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On: 08 September 2013, At: 04:47

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Race Ethnicity and Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cree20>

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Published online: 09 Jul 2010.

To cite this article: Zeus Leonardo & Ronald K. Porter (2010) Pedagogy of fear: toward a Fanonian theory of 'safety' in race dialogue, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 13:2, 139-157, DOI: [10.1080/13613324.2010.482898](https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2010.482898)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2010.482898>

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Pedagogy of fear: toward a Fanonian theory of ‘safety’ in race dialogue

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In education, it is common to put the condition of ‘safety’ around public race dialogue. The authors argue that this procedural rule maintains white comfort zones and becomes a symbolic form of violence experienced by people of color. In other words, they ask, ‘Safety for whom?’ A subtle but fundamental violence is enacted in safe discourses on race, which must be challenged through a pedagogy of disruption, itself a form of violence but a humanizing, rather than repressive, version. For this, the authors turn to Frantz Fanon’s theory of violence, most clearly outlined in *The wretched of the earth*. First, the article outlines the basic assumptions of Fanon’s theory of revolutionary, as opposed to repressive, violence. Second, we analyze the surrounding myths that an actual safe space exists for people of color when it concerns public race dialogue. Third, we critique the intellectualization of racism as part of the concrete violence lived by people of color in the academy, which whites continually reduce to an idea. We pedagogically reframe the racial predicament by promoting a ‘risk’ discourse about race, which does not assume safety but contradiction and tension. This does not suggest that people of color are somehow correct by virtue of their social location. In addition, it does not equate with creating a hostile situation but acknowledges that *violence is already there*. Finally, we consider the practical import of intellectual solidarity, where understanding racism becomes the higher good rather than whether or not one leaves the dialogue looking more or less racist than before.

Keywords: critical race theory; race dialogue; Fanon; multiculturalism; racism; diversity

[D]ecolonization is always a violent event. (Fanon 2004, 1)

Part of color-blindness is to demand that race dialogue takes place in a ‘safe’ environment. This is tantamount to premising racial pedagogy on assumptions about comfort, which quickly degrade anti-racist teaching into image and personal management (Thompson 2003). In other words, the higher goal of understanding and fighting racism is exchanged for creating a safe space where whites can avoid publicly ‘looking racist’, which then overwhelms their reasons for participating in racial dialogue. This approach ironically still leaves intact what bell hooks (1992) has called the ‘terrorizing force of white supremacy’, even within the context of safety (174). As opposed to this, critical race pedagogy is inherently risky, uncomfortable, and fundamentally unsafe (Lynn 1999), particularly for whites. This does not *equate* with creating a hostile situation but to acknowledge that pedagogies that tackle racial power

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will be most uncomfortable for those who benefit from that power. It also acknowledges that mainstream race dialogue in education perpetuates what the poet Aimé Césaire (2000) would call a ‘pseudo-humanism’ (37) that establishes white humanity at the expense of people of color, reminding us that ‘the only way the European could make himself man was by fabricating slaves and monsters’ (Sartre 2004, lviii). In other words, it reaffirms an already hostile and unsafe environment for many students of color whose perspectives and experiences are consistently minimized. It may be a euphemized form of violence, a discursive ‘cool violence’ compared to the ‘hot violence’ of economic exploitation (McLaren, Leonardo, and Allen 1999), but linguistic racism is no less a violation (Derrida 1985), maintains links between material distributions of power and a politics of recognition (Fraser 1997), and lowers standards of humanity. It reaffirms Žižek’s (2008) insight that violence is part of the fabric of the daily functioning of social life where systemic and symbolic violence passes as natural (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Bourdieu 1977). We suggest that a humanizing form of violence, a non-repressive expression of power, returns people to their rightful place, just as the violence of decolonization can potentially cancel the molesting power of colonialism.¹

Safety discourses on race are a veiled form of violence and it will require a humanizing form of violence to expose contradictions in the discourse of ‘safety’. As a result, a new system of violence is introduced. We want to make it clear that we are not working from the hegemonic and literal appearance of violence and ask the reader to suspend naturalized images of violence as only bloodshed, physical, or repressive. A humanizing form of violence is a pedagogy and politics of disruption that shifts the regime of knowledge about what is ultimately possible as well as desirable as a racial arrangement. It is not violent in the usual and commonsensical sense of promoting war, injury, or coercion. Insofar as the theory of violence we put forth is positioned against racial domination, it is violently anti-violence. To the extent that racial violence is structured in discourse, we argue that dislodging it will require a violent undertaking in order to set pedagogy on a humanizing trajectory. For this we turn to Frantz Fanon’s insights – particularly the chapter concerning violence in *The wretched of the earth*. Fanon’s work instructs us to consider the dialectics of violence: *education as violent and violence as educative*.

In public settings, people of color find themselves between the Scylla of becoming visible and the Charybdis of remaining silent. If minorities follow an analytics of color, they run the risk of incurring white symbolic racism at best or literal violence at worst. Although some may argue that people of color maintain their dignity and counteract the culture of silence when they come to voice, participating in public race dialogue makes them vulnerable to assaults on many fronts. On one level their actions illuminate what Fanon characterized as the tenuous relationship between humanity and reason. According to Gordon (1995), ‘If even reason or the understanding is infected with racism, where unreason stands on the opposite pole as a Manichaeian abyss of blackness, then a black man who reasons finds himself in the absurdity of the very construction of himself as a black man *who reasons...*’ (8). On another level, by sharing their real perspectives on race, minorities become overt targets of personal and academic threats. It becomes a catch-22 for them. Either they must observe the safety of whites and be denied a space that promotes people of color’s growth and development or insist on a space of integrity and put themselves further at risk not only of violence, but also risk being conceived of as illogical or irrational. Thus, white privilege is at the center of most race dialogues, even those that aim to critique and undo racial advantage.

