Chapter One

Fanon, Conflicts, Feminisms

Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon's controversial and widely read work, has been frequently debated by contemporary U.S. literary and cultural studies academics. In the book, the Martinican psychiatrist, revolutionary, and critical race theorist issued a most brutal, yet compelling, critique of writer Mayotte Capécia. As one feminist critic observes: "Typically, contemporary readers dismiss Fanon's condemnation as so obviously sexist that it does not merit analysis."[1] The feminist critic's ensuing analysis nonetheless reveals itself as importantly typical even in its implicit claim to atypicality, for she does in fact tackle Fanon's condemnation but merely to reinscribe his sexism.

Yet a thorough reading of Fanon's writings on women, liberation, and resistance in *A Dying Colonialism, Towards the African Revolution, The Wretched of the Earth,* and *Black Skin, White Masks* provides an important frame of reference for a liberatory feminist theory and praxis for women existing under various guises of colonial and neocolonial oppression and sexist domination within their own countries and communities.

PRELUDE TO THE FEMINISTS' CONFLICTS

Racial self-hatred and racism are endemic to the colonial enterprise. And revealing the mundane features of such tendencies through the phenomenological study of racism and colonialism was Frantz Fanon's calling—to a fault, in the view of his critics. Language was the primary instrument through which Fanon observed racism and alienation. The words of patients, the words

of novelists, the words of children, women, and men, and the unwritten but spoken Antillean rules that governed the most intimate of social relations were the prisms that enabled Fanon to shed light on racist cultures and the colonized psyche.

In his use of language to articulate racialized/sexualized psychical dramas, Fanon's own words have come under scrutiny—turning upon him and leading his work into conflicts with Euro-American feminist theorists and cultural critics.

With a significant degree of validity, gay and lesbian cultural theorists such as Diana Fuss and Kobena Mercer have found homophobia and heterosexism in Fanon's body of ideas.[2] Fanon's consistent situating of relationships within a heterosexual framework, coupled with a rather contentious homophobic statement—"I have never been able without revulsion, to hear a man say to another man: 'He is so sensual!'" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 201)—as well as a footnote on page 180 of that same book about his knowledge, or lack thereof, of homosexuality in Martinique, would certainly compel one to reassess the progressiveness of Fanon's gender politics and his relevance for feminists today. But I am not convinced that Fanon's latent homophobia translates into misogyny. Nor am I convinced sufficiently that these shortcomings undermine the contributions his theories on sexuality and subjectivity could make to a "queer revolutionary theory."[3]

The primary evidence cited as representative of Fanon's "misogyny" is all contained within his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. First is his use of the masculine as normative—*il, lui, le noir,*[4] *l'homme*—coupled with rigid constructions of gender and sexuality, resulting in the erasure of (black) feminine subjectivities. Second is his "grossly reductive" discussion of (white) women, psychosexuality, and sexual violence, thus relegating (white) women to the realm of the neurotic and characterizing their sexuality as essentially masochistic.[5] Third and most damning is his brutal reproof of Mayotte Capécia, which is reflective of patriarchal inclinations, a desire to police black women's bodies, and petty sexual jealousy.

Masculine referents, characteristic of intellectual writings of Fanon's era, indeed appear in *Black Skin, White Masks* and the majority of the Fanonian corpus. Silence on issues of sexual difference and/or use of masculinist language as a signifier of the neutrality (sexual indifference) in social theory sends up a red flag for many feminists, as it represents a clandestine means of

repression and oppression; it is to some extent no different from blatant biases/pro-male slants found in a great deal of other theoretical discourses.[6] As Naomi Schor writes, "What is to say that this discourse of sexual indifference . . . is not the last or (less triumphantly) the latest ruse of phallocentrism?"[7] It must be conceded, however, that *Black Skin, White Masks* is at once a clinical study and an experiential narrative.

Fanon is nonetheless neither silent on the question of gender, which exists as part of feminists' conflicts, nor sexually indifferent. I would argue that his use of masculinist paradigms of oppression and alienation in *Black Skin, White Masks* (or elsewhere) does not importantly posit male superiority. Masculinism is categorically different from antifeminism and misogyny. As Joy James writes in *Transcending the Talented Tenth*, because

> masculinism does not explicitly advocate male superiority or rigid gender social roles, it is not identical to patriarchal ideology. Masculinism can share patriarchy's presupposition of the male as normative without its antimfemale politics and rhetoric. Men who support feminist politics, as profeminists, may advocate the equality or even occasionally for the superiority of women. . . . However, even without the patriarchal intent some works may replicate conventional gender roles.[8]

In Fanon's more political manifestos, the "revolutionary" is never envisioned as wholly masculine, nor is the "neurotic blackphobe" conceived as importantly feminine in his clinical treatise. Fanon spreads his critical assessment of blackphobia rather evenly among male and female colonized subjects. The colonized woman of color seeks humanity, value, through white male love. The colonized man of color caresses "white breasts" with the belief that he is grasping "white civilization and dignity" and making them his own (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 63).

