



## *The Transcendent and the Postcolonial* Violence in Derrida and Fanon

**Andreas Krebs**

*University of Ottawa, Canada*

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akreb092@uottawa.ca

**Abstract:** In his article “The Force of Law: the Mystical Foundation of Authority,” Jacques Derrida introduces the concept of divine violence. The conditions of, and possibility for, the manifestation of divine violence, however, remain unclear. This article aims to elucidate divine violence through an appeal to Frantz Fanon’s writings on anticolonial violence, arguing that anticolonial violence is a direct manifestation of Derrida’s concept of divine violence. I will also argue that both Derrida and Fanon introduce complementary concepts of transcendence in their discussion of anti-colonial/divine violence which works against the violence of the state and towards a politics that crushes vertical structures of domination. For Derrida, only divine violence has the capacity to escape recreating the violence of the state; for Fanon, anticolonial violence escapes this recreation through constructing a “national consciousness,” a shared subjectivity that circumvents the work by nationalist leaders to recapture power and re-institute the violence of the colonial apparatus. This synthetic reading will introduce a new framework for the analysis of anti-colonial violence, and show that Fanon and Derrida may be read complementarily for a decolonization of colonized minds, bodies and spaces.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In his article “The Force of Law: the Mystical Foundation of Authority” (2002) Jacques Derrida presents his most comprehensive statement on violence, law, and the state, and makes the argument that the just exercise of force by the state is impossible. There remains in his text a problematic concept of violence which has not been sufficiently dealt with either by him or in the interpretive literature: divine violence. Although Derrida’s article has been inter-

preted widely by legal and political scholars (see LaCapra 1990; Cornell 1993; Maley 1999; McCormick 2001; Corson 2001), the possibility for the manifestation of divine violence remains unclear.

I will attempt to address the possibility of this divine violence proposed by Derrida through an introduction of Frantz Fanon’s analysis of anti-colonial violence, showing that anti-colonial violence allows for a manifestation of divine violence. I will also argue that both Derrida and Fanon introduce a certain transcendence in their discussion of anti-colonial/divine violence

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Andreas Krebs is a Ph.D. candidate in political thought at the École des études politiques, University of Ottawa, Canada. His thesis, titled “Colonialism and the Psychic Life of the Canadian Citizen Subject,” examines how colonialism persists through the formation of the dominant subjectivity in the Canadian context.

which works against the violence of the state and towards a politics that crushes vertical structures of domination. Both authors recognize that revolutionary violence has little hope of anything but recreating the violent conditions against which it allegedly works. To move beyond this cycle requires, for Fanon, a horizontal spread of power through universal action against colonial violence; for Derrida, a Levinasian recognition of the universal value of the Other. Thus both authors appeal to the transcendent: for Derrida, this is God, for Fanon, the 'national consciousness.'

I will attempt to show that these conceptions of the transcendental are complementary, and, through their mutual denial of the violent domination of the state, are potential means towards a truly postcolonial situation. Finally I will briefly analyze recent violence committed against Western targets by Islamic militant groups given the preceding discussion of divine violence. Through this synthetic reading, I hope to introduce a new framework for the analysis of anti-colonial violence, and show that Fanon and Derrida may be read complementarily for a decolonization of colonized minds, bodies, and spaces.

## II. JACQUES DERRIDA AND DIVINE VIOLENCE

Derrida's article "Force of Law" is an indictment of the state and the legal establishment as inherently violent. His argument begins with a decoupling of law and justice in which he questions the very possibility of justice being enacted through law. This is followed by an interpretation of Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" (1978), in which Derrida addresses how the violence of the law manifests itself. According to Derrida (and Benjamin) this violence is not only displayed in the specifics of the state's power, such as the death penalty or the figure of the police. The state, and there-

