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Atmospheric violence: Fanon and postcolonial subjectivity

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Abstract

Despite Fanon's recent popularity, his work on violence is portrayed as controversial, particularly regarding revolutionary violence. Revolutionary violence in anti-colonial movements is either glorified as a liberating force or vilified as terrorism. However, this portrayal misses one of the main contributions of Fanon's thought on violence, that is, violence cannot be separated into direct and structural, physical and epistemic, or revolutionary and colonial violence. I theorise what Fanon calls 'atmospheric violence' – violence that is, like the air, pervasive within the colonial system and its totality is reflected not only in the apparatus, structure, and meaning, but also in the felt, visceral, and embodied. In this sense, atmospheric violence cannot be compartmentalised but is layered, dynamic, and able, which is particularly useful in investigating the revolutionary violence of the colonised being. This paper theorises atmospheric violence through three points of engagement: first, atmospheric violence shows that colonial violence is violence of abjection rather than of social domination and subordination; second, atmospheric violence indicates that revolutionary violence reveals the complex relationship to agency and postcolonial subjectivity; third, atmospheric violence shows how revolutionary violence poses a potential for and a limitation to decolonisation due to its nature of non-compartmentalisation.

Keywords: Fanon; revolutionary violence; decolonisation; postcolonial IR; postcolonial subjectivity

Introduction

Frantz Fanon's work is increasingly popular with academics, as well as revolutionary practitioners on the ground. He attracts diverse readers with a theory of violence that is compelling, controversial, and complex in ways that, ultimately, as I show, resist a compartmentalised approach. His popularity is derived not only from his analysis of revolutionary movements from first-hand experiences but also from his rich and sophisticated theory of violence. Despite his popularity, however, his work is portrayed as controversial, particularly regarding revolutionary violence.[1] In part, this is

[1]Shatz 2023.

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due to the various understandings of violence in his work. For example, revolutionary violence in anti-colonial movements is either glorified as a liberating force or vilified as terrorism. Clearly, Fanon's revolutionary violence cannot be perceived as a discrete concept from violence embedded in colonialism. However, it cannot be underestimated as a procedural phenomenon in the liberation process. Yet, I do not aim to provide a 'correct' understanding of Fanon's violence. Instead, I seek to provide a fuller picture of his theory of violence that encompasses colonial and revolutionary violence, what he calls 'atmospheric violence.'[2]

In *The Wretched of the Earth (WE)*, Fanon examines instances of political violence embedded in European colonialism, which fomented decolonisation movements and brought about the political culture of postcolonial societies. For him, the violence pervasive in the colonial regime is not incidental but total, and it breaks out sporadically in direct forms of violence. Fanon calls it 'atmospheric violence,' that is, like the air, omnipresent and conveyed through various mechanisms into an outlet.[3] Atmospheres of violence not only permeate but also envelop the layers of violent elements that constitute them, appearing as the only way life might unfold and yet it may end life itself.[4] It suggests that colonial violence is embedded in the power relations that shape social, political, and cultural aspects of life in 'coloniality/modernity' through which the 'international' in the modern sense is created.[5]

In International Relations (IR), Fanon's theory of violence has been received mostly through postcolonial theories and critical race theories that engage with Fanon in understanding colonial violence embedded in the racial disposition of the constitution of the international system.[6] In particular, the postcolonial scholarship in IR has been intensely speaking with Fanon's work on violence in investigating the Eurocentric foundation of IR, which tends to emphasise colonial violence that shapes domination and subordination in the global system. While these engagements provide fruitful analyses in understanding coloniality inherent in the international order, they tend to focus on the structural dimension of violence, which fails to pay proper attention to revolutionary violence in Fanon's thought. This approach depends on the division between the direct and structural dimensions of violence, yet Fanon's investigation of violence lies in his reflection on the linkage between direct and structural violence.[7] In particular, his attention to atmospheric violence provides an analytical advantage to understand this linkage in revolutionary violence.

The concept of atmospheric violence, which has received less attention in IR, can illuminate the complicated relationship between direct and structural violence. The way that IR reads Fanon's violence makes a distinction between colonial violence and revolutionary violence. The former strips the oppressed, particularly the racial

[2]Fanon 2004, 31.

[3]Ibid. Fanon's concept of atmospheric violence receives new attention from studies of affective coloniality; see Aijazi 2024; DeBoom 2022; Stanley 2021; Sultana 2022. In particular, recent attention to the concept of atmosphere in affect studies, political geography, and philosophy provides rich resources. Theorists of atmosphere include Gernot Böhme (1993), Peter Sloterdijk (2005), and Ben Anderson (2009). I have found the work of Anderson particularly helpful in understanding the atmospheric quality of violence.

[4]Stanley 2021, 7, 16.

[5]Jabri 2014.

[6]Epstein 2014; Jabri 2013; 2014; 2017; Sabaratnam 2013; Shilliam 2016. Recent scholarship on violence employs Fanon's work as well: Blanchard 2023; Finlay 2017; Murray 2020; Van Milders and Toros 2020.

[7]Frazer and Hutchings 2008.

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minority, of their subjectivity. The latter may empower them with a sense of agency in the process of decolonisation.[8] However, atmospheric violence encompasses both aspects. It is pervasive in the colonial system, and its totality is reflected not only in the apparatus, structure, and meaning, but also in the felt, visceral, and embodied.[9] Like the air, atmospheric violence is the source of life under colonialism, even though that life entails suffering, beatings, and the possibility of being put to death. Yet, the features of atmosphere form dynamics in the totality of violence by 'forming and deforming, appearing and disappearing, as bodies enter into relations with one another.'[10] By doing so, it provides a potential of agentic experience being charged or discharged by the atmosphere of violence, yet this agentic quality of violence does not belong to the agent in her own right because she does not bring it about.[11] This depicts the potential and the limitations of revolutionary violence. Atmospheric violence in this sense cannot be compartmentalised but is layered, dynamic, and able, which is particularly useful in investigating the revolutionary violence of the colonised being.

The state of being under colonial oppression is a state without a proper status in the social system. It is closer to non-status, in which the colonised is not visible or even registered as an object. In the sense that atmospheric violence adds epistemic oppression to the concept of domination, it can be compared with Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic violence.[12] However, as I will show first in this paper, the colonised being cannot be perceived as in the oppressed position in the master–slave dialectic, as symbolic violence allows, rather it is abjected from the social and political order.[13] For the colonised, revolutionary violence appears as the only option to regain its subjectivity because of this. Yet, as I will show second, the abjected being may find an agentic experience in using revolutionary violence, but it cannot operate independently from other layers of atmospheric violence. Here, atmospheric violence shows how violence is embodied rather than being appropriated by the abject. Thus, abject violence does not necessarily result in reconstituting postcolonial subjectivity. Third, I look at the operation of revolutionary violence more closely. The mode of revolutionary violence is outside but not external to the colonial system, which makes it the necessary part of the internal outside. In this section, I explore the possibilities and limits of revolutionary violence that cannot work independently from the ensemble of atmospheric violence.

