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Violence and Care: Fanon and the Ethics of Care on Harm, Trauma, and Repair

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Abstract: According to Frantz Fanon, the psychological and social-political are deeply intertwined in the colonial context. Psychologically, the colonizers perceive the colonized as inferior and the colonized internalize this in an inferiority complex. This psychological reality is co-constitutive of and by material relations of power—the imaginary of inferiority both creates and is created by colonial relations of power. It is also in this context that violence takes on significant political import: violence deployed by the colonized to rebel against these colonial relations and enact a different world will also be violent in its fundamental disruption of this imaginary. The ethics of care, on the other hand, does not seem to sit well with violence, and thus Fanon's political theory more generally. Care ethics is concerned with everything we do to maintain and repair our worlds as well as reasonably possible. Violence, which ruptures our psycho-affective, material, and social-political realities, seems antithetical to this task. This article seeks to reconsider this apparent antinomy between violence and care via a dialogue between Fanon and the ethics of care. In so doing, this article mobilizes a relational conceptualization of violence that allows for the possibility that certain violences may, in fact, be justifiable from a care ethics perspective. At the same time, I contend that violence in any form will also eventually demand a caring response. Ultimately, this productive reading of Fanon's political theory and the ethics of care encourages both postcolonial philosophers and care ethicists alike to examine critically the relation between violence and care, and the ways in which we cannot a priori draw lines between the two.

Keywords: care ethics; Fanon; colonialism; violence; care; harm; relationality

1. Introduction

Frantz Fanon is an important figure in contemporary post-colonial political thought and Black Atlantic theory, known for his theoretical reflections on and participation in anti-colonial liberation struggles (perhaps most notably, the Algerian revolutionary struggle in the 1950s). Fanon's political theory [1–3] is structured by two recurring themes. First, for Fanon, the psycho-affective realm and the social-political are deeply intertwined in the colonial context. Psychologically, the colonizers perceive the colonized as inferior, while the colonized internalize this in an inferiority complex. This psychological reality is co-constitutive of and by material relations of power—the imaginary of inferiority both creates and is created by colonial relations of power. It is also in this context that violence takes on significant political import: violence deployed by the colonized to rebel against these colonial relations and enact a different world will be violent in its fundamental disruption of this imaginary. Violence, therefore, is a second key theme in Fanon's work. Violence runs through the colonial project, the psyches of both colonizers and colonized, and if properly directed, violence has the potential to liberate colonized subjects from their chains.

At first glance, the ethics of care does not seem to sit well with violence, and thus Fanon's political theory more generally. Care ethics is concerned with everything we do to maintain and repair ourselves and our worlds as well as reasonably possible [4]. Violence, which ruptures our psycho-affective, material, and social-political realities, seems

antithetical to this task. This article seeks to reconsider this apparent antinomy between violence and care. Specifically, via a dialogue between Fanon's political theory and the ethics of care, this article mobilizes a relational conceptualization of violence that allows for the possibility that certain forms or instances of violence may, in fact, be justifiable from a care ethics perspective. At the same time, I also contend that violence in any form will eventually demand a response of care. In this way, violence and care, I suggest, are not necessarily diametrically opposed. Instead, certain violences may be necessary for (or at the least, not always and already incompatible with) establishing care (relations and practices that allow us to live well). And, certainly, I assert, the aftermath of violence will always demand care.

In demonstrating these lines of connection between/across violence and care, I also lay groundwork for a continued dialogue between Fanon's political theory and a critical and political ethics of care. Fanon's political theory, concerned with undoing the oppressive and dominating relations that produce and sustain colonialism, has much to offer care ethicists who also seek to "undo the world as it is" [5]. The focus on violence—and how violence operates in and across different registers—can provide strategic vantage points for thinking through when, where, and in what ways the care ethics project of building a more caring world may enact or even require violence. At the same time, a care ethics lens amends Fanon's political theory, as it foregrounds the fact that even if violence is justifiable when it is directed at the destruction of unequal relations of power, violence never leaves anyone unmarked. As a result, I argue that a care-oriented intervention will always eventually be needed to interrupt cycles of violence and tend to the trauma and harm that arise in its wake. More simply, my hope is that this productive reading of Fanon's political theory and the ethics of care encourages both postcolonial philosophers and care ethicists alike to examine critically the relation between violence and care, and the ways in which we cannot a priori draw lines between the two. Neither violence nor care can be meaningfully understood, defined, or even critiqued when abstracted from context and the experiences of those living in and enacting it.

To make this argument, this article proceeds as follows. First, I review in detail Fanon's political theory, focusing on the two themes noted above: the intimate relation between the social-political and the psycho-affective realms, and violence. Following Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings [6], I argue that these two themes together allow Fanon to assert violence as both a doing (an instrumental tool that can be wielded towards anti-colonial ends) and a being (a unique libidinal energy that profoundly shapes the colonial subject). As Fanon argues, when the being and doing of violence are productively directed, they hold the potential to undo colonial relations and decolonize the mind. Next, I turn to a brief discussion of Fanon's final substantive chapter in *The Wretched of the Earth* [2], where Fanon presents several cases of mental disorders that have arisen in liberatory war. Here, I argue, Fanon undermines much of his claims about the liberatory potential of violence: in contrast, those who have enacted violence are presented as traumatized and deeply harmed. Violence does not, in the end, seem to deliver on the promise of fostering the conditions under which liberated persons can create themselves anew. To help address this dissonance in Fanon's theory, I introduce a critical and political ethics of care, and argue that the relational social ontology and normative trajectory of care provide a theoretical vantage point from which to rethink violence along relational lines. Through such a rethinking, I maintain space for Fanon's claims about the liberating possibilities of violence by demonstrating that violence cannot be abstractly pre-defined or determined (see also [7]); by extension, violence cannot abstractly be deemed always and already unjustifiable. At the same time, however, I also contend that even when justifiable, one cannot end with violence—a caring response is inevitably required. Care, I conclude, can respond directly to violence and help move us from trauma and toward repair and the reconstructive task of building worlds anew.

