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Katharine Ann Harris

University of Sussex

Book Review:

Living Fanon: Global Perspectives, edited by Nigel C. Gibson¹

This collection of essays on influential writer, revolutionary, and psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon explores the relevance of academic postcolonial thought to the politics of decolonisation. Bringing together a substantial and much-needed range of international writers, Nigel C. Gibson's volume contains a range of perspectives on Fanon's legacy.

It is precisely this range that is the book's strength as well as its weakness. Evidently perceiving the anomalous gap in Fanon criticism that has seen previous collections of essays take a problematically western perspective on Fanon and postcolonialism,² Gibson has formulated a text that truly covers the 'global perspectives' of the title. Contributors offer a variety of international perspectives and draw on a wide scope of international politics. However, whilst commendably achieving this breadth of focus, the collection as a whole suffers from the essays being somewhat disparate. It would perhaps benefit from drawing together under specific headings those essays which address similar themes, periods, or

¹ Nigel C. Gibson, ed., *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

² See, for example, Anthony C. Alessandrini, ed., *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1998), and an example of its reviews, Ash Sharma, 'Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives', *darkmatter Journal*, <<http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2007/03/01/franz-fanon-critical-perspectives/>>, 1 March 2007. Accessed 4 January 2012.

aspects of Fanon's works. Offering some sense of how the essays might be critically stratified could serve to make their heterogeneity more accessible both to readers knowledgeable about Fanon's work and to those new to it.

Particularly strong are those essays that locate subtle collocation in their response to the title of the work: *Living Fanon*. For example, Gibson's introduction and Lewis R. Gordon's 'Requiem on a Life' demonstrate the multifarious complexity of this phrase in their different approaches to it. On the one hand, Gibson addresses the meaning of Fanon in the present day, how his theses and theories might have relevance to situations now, and writes particularly convincingly on the concurrence between the origins of the Arab Spring and Fanon's arguments for the role of the individual in revolutionary states. In this sense, it is Fanon's works that are 'living'. On the other hand, Gordon's view of 'living Fanon' analyses Fanon's living body and how this might have ironic parallels in his writings. In particular, Gordon's essay offers an insightful analysis of how Fanon's theories of blood relatives and the 'nègre sale' find congruence in his degenerating body and blood. Here 'living Fanon' is about Fanon's experience of living and how it can be seen in his theories.

The strength of these two essays is their complex analysis of the depth of the title phrase, which gives them a sense of a shared focus despite their hugely different approaches. They suggest the (sometimes unrealised) potential of this volume to create dialogue in Fanon criticism, significant in the context of the newly *global* perspectives of the title. Often the collection inclines towards simply offering the perspectives in all of their breadth, rather than exploring the potential for interaction between them.

This is not to denigrate the overall quality of the writing in the volume, as many articles speak productively of Fanon and make valuable analyses and applications of his writings. And the limited dialogue between the essays has its positive aspect: an impressive heterogeneity in the ideas about Fanon on offer.

For example, Seloua Luste Boulbina offers a particularly illuminating analysis of Fanon's writings on women, and how his ideas have been undermined in recent theorisations of the postcolonial woman by repeated over-reliance on the category of rape. Boulbina seeks, instead, to locate Fanon's work at a precise point of intersection with the works of Subaltern Studies theorists, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Thus she formulates a strong thesis for suggesting Fanon as a precursor to the much later Subaltern movement.³ In doing so, however, I would suggest that Boulbina perhaps slightly underestimates the significance of

³ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds Cary Nelson and Lawrence (London: Macmillan, 1988).

Fanon's own reinscriptions of postcolonial female voicelessness, since he is frequently criticised for imposing his own voice onto female subjectivity in texts such as *A Dying Colonialism*. It is this that has led to the interpretation of Fanon as demonstrating a certain gender bias in his works,⁴ an interpretation that Boulbina's essay does not address, to the extent that she seems to uncritically erase it.

Grant Farred's essay is a complex study of interaction between Hannah Arendt's *On Violence* and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. This work by Arendt constitutes a problematic critique of Fanon, and Farred draws out significant points of contrast between the two theorists, stating their different perspectives on the value of violence in political quests for power. However, most significant and most subtle about Farred's work are the areas of concurrence that he exposes between Arendt's and Fanon's arguments, particularly with regard to the deployment of race as an essentialist category for political dispute. Farred explores the writers' shared mistrust of an uncritical political stance that relies solely on race as its source and as its unifying structure. Avoiding a dismissal of Arendt's arguably simplistic definition of Fanon as a promoter of violence, Farred explores the ways in which her analysis might be seen to originate from a not dissimilar attitude to politics.

Alongside essays such as these are other impressive works, in particular, Lou Turner's collocation of Fanon's theories of the body and the uses of torture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Karima Lazali on subjectivity in the context of decolonisation, and Mabogo Percy More on how Fanon's works might have ongoing relevance for questions of land in post-apartheid South Africa. *Living Fanon* is a significant body of work that is helpfully suggestive of how academic postcolonialism might offer new perspectives on present-day international politics. This is particularly the case, given that the global nature of these essays is a substantial step forward from previous collections of essays on Fanon and does much to redress the omnipresence of western perspectives in discussions of his work.

⁴ Perhaps most famously by bell hooks in both *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984), and 'Feminism as a Persistent Critique of History: What's Love Got to Do With It?' in Alan Read, ed., *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1996), pp.76-85.

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