Authentic participation for whites also has its contradictions but it is not marked by oppression. For people of color, race dialogue is more than ironic.

A certain kind of violence that shifts the standards of humanity for people of color and whites is necessary if race dialogue is more than an exercise in safety but a search for liberatory possibilities. It is violent for whites and forces them to account for race in a condition of risk, not safety. *If it is a safe condition, then it is the safety of being able to take risks, of putting oneself at risk, a condition many people of color already navigate*, something Du Bois (1989) once described as ‘double consciousness’. It is also violent to people of color as it removes a previously violent regime from being ensconced and grafted onto their bodies. We return to the neutral definition of violence, which is not inherently negative or positive but judged for its consequences. At times, this requires performing violence against a primary violence, thereby making a truly peaceful coexistence possible: *peace as a form of violence*. Avoiding this violent shift allows an existing violence to continue, instituting a permanent state of discursive and ideological warfare. The educative possibilities of violence are found precisely in this consideration.

Fanon was ultimately ambiguous about the role of violence in social change. When Fanon (2004) writes that decolonization ‘can only succeed by resorting to every means, including, of course, violence’, (3) we take him to mean violence in multiple ways, literal and physical violence only being one of them. For example, he declares:

In the colonial context the colonist only quits undermining the colonized once the latter have proclaimed loud and clear that white values reign supreme. In the period of decolonization the colonized masses thumb their noses at these very values, shower them with insults and vomit them up. (8)

Colonialism’s violence is pervasive and Fanon suggests that an equally complete reversal, from physical to psychological violence, will be required to oppose it: ‘Violence among the colonized will spread in proportion to the violence exerted by the colonial regime’ (Fanon 2004, 46–7). Ejecting colonialism at the level of values and subjectivity is as much a part of decolonization as material redistribution. As Wallerstein (2009) notes, ‘Without violence the wretched of the earth can accomplish nothing. But violence, however therapeutic and however effective, solves nothing’ (125). Although we clearly are appropriating Fanon’s insights for a context that differs from revolutionary Algeria and colonial Africa, we find his work useful for tackling modern problems with public race dialogues in education. Whether as a form of social analysis or support for policy, Fanon’s theory of violence is replete with insights on the racial contradictions of our time. First, we outline below the basic assumptions of Fanon’s theory of revolutionary, as opposed to repressive, violence. Second, we analyze the surrounding myths that an actual safe space exists for people of color when it concerns public race dialogue. Third, we critique the intellectualization of racism as part of the concrete violence lived by people of color in the academy, which whites continually reduce to an idea. Here we pedagogically reframe the racial predicament by promoting a ‘risk’ discourse about race, which does not assume safety but contradiction and tension. This does not suggest that people of color are somehow correct by virtue of their social location. Finally, we consider the practical import of intellectual solidarity, where understanding racism becomes the higher good rather than whether or not one leaves the dialogue looking more or less racist than before.

Toward a Fanonian theory of race and violence

Two dominant discourses exist within debates concerning critical studies of race and education, one focusing on critical race theory (Gillborn 2008; Yosso 2006; Dixson and Rousseau 2005; Parker and Stovall 2005; Brayboy 2005; Bernal and Villalpando 2005; Ladson-Billings 2004; Taylor 1998; Solorzano 1998; Tate 1997; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995) and the other a resurgent interest in the work of W.E.B. Du Bois (Alridge 1999, 2008; Provenzo 2002; Leonardo 2002). We support this development (Leonardo 2009). However, scant literature exists relating the work of Frantz Fanon to the study of education. This intervention is necessary considering the arguable relationship between education and colonialism, nationally and abroad (Macedo 2000; Ladson-Billings 1998; Altbach and Kelly 1978; Memmi 1965), as well as the recent turn to the decolonial imaginary in social theory (Maldonado-Torres 2006; Grosfoguel 2007; Wynter 1995) and the reassertion of a continuing coloniality in social life even after the fall of official administrative colonialism (Quijano 2000; Maldonado-Torres 2007). Gordon, Sharpley-Whiting, and White (1996) have argued that inquiries into Fanonian thought consist of five progressive stages, which include reactions to his work, biographies, analyses of his contribution to political theory, his role in the development of postcolonial theory, and finally his possible contribution to the generation of original work across the human sciences. We seek to extend this fifth stage in Fanonian thought by applying his theory to the study of education.

Fanon wrote at a time when the grim scenario of colonialism decreased through a moment of possibility when the process of decolonization could have led to the self-determined futures of the former colonies. Fanon (2004) recognized this critical moment and addressed the possibilities inherent in this political situation in his book, *The wretched of the earth* (see also, Fanon 1965, 1967a, 1967b). While Fanon's focus may have been more internationalist in scope, the thin line that he posited to exist between the possibility of liberation and the risk of intensifying repressive violence, is significant for current discussions that seek to dismantle racism within the United States. We suggest that Fanon's theorization of the process of decolonization, both in terms of the violence necessary for its existence and the violent activity required for its undoing, is applicable to a criticism of safe space dialogue concerning race. There is much to learn from Fanon's argument that 'decolonization is always a violent event', be it at the level of the nation or the individual, because it requires 'the substitution of one "species" of mankind by another' (1). What follows is an exploration that seeks to clarify Fanon's position regarding the violence of colonialism as applied to the study of race and education.