Theorising atmospheric violence contributes to the comprehensive picture of violence in which we have a better understanding of revolutionary violence that is crucial in resistance politics. Atmospheric violence emanates from the ensemble of layers of violence that manifest in physical, institutional, and epistemic violence. Through this, individual experience of violence can be singular, yet this singular experience cannot be compartmentalised from the collectivity of atmospheric violence. This understanding brings to light revolutionary violence's potential and limitations in relation to postcolonial subjectivity. Revolutionary violence provides agentic experience to the colonised, yet it does not constitute agency as in the rational

[8]Blanchard 2023; Van Milders and Toros 2020.
[9]Aijazi 2024, 6.
[10]Anderson 2009, 79.
[11]Ibid., 79.
[12]Cf. Brunner 2021.
[13]Agathangelou 2016; Shilliam 2016.

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actor model. This is because revolutionary violence cannot destroy the symbolic order of discourse that is embedded in the nation, modernity, and coloniality, which constitutes the very base of the rational actor. Rather, this agency is close to a mirage for it is charged or discharged by the dynamic of atmospheric violence, which envelops the ensemble of different layers of violence. This rethinking of revolutionary violence provides other pathways to understand postcolonial subjectivity, which may require delinking it from the conception of subjectivity in modernity/coloniality altogether.

In this paper, first, I show how the IR literature engages with Fanon's idea of violence. Particularly, postcolonialism in IR does not offer a proper understanding of his revolutionary violence. Second, I demonstrate that atmospheric violence is the violence of abjection by comparing it with Bourdieu's symbolic violence, showing that the social relationship of domination and subordination cannot apply to the colonial abjection of the colonised body. Third, I show how agency in the abject can be played out through direct violence. This approach raises the question about agency in revolutionary violence that reveals its complex relationship to abject being and postcolonial subjectivity. Lastly, I discuss the potential and limitations of revolutionary violence in decolonisation that are derived from its non-compartmentalised nature as a part of atmospheric violence.

Fanon in IR

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist, thinker, and revolutionary, and his work has broadly impacted postcolonialism, race theories, and violence theories. Broadly defined postcolonial approaches in IR explore Fanon's work by focusing on his analysis of colonial domination and the psychology of the colonised.[14] These approaches centre on Fanon's analysis of colonial violence that shapes the lived experiences of being in a black body, meaning that the colonised subject is unable to occupy the place of being recognised, normal, and reasonable.[15] Similarly, postcolonial scholars engage with Fanon to show that colonial domination has affected not only the subject position of the colonised but also the construction of the 'international' that can be governed, segregated, and zoned by imperial powers.[16] In a similar vein, more recent interest in the concept and practices of violence embedded in IR shows how colonial power shapes our understanding of international relations.[17] Among others, Fanon's analysis of colonial domination provides a way to understand the epistemic violence of colonial disciplinarity, which reproduces violent practices in IR.[18]

These approaches in IR provide a great advantage in understanding not only the Eurocentrism in international politics but also the ordering principles of international relations, which regenerate post/colonial structures of power and knowledge. However, these approaches remain vague or even eschew revolutionary violence in Fanon. It is a crucial omission in discussing Fanon's work in relation to violence in the postcolonial condition in IR, which leaves a gap in which Fanon's revolutionary violence can be conceived as a discrete concept from colonial violence,

[14]Agathangelou 2016; Epstein 2014; Jabri 2013; 2017; Murray 2020; Sabaratnam 2013; Shilliam 2016.
[15]Epstein 2014, 300, 307.
[16]Jabri 2014.
[17]Brunner 2021; Finlay 2017, Thomas 2011; Van Milders and Toros 2020; Wight 2019.
[18]Van Milders and Toros 2020, 122–3.

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meaning that it is inherently different from colonial violence. In Fanon's work, revolutionary violence is described as an inevitable force growing out of colonial oppression. According to Frazer and Hutchings, it is 'reactive violence' that is 'structurally present' in the colonial system.[19] It means that revolutionary violence is organically grown out of the system of violence; therefore, there is no clear-cut distinction. Yet, the division between colonial and revolutionary violence has been replicated by many authors, not to mention Jean-Paul Sartre.[20] In a similar fashion, Fanon has been portrayed either as a thinker who provides a poignant analysis of colonial violence that eats away the psychological power of the colonised subject or as a militant who ruthlessly argues that physical violence should be dominant in the battlefields of revolution. For sure, his theory and practice – his praxis – of revolutionary violence has been influential to movements all over the world, particularly to militant groups. The Black Panther Party leaders in America claimed to read and be inspired by Fanon, as did Che Guevara in Cuba, the international revolutionary movement leaders of the Quebec Liberation Front (FLQ), the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the 1960s.[21] And often, Fanon's notion of violence is understood, or misunderstood, as granting a justification for the use of violence by militant revolutionary groups.[22] However, Fanon's genius, or the uniqueness of his theory of violence, lies in the understanding that physical violence cannot really be separated from other forms of violence: institutional and epistemic forms of violence. Fanon's theory of violence is not just about the physical manifestation of violence but also about the violence that creates and demolishes the power disparity of domination and subordination, subject and object, and the self and the other.

The way that postcolonial IR engages with Fanon's works focuses on its structural violence embedded in colonial domination, yet it may underplay direct violence. This approach comes with the acknowledgement that colonial domination is not simply the physical domination of the colonised. Rather, it is primarily epistemic violence that enables the universal claim of Western epistemology by expelling the colonised subject as non-being.[23] This recognition necessarily requires paying close attention to the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave, which is the model of domination and subordination in politics. Epstein assesses that Fanon's contribution is to move the master–slave dialectic away from historical materialism, so that postcolonial analyses enable the 'appraisal of the psychic mechanisms of the postcolonial condition.'[24] In Fanon, psychoanalysis provides a way to understand colonial violence that affects the epistemic system as well as physical domination. By doing so, Fanon recognises the dialectic itself as a system of cognition that is entangled with violence.[25] This epistemic violence harms colonised people more than physical domination and exploitation: it forecloses the political possibility for the colonised subject. According to Agathangelou, the objectifying of the black body is the condition of epistemic violence in which the colonised subject is constituted as outside of the 'thinkability of

[19]Frazer and Hutchings 2008, 95.
[20]Sartre 2004. For a more recent example, see Blanchard 2023.
[21]Alexander 2016, 354–5.
[22]Blanchard 2023, 1059.
[23]Van Milders and Toros 2020, 123.
[24]Epstein 2014, 307.
[25]Agathangelou 2016, 111.