2. Fanon's Political Theory in Two Themes

2.1. Theme I: The Social-Political and the Psycho-Affective Realms

As just noted, two interrelated themes weave together Frantz Fanon's political theory as presented in *Black Skin, White Masks* [3], *The Wretched of the Earth* [2], and *A Dying Colonialism* [1] [1]. First, Fanon's analysis of the colonial condition demonstrates repeatedly that individuals' psychological infrastructure and the social-political sphere—particularly the social-political structures of colonialism—are intimately and inescapably intertwined. Colonialism, as Fanon illustrates, is a project that marks all parts of the human person, and neither colonizer nor colonized is untouched. Second, the key to understanding and ultimately liberating all from the colonial relation is violence. The violence of colonial relations, the internalization of this violence, and the immanent productive capacities of this violence run through the contours of colonialism's totalizing project—and perhaps its end.

To trace these themes, which are central to this article's broader argument which seeks to foster a meaningful dialogue between a critical and political ethics of care and Fanon's political theory, it is most fruitful to begin with a brief presentation of *Black Skin, White Masks* [3]. As Fanon [3] (p. xvi) writes, the thesis of his first book is that colonialism and the corresponding "juxtaposition of the black and white races has resulted in a massive psycho-existential complex":

> *The white man is locked in his whiteness.*
>
> *The black man in his blackness.*
>
> *We shall endeavour to determine the tendencies of this double narcissism and the motivations behind it.*

Specifically, Fanon argues that the colonial relation and anti-Black racism fundamentally structures the social-political *and* internal psycho-affective landscapes of all those involved. On the one hand, the very notion of 'black people' and 'white people,' and the hierarchy between them, is a consequence of colonial relations of power, as Fanon attests repeatedly throughout the text [2]. Further, Fanon argues that the psychological outcome of this reproduction of a hierarchy of black and white is an internalized superiority complex by the colonizers and a corresponding internalized inferiority complex by the colonized. The integral relation between these 'psycho-existential complexes' and the colonial context are perhaps no better illustrated than in the first substantive chapter of the text, in which Fanon [3] (pp. 2–3) discusses the relationship between colonialism, racism, and language:

> *The problem we shall tackle in this chapter is as follows: the more the Black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets—i.e., the closer he comes to becoming a true human being. [...] A man who possesses a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language.*
>
> *All colonized people—in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave—position themselves in relation to the civilizing language: i.e., the metropolitan culture. The more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush. The more he rejects the bush, the whiter he will become.*

In this passage, one can see Fanon's argument clearly: language is a key part of world-making and world-sustaining. In a world shaped by colonial relations—by a racist hierarchy of colonizers versus colonized—to participate in the world-making practices of the language of the colonizers is to sustain and reproduce these relations. Subsequently, colonized peoples who adopt the language of the colonizers sustain and reproduce their own oppression. For the Black Antillean, speaking the French language is to "reflect the very structures of your alienation in everything from vocabulary to syntax to intonation" [8] (np). Furthermore, this type of reproduction of the colonial world by the colonized plays out, psychologically, in complex ways for both colonized and colonizer. For instance, as

Fanon notes [3] (pp. 18–9), when the Black Antillean speaks the French of France, he is met by the colonizer with surprise:

> *The fact is that the European has a set idea of the black man, and there is nothing more exasperating than to hear: 'How long have you lived in France? You speak such good French?'* [. . .] *There is nothing more sensational than a black man speaking correctly, for he is appropriating the white world.*

This brief passage is telling. The fact that the European is 'surprised' to hear such 'good French' reveals their superiority complex: in a colonial world, they have internalized their superiority, and language is one of the markers of this superiority. To hear, then, "a black man speaking correctly" is surprising in that it ruptures this psychic structuring principle (itself co-constituted by the colonial social-political context) of superiority. Simultaneously, the exasperation experienced by the black man upon encountering this surprise is tied to the ways in which the exchange foregrounds his 'inferiority'. "To speak a language is to appropriate its world and culture" [3] (p. 21). When one encounters surprise at the sheer fact that one *could* appropriate a world and culture that is demarcated as superior to one's own, one is reminded of said demarcation, of the reality that *within such a system, one is constructed and positioned as inferior.*

This theme recurs time and time again through *Black Skin, White Masks* [3], as Fanon demonstrates how the colonial division of superior/inferior is "embodied in desire and discontent, in neurosis" [6] (p. 95). The colonial context both traps the black man as a slave to his 'inferiority,' and the white man as a slave to his 'superiority' (both of which are, of course, constituted in and by colonial relations of power), and this can be evidenced by neurotic behaviours in both.

> *The problem of colonization, therefore, comprises not only the intersection of historical and objective conditions but also man's attitudes toward these conditions.*
>
> [3] (p. 65)

The problem of colonialism involves, more precisely, ongoing attempts "to decipher the changing scale (measure, judgment) of a problem, event, identity, or action as it comes to be represented or framed in the shifting ratios and relations that exist between the realms of political and psycho-affective experience" [9] (p. xxxvii). Colonialism can only be assessed, and the behaviours of both colonizers and colonized can only be grasped, by foregrounding the ways in which the social-political realm and the psycho-affective realm are inextricably intertwined [3].

