedly have shaped, to some degree, how they responded to interview questions. While Whiteness at UCT appeared to be unsettled at UCT during RMF, the extent to which this unsettling equated with genuine attitude change, is difficult to determine.

Michael Quayle describes attitudes as 'latent constructs' that are 'only observable when expressed in some way'. He asserts that 'You cannot reach into someone's head and know what their attitudes are' (Quale, 2020;7). This research therefore examines expressed attitudes, as interviews cannot securely determine whether conformity to new campus norms reflected deeper internalised attitude change (Kelman, 1958). This raises the question: In relation to RMF and the white students of this research sample, did expression of attitude change (performative conformity) have a role to play in a process of genuine internalised attitude change?

In this study, all respondents reported both an awareness of the change in norms, with regards to how and when, as a white person, they should speak about RMF and race, as well as a sensitivity to the potential social cost of expressing disagreement with RMF's underlying ideologies. A new norm existed in which it was socially unacceptable for a white student to openly express criticism of RMF in the university space. A 'call out culture' on campus emerged in which Black students were more openly critical of white students with regards to their expressed views on RMF, race or racial injustice; this dynamic framed respondent conscientisation as potentially linked to fear of criticism, rather than a solely positive internal motivation.

As Kelman (1958) asserted, public conformity does not necessarily reflect private acceptance of new values or deeper changes in understanding and attitudes. Mallinson and Hatemi (2018,2) distinguish between conformity based on a desire to be liked by others, and that based on a desire to be right. While the former is primarily concerned with the social acceptance of their peers, or a desire to avoid social backlash such as being labelled 'racist',

the latter constitutes private acceptance of the new value, as it requires a belief that the opinions of others, may be more correct or informed than their own.

The tendency towards compliance with new social norms on campus is consistent with Mallinson and Hatemi's (2018,1) assertion that humans have a 'proclivity to conform to their peers when faced with social pressure'. Members of a social network or group provide information regarding the group's expectations for appropriate engagement in politics, which helps induce compliance with desired social norms (Cialdini et al 2004;592). The interviews suggest that RMF rhetoric and the Black UCT students mentioned in the findings chapters were effective in providing information regarding their new expectations of white students through direct communication in class and in a social or protest setting. These new expectations included the language white students use when talking about race and how much they dominate conversations around institutionalised racism and decolonisation.

While all respondents in the sample did conform to new norms, it is not known whether those who refused to be interviewed would also have conformed. This brings to mind the responses quoted in Section 1.4 where potential respondents told my gatekeeper that it was *too dangerous* to be interviewed, stating: *what if my name got out*. It is possible that some individuals refused an interview because they knew their views would not be considered 'acceptable' or aligned with new norms and were therefore not willing to express them to someone they did not know or trust.

However, Mallinson and Hatemi (2018,1) also argue that conformity pressure can play an important role in private acceptance: That performative change might be a valuable step towards internalised attitude change. Quayle proposes a network theory of attitudes within which people are considered to have a range of possible attitudes that only become meaningful when expressed. He asserts that attitudes are expressed 'with sensitivity to their potential audiences and are socially performative' – when expressing attitudes, we 'tell people who we are'. In this sense attitude change is therefore also identity change (Quayle 2020;2). It is therefore the case that any attitude, once expressed, is necessarily a performance, and that performativity itself does not necessarily equate with inauthenticity.

Respondents' expression of attitude change can therefore be understood as identity change which locates them in a network of related people and attitudes; holding particular attitudes

ties individuals into collective identity structures (Quayle, 2020; 3). In Christi van der Westhuizen's work on 'Afrikaner women' and strategies of whiteness in post apartheid South Africa, through interviews and focus groups with individuals who self-identified as women, Afrikaans-speaking, white, middle-class and heterosexual, she demonstrates the transformative potential of acknowledged shame for social relations (2019; 154).

