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 Capé-
cia. As one feminist critic observes: “Typically, contemporary readers dismiss Fanon’s condemnation as so obviously sexist that it does not merit analysis.” 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 femi-nist 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 prison that enabled Fanon
to shed the race and the colonized psyche.

In his use of language to articulate racialized/sexualized psy-
chological dramas, Fanon’s own words have become scrutinized—
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. Fanon’s
consistent situating of relationships within a heterosexual frame-
work, coupled with a rather contentious homophobic state-
ment—“I have never been able without revulsion, to hear a man
tell 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 pro-
gressiveness of Fanon’s gender politics and his relevance for
feminists today. But I am not convinced that Fanon’s latent ho-

mophobia translates into misogyny. Nor am I convinced suffi-
ciently that these shortcomings undermine the contributions his
theories on sexuality and subjectivity could make to a “queer
revolutionary theory.”

The primary evidence cited as representative of Fanon’s “mis-
ogyny” is all contained within his first book, Black Skin, White
Masks. First is his use of the masculine as normative—il, lui, le
homme—coupled with rigid constructions of gender and
sexuality, resulting in the erasure of (black) feminine subjectivi-
ts. Second is his “grossly reductive” discussion of (white)
women, psychosexuality and sexual violence, thus delegating (white)
western women to the realm of the neuretic and characterizing their sex-
uality as essentially masochistic. Third and most damning is his
brutal reproach of Mayotte Capéca, which is reflective of patriarchal
inclusions, a desire to police black woman’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 dif-
fERENCE and/or use of masculine 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 the-
etical discourses.” As Naomi Schor writes, “What is to say that
this discourse of sexual indifference . . . is not the last . . . triumphantly
the latest ruse of phallicocentrism?” It must be con-
ceded, 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 gen-
der, which exists as part of feminists’ conflicts, nor sexually
different. I would argue that his use of masculinist paradigms of
oppression and alienation in Black Skin, White Masks (or else-
where) does not importantly posit male superiority. Masculinism
is categorically different from antifeminism and misogyny. As Joy
James writes in Transcending the Tainted Text, 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
de normative without its antisemitic politics and rhetoric. Men
who support feminist politics, as proponents, may advocate the
equality or even occasionally for the superiority of women. . . .
However, even without the patriarchial intent some works may
replicate conventional gender roles.

In Fanon’s more political manifestos, the “revolutionary” is nev-
er envisioned as wholly masculine, nor is the “neuretic black-
phobia” 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 male love.
The colonized man of color carries “white breaths” 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 mas-
culinist referent. However, a discussion of language, oppression,
and sexual difference—that is, a feminist hermeneutics of the
colonized woman of color’s psychosocial 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 infantilized woman of color
desires to devenir française. One need only examine “the myth of the r-
eating Martinican” in Mayotte Capéca’s La négriété
blanche to understand that with every correct idiomatic expression, phonetic articulation, melodic intonation, and deliberate 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 country's cultural standards. He/she becomes wiser as he/she resonates his/her jungle. (p. 18)

Hence, the exclusion of subjectivities extends to the masculine and the feminine. Such exclusions must be nonetheless 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 disequilibrium 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 Niggers 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 forges a blanket assessment of black and white behaviors. Black Skin, White Masks, in essence, critiques stereotyping; it does not reinscribe it. The radical psychiatrist continues:

To those 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 Niggers, 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. 28–29)

Racists, sexist, 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 desire to rape on the part of the black male is nonexistent signals repressed desire.

While the white 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 impulsive 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
chapter one

fanon, conflicts, feminisms

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 relash of the super-Freudian "A Negro Is Raping Me" theory of white female masochism propounded by Marie Bonaparte and Helene Deutsch. Pure and simple, this radical theorist of third-world liberation was a hater of women.

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. In exactly one chapter, "The Negro and Psychopathology," Fanon analyzes specifically white women's neuroses relating to rape, 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 Elbridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice. But was not the colonial project itself envisioned by European colonizers as conquest 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. 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
Chapter One

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." Fanon never states such. Against Our Will offers as evidence his mere recounting of the effects of rape (impotence, insanity, 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... It launched 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."

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 African women via a vicarious colonial rape. When he arrived at the hospital in Béja, Algeria, the majority of his patients were Muslim men and European women. His psychiatric observations in The Wretched of the Earth are, consequently, the most part drawn from his decolonizing psychiatry in the Algerian hospital. However, on August 20, 1956, at the 51st session of the Congress des médecines allemandes et neurologues of France et des pays de langue française in Bordeaux, Fanon and psychiatrist Charles Geromin 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'imaginaire."

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 inescapability; and silence and feelings of grave dishonor, particularly for 1956–1960s 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. 139)

Tunisian lawyer Gisèle Halimi, attorney for Algerian freedom fighter Djamaa Bouachra, who was tortured and raped with a bottle by French soldiers, writes in La Cause des femmes that her client was irrationally obsessed with the idea of being disfigured by the forcible rape. As a Muslim, virginity was of the utmost importance; for her client, humiliation could result in her being a case of unwed marriageability. She was more concerned with her status as a virgin than with the cigarette burns and bruises covering her body. As much as any talk involving the female body was considered culturally taboo, Bouachra, under great duress and in desperation, finally requested a gynecological examination to determine if she was defiled.