2.2. Theme II: Violence

With the interrelation of social-political and psycho-affective colonialism established, Fanon's well-known focus on violence, the second theme explored here, can be contextualized. Violence, in Fanon's work, operates from, in, and across a multitude of interconnected registers. First, there is the physical violence of the colonial relation. As Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth* [2] (p. 23), "colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence". This violence, largely rooted in physical harm, i.e., "the infliction of physical injury and damage without benefit to the victim" [7] (p. 112), is key to the production and reproduction of the colonial relation, and thus the social-political colonial world. It is also directly implicated in a 'second' violence—the violent reordering of the psycho-affective realm that results in and from colonialism. The relation between these first two registers of violence brings us back to the theme just discussed. "The initial move, colonialism, inserts violence into the world" [6] (p. 95); this violence, and the social-political order it founds, reorganizes the psyches of both colonizer and colonized (albeit in different ways). This reorganization constitutes its own violence, especially for the colonized who experience the trauma of internalized inferiority complexes. The linking of these two violences, then, is a crucial pin that ties together Fanon's reflections in *Black Skin, White Masks* [3] and *The Wretched of the Earth* [2]. While his earlier writing in *Black Skin, White Masks* focuses on the effects of the internalized inferiority/superiority complexes

that are produced in the colonial social-political landscape, these consequences are more acutely understood as forms of violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* [6] (p. 95): the colonial world is violent in every way for the colonized. As Fanon describes, for example, in *A Dying Colonialism* [1] (p. 128):

> *There is, first of all, the fact that the colonized person, [. . .] perceives life not as a flowering or a development of an essential productiveness, but as a permanent struggle against an omnipresent death. This ever-menacing death is experienced as endemic famine, unemployment, a high death rate, an inferiority complex and the absence of any hope for the future.*
>
> *All this gnawing at the existence of the colonized tends to make of life something resembling an incomplete death.*

More simply, as Fanon [2] (p. 46) writes, "It is understandable how in such an atmosphere [i.e., colonial relations of domination] everyday life becomes impossible".

It is also the combination of these two interrelated violences that brings us to a third register of violence, pertaining to a libidinal energy which manifests in the colonial subject. Violence in this sense refers to a force or energy which stems from the ways in which "political and economic structures of exploitation and oppression are embodied in rage and resentment, and finally in the pathologies of body and mind" [6] (p. 95). The violence of colonialism generates a sui generis force [6] (p. 97) that is tied to the "struggle for psycho-affective survival and a search for human agency in the midst of the agony of oppression" [9] (p. xxxvi). Colonialism festers a rage and resentment, an anxiety, a libidinal energy that must ultimately, Fanon contends, be expressed. "In every society, in every community, there exists, or must exist, a channel, an outlet whereby the energy accumulated in the form of aggressiveness is released" [3] (p. 124).

Releasing this libidinal energy—itself the product of living in and internalizing conditions of violence—is necessary, and, for Fanon, requires physical violence [2] (p. 50–52). The redemptive part of this violence, and therefore of violence *as such* for Fanon, is that if this libidinal energy is harnessed and released through violence that is directed at destroying the shackles of the unjust social-political order of the present, it can be embodied in a creative and productive way, with the ultimate hope of building the world anew. In this way, a fourth register of Fanonian violence is liberating: "What we are striving for is to liberate the black man from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in a colonial situation" [3] (p. 14). This libidinal energy, this "violence rippling under the skin" [2] (p. 31) becomes generative when "the colonized subject discovers reality and transforms through his praxis, his deployment of violence and his agenda for liberation" [2] (p. 21; see also pp. 89–96).

Reflexivity and consciousness are, notably, key for the productive release and enactment of this libidinal energy. That is, liberatory violence is not violence for violence's sake. This is perhaps best exemplified in the final chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, where Fanon [3] (p. 206) famously writes, "O my body, always make me a man who questions!":

> *It is through self-consciousness and renunciation, through a permanent tension of his freedom, that man can create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world.*

While the violence of the colonized is necessarily a violence that responds to the violence of colonialism, and as such, it is inherently a reactive violence, it also must be a violence that recognizes "itself as the source of a new world, a new order" [6] (p. 96). Reflection, questioning, and understanding the conditions which give rise to the necessity of this violent release is of crucial import for Fanon's vision of how this violence can lead to liberation. In their awareness of how things are—of the violence inflicted upon them, of the unjustness of their circumstance—the colonized are able to "skim over this absurd drama that others have staged" [3] (p. 174) and build a different world. The reflexive colonized subject will be able to direct meaningfully their violence toward the disruption and destruction of the social-political structure. Another passage from *Black Skin, White Masks* [3] (p. 80, emphasis in original) helps to demonstrate this point:

> *In other words, the black man should no longer have to be faced with the dilemma 'whiten or perish,' but must become aware of the possibility of existence; in still other words, if society creates difficulties for him because of his colour, if I see in his dreams the expression of an unconscious desire to change colour, my objective will not be to dissuade him by advising him to 'keep his distance'; on the contrary, once his motives have been identified, my objective will be to enable him to choose action (or passivity) with respect to the real source of the conflict, i.e., the social structure.*

Through understanding the context of colonialism and 'becoming aware of the possibility of existence', the colonized subject can choose to act in response to the real source of the conflict, the real source of the violence: the social-political structure of colonialism. And, to be sure, the colonized subject is, as Fanon highlights, ready for such reflection: "their entire recent history has prepared them to 'understand' the situation" [2] (p. 40). "At the very moment when they discover their humanity", when they realize that they are not inferior, as the colonial system has suggested, the colonized "begin to sharpen their weapons to secure its victory" [2] (p. 8). Questioning, critique, and awareness are crucially important in Fanon's political theory, as it is such consciousness that has the potential to harness violence (which is inevitable within the colonial context, given the violence of colonialism itself) and target it at its source, i.e., the social-political order. "This violent praxis is totalizing since each individual represents a violent link in the great chain, in the almighty body of violence rearing up in reaction to the primary violence of the colonizer" [2] (p. 50).

