

Violence and Freedom in Isayama's Attack on Titan

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Abstract

This paper aims at providing a different understanding of violence as a productive force rather than a destructive force in Hajime Isayama's Attack on Titan animanga. Relying on Frantz Fanon's theory of revolutionary violence, Sigmund Freud's theory of aggression and violence, and James P. Sterba's just war theory, the paper shows that violence can be seen as a productive force, which is necessary for humans' survival, justice, freedom, and rebirth, rather than a destructive force. The study examines the protagonist's experience with violence by applying the above-mentioned theories to prove that violence can also be productive and that it appears in unending cycles. The paper focuses on how Eren in Attack on Titan achieves freedom and justice for his race through fighting. Eren knows from the beginning that violence is the only way to free Man. Finally, the paper concludes that peace is exceptional, and that freedom and justice are questionable.

Keywords: Anime, Attack on Titan, Isayama, Violence, Justice, Freedom.

Attack on Titan firstly appeared as a graphic novel, which is 'manga' in Japanese terms, written and illustrated by Hajime Isayama in 2009. It is aired as an anime in 2013, and its last season is aired in 2021. Attack on Titan is classified as a "post-apocalyptic" (Griffis 2017, 153) animanga that shows intensive and horrible usage of violence and that symbolizes the wars and homicides happening all around the world, especially in Japan. Through Captain Levi, one of the anime's main characters, the anime shows

how "all of humanity, [is] digested as one" (Isayama, ep 28) in a stomach of a Titan, which probably reflects how humans devour one another. This piece displays how "Humanity is at war with humanoid monstrosities known as The Titans mysteriously appeared approximately 107 years previous to the time in which the story takes place" (Griffis 2017, 153-154). Thus, the animanga of Attack on Titan gets worldwide popularity because it displays so many complex universal, political, social, and psychological

themes that all people in different regents and ages can identify with.

Among the many issues addressed by this anime outstands violence, which is defined by World Health Organization (2002) as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal development, or deprivation" (4). This suggests that violence is often viewed as a destructive force that destroys the individual as well as the society and causes them catastrophes. It is used by countries and governments to hold a hegemonic grip over people; they plunder and invade other nations in order to satisfy their political and hegemonic goals, which implies that violence has different destructive forms, which might be political or social. Thus, this paper aims at providing a different understanding of violence as a productive force rather than destructive in the Japanese animanga Attack on Titan by Hajime Isayama. Eren, the protagonist of the animanga, substitutes peace with violence to encounter the human Titans to protect his race. Eren's race, the Eldians, is exposed to a very long phase of violence practiced by the other race, the Marleyans, the fake royal family of the walls, the Fretz, and the government. To get rid of all this violence, Eren himself becomes violent and decides to kill humans along with Titans, which enables him to achieve peace for his own race. Similarly, Erwin Smith, who is the Commander of the Survey Corps -the soldiers who fight Titans outside the walls- adopts the same principle to guarantee the survival of the humankind.

Obviously, violence is viewed as an innate force that is used to dominate nations and to resist dominance at the same time, which creates an endless cycle that impacts people's life during the times of peace, freedom, and justice. Thus, this paper aims at showing the significance of violence in achieving freedom, considering that characters of Attack on Titan try to free

themselves by resorting to violence, which enables them to discover the truths of their life and existence. The paper explains how Eren is pacifist, humane, and monstrous, against the accusation promoted by many critics that Eren is monstrous and violent. The paper deploys Frantz Fanon's theory of revolutionary violence, where Fanon views violence as the main way for colonized nations' freedom and that violence reforms and recreates Man (2004).

Besides, the paper uses Freud's theory of violence and aggression found in Civilization and its Discontents (1962), which confirms that aggression and violence are innate in humans and that the creed of civilization with all its endeavors are unable to tame or demolish them. Moreover, the study depends on James P. Sterba's just war theory, which shows examples and cases of when violence can be justified. This theory does not deny the importance of violence; rather, it can be used to justify the violence conducted by Eren and the Survey Corps to free and defend themselves. In short, this paper reads Attack on Titan beyond its generic classification, as it deals with the text as a complex manifestation of the theme of violence, considering different political, social, and psychological theories.