The colonial situation of the 1950s and 1960s that Frantz Fanon writes of in *The wretched of the earth* presents us with an incredibly violent situation. According to Fanon, colonialism is a system that works, primarily by force, to permeate the entire lifeworld of the colonized. Those at the very bottom of the colonial hierarchy experience the brunt of physical violence. Yet, a form of educative-psychic violence in the form of racial discourses is also developed by the colonizer in order to keep the very consciousness of the colonized under control. For instance, the colonizer creates a narrative which posits that he is the creator of history, thus justifying conquest as well as racial and cultural supremacy. The colonizer 'makes history and he knows it', according to Fanon, and 'because he refers constantly to the history of his metropolis, he plainly indicates that [at the site of colonization] he is the extension of this metropolis' (15). This form of psychic violence leads to abjection and feelings of inferiority

on the part of the colonized (see also Fuss 1994). The colonized thus learn to stay in their place, and participate in a complex process of consent where they enact violence upon each other, are constantly anxious due to the violence they experience, and establish myths and religious systems that relegate their fate to the will of the gods (16–19). Sartre (2004) writes, ‘The status of “native” is a neurosis introduced and maintained by the colonist in the colonized *with their consent*’ (liv). Through this combination of physical and psychic violence, Fanon argues that the colonizer ‘brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonized subject’ (4). Fanon was clear that education – far from being neutral or enlightening in and of itself – is at the core of colonial domination. He emphasizes:

In capitalist societies, education, whether secular or religious, the teaching of moral reflexes handed down from father to son, the exemplary integrity of workers decorated after fifty years of loyal and faithful service, the fostering of love for harmony and wisdom, those aesthetic forms of respect for the status quo, *instill in the exploited a mood of submission and inhibition which considerably eases the task of the agents of law and order.* (3–4; italics added)

A hegemonic system of violence – one that necessitates a relationship of both active force and consent – functions so that the colonized either are forced into or acquiesce to their declared inferiority (Gramsci 1971; Hall 1996). This unraveling of physical and psychic violence would occur through the liberating violence of the colonized. In this sense, both domination and liberation are, in part, an educative question.²

For Fanon, violence is a necessary part of the process of decolonization due to the inherent brutality of the colonial situation. He argues firmly that the violence of colonialism can only be undone through the ‘*cleansing force*’ of violence (51). However, we must be clear what Fanon means when he uses the term ‘violence’ as well as his criticism of ‘nonviolence’. According to common sense, violence is defined as involving the exertion of force in order to injure, abuse, or destroy another human being. This kind of violence shifts downward our standards of humanity, a regime under which no human thrives. This is violence in both its negative and uncivilized senses, or the active and willful destruction of property and life, as opposed to a Fanonian conception of violence that is liberatory insofar as it frees humans from an oppressive regime by shifting upward the standards of humanity. The problem with the hegemonic definition of violence is that it acts as a regulatory power and renders violence as unacceptable on both sides of the colonial situation (Foucault 1990). As Angela Davis (1998) pointed out:

The conservative, who does not dispute the validity of revolutions deeply buried in history, invokes visions of impending anarchy in order to legitimate his demand for absolute obedience. Law and order, with the major emphasis on order, is his watchword. The liberal articulates his sensitivity to certain of society’s intolerable details, but will almost never prescribe methods of resistance that exceed the limits of legality – redress through electoral channels is the liberal’s panacea. (39)

This limited understanding of violence is dangerous because it stifles any type of dialogue seeking to unpack the complexity of violence and its multifarious use in social movements. However, non-violent tactics that have been praised include electoral politics, protests, the legal system, or dialogue where everyone is made to feel safe and included in the public sphere. The ultimate exemplars of the beneficial

qualities of non-violence can be found in the personages of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. We will have more to say about Gandhi and King below. For now, we want to propose that both Fanon (internationally) and King (United States specifically) give us new understandings of the pitfalls and possibilities of violence, thereby transcending its traditional definition as simply repressive. Like King Jr., Fanon spoke of dreams (2004, 15) but Fanon's projections were the natives' liberation predicated on violence.

It is clear that Fanon was not advocating for the non-violent overthrow of colonial systems. In fact, in his theorization of violence, Fanon was only concerned with political strategy when he focused his attention on the shift that occurs after the moment of decolonization, which involves the construction of the new nation. Fanon was not interested in glorifying violence for the purposes of starting mass upheavals; in fact, he was critical of nationalist movements of this strain. He was skeptical of simplistic nationalist movements, those that were not 'explained, enriched, and deepened ... into a social and political consciousness, into humanism'. Such movements, according to Fanon, would only lead 'to a dead end' (2004, 144). Nevertheless, he did accept the fact that violence is a necessary element of decolonization, political struggle, and human liberation (1).³ Thus, he stated, 'Colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence' (23). This passage is key. Fanon was well aware of the liberatory possibilities of violence, its potential to lead to both a plurality of action and the creation of a new politics. His thoughts on the liberatory properties of violence are worth quoting:

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 ... Enlightened by violence, the people's consciousness rebels against any pacification. (51-2)

Thus, Fanon leaves us with a dialectical definition of violence, one that accounts for its potential for brutality, but also its power to destroy, create, and unify. Naturalizing violence as only repressive comes with two consequences. One, it constructs legitimate violence as the sole possession of the oppressor enforced on the oppressed. It does not conceive of the oppressed, such as racial minorities, as capable of violence as a revolutionary right. Two, it fails to consider violence in the multitude, or the possibility that it may be used to humanize an oppressive relationship.

