

**The Hegemony of the White Gaze in America and Black
Resistance as Counter-hegemony**

by

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in Political Science

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Abstract

My primary aim in this thesis is to analyse and identify points of black resistance within the 'white gaze'. Seeking to maintain specificity, I will use historical and anecdotal evidence that examines the experience of Black bodies in the United States. I begin by arguing that the Black lived experience has been under the microscopic focus of the dominant white gaze which is undergirded by white supremacy and the domination of the black body. The second part of the essay will be centered towards ironing out ways or methods in which black resistance has been found and needs to be explored further, not only in order just to bring more understanding but ultimately to advance equality within the United States. Most notably, I explore this topic by amalgamating the phenomenological study of black lives in the United States and literature developed by Critical Racial Theorists.

Lay Summary

In light of the global outcry for justice which led to massive protests concerning anti-Black racism particularly in the United States, I wanted to highlight how systematic racism has affected and continues to affect Black people in a negative way. Moreover, 2020 marks six hundred and one years since the first “black” Africans were brought to the Colony of Virginia as an enslaved people. One important ongoing, though shifting feature of this racial domination has been the white gaze. The white gaze can be understood as a particularly negative or disparaging way that white people have looked at and thought of the non-white body under the eyes of white supremacy. Lastly, I wanted to explore some ways that Black people can and do resist white domination.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, J. Phiri.

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Introduction

Recent protests in the United States concerning anti-Black racism, including police violence, have highlighted once again the continuing role of white racism against Black Americans in that country. In fact, 2020 marks six hundred and one years since the first “black” Africans were brought to the Colony of Virginia as slaves. One important ongoing, though shifting feature of this racial domination has been the white gaze. This notion refers to how white racial domination and Black subordination have been crystallized in how those people who have called themselves “white” people have regarded, treated, and looked upon Black people throughout the modern era.¹

In this thesis, focusing on the effects of the white gaze in the United States, I aim to demonstrate how the white gaze can be understood as a particularly negative or disparaging way that white people have looked at and thought of the non-white body by the white world of modern times – say, since the importation of the first enslaved Africans into the Virginia colony in 1619. Moreover, within the context of Western white supremacist structures, the white gaze is an important site of white racial power that is predicated on a white epistemic order that seeks to dominate and subordinate black lives (Yancy, 2008, 35). According to the philosopher George Yancy, the white gaze is a hegemonic tool and by-product of the white supremacist structures and ideas that are historically grounded in material relations of white power (Yancy, 2008, xxxvi). It has been a gaze that conveyed that Black lives do not matter as anything other than a

¹ The rise of European colonialism and the African slave trade, initiated by Portugal around 1500, led Europeans increasingly to categorize and regard the diverse peoples of sub-Saharan Africa as “Negroes” or “Blacks,” and sometimes worse designations. In the United States during the late 1960s, Black activists rejected the designation of “Negroes” and reclaimed the term “Black.” See Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black radical Tradition*, foreword by Robin D. G. Kelley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, [1983] 2000), p. 82; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa and the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 20-27, 62.

means, as enslaved and subordinated laborers, for the benefit of white people. This kind of white looking at Black people, as I explain later, is exemplified in a passage of Frantz Fanon's book *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he discusses a white boy fearfully looking at him and declaring to his mother, "Look, a Negro," seeing Fanon as strange, threatening, and less than fully human (Fanon, 2008, 88-91).

In short, I will show that the white gaze is a manifestation of white racial power and domination that, as the passage from Fanon indicates, dehumanizes and marginalizes Black people. In so doing, the white gaze has been a significant part of a white supremacist racial order that has worked to limit the freedom, dignity, security, and well-being of Black people while enhancing the freedom and status of white people, even as it has not benefitted all white people equally. At the same time, while the white gaze has limited the freedom of Black people, it has not completely destroyed their agency. In fact, many Black people have always resisted the white gaze in various ways, with various degrees of success². The Black Lives Matter movement in the US is thus only the latest embodiment of Black resistance. This activism, I argue, has lessened the power of the white gaze but has not yet eradicated it.

In what follows, I develop this argument in seven parts and a conclusion. In the first section, I explain the basic idea of the white gaze. In section two, I examine how the white gaze racializes space, defining white spaces in which only whites are fully welcome and non-whites are not. Section three explores how the white gaze is materialized through popular culture,

² Black resistance in the US can be traced back to the beginning of their enslavement, through the Abolitionist movements and the subsequent emergence of Black intellectuals such as Debois in the wake of the Reconstruction period. Moreover, there was continued resistance from Black Americans who were coming back from the World Wars, through the Civil Rights and Black power movement. See Henry Louis, Jr, *Did African-American Slave Rebel?* (*The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* (PBS,08/15/2020) <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/did-african-american-slaves-rebel/>

especially in its negative depictions of Blackness. In section four, I analyze the white gaze's influence on racialization of gender and sexuality. In section five I examine how the white gaze undermines Black status. Section six considers violence and the culture of surveillance within the white gaze. These considerations raise the question of the possibilities for Black resistance to the white gaze. Therefore, in section seven I explore some of the ways that Black people have resisted this oppressive white gaze. In the concluding section, I summarize my argument and its implications.

I. Understanding the White Gaze

It is now widely understood among critical race theorists that the current capitalist world order is fundamentally anti-black. It largely conforms to what Charles Mills (1996) describes as the “racial contract” through which white people have organized societies for their own benefit at the expense of non-white peoples. Mills argues that “white supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today” (1996, 1). Whiteness, he says, “is not really a color at all, but a set of power relations” operating within the fabric of historically constructed social identities (Mills, 1996, 127). Thus, one could argue that the white gaze has always existed as a major tool of white supremacy. Fanon does a masterful job of situating the black experience within the white gaze by demonstrating that the black body lives under a ‘crushing object-hood’ (Fanon, 2008, 109). This analysis of the objectification of black bodies exposes some of the disastrous effects of the white gaze that are by-products of white supremacy. Thereby, the white gaze manifests itself in both figurative and phenomenological understandings – that is, through symbolic and embodied aspects. Nevertheless, some might ask, does the white gaze exist or is it just an inaccurate idea? The concept of the ‘white gaze’ denotes a kind of spotlight and a derisive looking at or a looking through the black body. Fanon provides a vivid picture by recounting a time when he heard the words, ‘Look, A Negro’ (2008, 109). He, like most blacks who are confronted with this objectifying gaze of the white world, was subjected to demeaning scrutiny and othering. Moreover, at certain historical moments, the intensity of the white gaze has had a dual effect on the Black body: on the one hand, rendering the Black body invisible, while, on the other hand, Black bodies are highly visible to the watching gaze. This dual function of the white gaze means that there is the negation of the Black bodies and the subsequent rendering of invisibility to the white world. As a matter of fact, the term ‘black’ was

formulated within the interstices of the colonial categorization people of African origin. In other words, all people of sub-Saharan African origins, despite diverse ethnic affiliations and language groups, were lumped into a single “racial” group of ‘Black.’ Thereby, the white gaze often manifests itself with a critical and controlling gaze over the Black body. The power of this duality is such that Black lived experience is often dependent on being able to survive and thrive under the oppressive white gaze. As Frederick Douglass observed, “Trained from the cradle up, to think and feel that their masters are superior, and invested with a sort of sacredness, there are few [enslaved Blacks] who can outgrow or rise above the control which that sentiment exercises” (Douglass, quoted in Yancy, 2008, 125). From this observation, we can clearly see that there is an all-encompassing scrutiny of the white oppressive view upon the black body. Likewise, Frantz Fanon talks about meeting the white man’s eyes and feeling overwhelmed by stating the following in *Black Skin White Masks*: “And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man’s eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema” (Fanon, 2008, 110)³.