Literary review

Before examining violence in Attack on Titan or considering how critics read the anime, it is necessary to mention that Attack on Titan is a story of humans encaged by the threat of annihilation by anonymous, bloody, dumb, and crude monsters called Titans. Yamazaki (2015) explains:

[the story focuses] on a more than century long battle between human beings and Titans, Attack on Titan depicts a minimized community of humans, the last in the world, living in a city surrounded by high walls. The city is structured according to a view of primitive society as consisting of three basic populations: rulers who govern the city; warriors who fight the Titans;

and citizens who produce food or machinery. During its intense and violent war with the Titans, the human population has already been reduced and is on the verge of being annihilated. The origin of the Titans and the reason for their existence, including why they eat people, remains a mystery to the humans. However, according to an ancient document handed down by humans as historical memory, the existence of Titans who ate human beings was already confirmed in ancient times. (29)

People in *Attack on Titan* are ignorant of the world around them, as "it is illegal for a citizen to leave the walled-in settlements or even possess knowledge of what lays outside them" (Griffis 2017,158-159). People inside the walls do not know where these Titans come from, why they eat humans, how to free themselves, or how to eliminate the enemy. Nevertheless, those people discover later that their king, Rod Reiss, has erased their historical memory to serve his greediness and maintain dominance over the population.

Explaining this plot, some critics claim that the anime is motivated by the violent crises and catastrophes that have happened in Japan at one point of time. Emily Griffis (2017), for example, says that "given *Attack on Titan*'s war plot and the feeling of impending doom for the human race, many scholars have linked this particular anime to World War II, specifically the bombing of Hiroshima" (155). Similarly, Asuka Yamazaki (2015) states:

In a period when the Japanese people already shared a sense of insecurity and anxiety about the future, their inner and outer lives completely collapsed with the shock of the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. More than 18,000 people died in this powerful earthquake, which also brought about unprecedented catastrophe in the form of a tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear disaster. It was an apocalyptic crisis on a scale the modern Japanese people had not experienced since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and they shared a feeling of loss and

hopelessness due not only to the delayed reconstruction of the disaster area, but also a collective post--disaster trauma. Simultaneously with these disasters, *Attack on Titan* had been intensifying its view of the apocalyptic and mythological world. (26)

Besides, other scholars and critics study *Attack on Titan* emphasizing the commonalities between the anime and Norse mythology, which associates the actions of the anime with the cycles of destiny and violence found in mythology. For instance, Rachel Truong's thesis explains how *Attack on Titan* represents the exact cycle of fate found in Norse mythology linking the characters and their Titans to Nordic gods. Truong (2018) explains the reason why Isayama creates such a resemblance saying:

The parallels between Isayama's graphic novel and Norse mythology are used as a way for Isayama to comment on the idea of a cyclic and unchangeable destiny. Based on the parallels presented, he is primarily using the values presented Norse mythology as a foil to Eastern or Japanese cultural beliefs. To this end, he puts forth the notion that unless humanity actively chooses to find the strength to change its situation and makes the personal sacrifices necessary to do so, the cycle of destiny will continue unchanged. To build his argument, Isayama primarily utilizes these parallels in two ways: by manipulating the destinies of those who share names or traits with characters in Norse mythology and by presenting his own versions of cyclic destinies. (2-3)

Similarly, Asuka Yamazaki (2015) discusses *Attack on Titan* in terms of Norse mythology. He states:

Attack on Titan transplants the grand worldview of these noble old tales into its narrative background, in order to adopt a grand, many--layered, and universal perspective on the apocalypse. This results in a setting beyond time and space, and a global poetic or artistic quality. By importing this ancient and fertile fantasy, the mythological elements of the twenty--first--century comic and those of the old tales become

unified. Thus, we can investigate how the contemplative experience of Attack on Titan brings the mythological violence of the modern era to light. (28)

Even though this article does not discuss the theme of violence in details, it shows how the ceremony of sacrifice and the cycle of violence in the anime are like violence found in Norse mythology. Thus, it highlights the importance of practicing violence through fighting and sacrificing while attempting to achieve victory and maintain honour.