fore the legal establishment, depends on an exercise of violence for its very existence; this violence is at once a preservation of the power of the state and a constant foundation of it. Every founding act includes in it the requirement of preservation, of generalization, and every preservation refounds the order which it preserves. Derrida is thus denying both the possibility of founding a state without recourse to violence, and of moving beyond this initial violence once a state has been founded. The revolutionary and therefore terribly violent moment of every founding act, when the previous order is overturned, remains embedded within every action of the newly founded state. These founding acts are always justified, but only through self-referential, circular arguments. Thus they are justified, or rationalized, but can never claim to be just. The only potentially just violence is transcendental: only God can commit just violence. This divine violence, linked with the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, strikes without warning and treats every case as unique. It is bloodless and expiatory while at the same time annihilatory; "divine violence is exercised on all life [...] for the sake of the living" (Derrida 2002: 288).

Contrasted with the justice of divine violence is the mythic violence of the state: the state creates its foundational myth in order to preserve itself; its violence is an expression and a desire for power. The violence of the state is fateful, which is to say arbitrary; this arbitrariness pervades each action committed by the state, from its foundation through to its daily exercise of bureaucratic and judicial process. The foundational myths which sustain its legitimacy have no essential or universal content; the foundational story serves simply as a placeholder for the requisite self-referential justification of legal violence, or the acquisition and monopolization of power.

This discussion of mythic and divine violence in the second section of "Force of

Law” is preceded by an interpretation of two other distinctions made by Benjamin: between founding and preserving violence, and between the general political strike and the general proletarian strike. Founding violence is expressed in the moment when a new political order asserts itself, in the process destroying the old order. Preserving violence is at root the “exercise of violence over life and death” (Benjamin 1978: 286) by the state; it threatens action while retaining a sense of arbitrary action, a sense of fate. Benjamin holds that this mixture of founding and preserving violence in the police is an “ignoble, ignominious, revolting ambiguity” (Derrida 2002: 277). Derrida, however, goes further than Benjamin and (characteristically) denies the distinction between founding and preserving violence altogether. The problem with Benjamin’s distinction is that of iterability, which predicts and requires a preservation in every act of foundation, and every preservation of the founding act is likewise foundational.

This discussion of founding and preserving violence, and their collapse into a singular type of violence, state violence, that always founds and preserves itself in acting, is informed by a discussion of the general strike. Following Georges Sorel, Benjamin distinguishes between two types of general strike: the general *political* strike, and the general *proletarian* strike. The former corresponds with a desire to re-found the state, the latter to destroy it. For Benjamin, the political general strike is simply a change of masters, while “the proletarian general strike sets itself the sole task of destroying state power” (Benjamin 1978: 291). Derrida, however, denies that the proletarian general strike is without an end in mind. As with Benjamin’s distinction between founding and preserving violence, Derrida argues that there is no distinction between these types of general strike; both seek to re-found the state, to initiate a new set of rules to be followed. Both are in-

formed by the desire to be implicated in the foundational moment. They both also work for something that, as it is founded, must be preserved.

Thus Derrida holds that anti-foundational or revolutionary violence can only result in a re-creation of the violence of the state, and is therefore actually foundational. These foundations become myths, acting to immortalize the state, ensuring its survival through an ideological recovery of the founding moment after the fact. These foundations/preservations are instances of mythic violence: “the manifestation of divine violence in its mythic form founds a law [...] rather than ‘enforces,’ an existing law” (Derrida 2002: 287). Mythic violence founds a law without representing a law; it is based on privilege, manifested in royal authority, which is itself totally arbitrary. This mythic violence corresponds directly with all founding actions, and lays the groundwork for the means for law to justify its use of violence. Legitimizing of such violence always works backwards from the legislation or decision in question to the founding moment (cf. Cornell 2003).