This brings us to the final form or register of violence in Fanon, again intertwined with the violences discussed above, which is the violence of decolonization. This violence is the most productive and creative of all. As Fanon [2] (pp. 1–2) boldly claims at the beginning of *The Wretched of the Earth*, "decolonization is always a violent event":

> *Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder.*

The violence of shattering a social-political structure, like colonialism, is undeniable. It will be a reordering of the world, and the opening up of productive possibilities for new worlds. When revolutionary violence is "purposeful, intentional, and oriented toward world-making" [8], "violence can be embodied in a creative way" [6] (p. 96) and it becomes associated with world making and creative genius that cannot yet be known [10]. Through this final phase of violence comes decolonization and horizons of possibility for a world without colonial oppression. This world is a future-oriented world, a world of freedom.

2.3. Themes I and II: The Productive Harmony of Violence, Context, and Subject

In this discussion of Fanonian violence, I have distilled five registers of violence which are, clearly, deeply interrelated. Indeed, Fanon's theory is "shot through with violence" and "connections are specified at every level—political and historical setting, interpersonal encounters at the level of the social network, down to the intra-personal level of emotional reaction and motivation" [6] (p. 95). Of these connections, I focus on one for the remainder of this section: the link between violence, context, and subject formation. Notably, this connection is best understood, as I endeavour to demonstrate now, by joining the two themes described above (that is, the relation between the social-political realm and the psycho-affective realm, and the theme of violence).

As Frazer and Hutchings [6] (p. 93) summarize, and as detailed above, violence, for Fanon, is "to begin with, immanent in political structures of power; second, it is embodied and libidinal". Violence permeates both the social-political context and the formation of subjectivities in these contexts. This point is captured by the interrelation between the first three registers of violence explicated above. It is for this same reason that violence, for Fanon, is also assigned a dual task [8], captured in the last two registers of violence explicated in the previous section. On the one hand, physical violence enacted by the colonial subject against those who dominate and oppress them can eliminate the violence of the material social-political reality of colonialism. It can violently rupture the social-political system, and clear the way for new social-political relations, new worlds. For the colonized,

"shattering their chains" [2] (p. 34), which have themselves been forcibly and violently applied and maintained, can only come about through violence; the "naked violence" of colonialism "only gives in when confronted with greater violence" [2] (p. 23). On the other hand, violence is simultaneously tasked with eliminating the colonial system at the level of the psycho-affective realm. As colonized subjects direct and release their libidinal energy through violence, they release themselves from the colonial imaginary which positions them as inferior (discussed most fully in *Black Skin, White Masks*) and in so doing, open the possibility of constructing themselves anew. As Fanon [2] (p. 51) writes,

> 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.

This dual task—in which violence both 'cleanses' the individual and releases their psyche from the colonial imaginary *and* ruptures the relations of power that sustain the colonial order—can also be thought of as violence as a doing and a being [6]. As Frazer and Hutchings [6] (p. 98) argue, violence as a doing captures violence "understood as a tool that can be used and then abandoned, which is of course why it is possible that violent revolution can nevertheless be the way to a new and peaceful world". This is the violence that will unmake colonial relations in the material social-political sense, and pave the way for a liberated world. Violence as being, as a libidinal energy, "is a force that is inherent in colonial structures of oppression, in everyday colonial life, in the psyche of the native-turned-citizen-solider" [6] (p. 98). This is the violence that, when directed in certain productive directions, will unmake the colonial subject and pave the way for new liberated subjectivities. In other words, when properly harnessed, a potential harmony between violence, context, and subjects can be found, one which can make "a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavour to create a new man" [2] (p. 239).

2.4. An Accidental: 'Colonial War and Mental Disorders'

In music composition, an accidental is a note of a pitch (or pitch class) that is not a member of the scale or mode indicated by the most recently applied key signature. In this section, I suggest that the chapter 'Colonial War and Mental Disorders' from *The Wretched of the Earth* [2] serves as an accidental in Fanon's political theory as presented above. In particular, I argue that this chapter, as an accidental, is not 'in pitch' with the rest of Fanon's theory—it sits in dissonance with Fanon's claim that violence can serve as a mechanism to escape or end violence. As I argue subsequently, something more than violence may be (I suspect, frequently will be) necessary to build a new world and create a new humanity—this something else, I contend, is care.

Before developing this line of argument, however, it is necessary to explore the dissonance that is the chapter 'Colonial War and Mental Disorders'. In this chapter, Fanon deals with the problem of mental disorders that arise out of the national war of liberation waged by the Algerian people. Despite Fanon's earlier claims that violence, when properly aimed toward the social-political structure, will liberate the colonized subject, allow them to reassert their agency, and plant the seeds for the formation of new identities and subjectivities, he here tells a different story regarding the consequence of violence:

> Today the all-out national war of liberation waged by the Algerian people for seven years has become a breeding ground for mental disorders. [. . .]
>
> These disorders last for months, wage a massive attack on the ego, and almost invariably leave behind a vulnerability virtually visible to the naked eye. In all evidence the future of these patients is compromised.
>
> [2] (pp. 182–4)

Examining a series of psychiatric cases, Fanon shows how those impacted and complicit in violence—including those inflicting violence in the name of the colonial project, as well as those committing violence as part of the liberation struggle—are deeply affected, rendered vulnerable, and often disturbed. This trend, Fanon notes, aligns with what he has witnessed

when treating patients from other African countries which have successfully waged a war for their independence [2] (p. 184). An example is worth quoting at length:

> *In a certain African country, independent for some years now, we had the opportunity of treating a patriot and former resistance fighter. The man, in his thirties, would come and ask us for advice and help, since he was afflicted with insomnia together with anxiety attacks and obsession with suicide around a certain date of the year. The critical date corresponded to the day he had been ordered to place a bomb somewhere. Ten people had perished during the attack.*
>
> *The circumstances surrounding the symptoms are interesting for several reasons. Several months after his country had gained independence he had made the acquaintance of nationals from the former colonizing nation. They became friends. These men and women welcomed the newly acquired independence and unhesitatingly paid tribute to the courage of the patriots in the national liberation struggle. The militant was then overcome by a kind of vertigo. He anxiously asked himself whether among the victims of his bomb there might have been individuals similar to his new acquaintances. It was true the bombed café was known to be the haunt of notorious racists, but nothing could stop any passerby from entering and having a drink. From that day on the man tried to avoid thinking of past events. But paradoxically a few days before the critical date the first symptoms would break out. They have been a regular occurrence ever since.* [2] (pp. 184–5)

What these cases suggest is that the use of violence did not liberate those who fought against colonial relations, like this resistance fighter. Instead, violence ensnared these fighters in a cycle of violence, trauma, and harm. This chapter, I suggest, thereby disrupts many of Fanon's political theoretical claims: "The idea that using violence may be a way to escape being in violence is countered by case after case in which people remain trapped in the violence they have inflicted and suffered" [6] (p. 98). Or, as Fanon [2] (p. 185) writes, "Our actions never cease to haunt us".

Thus, while Jean-Paul Sartre [11] (p. lxii) boldly claims in his Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* that "Violence, like Achilles' spear, can heal the wounds it has inflicted", the reader, by the end of the text, is left wondering whether this can be true. In this chapter on mental disorders, it seems that further violence has not broken the cycle of violence initiated and sustained by the colonial project—it has not 'healed'. Those who have inflicted violence, even towards liberatory objectives, are 'haunted' by their actions, traumatized, and unable to build and enact a flourishing life—the very goal of the liberatory violence in the first place. As Frazer and Hutchings [6] (p. 106) argue, while Fanon clearly foregrounds how violence in the social-political context is deeply implicated in the formation of subjectivities, and comes to be embodied by those who inflict it and suffer from it, "he fails to explain how the vicious circle between the doing and 'being' of violence can be broken through the doing of further violence".

To put this point differently, earlier in the text, Fanon [2] (p. 21) writes, "The challenge now is to seize this violence as it realigns itself". However, he offers little explanation of how this violence can be fully contained and controlled; the 'realignment' of violence, while perhaps offering an instrumental tool for liberation from the colonial context, appears to also realign the psyches of those who inflict it. The cycle of violence, while perhaps redirected, continues.

3. The Ethics of Care: Violence, Trauma, and Repair

For the remainder of this article, I assert that a critical and political ethics of care can serve as an important additive to Fanon's political theory, most notably in terms of this problem of the cycle of violence. While there is a rich literature describing the tenets of an ethics of care, for this article, I focus on two key characteristics of care ethics that are useful for thinking through the issue of violence: care ethics' relational social ontology and the normative criteria of care. These two tenets, I suggest, orient us towards violence, trauma, and repair in a way that does not wholesale dismiss Fanon's political theoretical claims,

but rather foregrounds that contexts of violence and rupture eventually demand a different intervention, one which is focused on repair.

To make this argument, I first provide an overview of a critical, political ethics of care. I then attend to the seeming incompatibility between a political theory that valorises violence, such as Fanon's, and a political theory that prioritizes care. In so doing, I demonstrate that instead of being antithetical, Fanonian violence and an ethics of care can mutually add to each perspective. Fanon's theory can remind care ethicists that the line between care and violence can never be drawn abstracted from context and, moreover, that care is especially significant in the context of violence. Care ethics likewise amends Fanon's political theory by emphasizing that cycles of violence will eventually demand a response other than violence, a response steeped in and from care.

3.1. A Critical, Political Ethics of Care

While the ethics of care is a diverse literature, there is broad agreement that care ethics is, first and foremost, premised upon a relational social ontology, which asserts that "we are the product of our relationships and cannot shed our social existence" [12] (p. 310). This means that we do not just 'have' relations; we are processual selves [13] who emerge, are changed by, and are therefore vulnerable to, relations that constitute us. From this vantage point, ethical action and thinking also stems in and from our unique relations and broader context, and it must inherently be plural [14–16]. A multitude of moral voices will emerge through unique sets of relations, and each of these moral voices carries the weight of the context in and from which it comes.

Given this, the ethics of care orients us towards a different moral task:

> *This is not an abstract ethics about the application of rules, but a phenomenology of moral life which recognizes that addressing moral problems involves, first, an understanding of identities, relationships, and contexts, and second, a degree of social coordination and co-operation in order to try to answer questions and disputes about who cares for whom, and about how responsibilities will be discharged.*
>
> [17] (p. 31)

For this reason, the ethics of care must be a critical and political theory [14]. If moral subjects and moral knowledges are constituted in and by unique webs of social relations, a care ethical orientation to morality means that we must pay attention to how and why subjects and knowledges emerge in and through these unique relations, and especially to how power permeates all of this, shaping our needs, desires, and visions for living well. We must interrogate these relations critically, and seek to understand how they come to constitute what counts as morality *as such* and how they shape our moral understandings, our "moral forms of life" [18] (p. 105). Further, this is a collective task of mutual exchange, in which we listen and attempt to respond well to others so as to better meet their needs.