That is, the white man’s eyes represent a dual experience of power and privilege: on the one hand, the white man exhibits some genuine curiosity of the unknown Black man (or “savage”); at the same time, the white man’s gaze has the power to render judgement by accepting or denying the Black body’s access into the canon of humanity. Moreover, the white gaze is an evitable formulation that appears within the context of the larger process of white racial domination spearheaded by white supremacists. Thereby, whiteness becomes something

³ This was Fanon’s colonial assertion of the almost impossible task of asserting Black humanity in colonial times. The postcolonial assertion of the humanity of the person of colour (admittedly not Black) is captured in the title of Sherene Razack’s (1998) book, *Looking White People in the Eye*. Thanks to Professor Handel Wright for pointing this out.

that the Black body must constantly seek to obtain in order to be accepted into ‘civilized’ society. Fanon states that the black man is required to be black only in relation to the white man (2008, 110). The problem, however, is that although whiteness is often presented as an attainable goal that non-whites should pursue, it nonetheless remains an ever-elusive objective, especially for Blacks. For instance, we can see that in the United States there were numerous occasions of white flight in many cities, especially when the number of Blacks moving from the south to the north increased substantially in the “great migration” that extended from roughly 1916-70.

Therefore, it was the racist edifice of white supremacy that made many African Americans believe the lie that moving neighborhoods or regions would get them accepted into white middle class in society⁴. Furthermore, the mark of blackness in America is that Blacks are often viewed with suspicion and excluded from many economic opportunities. The white gaze is so prevalent that it not only oppresses poor Blacks but also successful Blacks. The Rap Artist J. Cole describes this very phenomenon (after his studio was illegally raided because his white neighbors had called the police) in the song *Neighbors* in the following manner: “I can't sleep cause I'm paranoid, Black in a white man territory” (Cole, 2016). Another similar example is when, in 2010, the Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr, was arrested by the police while trying to enter his own house because his neighbor had called 911. These examples, exemplify how Blacks are always cognizant and reminded of their blackness whenever they enter white spaces regardless of their class status (Yancy, 2008, xxxiii).

⁴ Note that, “race” or racialized identity does include status dimensions so that even poor white historically have had a privileged social status, and even Blacks who are economically successful in class terms (middle class, professional, capitalists, wealthy entertainers, etc.) are seen as socially and economically out of place. That is, they have a lesser and more vulnerable or marginalized social status (Fredrickson, 1999).

Thereby, the white gaze is an inevitable derivative of the white supremacist racial categorization and exclusionary oppression of the Black bodies. George Yancy describes this phenomenon in the following manner:

The history of the black body in North America is fundamentally linked to the history of whiteness, primarily as whiteness is expressed in the form of fear, sadism, hatred, brutality, terror, avoidance, desire, denial, solipsism, madness, policing, politics, and the production and projection of white fantasies (Yancy, 2008, xvi).

Yancy's point is that the white gaze has acted as a universalizing agent of the white imaginary that was forged through a colonial and racist history of white dominance. Moreover, the white gaze is at times almost inescapable in racist societies as it cuts across social and economic class and gender structures as exemplified in the aforementioned examples. Thus, the white gaze acts as an effective gatekeeper for whiteness and white privilege.

In the process of unpacking the white gaze, it is important to be attentive to its enduring but shifting character. It has changed significantly from Jim Crow/ colonial era of Fanon to the current post-colonial/ post-civil rights movement era in which Black activists have achieved partial gains in overcoming stark racial domination of the Jim Crow period; but as I will explain, its power has not been completely overturned. The differences from the previous era of blatant white supremacy have been evident in achievements of Black Americans during the US civil rights movement to gain greater equality and dignity and to redefine their identities. One notable aspect of this process was the way Black activists rejected the designation "Negro" and asserted a Black identity, as represented in James Brown's song "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" in 1968.

II. Space and the White Gaze

Upon studying racialized societies, it is clearly evident that space plays a major role in both the establishment and the entrenchment of white supremacy that views the world through the lens of the white gaze. Mills describes this action as the ‘racing of space’, in that there is a clear desire to separate people based on the color of their skin (Mills, 1997, 41). Thereby, we have to understand that the demarcation of physical space played a fundamental role in the shaping of racialized societies such as the United States, thereby perpetuating global white supremacy. One can see this through the historical ‘white flight’ from American urban neighborhoods and the subsequent creation of ghettos. This process, I believe, begins with the white gaze, as Blacks and other brown bodies are identified as being different and therefore required to live in designated racialized spaces. Mills writes, “you are what you are in part because you originate from certain kind of space, and that space has those properties in part because it is inhabited by creatures like yourself” (Mills, 1997, 42). This racing of space became a way of controlling people’s movement and ultimately their very existence through the white gaze and other tools of white supremacy. We are all creatures of our environment and the fact that most Blacks are born in these disadvantaged places of being, means that they are trapped into a vicious cycle of inferiority, violence and poverty. Hence Mills states that “space must be normed and raced at the macro level (entire countries and continents), the local level (city neighborhoods)” (Mills, 1997, 43). Thereby, one may deduce that the white gaze plays a major role in the racialization of different spaces by acting as one of the main tools of white supremacy in identifying and determining categories of belonging into a particular space within a racist polity (Yancy, 2008, xxxiii).

For instance, in the United States the landmark case *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) assisted to legitimize and cement the prevailing idea of ‘separate but equal’ – that is, the belief that segregated social spaces, schools, and public accommodations could be considered “equal” as long as some such spaces and services were provided for both white and Black Americans – into the white imaginary. Moreover, this Supreme Court case helped to entrench the so-called Jim Crow laws that justified segregation among different racial groups and created more barriers to equality for Black people. The conscious or unconscious participation in the shaping of a segregated society based on race, meant that a lot of white Americans were active agents in the preservation of white supremacist attitudes and institution. Therefore, the white racialized imaginary, which is largely derived from the white gaze, is significant, in that it forms opinions, attitudes, myths and actions of the entire society. In contemporary times the white gaze has often through white neighborhood watch groups or through individuals, controlled standards for entry into white space, in the aim of maintaining racialized spaces that were conceived historically through a racist architecture. This has recently been exemplified by the myriad of cases of white people calling the police when the Black bodies are just trying to exist in these white spaces. One such prominent example is when a white manager of a Starbucks called the police on two Black men who had just come there for a meeting (Dias, Eligon, and Opperl, Jr., 2018). The troubling thought is that there are numerous other cases just like this one that do not make the national news.