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politics.'[26] The physical colonial violence against the oppressed people serves a larger goal to establish the 'colonial difference' that becomes the 'constitutive ontology of the international,' which sustains the political ordering of modernity/coloniality.[27]

Yet, epistemic violence is also productive, as the psychic mechanism provides a place for the postcolonial agency in the discursive symbolic order.[28] This understanding provides a possibility of postcolonial subjectivity, which is an important stepping stone for resistance towards colonial violence. Vivienne Jabri, among others, explores this possibility of resistance by searching for postcolonial subjectivity. She argues that Fanon gives us a full picture of the colonial system, which operates through epistemic, institutional, and empirical violence.[29] For her, it is important to understand the 'corporeal imprint of colonial power and colonial violence,' which constitutes the racialised hierarchy in the postcolonial era.[30] Under these circumstances, the aim of resistance should not be to merely achieve national independence; rather, it should be a way to shift the epistemological frame of the colonial order, under which the colonised subject cannot hold full subjectivity. Jabri argues that resistance comes as the 'claim to politics.'[31] This 'claim' signifies a constitutive moment of the postcolonial subjectivity, but the moment of the claim to politics in fact means making a leap of impossibility because the epistemic violence of the colonial system dislocates the authorial voice of the colonised subject.[32] Therefore, Fanon, according to Jabri, finds this impossible possibility in the 'space of negativity' in which the colonised becomes the subject of politics in between the 'no-longer' and the 'not yet.'[33] Based on this, she argues that the postcolonial subject is aporetic to the international, which is always already postcolonial.[34]

What Jabri defines as 'aporia' is the constitutive moment of the postcolonial subject, which cannot be conceived positively. In this moment of leap or shift, the colonised subject enacts resistance. She argues, 'Resistance for Fanon is suggestive of the interjection of the embodied self in opposition to the colonizer.'[35] The 'interjection of the embodied self' seems to be a way that the colonised subject breaks away from the colonial ordering of significations by enacting its embodied agency, which she conceptualises through the 'materialist epistemology' that creates the 'uncapturable excess' in Fanon.[36] Jabri does not mention revolutionary violence per se, but she argues that Fanon sees this potentiality in the anti-colonial struggle that is not a 'nauseating mimicry' but an 'independence' that institutes 'something 'new,' a new vocabulary and a new ontology.'[37] Jabri demonstrates historical examples of this potentiality in anti-colonial struggles of Egypt and Iraq in which the 'founding moments' constitute postcolonial subjectivity.[38] And these moments of founding

[26]Ibid., 117.
[27]Sabaratnam 2013, 272.
[28]Cf. Epstein 2010.
[29]Jabri 2017.
[30]Ibid., 48–9.
[31]Jabri 2013.
[32]Ibid., 63.
[33]Ibid., 71.
[34]Jabri 2017, 53.
[35]Ibid., 49.
[36]Jabri 2013, 72.
[37]Ibid., 72; Jabri 2017, 49.
[38]Jabri 2013, 86.

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are not a single moment or event but a series of resistance movements and reactionary colonial violence on the streets.

Jabri tries to understand this moment of becoming through anti-colonial struggles, but still does not give us a clear idea about how revolutionary violence works in this aporetic space. Resistance is not simply about the moments of claim, founding, and declaration, but it is also about attacking, battering, and killing, according to Fanon's descriptions. When Fanon says in the first sentence of *WE*, 'decolonisation is always a violent event,' it is not a euphemism.[39] The decolonisation process starts once the colonised masses realise that naked force is the core of colonialism by putting 'his back to the wall, the knife at his throat, or to be more exact, the electrode on his genitals.'[40] And they believe that physical force is the only way to achieve their liberation[41]; therefore, the confrontation between the colonised and the colonist is plainly 'an armed struggle.'[42] Fanon makes sure to point out that the militant revolutionaries are personally responsible for the death of the victims, the colonists.[43] The question, then, is: How does revolutionary violence work in resistance and in what way? To be sure, Fanon does not pass any moral or ethical judgement on these violent actions. Instead, he points out that the brutal force of the colonist is what the colonised understands: 'Such a logic is no surprise to the other colonists, but it is important to point out that it is no surprise to the colonized either.'[44] It is neither to justify revolutionary violence nor to attribute it to the colonist violence. Rather, it describes how violence works in colonialism, which is, in the end, the system of violence. Admittedly, revolutionary violence mirrors colonial violence, and it provides an agentic potential for the colonised subject. However, much like the complexity of colonial violence, revolutionary violence is not simply an act of emancipation. Rather, it poses interesting and tricky questions about violence – and its potentiality to postcolonial subjectivity. I respond to these questions, which postcolonial IR falls short in answering, by theorising atmospheric violence.

Symbolic and atmospheric violence

When Fanon says – colonial violence is atmospheric[45] – he points at the complexity of violence that not only infuses power relations but also erupts in the form of physical violence. He mentions that colonial violence is a 'naked' form of atmospheric violence.[46] Yet, Fanon's articulation of atmospheric violence exceeds the common conception of colonial violence that only applies to the colonised. Atmospheric violence 'rippling under the skin'[47] pervades the very fabric of living, affecting not only the colonised but also the colonisers. The social relations of colonialism are defined by violence, which also constitutes the base structure of colonies and metropolitan countries. In this, politics consists of violence, which is released to

[39]Fanon 2004, 1.
[40]Ibid., 20.
[41]Ibid., 33.
[42]Ibid., 42.
[43]Ibid., 44.
[44]Ibid., 43.
[45]Ibid., 31.
[46]Ibid., 23
[47]Ibid., 31.

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other parts of the globe through capitalism, that is, global violence.[48] Admittedly, revolutionary violence is often suggested as a way to overcome the colonial system. However, in Fanon, revolutionary violence is, in fact, the opposite pole of colonial violence, yet from the 'mutual frame of mind,' even though it is often put on the ethical high ground.[49] When Fanon says that colonialist brutality 'does not morally upset' the colonial subject, it is because both positions are produced by the mutually shared frame of colonialism. In this similar frame of mind, violence is the only link through which both recognise, understand, and embody the 'nature of things' in which the colonial regime owes its legitimacy to force.[50] Thus, colonial violence and revolutionary violence resonate together. According to Fanon, 'the violence of the colonial regime and the counter violence of the colonised balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity.'[51]

If colonialism, as Fanon sees it, is a system of violence through and through, and if revolutionary violence is a reaction to the colonisers with their method of domination, the violence of the colonised *could* appear as therapeutic. Sartre's preface to *WE* offers this impression. According to Sartre, 'The colonized is cured of colonial neurosis by driving the colonist out by force. Once their rage explodes, they recover their lost coherence, they experience self-knowledge through reconstruction of themselves.'[52] Indeed, Fanon said, 'At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence.'[53] Admittedly, it may provide a vent for the repressed psychology of the individual, but it leaves deep psychic damage.[54] In Chapter 5 of *WE*, Fanon demonstrates how violence does not 'cure' but makes people sick by showing the cases of mental disorders among the colonised and the colonisers.[55] He uses the term 'mortgaged' to describe the future of these patients who are haunted by the debt of violence.[56] This malaise at the individual level comes back to the collective psyche as well. The postcolonial society of young independent nations may operate in the same 'atmosphere of a battleground' as in colonialism,[57] which becomes the ground to raise 'revolutionary terrorism' that resists both the colonial and the postcolonial state.[58]