The chapter "The Negro and Language" again uses the masculine referent. However, a discussion of language, oppression, and sexual difference—that is, a feminist hermeneutics of the colonized woman of color's psychoexistential complexes when confronted with the phenomenon of the colonizer's language—equally reveals the epidermalization of inferiority. As the man of color wants to *devenir français*, the inferiorized woman of color desires to *devenir française*.[9] One need only examine "the myth of the r-eating Martinican" in Mayotte Capécia's *La négresse*

blanche to understand that with every correct idiomatic expression, phonetic articulation, melodic tonality, and deliberated roll of an "r," a rupture occurs: the heroine's phenotype undergoes a definitive, absolute mutation (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 19). Fanon continues:

> Every colonized people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation. . . . The colonized is elevated above his[her] jungle status in proportion to his[her] adoption of the mother's country's cultural standards. [She]He becomes whiter as [she]he renounces his[her] jungle. (p. 18)

Hence, the exclusion of subjectivities extends to the masculine *and* the feminine. Such exclusions must be nevertheless contextualized.

Black Skin, White Masks is a treatise on the psychopathology of alienated (duped) men and women of color and of "the no less alienated (duped and duping) whites" (p. 29). Keenly aware of class differences and the economic dis-ease of the colonized, Fanon opts to limit his analysis to the epidermalization/internalization of inferiority. Defining clearly the context of his study and of those studied, Fanon seems to have anticipated objections regarding exclusion, representation, and identification:

> Many Negroes will not find themselves in what follows. This is equally true of whites. But the fact that I feel a foreigner in the worlds of the schizophrenic or sexual cripple in no way diminishes their reality. The attitudes that I propose to describe are real. I have encountered them innumerable times. (p. 12)

Black Skin, White Masks is ostensibly drawn from his experiences, his observations. And because of the specificity of this study, of his encounters, he forgoes a blanket assessment of black and white behaviors. *Black Skin, White Masks*, in essence, critiques stereotypification; it does not reinscribe it. The radical psychiatrist continues,

> To these objections I reply that the subject of our study is the dupes and those who dupe them, the alienated, and that if there are whites who behave naturally when they meet Negroes, they certainly do not fall within the scope of our examination. . . .

> Which means simply that, side by side with normal people who behave naturally in accordance with a human psychology, there are others who behave pathologically in accordance with an inhuman psychology. And it happens that the existence of men of this sort has determined a certain number of realities. (pp. 31–32)

Racists, sexists, capitalists, homophobes undeniably dictate a number of realities in our social world—in the interpersonal as well as public policy realms—so much so that their practices are obfuscated by their normalization, their institutionalization. But there are again, for Fanon, blacks and whites, men and women, who resist these processes of duping.

Our discussion of the Fanonian context leads us into the thorny terrain of what are for feminists Fanon's most contentious pronouncements: on white women, sexual violence, and negrophobia.

White women who believe that they are in danger of being raped by black men as a result of the very presence and proximity of black men are, for Fanon, neurotic. By way of Hesnard,[10] Fanon notes that phobia is a neurosis characterized by the anxious fear of an object or by extension a situation in which contact alone can evoke anxiety, as contact serves schematically as initiating sexual activity (pp. 154–56). This fear of rape when the possibility or the desire to rape on the part of the black male is nonexistent signals repressed desire.

While the black body serves as a cultural marker of illicit sex and violence in blackphobic cultures, it would appear that Fanon's translation of the fear of rape to the desire for sex is quite a stretch. But we are here speaking of white women whose psychosexualities have been corroded, abnormalized, which in turn incite the cultural mythology of the black male rapist, the sexually voracious black brute, "the keeper of the impalpable gate that opens into the realm of orgies, of bacchanals, of delirious sexual sensations" (p. 177). Novelist Toni Morrison writes sardonically in *Sula* of white constructions of the "black male-as-uncontrollable penis" and of negrophobic white women obsessed with the black male rapist:

> White men love you. They spend so much time worrying about your penis they forget their own. The only thing they want to do is cut off a nigger's privates. And if that ain't love and respect I

> don't know what is. And white women? They chase you all to every corner of the earth, feel for you under every bed. I knew a white woman wouldn't leave the house after 6 o'clock for fear one of you would snatch her. Now ain't that love? They think rape as soon's they see you, and if they don't get the rape they looking for, they scream it anyway just so the search won't be in vain.[11]

The incessant fear of an improbable rape by the negrophobe is a racist cultural *affect* that cloaks desire; it is a projection of desire, that which Morrison calls "love."

To maintain that Fanon evokes a cultural stereotype of white women again ignores the context of his query.[12] Many white women will not find themselves here. There are white women who behave normally when they meet Negroes (black males). An antiblack culture—which, we should concede, coexists with a misogynist culture—is a structurally ill culture filled with perversities and perverse desires for racial and sexual hierarchies and domination. And if in such cultures (white) female psyches are thusly assimilated, *duped*, masochism is but one culturally induced manifestation of psychosis.

Perhaps one of the most critical feminists on this subject has been Susan Brownmiller, author of the controversial *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975). It is important to detail Brownmiller's conflicts with Fanon, as they have informed two generations of feminist critics on the subject. The overall thesis of Brownmiller's book is that she is a woman who changed her mind about rape. In the chapter "A Question of Race," one that Angela Davis took to task in *Women, Race, and Class* (1983) for its racist underpinnings, Brownmiller renders black male lives expendable under the weight of sexist domination encountered by white women, citing such cases as the Scottsboro Boys and Emmett Till. Brownmiller presents black women as victims of those lunatic white males operating on the nonprogressive, racist, and sexually violent radical fringes of society such as the Ku Klux Klan, while the veritable and overwhelming victims of sexual violence in this chapter and throughout *Against Our Will* are white women.