The racialization of space in relation to the ‘white gaze’ becomes clearer when analysed through the daily individual interactions or encounters of Black and white bodies. George Yancy speaks of the Black body being metaphorically ‘confiscated’ in his description of an encounter with a white woman on an elevator by observing;

It is a peculiar experience to have one's body confiscated without physically being placed in chains. Well-dressed, I enter an elevator where a white woman waits to reach her floor. She "sees" my Black body, though not the same one I have seen reflected back to me from the mirror on any number of occasions... She sees a Black male body "supersaturated with meaning, as they [Black bodies] have been relentlessly subjected to [negative] characterization by newspapers, newscasters, popular film, television programming, public officials, policy pundits and other agents of representation." Her body language signifies, "Look, *the* Black!" On this score, though short of a performative locution, her body language functions as an insult (Yancy, 2008,4).

Here Yancy paints a vivid picture of this common encounter. One implication is that there is a divide as a result of the racial baggage that society has placed on both individuals. I would also maintain that gender plays a significant role in this interaction. This as we will see is mainly because the African American male, has often been disproportionately criminalized and rendered a danger to society.

Bell hooks, in her book *We are cool: Black Males and Masculinity* (2004), further elaborates this problem. She says, "Black males in the culture of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy are feared but they are not loved" (hooks, 2004, ix). Thus, the white woman is a product of a racialized society that has normalized this racist caricature of the Black male body as being threatening. Is her reaction a conscious or unconscious one? I would argue that the majority of times it is an unconscious reaction. In other words, the woman's feelings of fear do not necessary stem from explicit racist motivations, but rather a mind that has been conditioned from birth to equate Black with violence and danger. In agreement with this ideation, Fanon opines, "hate is not inborn; it has to be constantly cultivated, to be brought into being, in conflict with more or less recognized guilt complexes" (Fanon, 2008, 53). Thereby, one can imagine the woman from a young age being taught through various explicit and implicit means that she should be afraid of black men. The fact that the elevator is a small space immediately puts the woman in a fight or flight psychological response.

Yancy (2008) also demonstrates that this particular situation is also very uncomfortable for the black man. Does her reaction reinforce his sense of inferiority? I would argue that he faces a stark choice on how to respond to her uneasiness. On the one hand, the black man could get angry and say something such as ‘I am not going to do anything to you’ as a form of protest against her irrational fear. But, he fears that, he will reinforce the notion of the angry black man syndrome, which is often championed by white supremacists whenever they are trying to justify violent repression of the black body. On the other hand, he could decide to make no sudden movements and take a nonthreatening body posture in order to reassure her that he means no harm. Nonetheless, in doing this, he may in turn be reinforcing white supremacists’ view that states that he ought to know his place! I believe that he is trapped in an almost inescapable white gaze no matter what he decides to do. Hooks eloquently describes this phenomenon. She states,

Whether in an actual prison or not, practically every black male in the United States has been forced at some point in his life to hold back the self he wants to express, to repress and contain for fear of being attacked, slaughtered, destroyed. Black males often exist in a prison of the mind unable to find their way out (hooks, x).

In sum, one can rightly deduce that the white gaze helps the white supremacist structures occupy space and has the initial categorizing power in determining who has the right to occupy that space or who does not. Space, here, as the social geographer Edward Soja explains, encompasses at least two dimensions – both the more concrete or material social spaces that we inhabit (what Soja calls “Firstspace”) and imagined, representational spaces (what Soja calls “Secondspace”) (Soja, 1996).

III. The White Gaze and the marketing of Blackness as evil

In this section of the essay, I am going to explore how the white gaze is materialized through popular culture that is initiated and normalized by white supremacy. This white racialized imaginary is significant, in that it forms opinions, attitudes, myths and actions of the entire society. Furthermore, racist ideas conveyed by popular culture through the lens of the white gaze, have a unique power to influence the unconscious mind and thereby form the underpinning of the dominant culture that is often anti-black. For instance, I believe that the white gaze has made it possible for Hollywood to place African Americans in stereotypical roles. The white gaze in this instance comes from the captains of industry and the majority white audience. Thus, a producer in film might characterize a black actor as a drug dealer and the audience will see this as normal. It is through the eye of the white gaze that mythical stories and fantasies were popularized, by a white supremacist culture that wanted justification for its negation of the Black bodies. Moreover, the white gaze creates and celebrates type of actual and mental games that seek to pacify the guilty conscious of the white world. The white gaze does this by making it easier for racists' structures to identify token blacks that represent the illusion of a post racial world. Thus, many white Americas thought that electing first Black President was evidence that the racial tensions and white racism in the United States had been solved by this particular singular event. The delusionary tales that have been created to convince the American 'negro' that he ought to count himself lucky to have been allowed to participate in the great American experiment occurs under the watching white gaze. The white gaze is so powerful that the average African American always feels judged by the wider society that has been conditioned by these misleading and destructive tales. Hooks puts it in the following words: black males "are

victimized by stereotypes that were first articulated in the nineteenth century but hold sway over the minds and imaginations of citizens of this nation in the present day” (hooks, 2004, x).

Upon looking at the divergent depiction of Black and white bodies in popular culture, one can see how the normalization of the white gaze could be imbedded within the fabric of a society. Baldwin, describing the depictions of whites as heroes in film, opines: “I suspect that all these stories are designed to reassure us that no crime was committed, have made a legend out of a massacre” (Baldwin, 2017, 22). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the average American, no matter what race or creed, during their formative years are most likely taught to celebrate the white cowboy story of fighting against ‘savages’ in the name of protecting his/her own. Thus, it is clearly evident that the racist structures of white supremacy in popular culture in the United States, normalizes the white gaze. Moreover, the white man was and is seen to be morally courageous in movies or novels whenever violence is employed as a means to an end. After all, who is going to protect and preserve the virtue of the white woman? Thus, the white gaze is so pervasive that it uses popular culture as means of establishing dominant ideas and images of good and evil. Additionally, the Black man’s life in most movies is often ‘nasty, brutish and short’ mirroring the real experience for most blacks in American society. For instance, the criminalization of the Black man on the big screen reinforces stereotypes and legitimizes mass incarceration of brown and Black bodies (Davis, 2003, 10). In this way, as it is embedded in popular American culture the white gaze contributes to the maintenance of a racist society. Moreover, the white gaze with its underlying racist messages helps establish mores and norms which are then internalized by ordinary Americans. The white gaze creates a culture that imitates life by placing a negative spotlight on black characters in stories.

