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Undoing the Instrumental/Non-Instrumental Binary

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## FANON'S FRAME OF VIOLENCE

Undoing the Instrumental/Non-Instrumental Binary

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.....  
**Affective responsiveness**  
**Arendt, Hannah**  
**Fanon, Frantz**  
**frames of violence**  
**instrumental violence**  
**non-instrumental violence**  
.....

*The scholarship on Frantz Fanon's theorization of violence is crowded with interpretations that follow the Arendtian paradigm of violence. These interpretations often discuss whether violence is instrumental or non-instrumental in Fanon's work. This reading, I believe, is the result of approaching Fanon through Hannah Arendt's framing of violence, i.e. through a binary paradigm of instrumental versus non-instrumental violence. Even some Fanon scholars who question Arendt's reading of Fanon, do so by employing a similar binary logic, hence repeating the same either/or paradigm of instrumental versus non-instrumental violence. I aim to challenge such interpretations of Fanon by demonstrating that in the context of anticolonial armed struggle in which Fanon writes, the either/or framework of the instrumental/non-instrumental binary of violence cannot fully capture his perspective. Violence can indeed be conceived as having both constructive and instrumental aspects. My argument is supported by Fanon's corpus, including his 1960 Accra speech, "Why We Use Violence" in *Alienation and Freedom*. This piece, I suggest, together with Fanon's other writings, poses a direct challenge to the Arendtian binary of violence. My analysis resists positioning the difference between Arendt and Fanon through the instrumental/non-instrumental binary. By using Judith Butler's*

*notion of “frame” I complicate their difference and argue Arendt’s framing of violence prevents her from apprehending Fanon and – more importantly – interpretations of Fanon based on this Arendtian frame of violence inevitably lead to misinterpretations.*

## Introduction

The scholarship on Frantz Fanon’s theorization of violence is crowded with interpretations that follow the Arendtian paradigm of violence (e.g. Oladipo 1989; Kawash 1999; Roberts 2004; Frazer and Hutchings 2008; Ayyash 2013). These interpretations often discuss whether violence is instrumental or non-instrumental in Fanon’s work. This approach, I believe, is the result of reading Fanon through Hannah Arendt’s framing of violence, i.e. through a binary paradigm of instrumental versus non-instrumental violence. Arendt’s own characterization of violence is instrumental, while she claims that for Fanon violence is non-instrumental (Arendt 1970). Even some Fano-nians who question Arendt’s reading of Fanon do so by employing a similar binary logic, hence repeating the same either/or logic of instrumental versus non-instrumental violence.<sup>1</sup>

1 Later, I focus on Roberts’ (2004) and Kawash’s (1999) readings as exemplary cases to show how Fanon scholars can get caught up in Arendtian interpretations.

2 By “frames of violence” I mean affective-theoretical lenses through which violence is linked to politics. The notion of frame deployed here follows Butler’s (2010) conceptualization.

My aim here is to challenge such interpretations of Fanon by demonstrating that in the context of anticolonial armed struggle in which Fanon writes, the either/or framework of the instrumental/non-instrumental binary of violence cannot fully capture his perspective. Violence can indeed be conceived as having *both* constructive *and* instrumental aspects. Hence, my analysis resists positioning the difference between Arendt and Fanon through the either–or logic of the instrumental/non-instrumental binary. I use Judith Butler’s notion of “frames of violence”<sup>2</sup> to complicate their difference and argue Arendt’s framing of violence prevents her from apprehending Fanon and – more importantly – interpretations of Fanon based on this Arendtian frame of violence inevitably lead to misinterpretations. My argument is supported by Fanon’s corpus, including his 1960 Accra speech, “Why We Use Violence” (“Pourquoi nous employons la violence”), published in *Alienation and Freedom* (Fanon 2018). Fanon’s frame of violence as formulated in this piece, together with his other writings, poses a direct challenge to the Arendtian binary framework.

My proposal to retrieve two distinct frames of violence from Fanon and Arendt’s theorizations serves the purpose of sharpening the visibility of dissident voices in the narrativization of violence. This in turn highlights the dissymmetry in how we engage with and affectively respond to the subjects and the contexts of violence. Although both thinkers consider violence as part of experience, Fanon’s position is much more focused on the effects of violence

3 Butler (2010, 33) articulates the term affective responsiveness to move away from an "ontology of individualism", which is often accompanied by a liberal, Eurocentric tendency to frame violence in abstract terms.

4 My discussion of violence in Arendt predominantly targets her misreading of Fanon in *On Violence*. Hence, I only focus on the articulation of the relationship between violence and politics in her writings post-*The Origins*. For a more comprehensive discussion of Arendt on the topic of violence, see Bernstein (2013, 78–104) and Gines (2014, 93–111).

