



# Decolonisation and Gender: A Feminist Critique of Frantz Fanon

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**Abstract:** This paper reconsiders the legacy of Frantz Fanon by interrogating the gendered and sexual politics embedded in his influential postcolonial writings. While Fanon's works have been foundational in theorizing colonial trauma, identity, and resistance, they also reflect the limitations of a heteropatriarchal framework. Engaging critically with *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, the study explores how Fanon's revolutionary vision often sidelines or marginalizes feminist and queer perspectives. Through a close reading of his language, narrative strategies, and ideological assumptions, the paper foregrounds the absence of intersectionality in his theorization of liberation. Ultimately, the study challenges the reader to reimagine decolonization not as a singular, masculine endeavor, but as a plural and inclusive process that must account for gender and sexual difference.

**Keywords:** Frantz Fanon, intersectional feminism, postcolonial theory, decolonization, gender, heteropatriarchy, *Black Skin White Masks*, *The Wretched of the Earth*, homophobia, masculinist discourse.

## Introduction

*"I cannot afford the luxury of fighting one form of oppression only"*

-Audre Lorde

Throughout his writings Frantz Fanon outlines the nuances of oppression and liberation within the black lived experience. While his work remains extremely significant within the discourse of postcolonial studies, his approach is predominantly hereto-patriarchal in nature. The following paper aims to examine and critique two of major works by Fanon, *Wretched of The Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks* through an intersectional feminist lens.

The aim of my study is to analyze if Fanon's ideas of liberation are incoherent with feminism. Firstly, I will be looking at the nuances of the predominantly masculine language used by Fanon; secondly, I will be highlighting elements of heterosexism and homophobia in his theories; in the third section, I will be presenting his ideas of decolonization and gender. In the final section, I will be drawing conclusions based on the abovementioned arguments.

## Predominantly Masculine Language in Fanon

Fanon predominantly uses masculine language for reference in his writing. For instance, since his original works were in French, Fanon uses masculine referents like 'il', 'lui', 'le', 'noir', and 'l'homme' throughout. According to Sharpley Whiting the normative use of masculine pronouns and examples "represents a clandestine means of repression and oppression; it is to some extent no different from blatant biases/pro-male slants founding a great deal of other theoretical discourses."

While expanding on the concept of the 'Self and the Other' in the *Wretched of the Earth* Fanon gives the example of the 'Native' and the 'Settler' without explicitly addressing their gender which results in the assumption of masculinity. Anne Mc Clinton opines, that, "generic terms like 'the Negro' or 'the Native' — syntactically unmarked for gender — are almost everywhere immediately contextually marked as male... The generic category "native" does not include women; women are merely possessed by the (male) native as an appendage."

One can, therefore, deduce that since in Fanon's theory both the 'Native' and the 'Settler' are male, his theory is an exclusive study of male relationships in a post-colonial set up. It would therefore not be wrong to critique Fanon for excluding women from his study of the colonizer-



colonized relationships resulting in the erasure of the already doubly marginalised identity of the black woman.

Gwen Bergner argues how Fanon “takes the male as the norm.” She further notes how for Fanon, “women are considered as subjects almost exclusively in terms of their sexual relationships with men.”

Fanon’s study of relationships between men of both races reduces women to objects of exchange between the two, this aligns with Luce Irigaray’s concept of women as “fetish-objects.” Irigaray contends, “they(women) are the manifestation and the circulation of a power of the Phallus, establishing relationships of men with each other.”

Bell Hooks’ idea of a “phallogocentric paradigm of liberation” in which “freedom and the experience of patriarchal manhood are always linked as though they are one and the same” can be applied to Fanon as well, since he majorly focusses on the liberation of the black male and gaining of economic and political power, thereby, leaving out the question of emancipation of women from his purview.

#### Heterosexism and Homophobia in Fanon

Chapter 6, titled ‘The Negro and Psychopathology’ of *Black Skin, White Masks* focusses the psychology behind relationships under colonisation, especially sexual relationships. The theories proposed by Fanon here have apparent undertones of sexism. Bodies of women emerge as a site of violence and revenge as he notes how black men desire white women for the “satisfaction of dominating a European woman.” It is interesting to note then how women irrespective of their race become objects of violence.

Fanon further questions the “negrophobia” of white women and proposes how their fear of being violated/raped by black men simply represents a desire for the same. “We discover that when a woman lives the fantasy of rape by a Negro, it is in some way the fulfilment of a private dream, of an inner wish.” This theory of Fanon reflects deeply misogynistic ideas as it absolves the black men of sexual violence at the cost of the white woman. Here too, it is noteworthy how Fanon leaves out the question of black women even though they hold a doubly marginalised position in terms of both race and gender. When asked about the same, Fanon addressed this exclusion by saying, “those who grant our conclusions on the psycho-sexuality of the white woman may ask what we have to say about the woman of colour. I know nothing about her.”

He proposes a similar idea for the white man as well, referring to “negrophobic” white men as “repressed homosexuals” afraid to acknowledge their attraction to black men. Fanon further expresses homophobic ideas claiming, “I have never been able, without revulsion, to hear a man say to another man: ‘He is so sensual!’ I do not know what the sensuality of a man is.”

It is noteworthy, how when it comes to sexual relationships Fanon looks at women both black and white as passive recipients, while men of both the races are contended as active agents. Therefore, while Fanon addresses the crucial intersection of race and sexuality, he privileges the male persona irrespective of race.

#### Decolonisation and Gender

However, while Fanon’s works can be heavily critiqued from a feminist lens, his idea of decolonisation is not completely exclusive of women. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonising Theory, Practising Solidarity* states that “while Fanon’s theorization is elaborated through masculine metaphors (and his formulation of resistance is also profoundly gendered), the framework of decolonization Fanon elaborates is useful in formulating a feminist decolonizing project.” Mohanty appreciates Fanon’s ideas of decolonisation in the context of gendered relations as they require “whole social structure being changed from the bottom up” and involving “profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures.”

In some of his later works like *A Dying Colonialism* Fanon has engaged with the issues of women’s oppression stating that while “the male, who is the privileged producer, enjoys an almost lordly status, the female has no opportunity, all things considered, to develop her personality or take any initiative. She takes her place in the vast network of domestic traditions in Algerian society.” His idea of liberation inevitably includes the native women as well even if he explicitly does not spell that out.

Therefore, while he can be critiqued for majorly articulating himself through masculinist ideas and metaphors, erasure of the doubly marginalised identity of the black woman, and privileging a hetero-patriarchal narrative, it would be wrong to label Fanon as completely misogynistic, for in his later works and in his overall idea of liberation, he does not leave the question of women out.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon’s writing can be



criticised for a predominantly masculine focus and elements of sexism and homophobia, however his overall concept of decolonisation still demands a restructuring of socio-political institutions under colonisation most of which were inherently patriarchal, therefore, his idea of decolonisation is not incoherent with women's liberation.

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