These mythical illogical portrayals of Blacks as evil are always racialized and often also gendered. The white gaze begins with the looking and the subsequent othering of non-whites in contrast to normalized whiteness. For example, the white woman as opposed to her Black counterpart is portrayed as the ultimate image of virtue and chastity. W. E. B. Du Bois once wrote the following words, “Colored folk, like all folk, love to see themselves in pictures; but they are afraid to see the types which the white world has caricatured” (Du Bois, 1970, 9). From these words, one can see that the mockingly distorted depictions of Blacks as lazy, stupid or violent, have over time produced a sense of shame and chronic anxiety of what the white world thinks of them (Blacks). Thus, we see that the white gaze is so powerful in that it affects Blacks in a negative manner by dominating their self-image. Imagine having daily experiences where the narrative and image of who you are, is constantly manipulated by a culture of white supremacy that does not value your humanity, one such example is the use of blackface in minstrels. The fact that blackface is still enacted by white students on college campuses throughout the US demonstrates that many have not understood the painful history that these types of impersonations represent.

For instance, Megan Kelly, a prominent white television personality, recently asked, “What is racist?” in reference to the phenomenon of some white Americans dressing up in blackface as part of their Halloween costume (Poniewozik, 2018). She, like many Americans who are lost in white privilege and supported by the power of the white gaze, imagines a colorblind world where Blacks are expected to get over their pain. Thereby, in this narrative, Blacks are expected to suffer in silence and act as if they have not gone through trauma as a people. Moreover, according to Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, “by distorting the features and culture of African Americans including their looks,

language, dance, deportment, and character—white Americans were able to codify whiteness across class and geopolitical lines as its antithesis” (Smithsonian National Museum, n.d.).

Thereby, we can observe that the white gaze is at its most influentially active when it permeates into society’s consciousness and thoughts through the back door of the imagination and the unconscious mind. One can deduce that it is these racialized images that normalize and entrench the white gaze. Moreover, these racist images are produced within the full view of the white gaze. Ultimately, the white gaze is so pervasive that it exists in the dual functionality of cause and effect.

IV. White Gaze: influence on Sexuality and Gender

The white gaze is a tool of a racialized society that does not just seek to keep an eye on black bodies in the public but also seeks to monitor how black people conduct themselves in the private sphere. One can see that sex has often been a tool of many different states for control and domination. Thereby, it is inevitable that racialized societies such as the United States would seek to monitor and or control Black sexuality (hooks, 2004, 65). In regards to this point, Elizabeth Abel asks, “What threat to white nationhood was posed by interracial eating?” (Abel, 2010, 160). She then opines that the fear of eating together stems from intermingling and the ultimate threat that potential interracial dating (and eventually interracial sex and marriages) posed to white American society. The white gaze equips the government to act as big brother in the Orwellian Nineteen Eighty-Four tradition to regulate interracial sex, especially before 1967 when under the miscegenation laws interracial marriages were prohibited in many states. Furthermore, according to white supremacists, interracial sex was and is the biggest threat to a homogeneous white America that is not to be under any circumstance be contaminated by Black blood. Through the period of Reconstruction and Jim Crow era, these miscegenation laws kept different races apart in the pursuit of maintaining racial purity. It was only after the landmark case *Loving vs Virginia* 1967 that these miscegenation laws were revoked in Virginia and 15 other states. Thereby, *Loving vs Virginia* is major part of the anti-miscegenation law struggles that have resulted in a lot more acceptance of interracial marriages and subsequent increase in interracial marriages⁵. Nevertheless, it vital to note that the white gaze plays a fundamental role

⁵ Currently, one in six newlyweds in the United States has a spouse of a different race or ethnicity, according to a recent analysis of 2015 census data by the Pew Research Center. That is a fivefold increase from 1967, when just 3 percent of marriages crossed ethnic and racial lines. See Sheryl Gay Stolberg, 50 Years After Loving v. Virginia (The New York Times, 06/11/2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/11/us/50-years-after-loving-v-virginia.html>.

in monitoring this separation (Yancy, 2008, 134). Moreover, the white gaze cannot stand the idea of mixed marriages and thereby pre-empts any interracial fraternizing and ensuring that it is deemed illegal or morally irreprehensible. Thereby, the white gaze can be seen as the eyes that promote overt ideas of racism in order to influence culture and subjugate Black and brown bodies. Yancy articulates this move as quintessential to the colonial gaze that always posits an 'definitional power' (2008, 54)

As I have already noted, the white gaze is gendered as well as racialized. The role of the white gaze goes beyond the usual societal roles that males or females occupy in the home, which can apply universally to all races (Yancy, 2008, 29). However, the white gaze uniquely tries to control and monitor the body of the Black female. Hence, the very idea of beauty is often viewed from the lens of the white gaze (hooks, 1992, 62). On the one hand, the Black woman is seen as being promiscuous, as her alleged promiscuity is seen as leading her to tempt the white man into the horrors of the private life which is interracial sex. On the other hand, there also has been widespread fetishizing of the non-white bodies by the white gaze. Hooks explains, "Often black female models appear in portraits that make them look less like humans and more like mannequins or robots" (hooks, 1992, 71). This carries with it an idealized symbol of beauty that is acceptable within the white gaze.

The white gaze in the US, then, involves a contradictory view of the Black woman. Despite overt and covert cultural messaging telling her that she is not beautiful, she remains the object of desire for many white men. Hooks describes this in the following manner, "if black women were raped in slavery it was because they were licentious and seductive, or so white men told themselves" (hooks, 1992, 63). Despite, the white gaze controlling nature, there is the struggle for agency within this white gaze. Hooks puts it in the following way:

This is certainly the challenge facing black women, who must confront the old painful representations of our sexuality as a burden we must suffer, representations still haunting the present. We must make the oppositional space where our sexuality can be named and represented, where we are sexual subjects-no longer bound and trapped (1992, 77).

Thereby, agency begins when Black females name and deconstruct the way the white imaginary portrays them. We have seen this in Black female activists such as Angela Davis who rose up to challenge and protest the way the Black females were portrayed. Hooks states that the domineering white gaze can have the unintended effect of awakening Black agency.

For example, hooks says “all attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze” (hooks, 1992,116).

Moreover, the Black male is not exempt from the entrapping gendered and racialized look of the white gaze upon his body, especially stemming from his interactions with white females. Moreover, the racist edifice mediated by the white gaze historically has ensured and continues to ensure that the Black male body has been eroticised and fetishized (hooks, 2004, 65). Hooks argues that “the history of the black male body begins in the United States with projections, with the imposition onto that body of white racist sexist pornographic sexual fantasies” (2004, 63). More specifically there is the belief that Black males have supernatural or animal like abilities during sexual intercourse (hooks, 2004, 63). Furthermore, hooks argues that enslaved male Blacks were not initially obsessed with the idea of sexuality but rather were more concerned with survival. Hooks goes on to say that the fact that western sexuality was predicated on domination, confused the newly arrived slaves in the Americas (2004, 65). As it is with the experience of Black women, there is a contradictory duality in the white view of the Black man. On the one hand, there is this erotization of the Black male body; on the other hand, according to the white gaze, the sexual appetites of the Black man are to be feared because they stem from an

impulsive and beastly nature. Hooks describes this in the following way: “Psychohistories of white racism have always called attention to the tension between the construction of the black male body as danger and the underlying eroticization that always then imagines that body as a location for transgressive pleasure” (2004, 75). Moreover, the image often depicted is one that suggests the powerful idea that, the Black man’s sexual drive should be kept in check, otherwise he might be let loose and end up raping a white woman (hooks,2004, 63). Evidence of this can be found in the following words by Chelsea Hale and Meghan Matt: “The most common reason for lynching was the perception that white women needed to be protected from African American rapists and attempted rapists. Black men were painted as sexually deviant monsters” (Hale and Matt, 2019).