Fanon's analysis of colonial violence that is not only physical but also psychological that shapes subjective experiences is recognised by postcolonial IR. It was Fanon's examination of the master–slave dialectic in which the relationship of domination and subordination expands beyond historical materialism to also shape ideational, psychological, and embodied dispositions.[59] In the sense that atmospheric

[48]Ibid., 37.
[49]Ibid., 43.
[50]Ibid., 42.
[51]Ibid., 46.
[52]Sartre 2004, lv.
[53]Fanon 2004, 51.
[54]Mbembe 2012, 21.
[55]Kuby 2015, 65.
[56]The original text of 'hypothéqué' is translated as 'compromised' in Fanon 2004, 184 (trans. Richard Philcox) but as 'mortgaged' in Fanon 2001, 203 (trans. Constance Farrington), as quoted in Frazer and Hutchings 2008, 98.
[57]Fanon 2004, 52.
[58]Hansen and Musa 2013, 282; Parashar 2018, 111.
[59]Epstein 2014, 307.

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violence adds the epistemic oppression to the master–slave dialectic, it can be compared to symbolic violence.[60] Symbolic violence is a concept coined by Pierre Bourdieu that refers to a phenomenon where the dominated incorporate the social order and hierarchical values through the consent into their mental structures or, in his terms, *habitus*.[61] The internalisation of the social order, even by people disadvantaged by it, is what Bourdieu calls the 'paradox of doxa.'[62] It is a 'form of domination that works through concealing itself from its agents, or, in Bourdieusian language, a form of domination that works through misrecognition.'[63] This form of domination is exerted not only through formal power but also symbolic force onto the subordinate subject, which has long-term effects as opposed to the political power, that is, symbolic violence.[64] It is similar to structural violence, but perhaps more insidious in that the subordinate subjects internalise social hierarchies as part of their value systems. This explains how power is 'imposed' on others in the symbolic realm.[65] Surely, it resonates with the epistemic violence of colonialism.

As is known, Bourdieu's intellectual trajectory has a lot in common with Fanon. Bourdieu and Fanon overlapped in Algeria during the period of struggle for its national liberation. In addition, it was their experiences in Algeria that were the foundations for their analyses on colonialism – that it is a system of domination held together by violence. Both focused on their impact on the consciousness of colonised subjects, which led to their emphases on the anti-colonial revolution as a way of liberation. Despite their overlapping interests, their contrast could not be starker: While Bourdieu primarily focused on class domination in the metropolis, Fanon focused on race domination in the colonies.[66] Consequently, symbolic violence is based on the experiences of the petit bourgeois in European societies and atmospheric violence on the colonised subject in Africa. Yet, the most fundamental differences come from their thinking about subject position.

In thinking of the relationship of domination, Bourdieu and Fanon have different points of departure. Bourdieu thinks that domination is the social and cultural structure of human relations 'not only as parents and children, but also as creditor and debtor, master and *khammes* [slave], only through the dispositions which the group inculcates in them and continuously reinforces, and which render *unthinkable* practices which would appear as legitimate and even be taken for granted in the disenchanted economy of "naked self-interest."'[67] For Bourdieu, the relationship of domination can only be reproduced when it is bound by personal relationships, and there are only two ways to get and keep a hold over people: overt (physical and economic) violence or symbolic violence.[68] Symbolic violence, 'the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety – in short, all the virtues honoured by the code of honour,'[69] may not be recognised as violence

[60]Cf. Brunner 2021, 202–3.
[61]Bourdieu and Passeron 1990.
[62]Smith 2007.
[63]Burawoy 2019, 2.
[64]Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, 1–69.
[65]Bohman 1999, 132.
[66]Burawoy 2019, 80; Von Holdt 2012, 116.
[67]Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, 197.
[68]Ibid., 195.
[69]Ibid., 196.

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but as social practices. Bourdieu gives a story of socialisation through the *habitus*, a 'set of dispositions and orientations that do not simply 'regulate' their actions, but define just who and what they are.'[70] In this way, the relationship of domination becomes the social system.

By adding the symbolic field to the master–slave dialectic, symbolic violence clearly shows the cultural, that is, non-material, dimension of domination, yet it remains in the binary of recognition and misrecognition within the social field. Bourdieu argues that the condition for the reproduction of domination is the 'collective misrecognition,' that is, a 'collective denial of the economic reality of exchange' between, for example, the peasant and his *khammes* [slave].[71] According to him,

> The peasant treats his *khammes* as an associate, because that is the custom and because honour requires him to do so, deceives himself as much as he deceives his *khammes*, since the only form in which the peasant can serve his interest is the euphemistic form presented by the ethic of honour; and nothing suits the *khammes* better than to play his part in an interested fiction which offers him an honourable representation of his condition.[72]

In this picture, the master and the slave in the relationship of domination play their parts in the economic field, and the euphemistic form of violence, symbolic violence, keeps the apparatus going. The misrecognition, or the collective conceit, that can be a form of symbolic violence, does not take away the social position of the slave. They are the part that makes the social order function. In this sense, the social position of the slave, even though it is deceived, exploited, and inculcated, remains a subject in the social field. Symbolic violence constitutes the social subjectivity of the slave.

However, the colonised subject in Fanon's analysis is not quite a subject, but an abject, who is not recognised nor visible in the field of socio-political registration. Julia Kristeva refers to the abject as a non-subject rather than a subordinate subject in the socio-political order. The abject resides totally outside of the subject and object's homologous relationship and is what is 'radically excluded and draws me [subject] towards the place where meaning collapses.'[73] In this sense, the colonised subject is a non-ontological being that is projected by the colonists. To understand this, we should look at Fanon's seminal work, *Black Skin, White Masks (BW)*. Here, he provides a psychological analysis of the black man that is constituted by the 'white gaze.'[74] There is no black man as an ontology, 'He must be black in relation to the white man.'[75] In this scheme, 'The image of one's body is solely negating. It's an image in the third person. All around the body reigns an atmosphere of certain uncertainty.'[76] According to Fanon, atmospheric violence does not constitute but *deconstructs* the subject, the being, or even the body. What is allowed to the black man is a mere 'physiological self' that is called out by the clamour on the street, 'Look! a

[70]Bohman 1999, 130.
[71]Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, 197.
[72]Ibid., 197.
[73]Kristeva 1982, 2.
[74]Fanon 2008, 90.
[75]Ibid., 90.
[76]Ibid., 91.

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Negro!'[77] Fanon captures the moment of psychological dissolution after being called a 'negro' in the streetcar.

