

Preface

I originally wrote *The Wombs of Women* for a French audience, hence the presence of certain explanations (of “race,” “racial,” “racialized,” “black,” “white”) that might seem superfluous to an English-speaking public. The “veritable Copernican revolution” called for by Aimé Césaire in 1956 has yet to happen, “so ingrained in Europe (from the extreme Right to the extreme Left) is the habit of doing for us, arranging for us.” And just as mobilization against structural racism, or what has been called “political racism,” has been expanding consistently in France, so the refusal to consider the ways in which racism has affected social movements and the Left has grown as well.

I needed also to provide my French readership with some basic information on neocolonial politics in the post-1962 French Republic, so strong is the perception in France that the French empire ended in 1962 with the independence of Algeria. Peoples of the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean, and South America, who currently live in territories that once belonged to the world of French slavery or to the postslavery colonial empire, remain under French rule. Their presence belies the legitimacy of a contemporary cartography and

history of racism and republican coloniality that can be limited to the European French space. Ignorance about and indifference to France's persistent "neocolonial" relation to so many societies have long been symptomatic of France's blindness to the colonial/racial.

It was also my aim in this book to counter a totally fictional narrative about the women's liberation movement of the 1970s—the idea that women of color were not present, that feminism was a struggle for secularism, or that parity was the goal of all feminists. I thought it important that I contribute to the debate about "femonationalism," as Sara Farris calls it—about new forms of femo-imperialism and femo-colonialism wherein women's rights increasingly serve imperialist and capitalist objectives. The French women's liberation movement, despite the radical anticapitalist and antipatriarchal stance of some of its advocates, was subject to the boomerang effect described by Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism*. These women's liberation groups did not heed his warning that racism would inevitably contaminate European progressive politics, and thus they continued to ignore how and why women had been made "whites," how and why so many feminists had supported colonization, and how and why the state enacted racialized politics concerning abortion and contraception in the 1970s—in other words, how and why the conception of women's rights has remained profoundly Eurocentric.

This book was written as a contribution to the ongoing conversation about a feminism that criticizes and critiques white feminism, Islamophobia, racial capitalism, and imperialism in France.

Finally, I should note that I myself was active in different groups of the women's liberation movement when I arrived in France in the 1970s but that I never called myself a feminist back then. For me, coming from Reunion Island and Algeria, nourished intellectually by the struggles for anti-imperialist liberation and against racism worldwide, that form of feminism spoke too much of and to whiteness and the West. That brand of feminism was not close enough to the struggles of the Third World—struggles that themselves, however, too easily dismissed the insights of psychoanalysis that had inspired Frantz Fanon and the theories developed by women of color against sexism and patriarchy in the ranks of revolutionary movements. Nowadays, I call myself a feminist because of the global movement for the rights of women in all their multidimensionality, because of the amazing feminists in the Global South, and because of the renewed strength of Afro-feminism, Islamic feminism, and queer and trans theories. I now call myself a feminist thanks to the movement's consistent effort to recover the buried history of women of color activism and theories and to develop new forms

of radical and political feminisms. All of this suggests that a Copernican revolution is in the making

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