#### The colonized have no language or grammar to articulate their suffering. The culture and violence of the colonizer is always already contained within their language. This form of linguistic colonialism locks in the articulation of resistance into a pre-existing social order centered around the exclusion of those marked inferior.

Del Lucchese 10 [Filippo. "Monstrous Words: Fanon and the Language of Resistance." (2010)]

In this article I deal with various aspects of the relationship between politics and violence, with a specific emphasis on the mediation of language. More specifically, I want to show through a consideration of Frantz Fanon’s thought how **power always employs violence in and through a language, a grammar, a syntax**. Yet, I will also point out how the language itself is a fundamental theoretical kernel in which a vital resistance to power, both ontological and political, is expressed. **The violence of power, even in its most extreme forms, is always employed through an action on language**. Nevertheless, certain political philosophers have offered a different perspective concerning the relationship between language and power. Defining resistance as the basic characteristic of politics, they have pointed out that the conflict with power takes place also within language. Language becomes a real theoretical battlefield through which it is possible to think a different role and meaning for violence. It is Fanon’s theoretical and political writings that can help us define a different conception of violence. Through an analysis of these works, I will reveal what for power is the “monstrous” character of resistance as well as its relation to the language of violence. It would not be difficult to show that **ever since the Greeks defined the Other by the term barbaros – i.e. as one who does not know how to speak – there can be no reflection on politics that does not pass through language**. If each epoch has bequeathed its own version of the problem, this is because the change in forms of organizing communal life, as well as conflicts, has not removed the need to establish the status of language vis-à-vis politics. If we wanted to identify a meaningful point of departure for modernity, it would be the same year as the ‘discovery’ of America by Christopher Columbus when the humanist Antonio de Nebrija, in his famous grammar, declared that Castilian was now replacing Latin as the language for dominating the world.[[1]](#footnote-1) By contrast, when it comes to our era, rather than searching for such a ‘resonant’ declaration (but there are some), it would be better to set about exploring in the microphysical dimension – that is to say, at the level of everyday usages of language, its simultaneously semantic and political nuances and shifts. To introduce a discussion of Fanon, we have therefore chosen to cite part of a passage from a text that is quite remarkable at a philosophical level, even though its ‘author’ would, for many reasons, have wanted to present it as radically anti-philosophical. It is the speech that Mohammad Sidique Khan, one of the authors of the London bombings, made in front of the camera, before setting out to blow up the underground on 7 July 2005.[[2]](#footnote-2) Among many other arguments that we might find very familiar in this context (the appeal to the Koran, opposition to the Jews and the Crusades), there are at least two that deserve our attention. While addressing himself to his victims (and not to the ‘powerful’ in the West – something already interesting in itself), this young, 30-year-old Muslim (the oldest of the group), who came from a Leeds suburb, declares: ‘I am going to keep this short and to the point because it’s all been said by far more eloquent people than me. But our words have no impact upon you. Therefore I’m going to talk in a language that you understand. Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood.’ We can derive two arguments from Sidique Khan words, which can be used to highlight some aspects of the thought of Fanon, who had reflected, if not in the same terms, than at least within the same problematic of violence. The two theses are (1) that **language has become completely powerless. There are no words or arguments that could contribute anything to understanding the world, or indeed to changing it: total death of language**; (2) it is nevertheless possible to bring it back to life through violence, blood, and sacrifice: ‘I’m going to talk to you in a language that you understand.’ Death of language on the one hand, its potential resuscitation on the other: we believe that it is possible by way of Fanon to criticize the first argument of the text we have just read, by stating that it is never possible completely to destroy a language and reduce its power to nothingness; and yet to uphold, at least in part, the young author of the attack, by saying that it is true that this power is not preserved in abstraction from action. That is to say, **all resistance is conducted** – among other things – **through language, but there is no language without a resistance. One cannot, for example, ‘say’ freedom without at the same time ‘acting’ freedom. [HE CONTINUES]** Once again, we must start with the Greeks if we want to grasp the meaning of the identification with a monstrous language. Jacques Rancière, among others, has put the point well with his concept of disagreement.[[3]](#footnote-3) **For Aristotle, the slave is one who understands language (he has to understand it in order to be able to obey his master), but who at the same time does not possess it, because he is not altogether human. This is the dividing line** between *phoné* and *logos* **to which Plato referred when he denounced democracy as** the usurpation of the *logos* and **the demand for political community by the savage** *phoné* of the animal people. The issue is played out on this dividing line between human language and non-human language. **For Fanon the inhuman conceived by colonization is animal or monstrous, because ultimately it is a question of constructing an absolute alterity that could ground and justify the exigency of a historical mission and a comprehensive, absolute domain.