> As a result, the body schema, attacked in several places, collapsed, giving way to *an epidermal racial schema*. In the train, it was a question of being aware of my body, no longer in the third person but in triple. In the train, instead of one seat, they left me two or three. I was no longer enjoying myself. I was unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world. I existed in triple: I was taking up room. I approached the Other…and *the Other, evasive, hostile, but not opaque, transparent and absent, vanished.* Nausea.[78]

If we take this as a portrait of psychological dissolution, Sartre's diagnosis that the colonised who suffer from colonial neurosis can be cured by driving the colonists out by force does not seem so easily achievable. In Freud, neurosis occurs when libido repressed in the state of unconscious is projected onto an object, which is the symptom.[79] In the chapter of *BW*, 'The Black Man and Psychopathology,' Fanon explains how the psychoanalysis of Freud is contradicted in the colonised society. By tracing the formation of black children's socialisation through the stories of children's books that are written by white men for white children, Fanon shows the process of self-alienation of the black man. It is because there is no psychology of the black man; only white psychology exists. As he puts it, 'The fact is that the Antillean has the same collective unconscious as the European.'[80] Therefore, 'it is normal for the Antillean to be a negrophobe.'[81] He proclaims, 'I'm a white man. Unconsciously, then, I distrust what is black in me, in other words, the totality of my being.'[82] It is because, unlike the white subject who can experience one's subjecthood by making the black as the Other, the black subject, although it is the converse of the white, does not have a symmetrical relationship to the white other. This means that the black subjecthood does not have the ontological ground to be experienced except through the 'second subjectification' of the white gaze.[83] However, this does not show that the black man is neurotic. Rather, there is a white man seeing his black body, and that is the symptom of neurosis precipitated by 'impulsive cultural imposition' of European colonialism.[84] The black body is a sign of a symptom, and his being is marked out. As Fanon said, 'Any ontology is made impossible in a colonized and acculturated society. Apparently, those who have written on the subject have not taken this sufficiently into consideration. In the weltanschauung of a colonised people, there is an impurity or a flaw that prohibits any ontological explanation.'[85]

The ontological impossibility of the black man reveals that colonial violence, that is, a naked form of atmospheric violence, does not create the Hegelian interdependence of the master and the slave or the ruler and the ruled, which can be political.

[77]Ibid.
[78]Ibid., 92 (emphasis mine).
[79]Freud 1922.
[80]Fanon 2008, 168.
[81]Ibid., 168.
[82]Ibid.
[83]Martel 2011, 202.
[84]Fanon 2008, 167.
[85]Ibid., 89–90.

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Rather, the domination through atmospheric violence is closer to the control found in the torturer and the tortured in *The Body in Pain.* In the analysis of Scarry on torture, the use of violence primarily aims for the total control of the body, leading to the dissolution of the subjectivity of the target and remaking her 'world' in which she is subject to the order of the torturer. As Scarry notes, 'Brutal, savage, and barbaric, torture (even if unconsciously) self-consciously and explicitly announces its own nature as an undoing of civilization, acts out the uncreating of the created contents of consciousness.'[86] In this sense, the violence of the torturer does not pursue physical pain but the breaking down of the world as she knows it through that pain. The pain does not aim to do physical harm but to break the subjectivity of herself that is only recognisable through meanings.[87] The meaninglessness of pain undoes the previous symbolic order in which she exists and reorders the world of the torturer as her own. If colonial violence is close to this, the colonised subject would live in the coloniser's world, in which violence is the only grammar of life. In this sense, revolutionary violence by the colonised subject is not an option among other options that they can choose. Rather, any option other than violence does not *appear* as an option at all because it is atmospheric, the air that they breathe. Fanon once said,

> No, the violence of the Algerian people is neither a hatred of peace nor a rejection of human relations, nor a conviction that only war can put an end to the colonial regime in Algeria. The Algerian people have chosen *the unique solution that was left to them* and this choice will hold firm for us.[88]

Agency in abject violence

Surely, revolutionary violence is portrayed as a necessary method in Fanon. He admits the necessity and the inevitability of the violent processes of decolonisation. It is not only an unavoidable process but also a critical step to untie the bondage of colonialism. For the colonised, 'violence represents the absolute praxis,'[89] which would give a sense of agency. However, is revolutionary violence enough to bring subjectivity back to the colonised? This question is closely related to Fanon's theory of violence. Fanon's revolutionary violence is often perceived as physical violence, but he points out other outlets of violence that are institutional, epistemic, and psychological.[90] Atmospheric violence with these layers should be understood as a construct of violence that has various modes of operation rather than as the combination of different types of violence. Therefore, these layers of violence can overlap and affect its operations in other layers. In this sense, revolutionary violence not only reflects the institutional, epistemic, and psychological violence of colonialism but also can affect the structural domain of colonial violence.

If violence is truly separable, then physical and direct violence could lead to the physical emancipation of the colonised subjects, at least by turning the tables. In other

[86]Scarry 1987, 38.

[87]Mbembe provides a similar description of colonial violence in Fanon. See Mbembe 2012, 21.

[88]Khalfa and Young 2019, 658 (emphasis mine).

[89]Fanon 2004, 44.

[90]Similarly, Achille Mbembe points out three dimensions of Fanon's violence as institutional, empirical, and linguistic; see Mbembe 2012, 22.

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words, if it consists of separate and discrete types of violence, a victory resulting from physical violence should lead to at least a decolonial moment of freedom from physical restraints of the colonised subject. However, even the physical freedom of the colonised subject may not arrive collectively. Rather, the division of postcolonial elites, who replace the white settlers, and the rest, who are subjected to the new rulers of the postcolonial states, makes foreign Africans, political enemies, the poor, and the general population available for violent labour on battlefields, in mineral mines, and other unregulated industries.[91] Fanon also did not expect that direct violence would ensure the emancipation of colonised subjects. Even if they could escape from the brutal colonial domination, he foresaw that the national bourgeoisie would be trapped in other layers of violence, which would lead to the decay of power and another version of tyranny and dominance.[92] The initial violence, which can be revolutionary violence, does not cure the malaise caused by the colonial system of violence in which other layers of violence, such as institutional, epistemic, and psychological violence, constitute the colonised subject outside of the realm of human, life, and possibility. Without undoing these violent layers, decolonisation would not be accomplished.

This does not mean that revolutionary violence is either futile or ineffective. Surely, it brings back a sense of agency. Under colonialism, any way to express natural indignation from suffering, pain, and repression was not permitted. The only way allowed was rituals. Fanon describes the exorcist rituals commonly observed in the communities of the colonised subject. In these rituals, the 'exorcism, liberation, and expression of a community are grandiosely and spontaneously played out through shaking of the head, and back and forward thrusts of the body.'[93] These aggressive body movements, along with intensive dance that come out as 'symbolic killings, figurative cavalcades, and imagined multiple murders,' are ways to calm their nerves during colonialism. But during the liberation struggle, the colonised subject finally deploys violence and his agenda for liberation from the colonisers, and the rituals finally stop.[94] The desire to kill their oppressors that was sublimated in ritual is achieved by revolutionary violence, and through that violence, the colonised subject may regain their agency.