This mythic violence is contrasted diametrically with divine violence. Divine violence is pure violence, the expression of violence as pure means and without the possibility of rational recuperation, “the manifestation of self, the in some way disinterested, immediate and uncalculated manifestation of anger” (Derrida 2002: 287). This uncalculated anger, which presents itself solely for its own presentation (and cannot be re-presented) destroys all that mythic violence seeks to found: law, limits, boundaries. “[I]nstead of leading to fault and expiation, it causes to expiate; instead of threatening, it strikes” (ibid: 288). This purely divine violence works for the sake of life and of the living, as opposed to mythic violence, which is exercised against life, and for the sake of power. Importantly, divine violence works beyond the level of judgment; as Derrida indicates, the biblical

imperative against murder is one which does not sanction violent retribution in case of its contravention. Finally, divine violence is distinguished from mythic violence in its relationship to blood. Divine violence annihilates without bloodshed; mythic violence ritualizes bloodshed in the form of sacrifice.

This point about bloodshed is important for Derrida's interpretation of divine violence, and the linkages to be made between it and anti-colonial violence. In shedding blood, mythic violence makes the sacrificial victim representative, denying the uniqueness of the individual. This is the threat principle at work; the victims of mythic violence ensure that the potential for violence remains foregrounded by the state. Divine violence strikes without bloodshed; however, this lack of bloodshed must be viewed as a figurative statement. Literally, divine violence must shed blood in the course of its annihilatory expiation.<sup>1</sup> However, this shedding of blood is not for the sake of any representational effect it would have. In annihilating for the sake of the living, divine violence liberates both the victim *and* the living: "it never attacks—for the purpose of destroying it—the soul of the living" (ibid). Mythic violence works towards domination, of continual convergence of politics around the state. Divine violence annihilates the limits to politics imposed by the state, ushering in "a new political era on the condition that one not link the political to the state" (ibid: 290).

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<sup>1</sup> In the post-scriptum of Derrida's article, he seems to condemn the vagueness of Benjamin's concept of divine violence. This condemnation is a result of the bloodless nature of the horrible techniques of the "final solution." However, Derrida's argument denies the function of the Nazi system which worked to dehumanize (deny the uniqueness) of its victims, numbering them, essentializing them based on a single identity category. I hold that this violence, although bloodless, does not correspond to the other facets of divine violence; in this case, blood does not "make all the difference" (Derrida 2002: 288).

Thus divine violence is aligned with justice and with decidability; mythic violence is aligned with law's inherent undecidability, and the inherent impossibility of justice in systems of law. The undecidability of law refers to its incapacity to adhere to one or the other of the poles in the founding violence/preserving violence dialectic. This undecidability ultimately leads to the auto-destruction of law through a constant weakening of founding violence through the refounding present in preservation. The decidable in divine violence is definitional—divine violence is the only possibly just decision that can be made. All other decisions depend on recourse to prefigured rules, no matter how much they account for the particularity of each situation. This presents a problem which is located in the essence of the divine. Derrida points out that in the final pages of Benjamin's text, the potential of revolutionary violence to be pure, immediate, unmediated, divine violence is spoken of in the conditional. This potential is always conditional precisely because the decision to define violence as divine is not open to any human individual. To proclaim a violence as divine is an example of a rational justification of that violence, a mythologizing of it, and a founding of a new order based on that violence. This problem of decidability means that divine violence remains only a possibility, as does justice, in the realm of politics.

### III. FRANTZ FANON'S ANTI-COLONIAL VIOLENCE

Frantz Fanon's ground breaking theorizing on subjectivity, violence, and revolution has inspired debate by critics and theorists from a wide range of theoretical backgrounds (Ziarek 2002). Being informed by psychiatry, psychoanalysis, phenomenology and Marxism, Fanon's approach to politics and the self moves beyond the universal humanism of historical materialism,

and recognizes the multiplicity of the subject. However, in the colonial situation, the self-identities of both colonized and colonizer are essentialized through their race. Fanon characterizes this situation as Manichean rather than dialectical; the nature of colonialism divides identities based on their 'essential' characteristics: black/white, settler/native (Gibson 2003). This essentialism overdetermines the colonized, reducing any potential action or thought of the colonized individual to race. This makes reciprocity impossible, and therefore denies dialectical movement towards mutual recognition.