** On this score, we can once again only partially uphold the discourse – for it is indeed a discourse with its *logos*, and not only a *phoné* – of the suicide bomber. If it is true that language can never be reduced to utter nakedness, it is also true that it only resists in and through struggle. It is only in resistance for freedom that Fanon discovers **the language of freedom**. And this language **is the highly concrete one of land, of souls and bodies, the struggle of the Algerian people for its own land and to eject the colonizer.** It is once again in modernity that philosophers had posed this question, **with respect to obedience and freedom of speech** and thought: **can one think freely without acting freely? Can one conceive a free soul and a language to express the ideas of this soul, without the body likewise being free?** I believe that without formulating the issue in these terms (which are those of early modern philosophy), Fanon made an experiment of this in the years of struggle. And his conception of ‘lived experience’ (especially that of the black, in chapter 5 of *Black Skin*) precisely represents an attempt to overcome the separation between description and comprehension of the world and humanity on the one hand and action on the other. **Even when Fanon speaks of ‘spiritual community’, a materialist** (rather than ‘spiritualistic’) **conception should be understood by it: consciousness is never given in the mind of the isolated human being – in his essence – but in collective existence and a veritable collective ‘indignation’: ‘Equally victims of the same tyranny, simultaneously identifying a single enemy, this physically dispersed people is realizing its unity and founding in suffering a spiritual community which constitutes the most solid bastion of the Algerian Revolution**.’[[4]](#footnote-4) The whole critique of Bantu essentialism, for example, is based on rejection of an Essence that does not exist or no longer exists. **Either one frees the body with the soul, or one is caught in the trap of this symbolic, Manichaean ontology, a chimera of reason – that is, once again, a poor, bare language.** Fanon’s whole analysis is guided by a concern not to separate the soul and the body of the colonized, their words and their actions. In the essay ‘On National Culture’, he explicitly says that ‘**you do not show proof of your nation from its culture but ... you substantiate its existence in the fight which the people wage against the forces of occupation’, for ‘You will never make colonialism blush for shame by spreading out little-known cultural treasures under its eyes.’[[5]](#footnote-5) Fanon speaks of decolonization as a new rhythm ‘introduced by new men, and with it a new language’, adding that ‘the “thing” which has been colonized becomes man during the [very] process by which it frees itself.’**[[6]](#footnote-6) All this is the strongest affirmation of the fact that on the one hand the colonized is never completely silent (his language is never completely bare), and that on the other his speech can only be provided through an action – that is, it needs to be given life: one cannot speak and think freedom without at the same time ‘acting’ it. If we use the expression ‘identification with monstrosity’, it is because we are dealing with much more than a mere metaphor here. Césaire was already speaking in such terms when he said: ‘We had adopted the word “negro” as a term of defiance.’[[7]](#footnote-7) His surrealism, understood as synonymous with revolution, was a weapon for exploding the French language by the use of this ‘black French’. Fanon’s gesture is even more intense. **The ‘wretched’ of the Earth** – the very choice of that title – **becomes a veritable war cry**, taken up by Jacques Roumain’s splendid poem ‘Les Sales Nègres’.[[8]](#footnote-8) **For Fanon,** as for Roumain**, it is no longer a time for dialogue** (in fact, for the colonialist it never has been a time for dialogue). **Decolonization presents this monstrous face, in that it is not a comparison between two rational points of view, but on the contrary an affirmation** (absolute, one might say) **of a henceforth autonomous point of view**. For Fanon, this comes back to reconsidering the dialectic in the colonial world. **When colour is introduced** into the Hegelian dialectic, what falls away is its very foundation – that is, reciprocity.[[9]](#footnote-9) What Fanon is talking about is therefore a monstrous incomprehension. **Language itself becomes monstrous, for the communication of orders and obedience becomes impossible: ‘There is talk of fanaticism, of primitive attitudes in the face of death, but once again the now crumbling mechanism no longer responds. ... The occupant is bewildered. The end of race prejudice begins with a sudden incomprehension**.’[[10]](#footnote-10) This incomprehension can be read in terms of monstrosity, in the same way that philosophers and theologians read it,[[11]](#footnote-11) by admitting the existence of mythical ‘monstrous races’ in very remote lands. Monstrous races had been created by God as a punishment, following the destruction of Babel. The confusion of languages and incomprehension are therefore born at the same time as monstrosity. The new struggle and the new language to which Fanon refers might in this sense be regarded as the Babel of the colonial world (and its malediction, stripped, obviously, of any metaphysical or religious accent). **It is an identification with the abject,[[12]](#footnote-12) in which people had previously been held by the rhetoric and language of the *colon***. Why do **we use violence**?, asks Fanon at the famous Accra Conference in April 1960. **Because** (this is his answer) **for the colonized it is the expression of an ‘animal’ instinct of preservation – one might say their *conatus*: ‘I say animal and speak in biological terms because, *when all is said and done*, such reactions are simply defensive reactions exhibiting an utterly banal instinct of self-preservation**. [emphasis mine]’[[13]](#footnote-13) It is in somewhat inverting Agamben’s logic, that Fanon here claims an animal dimension in the resistance to power. And this animal affirmation – this is the great discovery – is not only *phoné* (it never was), but a counter-*logos*, an autonomous rationality that terrifies the colonizer, by first of all transforming his language into a dead thing: ‘All the generals-in-chief of all the colonial wars repeat the same things, but how can they fail to understand that no rebellion is ever vanquished? What can it possibly mean, to vanquish a rebellion?’