5 In the context of Turkish–Kurdish relations, colonial practices involve assimilationist policies, denial of cultural rights, militarization of the Kurdish land, forced migration and institutional racism. For further discussion, see Beşikci (1991); Yarkin (2019). Also most interestingly, Bozarslan (2004, 48) claims the ideological

on the victims of colonial violence. His *affective responsiveness*, to borrow Butler's term, is shaped by a theoretical commitment to exploring what violence does to the subjectivity of the person who is surrounded by a violent world.<sup>3</sup> The question of how the colonized can eliminate this violent world cannot be divorced from Fanon's affective theoretical engagement. In contrast, Arendt's framing of violence does not capture the structural/everyday violence that Fanon is concerned with.<sup>4</sup> Within Arendt's discussions of violence, the effects of everyday violence she tends to neglect concern racial discrimination and violence (e.g. in the US), slavery and practices of social exclusion (e.g. Ancient Greece) and torture, detention and institutional racism (e.g. in Algeria).

The significance of discussing the sources and implications of different frames of violence resides in making sense of contradictory responses to state violence in the contemporary global context. One current example is the Turkish–Kurdish conflict. Some scholars characterize the institutionalized violence against the Kurds as colonial.<sup>5</sup> Many Kurds and Turks living in Turkey and abroad view the Kurdish armed struggle as the inevitable outcome of long-term Turkish state violence against the Kurds. In contrast, the majority of the Turkish public endorse the opinion, sanctioned by the Turkish state, that the Kurdish guerillas (PKK) are terrorists. In many ways, this view mirrors the 1960s official French discourse about the National Liberation Front of Algeria, on account of which the everyday implications of the French–Algerian colonial relation for the colonized were not apparent to many Europeans. This similarity alone suggests the current relevance of Fanon's frame of violence for anticolonial movements across the Global South and offers a positive response to Nigel Gibson's (1999, 101) question, "Does Fanon have a relevance beyond the Anglo-American Academy?"<sup>6</sup>

Fanon's insights on the question of violence not only disturb the liberal understanding of violence that sees the nation-state as the sole executor of violence, but they also reject the liberal configuration of the political sphere as antithetical to violence, which we repeatedly find in Arendtian interpretations. The liberal view, supported by Arendt's distinction between the social and political spheres, is also prevalent in the recent attempts to criminalize and persecute civil public protests, for example, in the United States with the Black Lives Matter movement, in France with the Yellow Vests movement, and in Turkey with the Gezi Park protests. The criminalization of public protests is tied to the idea of the nation-state as the primary guarantor and protector of the public welfare. This idea is challenged by postcolonial theories' intrusions, which render visible the racially specific distribution of violence and protection within both Global North and Global South states.

doctrine of the  
Kurdish armed  
organization PKK  
(Kurdistan  
Workers’s Party)  
“possessed a  
Fanonian  
dimension”.

6 With regard to this  
question, Young’s  
(2005) essay also

In what follows, I first discuss Arendt’s criticism of Fanon, followed by her views of violence as antithetical to politics. In exploring Arendt’s views, I mark their difference from Fanon’s. Secondly, I depict Fanon’s frame of violence. This is followed by a critical engagement with two Fanon scholars, both of whom, I argue, offer Arendtian interpretations that I find to be missing the spirit of Fanon’s judgments about violence.

### **Arendt’s frame: violence as opposed to politics**

powerfully  
demonstrates the  
relevance of Fanon’s  
thought beyond the  
Academy, as it  
provides a detailed  
analysis of Fanon’s  
impact on the sub-  
Saharan nations and  
their decolonization  
process.

7 The claim that  
Fanon glorified  
violence for its own  
sake did not  
exclusively belong to  
Arendt. Even Fanon  
scholars like Irene  
L. Gendzier held this  
view. For a  
discussion of this  
point, see Bulhan  
(1985, 147).

In *On Violence* Arendt informs her reader that she is reflecting on Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* “because of its great influence on the present student generation” (1970, 14). The “great influence” concerns the students’ willingness to resort to violence. *On Violence* was written as a critical reflection on the 1968 student riots in Europe and the US and it is in this context that Arendt takes issue with Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre and George Sorel, as leading thinkers who, Arendt suggests, defend violence for its own sake. To clarify her own position on violence, she concludes “violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues” (51). Violence is instrumental, for Arendt, in the sense that it can only be a means to a political goal, where the goal itself must be communicated through speech. According to Christopher Finlay, “instrumental justification thus appears as a key criterion for Arendt in distinguishing her account of permissible violence from the theories of Sorel, Fanon and others” (2009, 29). Although Arendt does not explicitly state that, for Fanon, violence is *not* instrumental, she does express that Fanon “glorifies violence for violence’s sake” (1970, 65).<sup>7</sup> She also adds that, for Fanon, “violence is justified on the ground of creativity” (75). Here, she is critical of Fanon because she is opposed to the idea of creation through violence. Arendt’s framing of violence suggests violence in itself is not capable of changing anything and cannot have any positive configuration. The main point of Arendt’s criticism of Fanon and others, then, is that they miss the instrumental nature of violence; instead, they maintain a non-instrumental vision of violence.