Fanon was critical of doctrines of passive non-violence because they created a situation of compromise wherein creative forms of tension and struggle were avoided and left untapped. He argued:

In its raw state this nonviolence conveys to the colonized intellectual and business elite that their interests are identical to those of the colonialist bourgeoisie and it is therefore indispensable, a matter of urgency, to reach an agreement for the common good. Nonviolence is an attempt to settle the colonial problem around the negotiating table before the irreparable is done, before any bloodshed or regrettable act is committed. (2004, 23)

Here we note that there are more similarities between Fanon's theory of violence and Martin Luther King's doctrine of non-violence than meets the eye. King adopted a non-violent platform, but this did not involve coming to the negotiating table to seek a compromise. To the contrary, the tactics of agitation deployed during the 1960s'

Civil Rights movement were intended to establish a necessary *crisis* and willingly performed violence against both whites and a system of white domination. Dr. King (1996) asserted, 'Nonviolent direct action seeks to create ... a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored' (741–2). As Lewis Gordon (2008) emphasized, 'Martin Luther King, Jr. is today recognized as an apostle of nonviolence. But when he was waging his nonviolent protest, it was perceived by most white Americans and the U.S. government as *violent*. That is because Dr. King was, in Fanon's formulation, *actional*'. In order to be perceived as being legitimately nonviolent in the eyes of white American society, 'King would have had to cease fighting against U.S. apartheid' (2008). Thus, King's tactic of non-violence was, in content but not in form, an act of violence aimed at liberating both the oppressed and the oppressor. In a quote that is remarkably similar to Fanon's theorization of the creative potential of violence, King (1999) stated:

The nonviolent approach does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor. It first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had. Finally it reaches the opponent and so stirs his conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality. (347)

The empty category of violence can now be further theorized, one filled with a political project. When Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. proposed non-violent protest as a favored strategy against empire, they understood very well that *this non-violent expression was a form of violence to whites*.

As a counter-hegemonic challenge to white supremacy, Gandhi and King's methodology of the oppressed (Sandoval 2000) – indeed their violence – was an attempt to shift upward the standards of humanity, which whites would interpret as an assault on their way of life. Dr. King (1996) continued:

Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. (742)

In the US case, whites obliged the world with hegemonic and literal expressions of violence captured by the media and circulated across the globe. Focusing entirely on a definition of violence that is dependent on its appearance – we know it when we see it – would miss the pedagogical lesson of King's gamble and the depth of Fanon's theory of violence. Although the civil rights protests were protected by the constitution, and although they were mostly peaceful, they were clearly violent to white sensibilities, and whites exposed their rage when they returned the violence *with interest* by escalating the tensions. White violence was captured by the media for all the world to see, striking at the legitimacy of US benevolence toward its racial minorities (Bobo and Smith 1998). In a literal sense, white violence was just that: repressive. But theoretically, it was not violent in the sense of altering relations for it maintained the current and false standards of humanity. It was a violence so hegemonic that it became naturalized, one that maintained the world as it was. It became

violence as a way of life, a necrophilic one at that. White violence is indicative of a certain death drive whereas the liberating violence of the oppressed possesses a humanizing, life-affirming moment. With Fanon (2004), we ask 'But how do we get from the atmosphere of violence to setting violence in motion?' (31).

Just as not all expressions of protest achieve the theoretical status of resistance, not all expressions of rage achieve the theoretical status of violence insofar as they fail to introduce change into a social system. For example, the armed protest of the Minutemen at the border of the state of Arizona and Mexico does not merit the title of resistance by virtue of the fact that they appear to be resisting when in fact they are assisting the immigration history between the United States and Mexico, which is violent to Mexicans (see Leonardo 2003). In contrast, not all apparently non-violent aspirations are easily assimilable into the convenient category of peaceful protest. In the United States in particular, it took the non-violent violence of the Civil Rights movement to introduce a *different system of violence* into civil society. As Fanon insists, challenging repressive systems of power requires going beyond a 'rational confrontation of viewpoints' (2004, 6). We suggest that there are pedagogical lessons contained in this history. Violence is always present in a social system because the struggle over power structures participation within the system. This is not necessarily deplorable but constitutes the field of discourses that struggle for our subjectivity (Weedon 1997). The issue hinges on a couple of questions. What political project is attached to this or that system of violence? What consequences and relations are produced? What are the standards of humanity in the system? Unless these questions are posed, we cannot arrive at the *practical function of violence*.

Following Foucault (1980), King's 'peaceful' protest was not an act by the powerless but a resistance that summoned every morsel of power against a repressive State. In other words, it was an expression of power that took the form of resistance, unlike whites' reactions, which were deployments of power for the sake of maintaining it. This is an important distinction. Using conventional modes of force against a State that monopolizes its legitimate use, as Weber (1978) reminds us, would likely not have succeeded for it would have been overwhelmed by the military, absent of a coup. As Perry Anderson's (1976) near book-length article on Gramsci makes plain, in modern societies the State becomes an 'outer ditch' filled by a complex system of civil institutions. This fact necessitates an equally complex understanding of civil society, which a 'war of maneuver' against an all-encompassing State fails to illuminate. Instead, a 'war of position' must expose fissures in civil society, exploiting its cultural institutions, such as the media and educational system. We may compare King's peaceful protest with the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. One may be tempted to suggest that the South African revolution was peaceful, without much bloodshed and ending with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Of course as Fanon might argue, the South African case was violent to the core, particularly to whites, whose entitlements were revoked. The same can be said about the achievements of the Civil Rights movement, which was a massive assault on an entire social system. Likewise, a critical education is radically violent if it expects to shift the racial dialogue. It is a humanizing form of violence that puts people back in their rightful place and restores their dignity, both the oppressor and the oppressed (Freire 1993).

A humanizing violence is both necessary and liberatory because the actual system and theoretical backbone of colonialism and systems of domination create unethical situations wherein individuals are relegated to subject positions that make them something below, or other than, human. In Charles Mills' (1997) understanding,

people of color become subpersons within the assumptions of such a system. What it means to be human or what it means to be an actional individual in Fanon's sense, is defined via the discourse of the colonizer as the embodiment of the western-white-heterosexual-propriety male (Wynter 2001). Fanon was correct to warn us that non-violence as compromise, electoral politics, political concessions, and appeal to legality only forestalls the overthrow of a *regime of thought* that continues to demarcate between the human and the subperson. If dialogue seeks to undo racism, then we must ask if notions of safe dialogue legitimate an oppressive system or if they engage in a process that is creative enough to produce a new social consciousness, a new human subject 'with a new language and a new humanity' (Fanon 2004, 2). According to Fanon's 'stretched' materialist dialectic, in order to speak to the issue of colonial classes (see De Lissovoy 2008), liberatory violence is the only way to overcome the system while actively reclaiming one's humanity.

