The theme of violence can be traced throughout Hannah Arendt's major political writings such as *The Human Condition* and *On Revolution* where she draws connections between war, violence, and necessity (or liberation from necessity); *The Origins of Totalitarianism* where she examines Europe's uses of violence in concentration camps, as well as massacre and imperialism in Africa; and, of course, *On Violence* where she condemns the violence of the Black Power movement and of anti-colonialism. The essay that follows will take as its starting point the violence/power distinction and then the appropriate uses of violence versus non-violence as presented in Arendt's *On Violence*. I argue that this distinction between violence and power is misapplied in Arendt's critique of Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon's analyses of anti-colonial revolutionary violence in Algeria. Arendt wrongly interprets Sartre and Fanon's analyses of violence and counter-violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and her critique of violence proves to be unbalanced. On my view, she rejects their analyses because they argue for the use of violence by the oppressed to overcome the violent system of colonialism. I contend that it is because they argue for revolutionary violence (or counter-violence) against their oppressors that Sartre and Fanon are accused of glorifying violence for violence's sake.

In the concluding section of the essay, I briefly consider the possibility that while Arendt's critique of anti-colonial violence is misguided, her analysis might prove helpful when applied to the post-colonial context in which former anti-colonial leaders fighting for independence strike out violently against the people. Instead of assuming that this is a confirmation of Arendt's assertions about anti-colonial violence, I argue that it demonstrates the pervasiveness of violence intrinsic to colonial and neo-colonial systems.
I. Violence, Power, and Non-Violence

In *On Violence* Hannah Arendt distinguishes between the terms power, strength, force, authority, and violence—all of which she describes as methods by which man rules over man. Of particular interest here is the distinction she draws between violence and power. According to Arendt “power is the human ability to act in concert […] it belongs to a group and remains in existence only as long as the group keeps together.”¹ Power is inherent in political communities and requires legitimacy, but not justification. Arendt asserts that legitimacy is derived from the initial organization of acting in concert, but justification is derived from a future end. Not only does Arendt stress that violence does not equal power, she adds that politically speaking the two terms are opposites. Power does not entail any form of violence. This is so much the case that to speak of non-violent power is, for Arendt, redundant. She explains that power and violence cannot rule simultaneously, “Violence appears when power is in jeopardy and ends in power’s disappearance.”²

While power needs legitimacy and not justification, violence always stands in need of justification and will never obtain legitimacy. Power belongs only to a group and it points to that group’s ability to act in concert, but violence remains merely a means and is by nature instrumental. Arendt asserts that the ends of violence are always in danger of being overwhelmed by the means that they justify, and which are needed to reach them.³ Furthermore, Arendt warns that within violence there is an arbitrariness or an “all-pervading unpredictability” that will not allow for any certainty.⁴

I will challenge three of the above claims by Arendt. First, I want to challenge the idea that the unpredictability of violence is particularly problematic. The uncertainty and unpredictability of violence can hardly be perceived as a strong criticism of violence because Arendt makes the same claims about all human activity. Recall that Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, prioritizes action above labor and work because of its spontaneity and what she calls natality. So unpredictability is not only a characteristic of

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² Ibid., p. 155.
³ Ibid., p. 106.
⁴ Ibid., p. 106.