Yet, this agency poses more complex questions for postcolonial subjectivity. According to postcolonial IR, postcolonial subjectivity cannot be constructed simply by the rational actor model or by the constructive model of agency. Both models are derived from the modes of articulation already embedded in the context of coloniality/modernity, which created in the first place the non-subject position of the colonised subject.[95] The subject position, generated by the discourse, provides a place of the subject within the social disposition as the I or We.[96] However, the I position of a black man in the social disposition of colonialism cannot be harmonised into the individuality and liberty, which is assumed in modern liberal political subjectivity. Rather as seen in *BW*, the black man's experience of subjectivity is only

[91]Hoffman 2011.
[92]See Mbembe 2012, 25–6.
[93]Fanon 2004, 20.
[94]Ibid., 20.
[95]Jabri 2014, 377.
[96]Epstein 2010, 343.

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achieved by an act of interpellation ('Look! A Negro!') as the black body.[97] Yet, it is not to take the place of the object position in the subject–object relationship like in the Hegelian dialectic. Rather, it is 'the constitutive duality of a black object, which has been made into a "fact."'[98] That is, it is made outside of that dialectic, but it is constitutive to the political realm in which social subjectivity can operate. The 'constitutive outside' is something that is expelled to constitute the inside, but not as the 'other' in the self-other relationship, but rather it is naturalised and petrified to be the condition of social positions. In other words, as I show in the previous section, the colonised subject is in a non-position of abject.

This is differentiated from the understanding of agency based on social identity in IR. The socially subordinated group can be situated within the structure–agent model of social order. The structure constructs social agents who occupy certain identities based on social dispositions. However, the idea of identity in constructivist IR presupposes 'the cohesive self' as an agent that carries out intentional actions based on self-understandings.[99] This notion of self, according to Epstein, uncritically borrowed from identity and social identity theory in psychology,[100] regards an agent as a natural and biological person prior to social construction. This naturalised agent is identified with a social category of memberships and roles, and thus agency becomes a socially empowered position. In this picture, the structure of hierarchy can create social and political differences. However, social differences among identities in social constructivism do not reflect the rift between the social subject and the abject.

Robbie Shilliam discusses how colonial structure is different from socio-political difference. In John Locke's liberal-colonial social system, Shilliam notes that Locke divides the colonial subjects into two: American natives and African slaves. By differentiating 'natives' and 'slaves,' according to Shilliam, Locke explains that natives could 'become incorporated into political society, there to learn through industriousness how to become good servants in the house of the pater familias.'[101] However, it depends on their merits so as to assimilate themselves into the political, moral, and spiritual order of the freeman. If they cannot achieve this, there is a risk of being abjected from the natural and political order. However, this possibility of redemption does not exist for 'slaves.' As Shilliam puts it, 'Negro slaves are already abjected from natural law' in the first place.[102] This colonial difference is not a difference between human beings: 'Negro slaves are not even human beings,' and this 'particular relation of being to non-being has no immanent potential for reconciliation.'[103]

In this sense, the agency of the abject is not something reasonably expectable or understandable in the colonial system. This agency comes in the shape of a shock, a break, and fear. For Western intellectuals such as Sartre, Fanon's revolutionary violence seems to give an answer to this irreconcilable gap between the abject and the subject. However, they do not provide a proper understanding of revolutionary violence. Violence in anti-colonial resistance emanates fear not because of its

[97]Martel 2011, 202.
[98]Agathangelou 2016, 115.
[99]Epstein 2010, 333.
[100]Ibid., 333–4.
[101]Shilliam 2016, 429.
[102]Ibid., 429.
[103]Ibid., 431.

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destructive power – colonial violence's destructive power does not bring the same terror to its audience – but because of its unintelligibility. Terrorism, the term that is strongly associated with the historicity of anti-colonial violence, brings its terrifying effects from this unintelligibility. Tellingly, suicide bombing has been the subject of inquiry to understand it with strategic rationalities.[104] According to Stephen Chan, the parallel of anti-colonial violence and suicide bombing is not an analogy but an analytic application.[105] If the colonial structure of society and economy is, according to Fanon, 'accidentally white,' then the agency of revolutionary violence does not need to be necessarily about blackness.[106] This question enables Chan to explore the question of revolutionary violence more broadly, from Fanon to suicide bombers.

Chan explores an idea of agency in the abject, the 'native.' To begin with, he rightly points out that Sartre provides two discontinuous pictures of the natives: one as fury, mad, and fanatic, and the other as an actor of revenge enacting violence. These pictures of the natives depict them either as victims without agency or as unintelligible actors that are the pure vengeful embodiment of violence. By doing so, Sartre leaves out the 'act of thought' that connects the two.[107] Instead, Chan provides a way to understand how the abject arrives at a position of agency, but it cannot be revealed in a plainly rational way.[108] Chan provides a path to understand the move from madness to violence through 'disproportionate subjectivity.'[109] Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's discussion, he shows that a subject position is, in fact, a mixed cocktail of disproportionate positions or an 'ontology of disproportion.'[110] The disproportionate positions 'inflect not history as history (certain things happened at a certain time), but history as it is narrated, that is, history itself becomes a form of literature, infused with the disproportion of the narrator and the metaphors he or she must use.'[111] Out of this, the 'natives' or suicide bombers follow texts, reasons, narratives, and their sense of an inward disproportion, but this process of infusion is also exposed to the 'outward-lookingness of disproportion,' which prompts them to contemplate an act of violence 'thoughtfully, textually, coolly, before slaughter is caused in a final moment of calm lucidity.'[112] It provides '"cool frenzy," "reflective madness," and "reflection" in its "sane" and measured, externally conscious, mode.'[113] Therefore, suicide bombers may not be understood through rational agency in its explosion of the self, but, according to Chan, she enacts agency that resides in the disproportionate subjectivity.

Surely, Chan provides a more accurate reading of Fanon than Sartre. Yet, his theorisation does not get us far beyond the death of suicide bombers. What happens after the action? What does the violence do? What is the meaning of this revolutionary violence? The violence of suicide bombing is not only a destructive but also a productive force to form the possibility of embodied agency in abject beyond the

[104]Hoffman 2003; Pape 2005.
[105]Chan 2007.
[106]Fanon 1986, 202, quoted in ibid., 156.
[107]Chan 2007, 154.
[108]Ibid., 160.
[109]Ibid., 162.
[110]Ibid., 160.
[111]Ibid.
[112]Ibid., 161.
[113]Ibid., 163.