Moreover, Truong questions the heroism of the anime's protagonist, Eren. She claims that Eren misses up his humanity and his monstrosity altogether forming a cruel protagonist who is both the hero and the monster to the Marleyans who oppress his race. Commenting on a panel from chapter 100 of the manga, which shows Eren in his Titan form killing a man from the enemies and splitting him into halves, Truong states that the viewer of such a scene may think of Eren as a monster than a hero. Truong (2018) maintains that:

Most telling of all, however, are the words "The war begins", showing the reader that Eren's attack is the first blow of an oncoming violent war of Marley versus Eldia. This reflects the way Bertolt's first attack was the first blow of humans making progress against the Mindless Titans. Isayama... shows in these panels that though Eren has been the hero in the readers' eyes for 100 chapters up to this point, the cycle of violence he is perpetuating changes him into a monster. The cycle of violence is thus portrayed in a strongly negative light and is shown to be able to transform even the hero of the story into a terrible monster. (27)

Accordingly, this paper argues against Truong's monstrosity-oriented accusation of Eren and shows Eren as just a fighter and hero. we believe that Eren must fight Marley and liberate Eldia -even if that mission sets him in an extremely monstrous form. For Eren, the Eldians have suffered much violence through the Marleyans; therefore, the Eldians have the right

to fight and use violence accordingly. If Eren stops fighting, the enemy will fight back and use violence to eliminate the Eldians, which may set them again in the same old cycle of oppression.

Discussion

At the beginning of the anime, Eren appears as a pacifist who believes that all humans are good natured and deserve to be rescued. He does not believe that Annie, who has used to be a faithful comrade, may betray them. When she is transformed into a Female Titan, kills many members of the Survey Corps, and demolishes the elite members and strongest soldiers of the Survey Corps from Captain Levi's Squad, Eren decides to fight her using his Titan power, considering that he fails at the beginning to get transformed into a Titan while fighting against her. At that moment, Eren recalls what Armin has told him about Annie and addresses himself thus, "there's no time to figure out if this is the right thing to do! Just move... Don't try to keep your hands clean! That's right... The world is cruel!" (Isayama, ep 24).

Eren now realizes that if he has not fought Annie, he would have never succeeded in protecting his comrades and the people inside the walls. His personality switches from being a completely pacifist into being an individual who believes in the significance of fighting when it comes to gaining freedom. Yet, he never gives up his pacifism. Thus, he hesitates at first to fight against Reiner and Bertholdt, but when they reveal the evil truth behind their Titans' powers, he decides to fight them back. Before fighting Reiner, Eren remembers the time during the training of the Survey Corps when he, Bertholdt, and Reiner talk about why they want to fight Titans, Reiner says that he wants to return to his hometown, while Eren wants to revenge for humans and his mother. All this time Reiner was lying to Eren and the rest, this makes Eren full of anger and transforms into a Titan to fight Reiner and Bertholdt while addressing them of "You damn traitors!" (Isayama, ep 32). During the

fight with Reiner, Eren says "I can't evade it... Since I'll get knocked over anyways... now It's a battle of strength!... I can win!... against Reiner... I can win!" (Isayama, ep 32). This indicates that Eren is not a person who "grows up to become a monster" (34), as Truong claims; rather, he is a person who still does not believe that people can be evil or disloyal or that they deserve to be killed.

Interestingly, other people and military members in the anime appear as pacifists who do not mind living without freedom if this maintains their apparent peace. For example, when the Survey Corps return from a mission outside the walls with badly injured soldiers and mutilated bodies, people start babbling "These are all that made it back? Everyone else must've been eaten. That's what happens when you go outside the walls" (Isayama, ep 1). In addition, the military members are also pacifists as long as they are imprisoned inside the walls. When Eren realizes the destructiveness of such a passive pacifism, he tries to convince the Garrison, which is the largest military division in Attack on Titan that keeps order inside the walls, to fight for their freedom as human beings. An example of the soldiers passivity is when Eren talks to Hannes, a soldier who is a friend of Eren's family, about the importance of fighting Titans. Their conversation runs thus:

Eren: Then, you're actually not prepared to fight them?

Hannes: nope.

Eren: what?! Then stop calling yourselves the Garrison, and become the Wall Repair Corps!

Hannes: I wouldn't mind that... But listen, Eren... If we're fighting, it means things are bad. As long as everyone's laughing at us and calling us useless freeloaders, that means we're all safe.

Eren: Even if we can never leave these walls for our entire lives, as long as we eat and sleep, we'll survive... But that makes us just like... Just like cattle! (Isayama, ep 1)

This dialogue shows that fighting is of no use -from the Garrison's perspective. Simultaneously, it reflects Eren's belief that

avoiding fighting at the cost of freedom may cause the Titans to attack people in the future.