In her other works, too, Arendt sustains the idea that violence is instrumental. On two different occasions (1998, 26; 2006, 9), she speaks of violence as instrumental through its lack of speech. The muteness of violence issues from its instrumental nature: violence needs to be supplemented by a discourse that will serve as a justification. Arendt’s characterization of violence as instrumental and speechless is essential to her opposition of politics and violence. Another crucial aspect of Arendt’s thinking about violence, one that comes close to Fanon’s position, is her recognition of violent political beginnings.

In *On Revolution* she argues every political beginning presupposes violence (Arendt 2006, 10). For us, then, the question will be this: given that Arendt is aware of the necessity of violent beginnings for political entities and justifies violence when there is a further political goal, why does she deny Fanon legitimacy in his call for armed struggle against colonial powers? Why does Fanon appear to Arendt to be someone who praises violence for its own sake? In the context of colonialism, the very context where Fanon writes, are not the violent uprisings of the colonized a means to national independence, and therefore a legitimate political goal according to Arendt?

Kathryn T. Gines argues that “Arendt is aware of the violence used to establish and maintain what she calls imperialism, and yet she is not as critical of the oppressors’ violence as she is of the revolutionary counterviolence of the colonized” (2014, 99). In agreement with Gines and further, it is my contention that Arendt’s *affective response* is *unresponsive* to the effects of colonial violence, such that she does not see anticolonial armed struggle as a justified political means.

The notion of affective responsiveness is key for demarcating Fanon and Arendt’s frames of violence. In Butler’s formulation, affective responsiveness does not simply mean an individual’s affective response to a situation, “but a way of responding to what is before us with the resources that are available to us” (2010, 50). Butler argues that affective responsiveness is conditioned by framing, where the recognizability of the targets of violence depends on that framing. Butler thus suggests framing produces one’s affective response to and interpretation of violent actions (34). In this respect, Arendt’s framing of violence, and therefore her affective response to colonial violence, relies on her depiction of the social and the political as two distinct spheres, as I demonstrate below.

It is worth noting that calling into question Arendt’s responsiveness to human suffering in the French colonies might seem unjustified given the fact that as a Jewish thinker and Holocaust survivor, she dedicated her life’s work to analyzing and understanding political evil, totalitarian regimes, statelessness and collective responsibility.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of Arendt’s longstanding interest in these issues, her framework appears to be unequipped to address the effects of everyday violence on colonized people.

In *The Human Condition* Arendt defines political action in terms of speech and collective public reasoning and juxtaposes it to violence: “to be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through violence” (1998, 26). This appeal to speech as the distinctive characteristic of politics is Aristotelian. According to this distinction, only those who are entitled to speech are rendered fully human. The entitlement to speech distinguishes the political actor from the rest, such that in the *polis*, not everyone who was capable of speaking (e.g. slaves

8 For further discussion of Arendt’s responsiveness to suffering, see Scholem (1978, 241) and Nelson (2004, 224).

and women) was allowed to participate in the political life. Hence, the Aristotelian understanding of the political sphere is based on the exclusion of a certain group of individuals. These Aristotelian distinctions and categorizations are at the heart of Arendt's understanding of the political sphere. In *The Promise of Politics*, Arendt (2007, 116) notes the political sphere understood by Aristotle excluded both slaves and the barbarians. The political equality of Greek citizens, therefore, required the exclusion of a group of individuals from the political sphere and citizenship.

Although Arendt is not expressing approval, she is aware this exclusion was a necessary precondition for political life in Ancient Greece: “the point of exploitation of slaves in classical Greece was to liberate their masters entirely from labor so that they might enjoy the freedom of the political arena” (2007, 117). She is thus clear that the institution of slavery made possible the emergence of the political sphere and equal citizenship in ancient Athens. Arendt's discussion of the Greek *polis*, then, makes evident her recognition of the presence of institutional exclusion and exploitation within ancient Greek society. What is relevant for us is that the recognition itself is not accompanied by any ethical judgment. Although Arendt doesn't approve of these practices, neither does she condemn them. Her point may be to distinguish the social sphere (i.e. the sphere of hierarchy, necessity, and coercion) from the political sphere (i.e. the sphere of equality and freedom), but as a result, her analysis remains devoid of any reference to the inequalities and violence inherent in the social sphere.

According to Uday Mehta (2010, 44), Arendt was well aware that securing political freedom required ignoring the substantial questions regarding social inequality, especially in the case of America. Mehta's point is particularly apt in relation to Arendt's analysis in “Reflections on Little Rock” (Arendt 1959). This short text by Arendt shows that her understanding of politics does not in any way secure equality and justice in the social realm. As Gines puts it, “Arendt's delineation of the Negro question as a social issue prevents her from recognizing that anti-Black racism (like Jew hatred) is a political phenomenon” (2014, 1–2).

In line with the Supreme Court's 1954 decision to outlaw the segregation of schools, in 1957 nine African American students enrolled in the segregated Little Rock Central High School. Arendt's essay “Reflections on Little Rock” is concerned with “the crisis” that followed. Arendt (1959, 50) is explicitly critical of federal enforcement of desegregation in schools. Arendt does not see this social inequality (i.e. segregation) as a political problem because she sees the social sphere as not functioning on the grounds of equality. To clarify this position, she makes a distinction between “discrimination” as the principle of society and “equality” as the principle of politics. She writes, “what equality is to the body politic – its innermost principle – discrimination is to society” (51).