Van der Westhuizen asserts that while *unacknowledged* shame: 'activates a repetitive loop of feelings, including socially destructive anger, which can in turn re-trigger shame', *acknowledged* shame allows the mending of the social bond through the recognition of the racialised other as 'capable of shaming, hence of seeing and being seen as a person' (Shotwell in van der Westhuizen 2019; 159). Acknowledged racialised shame presents opportunity for 'refusal of a racist self, with the potential for re-identification' (Shotwell in van der Westhuizen 2019, 155). It is therefore possible that those who refused to be interviewed for this research were unwilling to acknowledge shame and undergo such an identity change. It can be postulated that expressed attitude change, particularly that which involved uncomfortable or shameful admissions, even if initially a result of superficial adherence to new norms to avoid social cost, are at the very least, evidence of some form of identity change.

Furthermore, when respondents acknowledged racial oppression or their complicity in it, that act in itself is breaking with Steyn's Ignorance Contract (Steyn, 2012). The act of naming racial power structures which previously remained unnamed, or acknowledging their white racial identity and potential complicity, are in themselves evidence of white conscientisation. Despite the fact that we cannot be sure it is more than a performance; the 'primary unmarked and so unexamined 'blank' category.' (Chambers, 1997:189) that is 'white' was now being named and examined. Wildman & Davis' (1994; 885) assertion that 'What we do not say, do not talk about, maintains the status quo', suggests that respondents acknowledging white privilege and institutionalised racism, in itself, disrupts the status quo of institutionalised whiteness and so breaks with the ignorance contract.

However, Sara Ahmed (2006) on the 'politics of admission' points out that admitting to one's own racism is not in itself an anti-racist act, neither does it commit an individual to an act that could be considered anti-racist. Ahmed asserts that anti-racist speech, while an action, is not a 'finished' form of anti-racist action, as what that speech 'does' depends on how it is enacted

(2006). This does not contradict van der Westhuizen's work, as she conceptualises acknowledged shame as presenting an *opportunity* for transformation; individuals do not necessarily seize upon this opportunity.

For example, in this study a number of respondents acknowledged in 2015 that they had few Black friends, and expressed recognition of the importance of racially diversifying their social circle; they then admitted that they had yet to do so by the time of interview in 2019. The alignment between their reported attitude change and the reality of their actions, or lack thereof, suggests that, at some level at least, they had yet to meaningfully internalise the new perspective, or be transformed by their acknowledged shame.

## 5.3 General Conclusions

RMF at UCT is an instance of a wider phenomenon in South Africa and beyond: Statues as symbols of cultural heritage providing a tangible focus for protest against the legacy they serve to glorify. Through RMF for example, it is possible to understand Rhodes' statue as a symbol of racial subjugation without actually knowing his historic role in injustices (Marschall, 2017). However, it cannot be assumed that RMF elsewhere will have impacted white consciousness in similar way.

In the first-place, different student communities have different racial compositions, and each institution has its own culture and history. As of 2018, 22% of the students that enrolled at UCT classified themselves as white, with the majority classifying themselves as 'black South Africans' or 'generic black' (defined as 'black South Africans, coloured, Indian and Chinese') (UCT, 2018 Transformation Report). In South African University campuses with more or fewer white students, the white conscientisation process will likely differ. Furthermore, as South Africa has unique historic patterns of colonisation and consequent racial communities, it can even less be assumed that similar processes of attitude change will apply in other countries, whether it be post-colonial African nations or majority white European colonising nations such as the UK, where a statue of Rhodes also became the focus of an anti-colonial RMF movement at Oriel College, Oxford, sparked by the UCT movement.

While it is not possible to generalise, this research nevertheless suggests that RMF did impact the white students of the sample with regards to: their expressed attitudes towards and awareness of, institutional racism; the black student experience; and the implications of their own white racial identity. All respondents reported conforming to the new campus norms and expressed attitudes in support of the need for change at UCT.

In elucidating some circumstances through which a protest movement can facilitate expressed attitude change, this work illustrates how such movements can work to influence a privileged racial group. While we cannot know the deeper attitudinal changes that resulted, we can now better understand the value of racial, political and academic diversity among social groups as a basis for change, and the catalytic role of protest when experienced in a diverse community. At least at a performative level, RMF impacted all respondents in this study and it is significant that all respondents reported that they were still conforming to norms established during the RMF movement, at the time of interview, four years later.

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