In the same vein, Eren expresses his will to use violence against Reiner and Bertholdt after realizing that they are traitors of their community. He addresses Reiner thus:

I always thought you were a stand-up guy. Someone who remained calm, regardless of the situation... a guy who put your comrades ahead of yourself... and I... to think that at one time I wished... to be as strong as you someday... you guys... You are the worst... I bet in history of mankind, nobody's done anything as terrible as you... you shouldn't be allowed to exist anymore. (Isayama, ep 32)

Obviously, Eren is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of freedom and peace. He has now the will to fight, and it seems that he behaves according to his strong instinct of life or Eros, which is triggered by the instinct of death or Thanatos. Illustrating the mechanism of the Eros and its corporation with the Thanatos, Freud says:

The manifestations of Eros were conspicuous and noisy enough. It might be assumed that the death instinct operated silently within the organism towards its dissolution, but that, of course, was no proof. A more fruitful idea was that a portion of the instinct is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as an instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness. In this way the instinct itself could be pressed into the service of Eros, in that the organism was destroying some other thing, whether animate or inanimate, instead of destroying its own self. (1962, 66)

The Eros activates Eren's instincts of aggression and destruction, and it seems that he is willing to use such instincts to define himself and maintain his existence as well as essence. Eren here does not mind using violence to save the lives of everyone inside the walls.

In this episode where three thieves kidnap Mikasa after killing her father and mother, Eren decides to act violently against the thieves. He finds the place where Mikasa is imprisoned,

fight against the kidnappers, and kills two of them. Yet, one of them grabs Eren to kill him, but Eren calls out Mikasa to "fight... fight! If we don't win... we'll die... If we win, we'll live! ... If we don't fight, we can't win!" (Isayama, ep. 6). Inspired by these words, Mikasa realizes that only the stronger can survive, which awakens her instinct of violence. Thus, Mikasa fights the thief, kills him, and saves Eren's life. Commenting on this scene, Rachel Truong (2018) writes, "a viewer can clearly see that Eren is making changes in his world. In this case, he 'awakens' Mikasa's innate abilities as a fighter and helps her save both their lives. In many ways, this can be seen as a hero's task, as he manages to boost a young girl's confidence and spur her into saving both his life and her own" (34).

Moreover, Truong relies on this episode to accuse Eren of having aspects of monstrosity. She says:

It is very true that Eren performs a service to Isayama's world by giving confidence to one of the best fighters of his generation and saving her life in the process, but by doing so, he also continues the cycle of violence. He first kills two of her traffickers, then spurs her into killing the third. He puts blood on both of their hands and instills the absolute need to fight in the both of them. (2018, 34)

This viewpoint seems insightful, but if Eren and Mikasa did not fight, both would be dead. This implies that Eren is not the main generator of violence, but that violence is cyclic and cannot be avoided. A person cannot survive without fights and violence because violence is innate in people's nature, something Eren is experiencing here.

According to Sterba's just war theory, "one can justifiably kill an unjust aggressor if it is the only way to save one's life" (1998, 158). Therefore, killing the thieves to save one's life or to stop the oppressor from practicing violence against the oppressed is always just. In Eren and Mikasa's case, they are neither heroes nor killers, but they are normal humans who defend their

lives by killing their unjust, threatening aggressors. In fact, Eren does not give up his pacifist nature entirely. He incorporates his will to fight with wisdom, thus getting the ability to decide when to behave as a pacifist human and when to unleash the monster inside him. Interestingly, Truong (2018) claims that "[Eren] does not exercise control over the balance between his humanity and his monstrosity. Rather, he completely tosses away all of his humanity and becomes a monster in an attempt to make... changes to his destiny" (47). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Eren has never been eager to start any fight against anyone who does not have caused any troubles to the community, which suggests that Eren has a complete control over his instinct of aggression. When encouraged by his friends to imprison Annie for betraying the community, Eren does not believe the news directly. He insists that they wait and try to understand Annie's situation, which may spare her life.

