

*[We] must guard against the danger of perpetuating the feudal tradition which holds sacred the superiority of the masculine element over the feminine. Women will have exactly the same place as men, not in the clauses of the constitution but in the life of every day: in the factory, at the school, and in the parliament.*

Frantz Fanon

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## Foreword

It is a current truism that a strange marriage (in fact, one in which battery is not an unknown feature) exists between feminism and black liberation politics, especially male revolutionary politics. Fortunately, much spoken and written work has addressed the sexism and misogyny of black or "Third World" male radicals. Unfortunately, the critiques are occasionally Pavlovian in their dismissals of male revolutionaries, fighting racism and imperialism, as uniformly counterfeminist. These Pavlovian leaps, like binary polarities, mask the complexities of liberation struggles against the oppressed status of colonized peoples. Say "black revolutionary" and the reflex response "patriarchal male" manifests as the negative image. But its appearance displaces the subtle analyses of gray areas and the fine lines differentiating anti-imperialists whose revolutionary praxis (despite their sexual politics) contributed to women's liberation from those revolutionaries who expressed little interest in women's rights. The shapes of profeminist male revolutionaries can only materialize in painstaking examinations of gender politics in antiracist, decolonization theory.

Resisting simplistic constructions, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms* discusses the Martinican theorist and his relevance to feminisms in their plurality. Sharpley-Whiting elevates the level of feminist debate within both antiracist and feminist discourse, offering new understandings of gender politics in Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*, *The Wretched of the Earth*, and *A Dying Colonialism*. *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms* initiates and sustains sophisticated analyses about the convergence between and theoretical ruptures within "Third World" freedom movements and women's liberation. It

provides an important service to progressive social and political theory; regarding this twentieth-century revolutionary and feminist theory, the book skillfully “debunk[s] the binary erected by some feminists between Fanon’s philosophy of revolution and women’s liberation.”

Sharpley-Whiting’s study encompasses Fanon’s revolutionary writings and his European/American and Arab/Algerian feminist critics, as well as his legacy found in the works of radical black feminist theorists such as bell hooks and Gloria Joseph. In fact, Sharpley-Whiting joins the ranks of African American women who acknowledge the limitations of Fanon’s thought yet maintain a link between his revolutionary ideology, his love for freedom and people, and their own feminist commitments. Such women have used Fanon to evaluate the limitations of feminism. For instance, through her reading of Fanon’s “Pitfalls of National Consciousness,” Sharpley-Whiting issues a challenge to academic feminists “to renew their commitment to feminism’s activist and socially transformative origins.” She also parlays Fanon’s discussion of “colonial feminism” among French women during France’s occupation of Algeria into a critique of postmodern feminist writers who first dismiss Fanon without engaging the revolutionary content of his praxis and who caricature Fanon’s observations about women and gender.

Not inclined toward romantic revivals, Sharpley-Whiting reminds us that “Fanon never pronounced himself as a feminist.” She refuses to reconstruct him as such even while she demystifies his postmodern reconstruction as a counterfeminist. In her work, Sharpley-Whiting makes provocative and thoughtful arguments, observing that while Fanon’s “heterosexism and latent homophobia are incompatible with progressive feminisms,” there is no convincing argument that this “translates into misogyny.” Describing Fanon’s *Black Skins, White Masks* as a “clinical study and an experimental narrative,” she contends that its honesty about white women’s interracial sexual phobias may be considered “brutal” but “not brutalizing.” Fanon identifies how both black male and female bodies are hypersexualized, associated with sexual license and violence, in the “white imaginary.” In Sharpley-Whiting’s argument, black female victimization by (white and) black males thus becomes the identifying marker among some feminist writings that overlook the nuances found in revolutionary thought.

Sharpley-Whiting’s wry and astute discussion of Mayotte Capecia reveals how Fanon’s female Martinican contemporary was complicit in French sexual-racial objectification of France’s colonial “subjects.” Feminists’ negative and (as Sharpley-Whiting points out) in some cases hyperbolic responses to Fanon’s criticisms of Capecia’s “negrophobia” have resulted in her reconstruction as “the lamb at Fanon’s sacrificial altar.” The debate surrounding Fanon’s response to Capecia presents implications that extend beyond this one revolutionary intellectual; it raises the question of how to read a black male revolutionary’s caustic critique of a woman of African (and European) descent who is championed by white literary elites precisely because of her denigration of black life and culture as “savage.” How do we understand the valorization of Capecia as a “native” writer half a century ago, during a time of disintegrating colonial empires, by a male French literary elite—in relationship to her being championed, by postmodern feminists who do not fully confront her antiblack sentiments, as a woman “vilified” by an anticolonialist?

In her argument that Fanon expressed a commitment to women’s liberation, a commitment largely ignored or misconstrued by too many readers and writers, Sharpley-Whiting suggests ways in which we might talk about resistance to racism without masculinist or patriarchal occlusion and how simultaneously we might speak about phallogocentric bias and sexism in male antiracist, anticolonial discourse without obscuring antiracist theory and practice. Sharpley-Whiting tackles the limitations and inconsistencies of feminist scholarship concerning Fanon’s writings on women without repudiating feminism or valorizing the male revolutionary. Her discussions of feminisms draw the connections between contemporary black women theorists and activists and the resources and radicalizing inspiration they drew from Fanon’s uncompromising political life and writings—even while finding it necessary to rework his words for a more liberatory sexual politics. As it explores the conflicts surrounding varied feminisms and Fanon’s commitments to revolutionary struggle, this book makes a vital contribution to liberation theory for both women and oppressed peoples.