The myth of safety in race dialogue for people of color

One of the main premises of safe-space discourse is that it provides a format for people of color and whites to come together and discuss issues of race in a matter that is not dangerous as well as inclusive. Thus, the conventional guidelines used to establish a safe space – such as being mindful of how and when one is speaking, confidentiality, challenge by choice, and speaking from experience – are used to create an environment where fundamental issues can be broached and no one will be offended. Taken unproblematically, this trend is reasonable. However, the ironic twist is that many individuals from marginalized groups become both offended and agitated when engaging in apparently safe spaces.⁴ In their naiveté, many white students and educators fail to appreciate the fact – a lived experience – that race dialogue is almost never safe for people of color in mixed-racial company. But before we romanticize its opposite, or same-race dialogues, the idea that homogeneous spaces are automatically safe for people of color is a mystification for they result precisely from a violent condition: racial segregation. That said, something has gone incredibly wrong when students of color feel immobilized and marginalized within spaces and dialogues that are supposed to undo racism. This situation should give us doubt regarding whether or not safe-space dialogue really allows for the creativity necessary to promote a humanizing discussion on race, or if it functions, in Fanon's words, as a negotiating table that seeks peaceful compromise without engaging in the violence necessary to both explore and undo racism.

We want to suggest that the reason why safe-space discussions partly break down in practice, if not at least in theory, is that they assume that, by virtue of formal and procedural guidelines, safety has been designated for both white people and people of color. However, the term 'safety' acts as a misnomer because it often means that white individuals can be made to feel safe. Thus, a space of safety is circumvented, and instead a space of oppressive color-blindness is established. It is a managed health-care version of anti-racism, an insurance against 'looking racist'. Fanon provides a useful counter to the inherent color-blindness of current racial pedagogy. Fanon's arguments in both *Black skin, white masks* and *The wretched of the earth*, show sympathies with what intellectuals now call a post-racial analysis (see Leonardo in press). Fanon (1967a) warned against the inherent narcissism of white racial superiority found in arguments for separatism, what Appiah (1990) terms 'extrinsic racism', which is the inferiorization of an outer group in terms of their moral worth.

Fanon stated, 'I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex. I hope by analyzing it to destroy it' (12). In destroying the neuroses of blackness, Fanonian violence approaches post-race implications to the extent that the genesis of blackness is a source external to it: that is, whiteness (see Nayak 2006). By hoping to destroy it, Fanon suggests ending race as a neurotic relation. However, to be clear, Fanonian post-race differs from color-blindness because it seeks to destroy race and racism via a practice of full engagement as opposed to a practice of avoidance. Fanon's methodology was phenomenological because he sought to undo racism by engaging the phenomenon itself, of going through race in order to undo it. Thus, a Fanonian post-racial gesture to pedagogy is both different and more beneficial than the color-blind stance taken up in safe-space dialogue, which is hardly blind to color. Perhaps the problem with safe space is that it willingly tries to side step the issues, as well as the educative aspects of anger and frustration, necessary for a beneficial and truly liberatory dialogue on race to take place.

A Fanonian approach leads us back into considerations of violence in race-based dialogue. The question we must ask is how do we go about understanding liberatory discussions on race as necessitating violence? We are not speaking of violence in the sense of a willful act to injure or abuse, but a violence that humanizes, or shifts the standards of humanity by providing space for the free expression of people's thoughts and emotions that are not regulated by the discourse of safety. Our main criticism of safe space is that it is laced with a narcissism that designates safety for individuals in already dominant positions of power, which is not safe at all but perpetuates a systematic relation of violence. Fanon advised against a politics of narcissism, and instead advocated a materialist politics of recognition whereby an individual allows himself to be mediated by the other, or Fanon's appropriation of Hegel's (1977) idealism of the other. Unfortunately, this does not happen because white narcissism is at the very center of safe space. Through the avoidance of conflict and the emphasis on personal and image management, it maintains the self-image and understanding of whiteness and reveals a refusal to change through the other. To be fair, Fanon also took to task people of color's own narcissism, particularly as it concerns the limitations of identity politics and nationalism, what Appiah (1990) calls 'intrinsic racism', or the assumption of a family resemblance within a group necessary in the short term and usually for protection against the assaults of an outer group.⁵ African nationalism during decolonization is an example of the second class, whereas Nazism represents the first class; both are problematic, but they differ in purpose and outcome. White indulgence is a gross attempt to understand the self through the self rather than through the other: narcissism par excellence. In fact, Fanon warns us that the 'other' in the self/other dichotomy in racial dialogue may not even exist. According to Gordon (2008):

In the contemporary academy, much discussion of race and racism is replete with criticism of otherness. Fanon, however, argues that racism proper eliminates such a relationship. Instead of self and other, there are self, others, and non-self, non-others. In other words, there is the category of people who are neither self nor others. *They are no-one*. The dialectics of recognition is disrupted, and the struggle of such people becomes one of achieving such a dialectics. Put differently, they are not fighting against being others. They are fighting to become others and, in so doing, entering ethical relationships. This argument results in a peculiar critique of liberal political theory. Such theory presupposes ethical foundations of political life. *What Fanon has shown is that political work needs to be done to make ethical life possible. That is because racism and colonialism derail ethical life.* (italics added)

A pedagogical approach that avoids safety in the interest of image and personal management makes such an ethical relationship possible.