According to Viki Bell, Arendt's view that the social and the political realms are grounded by two different principles is connected to "her notion of the political as a realm, which is separate from the social and the private" (2000, 64). Hence, the political principle of equal citizenship is not at all the guarantor of equality in the social realm; in fact, *discrimination* becomes the central governing principle of society because "without discrimination of some sort, society would simply cease to exist, and very important possibilities of free association and group formation would disappear" (Arendt 1959, 51). Very explicitly, Arendt considers *discrimination* to be society's *sine qua non*; she naturalizes discrimination by describing it as an inclination among members of society. Interestingly, her description of discrimination has no negative connotation. Yet, as in the case of segregation of schools, social discrimination might lead to inequality in citizenship rights, i.e. within the political sphere. This point does not rise to the level of a concern for Arendt because she disregards the interconnectedness between the social and the political spheres. In the context of "Reflections on Little Rock", this analytic separation of the social from the political has immediate effects in Arendt's narrative; the separation enables the normalization of exclusionary practices within society (i.e. segregation in schools) and elides from the account the effects these practices have on those who are violated by them.

Arendt's framing of the relation between violence and politics, which I have outlined above, suggests her framework is not equipped to address the effects of racially and geographically specific operations of everyday violence in colonial contexts. Next, I focus on Fanon's frame of violence through Arendt's criticism.

### Fanon's frame: multidimensional and beyond the Arendtian paradigm

To identify the national liberation movements with such outbursts is to prophesy their doom – quite apart from the fact that the unlikely victory would not result in changing the world (or the system), *but only its personnel*. (Arendt 1970, 21, emphasis mine)<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Arendt's remark is explicitly negative towards national liberation movements. This is puzzling given the fact that Arendt herself advocated the formation of a Jewish army against Hitler. The struggle for

Arendt's statement is intended as a criticism against Fanon. Yet Arendt's claim, that victory achieved through violence merely changes the personnel, misses the point that Fanon makes in his various writings, because in a colonial world, it is precisely the attitude of the colonizer (the personnel) that is the problem. Therefore, Arendt's assertion that changing the personnel don't matter disregards the racially specific operations of colonial violence. Colonialism, as a practice of government, is sustained and maintained by



Jewish liberation, Arendt thought, was only possible through Jewish armed struggle (see Bernstein 2013, 95).

10 This point is strongly emphasized by Bulhan (1985), Gordon (1995, 2015), Gibson (2003) and Keller (2007).

11 On the everyday effects of colonial capitalism, see the documentary *Concerning Violence* (Olsson 2014).

12 As Gordon notes, two years after the start of the Algerian War of Independence in 1954, Fanon resigned from his post as the head of the psychiatry unit at the Blida-Joinville hospital and became “a full-time organizer, writer and physician for the FLN” (2017, 48).

13 On the one hand, there is the dialectical formation of subjectivities, which is the result of the Manichean structure of colonialism; on the

extreme forms of violence targeting racially specific bodies (e.g. Muslims in Algeria, Blacks in South Africa) and, as Fanon states in *Toward the African Revolution*, “colonialism cannot be understood without the possibility of torturing, of violating, or of massacring” (1967, 66). This is why, according to Fanon, changing the personnel, i.e. getting rid of the colonizer through violent struggle, will be the first and necessary step. Primarily, Fanon is interested in the effects of colonial violence on the psychic formation of colonized individuals.<sup>10</sup> In almost all of his writings, Fanon emphasizes that the damage done by the colonizer is not limited to physical violence. The colonized individual lives in an environment where violence is constant, multidimensional and diffused into everyday life.<sup>11</sup>

Fanon’s analysis of the psychic impact of everyday violence is one of the most powerful and insightful elements of his framing of violence, and it stands at the root of his understanding of armed mobilization. As a black intellectual from the French colony of Martinique, Fanon’s earlier insights into the effects of colonial racism and violence, published in *Black Skin, White Masks*, gained a specific audience after 1957, when he began to write in *El Moudjahid*, the organ of the FLN (National Liberation Front) of Algeria.<sup>12</sup> He remarks in an issue published in September 1957: “the attitude of the French troops in Algeria fits into a pattern of police domination, of systematic racism, of dehumanization rationally pursued” (Fanon 1967, 64). Throughout his writings on Algeria, collected in his *Toward the African Revolution*, Fanon repeatedly references the “systematized de-humanization” instituted by the colonizer (53). This systematic performance of violence structures an inhuman world inhabited by dehumanized subjects. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon continues to emphasize that it is the colonizer who “brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonized subjects” (2004, 4).