Derisively referring to Fanon as "the darling of the New Left," who borrows heavily from the works of psychoanalysts Helene Deutsch and Marie Bonaparte as well as his own clinical research, Brownmiller writes:

> Rape runs as a curious subtheme in all of Fanon's writings. As a doctor of psychiatry and a student of colonialism, Fanon was in an excellent position to make a substantial, original contribution to the world's understanding of rape as a means of oppressing native women in Algeria and the Antilles, but Fanon's concern to which he returns again and again (it is something of an obsession) is with the native man and the *white* woman. "Whoever says rape says Negro," he announces in *Black Skin, White Masks* in the preface to his morbid rehash of the super-Freudian "A Negro Is Raping Me" theory of white female masochism propounded by Marie Bonaparte and Helene Deutsch. . . . Pure and simply, this radical theorist of third-world liberation was a hater of women.[13]

Brownmiller's argument is riddled with inaccuracies, oversimplifications, and skewed interpretations. Her ire is not at all raised to such vehement levels of denunciation with respect to Freud, Bonaparte, Deutsch, or even her contemporary Nancy Friday's revelations of white female preoccupations/fantasies with black male rapists in *My Secret Garden*.[14] In exactly one chapter, "The Negro and Psychopathology," Fanon analyzes specifically white women's neuroses relating to race, rape, and sexuality. That Fanon dared to undertake such an analysis appears to be the crux of the dilemma; for Brownmiller, one chapter is *too* much. Fanon's discussion translates into obsession: Fanon as morbid freak and rape-obsessed, Fanon as sanctioning rape as revolutionary, as Brownmiller equates *Black Skin, White Masks* with Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*. But was not the colonial project itself envisioned by European colonizers as conquests over, penetration into, other bodies and lands, in masculine and feminine terms?

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, *A Dying Colonialism*, and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon makes great effort to detail the violations visited upon and liberties taken with Malagasy, Algerian, and Antillean women. Indeed, in *Towards the African Revolution*, he provides a lengthy discussion of French torture and violations, using the rape and torture of FLN member Djamila Bouhired as well as adolescent Algerian girls as the worst examples of colonial terrorism and sexual oppression.[15] To assert, as Brownmiller does, that Fanon did not view rape as a form of colonial oppression directed explicitly toward colonized women thus reveals itself as questionable.

Fanon's "misogyny" is further posited by Brownmiller in her

citation of a case study of mental disorders brought on by French colonization in Algeria. According to Brownmiller, Fanon interprets rape as "a devious colonial trick to emasculate third world men."[16] Fanon never states such. *Against Our Will* offers as evidence his mere recounting of the effects of rape (impotency, insomnia, depression, violent urges) on the husband of an Algerian woman. Fanon recognizes the complexities of the issue of rape in the colonial project. Rape functions as a direct violation of the Algerian woman's person and equally to destabilize the Algerian community. Angela Davis observes in her essay "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" what Brownmiller clearly misses: "In its political contours, the rape of the black woman was not exclusively an attack upon her. . . . In launching the sexual war on the woman, the master would not only assert his sovereignty over a critically important figure of the slave community, he would also be aiming a blow against the black man."[17]

Because Fanon did not practice psychiatry in Martinique, he did not have the opportunity for direct psychiatric observation of sexual disorders in the lives of Antillean women vis à vis colonial rape. When he arrived at the hospital in Blida, Algeria, the majority of his patients were Muslim men and European women. His psychiatric observations in *The Wretched of the Earth* are, consequently, for the most part drawn from his decolonizing psychiatry in the Algerian hospital. However, on August 30, 1956, at the 54th session of the Congrès des médecines aliéniste et neurologues de France et des pays de langue françaises in Bordeaux, Fanon and psychiatrist Charles Geromini presented a psychiatric study of Muslim women in a paper entitled "Le T.A.T. chez la femme musulmane: sociologie de la perception et de l'imagination."

And while the rape of Algerian women was widespread and well known, it was rarely openly discussed by the women, except perhaps within the feminine collective. For women who are accustomed to being assaulted daily in one way or another by a foreign presence during the course of war, rape was an inevitability; and silence and feelings of grave dishonor, particularly for 1950s–1960s Muslim women, were its counterpart. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon writes that

> a woman led away by soldiers who comes back a week later—it is unnecessary to question her to understand that she has been violated dozens of times. . . . When a man welcomes back his wife who has spent two weeks in a French camp and he says hello to her and asks her if she is hungry, and he avoids looking at her and bows his head . . . such things are a daily occurrence. (p. 119)

Tunisian lawyer Gisèle Halimi, attorney for Algerian freedom fighter Djamila Boupacha, who was tortured and raped with a bottle by French soldiers, writes in *La Cause des femmes* that her client was frantically obsessed with the idea of being dishonored by the forcible rape. As a Muslim, virginity was of the utmost importance, for defilement could relegate her to a state of unmarriageability. She was more concerned with her status as a virgin than with the cigarette burns and bruises covering her body. As much as mere talk involving the female body was considered culturally taboo, Boupacha, under great duress and in desperation, finally requested a gynecological examination to determine if she was defiled.[18]