It is by extension of it being a relational approach to moral philosophizing that the ethics of care is also a thin "organizing trajectory around attentive/responsive living" [19] (p. 287). As I [14] (p. 143) describe elsewhere:

> *This 'organizing trajectory' is, to be sure, only thinly normative; how to be attentive and respond to a plurality of situated needs and heterogenous vulnerable moral selves cannot be predetermined or prescribed, only gleaned through tentative, and sometimes agonistic, practices of care which are continually assessed and revised. Nonetheless, what is of moral value from an ethics of care perspective is care, and the substance of moral practices is found in the ways in which we attempt, often through many iterations, to live well, to respond to needs, and to minimize harm and suffering.*

Again, given our relational and therefore vulnerable being (in that we are vulnerable as finite, material, and embodied beings, and in that we are vulnerable to the social relations that constitute our subjectivities), care ethics orients us to the ongoing task of fostering relations that support life, that allow for repair, and that respond to needs and desires. At the same time, care ethics' recognition of the multiplicity of moral selves and moral forms

of life (a recognition which stems from its relational social ontology) means that what, exactly, is a need, and correspondingly, the content of 'care', cannot be taken for granted. As I have argued, alongside scholars like Kirsten Cloyes [20], care must be agonized. Different versions of care, heterogeneous understandings of needs, and divergent desires and interests must be deliberated on, and they will sometimes be at odds. A key moral task involves attempting to understand needs and forms of care that may be very different from our own, so that we may humbly and reflexively consider and adjudicate amongst competing visions of care. As Margaret Urban Walker [18] (p. 7) writes, "the justification of the moral understandings that are woven through a particular lifeway rests on the goods to be found in living it". Care ethics, as an approach to moral thinking which prioritizes the good to be found in living any form of life, does not rely on universal principles to make moral claims and justifications. Instead, it "recasts moral deliberation as the difficult and messy task of attempting to decentre one's own judgement (never fully possible) in an attempt to know the other (never fully possible) in an ongoing and iterative way" [14] (p. 143) so as to undertake the often "tough" [21] (p. 99) and pain-staking work of building and repairing relations that allow all to live as well as is reasonably possible [4] (p. 40) given our vulnerable embodiment and relational subjectivity.

3.2. Reconceiving Violence and Care: A Relational Approach

Given the understanding of care ethics just outlined, it might appear that care ethics is inherently and diametrically opposed to violence. Care ethics is concerned with everything we do to maintain and repair ourselves and our worlds as well as reasonably possible [4] (p. 40); violence, as that which ruptures our psychological and material reality, seems antithetical to this task. If care ethics is defined by a thorough-going pacifism, then staging this dialogue between care ethics and Fanonian violence is perhaps pointless. From such a vantage point, care ethics would condemn both colonial violence and the violence that Fanon asserts is key to the liberation of the colonized subject—further discussion would not be necessary. This is a complicated subject, and one which I perhaps cannot attend to fully here. However, following Frazer and Hutchings' [7] reading of Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* [22], I argue that care ethics, while highly critical of violence, does not inherently assert that violence is always and necessarily unjustifiable. In so doing, I claim that Fanon's political theory and the ethics of care can be productively read together, and I call for a more nuanced and sustained engagement with issues of political violence by care ethicists.

To illustrate, let us consider Ruddick's approach to ethics based on maternal thinking. While Ruddick did not use the language of care ethics, she has been linked to the care ethics literature in that her approach to ethics is relational and steeped in maternal thinking, a type of thinking which has as its general organizing principle the key aim of nurturing and socializing (i.e., caring for) the child. For instance, as Ruddick [22] (pp. 18–9) notes,

> *Maternal practice begins with a double vision—seeing the fact of biological vulnerability as socially significant and as demanding care.* [. . .] *To be committed to meeting children's demand for preservation does not require enthusiasm or even love; it simply means to see vulnerability and to respond to it with care rather than abuse, indifference, or flight.*

This maternal practice is very much in line with the ethics of care, which, as outlined above, is premised on a relational social ontology (and thus foregrounds our inescapable vulnerability) and a commitment to responding to this vulnerability with care. It is also because of this orientation that Ruddick has largely been read as a pacifist. Nurturing life, again, seems to be fundamentally at odds with violence. Yet, Frazer and Hutchings [7] (p. 116) suggest that Ruddick's work is better conceived of along the lines of "non-violent peacemaking". This difference may seem small, but it is salient. Like care ethics, Ruddick's relational ethics suggests that all ethical dilemmas and moral quandaries must be examined critically in the context in which they emerge. This includes issues related to violence, and even the meaning of violence itself. As Frazer and Hutchings [7] (p. 119) write,

> *From the standpoint of maternal thinking [and, as I argue here, the ethics of care], a reliance on violence contradicts the immanent meaning of the practice of mothering [or care more broadly] and reproduces subjectivities for whom others are 'killable'. Violence figures in [Ruddick's] work as something that cuts, breaks or freezes the possibility of constructive relationships between those in conflict, both interpersonally and collectively. Non-violence by contrast preserves, maintains and creates constructive relationships between those in conflict, interpersonally and collectively.*

> *What follows from this is that a feminist peacemaker cannot make conclusive judgements relating to whether a particular set of strategies and tactics are either violent or non-violent outside of a holistic understanding of the conflict at issue. Further, an appreciation of the importance of position in relation to the means by which political struggles are being fought is needed.*

In defining violence from a relational perspective, we can conceptually think about violence as that which ends relationships, and non-violence as that which preserves them (and of special concern for Ruddick and a critical and political ethics of care that focuses on relations of domination, oppression, and exploitation, non-violence is that which allows the *less* powerful to live well in their relations). From this vantage point, however, categorizing certain actions outside of the context in and through which they unfold as belonging to either of these categories (that is, either violence or non-violence) does not make sense. Instead, we must understand which relations the action will preserve and which they will end. Moreover, we must be attuned to the fact that certainly some relationships, such as relations of domination, should be ended if the goal is to preserve and maintain life.

