CONCERNING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A FANONIAN ANALYSIS OF COLONIZING THE FEMALE BODY

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Abstract: This paper explores various manifestations of violence against women in the United States through a Fanonian analysis of colonizing practices. It argues that the hostility towards women which has been so evident in American public policy over the past year can be understood as a large-scale, abstract version of more concrete applications of social control still pervasive in interpersonal relations. Understanding misogyny and objectification of women through Fanon's theory of colonization shows us that the philosophical basis of American attitudes about gender roles and gendered public policies is not the "pro-life" orientation promoted in political rhetoric, but the deliberate application of a politics of fear.
Keywords: violence, colonization, public policy, women's well-being, intimate partner abuse.

The rhetoric of American exceptionalism typically functions to exalt the United States by casting all other societies as "Other," that is, as lesser. In the case of contrasts with developing nations, exceptionalist pretensions often cast these other societies as less capable of constituting and maintaining effective forms of social organization. When explaining the sense in which the United States is exceptional as an advanced economy, however, the other states – European nations in particular – are depicted as less committed to values the articulator of exceptionalism assumes to be necessary conditions of human flourishing. U.S. superiority is asserted inconsistently, and usually without any sign of awareness that it is inconsistent, as a commitment to hyper-individualism and as a commitment to greater inclusion of all people on the grounds of their social value and a deeply-rooted tradition of communitarianism.[1] Even where there is no explicit contrast

[1] "America is a great place because there's a fantastic fusion of two forces: individualism and community. When you look at communities where there's been a natural disaster or where there's been a terrible terrorist attack, what you see is Americans running towards each other, not running away […] And I don't think there's anywhere on the Earth quite like it," says Martin Bashir (2012), opinion show host for the cable television news network MSNBC. See

being made with other nation-states, this implicit claim that the United States is a society more respectful of the moral value of all of its inhabitants dominates the public-sphere discourse. We see this distorted national self-perception in the newly-adopted cliché used by politicians to express support for marriage equality – that you are American "no matter who you love"[2] – a long overdue attempt to leap out of more hateful elements of homophobic and heteronormative discourse through American exceptionalism's characteristic appeal to ahistoricity. What this rhetoric obscures (in addition to those past decades in which sexuality was rigidly policed and whom one loved mattered very much) is an obsessive discursive focus on a stereotypical "mainstream" that is fast becoming a demographic minority – the white middle class – and a deliberate inattention to people who do not fit that stereotype: people of color and people too economically disadvantaged to lay claim to membership in the elastic category, "middle class." My intention in this article is to show that the "xenophobic manipulation of women's rights" that is the thematic focus of this issue appears in American life both as a violence of abstraction at the level of public discourse and as a dismissal of women's security needs and bodily integrity at the level of everyday individual lives. I see this application of abstract (attenuated) violence in discourse and concrete violence in marginalized communities as similar to the distinction Frantz Fanon makes in *The Wretched of the Earth* concerning the differential treatment of the "settler" and the "native" in colonized communities, and I shall therefore argue that the logic of colonization is a fruitful tool to illustrate uneven or contradictory responses to gendered violence in the United States.

At the level of public policy-making and national discourse, there is a stated commitment to defending selective rights that women are deemed to have: not reproductive rights, but the right to be safe from violence. But this discursive defense of women's right to a life free of violence is coupled with an assumption that this protection will cover a particular type of victim, the middle-class woman who, despite her gender, is enough like the nation's lawmakers that she can be seen as deserving – indeed, that she can be seen at all. The cornerstone of legal safeguards against gendered violence, the Violence Against Women Act (abbreviated VAWA), is a piece of federal legislation that mandates recognition of domestic violence and sexual assault as crimes in all of the states, territories, and tribal lands within the United States and provides funding for programs to combat violence (National Network To End Domestic Violence – NNEDV, 2013). As is sometimes the case with federal legislation in the United States, VAWA – first

http://info.msnbc.com/_news/2012/08/16/13319372-martin-bashirs-new-lean-forward-ad?lite.

[2] For example, in a commencement address given to graduates at Barnard College, President Barack Obama spoke of "that brilliant, radically simple idea of America that no matter who you are or what you look like, no matter who you love or what God you worship, you can still pursue your own happiness" (May 14, 2012). See: https://barnard.edu/headlines/transcript-speech-president-barack-obama#overlay-context=headlines/citation-evan-wolfson .

passed in 1994 – bears the quirk of an expiry date, such that it periodically needs to be reauthorized. The recent controversy surrounding reauthorization demonstrates how difficult it can be, in this political environment, to extend protection to women who are not part of the social mainstream. Reauthorization was effected in both chambers of the Congress without incident in 2000 and in 2005, but in 2010 it ran headlong into an ideologically polarized legislature during an election year (National Domestic Violence Hotline, n.d.; Harper, 2012). The significant stumbling block was disagreement between the upper and lower chambers of the legislature – the Senate and the House of Representatives, respectively – that had resulted in two distinct versions of the reauthorization bill. The Senate version proposed extending protection to three groups of women who had previously been either excluded or inadequately recognized – Native American women, undocumented immigrants, and members of LGBTQ communities – whereas the House version sustained the inattention to some of these groups that had marked previous incarnations of the Act (Harper, 2012). In essence, the House reauthorization bill was a declaration that some women deserve to be protected from violent crime, and others do not.