Lebanese feminist Evelyne Accad writes in *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* of contemporary Arab women's silence, by culture and nature (as a result of culture), regarding their bodies, sexuality, and desire. Paraphrasing Arab feminist Illham Ben Milad Ben Ghadifa on the subject, Accad relates: "Silence reigns over the subject of menstruation, virginity, masturbation, pleasure in general, abortion, birth and the female body as a whole. Moreover, women try to enforce silence on one another with regard to sexual issues."[19] If sexual silence plagues contemporary Arab women, even to the point of censorship on the subject among the women themselves, one can very well imagine the codes of sexual silence in the 1950s and 1960s and subsequently Fanon's inability to write extensively on the sexual lives and sexual neuroses of Algerian women.[20]

Feminist conflicts with Fanon are not, as I have related in the Introduction, relegated to a white and Western terrain, nor are these conflicts found merely in one of Fanon's works. Activist Arab feminists like Marie-Aimée Helie-Lucas have also taken issue with Fanon some three decades after his writing *A Dying Colonialism* regarding women's liberation and the independent Algeria. While Euro-American lit-crit feminist and cultural critics take issue with *Black Skin, White Masks*, Arab feminists ground their criticisms in the more political and culturally specific manifesto: *A Dying Colonialism*.[21] The terms of censure are nonethe-

less quite different. That is, Fanon is not uniformly denounced as misogynist and/or antiwomen's liberation. He is rather accused of "mythmaking" by Algerian feminist Helie-Lucas for his descriptions of women as freedom fighters during the Algerian revolution and the revolutionary uses of the veil, which masked the sexism experienced by women. He is accused, also, of being conservative by Egyptian feminist Mervat Hatem for his supposed static approach to culture that relegated women to defenders of tradition through the wearing of the veil.[22] Furthermore, Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil: Male–Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* explains in a footnote that while Fanon was sensitive to segregation and revolutionary assertions of human rights, he found "curiously" the accosting of revolutionary unveiled Algerian women in the streets by men "funny."[23]

And though Fanon's writing had and continues to have an appeal among black materialist feminists, African-American feminist bell hooks takes issue with Fanon's use of masculinist paradigms, which hooks alternately refers to as "sexist" in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* and "patriarchal" in the essay "Feminism as a persistent critique of history: What's love got to do with it?"[24] Poststructuralist Nigerian feminist Amina Mama argues that Fanon's "theory of lactification implicitly pathologises black people" and "typifies the black women he encountered in France and the Antilles."[25]

The complex positionalities embodied in the criticisms of Fanon has led to my use of the plural with the terms "conflict" and "feminism." While gender equity/women's liberation is the underlying commitment of these feminisms, openness to Fanon's thought regarding its usefulness to women's liberation as well as wholesale dismissals and exorcisms of him from feminist theory and practice appear to be contingent upon theoretical issues such as race, progressive radicalism versus reactionary liberalism, and the repressive patriarchal dynamics of nationalism and fundamentalism. Indeed, while there are feminists' conflicts with Fanon, there are equally ideological cleavages *within* feminism which I would like to explore through the prism of three feminists' positions: liberal Euro-American lit-crit feminism, U.S. radical black feminism, and Algerian nationalist feminism. In sum, the moments where and the ways in which Fanon is engaged in feminist theory—i.e., where the conflicts emerge—unmask ideology, race, and the polemics of nationalism and contemporary fundamentalism.

LIBERAL EURO-AMERICAN LIT-CRIT FEMINISM

I have detailed much of Euro-American lit-crit feminists' conflicts with Fanon in the passages above, but it is important to elaborate briefly on those conflicts with respect to the aforementioned parameters of ideology and race. Certain facts must be stated at the outset: many Euro-American lit-crit feminists have not read Capécia's novels, but only one another's writing on Fanon and Capécia.[26] Hence, denunciations of Fanon's colonial psychosexual theories as wholly "misogynistic" with respect to Capécia, in particular, demand reevaluation.

What appears especially prevalent and somewhat troubling in these critical works is a recurring antiblack male bias, for these lit-crit feminists appropriate indiscriminately the equally masculinist, oftentimes virulently racist-sexist thought of Freud, Lacan, Foucault, and Nietzsche into their feminist theorizing, even as they aggressively critique Fanon for his "misogyny." The lit-crit feminists appear thus to promote a narrow feminist politics that does not have an antiracist/anticapitalist agenda within the framework of its readings of the racial/sexual/economic complexities of texts like *Black Skin, White Masks* or *Je suis martiniquaise* and *La négresse blanche*.

Ideologically, the leanings of lit-crit feminism are of the "gynocentric" liberal persuasion. Borrowing from feminist philosopher Iris Young, gynocentric feminism "defines women's oppression as the devaluation and repression of women's experience by a masculinist culture that exalts violence and individualism."[27] Equally, social and political theorist Ronald Dworkin regards the liberal as "anxious to protect individuals whose needs are special . . . from the fact that more popular preferences are institutionally and socially reinforced."[28] However, in its gynocentric liberalism, this strain of feminism ascribes to gender/sexual difference the overdetermining power in its analyses; it takes to task forms of patriarchal aggression without an equally strident examination of the retrogressive politics it defends, lacking as it is in an antiracist, antifemale sexist, anticapitalist foundation. It is thus not a liberalism with radical humanist dimensions that would challenge and seek to eradicate all systems of oppression as they intersect with and compound women's experiences.