Fanon understands the move from colonialism to anticolonial struggle as inevitable. According to him, a “society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a non-viable society, a society to be replaced” (1967, 53). Agreeing with Fanon’s assessment that the violence of the colonial world creates violent subjectivities, Butler identifies two different configurations of violence in Fanon that emerge from a single violent context (Butler 2006, 13–14; see also Nayar 2013, 70). The first configuration of violence is the violence imposed upon the colonized by the settlers. Here, violence is created by the colonizer and sustains the colonial world. At this level, subjectivities are constituted dialectically – black/white, the colonized/colonizer, the Arab/European.<sup>13</sup> The dialectical formation of subjectivities is explicitly articulated by Fanon: “*It is the racist who creates the inferiorized*” (2008, 73, emphasis in the original) and “it is the colonist who *fabricated and continues to fabricate* the colonized subject” (2004, 2, emphasis in the original). Here, the dialectical relationship between the colonized and the colonizer fits into the schema of victim and perpetrator (of violence).

other hand, there is the rendering of the colonized to the “zone of nonbeing” (see Gordon 2017, 54–55). Due to the latter, colonialism defies the Hegelian logic of recognition.

The second configuration of violence is the violence that the colonized appropriates. Fanon stresses that the effects of the violence of colonial racism can be weaponized if it can be turned upside down and used as a means to destroy the colonial world. Channelled into revolutionary politics, this appropriated violence can lead the colonized to take up violent action against colonialism itself. This is the sense in which, for Fanon, violence has a constructive and/or productive effect – when it is used for decolonization through armed struggle (2004, 219). Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan articulates this point as follows:

The oppressed who are dehumanized by the violence of the oppressor also turn that violence against themselves when they lack the consciousness and organization to fight back. But they regain their identity, reclaim their history ... [t]hrough violence, they remove the primary barrier to their humanity *and* they rehabilitate themselves. (Bulhan 1985, 144, emphasis in original)

As Bulhan's interpretation makes clear, Fanon is not speaking of generating *ex nihilo* violent behaviours, tactics and strategies; rather, he is suggesting the colonized make productive use of the violence that is already *given* to the colonized, as she inhabits a violent world. To put it explicitly, the violence that constitutes the colonized's subjectivity, and which eventually leads the colonized to take up all possible forms of violent activity, originates from colonialism itself. Richard Keller's interpretation agrees with Bulhan on this point (also see Bernstein 2013, 110–120). Keller stresses anticolonial violence is “an appropriation of the violence of the settler turned towards the end of liberation and the creation of new revolutionary subjects” (2007, 165).

Against the interpretation put forth by some critics, which I will turn to shortly, I argue this “appropriated violence” is *both instrumental and constructive*. Fanon is explicit about the aim of this violence: he writes that the anticolonial struggle in Algeria “is aimed both at the death of this [colonial] configuration and at the creation of a new society” (1967, 64). This suggests that, for Fanon, violence is necessary, yet it is necessary only in a specific colonial context, as a *means* for decolonization (see Nesbitt 2013, 194). It is precisely this point that escapes the critics who try to fit him into the Arendtian binary of violence.

According to Fanon, the colonized subject is a violent subject, not only because she lives in a violent present, but also because her *past* and her *future* are colonized through violent epistemologies, intended to rob her of her humanity. Addressing this temporal dimension of colonial violence allows Fanon explicitly to articulate the colonial dehumanization process and the rehabilitating effect of armed struggle against it. This is brilliantly and succinctly stated in his 1960 speech at the Accra Positive Action Conference. This speech, “Pourquoi nous employons la violence”, was translated

into English under the title “Why We Use Violence” (hereafter cited as *WWUV*) and published in *Alienation and Freedom* (2018). In particular, this section of the speech is key in shedding light on how Fanon conceives of the three-dimensional temporality of colonial violence:

I say that such a system established by violence can logically only be faithful to itself, and *its duration in time depends on the continuation of violence* ... Colonialism, however, is not satisfied by this violence against *the present* ... The history of the colonized peoples is transformed into meaningless unrest ... [hence, there is] violence against *the past* that is emptied of all substance, [and also] violence against *the future*, for the colonial regime presents itself as necessarily *eternal*. We see, therefore, that the colonized people, caught in a web of a *three-dimensional violence*, ... are soon *logically* confronted by the problem of ending the colonial regime by any means necessary. (Fanon 2018, 654, emphasis mine)

Following Achille Mbembe’s (2017, 106) and Robert J. C. Young’s (2005, 39) readings of this text, where the function of “time” and/or “temporality” is underscored, I want to dwell further on the temporality<sup>14</sup> of colonial violence because it directly challenges the Arendtian paradigm of violence, where violence is “mute” and has no positive and/or constructive configuration.

14 Although not directly addressing the issue of temporality of violence, Bernstein (2013, 114–116) also discusses Fanon’s engagement with temporality in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

The first, perhaps obvious, point I want to reiterate regarding Fanon’s addressing of a *three-dimensional violence* is that the experience of violence is never limited to the present moment. Colonial practices deprive the colonized individual of a meaningful past, as if she had no history worthy of civilization before the colonial regime. This is also articulated in *The Wretched of the Earth* and followed by the suggestion that “reclaiming the past” “triggers a change of fundamental importance in the colonized’s psycho-affective equilibrium” (2004, 148). It is because the colonizer targets the colonized’s past that the epistemological battle against colonialism requires rewriting the past where there is “dignity, glory, and sobriety” (148).