#### The university is head management in this production of language. Think of teachers afraid to speak out or publish radical views because they wont get published or tenured, students who hold their tongue to protect their grades. Even if the 1AC promises radical free speech it only ever happens with a pre-existing symbolic order.

Occupied UC Berkeley 09 [Anonymous student who took part in the UC Berkely protests "The Necrosocial." Anti-Capital Projects. N.p., 9 Nov. 2009. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.]

**Being president of the University** of California **is like being manager of a cemetery: there are many people under you, but no one is listening**. UC President Mark Yudof Capital is dead labor which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor. Karl Marx Politics is death that lives a human life. Achille Mbembe Yes, very much a cemetery. Only here there are no dirges, no prayers, only the repeated testing of our threshold for anxiety, humiliation, and debt. **The classroom just like the workplace just like the university just like the state just like the economy manages our social death, translating what we once knew** from high school, from work, from our family life **into academic parlance, into acceptable forms of social conflict.** **Who knew that behind** so much **civic life** (electoral campaigns, student body representatives, bureaucratic administrators, public relations officials, Peace and Conflict Studies, ad nauseam) **was so much social death?** What postures we maintain to claim representation, what limits we assume, what desires we dismiss? **And in this moment of crisis they ask us to twist ourselves in a way that they can hear**. **Petitions** to Sacramento, **phone calls** to Congressmen—**even the chancellor patronizingly congratulates our** September 24th **student strike, shaping the meaning and the force** of the movement as a movement against the policies of Sacramento. **He expands his institutional authority to encompass the movement**. **When students begin to hold libraries over night**, beginning to take our first baby step as an autonomous movement **he reins us in by serendipitously announcing library money.** He manages movement, he kills movement by funneling it into the electoral process. **He manages our social death.** He looks forward to these battles on his terrain, to eulogize a proposition, to win this or that—he and his look forward to exhausting us. **He and his look forward to a reproduction of the logic of representative governance, the release valve of the university plunges us into an abyss where ideas** are wisps of ether—**that is, meaning is ripped from action**. **Let’s talk about the fight endlessly, but always only in their managed form**: to perpetually deliberate, the endless fleshing-out-of—**when we push the boundaries of this form they are quick to reconfigure themselves to contain us**: the chancellor’s congratulations, the reopening of the libraries, the managed general assembly—**there is no fight against the administration here, only its own extension.** **Each day passes in this way**, the administration on the look out to shape student discourse—it happens without pause, **we don’t notice nor do we care to. It becomes banal, thoughtless. So much so that we see we are accumulating days: one semester, two, how close to being this or that,** how far? This accumulation is our shared history. **This accumulation**—every once in a while interrupted, violated by a riot, a wild protest, unforgettable fucking, the overwhelming joy of love, life shattering heartbreak—**is** a muted, but desirous life. **A dead but restless and desirous life.** **The university steals and homogenizes our time** yes, **our bank accounts also,** but it also steals **and homogenizes meaning**. **As much as capital is invested in building** a killing apparatus abroad, **an incarceration apparatus** in California, **it is equally invested here in an apparatus for managing social death**. Social death is, of course, simply the power source, the generator, of civic life with its talk of reform, responsibility, unity. **A ‘life,’ then, which serves merely as the public relations mechanism for death: its garrulous slogans of freedom and democracy designed to obscure the shit and decay in which our feet are planted**. Yes, **the university is a** graveyard, but it is also a factory: a **factory of meaning which produces civic life and at the same time produces social death**. A factory which produces the illusion **that meaning and reality can be separated; which everywhere reproduces the empty reactionary behavior of students based on the values of life (identity), liberty (electoral politics), and happiness (private property).** Everywhere the same whimsical ideas of the future. Everywhere democracy. Everywhere discourse to shape our desires and distress in a way acceptable to the electoral state, discourse designed to make our very moments here together into a set of legible and fruitless demands. Totally managed death. A machine for administering death, for the proliferation of technologies of death. As elsewhere, things rule. Dead objects rule. In this sense, it matters little what face one puts on the university—whether Yudof or some other lackey. These are merely the personifications of the rule of the dead, the pools of investments, the buildings, the flows of materials into and out of the physical space of the university—each one the product of some exploitation—which seek to absorb more of our work, more tuition, more energy. The university is a machine which wants to grow, to accumulate, to expand, to absorb more and more of the living into its peculiar and perverse machinery: high-tech research centers, new stadiums and office complexes. And at this critical juncture the only way it can continue to grow is by more intense exploitation, higher tuition, austerity measures for the departments that fail to pass the test of ‘relevancy.’ But the ‘irrelevant’ departments also have their place. **With** their **‘pure’ motives of knowledge for its own sake, they perpetuate** the blind inertia of **meaning** ostensibly **detached from its** social **context**. As the university cultivates its cozy relationship with capital, war and power, these discourses and research programs play their own role, co-opting and containing radical potential**. And so we attend lecture[s] after lecture about how ‘discourse’ produces ‘subjects,’ ignoring the most obvious fact that we ourselves are produced by this discourse about discourse which leaves us believing that it is only words which matter, words about words which matter. The university gladly permits the precautionary lectures on** biopower; on **the production of race and gender; on the reification and the fetishization of commodities. A taste of the poison serves well to inoculate us against any confrontational radicalism. And all the while power weaves the invisible nets which contain and neutralize all thought and action, that bind revolution inside books, lecture halls. There is no need to speak truth to power when power already speaks the truth.** The university is a graveyard– así es. The graveyard of liberal good intentions, of meritocracy, opportunity, equality, democracy. Here the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. We graft our flesh, our labor, our debt to the skeletons of this or that social cliché. In seminars and lectures and essays, we pay tribute to the university’s ghosts, the ghosts of all those it has excluded—the immiserated, the incarcerated, the just-plain-fucked. They are summoned forth and banished by a few well-meaning phrases and research programs, given their book titles, their citations. This is our gothic—we are so morbidly aware, we are so practiced at stomaching horror that the horror is thoughtless. In this graveyard our actions will never touch, will never become the conduits of a movement, if we remain permanently barricaded within prescribed identity categories—our force will be dependent on the limited spaces of recognition built between us. Here we are at odds with one another socially, each of us: students, faculty, staff, homebums, activists, police, chancellors, administrators, bureaucrats, investors, politicians, faculty/ staff/ homebums/ activists/ police/ chancellors/ administrators/ bureaucrats/ investors/ politicians-to-be. That is, we are students, or students of color, or queer students of color, or faculty, or Philosophy Faculty, or Gender and Women Studies faculty, or we are custodians, or we are shift leaders—each with our own office, place, time, and given meaning. We form teams, clubs, fraternities, majors, departments, schools, unions, ideologies, identities, and subcultures—and thankfully each group gets its own designated burial plot. Who doesn’t participate in this graveyard? In the university we prostrate ourselves before a value of separation, which in reality translates to a value of domination. We spend money and energy trying to convince ourselves we’re brighter than everyone else. Somehow, we think, we possess some trait that means we deserve more than everyone else. **We have measured ourselves and we have measured others. It should never feel terrible ordering others around, right? It should never feel terrible to diagnose people as an expert, manage them as a bureaucrat, test them as a professor, extract value from their capital as a businessman. It should feel good, gratifying, completing. It is our private wet dream for the future; everywhere, in everyone this same dream of domination. After all, we are intelligent, studious, young. We worked hard to be here, we deserve this. We are convinced, owned, broken. We know their values better than they do: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. This triumvirate of sacred values are ours of course, and in this moment of practiced theater—the fight between the university and its own students—we have used their words on their stages: Save public education! When those values are violated by the very institutions which are created to protect them, the veneer fades, the tired set collapses: and we call it injustice, we get indignant. We demand justice from them, for them to adhere to their values. What many have learned again and again is that these institutions don’t care for those values, not at all, not for all.** **And we are only beginning to understand that those values are not even our own.** The values create popular images and ideals (healthcare, democracy, equality, happiness, individuality, pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, public education) while they mean in practice the selling of commodified identities, the state’s monopoly on violence, the expansion of markets and capital accumulation, the rule of property, the rule of exclusions based on race, gender, class, and domination and humiliation in general. They sell the practice through the image. We’re taught we’ll live the images once we accept the practice. In this crisis the Chancellors and Presidents, the Regents and the British Petroleums, the politicians and the managers, they all intend to be true to their values and capitalize on the university economically and socially—which is to say, nothing has changed, it is only an escalation, a provocation. Their most recent attempt to reorganize wealth and capital is called a crisis so that we are more willing to accept their new terms as well as what was always dead in the university, to see just how dead we are willing to play, how non-existent, how compliant, how desirous. Every institution has of course our best interest in mind, so much so that we’re willing to pay, to enter debt contracts, to strike a submissive pose in the classroom, in the lab, in the seminar, in the dorm, and eventually or simultaneously in the workplace to pay back those debts. Each bulging institutional value longing to become more than its sentiment through us, each of our empty gestures of feigned-anxiety to appear under pressure, or of cool-ambivalence to appear accustomed to horror, every moment of student life, is the management of our consent to social death.