VAWA's continued legal authority is crucial precisely because it is a piece of legislation that has an undeniably successful track record in achieving its goal of reducing gender-based violence. Government reporting outlets and independent advocacy groups differ somewhat in the exact figures they put forth, but they agree that there has been an increase in both charges filed and arrests made in the areas of domestic violence and sexual assault since VAWA was first introduced (whitehouse.gov, 2013; NNEDV, 2013). They report reductions in intimate-partner homicides ranging from 34 percent to 35 percent in cases of female victims and ranging from 46 percent and 57 percent in cases of male victims, in addition to an overall decrease in the rate of non-fatal intimate-partner violence by about 67 percent (whitehouse.gov, 2013; NNEDV, 2013). Federal mandates which direct the states to harmonize their laws with VAWA protections have resulted in reforms to state law that now treat acquaintance rape and spousal rape as seriously as so-called stranger rape, that have made stalking a crime in all states, that authorize immediate arrest of suspected perpetrators by police officers who respond to situations in which they have probable cause to believe domestic violence has occurred, and that attach criminal penalties to violations of civil protection orders (whitehouse.gov, 2013). VAWA also provides federal funding for specialized training of law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges to educate them about domestic violence and sexual assault concerns, coordinates law enforcement responses with social service agencies and community groups, offers housing and immigration status protections to victims, and founded the National Domestic Violence Hotline – which 92 percent of its callers report is

their first attempt to seek help (whitehouse.gov, 2013). Failure to reauthorize the Act would have eliminated funding for investigative and prosecutorial resources in matters of violent crimes against women, provisions for restitution, and the possibility of civil redress for women whose cases were not prosecuted in criminal courts (Harper, 2012).

Although debates about the act have reflected a conservative bias towards the needs of white middle-class women, VAWA's successive reauthorizations have pushed against the discursive trend of focusing attention and resources on the middle class by extending the protections of the 1994 Act to immigrant women whose right to remain in the country might have been jeopardized by leaving an abusive sponsoring partner (2000 reauthorization) and to women living in government-subsidized housing whose decision to leave an abusive partner might have resulted in eviction or denial of housing (2005 reauthorization), a continued commitment to inclusiveness that has arguably been part of the long delay in a reauthorization process originally scheduled to take place in 2010 but only signed into law by President Obama in 2013 (National Domestic Violence Hotline, n.d.). The need to protect other groups of women – Native American women, undocumented immigrants, and members of LGBTQ communities – is as evident as the reluctance of some legislators to acknowledge them as worthy of the shelter the law has to offer. Native American women, for instance, suffer a homicide rate that, on some reservations, is as much as 10 times higher than the national average, and statistics compiled by the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) suggest that roughly 39 percent of these women will suffer violence in the home (NCAI, 2012). The protection that was proposed in the Senate bill and objected to in the House version will now make it possible for them to bring charges against non-Native American abusers in tribal courts – a vital protection when one considers 2000 Census statistics showing that 56 percent of Native American women are living on tribal lands with non-Native American spouses or domestic partners (NCAI, 2012). Until this added protection was included in the 2013 reauthorization, Native American women seeking legal redress could not get it from the courts governing tribal lands, who were prohibited from trying non-Native offenders (*Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, 1978). They had to appeal to federal or state prosecutors in distant communities who declined to prosecute 52 percent of cases involving violence against Native American women (NCAI, 2012). Despite the very specific need of Native American women for legislative protection, VAWA provisions giving them the right to press charges against non-Native partners in tribal courts for violence or abuse committed on tribal lands have been dismissed as special treatment to which they are not entitled by many of the white male lawmakers who represent electoral districts containing tribal lands – even by one of the two Native men who represent such districts in the Congress (Bogado, 2013).

The debate on what protections should be in the 2013 reauthorization of VAWA is illustrative of two distinct theoretical constructs that I see as providing parallel explanations of the hostility and inaction that movements to end gender-based violence must confront: first, the violence of abstraction that is the public policy, public sphere mirror image of everyday marginalization that peace studies theorists, following Johann Galtung (1969), have labelled "structural violence," and second, the colonial structures theorized by Frantz Fanon in his landmark analysis *The Wretched of the Earth*. The notion of a violence of abstraction is developed by phenomenologist Jonathan Wender in his book *Policing and the Poetics of Everyday Life* as a particular type of dehumanization that results when those in authority view human beings in crisis as problems to be solved (Wender, 2008: 90). Reflecting on the ways this "logic of problematization" asserts itself in the daily work of the law enforcement officer, Wender contends that "the most discomforting aspect of the police bureaucracy is not its power of physical coercion but its ability to encipher a human being into an abstract assemblage of data" (*ibidem*: 107). Reduction of people to data, to statistics, to percentages is a devaluing erasure of their complexity that is made possible through abstraction – in much the same way that troubling histories of racism, sexism, and homophobia in the United States are erased by the ahistorical rhetoric I noted in my introductory comments about the putative equality of all Americans, "no matter who you are, […] no matter who you love" (Obama, 2012). Violence of abstraction depicts women solely as victims, in need of protection by men and by putatively masculine institutions like rule of law. In offering this critique, I do not mean to suggest that the law ought to overlook crimes and injuries that might be committed against persons of either gender. What I am contending is that debates about which women *deserve* to be protected begin from an assumption that women, as a class, *need* to be protected by others – which is to say, following Marx, that we cannot protect ourselves.[3] This assumption of diminished capacity replicates the structural inequality we find in Fanon's analysis of the colonial state – women are less capable than men – and invites us to see women as inherently inferior, rather than seeing the reality of a society that subjugates women through application of random, yet pervasive, acts and threats of violence against us.