The attendant results in many of these prodigious scholarly endeavors are representations of Fanon as sanctioning a perverse form of black nationalism;[29] as anti-interracial relationships, i.e., black women/white men, although his own wife was French; and as antifemale, specifically antiblack female.

ALGERIAN NATIONALIST FEMINISM

The revolutionary role played by women in Algeria's successful struggle for national independence is immeasurable by most historians' and writers' accounts. As nationalists, Algerian women advocated and fought for their country's right to exist as a sovereign state with its own cultural values and belief systems. As feminists, they further believed that their participation in bringing about a politically and economically liberated Algeria, a new Algeria, would lead to a reconceptualization of regressive gender relations.

But the Algerian war of independence has come to symbolize a glaring example of the incompatibility of nationalism—the national, that is, or the ideas of the nation—with feminism—that is, women's liberation. According to Tom Nairn, the "nation is the modern Janus," inscribing both progression and regression, political rationality and irrationality in its very genetic code.[30] The nation is at once a cultural construct and a political organization.[31] As a cultural construct, the nation develops and lays claim to certain ideas and values as culturally authentic, traditional, helpful in sustaining its very identity. As Algerian women are viewed as the transmitters of that cultural identity, the bearers of the tradition, they become locked in a discourse on the nation, nationalism, that attempts to impede their progress into modernity and denies their freedom, subjectivity, indeed, their rights. It is particularly around issues of the family, female sexuality, and the body that the most rigid and repressive national codes and laws of regulating gender emerge.

Therein lies the dilemma for Algerian nationalist feminists. They are tied to the idea of an autonomous Algeria, for they fought and died for this progression; but they are literally bound by the retrogressive aspects of the idea of the nation. As Monique Gadant writes:

> Nationalism asked of women a participation that they were quick to give, they fought and were caught in the trap. For nationalism is frequently conservative, even though it appears to be an inevitable moment of political liberation and economic progress which women need to advance along the path of their own liberation. . . . The example of Algerian women is there to remind all women that participation does not necessarily win them rights. From the points of view of those women contributors who have grown up after the war of liberation, everything is still to be done.[32]

It has been a very difficult task, to say the least, for Algerian women to navigate their course between nationalism and feminism.

Algerian feminist Marie-Aimée Helie-Lucas, born in 1939, belongs to that generation of women born before the onset of the war of liberation in 1954, who struggled during the revolutionary war as young women, and in anguish continue to struggle for women's liberation in the postwar era. As a witness to the patriarchal inflections of Algerian nationalism, Helie-Lucas is torn, believing in Algerian nationhood, but resistant to the sexism and misogyny it seems to engender.

It is particularly around the issue of the veil—especially its uses during the struggle for national independence and abuses in the besieged nationalist and fundamentalist Algerian postcolony—and portraits of women as freedom fighters equal to men during the Franco-Algerian war that the conflict arises between Helie-Lucas and Fanon.

It would be stating the obvious to recount Frantz Fanon's belief in national independence for Algeria. But what is not so obvious or what has been somewhat obscured in Helie-Lucas's discussion of the tensions between nationalism and feminism as they relate to her sketchy criticism is that Fanon did not advocate a narrow, misogynist nationalism, but rather a national consciousness that would lead to internationalism and social democracy. Another little-noticed but important point is that Fanon was equally critical of the "pitfalls of national consciousness," which included a cautionary note on "the dangers of perpetuating the feudal tradition which holds sacred the superiority of the masculine element over the feminine" (*The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 202).

RADICAL U.S. BLACK FEMINISM

Radical U.S. black feminism is often recognized as a materialist feminism because of its activist legacy and its writerly projects that theorize about the transformation of material conditions that impact the day-to-day lives of black women. By "radical" I mean specifically a feminism that is not "shortminded,"[33] as Sojourner Truth once stated. I will return to this term with its conceptualization of humanity and freedom, knowledge production, and its "speaking truth to power" at this study's conclusion.[34] Radical black feminism recognizes the importance and the interconnectedness of experience and radical thought, theory and practice.

While linked by ethnicity and oftentimes class, not all black feminists are radical; just as not all Euro-American lit-crit feminists are liberal. Some black feminists are ideologically liberal or conservative.

But at its very inception and within its very conceptualization as theory, antiracist and antisexist agitation has been the cornerstone of black radical feminists' agendas. Indeed, the lived experiences of the earliest black women—orators and activists such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett—articulated through the confluence of race, gender, and class laid the essential groundwork for future radical black women thinkers. These black feminists' predecessors simultaneously addressed the issues of abolition and/or lynching—black liberation—and black women's humanity in their many speeches, lectures, and radical and radicalizing activities.

To be sure, individual and group agendas have evolved and broadened the fundamental premises of radical black feminist thought and activism to reflect their era. By foregrounding black women and black liberation in their politics and critiques of violence and oppression, radical feminists have also moved toward abolishing structural and systematic injustices for all oppressed peoples. In a provocative address given to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), well-known grassroots activist and feminist Fannie Lou Hamer expressed cogently the umbrella-like nature of radical black feminism:

> You know I work for liberation of all people because when I liberate myself, I'm liberating all people . . . her [the white woman's] freedom is shackled in chains to mine, and she realizes for the first time that she is not free until I am free. . . . But we are here to work side by side . . . in trying to bring liberation to all people . . . then we will have a better chance to just act as human beings, and to be treated as human beings in our sick society.[35]

Not only do black women live and exist within a simultaneity of oppressions, so that black progressive feminism is the theoretical and political response to these oppressions. But radical black feminism's political and insurgent offensives to these oppressions will eventually result in—as the Combahee River Collective insists in its "Black Feminist Statement"—"the destruction of all systems of oppression"[36] and the liberation of the most wretched of nonblacks, nonfemales, and the poor. Human freedom and critical consciousness would seem to be the *cause célèbre* of contemporary radical black feminist theory and practice.