As a vivid historical claim, we can look at the Emmett Till case. It is clear that once young Emmett was confronted by the glaring eyes of the white gaze, it was inevitable that this incident would lead to his subsequent lynching (Yancy, 2008, 27). The white gaze, especially at that particular time in history, could not be bothered that he was just a boy who was depicted as the raging savage Negro to which Fanon alludes. I would argue against claims by some commentators that we now live in a so-called post racial or colorblind society in the United States. There is considerable evidence that suggests that if a white woman accuses a Black man of any sexual misconduct, the justice system will likely consider the Black man guilty until proven innocent. For instance, data from the *National Registry of Exonerations* that shows “that black defendants convicted of raping white women are about eight times more likely to be innocent than white men convicted of raping women of their own race” (Gross, Possley, and Stephens, 2017, 12). It is clear that the white gaze is prevalent in the most intimate of human

interactions and seeks to regulate sex between racial groups. Moreover, the white gaze is a major part of controlling reproduction in the aim of keeping white genetic purity and blacks subjugated.

Nevertheless, hooks argues that there is room for the Black males to find agency against the pornographic white gaze. She argues that there needs to be spaces where Black males can find sexual healing and reclaim their “healthy erotic agency” (2004, 77). Additionally, awareness that Black male sexuality was also forged within the context of the white pornographic gaze is the beginning of a necessary consciousness that leads to resistance.

V. White Gaze and Black status

The white gaze affects Black status in society by seeking to define black reality. Furthermore, it serves to regulate and police who is accepted into various places or positions in society, clearly exemplified by the struggles that Barack Obama experienced as the first Black president of the United States from 2009-2017 (Yancy, 2008, xvii). Despite the country's chequered and horrific past in regard to its treatment of Blacks, many commentators proclaimed that the United States had become a post-racial society soon after Obama's election (Joseph, 2016). It would soon become clear to the objective observer of American society, however, that this school of thought was naïve and ahistorical at best. The history of racial division could not simply be erased in one single election, just as the passing of the 13th and 14th amendments to the US Constitution after the Civil War did not automatically give Black people full equality under the law. Furthermore, the white gaze on Obama was extremely intense and at times very crushing to the hopes of racial equality. Peniel Joseph states that "almost, immediately, the Obama Presidency unleashed racial furies" that got worse of over time (Joseph, 2016). Thereby, President Obama could not just embrace his blackness without offending many white people. In particular, Obama had to tread lightly in his first term when it came to issues of racial justice (Ibid.). One important example was when Obama stated that Trayvon Martin could have easily been him or his son, if he had had a son. In short, the white gaze manifested itself in the heightened scrutiny of Obama among many white Americans. In particular with respect to any actions that appeared to in anyway unduly favor Black Americans, most white racists actively worked to ensure that he did not step out of place or he would face the consequence of being a one term President. The white gaze often makes Black Americans and non-Black allies afraid to stand up for Black justice at the risk of facing evitable white backlash (Yancy, 2008, xvii). The

history of lynching in the US bears this out, as Du Bois addresses in *The Souls of Black Folk* (see ch. 13, “Of the Coming of John”). Yet, such threats have not completely stopped black resistance, as represented most visibly in recent years by Black Lives Matter movement. Therefore, under the white gaze even the so-called token Blacks must act white, or within the limits of what whites find acceptable, in order to maintain their positions of power and privilege.

The white gaze in this case acts as a way of looking at the world that is based on an irrational reality. Furthermore, the white gaze does this by being ever present in the white world’s justification and normalization of an extremely unequal societal structure. Fanon summed it up well when he states in *Black Skin White Mask*, “historically, inferiority has been felt economically” by Blacks (Fanon, 1967, 43). The white gaze also has a way of making Blacks feel inferior specifically by the looking at or looking through the Black body. For instance when Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks*, speaks about Blacks experiencing traumatic psychological tension as a result of being watched or judged at some time in their lives, which in turn puts them in a constant state of alertness or fear.

Fanon’s claim resonates with my own experiences. As a direct result of this tension, Black people start believing the images that the white world has portrayed about them due to the overarching influence of the white gaze (1967, 110). However, it is when Black people seek to matter that they find the necessary courage to resist the white gaze. Fanon puts it in the following words: “Disalienation will come into being [for Blacks] through their refusal to accept the present as definitive” (Fanon, quoted in Yancy, 2008, 105). One can then surmise that the white gaze seeks to keep a watchful eye on black mobility and often has an adverse reaction to black success. Despite this being the case, it is when blacks begin to resist the notion that their success must be defined by the white gaze were self-definition and freedom occur.

VI. Violence and the Culture of surveillance under the White Gaze

As I previously stated, violence is a logical result of the white gaze, mainly because the gaze is fueled by racist stereotypes of the Black body (Fanon, 2008, 113). In a society controlled by the white gaze, the Black body suffers dehumanizing and horrifying violence often in silence. The slave plantation remains one of the most powerful images of violence inflicted on blacks under the domineering eyes of the white gaze. Moreover, violence was one of the major methods of control and subjugation on the plantation. For example, if an enslaved person escaped, he/she would be severely flogged and/or have a limb cut off or in some cases face a ghastly death such as lynching (hooks, 2004, 64). There was always the white eye of control on the enslaved, embodied by the overseer who held a burdensome and ultimately physiologically dehumanizing gaze. Nonetheless, a sceptic might ask, “Is there a direct link between the white gaze and violence?” In order to discover if there is a connection, we must not merely imagine violence as physical; we must also consider psychological, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual violence. Bob Marley described the anguish of the black folk in the following poetic verse, “How long shall they kill our prophets, while we stand around and look?” (Marley, 1980). Thus, violence within the white gaze is tied to the language of looking and negative depiction of the Black body that has been incorporated into the general societal discourse.

Consider, for instance, how the word ‘thug’ has often been synonymous with the word ‘nigger’. Smiley and Fakunle (2017) problematize the idea of “thug” in their attempt to understand the demonization and criminalization of unarmed Black male victims in America.

They state,

This term (thug) has become the platform to dismiss black life as less valuable and perpetuates a negative and criminal connotation in forms of micro-insults and micro-invalidations. Moreover, the recent killings of unarmed black men have sparked discussion and discourse surrounding the term “thug” and how it is used in the

context of reshaping perceptions of black life broadly and black males specifically (Smiley and Fakunle, 2016).