#### Speaking in the master’s tongue only serves to legitimize their power over us. The language of colonization carries within it a set of dominating principles that are consumed and shared by those who learn it. Linguistic colonization means you assimilate to live and die trying.

Fanon 08 [Frantz. Black skin, white masks. Grove press, 2008.]

I ascribe a basic importance to **the phenomenon of language**. That is why I find it necessary to begin with this subject, which should **provide us with one of the elements in the** colored man’s **comprehension of the dimension of the other. For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other**. The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question… No one would dream of doubting that its major artery is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man. Here is objective evidence that expresses reality. But when one has taken cognizance of this situation, when one has understood it, one considers the job completed. How can one then be deaf to that voice rolling down the stages of history: “What matters is not to know the world but to change it.” This matters appallingly in our lifetime. **To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization**. Since the situation is not one-way only, the statement of it should reflect the fact. Here the reader is asked to concede certain points that, however unacceptable they may seem in the beginning, will find the measure of their validity in the facts. The problem that we confront in this chapter is this: **The [black]** Negro of the Antilles **will be proportionately whiter**—**that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the** French **language**. I am not unaware that this is one of man’s attitudes face to face with Being. A man **[those] who ha[ve]**s **a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language.** What we are getting at becomes plain: **Mastery of language affords remarkable power.** Paul Valery knew this, for he called language “the god gone astray in the fl esh.”1 In a work now in preparation I propose to investigate this phenomenon.2 For the moment I want to show why the Negro of the Antilles, whoever he is, has always to face the problem of language. Furthermore, I will broaden the field of this description and through the Negro of the Antilles include every colonized man. **Every colonized people**—in other words, every people in **whose** soul an **inferiority complex** **has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality**—**finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation;** that is, with the culture of the mother country. **The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to** his **adoption of the** mother **country’s cultural standards.** He **becomes whiter as** he **[she] renounces** his **[her] blackness,** his **[her] jungle.** In **the** French **colonial army**, **and** particularly in the Senegalese regiments, the **black officers serve** first of all **as interpreters. They are used to convey the master’s orders to their fellows**, and they too enjoy a certain position of honor.

1. A. de Nebrija, *Gramática castellana*, texto establecido sobre la ed. princeps de 1492 por Pascual Galindo Romeo y Luis Ortiz Munoz, Edición de la Junta del Centenario, Madrid 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Retort (I. Boal *et al.*), *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, Verso, London and New York 2005, p. 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. J. Rancière, *La Mésentente. Politique et philosophie*, Galilée, Paris 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. F. Fanon, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier, Monthly Review Press, New York 1965, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 179-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A. Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Présence Africaine, Paris 2004 (interview with René Depestre). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. *Oeuvres complètes de Jacques Roumain*, Ed. Léon-François Hoffman, Collection Archivos, UNESCO, Madrid 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. On Fanon and the dialectic, see A. Sekyi-Out, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Fanon, ‘Racism and Culture’, in *Toward the African Revolution*, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Among others, Augustine in *The City of God*, XVI, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See also J. Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l’horreur. Essai sur l’abjection*, Seuil, Paris 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Fanon, *L’An V de la révolution algérienne*, La Découverte, Paris 2001, pp. 176-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)