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 Illaham Ben Miloud Ben Charaf 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." 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.

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 Helia-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左-wing feminist and cultural critics take issue with Black Skins, White Masks, Arab feminists ground their criticisms in the more political and culturally specific manifesto A Dying Colonialism. The terms of cease...
less quite different. That is, Fanon is not uniformly denounced as misogynist and/or antifeminist. 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 Merawat Hatem for his supposed static approach to culture that relegated women to defenders of tradition through the wearing of the veil. 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, accepting of revolutionary unveiled Algerian women in the streets by men “funny.”

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?” Poststructuralist Nigerian feminist Amina Mama argues that Fanon’s “theory of lactation implicitly pathologizes black people” and “typifies the black woman he encountered in France and the Antillies.”

The complex positionality embodied in the criticisms of Fanon has led to my use of the word “issue” to refer to the work and the term “issue” in a general sense. While gender equity/women’s liberation is the underlying commitment of these feminists, openness to Fanon’s thought regarding its usefulness to women’s liberation as well as its wholeness dismissal and exorcisms of him (men’s feminism) theory and practice appear to be contingent upon theoretical issues such as race, progressive radicalism versus reactionary liberalism, and the repressive patriarchal dynamics of nationalization and fundamentalism. Indeed, while there are equals 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—and, where the conflicts emerge—unmask ideology, race, and the polemics of nationalism and contemporary fundamentalism.

**LIBERAL EURO-AMERICAN LIT-CRIT FEMINISMS**

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 another’s writing on Fanon and Capécia. Hence, denunciations of Fanon’s colonial psychosocial theories as wholly “misogynistic” are the result of a lack of reader evaluation.

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-sectarian thought of Freud, Lacan, Foucault, and Nietzsche into a 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/antiracial agenda within the framework of its readings of the racial/sexual/economic complexities of texts like *Black Skin, White Masks* or *Je suis morte, je n’ai jamais existé* and *La négresse blanche*.

Ideologically, the leanings in lit-crit feminism are of the “gynocentric” liberal persuasion. Borrowing from feminist philosopher Iris Young, gynocentric feminism “defines women’s oppression as the deviation and repression of women’s experience by a masculinist culture that excludes violence and individualism.” 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.” However, in its gynocentric liberalism, this strain of feminism ascribes to gender/sexual difference the over-determining power in its analyses; it takes to task forms of patriarchal aggression without an equally stringent examination of the retrogressive politics it defends, lacking as it is in an antinacist, 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.
Chapter One

The attendant results in many of these prodigious scholarly endeavors are representations of Fanon as sanctioning a perverse form of black nationalism; as anti-interracial relationships, i.e., black women/white men, although his own wife was French; and as anti-female, 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 rights 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 Fatma Khoudri, the “nation is the modern Janus,” inscribing both progress and regression, political rationality and irrationality in its very genetic code. 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.

Hence his dilemma for Algerian nationalist feminists. They are tied to the idea of an autonomous Algeria, for they fought and died for this progress; but they are literally bound by the retrogressive aspects of the idea of the nation. As Monique Gedant 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 paths 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.

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 Helle-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, Helle-Lucas is torn, believing in Algerian nationalism, but resistant to the sexism and misogyny it seems to engender.

It is particularly around the issue of the “separé”—especially its uses during the struggle for national independence and abuses in the besieged nationalist and fundamentalist Algerian post-colonial—and portraits of women as freedom fighters equal to men during the French-Algerian war that the conflict arises between Helle-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 Helle-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).
Chapter One

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 “shortsighted,” 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.20 Radical black feminism recognizes the importance and the interconnectedness of experience and radical thought, theory, and practice.

While linked by ethnicity and at times 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 antifeminist agitation has been the cornerstone of black radical feminists’ agendas. Indeed, the lived experiences of the earliest black women—leaders and activists such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barretta—articulated through the confluence of race, gender, and class 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 systemic injustices for all oppressed peoples. In a provocative address given to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), well-known grassrootist activist and feminist Bonnie 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 like white wom-

Fanon, Conflicts, Feminisms

an'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.21

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”22 and the liberation of the most wretched of nonblacks, nontenables, 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, exhumed from the遗漏 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 Banlight 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 endeavor generous. He did not simply adhere to a cause. He gave himself to it. Completely, without reserve. ... By hatred of compromised, 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 toward life, which he could not imagine in terms other than of thought transformed into action.23