If we are truly interested in racial pedagogy, then we must become comfortable with the idea that for marginalized and oppressed minorities, *there is no safe space*. As implied above, mainstream race dialogue in education is arguably already hostile and unsafe for many students of color whose perspectives and experiences are consistently minimized. *Violence is already there*. In other words, like Fanon's understanding of colonialism, safe space enacts violence. Those who are interested in engaging in racial pedagogy must be prepared to (1) undo the violence that is inherent to safe-space dialogue, and (2) enact a form of liberatory violence within race discussions to allow for a creativity that shifts the standards of humanity. In other words, anger, hostility, frustration, and pain are characteristics that are not to be avoided under the banner of safety, which only produces Freire's (1993) 'culture of silence'. They are attributes that are to be recognized on the part of both whites and people of color in order to engage in a process that is creative enough to establish new forms of social existence, where both parties are transformed. This is not a form of violence that is life threatening and narcissistic, but one that is life affirming through its ability to promote mutual recognition.

Pedagogy of fear and the intellectualization of race

Teaching race literacy is necessary but difficult. In addition, authentic race dialogue is elusive because over and beyond its emotional register for many educators and students, race dialogue runs into the formidable force of ideology. *In mixed racial company, race dialogue is almost never for the benefit of people of color and race-conscious whites*. In fact, as Nishitani Osamu (2006) observes, race dialogue in mixed-race company works to maintain the Western distinction between 'anthropos' (the inhuman) and 'humanitas' (the human). Osamu points out, "'anthropos" cannot escape the status of being the object of anthropological knowledge, while "humanitas" is never defined from without but rather expresses itself as the subject of all knowledge' (260). Put another way, race dialogue often maintains the status of whiteness as being both natural and unchanging in the white imaginary. In other words, whiteness remains ubiquitous even if it is not named, and noticing whiteness is itself regarded as a form of transgression (hooks 1992). Whiteness is the immovable mover, unmarked marker, and unspoken speaker.

Although it would be interesting to focus on race discussions within a homogeneous group, or same-race dialogues, the imagined situation we put forth is a mixed company because it projects the ideal of public integration and the educational challenges to it. Given that integration is the goal, many students of color who seek 'safe' race discussions in public rarely find them, having to settle for the reality that most pedagogical situations involving race are violent to them. They realize quite quickly that public race talk is not for them but for whites, or at least a white mindset. In other words, it caters to a white racial frame, a white imaginary (Leonardo 2009), which is a collective unconscious that tolerates race dialogue in small amounts. Often, as Fanon's (1967a) critique of Sartre (1948) indicates, whites turn racism into an intellectualist problem, rather than a lived one (132–5).⁴ Following a Fanonian dialectic, at root racism is a material problem, which suggests displacing an idealist framework with a concrete one. Public race discussions are examples of white racial hegemony insofar as they represent whites' accommodation to demands of color as long as white

common sense is observed and kept intact. As a result, most race discussions benefit whites and patronize people of color; they project a white audience, both real and imagined. In this interaction, the otherwise deep and intimate understanding that people of color have to offer is forsaken in exchange for an epiphenomenal, intellectualist interpretation of race.

There are genuine fears that must be confronted when educators publicly discuss race in the classroom. Both whites and people of color face certain dangers that prevent an authentic exchange. Not only do whites fear that they will be exposed as racist; they also fear being found out as racial beings. People of color already know that whites comprise a racial group, therefore white raciality would not represent a shocking discovery for them. However, whites' discovery of their own raciality is precisely what is at stake. Hiding behind the veil of color-blindness means that lifting it would force whites to confront their self-image, with people of color acting as the mirror. This act is not frightening for people of color but for whites. In the light of day, this fact of whiteness would have led Fanon to declare, 'Look a white person!' Although this pale façade is becoming more difficult to sustain, whites cultivate a color-blind mask that even Fanon would not have predicted. To be clear, color-blindness in a color-obsessed nation appears oxymoronic and whites would have to work hard to maintain the mask. In a race-saturated society, such as the United States, *color-blind racism is accurately described as a mode of feigning an oblivion to race*. In short, color-blind perspectives are attempts to observe – indeed to see – race in a way that maintains whites' equilibrium. It is not literally a form of blindness but its precise opposite: seeing race in a selective way that makes whites acceptable, not to people of color per se, but to themselves. *It would be a mistake to regard color-blindness as a non-racial move and more accurate to construct it as a particular deployment of race*.

Authentic race discussions are violent to whites for the very reason that such discussions would expose their investment in race, their full endorsement of, rather than, flippant regard for it. It speaks to the inauthentic education that whites experience. This does not suggest that their fear has no basis. In fact, it has a material basis for it represents one of the many walls that people of color have to scale as they attempt to convince whites that race matters in a manner different from whites' understanding of it. Some whites who are open minded enough, often feel enlightened and enlivened by discussions that confront racism, vowing their commitment to the cause. That established, whites often conceive of race talks as intellectually stimulating – as in a discovery or another topic in which they can excel – rather than a lived experience that students of color in good faith share with their white colleagues. Meanwhile, students of color walk away from the same discussions barely advancing their understanding of race and racism, sometimes satisfied departing with their legitimacy and mindset intact. After all, these confrontations were not for their benefit; they were not meant to advance people of color. A Fanon-inspired race dialogue is not anti-intellectual, but precisely anti-intellectualist. Said another way, it is materialist.