Colonialism, Fanon tells us, is characterized by pervasive violence – both by the state and by the settlers set up as the colony's elite against the marginalized natives – and characterized by governing institutions that construct and preserve inequality (Fanon, 1963: 29-30). Ruling others, demanding that they serve your interests to the exclusion of their own, can only be achieved through application of violence. And keeping the people

[3] What Marx said, about the peasant class most economically marginalized in nineteenth-century France, was that "[t]hey cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" (Marx, 1994: 200).

you have colonized subservient is most likely to be successful if you can convince them that they are, objectively, of lesser value than the group who rule. Fanon asserts that colonized natives – first conquered, then exploited and simultaneously made to feel inferior by the colonizing settlers – are governed by the naked force of colonial institutions such as checkpoints and police brutality in contradistinction to the veiled force of education and acculturation that shapes the lives of the settlers (*ibidem*: 31). *The Wretched of the Earth* concerns itself with both the logic of colonization as it is practiced by colonizing settlers who use violence as a dehumanizing force to break the community relations – the solidarity – of the colonized natives and the psychology of colonization as it breaks down the confidence and sense of self of the native. Because of this, Fanon's analysis seems to me to provide the most fruitful theoretical bridge between the violence of abstraction that allows legislation guaranteeing women's bodily integrity to become a political football and the structural violence that marks the everyday lives of women (and their male allies) who survive and resist the gendered violences of sexual assault and intimate partner abuse.

While it might be tempting to read my connection of gendered violence to Fanon's analysis as a metaphorical adoption of the concept of colonization, I intend my deployment of the concept to be understood literally. As I read Fanon, his deconstruction of colonization and his development of a theory of decolonization are grounded in an analysis of power relations that is as applicable to gender as it is to conquest of foreign territories. He draws together political dominance, economic exploitation, and a program of psychological destabilization that convinces the conquered of their incapacity to resist. To speak of the gender dominance that others theorize as patriarchy using the language of colonization helps me to see the commonalities in how violence is transmuted into power in various contexts that would otherwise be separated into distinct categories of gender relations and geopolitical concerns.[4] Notably, reading gender violence in the United States through Fanon reveals the normalization of violence against women that is presented to men – it's just the way of the world, something that happens, rather than something that some people (statistically, mostly men) do to other people (statistically, mostly women) – as an analogue of the normalization of violence against natives that settlers in colonies live with as a matter of fact. Even as I see this colonial attitude surfacing at the macro level of society in policy discussions of how to address violence against women, I see it also at the micro level, in the lives of individual women, in the

[4] My insistence on linking imperial conquest and patriarchy is grounded in philosophical endorsement of bell hooks' argument that patriarchal domination is not the foundation of all oppression and would not lead necessarily to an end to violence against women and gender subordination. Instead, hooks contends, patriarchal domination is one manifestation of a more pervasive "politics of domination" that is learned in the home through exercise (and often, misuse) of parental authority, a phenomenon that women participate in "as perpetrators as well as victims" (hooks, 1989: 20).

pervasiveness and diversity of control mechanisms that continue to structure women's lives as dependent upon men and dependent, for their safety and well-being, on maintaining attitudes of passivity towards the world. Why does the dominant message transmitted to women and girls stress their value as sexual objects, rather than, say, their value as scholars, athletes, or even sexual *agents*? And what connection does this sexualization of women have to violence against us?

In part, the explanation for reducing women's value to our reproductive capacities and sexual attractiveness lies in the history of patriarchal political institutions, the usefulness of compliant women to a system that Adrienne Rich (1986) has theorized as "compulsory heterosexuality." The commentary Rich offers on Kathleen Gough's eight characteristics of male power elaborates many violent tactics – from rape to genital mutilation – that serve to convince women of their vulnerability and the futility of adopting any attitude other than passive acceptance of male authority (from "The Origin of the Family," quoted in Rich, 1986). Rich's elaborated examples of Gough's inventory of characteristics range over strategic sexual terrorism, exploitation of women's production and reproduction, withholding of education and information that might allow women to see themselves as autonomous agents, and promotion of cultural values that inculcate female inferiority and male superiority. The blend of calculated application of violence and indoctrination of distorted self-evaluations and worldviews that we find in Rich's account of the heteronormative society mirrors the colonial structures we find described in Fanon's account of occupation by the rapacious imperial state.