That is, this negative language is normalized and spotlighted by a prevailing white gaze. Let us once again go back to Fanon to get a clear understanding of this phenomenon. In *White Skins Black Masks*, Fanon begins his chapter “The Fact of Blackness” by highlighting this type of language, “‘Dirty nigger!’ Or Simply, ‘Look, a Negro!’” (2008, 109). The white gaze looks upon and creates an identity that attributes these words upon the Black body which is ultimately dehumanizing towards Black people. Fanon’s juxtaposition is so powerful because it speaks to a different historical racist era, but one that has similar undertones to other forms of white supremacy. There was a point in time when one could openly use the word “Dirty Nigger” and this was acceptable under the white gaze. In contemporary United States this phrase would be frowned upon. Nevertheless, Fanon shows us that “Look a Negro” has been just as dehumanizing; it has just been a more disguised racism. Moreover, even the very term ‘negro’ is rarely used in the US after changes in language and Black self-ascription. There is therefore no doubt that the white gaze uses psychological violence to maintain influence and control. Furthermore, the white gaze will always subsequently end up subjecting the Black body to the numerous categorical expressions of violence mentioned above because at its core it is steeped in the canopy of white supremacy.

Moreover, the white gaze’s surveillance is what enables violence on the black body to occur. More specifically, slave branding was the chief corner stone laid in the historical foundation of surveillance on Black bodies (Browne, 2015, 92). By branding their Black slaves, the racist white slave owners made sure that they kept track of their property and maintain their control over their slaves. As the slave trader Theodore Canot wrote,

Two days before embarkation, the head of every male and female is neatly shaved; and if the cargo belongs to several owners, each man's brand is impressed on the body of his respective negro. This operation is performed with pieces of silver wire, or small irons fashioned into the merchant's initials (Theodore Canot, *Memoirs of a Slave Trader*, 1854, quoted in Browne, 2015, 90).

The fact that the enslaved Blacks were branded like cattle demonstrates the corrosive paranoia that the slave masters must have possessed. They were well aware that slavery would always be resisted by the subjugated peoples because it was inherently inhumane. Additionally, branding is also about rendering human beings into animals and property. It is about ownership, marking one's possession as belonging to one. Furthermore, it was a system of keeping biometric records of the human subjects to facilitate future surveillance and control.

As Browne explains, this branding of Black slaves foreshadowed ongoing dehumanizing surveillance of Black Americans under the white gaze throughout US history: "The tracking of blackness as property informs the contemporary surveillance of the racial body by now questioning how the intimate relation between branding and the black body our biometric past can allow us to think critically about our biometric present" (Browne, 2015, 91). In contemporary times, such surveillance has been evident in police tactics and actions in non-white communities. For instance, in New York City the policy of stop and frisk which disproportionately targeted minorities and colored communities can be traced back to the Lantern Laws of March 1773,⁶ which were designed to prohibit non-white people from traveling without an form of lighting, this was ensure that they could be visible and monitored at all times

⁶ "lantern laws," which were ordinances "For Regulating Negroes and Slaves in the Night Time" in New York City that compelled black, mixed- race, and indigenous slaves to carry small lamps, if in the streets after dark and unescorted by a white person. With this citywide mandate, "No Negro, Mulatto or Indian slave could" be in the streets unaccompanied "an hour after sunset" without "a lanthorn and lighted candle in it, so as the light thereof may be plainly seen" without penalty. See Browne, Simone. 2015. *Dark matters: on the Surveillance of Blackness*. Duke University Press.p.g 25.

(Browne,2015, 76). Such racial profiling of Black Americans persists due to the entrenched culture of surveillance of the Black body, informed by stereotypes of Blacks as criminals, that is manifest in the white gaze.

Additionally, I would like to briefly explore the power of surveillance and space that also has racialized historic roots. The modern-day documents of travel or identification such as State IDs stems from the need for the white gaze to monitor black people. Browne states the following, “The Book of Negroes, I argue, is the first government issued document for state regulated migration between the United States and Canada that explicitly linked corporeal markers to the right to travel” (Browne, 2015, 25). We see that in order for Blacks to be kept in their subordinate place there was the need to find ways of keeping track of their movement. Furthermore, this was done in the segregated south of the United States as was also practised in Apartheid regime in South Africa (passbooks). More specifically, Black women who worked as domestic workers were used as a test case for this type of surveillance (Browne, 2015, 57). The white gaze is critical in that white supremacy created spaces that the number of Blacks in white areas had to be limited and documented at all times. The *Book of Negroes* became the first public state record of presence Black people in North America (Browne, 2015, 70). Thus, the modern-day passport system has its roots in the tracking of Black people and influences modern day immigration control. Evidence of this can be found in the following words:

My argument here is that the body made legible with the modern passport system has a history in the technologies of tracking blackness. My discussion on the making of the Book of Negroes offers a historicizing of the ways in which the tracking, accounting, and identification of the racial body, and in particular the black body and black social life, form an important, but often absented, part of the genealogy of the passport (Browne, 2015, 70).

In short, the white gaze not only inflicts physical violence, but violently affects the Black man's entire being and endures in the current culture of surveillance on the Black body.

VII. Examples of Black resistance against the White Gaze

After painting such a dire picture of the prevailing white gaze, one might wonder if there is any hope of escaping it. In other words, to what extent is there a point of resistance or is there any agency in the Black oppositional gaze? The oppositional 'gaze' can be seen as a political looking back against racist power relations, a daring to look back at the world through the eyes of the subjugated, which in itself is a revolutionary act. Hooks, in her book *Black Looks*, explains that "the 'gaze' has always been political in my life" and that "the gaze has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people" (hooks, 1992, 115-116). Before we get to the idea of the oppositional Black gaze, which I believe has to play a major part in Black Liberation movements and will help achieve full freedom, and equality, let us consider some of the thoughts expressed by Fanon. In the last two chapters of *Black Skin White Masks* and his chapter on violence in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon, while discussing the concept of recognition, stated that "the former slave wants to make himself recognized" (Fanon, 2004 [1961], 217). This need for recognition is the starting point of resistance against the white gaze since the white gaze exemplifies the denial of mutual recognition of Black people by white people. Fanon stated that at the basic level the Black man wants to be recognized by the white world and he believed that the black man just wants to be accepted into the realm of being, that is to be recognised as fully human with unquestioned human dignity (2004, 217). This "dignity of the spirit" arises as soon as the Black man seeks to become more than he is in his current condition (2004, 218). Crucially, Fanon elaborated in the penultimate chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the white gaze can only be resisted if Black people are made aware of their own agency and, ultimately, only if and when they realize and assert their full humanity (as many have done in the past and still are doing through resistance). This is the catalyst for struggle and the fuel that is needed to resist any

form of oppression. In the face of oppression, Fanon stated, “But man is also no. No to scorn of man. No to degradation of man. No to exploitation of man. No to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom” (Fanon, 2008, 222).