Any capacity of the colonized for self-realization or agency is thus nullified through the colonial process. The colonizer is likewise trapped in his relationship with the colonized. Fanon adopts a Lacanian approach to identity formation in contending that humanism, the intellectual current most responsible for the definition of the European self, relies upon the antonym of the non-European for its own definition. Homi Bhabha elaborates: the "post-Enlightenment man [is] tethered to, *not* confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man" (2004: 62). Fanon claims that the only means of moving beyond this intransigence is through action on the part of the colonized. In some respects, this reflects the means through which Fanon came to terms with his own psychological injuries, which were linked to his experience as a black man in white French society. For Fanon, the action which he prescribes was expressed in the writing of his autobiographical, phenomenological account of the inferiority complex of the black, *Peau noir, masques blancs* (1951). In order to heal, the individual must come to terms with his injuries, and this coming to terms can only be through action (Bulhan 1985). However, unlike his own experience of healing through writing, Fanon's later work *Les damnés de la terre*, explains how violent action against the symbols of colonialism is a

means towards the transformation of the Manichean framework and therefore the individual consciousnesses which constitute it and are constituted by it. This transformation allows for the inculcation of previously impossible agency, and the transcendent recognition of the national consciousness. The following section explains first how this anti-colonial violence enables the realization of the agent, and second how this violence corresponds to Derrida's concept of divine violence.

Through the colonial process, the colonized individual's physical and mental energies are bound. The daily violence of the colonial police and military forces, of apartheid and poverty, contain the mental and physical potential of the colonized. These energies never cease working towards expression and release. Even the dreams of the colonized reveal this desire for release: "les rêves de l'indigène sont des rêves musculaires, des rêves d'action, des rêves agressifs. Je rêve que je saute, que je nage, que je cours, que je grimpe" (Fanon 2002: 53). The expression of these energies is initially realized with a death-reflex, an auto-destruction (Seshadri-Crooks 2002); this is the spontaneous lashing out by colonized individuals against themselves and their own communities.

Fanon also states that the dreams of the colonized constantly turn towards the desire to take the place of the colonizer. This desire of 'becoming-Other' is mirrored in the colonizer, who wants to become the colonized, making the *colonized* into the threat to the 'natural order' (Krautwurst 2003). This mutual desire of becoming is also a mutual desire of destruction. The colonizer, says Fanon, would like nothing better than to annihilate the colonized:

le colon demande à chaque représentant de la minorité qui opprime de descendre 30 ou 100 ou 200 indigènes [et] il s'aperçoit que personne n'est indigné et qu'à l'ex-

trême tout le problème est de savoir si on peut faire ça d'un seul coup ou par étapes. (Fanon 2002: 81-82)

However, this annihilation would result in suicide. The colonizer requires the colonized at two levels of existence: economic and psychological. The labour power of the colonized is required in order for the colony to be viable. Also, elimination of the colonized would be elimination of the opposite end of the colonizer's identifying binary. Similarly, the logic of the colonized is couched in the capacity of swallowing the colonizer through the sheer force of numbers.

This desire for mutual destruction marks the beginning of anti-colonial violence and decolonization—not just of land, but also of mind and body. Anti-colonial violence, for Fanon, is a kind of “self-rehabilitation of the oppressed [which] begins in directly confronting the source of his dehumanization” (Bulhan 1985: 147). This rehabilitation is expressed through the act of violence. This violence demonstrates to the colonized that the colonial structures are not impervious to harm, and that her inferiority, entrenched through colonial ideology, is not essential. What becomes essential is that both colonized and colonizer are mortal, and that both shed blood. Thus through (violent) action against the symbols of colonialism, the colonized becomes more than a mere thing or animal.