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control of bodily motion. The sacrifice in this context 'refers to the formation of the self through the exclusion of the bodily aspects of the abject.'[114] The body in abject, according to Fanon, is made ontologically impossible.[115] Exploring the lived experience of the black man, Fanon explains how the colonised cannot just ontologically exist. 'Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man,' whose lived experiences are ignored and whose 'metaphysics, or less pretentiously their customs and agencies to which they refer, were abolished.'[116] In this sense, the body is not ontologically premade or prior to the social, cultural, and, here, colonial law. Rather, the norms of the body's integrity, boundary, and sovereignty are governed by the colonial structure. Thus, when a suicide bombing detonates the abject body, it does not just destruct the integrity of the body but also obliterates the colonial sovereignty undergirding the absolute security of the body's integrity. As destabilising the static sovereign body, it shifts our focus onto 'the processes and practices by which the boundary and identity of the sovereign body are contested and potentially transformed.'[117] By doing so, it shows that the integrity of the social and political order that sovereignty attempts is impossible.[118] The bodies of the abject that are dying through suicide bombing, hunger strike, or self-immolation, embody (non-subject) agency that makes meanings in the body politic. In other words, by exploding one's body, it creates a discursive position to 'talk back' to the order, the authority, and the power that produces the division of subject and abject.[119] Abject violence, therefore, exerts embodied agency from a discursive position but without a place of subject position.

By practising violence – absolute praxis – the colonised achieves the sense of agency, often through self-sacrifice, but it is not enough to reconstruct postcolonial or decolonial subjectivity. Abject violence under multi-layered colonial violence initiates the shock that destabilises the social and political order that is operated through that violence. In this circumstance, the discursive position achieved out of physical violence can still be trapped in the other layers of violence that frame social discourse. During the anti-colonial struggle, the practices of abject violence are often narrated through the frame of national independence, nationalism, and sovereignty of the newly created national and ethnic self. It is paradoxical, for example, that female suicide bombers are praised as mothers of the nation so that 'women's political agency is recognised yet only through gendered and heterosexual narratives.'[120] Similarly, abject violence in anti-colonial revolutions is captured by the nationalist framework of actors that resonates with the colonial ordering of the international. In this sense, revolutionary violence brings ambiguous consequences in the reconstitution of subjectivity. On the one hand, abject violence poses a fundamental threat to the sovereign order that operates under the division, demarcation, and borders between inside and outside, Self and Other, and subject and abject. On the other hand, its mode of operation is not free from the modernity/coloniality in which national sovereignty is expanded to former colonies, but the system of colonial

[114]Wilcox 2015, 82.
[115]Fanon 2008, 89.
[116]Ibid., 90.
[117]Fierke 2013, 82.
[118]Wilcox 2015, 89.
[119]Fujii 2021.
[120]Wilcox 2015, 102.

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violence remains in the name of state violence and international interventions. Therefore, the postcolonial or decolonial subjectivity only emerges from the deconstruction of the sovereign order, which cannot be immediately achieved by revolutionary violence. This process requires challenging the boundaries of identity, subjectivity, and agency.[121] I discuss the potential and limitations of revolutionary violence more closely in the next section.

Atmospheric violence in the dying world

The 'politics' of violence in Fanon resonate with Achille Mbembe's necropolitics.[122] Mbembe questions the practicality of Foucault's idea of biopower – the right to kill or to allow to live, arguing that biopower does not reveal clearly the sovereign power's relations to death. For example, in the plantation, the relations between life and death are blurred, which reflects the particularity of colonial occupation. The spatiality of colonial occupation reverses the geographical imagination of the modern state. The boundary between internal and external spaces cuts across the occupation territory, and internal frontiers are established for internal others who do not constitute the legitimate enemy. The distinction between combatant and non-combatant or between enemy and criminal does not apply to these people, or 'savages.' In other words, they do not constitute subjects. They do not belong to the subject–object relationship, which implies the possibility of confrontation, war, and politics. Rather, they are abject, nature, and the field of destruction from above. The biopower, to manage and control the population, is not sufficient to explore total destruction in which the distinction between the means and the ends of wars collapses. Necropolitics does not see the distinction between war and politics. Rather, it is war through and through, or rather, killing itself. Mbembe explicates how necropolitics connects the colonial occupation in the plantation, the apartheid regime, and Palestine to contemporary military operations.[123] The colonial powers do not aim to occupy the territory to rule but to destroy and leave. Mbembe distinguishes necropolitics from Foucault's biopolitics or Giorgio Agamben's idea of the camp[124] in this sense. Unlike these concepts, necropolitics shows that the instrumentalisation of the destruction of human existence constitutes the nomos of the political space that we still live in.

Violence in necropolitics, therefore, is not an aberration. Rather, it is the way of doing things, the institution, and the law enforcement. It is, again, atmospheric. It disappears because there is no trace; As Butler said, 'Violence against those who are already not quite living, this is, living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark.'[125] Violence cannot be recognised for what it is in the necropolitics of military occupations, colonial regimes, and plantations. Butler points out the nameless deaths of Afghan people in the counter terrorist operations during the last two decades, as opposed to the glorified, public, and celebrated public grieving

[121]Shilliam 2014, 365–6.

[122]Mbembe 2003.

[123]Ibid., 26–7.

[124]Although Agamben also says that the camp as the state of exception comes to 'be confused with juridical rule itself,' the camp is a space of exception, but it is not simply an external space. 'What is excluded in the camp is … included through its own exclusion. But, above all, the state of exception is itself taken into the juridical order.' Agamben 1997, 108–9.

[125]Butler 2004, 36.

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of the 'sacrifice' of U.S. citizens who were killed during the wars. Butler urges us to think 'how this differential allocation of grief serves the derealising aims of military violence.'[126] Necropolitics reveals how physical and direct violence is imbricated within atmospheric violence, which, in turn, 'derealises' the brutality of sheer violence.

Fanon would find himself, along with other colonised subjects, in the necropolitical space. It is outside of the normal juridical space, but it is constitutive of the inside. In IR, the anarchical space outside of the sovereign states is contemplated as a space of conflict, blood, and violence, but the production of this anarchical space is 'central to recognition for the sovereignty of the state and the sovereignty of the human, whereas the recognition of the black and colonised subject seems impossible in a colonised society.'[127] Violence in conflict zones is outside but not external to the system of sovereignty. Rather, it is the condition of the transformation, advancement, and revolution of the machinery of sovereign power. As a reciprocal opposition to sovereign power, violence becomes the necessary machinery of the postcolonial states. This machinery, what Hoffman calls 'war machines,' drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept, takes place outside the state but is constitutive to the condition of sovereign power.[128] War machines resist the state – the hierarchical mode of organising power – where they invent concepts, experiments, and unexpected relations. Yet, this resistance against sovereign power, even if it is successful, does not necessarily bring a more liberated condition from violence. For example, the war machines in West Africa that generate armed conflicts circulate violent labour in battlefields and mines, consuming both the state and the people from the inside out.[129] In this sense, war machines are the mode of subversive violence in war zones, non-states, and colonised spaces, but this subversive violence does not necessarily lead to a better picture, far less a solution.

