Abstract

To Fanon, With Love: Women Writers of the African Diaspora Interrupting Violence, Masculinity, and Nation-Formation

By Yolande M. S. Tomlinson

As the epistolary inscription of its title suggests, this project undertakes a critical task of “writing to” and “writing back to” Frantz Fanon on the issues of violence, masculinity, and nation-formation. To this end, I deploy Brian Keith Axel’s formulations of “national interruption” to position African diasporic women’s novels—specifically Gayl Jones’s Corregidora, Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions, and Edwidge Danticat’s Breath, Eyes, Memory— as critical interruptions to Fanon’s formulations. This task unfolds in three parts. In Part I, I begin by undertaking a close reading of Fanon’s two seminal texts, Black Skin, White Masks and The Wretched of the Earth, to argue that Fanon’s ‘masculinist’ politics and drive toward mastery and nation-formation are embedded in his articulation of homelessness and the black male body as a closed-system and an agent of violence. Conceptualized through a corporeal lens, this approach contests some feminist scholars’ claims that Fanon’s revolutionary project offers liberatory possibilities for women and other vulnerable populations. In Part II, I place the above novels in dialogue with three key issues I find central to Fanon’s project of liberation: the master/slave relationship; his revolutionary subjectivity; and, the relationship between violence and nationhood. Throughout this analysis, when the body and healing are analytically privileged above the nation, what emerges is a movement from the language of fragmented bodies (masculinist/nationalist violence) to fragmented geographical borders (diaspora) and a reconstitution of traditional masculinity, community, and belonging. In the final part, the afterword, I explicate the title as an act of “writing back to” Fanon and his feminist interpreters and outline –via Toni Morrison’s Love–a new model on which to recuperate Fanon and masculinity for a contemporary feminist anti-violence politics of liberation. Ultimately, this project argues that we must be willing to ‘interrupt’ problematic formulations of gender—men as agents of violence, women as victims—and begin to articulate new paradigms of love, gender, and community.