Given the range of these women's political and social concerns, and their focus on agency, human freedom, and liberation, it is not at all surprising that the liberation theories of Frantz Fanon—a man obsessed with humanity and justice, a slave of the cause of people, of liberty, who at death's door, emaciated from the leukemia that had eaten away at his flesh, desired to have his body flung into the battlefields of Algeria—would find a place in the writings of radical black women of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. As Fanon biographer Hussein Bulhan relates by way of Aimé Césaire:

> If the word "commitment" has any meaning, it was with Fanon that it acquired significance. . . . This must be understood about him: his revolt was ethical, and his endeavour generous. He did not simply adhere to a cause. He gave himself to it. Completely, without reserve. . . . By hatred of compromise, by hatred of talkativeness. By hatred of cowardliness. No one was more respectful of thought than he, and more responsible in the face of his own thought, nor more exacting towards life, which he could not imagine in terms other than of thought transformed into action.[37]

Radical feminist revolts are equally ethical attempts to legislate justice, decolonize minds corroded by U.S. antiblack, (hetero)-sexist, and exploitative politics, and build a new, egalitarian world in which black women in particular are "inherently valuable" and "recognized as human."[38]

There are thus no ever-widening gulfs, uncrossable chasms, unmendable breaches between the emancipatory politics of U.S. black radical feminists and Frantz Fanon's revolutionary theories. The approach to his writings is a more integrative one, even as it is importantly critical of his masculinist worldview.

FANON AS "FEMINIST"

That feminism means different things to different feminists has resulted in schisms, divisions, and contemporary feminisms. Agendas and programs vary from theorist to theorist and from practitioner to practitioner. The pressing issues of race, class, and heterosexism have birthed socialist feminists, radical black feminists, Marxist–Humanist feminists, liberal lesbian feminists, and so on. Whether feminism means "the radical notion that women are human" or "to be feminist one has first to become one," loose and exclusionary definitions abound.[39] Thus it becomes at once a simple and daunting task to speak of Frantz Fanon as a feminist. At the very least, his woman-centered analyses, which will be examined in-depth, contain feminist dimensions. But analyses in and of themselves are not necessarily feminist if they do not interrogate, challenge, or seek to transform the "facts" of women's social realities.

Fanon believed in and worked for the liberation of the damned of the earth, "men and women who are colonized" (*The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 36). He interrogated and challenged specifically the contradictions in women's lives. Unlike feminisms' centering of women in their analyses of oppression, Fanon's politics worked toward the obliteration of sexist oppression in the scheme of bringing about human freedom. And as Marxist–Humanist feminist Raya Dunayevskaya writes, "there is no such thing as women's history that is not the actual history of humanity's struggle toward freedom."[40] Fanon believed that revolution would transform the exploitative and oppressive spheres of formal and informal political, social, and economic life for men, women, and children—humanity from the bottom up.

But rather than speak of Fanon as a feminist, it is perhaps more appropriate, as the introduction suggests, to speak of Fanon's radically humanist profeminist consciousness. This consciousness is guided by Fanon's envisioning of women's liberation from the confines of repressive patriarchal traditions, and his advocacy of women's movement from objects to subjects of history, converging most poignantly in *A Dying Colonialism;* however, it transcends, as does the bulk of his writings, the specificities of the Algerian, sub-Saharan African, and Martinican experiences.

I would be remiss to close this chapter on feminists' conflicts without some remarks regarding Fanon's curious statement on women of color and psychosexuality. After a lengthy discussion of white women and rape in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon writes of the woman of color: "Those who grant our conclusions on the psychosexuality of the white woman may ask what we have to say about the woman of color. I know nothing about her" (p. 180). The fact that Fanon the psychiatrist did not have the opportunity to encounter Antillean women as patients would certainly contribute to his "not knowing." His interactions with Antillean women were limited to social interactions: dance halls, student gatherings, and so forth. Any clinical observations regarding Antillean women's sexual phobias were gleaned from snatches of conversation here and there, literature, his own experiences in the Antilles, and pure speculation.

But there has been a certain selectivity in feminists' citations of Fanon's statement. The psychiatrist does proffer an observation. The colonized Antillean woman's phobic object would be a Senegalese type, an inferior, the blackest black, the *nègre's nigger.* The virtual absence of women of color in the status of patients in 1951 subtends the contemporary issue of black women's reticence about seeking mental health care and wellness. Clearly women of color, daily assaulted by racist-sexist objectification in the colonial era, were in need of mental health services.