This oscillation between external and internal control mechanisms – between violence and indoctrination – is equally visible in the lives of individual women, particularly when considering how expectations for our romantic and domestic lives shape our experiences. In the United States, understanding of romantic relationships and domestic partnerships has changed over the last few decades in at least two very important ways. First, the increasing influence of feminist thought and theorizing about power relations have given us a greater awareness of dysfunctional relationships, from unhealthy attachment, to stalking, to overt domestic abuse. Systemic abuse in relationships, Nancy Hirschmann suggests, functions like colonization. She contends that:

> the more complete and effective a system of oppression is, the less aware of it *as* oppression its victims are; a truly successful system of oppression will have encoded itself into the worldview of the colonized, become their reality, and constructed their inner visions of themselves, social and political relations, nature, the world. (Hirschmann, 1996: 139)

Second, in fundamentally changing the ways in which relationships are conducted, advances in communications technology like cell phone texting – which effectively eliminates the publicity of conversations taking place in public places, and consequently the ability of bystanders to intervene in conflicts – are blurring the line between external and internal control. The emergence of texting as a means of constant communication in relationships has facilitated its development as a mechanism through which one relationship partner may exert control over the behavior of the other, and may perpetuate systemic abuse in ways that make it more difficult for the abused partner to recognize the communication as abuse.

One helpful place to start thinking about the kind of intimate partner abuse that blurs the line between violence and indoctrination is Kathleen Ferraro's genealogy of the discourse on domestic violence. This term, she notes, "is a code for physical and emotional brutality within intimate relationships, usually heterosexual" (Ferraro, 1996: 77). She identifies the contemporary "domestic violence" discourse she is concerned with analyzing as emerging in the United States "in the early 1970s, along with the second wave of the women's movement" (*ibidem*: 78). What particularly interests Ferraro about our thinking on domestic abuse is the way it has been taken up and altered, from a progressive feminist discourse concerned with the safety of women into a law-and-order discourse concerning the criminality of domestic assault. "It is possible to oppose 'domestic violence' and at the same time oppose all other efforts to restructure relations of dominance, including women's subordination," she observes (*ibidem*). The originary voice of progressive feminism, which seeks to challenge the male dominance grounding the conservative "family values" worldview, has, she thinks, been drowned out by the crime-control perspective that entrenched itself in the Reagan through Clinton eras as the standard response to social ills (*ibidem*: 89).

It is important, however, to notice that Ferraro is not just engaging in a simplistic left-wing attack on the right. She endorses the view that perpetrators of assault, domestic or otherwise, *should* face the criminal justice system (*ibidem*: 87). The problem she identifies in the law-and-order strand of discourse around domestic violence is that law and order is effectively where the conversation stops. Public policy and public spending are focused on arrest and imprisonment of individual criminals, and far too little attention is given to "the legal structures upholding male-dominated nuclear households" and the needs of women trying to leave abusive relationships: employment at a living wage, safe and affordable housing, affordable healthcare and daycare, and protection of families who have "irregular" immigration status (*ibidem*: 81-82, 89).[5]

[5] Kimberlé Crenshaw makes similar arguments about the failure of public policy to address the needs of abused women, with particular attention to the ways that women of color are burdened, in "Mapping the

While Ferraro points out the limitations of criminal justice discourse, she also recognizes the ways in which feminist discourse has failed to adequately explain the complexity of these crimes committed in the privacy of the home. "Like other aspects of early second wave feminism," she contends, "domestic violence discourse has been oriented toward the construction of a unified image" (*ibidem*: 78). She explains:

> Although the unidimensional image of "woman" in feminist thought and movement has undergone major revisions in response to critiques from those who felt silenced or misrepresented, the domestic violence discourse has remained moored to assumptions of homogeneity among those who are battered and those who batter. (*ibidem*)

This construction of a "type" of woman who is battered and a "type" of man who is an abuser is a particularly problematic stereotype because it encourages identification among some, at the expense of alienation among others, and with implications for whether and how this social ill is taken seriously.[6] Such divisiveness in turn breeds an attempt to unify that, in its presumed unification, simply perpetuates the alienation of those who find themselves unrepresented. This is yet another instantiation of the violence of abstraction.

Even Ferraro, however, in the course of her very careful analysis, accepts some claims fairly uncritically – notably the idea that because the larger category of intimate partner relationships in which one finds domestic violence includes dating relationships, all intimate partner relationships can be theorized as a single model (*ibidem*). This is a point that needs to be considered much more carefully: there are some important differences between dating and live-in relationships that may well be reasons why women who are being abused by partners they live apart from might not see themselves as being abused. Asserting control and manipulating a partner through text messaging, for example, might not be seen as part of an abusive relationship because it is not overtly violent. Indeed, one of the primary messages about domestic violence that self-help/outreach websites strive to convey is that abusive relationships are fundamentally a matter of control, not violence (Turning Point, 2006).[7] I would argue there is another way to frame discussions of intimate

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Margins" (Crenshaw, 1994: 95-98). This section contains an excellent discussion of the obstacles faced by immigrant women who are – or understand themselves to be – dependent on their husbands for their legal status.