Like Eren, many characters in Attack on Titan get to believe in the importance of violence when it comes to liberating people. Inspired by Eren's ability to transform into a Titan and resist Titans, Dot Pixis, the General of the Garrison, plans to rely on violence to seal Wall Rose, the second wall after Wall Maria, an action that should prevent the Titans from coming over and destroy the lives of the people inside the walls. It is true that Pixis' decision to go on that mission is challenged by many soldiers who are responsible for protecting Eren from the Titans. Daz, one of the soldiers, says in a trembling voice, "I have to return to that hell?... This is nothing but mass suicide! It's meaningless!" (Isayama, ep. 11). Nevertheless, General Pixis insists that soldiers should comply with his preference of violence at this time. He explains, "I shall pardon anyone who deserts now. Once you succumb to the Titans' fear, you can never fight them again. Those who have learnt that fear should leave. And anyone wishing their parents, siblings, and loved ones to feel that fear should also leave!" (Isayama, ep. 11). General Pixis

does not only make himself clear that fighting is the only available option; rather, he ignites the will to fight and sacrifice in the soldiers. In Yamazaki's words, "we can clearly recognize a militant political ideology related to the enthusiastic worship of death and a strong awareness that soldiers are predestined to become victims of war" (2015, 39). Thus, the military members willingly sacrifice themselves to achieve freedom and peace for the entire community inside the walls.

Similarly, Captain Levi encourages his soldiers to be violent and fight without hesitation in order to defend themselves and others. Through fighting people and being violent, the Survey Corps saves the lives of its members and discovers the secret of the ruling power of the walls, which allows them to overthrow the government and kill king Rod Reiss. At the beginning, soldiers have not accepted the idea of killing humans to win a battle. Until the incident of fighting the Military Police to free Eren and Historia from king Rod Reiss' grip and make a coup d'etat, they have thought that they have no enemies other than Titans. Yet, when Jean, one of Eren's friends, is about to be killed by a female member of the Military Police Brigade, which is a military sector that is responsible for keeping order and peace in the inner Wall Sina, Armin follows Captain Levi's commands and starts fighting humans whenever necessary, thus killing that female without hesitation. Thinking about it later, Armin says "Jean, there's something I don't understand... When I shot that gun to save you... I honestly thought I didn't make it in time. Sorry, but... why was I the one who shot first?" Captain Levi replies, "Because the other person hesitated" (Isayama, ep. 39). This indicates that Captain Levi believes that being hesitant to use violence while under threat of an enemy causes one to lose his or her life.

Still, When Armin laments for the death of his humanity, Captain Levi tries to convince him that killing such a policewoman has been a good choice. The Captain says, "Armin, you've got blood on your hands now. You can't go back to

who you were... Embrace the new you. Just think, if your hands were still clean... Jean wouldn't be here right now. I'll tell you why you pulled the trigger... Because your comrade was about to die. Armin... Thanks to you getting blood on your hands, nobody on our squad ended up dead" (Isayama, ep. 39). This stresses the importance of fighting when it comes to save one's life and the lives of others, and in this case, the lives of the Survey Corps' members.

Similarly, Commander Erwin supports the perspective that violence must be used to resist the enemy and achieve freedom. Trying to inspire his soldiers and motivate them to use violence against the aggressor, Erwin talks about the importance of fighting and sacrifice to seal Wall Maria, whether this may cost the soldiers their lives at the hands of the Beast Titan. Erwin says:

It's all meaningless. No matter what dreams or hopes you had... No matter how blessed a life you've lived... it's all the same if you're shredded by rocks. Everyone will die someday. Does that mean life is meaningless? Was there even any meaning in our being born? Would you say that of our fallen comrades? Their lives... Were they meaningless? No, they weren't! It's us who gives meaning to our comrade's lives! The brave fallen! The anguished fallen! The ones who will remember them... are us, the living! We die trusting the living who follow to find meaning in our lives! That is the sole method in which we can rebel against this cruel world! My soldiers, rage! My soldiers, scream! My soldiers, fight! (Isayama, ep. 53)

Inspired by this speech, Erwin and the soldiers achieve several victories against the Titans. It seems that they get the opportunity to realize when and how to deploy violence justly. Yet, Truong reads this scene from a different perspective. She says, "over the course of this lifelong chase, [Erwin] has sacrificed the lives of hundreds of his comrades, putting aside his own humanity in order to make change happens" (2018, 39), which impacts the destiny of people inside the walls, as the Survey Corps eventually

succeed in regaining Wall Maria and liberate people.

Considering that too many innocent soldiers die in the first operation to seal Wall Rose and save Eren, the series of fights may seem like a mass suicidal mission. Nevertheless, we need to consider that Eren is the most valuable individual among the soldiers, as he can transform into a Titan. Celebrating Eren's uniqueness and invaluable responsibility, Annie calls him "a brave, suicidal bastard" (Isayama, ep. 23). Therefore, Eren's survival is worth sacrificing the souls of other soldiers, for his ability to transform into a Titan qualifies him to challenge Titans and save the civil community inside the walls.