What does it mean nonetheless for a woman of color consistently subjected to the empirical reality of rape by the colonizer to project rape onto a Senegalese man? Clearly, it points to an extreme form of neurosis brought on by colonialism, cultural domination, and racism. It would only be natural that women of color would fear rape or sexual coercion by a white male colonialist, as its frequency was daily and legal recourse was inaccessible. But for both black and white women, the rapist, the phobic object, is black because of the historical and cultural mythological constructions of blackness in racist cultures. On a symbolic and very real level, white males escape the cultural

stereotype of the rapist when clearly they exercised the most license over black and white women's bodies in the colonies. But as we will see by Mayotte Capécia's phobic responses regarding black male sexual prowess, such is not the case for the inferiorized woman of color.

NOTES

1. Gwen Bergner, "The Role of Gender in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 110, no. 1 (January 1995): 83.

2. See Diana Fuss's "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification," *Diacritics* (Summer/Fall 1994): 20–39; and Kobena Mercer's "Decolonisation and Disappointment: Reading Fanon's Sexual Politics," in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Culture*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996): 114–31.

3. His homophobia has not, however, deterred progressive Marxist–Humanist lesbian feminists like the San Francisco Bay area Subjectivity of Sexuality group from using his writings in their articulation of a "Queer Revolutionary Theory" in *Queer Notions: Thoughts on the Relationship of Sexuality to Revolution*, published by the Subjectivity of Sexuality group. The group is part of the Bay Area *News and Letters* Women's Liberation Committee. This statement set in motion a rather lengthy segment in Isaac Julien's *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask*.

4. *"Le noir"* poses a particular problem. While it is used throughout the text more frequently to mean "the black man," as it is generally followed by *"il,"* at times, it simply means "the black." There is also in Fanon's use of *man* in certain instances the notion of humanity, 'MAN,' as Homi Bhabba rightly suggests, however objectionable it may seem to our feminist sensibilities. See, for instance, Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995). One cannot simply ignore the issue of the faulty and highly problematic translations.

5. See Mary Anne Doane's essay, "Dark Continents: Epistemologies of Racial and Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema," in *Femmes Fatales* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 209–48. Doane's essay focuses particularly on Fanon's representation of white women, while Bergner attempts to account for his presentation of black women.

6. Lois McNay, *Foucault & Feminism: Power, Gender, and the Self* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 11–12.

7. Naomi Schor, "Dreaming Dissymmetry: Barthes, Foucault, and Social Difference," in *Men in Feminism*, ed. Alice Jardine (London: Methuen, 1987), 109. Also cited in McNay's *Foucault and Feminism*, 12.

8. Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 36.

9. See Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant's *Lettres créoles: tracées antillaises et continentale de la littérature, 1653–1975* (Paris: Hatier, 1991). But even as she mimics white women, whether through language or through white male love, the material doors opened to the woman of color are quite different from those opened to the male *évolué*.

10. A. Hesnard, *L'univers morbide de la faute* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949), 38.

11. Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Plume, 1973), 103.

12. See Homi Bhabba's "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition," in Foreword to *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986). Even if we lend some credence to Bhabba's claim that Fanon does not discuss the "object of desire," we arrive at conclusions that support Fanon's analysis. White women in racist cultures have been historically constructed as objects of black male desire and as able to be raped. These women, however, are equally constructed as not desiring relations with black men. Conditioned by cultures that place a primacy on whiteness, whites are teleologically always the desired object. Under these circumstances, some white women, misled into believing that they are always desired by the black, and that they are in danger of being raped by the black, will certainly manifest negrophobia and paranoia—fears of rape—in the presence of black males.

13. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Bantam, 1975), 249–50.

14. Nancy Friday, *My Secret Garden* (New York: Trident, 1973).

15. Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution*, chapters 2–3 of section 4: "Algeria Face to Face with French Torturers" and "Concerning a Plea."

16. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 250.

17. Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995), 213.

18. Rita Maran, *Torture: The Role of Ideology in the French-Algerian War* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 161–69. Also see Halimi's *La Cause des femmes* (Paris: Grasset, 1973), 29, 35, 38–40, 75; and Valerie Orlando and Sharpley-Whiting's *The Djamila Boupacha Committee and the Women's Cause: Algerian Feminist Resistance/French Women's Activism—Djamila Boupacha, Simone de Beauvoir, Gisèle Halimi, Germaine Tillon* (manuscript).

19. Accad, *Sexuality and War* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 21.

20. Even U.S. women today, although more open about their bodies and desires, when confronted with sexual violations are oftentimes uncomfortable explaining these violations to male examining physicians and police officers. The result has been the hiring of more female physicians in hospital rape crisis units and officers in sex crimes divisions.