[6] Perceiving domestic violence as a problem among the poor encourages members of the middle-class to disregard its existence in their homes, and permits political silence on behalf of the governing class. On the other hand, outreach efforts that attempt to promote domestic violence as a danger in all families have skewed public service messages and community resources towards middle-class women and neglected marginalized women in poor minority communities. See Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1994) article for this argument.

[7] I cite this self-help/outreach site as one instance of the many such sites that present themselves as accessible resources for people in abusive or controlling relationships. It offers nuanced information about a variety of concerns – dating violence, the power and control mechanisms that counselors offer as warning

partner abuse. Instead of making a distinction between control and violence, and casting "control" as the defining characteristic of these relationships, I think there is more discursive space opened up for critical analysis of this social phenomenon if we see it as part of the social dysfunction that peace studies theorists identify as "structural violence." One theorist in this area, Kathleen Ho, defines structural violence as "the avoidable disparity between the potential ability to fulfill basic needs and their actual fulfillment" (Ho, 2007: 1). Her discussion of structural violence as a human rights violation focuses on questions of poverty, but the claim that social and economic inequalities, because they are avoidable, constitute a systemic violence against those who are disadvantaged with respect to power is applicable to intimate partner abuse (*ibidem*: 4). The relative economic disadvantage of women in American society – evidenced by wage disparity and rates of poverty for female-headed single-parent households – and the social indoctrination that Rich identifies produce conditions of vulnerability for women that result in constrained agency (*ibidem*: 10). The structural violence of normalized abuse, control, and manipulation of women in relationships convinces them of their inability to act – producing conditions of learned helplessness structurally similar to the psychology of colonization Fanon describes – and forms the "lived experience" counterpart to the violence of abstraction that reduces the distinct legislative needs of different groups of women to a singular remedy protecting the stereotypical middle class woman from violence.

To see intimate partner abuse as structural violence, however, is culturally difficult. Inability to even recognize that abuse can take place without the presence of overt violence is particularly acute in a cultural context like the United States, which romanticizes the "take-charge" man and the passive woman. Think, for instance, of the standard reaction of young female movie-goers to the romance depicted in the *Twilight* (2008) franchise: the adoration of Edward Cullen as a loyal and loving partner and the reading of his obsessive interest in Bella as evidence of his romantic character.[8] Just as Edward's intrusive actions – breaking into Bella's bedroom to watch her sleep, for example – are presented as romantic longing, so too the tagline for the first film – "A teenage girl risks everything when she falls in love with a vampire" – conveys a message of heroic sacrifice on Bella's part. The risk she takes is not, of course, presented as the risk a self-sufficient and capable young woman is faced with when she discovers the stalking impulses of the young man who has caught her eye. Instead, the "risk" is whether she can maintain her humanity in a relationship with a vampire, and the sacrifice she

signs, advice for people thinking about leaving an abusive or controlling intimate partner, how to identify a healthy relationship – which reflect current thinking in the domestic violence crisis counseling community, in a format and language that are easy to understand.

[8] See, for instance, the discussion of popular culture reactions to the film offered by Jonathan McIntosh in his guest blog post "What Would Buffy Do?" (McIntosh, 2009).

appears intent on making at the end of the film is precisely that humanity. She desires Edward so much and values her current self so little that she wants to become like her lover in order to be with him always. Disseminating this willingness to give up her life in order to be a mere part of his as a romantic ideal for young girls plays into the psychological indoctrination on which both patriarchal and colonial dominance depend, and plays into the interests of abusive and controlling men.

In an effort to offer warning signs that one might be in an abusive relationship, some of the self-help and outreach information available on the Internet also interrogates our cultural confusion. Among the "early warning signs" are such actions as "constantly asks you where you are going, who you are with, etc.," "cut[s] you off from friends and family," and "monitors your clothing/make-up" (Turning Point, 2006). These are clearly attempts to control, but "women are taught to interpret [such actions] as caring, attentive, and romantic" (*ibidem*). One complicating factor in making determinations about whether a given relationship is abusive is depicted, but not interrogated, in *Twilight*. The desire to exert control may motivate the actions of abusers, but the abused partner is likely to recognize the relationship as unhealthy or undesirable only if, and to the extent that, she perceives it as constraining her capacity to choose for herself. If, as *Twilight*'s Bella does, she believes herself to be freely choosing the relationship, she will not recognize it, or its mechanisms, as abusive. In the case of "text control,"[9] for example, the communication that is effectively consolidating the abuser's control may well be interpreted by the abused as a means of nurturing the relationship and being available as an emotional resource to her partner.