The second point concerns the colonized’s future. Although colonial violence is never limited to the present, as Fanon stresses, nonetheless, it has the effect of locking one into the present moment and hijacking the future. This hijacking is the function of physical and epistemic violence; the experience of futurelessness is shaped by the systematic distribution of everyday colonial violence as it is felt in the body and soul (Fanon 2018, 655). Here, in clear opposition to Arendt, Fanon suggests violence is *not* mute; colonial violence has a logic of its own and a peculiar temporality that presents itself as eternal. Hence, colonial violence presents itself to the colonized as encompassing all of time in its three-dimensional form, as Fanon’s remarks above suggest.

15 Young underscores the difference between *WWUV* and the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* in terms of the discussion of violence and suggests the former provides a more “historized” account with the aim of convincing the delegates at the conference of the legitimacy and the righteousness of the Algerian armed struggle (2005, 38–39).

16 Underlining the “truth” of the Algerian armed struggle goes hand in hand with why Fanon regards this particular armed mobilization as a “model” for other African anticolonial movements. The latter point is discussed in detail by Young (2005, 33–34).

Fanon’s articulation of colonial violence in *WWUV*, as embedded in time, configures a distinctive lens through which one can understand the coexistence of physical, psychic and epistemic violence as dominating time.<sup>15</sup> There is yet another dimension to the temporality of violence Fanon alludes to in this text: the universal yet historical character of anticolonial violence. He suggests violence perpetrated by the colonized can gain a universal character when it is “fought with the language of truth and of reason” (2018, 655). In this text, his example of such violence fought with “truth” is the Algerian revolution.<sup>16</sup> Fanon stresses that Algerians were able to reclaim their future not by “giving a meaning to his [their] life but rather of giving one to his [their] death (655).”

Framing violence as a temporal phenomenon in this three-dimensional way goes beyond the Arendtian formulation of violence as mute and instrumental (i.e. without any positive and/or constructive force). One can speak of the temporality of violence in Arendt only with regard to its future-oriented character; instrumental violence seeks justification from the future goal of political emancipation. Apart from this future-orientedness, Arendt’s analysis of violence does not (and cannot) engage in the important question of temporality because she is not concerned with the effects of violence as experienced by the people. The question of the temporality of violence becomes available as a topic of reflection when one seeks to understand how violence operates and effects the lives of the people as configuring their past, present and future, that is, in the spirit of Fanon’s analysis in *WWUV*.

Nicolas De Warren (2006, 32) rightly stresses that Arendt’s failure to make sense of Fanon’s engagement with anticolonial violence has to do with her unwillingness to recognize the colonial situation as already violent. I read this unwillingness as part of her *unresponsive response*, which I alluded to earlier (see p.5). As I have pointed out, one’s affective responsiveness to violence is interconnected with how one frames violence. On this point Butler writes:

Affects ... become not just the basis, but the very stuff of ideation and of critique. In this way, a certain interpretive act implicitly takes hold at moments of primary affective responsiveness. Interpretation does not emerge as the spontaneous act of a single mind, but as a consequence of a certain field of *intelligibility* that helps to form and frame our responsiveness to the world. (Butler 2010, 34, emphasis mine)

Here, Butler underscores that one’s affective relation with a particular issue has a direct link to how that issue is interpreted, and in that sense, interpretations are not individualized personal opinions about a certain topic but arise from a field of intelligibility that governs the context where the issue comes forth. Because this field of intelligibility is woven with various affects, one’s interpretations are infused with affects. In connection

with Butler's above analysis, I argue the multidimensional aspects and impacts of colonial violence in Algeria were intelligible to Fanon, but were unintelligible to Arendt, and this is precisely why they differ in their affective responses to colonial violence, as well as in the way they frame that violence.

In his *Fanon and the Crisis of the European Man*, Lewis Gordon explores the conditions of such unintelligibility and regards it as the epistemic effect of living in a world imbued with racism. Gordon (1995, 38) formulates unintelligibility as one of the epistemic effects of racism. Fanon understood that for most European intellectuals, the racist structure of colonial violence was invisible. Fanon's affective articulation of violence is a forceful response to make visible the psychosocial impact of this colonial racism on black and Arab subjectivities.

Fanon is also very clear in pointing out that the colonial world is inhabited by two different kinds of species (2004, 1). The splitting of the human species into two is the hallmark of colonial violence. Fanon's experience of and reflections on the multidimensional operations of colonial violence suggested to him that the question of violence could never be articulated in abstract terms, i.e. as a problem of the human, as was the case with Arendt at times. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres correctly suggests, "Fanon adopts a different attitude from that of liberal humanism: instead of talking about Man, he approaches black people" (2008, 97).