The notion of war machines illuminates how Fanon's revolutionary violence works in contemporary politics. Before it is captured in state politics, which reorient it to become institutional, programmatic, and exercised in the service of national politics, revolutionary violence poses a resistance to the state, the apparatus of sovereignty, and the modern/colonial ordering. Revolutionary violence as outside forces of the state provides a way to destabilise the modern/colonial orderings of state power. 'The war machine's "revolution," that 'deterritorialises without reterritorialisation,'[130] may cut across the orderings of borders, colonial hierarchy, and compartmentalisation of bodies without instituting another ordering. In this regard, Fanon's revolutionary violence, according to Agathangelou,

> is aimed less at slaughtering the settler, more at obliterating the political order of colonialism itself. His primary targets are the pure rules of Aristotelian logic, Manichaeism, compartmentalisation, and mutilation of humanity; the colonial world, that is to say, the "world divided into compartments," which "can only be called into question by absolute violence.'[131]

[126]Ibid., 37.
[127]Agathangelou 2016, 117.
[128]Hoffman 2011, 7.
[129]Ibid.
[130]Ibid., 15.
[131]Agathangelou 2016, 119; Fanon, 1961, 37.

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Yet, the role of revolutionary violence that calls the colonial ordering into question cannot be separated from its connection to the atmosphere of violence in which revolutionary violence works in resonance with other layers of colonial violence. Undeniably, revolutionary violence may disrupt the climate of colonialism and destabilise its ordering. And it creates a dynamic in the atmosphere, perhaps leading to a different local weather in which the heaviness of coloniality is temporarily cleared with revolutionary potentiality.[132] However, this instability is still working within the atmospheric violence. According to Fanon, the idea that a single move may lead to absolute sovereignty is a 'mirage sustained by his [the colonised] unmediated physical strength' in acting upon revolutionary violence.[133] It is a mirage because the colonised may be charged with a sense of agency, although they may be just a conduit of atmospheric violence that still envelops the colonial epistemology. Therefore, if they stay in this mirage or imagination, Fanon says, 'They achieved no real progress along the road to knowledge. His consciousness remained rudimentary.'[134] The rudimentary consciousness that is the 'virtually pathological dreamlike state where the sight of the other induces vertigo, where my blood calls for the blood of the other'[135] in fact belongs to the colonial/modern epistemology.

Revolutionary violence often promises the initiation of a new system, but its operation and its consequences cannot stand independently from other layers of atmospheric violence in colonialism. In this sense, revolutionary violence does not provide a clean slate from the colonial system of violence. Nevertheless, revolutionary violence is not futile. Fanon argues that at least it makes them realise 'multiple realities' in which the colonial Manichaeism loses its power.[136] This realisation is perhaps what revolutionary violence provides to the colonised. According to Fanon, 'Violence alone, …, provides the key for the masses to decipher social reality.'[137] Here, violence brings to light multiple political and international realities that the colonised should navigate through in the process of decolonisation. However, this process does not spare anyone from the pains and harms this violence may cause. Rather, it only shows that revolutionary violence does not have any unambiguous relationships to agency, subjectivity, and liberation. Violence may reveal multiple realities behind the scenes, yet it does not determine which reality will be dominant. Thus, revolutionary violence always remains undecided, which can become reactionary sovereign violence of the postcolonial state or a deconstructive force of the people to dismantle the politics of death. However, whichever direction it is reoriented towards would not be put into place without activating other layers of atmospheric violence.

Conclusion

In theorising atmospheric violence in Fanon, this paper shows how different layers of violence resonate with each other, in which revolutionary violence and colonial violence are interrelated. This interrelation, however, is not just through different

[132]DeBoom 2022, 3.
[133]Fanon 2004, 88.
[134]Ibid., 88.
[135]Ibid., 89.
[136]Ibid., 93.
[137]Ibid., 96.

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categories of violence but through the enveloping medium of atmosphere. This aspect of atmospheric violence particularly illuminates the lived experience of colonial violence, which differentiates it from symbolic violence. While symbolic violence and atmospheric violence both demonstrate epistemic violence of domination, unlike symbolic violence, atmospheric violence expels the colonised from the social order itself to the de-position of being abject. Thus, symbolic violence is invisible and naturalised, but atmospheric violence is palpable and experiential.[138] As the colonised – the abject – is foreclosed from any possibilities of social challenge, revolutionary violence may appear as the only viable option to regain agency. Surely, it may not be denied that revolutionary violence provides agentic experience to the colonised by disrupting and destabilising the orders of sovereignty. However, revolutionary violence does not provide the agency as the rational actor model promises because it cannot destroy the symbolic order of discourse that is embedded in the nation, modernity, and coloniality, which constitutes the very base of the rational actor. This agency is a mirage that is charged or discharged by the dynamic of atmospheric violence, which envelops the ensemble of different layers of violence. Revolutionary violence demonstrates a limited ability to reconstitute postcolonial subjectivity, which requires the postcolonial orderings of power and global politics. Revolutionary violence in this sense may provide a shock to the colonial system, but it still operates with other layers of atmospheric violence, which often leads to a shift but not necessarily a liberation from the colonial epistemology.

Revolutionary violence may not always mean direct and physical violence, and yet, under the circumstances of the colonised with the lack of mediated tools such as institutions or social relations, violence to revolutionise the structure usually means direct and physical forms of violence. However, its physical form does not make it simple. The status of revolutionary violence in the analysis of colonial violence – either as its reflection or its consequence – hampers us to clearly see both its power and its limits. Therefore, this unclear view makes us either hopeful or dismiss its usage in the process of decolonisation. Revolutionary violence provides an opening of the colonial system, as Fanon mentions that it deciphers social reality, yet this opening is not necessarily for something new. This opening can be co-opted and used for the system's innovation and continuation, as seen in the case of 'war machines.'[139] By the same token, the agentic experience of using revolutionary violence does not constitute the subject position of the colonised, not only because they are the conduit of atmospheric violence, but also because the postcolonial subjectivity would not be the mere replacement of the colonial subjectivity. Atmospheric violence provides a way to understand agency not through the actor's sovereign power but through affective experience. This way, the imbricated layers of colonial violence can be not just different categories but appearing and disappearing climates of atmospheric violence.

Atmospheric violence is particularly valuable in conceptualising how direct violence plays out in relation to resistant politics. Fanon's work on violence shows the unique moment of intersection between theory and practice. This is one of the primary reasons why Fanon reverberates in current politics. His idea of violence shows the quality of embodied knowledge, which one cannot easily acquire without lived experiences. Yet, for this reason, it is complex, rich, and immersed with

[138]Von Holdt, 2012.
[139]Hoffman, 2011.

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meanings, even though it may appear clear, straightforward, and even simple due to its powerful language. However, what I find helpful is to understand that, for Fanon, decolonisation is not only a historical process but also a process of building a new consciousness. As he notes, decolonisation is not to replace the ruling class of European colonists. Rather, it is about building a new world filled with a different air, that is, to 'invent a man in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving.'[140] In the end, Fanon's ideas were for changing human lives, and in this sense, there may not be a 'wrong' interpretation. However, there can be more useful or more helpful interpretations depending on the aims of these interpretive works. As a profound insight, Fanon's theory of violence should be read and reread in relation to our political experiences.

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