Sacrificing the lives of many soldiers to save Eren's life is in fact justifiable and does not contrast with Sterba's just war theory. In his book, *Justice for Here and Now*, Sterba (1998) refers to a similar case thus:

Case (4): where only the intentioned or foreseen killing of an unjust aggressor and the foreseen killing of five innocent people would prevent the death of two innocent people. In this case, neither antiwar pacifists nor just war theorists would find the cost and proportionality requirements of just war theory to be met. Too many innocent people would have to be killed to save too few. Here, the fact that the deaths of the innocents would be merely foreseen does not outweigh the fact that we would have to accept the deaths of five innocents and the unjust aggressor in order to be able to save two innocents. (158-159)

This case indicates that the death of several innocent people to save the lives of a few people is sometimes accepted- if justified. Thus, the soldiers have not sacrificed themselves just for the sake of Eren himself; rather, they have done that because Eren has the chance and ability to defend a larger number of innocent people.

Through his monstrous and violent attitude, Eren can accomplish the first victory of humanity against Titans, and he succeeds in sealing Wall Rose through that suicidal mission,

thus giving value to the death of his comrades. Describing that mission, Eren says:

From the time we are born, we are free... It doesn't matter how strong those who would deny us that freedom are... Flaming water... Frozen earth... I don't care what it is! The one who sees them will be the freest person in the world! Fight... I'd willingly give my life for that! It doesn't matter how terrifying the world is. It doesn't matter how cruel the world is! Fight... Fight! Fight! Fight! (Isayama, ep. 13)

Sealing Wall Rose, Eren's Titan power achieves his people's first step towards freedom and reveals the truth about their imprisonment. Acknowledging this achievement, Riko, a female member of the Garrison, declares, "today, for the first time, humanity has defeated the Titans!" (Isayama, ep. 13).

Obviously, violence plays an important role in the process through which people inside the walls gain freedom, considering that the first step of this process is the discovery of truth regarding the community and government inside the walls. The Reiss family hides their origin and history from people through altering historical records, according to the viewpoint of Commander Erwin's father. The Reiss family keeps people engaged and isolated from the rest of the world and avoids any encounters with them to maintain their status. Yet, Commander Erwin relies on his father's theory to reveal the truth that the royal family hides and sets the plan of coup d'état that demands for a revolution without shedding blood and he succeeds. Commander Erwin and the rest of the Military succeed in revealing the truth that the current royal family, the Fritz, is fraud and that the real royal family is the Reiss family that holds the power of the Founding Titan who is capable of waging war against Titans and free everyone inside the walls. While Commander Erwin and the rest of the Military sections succeed in their mission of a coup d'état without shedding blood, Captain Levi and his squad complete Commander Erwin's plan to dethrone the king with shedding blood and fighting to rescue Eren and Historia, who is king Rod Reiss'

daughter, to make her the true of the walls. Captain Levi and his squad fight the Military Police, who are in charge of protecting the king Rod Reiss, and let Historia kill her evil father so she becomes his successor. This indicates that violence is sometimes the only available means to overthrow against the oppressor and gain freedom.

In fact, the Survey Corps as well as the people inside the walls have not known the whole truth until they win the battle in which they regain Wall Maria and reach the basement of Eren's father. Francesco-Alessio Ursini (2017) in his essay says:

After the battle, Eren manages to access his old home's basement, where he finds his father's diary. By reading this document and by also tapping onto his father's memories, Eren discovers that the world within the walls is located on an island, aptly named 'Paradis', where the survivors from a centuries-long war have sought refuge. The royal family created a fictional history of humans being persecuted by Titans as propaganda to shield citizens from this horrendous past. The rest of humankind keeps a close eye on this isolated kingdom and its Titans, fearing the beginning of another war. (14)

As a result of such battles, the Survey Corps gets the opportunity to know the truth without which people inside the walls would have stayed imprisoned forever.