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.”24
There are thus no ever-widening gulfs, uncrossable chasms, unbridgeable 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 feminists. Agendas and programs vary from theorist to theorist and from practitioner to practitioner. The pressing issue 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. Thus it becomes 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). This he interrogated and challenged specifically the contradictions in women’s lives. Unlike feminists’ centering of women in their analyses of oppression, Fanon’s politics worked toward the obliterating of sexist oppression in the scheme of bringing about human freedom. And as Marxist-Humanist feminist Rayna Dunayevskaya writes, “there is no such thing as women’s history that is not the actual history of humanity’s struggle toward freedom.” Fanon believed that revolutions 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 protofeminist consciousness. His 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. 380). 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 snippets 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 preface an observation: The colonized Antillean woman’s phobic object would be a Senegalese type, an inferior, the blackest black, the negre’s nigger. The virtual absence of women of color in the status of patients in 1951 subsumes the contemporary issue of black women’s relevance 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 anthropological 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 Capéchin's phobic response regarding black male sexual prowess, such is not the case for the interiorized victim of color.

NOTES

3. His homophobia has not, however, deterred progressive Marxist-Humanist lesbian feminists like the San Francisco Bay Area Sexuality group from using his writings in their articulation of a "Queer Revolutionary Theory" in "Queer Women's Thoughts on the Relationship of Sexuality to Revolution," published in the Sexuality group's newsletter. The group is part of the San Francisco Bay Area Women's Liberation Committee. This statement set in motion a rather lengthy segment in Isaac Julien's 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," 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, MAX, as homophobia rightly suggests, however objectionable it may seem to our feminist sensibilities. See, for instance, Anna McAninch's "Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context" (New York: Routledge, 1995). One cannot simply ignore the issue of the faulty and ugly problematizing transcriptions.
9. See Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant's L'Autre côté des nuages: retraces antillaises et continentales de la littérature, 1633-1975 (Paris: Hatier, 1991). But even as she mines 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.
12. See Emile Bhabha's "Remembering Fanon: Solid, Psyche and the Colonial Condition," in Foreword to Black Skin, White Masks (London: Pluto Press, 1988). Even if we lend some credence to Bhabha'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 primary emphasis on whiteness, whites are ideologically 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 hypochondria and paranoia—fears of rape—in the presence of black males.
15. Fanon, Towards the African Revolution, chapter 2-3 of section 4: "Africa Face to Face with French Torturers" and "Concerning a Plague."
20. Even U.S. women today, although more open about their bodies and desires, when confronted with sexual violations are sometimes 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 literary 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 minhinni. She equally refers to Fanon's misogyny on the question of Mayotte Capéda. 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 mainstream, etc., when Fanon was not a psychoanalyst but a psychiatrist that is, he did not practice psychoanalysis. Currently troubling is the erosion 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-Lucan are at two extremes of the spectrum. While McClintock insists that Fanon wholly denies women's agency, Helie-Lucan maintains that Fanon, in his celebration of women's agency, inflicts it in such an extent that it masked the reality of gender inequality. There is of course a middle ground between these two readings which I hope to open up. McClintock questions the agency which the agency begins for the women in Fanon's text. Fanon's writing, for McClintock, denies feminist resistance prior to the national revolution and too that resistance into male militancy. The is, he reduces intersectionality through the idea of the heterosexual revolutionary family. Fanon did not mention the long-standing resistance of 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 militancy, or Algerian women were always active in the struggle. Moreover, Fanon does not deny the historical dynamism of the veil; that the veil functioned to separate the sexes. McClintock's elaboration of the "designated agency theory" and decontextualized exemplification 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, sufficient 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 Soki-Obi's Fanon's Dialectic of Experience (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1996). Soki-Obi painstakingly analyzes Fanon's writing and his dramaturgical turns.

22. Meriem Halima, "Toward the Development of Post-Islamist and


23. Meriem, Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 79, n. 22. Meriem writes, "It is interesting to note that Fanon thought the incidents were funny. For a man with Fanon's sensitivity to oppression and preoccupation with revolutionary assertion of human rights, his remark is puzzling to say the least." Fanon wrote in A Dying Colonialism, "During those insufferable 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).


25. Aminah Mama, Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender, Subjectivity (New York: Routledge, 1995), 142, 147. Mama's discussion of psychology and black subjectivity nonetheless borrow 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 Rokema Morgen, who unquestionably refer to Young's reading. Vergès, in Isaac Julien's film, references Goldfranckian writer Maryse Condé's reading. Martina Attile incorrectly assumes that the novels are unessential, while Lola Young simply reads Fanon's "misogyny" with not so much as a citation from Capéda's anti-feminist texts. Similarly, the literary critics explored in this work—Doone, Begger, and Andrade—do not demonstrate a familiarity with Capéda's works besides Fanon's selective citations from the novels.

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


Chapter Two

Fanon and Capécia

I am a Frenchwoman, as any other.

—Mayotte Capécia, Je suis martirizada

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 negro, every abnormal manifestation, every affective erethism in an Antillean is the product of his cultural situation.

—Franz Fanon, Black Skin, White Minds

In 1982, 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?”

With a highly methodical practicality, this black feminist “casts up” and “carefully overhauls” the account of blacks. 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,” 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.