Minority fears are quite different from white apprehensions concerning public race talk. Despite the countless occasions where people of color expose their intimate thoughts and hurts about racism, then followed by white dismissal (not always overt), their desire for authentic race dialogue represents their hope not only in themselves but a hope projected onto whites. It is, on one hand, naïve and a sign of wishful thinking on the part of minorities to expect more out of whites than whites expect out of themselves. On the other hand, it is a humanizing desire and commitment to the other that prevents people of color from disengaging from whites. People of color may

suspend their memory of white aggressions in order to start anew, of renewing their hope that *this time it will be different*. Then they are reminded of the pattern they know so well and their disappointment haunts them. They may even strike back against empire and voice their disapprobation at whites. Too often, whites interpret minority anger as a distancing move, or the confirmation of the ‘angry’ person of color archetype, rather than its opposite: an attempt to engage the other, to be vulnerable to the other, to be recognized by the other, to be the other for the other.

As Freire (1993) once remarked, protestation from the oppressed is an act of love insofar as it represents an act of engagement. When the oppressed open their wounds through communication, they express the violence in their dehumanization that they want the oppressor to recognize. People of color do not only fear overt violence from whites (although this would be enough) but rather their wantonness, their lack of recognition of people of color, a certain violence of the heart rather than the fist. This is what Fanon (2004) describes as ‘violence rippling under the skin’ (31). This secondary form of violence confirms a daily assault that often goes unnoticed. It is a double violence that fails to acknowledge the other on whom one imposes an unwelcome will. It may sound like a slave’s maneuver to desire recognition from the master but such is the relationship of bondage within a colonial relationship. It would be enough to suggest that people of color fear overt white violence in the form of physical aggression. People of color have other fundamental fears in becoming invisible to whites, of becoming merely an idea to them.

Some minority students willingly participate in otherwise problematic race conversations because they refuse to surrender to absolute cynicism, where racism would have succeeded. They realize that participation maintains their sense of humanity and disengagement subverts the kind of person they want to cultivate, the kind of self or student they want to be. In other words, disengagement is one of the symptoms of structural racism, which succeeds at isolating us from one another, of subverting our ability to live through the other. Still some people of color give into despair, tired as they are of educating whites from ground zero ... every time, again and again. Who can blame them? It is a survival mechanism that people of color have practiced over the years in order to prevent their anger and frustration from consuming them, of turning to self-destructive forms of violence in the form of rage. Or, it is a defense against white violence – in the form of microaggressions – which strikes at the academic legitimacy of scholars and students of color when they violate the color-blind codes of conduct that regulate the classroom. People of color sometimes overlook white violence *so they can get through their daily life*. Like a child who has been abused, people of color avoid white violence by strategically playing along, a practice that whites, whose racial development stunts their growth, underestimate when they mistake consensus as the absence of coercion. Like abused children who do not possess the ability to consent and defend themselves against the verbal and physical power of a parent, people of color have become masters at deflection. This is how they secure safety in violent circumstances.

It is apparent that both whites and people of color want to avoid violence from being enacted against them. They enter race dialogue from radically different locations – intellectual for the former, lived for the latter – and an unevenness that the critical race pedagogue must accept and becomes the constitutive condition of any progressive dialogue on race. It is the risk that comes with violence but one worth taking if educators plan to shift the standards of humanity. In an apparently common quest for mutual racial understanding, whites and people of color participate in a violence that becomes

an integral part of the process and seeking a 'safe space' is itself a form of violence insofar as it fails to recognize the myth of such geography in interracial exchange. As it concerns people of color within the current regime, safe space in racial dialogue is a projection rather than a reality. This is the myth that majoritarian stories in education replay and retell in order to perpetuate an understanding of race that maintains white supremacy. Safe spaces are violent to people of color and only by enacting a different form of violence, of shifting the discourse, will race dialogue ultimately become a space of mutual recognition between whites and people of color.

If people of color observe the current call for safety, this process defaults to white understandings and comfort zones, which have a well-documented history of violence against people of color. It is a point of entry that is characterized by denials, evasions, and falsehoods (Frankenberg 1993; Mills 1997). Its shell is non-violent for in public most whites prize self-control. Race dialogue within a white framework is rational, if by that we mean a situation that preserves, as Angela Davis (1998) mentioned, peace and order. This procedural arrangement has much to recommend it if we want to avoid uprisings and outright violence. But its kernel is already violent to people of color because a certain irrational rationality is at work. Both parties leave the interaction relatively 'intact', which should not be equated with the absence of violence. Whites depart the situation with their worldview and value systems unchallenged and affirmed, and people of color remain fractured in theirs. Whites would need to experience violence if they expect to change. But this is different from a hegemonic understanding that violence is always a form of dehumanization. In our appropriation of Fanon's dialectics of violence, we find transformative possibilities in violence depending on the political project to which it is attached. Moreover, in this framework violence is not so much a description of this or that act qualifying as a form of violence, but a theoretical prescription of a different state of affairs, a response to oppression that equals its intensity. Thus, we do not describe what violence looks like, but assess its consequences.

A race education worth the name: shifting the ground of pedagogy

Given that education requires an overhaul if the ship of racism may be steered differently, then violence is warranted as a way to shift the standards. In this last section, we advance some ideas around the criteria for a more authentic dialogue around race in education. In so doing, we do not suggest that dialogue alone can turn the tide without addressing the structural changes that give racism its force. We do not harbor such illusions of grandeur. We offer the following thoughts on dialogue as a form of social practice: *dialogue as a method of violence and violence as dialogical*. A critical race education requires a pedagogy of violence that transcends fear without conveniently forgetting that it structures the learning moment. Our suggestion is not to escalate the pedagogy of fear that students and people of color experience by turning the proverbial table on whites. In saying this, we want to acknowledge that fear is already in the room, not as a form of cul-de-sac or pessimistic analysis but a realistic appraisal of an existing limit situation, an act of defiance in Bell's (1992) sense. But just as fear may be turned against itself in order to produce conditions for courage, so we suggest that fear is an emotion that does not necessarily paralyze the educator or scholar.