Therefore, at some level, Fanon is concerned with the transformation of the colonized individual into ‘man,’ which corresponds to a certain humanism in his thought: “la ‘chose’ colonisé devient homme dans le processus même par lequel elle se libère” (Fanon 2002:40). However, as his thought develops over the course of *Les damnés de la terre*, it becomes clear that this ‘becoming man’ by no means corresponds to a simple desire for recognition by the colonizer, or to fit within the category of ‘man’

as determined by universal humanism. The necessary violence to which the colonized resorts is a process of becoming. Through this process, the colonized becomes an agent, experiences that which is required to realize oneself in the world. This agent-making, anti-colonial violence works against the existing structures of violence, both colonial and humanist. Through this violence there transpires a mutual transformation of both sides of the previously Manichean binary. As will be discussed in the final section, the transformative, anti-colonial violence is accompanied by the blossoming of a ‘national consciousness’ which is neither exclusionary nor a refounding of the violent structures of the state.

As Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks states, anti-colonial violence as presented by Fanon is “utterly beyond good and evil [and] does not avail of a self-justifying meta-narrative” (2002: 85). This recognition of the pure nature of anti-colonial violence is the opening necessary for a discussion linking it to Derrida's concept of divine violence. The spontaneous outbursts of violence that are the initial expressions of anti-colonial violence have no ends in mind; this is violence as pure means, as pure expression, as pure anger, it has “no other aim than to show and show itself” (Derrida 2002: 287). Anti-colonial violence destroys the colonial law, the expression of universal humanism, through demonstrating its untenable inconsistencies. The boundaries of the colonial state are destroyed; violence begins to be perpetrated in the métropole itself (viz. the café bombings in France during the Algerian war of independence). The boundaries between colonizer and colonized are likewise destroyed. As mentioned, each becomes no less mortal than the other. In language strangely similar to that used by Derrida, Fanon states that once anti-colonial violence begins, the “enterprise of mystification” practiced by the “demagogues, opportunists, magicians” becomes “practically impossible” (Fanon

2002: 91; translation mine).

The violence against the colonial structure pits divine violence against mythic violence; as the thousands of colonized are felled by machine gun fire, the founding/preserving mythic violence of the colonial state works against itself. Its arbitrary nature becomes clear through its constant shedding of representative blood. Each victim of colonial violence represents all colonized individuals, in the consciousness of the colonizer and colonized. For the colonizer this is because the shapeless masses of the colonized are indistinguishable one from the other; for the colonized, colonial massacres work as the threat principle of the state. In this orgy of violence, which is at once both founding and preserving, the colonial state drives itself towards suicide. The foundational becomes all the more present in each preservation of order, and necessarily demystifies the foundation of the colonial state from the sheer quotidian presence of mythic fate. Each victim of anti-colonial violence, however, is killed without warning, without threat. Anti-colonial violence does not threaten, and is never arbitrary. This violence is expiatory: through his death, the colonizer receives the capacity for atonement for his complicity in the violence of the colonial structure. The only possible characteristic of divine violence outlined by Derrida which presents a problem is bloodshed; for Derrida, “[b]lood would make all the difference” (2002: 288). Anti-colonial violence does not seem capable of escaping from the shedding of blood. However, it is clear that, as with divine violence, anti-colonial “violence is exercised on all life but to the profit of for the sake of the living” (ibid).

The lack of a “self-justifying meta-narrative” (Seshadri-Crooks 2002: 85) in anti-colonial violence, far more than bloodshed, seems to really ‘make all the difference.’ This is not to say that Fanon does not recognize that attempts are constantly made to ideologically channel anti-colonial violence.

