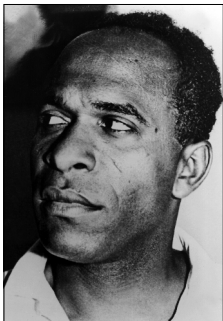


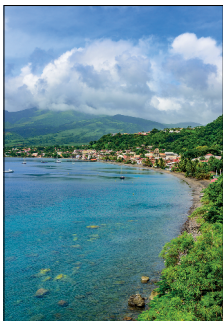


Offline: Frantz Fanon and the origins of global health



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A dangerous myth has been cloaked around the young body of global health. It is a myth that hides uncomfortable truths about inequalities of power. It is a deception that erases important histories, marginalises already neglected peoples, and prevents accurate understanding of why progress towards sustainable health improvements in some of the most resource-poor settings is so slow and erratic. In 2013, *The New England Journal of Medicine* published two articles that sought to explain the emergence of global health and how global health should evolve in the future. Allan Brandt, a distinguished Harvard medical historian, argued that “the HIV epidemic and the responses it generated have been crucial forces in ‘inventing’ the new ‘global health.’” He claimed that AIDS had disrupted old thinking in international health, challenging divisions between public health and clinical medicine, disease prevention and treatment. AIDS unleashed a new era of health activism that put those living with the disease at the forefront of advocacy. The AIDS response triggered unrivalled investments in health, led to the creation of new public, private, and philanthropic global health institutions, and contributed substantially to the central place of health in the UN-led Millennium Development Goals. The AIDS movement enshrined all of these innovations in a robust framework of human rights. Brandt concluded: “When the history of the HIV epidemic is eventually written, it will be important to recognise that without this epidemic there would be no global health movement as we know it today.” In a companion paper, Peter Piot and Thomas Quinn argued that the “unprecedented global response to the AIDS pandemic can serve as a paradigm for the response to other global health threats”. What *is* became what *should* be. The descriptive was transformed into the normative. These positions have become axioms of modern global health. While the HIV epidemic has been (and continues to be) an important force in shaping global health, it is an error to assign a single disease as its point of origin. To do so jeopardises efforts to advance health, liberty, and equity for the most disadvantaged communities on our planet.



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Global health is not merely a constellation of diseases, a collection of national health systems, or even a set of values. It is a way of looking at our world. It seeks to

observe, document, monitor, interpret, and eliminate the harms that accrue from national and transnational forces inimical to health—political, commercial, military, financial, diplomatic, legal, intersectional, and cultural. Global health is about power and poverty, violence and exploitation, oppression and silence, and collusion and exclusion. If one views global health using this broader lens, the historical turn that was the decisive and creative moment for the birth of global health was surely decolonisation. It was decolonisation, beginning in the 1950s with legacies that continue to this day, which illuminated the myriad pressures that shape the health of peoples worldwide. And the person who wrote the first manifestos for global health was Frantz Fanon.

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Fanon was born in Martinique on July 20, 1925. He died from leukaemia in Bethesda, Maryland, on Dec 6, 1961, aged just 36. Yet in his short life he wrote three books—*Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), *A Dying Colonialism* (1959), and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)—together with dozens of essays and articles, some of which are collected in *Toward the African Revolution* (1964) and, most recently, *Alienation and Freedom* (2018). Fanon applied his clinical and psychiatric education to understand “the Black-White relationship”. Through the use of what he called “sociodiagnostics”, he anatomised settler-colonialism, its racism, psychology, and shame. He described the way medicine was co-opted as a tool for colonial control. He explored the repressive motives of European civilisation. By studying and taking part in the struggle for Algerian independence, he described a political path towards resistance and eventual decolonisation. He set out the responsibilities and duties of intellectuals in these struggles. He foresaw the betrayals ahead in post-colonial worlds. He traced the links between neoliberalism and neocolonialism. And he sought nothing less than to define a new theory of humankind and to reintroduce that humankind to the world. At this time of global fracture and anti-Otherness, Frantz Fanon, largely forgotten and never discussed, deserves to have his memory reclaimed, his writings read, and his ideas resurrected.

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