In contrast, Arendt's reflections on violence, as manifested in *On Violence*, are abstractly construed. And her understanding of politics is built upon the distinction between the political and the social spheres, which inform her framing of violence. However, there is no political sphere in the Arendtian sense in colonized Algeria. Her distinction is not applicable to the colonial context because the political domain is *not* constituted by speech and collective public reasoning of the citizens. Hence, her criticism of Fanon issues from her failure to understand the lived experience of the colonized. Accordingly, Arendt does not consider decolonization through armed struggle as a legitimate political goal, since she does not attend to the effects of colonial violence. As a result, Arendt misinterprets Fanon as praising violence.

Next, I discuss two interpretations by Fanonian scholars, Kawash and Roberts, whose works sharply demonstrate the power of the Arendtian paradigm within contemporary theorizations of violence.

### **Fanonian interpretations caught in the web of the Arendtian binary of violence**

In her essay "Terrorists and Vampires: Fanon's Spectral Violence of Decolonization", Kawash, at first, stresses "Fanon understands revolutionary acts *within the context of their ends*" (1999, 236, emphasis mine). These remarks belong to her reading of Fanon's (1965) "Algeria Unveiled" (AU)

suggesting that acts of violence, as represented in *AU*, are instrumental and revolutionary because they aim at ending the colonial condition. Although Kawash at first stresses the instrumental nature of violence in *AU*, as she moves on to her analysis of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, she articulates an "order of violence" that is non-instrumental:

This violence of decolonization, a violence that destroys the colonial world to make way for a new humanity, *cannot be comprehended in terms of quantities of instrumental violence*. In relation to the instrumental violence whereby the colonized opposes the rule of the colonizer, *the violence of decolonization appears as another order of violence* altogether. (Kawash 1999, 237, emphasis mine)

She suggests these "two orders of violence" (instrumental and non-instrumental/absolute) do not refer to a qualitative distinction. Non-instrumental violence refers to a moment in which instrumental violence gains a transformative force, exceeding the reactive/instrumental violence of the colonized. She thus argues this transformative/absolute order of violence cannot be construed as instrumental insofar as it has the constructive role of decolonization (238). Kawash therefore identifies two orders of violence in Fanon's thought. The first she refers to as "instrumental violence", whereby the colonized opposes the rule of the colonizer. The second she refers to as "absolute violence" or "the violence of decolonization." This is transformative, excessive violence, which is absolute in the sense that it destroys the entire colonial structure (237). She underscores that this violence is "outside means and ends" (238).

Kawash clearly identifies two orders of anticolonial violence in Fanon's body of work: instrumental/reactive/destructive and non-instrumental/absolute/constructive. It is on this point that I disagree with Kawash. To claim that a certain form of violence is instrumental does not mean it is *not* capable of changing a social context. Such reasoning belongs to the Arendtian either/or framework, where violence, as instrumental, is incapable of change. Fanon, however, is explicit about the *simultaneously instrumental and constructive nature of anticolonial violence*. He writes: "the colonized man liberates himself in and through violence. This praxis enlightens the militant because it shows him the means and the end" (2004, 44). As Fanon suggests, this violence liberates (i.e. it is constructive) only because it shows the colonized "the means and the end" (i.e. it is instrumental).

Rather than identifying two orders of anticolonial violence in Fanon's work, as Kawash does, I suggest Fanon's treatment of anticolonial violence is strictly instrumental. Its instrumental character, however, has a liberating and/or constructive effect. The violence of anticolonial struggle as a means of national liberation liberates the colonized, and thus opens up the possibility

of transforming the colonial world into a decolonized one. Therefore, it is not the violence itself that is constructive but, rather, its effect – as a cleansing and disintoxicating force (Fanon 2004, 51).

Although Kawash claims to be closer to Fanon in her thinking, she strays into an Arendtian way of conceptualizing instrumentality. Just like Arendt, she maintains that instrumental violence cannot have a positive/constructive effect. In contrast, I consider the constructive aspect of violence through its instrumentality, i.e. its effect. This allows me to move beyond the Arendtian binary of instrumental/non-instrumental violence by way of concentrating on the question of temporality – between the instrumental and constructive aspects of anticolonial violence. Overall, I think the brilliance of Fanon’s frame of violence lies in opening a theoretical ground for conceptualizing various temporalities of violence; this cannot be done on the basis of either/or frameworks, such as Arendt’s, which construe causality in rather narrow terms.

Among scholars who write on Fanon’s conception of violence, Neil Roberts stands out for attaching an intrinsic value to violence. Roberts begins his essay “Fanon, Sartre, Violence and Freedom” by stressing the tendency in the Fanon scholarship to construe Fanon’s views on violence as instrumental. His argument intends to serve as a counter-attack to this tendency in the Fanon scholarship. Roberts sets another, related goal: distinguishing Fanon’s understanding of violence from Arendt’s. Hence, Roberts, echoing Arendt’s claims about Fanon, argues violence is *not* instrumental in Fanon, and also it differs from Arendt’s conception of violence. In doing so, Roberts delimits himself to two conceptions of violence – instrumental and intrinsic (2004, 144) – and sets himself up to choose one or the other. He thus writes:

Intrinsic violence, in contrast to instrumental violence, refers to a metaphysical concept in which the act of either random irrational or calculated rational violence itself contains inherent value. Intrinsic violence operates outside the means-ends continuum ... Intrinsic violence places positive value on a violent act irrespective of the outcome at a specific moment of implementation. (Roberts 2004, 146)