Violence is the main means to discover truth in *Attack on Titan*, which expresses this viewpoint by emphasizing the integrity of violence into people's existence and sense of freedom. It is reported that the people outside the walls are called the Marleyans and that the ones inside the walls are called Eldians. The latter are oppressed by the developed and flourished civilization of the Marleyans. Eren's father comes from outside the walls, and Eren inherits his father's memories. Through those memories, Eren remembers that the Marleyans imprison the Eldians who do not obey the Marleyans' regulations, inject them with a liquid that transform them into mindless Titans, and send

them to the Paradise Island. This suggests that humans can be enemies to each other due to race, colour, religion, and ethnicities, which causes the oppressed of the two parties to start longing and marching for freedom.

As the Eldians get to view the Marleyans as their enemies and lethal threat against the Eldians' freedom, the Eldians decide to use every available means to defend themselves and their right of practicing freedom. Thus, they start thinking of practicing violence, as evident in reconstructing the Survey Corps and rehabilitating their reputation, considering that the Survey Corps have been accused of killing innocent humans like the Military Police when they fight to make a coup d'état. Interestingly, the Survey Corps explains their violent deeds by associating them with people's need to uncover the truth behind the walls, the true history of the royal family, and the true value of Eren, Historia, and Reiss. The Corps declare that killing the Military Police is justifiable, considering that Eren is only rescuer of humanity, Historia Reiss is the only descendent of the royal family, and she is the faithful and authoritative ruler of the city inside the walls.

Thus, the Survey Corps use violence to regain Wall Maria, which has been lost for almost five years. Armin exclaims:

Five years ago, when humanity lost [Wall Maria] territory, from within the remaining two walls, they realized: 'that we... are not meant to continue living.' After all, humanity cannot defeat the Titans... However, one young man gripped that small blade held in his heart, and thrust it into a Titan... when humanity saw this, what did they think? Some were proud. Some held hope. Some cried out in anger. Then, if Wall Maria was retaken, what would humanity cry out? Would they finally start believing that humanity deserves to live?... If Wall Maria was retaken... (Isayama, ep. 50)

Obviously, Wall Maria embodies freedom, and regaining it is essential for people inside the walls, which suggests that Eren and the Survey Corps can "liberate... [themselves] in and

through violence" (Fanon 2004, 44). When Eren and the Survey Corps reach Wall Maria, Eren says, "I don't know why, but when it comes to taking back freedom... strength flows through me" (Isayama, ep. 51).

The great battle of Wall Maria highlights the importance of using violence, fighting, and waging wars to regain freedom, which copes with Fanon's belief that violence and liberty are mutually integrated. Fanon (2004) writes:

Fighting for the freedom of one's people is not the only necessity. As long as the fight goes on you must reenlighten not only the people but also, and above all, yourself on the full measure of man. You must retrace the paths of history, the history of man damned by other men, and initiate, bring about, the encounter between your own people and others. (219)

Thus, sealing Wall Maria causes Eren to use the hardening power of his Titan so that he can defeat Zeke, the Beast Titan, Renier, the Armoured Titan, and Bertholdt, the Colossal Titan. Also, it demands Captain Levi's squad to get involved in fighting the Armoured Titan inside Wall Maria and Commander Erwin to sacrifice his own life as well as the lives of his soldiers to distract the Beast Titan's attention so that Captain Levi gets the opportunity to kill him.

Violence in this scene is so intense, and it inevitably affects the viewers' feelings. Nevertheless, it enables people to get to the basement of Eren's father and discover the hidden truth of their island. Yamazaki explains, "In Attack on Titan, to talk about the walls in everyday life or to investigate their secrets is a serious taboo, since freedom of speech has been taken away by the government in order to keep the walls' origins a complete mystery" (2015, 35). Thus, scrutinizing the secrets of the walls, Captain Levi, his squad, and Eren get to know that there should be some different nations behind the sea. Eren declares, whoever reaches the sea should be the freest person on earth.

Ironically, the sequence of actions proves Eren's viewpoint that the sea embodies freedom as wrong. It is made clear that what lies there is

a continuation of oppression, violence, and imprisonment. Eren reaches the sea, but he does not feel happy or optimistic, as he realizes there that the cycle of violence does not end, and that peace and absolute justice are impossible to achieve. Eren declares, "on the other side of the sea... is freedom. That's what I always believed. But, I was wrong. On the other side of the sea... are enemies... Hey... If we kill all our enemies... over there... will we finally... be free?" (Isayama, ep. 59). Eren understands that his enemies are the worst on earth, but he is still questioning whether killing oppressors is the appropriate way to get rid of oppression and achieve freedom. Eventually, he becomes sure that he either continues fighting or surrenders and remains imprisoned by the Marley.