Nancy Hirschmann's view is that this emphasis on the presence or absence of choice should be central to our definition of abuse. "[I]s not a key element in our labeling [a relationship] abusive the fact that a woman's agency, her capacity to make choices and act on them, is being denied?," she asks (Hirschmann, 1996: 127). For Hirschmann, the capacity for free choices implicates political conceptions of liberty. The difficulty that traditional theories of liberty have in explaining what freedom means in the context of abusive relationships proves we need to do more work building concrete experiences into abstract theories (*ibidem*: 128-129). Where theories of "negative liberty" denote "an absence of external constraints" (law, force, and other forms of coercion), "positive liberty" "attends to what might be called 'internal barriers': fears, addictions, compulsions that are at odds with my 'true' self can all inhibit my freedom" (*ibidem*: 129-130). Negative liberty

[9] "Text-control" may not be the catchphrase under which this phenomenon eventually becomes widely known to the general public but it is important to begin attempts to label the behavior. In her analysis of domestic abuse, Andrea Westlund cites research showing that"'[d]ate rape' and 'separation assault' name phenomena women know from our own experience, but which remain invisible without names (Mahoney 1991, 68-69)" (Westlund, 1999: 1060). "The naming of such phenomena," she claims, "challenges the norms that make them invisible" (*ibidem*).

would tell students who are being controlled by text messages from their partners "you could always turn off the phone" or "you're not being forced to read and respond to the texts" (*ibidem*).

For the purposes of this discussion, the compelling defect of negative liberty is its failure to grasp the insight drawn from strands of feminist moral philosophy which point to women being socialized into a moral worldview that privileges obligations over rights (*ibidem*: 128). The question of whether a woman "is […] free if she returns to (or stays with) her partner" assumes freedom as the only consideration and discounts the way obligation shapes our lives (*ibidem*: 127). As I suggested above, female students being "text-controlled" might, for instance, not experience a barrage of text messages as oppressive because they are more focused on a need to validate the thoughts and feelings of their relationship partner than on exercising a right to privacy. Indeed, they may be tempted to interpret text messaging technology as conferring upon them a freedom to stay in touch with their partners, rather than seeking freedom from being monitored by them. Positive liberty theories can account for motivations that seem freely chosen but in fact hamper our quality of life by explaining that "the immediate desires I have may frustrate my true will" (*ibidem*: 130). Hirschmann uses the example of eating disorders to explain this phenomenon of "inauthentic" choices that our true selves would not rationally make, and contends that frustrating these desires does not constrain freedom (*ibidem*). "[L]ock[ing] me out of the kitchen to prevent a binge" can enhance my liberty, she argues (*ibidem*). Although "control" is implicated differently in eating disorders and controlling relationships, we can in both cases make a distinction between immediate desires and the long-range desires of the true self. Making students shut off their phones in class might support their liberty by recognizing that the immediate desire to be in caring relationship may make girls and young women vulnerable to manipulation and control. This view understands women in our society to feel a strong incentive to adopt a model of femininity that is passive in the face of male authority. Young women today often deny that they hold this attitude but they nonetheless continue to engage in behaviors seemingly in collusion with this model of passive, sexually available femininity – the colonial attitude Hirschmann describes, an indoctrination of oppression that is so complete one does not recognize it in oneself.

The most obvious defect of positive liberty is its paternalism. In delineating desires that belong to one's true self and those that are "imposed," one is essentially telling a young woman what her true self is – sometimes in opposition to what she will experience as her most heartfelt desires. Both negative liberty's emphasis on "issues of consent, opportunity, and choice" and positive liberty's emphasis "on relationship and community" – developing our capacities to contribute productively to our social networks – are important

to feminist attempts to expand women's liberty in contemporary society, Hirschmann tells us (*ibidem*). "[W]hat domestic violence particularly highlights," she claims, is "that choices are so deeply, fundamentally, and complexly constructed for women that the conventional understandings of liberty and restraint found in the positive-negative debate are inadequate to address women's experiences" (*ibidem*: 136). This complex construction even shapes what is seen as a choice and what is not. In the explicit domestic violence Hirschmann is theorizing about, leaving the relationship – however vulnerable that may make a woman, economically, say, or in terms of immigration status – is a choice the battered woman could make, but her abuser's "impulse" to behave violently towards her is not cast as a choice he makes (*ibidem*: 138).[10] Rather, abusive men, she notes, frequently blame their "bad behavior" on alcohol, workplace stress, and alleged provocations on the part of the woman herself (*ibidem*). By the same token, we need to be careful that any educational outreach we engage in around "text-control" behaviors does not focus exclusively on the woman's "choice" to respond, but also interrogates her partner's choice to engage in threatening and manipulative behavior.