This channeling comes for the most part from the national (colonized) bourgeoisie and nationalist political parties, who attempt to pacify the colonized, and seize the role of ‘interlocutor’ between those working against the colonial structures, and those representing those structures. These actors work to re-orient the violence of the colonized towards a non-radical, passive acceptance of the terms of decolonization as determined by the colonizing power itself. Fanon characterizes the national bourgeoisie and mainstream political actors as “une sorte de classe d’esclaves libérés individuellement, d’esclaves affranchis” (Fanon 2002: 60-61). This ideological recuperation of spontaneous, divine, anti-colonial violence results not in the potential for a complete annihilation of the violence of colonial/state structures, but a recreation of them. Just as Derrida states that “all revolutionary situations, all revolutionary discourses [...] justify the recourse to violence by alleging the founding, in progress or to come, of a new law, of a new state” (2002: 269), Fanon recognizes that:

[l]e militant qui fait face, avec des moyens rudimentaires, à la machine de guerre colonialiste se rend compte que dans le même temps où il démolit l’oppression coloniale il contribue par la bande à construire un autre appareil d’exploitation (2002: 138-9)

For Fanon, prevention of the founding of a new ‘apparatus of exploitation’ is only possible through the inculcation of a national consciousness. This national consciousness denies the accumulation of power, and the rational recuperation, of the foundational violence of the state through a horizontal spread of capacity, responsibility and agency. This links with the mutual recognition achieved through the transformative process of anti-colonial violence, and with Derrida’s requirement of a recog-

nition of the unique in any possible non-violent politics.

#### IV. THE POSSIBILITY OF THE TRANSCENDENT IN DERRIDA AND FANON

The preceding has attempted to show that the void left in both Derrida's article and the interpretive literature surrounding it regarding the problematic concept of divine violence can be filled through recourse to the work of Frantz Fanon. Certain questions remain, especially relating to the potential for divine violence to truly escape the violent political structures of the state. This escape is dealt with differently by each theorist, but their approaches share a certain transcendental character. For Fanon and Derrida the transcendental is both the result of divine violence and what makes it possible. For Derrida, this is clear through the name given to divine violence—it automatically appeals to the transcendent, which allows for and initiates divine annihilation of violent political structures. For Fanon, the transcendent appears through the inculcation of a national consciousness, which instantiates itself through anti-colonial violence, and is also the only means of preventing a slip from the postcolonial, horizontal relationships of recognition back to further exploitation in a neo-colonial state. This final section will explore these two approaches to the possibility of transcendental politics and how they relate.

Derrida associates justice with a welcoming of the Other, quoting Levinas: "the relation with the other—that is to say, justice" (2002: 250). This Levinasian ethic stresses a recognition of the uniqueness of the Other, and a commitment to treat all situations as particular. Only through this commitment can human interaction be deemed just. Derrida spells this out explicitly later, while discussing Benjamin's introduction of divine violence:

This sudden reference to God above reason and universality, beyond a sort of *Aufklärung* of law, is nothing other, it seems to me, than a reference to the irreducible singularity of each situation. And the audacious thought, as necessary as it is perilous, of what one would here call a sort of justice without law, a justice beyond law [...] is just as valid for the uniqueness of the individual as for the people and for the language, in short, for history (ibid: 286).

Divine violence, in annihilating the state, is an expression of justice without law, but is also necessarily accompanied by the transcendental recognition of the divine in each unique individual. This recognition ensures that once divine violence has annihilated the state, the vertical structures of domination will not find their founding myth; through each recognizing the uniqueness in each individual and in each situation, the possibility of accretion of power and proceduralizing of justice is denied.

Likewise, Fanon's conceptualization of national consciousness works to deny the refounding of the state's structures of domination. The verticality of colonial violence becomes horizontal among the colonized (Bulhan 1985). In committing violent action, the colonized acts independently, spontaneously, but her actions are paralleled in the actions of all colonized individuals who commit anti-colonial violence. This creates an organic linkage between them, which makes the formation of the national consciousness possible. This is contrasted with the verticality of the violence of the colonial structure, which has as its apex the overseas métropole, with all other actions existing only as representations of this supreme authority. While the colonial soldier gains his authority from the mythologies of foundation of the colonial state, the

colonized committing anti-colonial violence has no need of authority, since her actions are not representations but, as seen previously, pure means.