Thereby, the existence of agency among Black people demonstrates that it is possible for the white gaze to be resisted. In the chapter *The Negro and Recognition*, Fanon touches on the importance of education in bringing awareness within the Black community. He believed that an educated man “prepares to act” against his oppressors and that Black people will not remain passive when confronted with the everyday realities of the white gaze (Fanon, 2008, 222). Nevertheless, Fanon would agree that Black people would have to be given a decolonised education in order for the education or consciousness to give them a sense of agency within the white gaze. Such an education would counter the colonial racial devaluation of Black lives and Black agency. He stated that “to educate a man is to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act” (2008, 222). Thus, a decolonised mind or thoughts will always lead to actions that seek to restore full equality and justice in these racialized settler colonial societies. Fanon would later translate this approach to liberating collective action in *The Wretched of the Earth* into a call for armed resistance against oppressors as a means to decolonisation of the minds of the colonized and concrete decolonization. Ngugi wa Thiong’o in his book *Decolonizing the Mind* offers a detailed account of what this type of decolonization would entail by stating:

The classes fighting against imperialism even in its neo-colonial stage and form, have to confront this threat with the higher and more creative culture of resolute struggle. These classes have to wield even more firmly the weapons of the struggle contained in their cultures. They have to speak the united language of struggle contained in each of their languages. They must discover their various tongues to sing the song: ‘A people united can never be defeated’ (Ngugi,3)

One can see that there is a need for a global intellectual and cultural decolonization and assertion of the humanity and creativity of the colonized. This decolonization affects Africans and all peoples of African descent who are living in the Diaspora. Thereby, consciousness is an ongoing struggle to reclaim their historical narrative and creativity.

Thus, Fanon did not naively believe that “appeals to reason or respect for human dignity can alter reality”; instead, he realized that “consciousness is only the beginning but there is a required second step of contending against oppressive forces” (2008, 224). Fanon took a defiant stance against the humanity of Black people being defined (or denied) by whiteness. He stated, “I am not the slave of the slavery that dehumanised my ancestors” (2008, 230). That is, he insisted that Black people are not captive to, or strictly determined or limited by, the history that has been written from the viewpoint of the white gaze. Moreover, Fanon argues that it is in actively resisting the racist historical baggage conducted under the white gaze, when the Black man or woman can truly begin to be free. He goes on to add that “in the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself” (2008, 229). Thereby, one can rightly deduce in the quest for freedom that Black people are on a journey of self-discovery that is not tied to the reality that the white gaze has created. Fanon’s aim, in short, is to cut the historical umbilical cord of the past dehumanizing relationship between Black and white people while discovering Black agency. Fanon summarizes these thoughts in the following way: “If the question of practical solidarity with a given past ever arose for me, it did so only to the extent to which I was committed to myself and to my neighbor to fight for all my life and all my strength so that never again would a people on earth be subjugated” (Fanon, 2008, 227).

Fanon, then, maintained that the past is only valuable insofar as it leads to decolonization and the full recognition of the humanity and dignity of Black people. Yet, in *The Wretched of the*

Earth, he clearly articulated that “decolonization is always a violent event” (Fanon, 2005, 1). He also argued that the colonized would only fully realize their humanity through the radical process of decolonization. Decolonization would mean total change of the colonial infrastructure of domination. Therefore, Fanon’s view immediately raises the question of how it is relevant today, in different ‘post-colonial’ circumstances. We have to begin by recognising that Fanon was writing in a colonial/ anti-colonial struggle moment in the 1950s and early 1960s. Yet, in contemporary times we live in a (formally) post-colonial period – one that arguably has substantially changed since the colonial era but still carries the horrific legacy of anti-Black colonial racism. Here Bell hooks’s understanding of the Black oppositional gaze offers a way to carry forward Fanon’s insights into the contemporary times. As aforementioned, there has, of course, always been some Black resistance whenever Black people have been subjugated. Thereby, hooks, following in the footsteps of Fanon, seeks to describe how Black critical thinkers have taken it upon themselves to think of ways that the “colonized gaze” can be resisted and ultimately uprooted (1992, 2). She recognises that there is a difficulty in sustaining this resistance but states, “It is only as we collectively change the way we look at ourselves and the world that we can change how we are seen. In this process, we seek to create a world where everyone can look at blackness, and black people, with new eyes” (1992, 6).

In short, it remains vitally important for the Black people to take a critical stance on evaluating the white gaze when it comes to the appropriation of Black images. In particular, it is essential that Black people take an active role in evaluating how the white world portrays them if they are to eventually escape the subordinating white gaze (hooks, 1992, 7). For instance, in response to recent protests against anti-black racism and police violence in the US and globally, the Quaker Oats company in the US (which is owned by PepsiCo), the owner of the 131-year-old

brand of the racist caricature named Aunt Jemima, announced that it would change the product name in an effort “to make progress toward racial equality” (Hsu, 2020). Moreover, there has been a reawakening of societal consciousness spearheaded by black activism forcing corporate America to acknowledge black lives and issues. That is why an “increasing number of companies, including Vox Media, Twitter and Square, will now observe June 19⁷ as a permanent company holiday,” called Juneteenth, also known as Freedom Day, with the aim of honoring Black celebration of their actual Emancipation (Holt, 2020). These seem to me clear examples of how Black activism is shifting the white gaze, and calling Black and white people to think about blackness and Black lives differently.

Moreover, hooks argues that Black critical thinkers should adopt a revolutionary stance when it comes to the struggle against the white gaze. We need to dismantle the white racist structures that seek to subjugate black bodies. Nevertheless, for this resistance against white gaze to be sustainable, it is also imperative that the old racist views are replaced with new ways of looking at the Black bodies (1992, 7). Hooks argues that the need for Black people to love their blackness is fundamental and it is the logical conclusion once Black people have become self-aware. She argues that the loving of blackness in a white supremacist culture carries with it the threat of death. Nonetheless, hooks observes, “The oppositional black culture that emerged in the context of apartheid and segregation has been one of the few locations that has provided a space for the kind of decolonization that makes loving blackness possible” (1992, 9). Thereby, these

⁷ First Juneteenth celebrations equivalent to Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s report of the ceremonies for the Emancipation Proclamation as it was read aloud on Port Royal Island, South Carolina, on New Year’s Day, 1863. Black troops, white commanders, white clergymen, white women schoolteachers, black women schoolteachers, and the formerly enslaved turned resisters gathered at the sober campground to ratify in their hearts the next covenant of the Republic. See Darryl Pinckney. ‘We Must Act Out Our Freedom’. (The New York Review of Books, 8/2020) <https://www.nybooks.com/contributors/darryl-pinckney/>

moments in Black historical resistance against the white gaze are important because of the emergence of the political formulation of loving of blackness. Thus, it is in this organization oppositional Black culture and movements often where Black people feel safe and free.