This is an important point, as some readings of the ethics of care posit that care ethics requires moral subjects, and particularly women, to maintain certain relations at all costs—even when these relationships are harmful. Such readings rely on an understanding of care as a symptom or negative outcome of patriarchy, as opposed to a critical and political challenge to relations of power (like those that constitute patriarchy). From the standpoint of the former, patriarchy has shaped care and women's subjectivities so fundamentally that care is seen as (strictly or largely) oppressive for women. An example of this type of thinking would argue that because of patriarchy, women "have not learned to discriminate well between good [relationships] and bad ones but have learned instead to assume responsibility for maintaining whatever relationships 'fate' seems to throw [their] way" [23] (p. 86). This suggests that women lack autonomy, and the ability to judge whether a relationship is harmful or not, as they have been positioned to always 'self-sacrifice' for the good of the relationship. Put differently, this reading of the ethics of care as 'self-sacrifice' [13] (p. 58) suggests that because care ethics is premised on a relational ontology, and because the ethics of care has been associated with women's voices, it strips women of autonomy and agency. However, as scholars like Grace Clement [24] point out, the ethics of care actually argues that we are all constituted in and through our relations and, by extension, it is only through our relations, and "only as a result of the care of others", that one can become autonomous [24] (p. 32). This, when combined with the fact that a critical, political ethics of care requires us to agonize care, to interrogate when relations are 'caring' or not, and to reflect on the messiness of relations, means that sometimes 'good' care may actually mean ending a relation. Following a similar logic, I believe that it is possible to conceive of 'violence' which seeks to undo relations of exploitation, oppression, and domination (for instance, colonial relations) as perhaps somewhat aligned with the goals of care: depending on the context and the relations of power at play, fighting to end relations that are not caring relations could be seen in some sense as care, or, more accurately, as a movement towards more caring relations.

At the same time, a care (and maternal) perspective is "very powerfully weighted against the use of violence" [7] (p. 119). Violence as an instrument is to be viewed suspiciously [7] (p. 119). Yet, Ruddick's argument about the importance of context—an argument espoused by a critical and political care ethics perspective more broadly—suggests that "it is not until one has grasped the specific context of a particular conflict, and taken on board

the perspectives of those who are/will be fighting, that a proper judgement can be made as to what actions may be in accord with an orientation to making rather than breaking relationships in which preservation, nurture and mutual accommodation are possible" [7] (p. 119). Violence cannot be abstractly pre-defined or determined; by extension, violence cannot abstractly be deemed always and already unjustifiable.

This point is worth dwelling on in the context of this dialogue between the ethics of care and Fanon's political theory. As Fanon reminds us, there are many registers (as I have called them above) of violence. Some, like brute physical violence, might seem more obviously condemnable (although again, I maintain that such determinations cannot be made without critically examining the contexts in and through which such violence occurs). However, other forms of violence—such as the violence of radically restructuring a social-political order—are perhaps more difficult to dismiss. Indeed, when care ethicists call for a reorganization of the social-political order—for a more caring world, for new social-political formations structured around care (see, for example, [14,25–27])—it would be erroneous to assume that this is not, in some sense, a call for violence (as it has been defined above). Rupturing a social-political order is violent and can have violent effects on people's psycho-affective realm (a lesson that Fanon has taught us so well).

For instance, elsewhere I have argued with my colleague Sacha Ghandeharian [27] that the COVID-19 global pandemic was traumatic in part because it demanded that our society confront our inherent ontological vulnerability. This was deeply traumatizing for many people as their structuring principles (based on a liberal myth of self-sufficiency and independence) were shaken to their very core. As people continue to navigate this trauma in a variety of ways—with responses ranging from denying outright the threat posed by COVID-19, to extreme forms of self-isolation—we can see that this event has had serious effects on the psyches of many. Investing in building a world that foregrounds our vulnerability—and therefore 'undoes' the liberal world [5,28]—could have, and likely will have, the same violent and traumatic affects. And yet, this is precisely what a critical and political ethics of care calls for. Again, if we redefine violence along relational lines to refer to that which "freezes the possibility of constructive relationships between those in conflict", and correspondingly, if we redefine non-violence as that which preserves, maintains and creates the conditions of possibility for constructive relationships [7] (p. 119), then a care ethics perspective cannot a priori conclude that all 'violence' is unjustifiable.

At the same time, however, we can adjudicate between and across different forms of 'violence'—that is emphatically the point. Perhaps building a caring world, in which we must confront our inherent vulnerability, will be violent to those subjects constituted in/through the liberal imaginary. But, in considering the broader context, and understanding that such a world would allow us to foster political dialogue on how to meet caring needs, how to rectify systemic injustices, and how to enhance the lives of all, we see that such violence is, perhaps, non-violent (as it is defined above), or at the very least, it may not be totally unjustified. It is from such a vantage point that I believe we can productively put care ethics and Fanon's political theory in conversation: Fanonian violence need not be condemned a priori from a care ethics perspective, despite the perceived and real tension between care and violence. Rather, an ethics of care approach to interrogating conflicts understands that the meaning and experience of violence (including what counts as violence) is contextual and can only be considered by examining the social-political context in and through which it unfolds. Such an approach

> stresses how the meaning of violence is not given simply by the infliction of pain and injury but also by the relations of power into which inflictions of pain and injury are introduced. [. . . This] opens up the possibility that some contexts that are apparently free of pain and injury may actually be violent, and some contexts in which pain and injury are inflicted may be non-violent, or at least not incompatible with non-violence.

[7] (p. 120)

An example of the former situation would be where systems of power, like colonial relations, make it difficult for some to meet their needs—often without the use of any direct

force or violence. An example of the latter might very well be the type of violent revolution that Fanon envisions—a form of inflicting pain and injury so as to create 'non-violence,' meaning relations in which all, and particularly the least powerful, can flourish. From this point of view, care ethics, I suggest, is not necessarily opposed to Fanon's violence; moreover, care ethics could perhaps help us assess Fanon's claim about the efficacy of violence *in specific contexts*.