The horizontal nature of the national consciousness, linking all who have worked in some way against the violence of colonial oppression, effectively precludes the possibility of re-instantiating verticality in the postcolonial political community. Fanon makes the point that “[q]uand elles ont participé, dans la violence, à la libération nationale, les masses ne permettent à personne de se présenter en ‘libérateur.’” (Fanon 2002:91). In the collective enterprise contra the structures of colonialism, the domination of the state disintegrates *through* the formation of a community of mutual recognition. This is perhaps the only real possible postcolonial situation, where the institutional domination of the state is denied a means of entering social consciousness.

This is meant to be more than simply an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991)—which would be imagined through a process of ideological creativity, of mythologizing. Fanon “is far too aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures to recommend that ‘roots’ be struck in the celebratory romance of the past or by homogenizing the history of the present” (Bhabha 2004: 13). Thus Fanon’s national consciousness has little to do with nationalism as usually characterized; it is also not based on any essential characteristic, particularly race. The formation of national consciousness is linked to the *process* of anti-colonial violence; this means that the creation of national consciousness does not stop with the initial spontaneous boiling over of the sentiment of the colonized: “[l]e peuple vérifie que la vie est un combat interminable” (Fanon 2002: 90). This process is therefore never complete, there is never a point at which anti-colonial struggle (struggle against domination, against vertical po-

litical structures) realizes its goal.

The transcendence of the national consciousness is witnessed by its relationship with phenomenological experience and the denial of the Cartesian basis for selfhood. Fanon’s phenomenology denies the separation between mind or spirit and body. This privileges the lived experience of the individual; however, the colonized individual, through participation in anti-colonial violence, is also *transcending* the flesh (Gibson 2003). The overdetermination of the colonized through her racialized identity is no longer possible once the mutual mortality of colonized and colonizer are made clear through anti-colonial violence. The disintegration of the immortality/universality of colonial structures introduces an infinite possibility and potential immanent in the (previously) colonized body. This links the unique (lived experience) to the transcendent (infinite potential), paralleling Derrida’s appropriation of Levinasian transcendental ethics. The mixture of the surmounting of overdetermination by each colonized individual and the collective experience of the exercise of anti-colonial violence links the unique and the transcendent. Thus a reconciliation between phenomenology and transcendental ethics may be possible, despite Derrida’s early condemnation of phenomenology (see Derrida 1978).

## V. CONCLUSION

The preceding attempt to fill the void in Derrida’s “Force of Law” through recourse to Fanon’s concept of anti-colonial violence leaves numerous questions unresolved. Here I will attempt to address some of these issues which present themselves.

First, and perhaps most blatantly, the problem of decidability remains. As stated, Derrida’s concept of the divine denies the possibility of making a decision on the divinity of violence; to name a violent act as such is itself an act of rationalizing, ideolog-

ically recuperating, and thereby mythologizing it. Under Derrida's terms, there can be no such thing as a mortal judgment on the divinity of a violent act. This impossibility of judgment does not, however, mean that anti-colonial violence cannot be divine. The characterization of anti-colonial violence by Fanon matches Derrida's characterization of divine violence; however it is the action, and not the characterization, that cannot be assuredly affirmed as divine. Divine violence cannot be recognized as such, and of course its recognition has no bearing on its fact or presentation. Recognizing the divine in an action has not the slightest importance in relation to recognition of the divine in the Other.