21. There are at least two Euro-American lit-crit feminists who analyze *A Dying Colonialism*: Anne McClintock's aforementioned *Imperial Leather* and Diana Fuss in her "Interior Colonies." Fuss unpacks the textual layers of "Algeria Unveiled" specifically within a poststructuralist framework of mimicry. She equally refers to Fanon's misogyny on the question of Mayotte Capécia. What is troubling about the article is that it attempts to read Fanon psychoanalytically in spite of his own ambivalence about psychoanalysis as unable to understand the neurosis of the black in particular. Moreover, Fuss situates Fanon's decolonizing medicine in *The Wretched of the Earth* within the psychoanalytic discourse of *analysand*, etc., when Fanon was not a psychoanalyst but a psychiatrist; that is, he did not practice psychoanalysis. Equally troubling is the erasure of ethnic specificity in her projection of a "black" identity onto Algerians in an attempt to create continuity between the black subject and the psychoanalysis taken up in *Black Skin, White Mask*, the psychiatry in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and the textual metaphors in *A Dying Colonialism*. McClintock's work on "Fanon and Gender Agency," on the other hand, is a complex and insightful read of the shortcomings and contradictions of "Algeria Unveiled" and "The Algerian Family" with respect to women's agency. McClintock and Helie-Lucas are at two extremes of the spectrum. While McClintock insists that Fanon wholly denies women's agency, Helie-Lucas maintains that Fanon, in his celebration of women's agency, inflates it to such an extent that it masked the reality of gender inequity. There is of course a middle ground between these two readings which I hope to open up. McClintock questions where the agency begins for the women in Fanon's text. Fanon's writing, for McClintock, denies feminist resistance prior to the national revolution and ties that resistance into male militancy; that is, he reinscribes heterosexism through the idea of the heterosexual revolutionary family. Fanon did not mention the long-standing resistance of Arab women to patriarchal oppression, but he certainly did not suggest that women's resistance was filtered through men's militancy. There were various phases of women's involvement in the struggle, but Fanon interprets every action of the women as militant, for Algerian women were always active in the struggle. Moreover, Fanon does not deny the historic dynamism of the veil; that the veil functioned to separate the sexes. McClintock's elaboration of the "designated agency theory" and decontextualized excerptings of Fanon to prove this theory are too numerous to cite. While she integrates a good deal of Fanon's other work into her feminist theorizing, suffice it to say that her critique of *A Dying Colonialism* selectively cites Fanon and in doing so distorts his analysis. For an excellent discussion of Fanon's gender politics from a male perspective, see Ato Sekyi-Otu's *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1996). Sekyi-Otu painstakingly analyzes Fanon's writing and its dramaturgical turns.

22. Mervat Hatem, "Toward the Development of Post-Islamist and Post-Nationalist Feminist Discourses in the Middle East," in *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, ed. Judith Tucker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 29–48.

23. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 191, n. 22. Mernissi writes, "It is interesting to note that Fanon thought the incidents were 'funny.' For a man with Fanon's sensitivity to segregation and preoccupation with revolutionary assertion of human rights, his remark is puzzling to say the least." Fanon wrote in *A Dying Colonialism*, "During those interminable minutes when she must avoid standing still, so as not to attract attention . . . incidents that are at once funny and pathetic are not infrequent" (53).

24. Read, *The Fact of Blackness*, 77–85.

25. Amina Mama, *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender, Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 142, 147. Mama's discussion of psychology and black subjectivity nonetheless borrows extensively from Fanon; as the title suggests, she wants to move *beyond the masks*.

26. See, for example, the cultural/gender studies critics within Read's anthology, *The Fact of Blackness*. See also the dialogues and essays of Vergès, Lola Young, Martina Attile, and Kobena Mercer, who unquestionably defer to Young's reading. Vergès, in Isaac Julien's film, references Guadeloupian writer Maryse Condé's reading. Martina Attile inaccurately assumes that the novels are unavailable, while Lola Young simply reads Fanon's "misogyny" with not so much as a citation from Capécia's anti-feminist texts. Similarly, the literary critics explored in this work—Doane, Bergner, and Andrade—do not demonstrate a familiarity with Capécia's works besides Fanon's selective citations from the novels.

27. Iris Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 74.

28. Dworkin, "Liberalism," in *Liberalism and Its Critics*, ed. Michael Sandel (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 78.

29. Read, *The Fact of Blackness*, 103–13.

30. Cited in Homi Bhabba's introduction to the edited volume, *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 2.

31. See Hagen Schulze, *States, Nations, and Nationalism: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996).

32. Cited in Evelyne Accad's *Sexuality and War*, 18.

33. Cited in Raya Dunayevskaya's *Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 50

34. Edward Saïd, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 85–102.

35. Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 609–11.

36. The Combahee River Collective, "Black Feminist Statement" in Patricia Bell-Scott, Gloria Hull, and Barbara Smith's *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1982), 18.
37. Bulhan, *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression* (New York: Plenum, 1985), 52.
38. The Combahee River Collective, "Black Feminist Statement," 15.
39. Words on logo of the National Organization for Women. Second definition is from Sandra Bartky's *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 11.
40. Dunayevskaya, *Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution.*

Chapter Two

Fanon and Capécia

I am a Frenchwoman, as any other.

—Mayotte Capécia, *Je suis martiniquaise*

What is your real value in the world's economy? What are you worth?

—Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*

With the exception of a few misfits within the closed environment, we can say that every neurosis, every abnormal manifestation, every affective erethism in an Antillean is the product of his cultural situation.

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

In 1892, Anna Julia Haywood Cooper posed a series of peculiar but thought-provoking questions in a collection of essays entitled *A Voice from the South*: "What are we worth? . . . what do we represent to the world? What is our market value? Are we a positive and additive quantity or a negative factor in the world's elements?"[1]

With a highly methodical practicality, this black feminist "casts up" and "carefully overhauls" the account of blacks.[2] While valuable black resources and raw materials are wasted due to pervasive antiblack racism, classism, and sexism, Cooper concludes optimistically that no amount of blackphobia can mitigate individual and collective black contributions to "those things the world prizes,"[3] nor deny the aggregate worth of blacks as a race. "What are we worth?" recommends industriousness, black philanthropy, education, and other socioeconomic strategies of resistance as a means through which to change the value of blacks to the world.[4]