Ultimately, Hirschmann thinks that women's freedom is blocked by "patriarchy […] the social, legal, and economic control" of women by men that is normalized in our culture (*ibidem*: 140). She notes that:

> Depression, feelings of low self-worth and accompanying beliefs that the woman somehow deserved the violence, or guilt and the belief that she provoked the violence, are all too common and may keep women from leaving their abusers. These feelings often coincide with women's holding of traditional values about women's and men's roles and the stigma of divorce. Indeed, women who feel guilt or shame may be reluctant to come forward at all or even to admit to themselves that they *are* battered women. (*ibidem*: 133)

The continual return of feminist thinking on domestic violence and abusive relationships to matters of control – especially Hirschmann's discussion of how an external worldview, imposed upon us, can change our perceptions of ourselves and our environment – invites us to consider the relevance of French philosopher Michel Foucault's writings on power and social control. While Foucault's concern is with the ways institutions shape us into the beings that serve their aims, the interesting thing about linking his description of discipline to Fanon's description of colonization and Hirschmann's observation of domestic violence as an internalization of systems of oppression is how well these accounts work together to

[10] Kimberlé Crenshaw makes a related point about the ways the burden and blame of domestic violence fall more heavily on abused women than abusing men: the burden is "more readily interpreted as obliging women not to scream rather than obliging men not to hit" (Crenshaw, 1994: 103).

explain how domestic abuse functions.[11] One of the points of convergence we see in both Foucault's theory of discipline and the cycle of domestic abuse is the deliberately early exercise of power so that mere threats can have the same controlling effect later on. Foucault concurs with Beccaria and other reformers of the criminal system that, to be effective, "[t]he penalty must be made to conform as closely as possible to the nature of the offence, so that the fear of punishment diverts the mind from the road along which the prospect of an advantageous crime was leading it" (Foucault, 1995: 104). In the case of domestic abuse, the "crime" in question would of course be any autonomous action on the part of the abused that threatens the abuser's ability to maintain control. Another similarity between social control by institutions and control within a domestic relationship is the use of isolation. Foucault cites the view of 18th century theorists of punishment that, in isolation, the person would turn his or her thoughts inward and "rediscover in the depths of his conscience the voice of good [… in] an exercise in spiritual conversion" (*ibidem*: 122). Clearly, in abusive relationships, it is not "the voice of good" that is intended to guide the abused person's thinking and behavior, but the voice of the abuser. Nevertheless, the principle remains the same: a voice that seems to belong to an authoritative other (be it God, or the abusive relationship partner) is internalized, and the result of internalization appears as a "conversion."

Once someone has internalized the voice of external authority, it can be exceptionally difficult for him or her to even recognize that voice as distinct from the thoughts and desires of the "true self," let alone resist it. Foucault explains this phenomenon by observing that the disciplined individual "becomes the principle of his own subjection"; he or she takes on the role of monitoring his or her own behavior to make sure it conforms to "the rules" and thereby assumes dual roles, both prisoner and jailer (*ibidem*: 202-203). This is an advantage for those who would control an intimate partner because, as a sort of outsourcing from the abuser's point of view, it lessens the amount of power that needs to be exerted. It is, at the same time, a disadvantage for the controlled because any eventual liberation on their part will be experienced as fighting against their own desires. The obvious economy of time and effort that discipline requires of the controller means also that disciplinary powers may be "de-institutionalized," to use Foucault's term; they are easily adapted into methods of control that can be used within families, or exerted through technologies like cell phones, rather than face-to-face (*ibidem*: 211, 215). The reason this adaptation is so easy, Foucault remarks, is that "disciplines […] bring into play the power

[11] In her analysis of the links between Foucauldian theory and domestic violence, Andrea Westlund notes that the point about control over women being like Foucault's discipline has also, influentially, been made by Sandra Bartky (Westlund, 1999: 1045).

relations […] as discreetly as possible," through similarity to expected romantic and/or caring behaviors (*ibidem*: 220).

Now that disciplinary principles of internalization and self-monitoring are so pervasive, some readers of Foucault on social control theory interpret him as saying that there is no way out of these systems of control. However Foucault himself points to a possible means of escape in the course of discussing what disciplinary power must suppress in order to be effective. He notes that disciplinary tactics "must neutralize the effects of counter-power that spring from them and which form a resistance to the power that wishes to dominate," and identifies "counter-power" as "anything that may establish horizontal conjunctions" (*ibidem*: 219). This observation suggests that effective resistance – against institutional discipline or a controlling and abusive relationship partner – can be constructed in non-hierarchical networks that promote solidarity and the kind of politically-aware sharing of personal experiences that earlier generations of feminists labeled "consciousness-raising." Foucault commentator Andrea Westlund makes this point also, arguing that "[b]ecause they use a marginalized group's experiences and testimony to destabilize oppressive norms, battered women's shelters and grass-roots anti-domestic violence programs are subversive in their activities" (Westlund, 1999: 1056). "[S]uch anti-domestic violence programs," she concludes, "constitute local sites of resistance, in something very like the Foucauldian sense" (*ibidem*: 1057). I think it is quite possible that these programs might also provide the concrete experiences that Hirschmann calls for as an expansion of political philosophy's theorizing of liberty. Having access to a social space in which one can share stories about what one has experienced and how one has reacted can inspire all of the participants to enlarge their horizons of possibility. That is, such spaces can become sites of shared resistance, revealing not just momentary breaks in the disciplinary power that abuse survivors are manipulated by, but also the solidarity that Fanon argues must be built through collective decolonizing actions by colonial natives if they are to liberate themselves from the violence and inequality imposed by the colonial settlers.