One, a race dialogue assumes already racialized participants. Therefore, safety is relational and asks the question, 'Who feels safe and toward what ends?' Working against the pretences of color-blindness, the race literate educator is not a post-race

subject, if by that we mean achieving a position outside the universe of race. In race literacy, one works with race from within, not without (see Twine 2004; Guinier and Torres 2003). In this sense, race has no outside (Leonardo 2005). Even imagining a condition that hails ‘after race’ (which is possible), is an event within racialization for our imagination is itself racial. Fanon’s was a racial analysis with post-racial implications. Therefore, race dialogues and the regulative ideals that educators establish as rational procedures that guide the discourse, are racialized ideals rather than race-neutral. As Omi and Winant (1994) have reminded us for a couple decades, procedures require a racial formation to give them meaning and significance. Discursive regulations are racial for they speak to the issue of power and who can say what to whom in the course of an exchange. They are part of a larger understanding of the self as belonging to a racial universe, not in the sense of an inherently limiting system (for all systems are limiting) but one that defines possible expressions within a given condition (see Goldberg 1993).

Two, a pedagogue may begin a course simply by having a meta-dialogue (dialogue about dialogue) about the assumptions of safety so pervasive in the academy when it comes to the topic of race. By redefining classroom space as a place of risk, educators encourage students to experiment with their self-understanding, and to promote the audacious notion that they may change their minds by the end of a term. We need to be clear that a place of risk does not promote hostility but growth. It does not promote discomfort for its own sake, as if learning only happens when one is uncomfortable. As we have noted, many students of color experience discomfort in public race forums, which hardly leads to new learning for them. Yes, something is learned, but discomfort is not the precondition to worthwhile learning. Against much of anti-racist writing, we do not suggest that a pedagogue’s *goal* is to encourage white discomfort. Rather, whites must take ownership of feeling uncomfortable in critical race dialogue. Pedagogues can encourage them to take responsibility for their feelings of inadequacy and defensiveness. When paired with clarity in purpose and solidarity with the other, where judgment is practiced but one is never judged, discomfort can be liberating because it enables whites and people of color to remove the mask. They may end up knowing each other more fully as complex human beings rather than the shell of one: whites assumed to be more superior than they are, people of color more inferior than they are. After many years of experience in the university setting, we have learned that this apostasy – of creating risk as the antidote to safety – leads to more transformative learning opportunities. It humanizes students of color because it legitimates their voice and affirms whites’ incompleteness, for it is guided by an ethic of concern for and not a desire to expose whites as simply racist. Not only does risk discourse encourage looking behind the dialogue (a hermeneutics of suspicion) but it also appreciates what it opens up in front (a hermeneutics of empathy). This lack of safety ironically produces a condition where whites are more able to empathize with people of color as both groups assume the consequences for risk, whereas people of color usually assume the burdens of a ‘safe race dialogue’. A comfortable race dialogue belies the actual structures of race, which is full of tension. It is literally out of sync with its own topic.

Finally, violating the discourse on safety means aiming at rigor. It opens up deeper engagements on race, both in the intellectual and practical sense as a lived reality. In an educational system that prides itself on excellence, pedagogues paradoxically aim low when it comes to race dialogue, settling instead for mediocrity. They fail to take advantage of the deep competencies that students of color have to offer and instead

rely on the shallowness of whiteness. It is a pedagogy guided by the least competent students in the room, a strategy that most educators would not endorse or tolerate in any other condition. It means helping the children most left behind (and who invest in being the last one in) when it comes to race literacy: mainly, white students. They are often racially illiterate and unable to decode the fundamental racial lessons of daily life. Using a Fanonian analytics of the oppressed to drive race dialogue does not mean that the oppressed are correct most of the time even if it means they are correct more of the time. It does not focus on their individual accuracy but on their collective experiences and the perspectives born from a life of risk. For their important decisions rely on race literacy as if their life depended on it. A humanizing violence would restore their education in the proper sense. This means increasing the violence in education, of disrupting its inhumane dimensions toward new standards of humanity that liberate rather than oppress.

Notes

1. We would like to take this moment to thank the anonymous reviewers for their excellent suggestions to improve the manuscript. Much appreciation goes to REE Chief Editor, David Gillborn, for giving our perspective space in the journal and working with us from beginning to end. It is a pleasure to publish in what has become the definitive venue for critical thought on race and education.
2. We recognize that Paulo Freire took up Fanon's project on the question of violence in *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Furthermore, Freire theorized the nature of liberatory dialogue in the same text. Our project differs from Freire's to the extent that racial violence, and particularly its US iteration, figures more centrally in our analysis.
3. Homi K. Bhabha (2004) asserted that the glorification of violence that is attached to *The wretched of the earth* is the result of Jean-Paul Sartre's preface rather than Fanon's arguments (xxi).
4. One of the authors of this essay has seen this phenomenon play out during his own participation in a race-based discussion where, after the designation of safety, several African American and Latino students left the group after being accused of attacking white participants, leading one African American student to declare, 'Fuck safe space!' as she retreated from the group. Whites looked on in amazement.
5. Fanon (2004) writes, 'Antiracist racism and the determination to defend one's skin, which is characteristic of the colonized's response to colonial oppression, clearly represent sufficient reasons to join the struggle. But one does not sustain a war, one does not endure massive repression or witness the disappearance of one's entire family in order for hatred or racism to triumph. Racism, hatred, resentment, and "the legitimate desire for revenge" alone cannot nurture a war of liberation' (89).
4. In *Black skin, white masks*, Fanon takes Sartre to task for reducing black experience to an idea rather than a brutal fact. Fanon writes, '*Orphée Noir* is a date in the intellectualization of the *experience* of being black. And Sartre's mistake was not only to seek the source of the source but in a certain sense to block that source' (134).

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