Elaborating on this scene, Truong (2018) writes:

Eren is fighting so hard to end the suffering of his people that he locks himself into the cycle of violence. He is unable to take in the joy the others feel at the end of their land's suffering at the hands of the Titans. [...] By drawing his protagonist in this way, Isayama is telling the reader that there is neither honor nor glory in perpetuating the cycle of violence. Rather than joining his companions in celebrating bringing peace to the land. (31-32)

Eren does not feel disappointed because violence fails to bring him peace; rather, he is disappointed because he realizes that peace does not last. He fully understands that the cycle of violence can never end because the instinct of aggression itself cannot be suppressed, thus complying with Freud's viewpoint that violence and the inclination towards aggression are stirred by the Eros, which makes violence a way of rebirth.

Freud (1962) explains, "in spite of every effort, these endeavours of civilization have not so far achieved very much. It hopes to prevent the crudest excesses of brutal violence by itself... but the law is not able to lay hold of the more cautious and refined manifestations of human aggressiveness" (59). This explains why

Eren is involuntarily involved in the cycle of violence throughout chapter 100 in the manga version of *Attack on Titan*. In this chapter, which is entitled "Declaration of War," Eren is viewed carrying on his way to fight and revenge for his race, considering that he shifts from fighting Titans into fighting human beings. Eren crosses the sea to fight the Marley who have oppressed his race for a long time. The Marleyan leader, Willy Taybar, declares the war between the Marleyans and the Eldians, and it seems that Eren does not have the choice to retreat now.

Eren leads the encounter between the Eldians and the Marleyans trying to restore freedom and justice for the Eldians. Justifying his decision to fight against the Marleyans, Eren addresses Reiner thus:

That day... the day you crushed through the walls and let Titans overrun my hometown... and my mother was eaten alive before my own eyes... Ever since that day... I kept wondering, why did those innocent people have to go through something so horrible...? Why did so many people get eaten alive...? I just couldn't understand. Why Reiner? Why was my mother eaten by a Titan that day?... whether It's over the sea, or inside the walls, we're all the same. But you were all, taught that the people inside the walls are different from you. They told you that the people in the walls are a threat to you, the Eldians on the continent, and to the rest of the people in the world... That we were devils. That belief is hammered into the minds of young children who know nothing of the world... by the adults who knew nothing themselves (Isayama, ch.100)

Obviously, Eren here follows Fanon's viewpoint that "You must retrace the paths of history... and initiate, bring about, the encounter between your own people and others" (2004, 219). Recalling the history of his own people's suffering because of the Marleyans, Eren's monstrosity amalgamates, thus making violence as the only available approach to adopt for Eren and his people.

Conclusion

Attack on Titan suggests that violence is a productive and protective force, rather than destructive. Eren's monstrosity and violence enable him to achieve change to life inside the walls, as he frees his race from the chains of the Marleys' servitude and oppression. The mission of sealing Wall Rose succeeds through using Eren's Titan power and the sacrifices of the Garrison to protect Eren, as a result, they save people who live in the territory of that wall. Eren's violence defeats the aggressor Annie, dethrones the king and the government to establish a new nation with new laws and a true Queen, and finally, succeeds in retaking Wall Maria. In addition, the sacrifices of Commander Erwin and the soldiers from different military sections help in achieving the above-mentioned victories. This violence is productive since it enables them to know their real enemies, and protective since it saves the lives of people inside the walls.

Therefore, the unending cycle of violence pulls Eren and the rest of soldiers into it. They must complete fighting because: they either surrender/die or fight/live. This makes violence in the anime justifiable as it is used as a way of self-defense. Accordingly, this shows that although violence brings destruction and death, this destruction, in return, can bring life, peace and freedom. Moreover, the paper questions the common definitions of justice and freedom. When Eren and the Survey Corps reach the truth behind the world and discover the harsh reality that Freud (1962) described as "Homo homini lupus" (58) which means Man is a wolf to man. This means that humans are enemies to humans; they oppress and kill one another to satisfy their instinct of aggression and violence. This concludes that violence is essential for human beings and peace is exceptional.

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- The authors have no competing interests to declare.
- All authors contributed to the study conception and design. All authors participated in material preparation, data collection, and analysis. They all cooperated to compose the first draft of the manuscript, comment on previous versions of the manuscript, and read and approve the final manuscript.

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