In some ways, then, this dialogue between Fanon's political theory and the ethics of care reminds care ethicists of the importance of attending to violence. This may seem like an odd statement, for surely care ethics is concerned with violence, with that which harms and prevents care. Yet, surprisingly little work confronts violence in the care ethics literature [4] [29,30]. Fanon's theory, in linking violence to both harm and to the possibility of liberated futures for all, reminds us of the pressing need to understand how violence itself is only meaningful, and can only be judged, in the context through which it emerges and in dialogue with those who are or will be fighting [6]. It reminds us of the importance of investigating how our own care practices, including our calls for new caring worlds, can, and perhaps even inevitably will, be violent. And lastly, it also reminds us that care carries extraordinary significance in the context of violence: care can respond directly to violence and help move us from trauma and towards repair. I conclude this argument by turning to this point now.

3.3. From Trauma and Towards Repair

Having demonstrated that violence and care are not inherently antithetical, and thereby cleared the way to continue building this dialogue between a critical, political ethics of care and Fanon's political theory, I return to the issue of the inescapability of the cycle of violence. As argued above, while Fanon correlates certain violences with an assertion of agency, and thus a creative building of the self and a new world, his accounts of mental disorders in liberation wars suggest another outcome: violence, including committing violence so as to dismantle colonial relations, marks those who enact it with trauma. It is unclear how those with such traumas will escape this cycle of violence—how "the new man" will "triumph" [2] (p. 233)—even if we accept the possibility that the violence itself is justified in so far as it undoes colonial relations.

It is here that care ethics, I believe, can productively amend or reorient Fanon's political theory. The ethics of care is both a critical and productive project. On the one hand, care ethics is attuned to the need for critique, to interrogating relations of power that impede well-being, and to disrupting those relations of power. For this reason, as demonstrated in the section above, care ethics holds space for the type of violence Fanon supports. Yet, care ethics, as a thin normative trajectory organized around attentive and responsive living, is also a "reconstructive" [19] (p. 286) theory. Care demands that we do more than critique and disrupt; we must actively respond and repair. "Care claims a tangible moral idea" [19] (p. 286): responding to need, minimizing harm, and fostering nurturing relations for all, orients us continually to traumas and how we can repair them, or at least lessen their effects. It is a moral orientation which "forces us to think concretely about people's real needs and to evaluate how those needs will be met" [17], (p. 31). Importantly, thinking concretely about people's needs must be an iterative and ongoing project. Needs shift and change, and our responses to harms may not be sufficient—in such cases, an ethics of care would demand we respond again, reflectively and through attentive listening to the other. From a care ethics perspective, then, while violence, as in inflicting pain and harm, might be non-violence (or, at least, it might be compatible with non-violence, as outlined in the previous section), we also cannot assume that it would ever be sufficient to rectify whatever harm it is disrupting.

Instead, the messy moral life of care requires persistent address. It requires careful examination of how our responses to injustices and harms—whether those responses involve violence or not—are productive and enabling of relations that support meaningful lives. The vulnerability of our material bodies and relational subjectivities demand ceaseless

response, and care ethics orients us towards that response ceaselessly. While care is not, of course, a panacea, it is a thoroughgoing commitment to responding to our vulnerability, our traumas, and thereby striving for a 'good enough' life. Thus, while in the above I have suggested that care might in some instances be aligned with Fanon's violence, I conclude this argument by contending that care is, undoubtedly, that which must come after. An ethics of care holds us to the *unending process* of responding to need and trauma. Furthermore, this unending process requires innovative work and research. Indeed, a nascent literature on Fanon's recently collected and translated psychiatric writings ([31,32], see also [33]) is illuminating exciting insights related to psychiatric practices that might be a fruitful resource for enacting the care that must follow violence. An avenue for future research for care ethics concerned with violence and trauma would be to engage seriously with this emerging work and other therapeutic methods.

In short, both Fanon's political theory, and a critical political ethics of care, I believe, are concerned with building new worlds, new horizons of possibility which are freed from relations of domination, oppression, and exploitation, and new social-political realities in which all can flourish. While Fanon emphasizes the potential productive capacity of violence towards such a goal, the ethics of care emphasizes the productive capacity of care. When taken together, these theories help remind us of the importance of both. As Fanon shows us, what seems to be 'violent' might be compatible with care, particularly if and when the violence is done so as to rupture unequal relations of power. As care ethics reminds us, even in such cases, rupture is not enough. Something must be built in the aftermath of the "total disorder" [2] (p. 2) inherent to undoing social-political structures that dominate and oppress. Striving to live well is a productive and reconstructive task, and something more will be needed to repair and rebuild the world. The ethics of care is a normative commitment to endeavouring continually to enact that 'something more'.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1   Please note that I am relying on English translations of Fanon's work in this article.

2   For instance, Fanon [3] (p. xviii) writes, "what is called the black soul is a construction by white folk". Elsewhere, he [3] (p. 128) notes, "The black man is unaware of [his skin] as long as he lives among his own people; but at the first white gaze, he feels the weight of his melanin".

3   It is worth noting that Fanon is not reductionist in this sense; he also gives weight to the ways in which familial relations and interpersonal relations (which are, undeniably, also shaped by the social-political realm) can have serious effects on the individual's psyche. In other words, Fanon does not locate all neurosis as coming from the colonial system, although his goal is to trace the many ways in which this system does fundamentally shape people's psycho-affective landscapes. See, in particular, chapter 3 of *Black Skin, White Masks* [3].

4   There are notable exceptions. Virginia Held [29] tackles the question of care ethics and violence directly, although in a way that is distinct from what has been argued here. For instance, while I have argued that a care ethics approach to understanding violence would entail investigating what practices constitute violence or non-violence within specific contexts, Held [29] (p. 126) spends less time interrogating these nuances and instead asserts that "violence damages and destroys what care labours to create". Fiona Robinson's [30] exploration of care ethics and human security is another important exception. Robinson expands notions of human security from a care ethics lens to reconsider what should count as 'human security;' in so doing, she implicitly expands on notions of violence, which are often conceived of narrowly and in terms of direct bodily harm within the international relations literature.

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