This idea of loving of blackness demonstrates that for society to fully affirm the dignity of Black people there needs to be a decolonising of both the white and black mind. Jean-Paul Sartre makes this very point clear in his “Preface” to *Wretched of the Earth*. He declares to his fellow white Europeans, “we too, people of Europe, we are being decolonized” (Sartre, in Fanon, 2004 [1961], Ivii). Furthermore, we see that for Blacks to struggle against the white gaze and to achieve freedom and equality, they must cultivate a culture that values blackness. One example of this can be seen in the Black Lives Matter movement, which emphasises this very point. Black Lives Matter exemplifies how the affirmation of self-worth has gone hand-in-hand with active resistance to oppression and marginalization. Moreover, this follows the example of the civil rights, Black Power, and Black Arts Movements that were part of the black freedom struggles of the 1950s-1970s in the US, and these were matched by the Black consciousness movement in South African, led by Steven Biko and others. Hooks speaks directly to such movements as follows:

Collectively, black people and our allies in struggle are empowered when we practice self-love as a revolutionary intervention that undermines practices of domination. Loving blackness as, political; resistance, transforms our ways of looking and being, and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim black life (1992, 20).

That is, one of the negative effects of the white gaze is that it makes Black people feel inferior and unwelcome whenever they enter a white space. Thus, it is vital that Blacks begin to self-love as a fundamental way of escaping the imperial gaze that seeks to define them.

Ultimately, the crucial point of resistance of the white gaze is the oppositional gaze of resistance from the Black people. This is the fundamental space or position of agency that the Black people have always possessed. Hooks argues that this look is powerful in that it can act as a way of documenting oppression. Thus, it has too often been images of Black men and women being killed by the police that have been a powerful catalyst for resistance against oppression. A very recent example is that it was only when George Floyd was killed right in front of our eyes, with this killing captured on a cell phone by an observer. This event led many Black people and their allies to say enough is enough. In a manner similar to Fanon, hook says that in the process of resisting the white gaze, the oppositional eye learns to look in a particular way in order to ultimately resist (1992, 116). This critical look manifests itself in the world of cinema as Black people begin to have a critical eye towards the way they are portrayed on scene. We see in movies like Spike Lee's film "Do the Right Thing" (1989) – an example of black people writing their own narratives on the big screen as a way of combating the racist images and engage the negation of black representation (hooks, 1992, 117). In such radically conscious Black cinema, Black narratives and images are no longer under the white gaze. Thus, every spectator has agency to either accept or resist the images in film or television. One other powerful tool of activism emerged on a comedic live stage, where Black comedians such as Richard Pryor or Chris Rock, were able to tell the Black story in a unique way that often exposed the white gaze in entertainment and in society while exhibiting Black agency.

Furthermore, living in a predominately racist white world, the Black consciousness movement will need solid allies. Allies are needed in the deconstruction of the white gaze in order to create a new way of living in the world. Hooks observes, "Luckily, there are individual non-black people who have divested of their racism in ways that enable them to establish bonds

of intimacy based on their ability to love blackness without assuming the role of ‘cultural tourists’” (1992, 17). It is vital that allies begin to love Black lives not just as part of a political agenda or slogan but as a fundamental way of combating the white gaze holistically. It is so easy for white people to consider themselves allies while still holding on to stereotypes about Black people and not seek to actively dismantle white supremacist structures. Thus, I believe the first step is for white allies to recognize their white privilege and the existence of the white gaze. For far too long, there has been silence from moderate and liberal whites in America. Martin Luther King, Jr. observed that the white moderates were more “devoted to order than justice” (King, 1963). Moreover, in light of the protests that have emerged from the George Floyd’s death at the hands of police, Charles Blow, writing in the *New York Times*, warns us that this “freedom summer” should not be “another moment when allies fail” (Blow, 2020). In short, for structural racism to be given a fatal blow will require sustained efforts and true commitment from Black Americans and their allies. Thus, I believe that without recognising the existence of the racial contract and acknowledging how one may have intentionally or unintentionally benefited from the anti-Black world, one cannot be considered an ally (Blow, 2020).

Black activism has a rich history of inspirational figures taking a stand against the white gaze because they were prepared to pay the cost in the march towards freedom. One such a figure is Muhammad Ali, who once courageously stated, “I know where I’m going and I know the truth, and I don’t have to be what you want me to be, I’m free to be who I want” (Lipsyte, 2016, 3). These words echoed his desire to escape the white gaze and to be totally emancipated. Moreover, Ali’s opposition to limitations imposed on him through the white gaze can be clearly seen when he refused to go fight in America’s war in Vietnam. He said, ‘I ain’t got nothing against no Vietcong.’ This stance ultimately cost him his livelihood and put him at odds with the

US government which temporarily took away his freedom (Lipsyte, 2016, 74). Ali's influence looms large on Black athletes taking a stand against racism and he stands as a giant that influenced a generation of Black activists (Lipsyte, 2016, 79). Black people must dare to look back critically at the white gaze and move to decolonize racist systems and minds. Racism must be combated wherever it raises its ugly head. This anti-Black system of oppression was carefully, intentionally, and violently preserved over centuries and it requires similar effort and commitment to dismantle it at its roots (Blow, 2020).

VIII. Conclusion

In summary, one would have to recognise what has been demonstrated in this thesis, that the white gaze carries power that was established by historical racist structures that have continued to dehumanize and marginalize black lives. This historical baggage, which endures in the white gaze, entails continuing tension for the Black body. Moreover, the white gaze acts as a universalizing agent of the white imaginary that was forged through a colonial and racist history of white dominance. Thus, whenever Black men and women enter the white world, they immediately encounter these power dynamics, to which they must respond by either flight or fight. The white world is, as Fanon outlines, considered by many the “real world.” Thus, Black people always have to perform under the white gaze and seek acceptance into this so-called “real world.”

Ultimately, the white gaze also has the power of negation by the messaging that black life doesn't matter. This is done whenever Black stories of pain are dismissed as reverse racism. Yancy states, “Historically, “the imago of the [Black] in the European mind” has involved a process of discursive and material violence” (Yancy, 2008, 106). Thus it is important to always be aware that the white gaze is an important site of white racial power that is predicated on a white epistemic order that seeks to dominant and subordinate Black lives. On the other hand, while the white gaze has limited the freedom and dignity of Black people, it has not completely destroyed their agency. In fact, many Black people have always resisted the white gaze in various ways, with varying degrees of success. The Black Lives Matter movement in the US is thus only the latest embodiment of Black resistance. Hooks states that the domineering white gaze can have the untended effect of reawakening black agency. For example, she says that “all

attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze” (hooks, 1992,116).

The crucial point of resistance to the white gaze is the oppositional gaze of resistance from the black people and the consciousness of starting to love blackness. Loving blackness requires the decolonization of the mind of both Black people and their allies – including both white allies and other people of color. But more importantly, after coming to this awareness, decolonised minds must take action to dismantle the effects of the white gaze, which include the white supremacist structures and enduring inequalities that it supports. For future research, we need to gain a deeper understanding of how the white gaze has changed significantly from the Jim Crow/ colonial era of Fanon to the current post-colonial/ post-civil rights movement era, in which Black activists have achieved partial gains in overcoming stark racial domination of the Jim Crow period. It is evident, however, that while the white gaze has changed over time and its power has not been completely overturned.

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