Second, violence in Fanon and Derrida remains an intensely ambivalent thing. Even though Fanon espouses violence emphatically for its salutary effects on the individual consciousness, he realizes that the same violence has the potential for horrible damage to that consciousness. His experiences treating torturers and torture victims at the Blida hospital in Algeria is testament to this. But Fanon's concept of violence has been interpreted in numerous ways in the literature (Gibson 2003); in fact, anti-colonial violence, in its correspondence with the Hegelian concept of 'work' by Fanon, may even include non-violent action (such as Fanon's own writing project). Of course this does not solve the problem of his insistence on the necessity of *violence* to rupture the intransigence of the Manichean colonial structure. However, recognition of the extremity of the case of Algeria, to which Fanon often specifically referred, may allow for a continuum between non-violent anti-colonial action and anti-colonial violence, all of which may have the same positive effect on the consciousness of the colonized. In Derrida's case, his entire project has been working against violence, first in the academy, then, during the last years of his life, in the more overtly political realm. This may be why, in the post-scriptum to "The Force

of Law," he seems to retreat from an endorsement of divine violence, opening the possibility of its association with the techniques of the Shoa (see note 1 above). But this may be seen as remaining consistent with his insistence of the problem of decidability. Denouncing violence, unveiling the violence of law and of the state, is a necessity, since not to do so is to remain complicit in the mythic violence structuring modern political life. Divine violence, however, cannot be named and remains exterior to human understanding. In this way, Derrida's seeming inconsistency may be retrieved.

Finally, there remains a difficulty in reconciliation between the two projects at the level of the individual's subjectivity/agency. Even the most creative interpretation of Fanon cannot completely mould him into a poststructuralist. He undoubtedly remains committed to a certain realization of 'man in the world' that perpetuates modern views of the cause/effect relationship. My own characterization of anti-colonial violence as agent-making reinforces this aspect of Fanon. However, although Fanon himself states that anti-colonial violence is subject-creating violence, I take issue with this characterization. It is my view that anti-colonial violence works to destroy both subjecthood and subjectivity in all senses of the term. First, through the use of violence the colonized agent affirms that she is no longer *subject* to the laws of the colonial state. Second, through a crushing of the Cartesian dualism inherent in colonialism and humanism,<sup>2</sup> the subject/object dichotomy becomes irrelevant. Fanon's phenomenology is one that simultaneously unifies the individual through a lived experience of the flesh, and fragments her through recogni-

<sup>2</sup> Viz. the mutually defining relationship between colonizer and colonized, which is an expression of the value laden binary of mind/body. Also, through the overdetermination of the colonized through her skin, the binary Cartesian experience is crushed into a consciousness which does not separate the physical experience from the mental. See Khalfa 2004.

tion of the multifaceted nature of the psyche. As mentioned above, anti-colonial violence allows a rupture with the overdetermining racial identity towards an infinitude of possible expressions of identity. This possibility hints strongly at Derrida's (and other poststructuralists') project of rupturing the self-sameness of the subject.

Anti-colonial violence thus understood allows for a far more nuanced conception of violence against colonial structures. However, there is an intriguing question that remains to be addressed: given the parallels between divine and anti-colonial violence, what can be said about terrorism, particularly the attack which took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001? This is a particularly important question given that so many so-called terrorist actions justify themselves through appeal to divinity. However, as should be clear, an appeal to divinity is never enough to make an action divine—and for Derrida, its enunciation as such points towards a mythologizing working towards the foundation of another violent order. The potential for such attacks, even if they can be taken to be anti-colonial in some way or another, to work towards Fanon's own transcendent ideal is also doubtful. The physical distance between the colonizer and the colonized (in this case perhaps the West and the rest) makes the phenomenological experience of bloodshed, so central to Fanon's ideal of recognition, impossible. Also, it is clear that the violence of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and the violence that continues to be claimed as retaliation, are both made for mythological recuperation. Given these two limitations on the potential for anti-colonial violence to become divine in this so-called postcolonial age, the question must remain whether divine violence once possible in the performance of anti-colonial violence—violence that can be characterized as pure means acting for the sake of the living—may never find outlet again.

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