While Westlund characterizes the explicit bullying and control techniques employed by abusers as more consistent with pre-modern, pre-"disciplinary" techniques of power, she does acknowledge that, typically, "[t]he proximity of the battered woman to her assailant allows for a degree of close surveillance not possible in pre-modern relations" (*ibidem*: 1048). It is this surveillance, she says, "which lends to domestic violence a certain resemblance to the type of power exercised in modern disciplinary institutions" (*ibidem*). Westlund's position that overt bullying is "pre-modern" in the Foucauldian sense merely serves to underscore the modern, disciplinary nature of cell phone texting as an exercise of power. Like Ferraro and Hirschmann, Westlund also connects heterosexual battering,

at least in part, to "some of the gender norms that modern institutions themselves inculcate – a particular kind of nuclear family, for example, characterized by a gendered division of labor, roles, authority, and sexual and political identities" (*ibidem*: 1050). The ability of controlling behaviors to mimic, or camouflage themselves among, caring behaviors and gender norms makes it particularly difficult to inoculate people against abusive relationships; everything in our social conditioning reinforces the notion that we should seek relationships in which our partners display interest in our plans and activities, and that we should demonstrate our reciprocal emotional commitments by appreciating their interest in us and fostering our own interest in their lives. Especially when this conditioning is coupled with a belief that men should take charge and/or assume a protective role in their relationships with female partners, it can be very difficult to distinguish growing romantic interest from the warning signs of a controlling personality.

Failure to make this link between the phenomenology of intimate partner violence and the ways that Fanon, Foucault, and the feminist theorists I have been discussing theorize power relations not only makes it difficult to see an unhealthy relationship for what it is when one is in it, but also gives rise to the puzzle so many bystanders are so quick to verbalize – why doesn't she leave? One preliminary response to this question is to stress that leaving is a dangerous and complex process that often requires multiple attempts. As Nancy Hirschmann remarks in her analysis of how theories of liberty need to adapt to accommodate real-world problems like domestic violence, "what may appear to be complicity [… or] internalization of abuse, […] may in reality be a form of resistance, management, or just plain survival" (Hirschmann, 1996: 140). But the fact that individuals appear to choose to stay in relationships that we all know – in abstraction – are not healthy ones does seem to many to be complicity. I think it is this presumption of complicity that encourages people who claim to endorse a "pro-life" politics to be so cavalier about the violence and psychological deterioration that abuse victims face. Staying equals complicity, and complicity collapses into full responsibility, so – in this worldview in which judgment fills the space that empathy and sensitivity to complicating factors might otherwise occupy – the victim brought the misery on herself; she is to blame. And because she is to blame, she does not (entirely) deserve to be protected.

The lack of awareness many bystanders have about intimate partner violence (and other processes of colonization and social control, for that matter) is noted, and cynically exploited by many who direct the political discourse of the United States. For them, the ideal citizen is not inspired by the politics of "life" (as in pro-life) but by the politics of fear. Fearful people are easier to control, so dealing with them (producing them) secures one's grip on power, but one needs credible threats in order to nurture that fear. A widespread culture of violence against women is therefore tolerated by those who might otherwise

legislate protection – because it serves their interests. The only effective way to change this is to deploy the decolonization strategies Fanon recommends to build solidarity among members of society.

This has to be a grassroots policy of building community beyond the truncated public sphere designated as the political space of the nation, much like the consciousness-raising communities and non-hierarchical networks that might liberate us from Foucauldian social control. In essence it refuses colonization, and the hysteria that the politics of fear seeks to inculcate, by doing an end-run around the official, legitimized sphere in which citizens are invited to endorse the existing power structure and instead building more inclusive discursive spaces peopled by supportive community members. My own experiences with this decolonizing, horizontal counter-power revolve are taking place these days on the college campus. They include organizing "Take Back The Night" ceremonies in which each participant offers his or her commitment to specific actions that will end domestic violence and sexual assault; working with male allies in the student population to develop peer-driven bystander intervention education strategies designed to shift the cultural norms to an intolerance for non-consensual sex that is consistent with the values of the university community; providing advocacy and encouragement to female students who are banding together to support each other in the effort to develop healthy body images and a greater sense of self-esteem; and developing a faculty and staff network that portrays a view of feminism that contests the vicious stereotype so pervasive in American culture of the hate-filled, humorless totalitarian who wants to destroy all of the institutions and ideals that comprise American civilization. Other examples of grassroots consciousness-raising and solidarity are increasingly present on the internet – most notably, the creative, provocative, and therapeutic "Who Needs Feminism?" Tumblr (http://whoneedsfeminism.tumblr.com) – and embodied in the global dance party that was One Billion Rising, the February 14 (Valentine's Day) outpouring of human energy to end violence against women. These coalitions of people who choose to see ourselves – and demand to be seen by others – as survivors and resisters, instead of victims, will be the spaces in which we can nurture the movements we will need in every community, in every part of the world, of men and women coming together, rising up to demand an end to gendered violence.

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