Roberts suggests intrinsic violence is valuable in itself; it does not refer to ends, since it is not construed as a means. I contend that when Roberts suggests violence has intrinsic value for Fanon, he oversteps Fanon’s claim by decontextualizing violence, as if violence for Fanon does not serve a specific end. Furthermore, Roberts’ argument conflates the intrinsic necessity of violence with the intrinsic value of violence. Roberts writes, “constructing violence as intrinsically necessary [is] to enact a new humanism” (2004, 149). However, arguing there is a necessity to use violence (as Fanon does) is different from arguing for an intrinsic value beyond instrumentality. Although



Roberts writes that his “claim is that a concept of intrinsic violence best explains the necessary use of violence in Fanonian political theory” (2004, 147), in developing his account, he is instead referring to what violence accomplishes:

Violence actualizes the realization of political independence and decolonization since it reveals the reality of capitalist/colonial violence, communicates effectively to the colonial oppressor, and clears the foundation on which a new order may be built. Lastly, violence creates a new humanity through building a national identity. (Roberts 2004, 149)

The above remarks by Roberts are an interpretation of Fanon's description of violence as a “cleansing force”, but according to Fanon, violence has this effect insofar as it is geared towards an end. Violence cleanses because people in struggle “realize that liberation was the achievement of each and every one” (Fanon 2004, 51). Fanon's positive configuration of violence is only possible in the context of anticolonial struggle; thus, it is always conceived in terms of its goal, i.e. national independence. Hence, to argue for a form of violence “outside the means-ends continuum” would be to miss Fanon's point. Let me clarify my objections to Roberts' assumptions and arguments: to argue that, for Fanon, violence is necessary: (1) does not require attaching an intrinsic value (ontological/existential value) to violence; and (2) to argue violence has a “cleansing force”, as Fanon does, does not entail placing it beyond instrumentality.

I contend that in juxtaposing Arendt and Fanon's conceptions of violence, Roberts goes too far in attributing an “intrinsic value” to Fanonian violence. To argue that, for Fanon, violence is intrinsically valuable not only misrepresents Fanon's views on violence, but also undermines the force of Fanon's argument, which asserts the necessity of violence *on the basis of* anticolonial struggle. In contrast to Roberts, who ascribes an intrinsic value to Fanon's anticolonial violence, I argue violence, for Fanon, is instrumental and its instrumentality has a constructive, positive effect, for it liberates the colonized individuals by showing them the possibility of changing the world where they suffer.

Armed anticolonial mobilization is the first necessary step for decolonization, motivated by a collective national consciousness, uniting a collective body of people through a national cause. But how can one be sure that this collective consciousness and national cause is free of the old structures and relations of European colonial exploitation? In the final passages of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon addresses this issue. In proposing a “new humanity”, he speaks of a new understanding of man, one that is not modelled on Europe (2004, 235). Fanon addresses the newly liberated



colonized of the Third World, as they are on the verge of creating themselves anew with the abolition of colonialism. According to him, for something new to be possible, the colonized have to *reconstitute* their identity. This time, they have to *cleanse themselves* of the violence that previously constituted their world. The stripping away of physical as well as epistemic violence, then, would be the necessary first step for this “new humanity” to emerge. This very point, however, cannot arise from Kawash and Roberts’ interpretations, because for both of them the violence of anticolonial struggle has a positive value in itself, i.e. not as a means and a condition of the possibility of a new society. Hence, I suggest their characterizations of Fanon’s thought prevent them from recognizing this insight about the conditions of possibility of Fanon’s “new humanity.”

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I suggest Arendt’s characterization of violence as instrumental has pushed some scholars to the position of treating Fanon’s account of violence as non-instrumental. In contradistinction to these critics, I argue Fanon’s framing of anticolonial violence is strictly instrumental, but not in the Arendtian sense. Fanon’s notion of instrumentality, in contrast to Arendt’s, implies violence can have a positive, constructive effect. I demonstrate that addressing the question of violence through the either/or framework of the instrumental/non-instrumental binary, as Arendt does, cannot capture the depth of Fanon’s theorization of violence.

Arendt, dismissing the violent colonial context that Fanon discusses, claims that, for Fanon, violence is justified on the ground of creativity. Arendt thus fails to acknowledge that Fanon’s call for violence does not attempt to create violence but, rather, aims to prevent the violence that is already present in the structure of the colonial society. In order to develop these points, I pose the difference between Arendt and Fanon by deploying Butler’s notions of “frame” and “affective responsiveness.” I further argue Fanon’s framing of violence is affectively responsive to the effects of colonial violence by way of its focus on the multidimensional character of violence – in particular, the temporal dimension of what violence does to the subjectivity of the person, as she relates to the past, present and future, while surrounded by a violent world. It is my contention that attending to such differences in how violence is framed can cultivate insights as to how one can make better sense of alternative responses to violence in the current global context, where violence is increasingly multidimensional and multifunctional.

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