

Book Review

Title: *Studies in a Dying Colonialism.*

Author: Frantz Fanon

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Reviewer: Chediel Nyirenda

Fanon is a notable author among several revolutionary Africa Writers. He was born in Martinique in 1925. He was active in both intellectual and active military combats against white supremacy and colonialism in Algeria. He is known for his ardent and open hatred for colonialism and oppression in general. The book has 181 pages. The beginning of the book has two introductions. One is by A. M. Babu (1989) and the second by Adolfo Gilly (1965). The book is made up of five chapters, two appendices and a conclusion. It is set in Algeria. The focus of the book is in the fields of Development Studies and Politics (African Politics in particular). The chapters cover Algeria's history and politics, The role of the media, The Algerian family life, Medicine and the role of the European minority in Algerian politics and economy.

In his introduction, A. M. Babu, the Tanzanian scholar and staunch believer of socialism, accentuates the importance of forging an enduring relevance of the spirit of revolution with the aim that the people should take control of their governments – even in the time of neo-colonialism and terrorism. He advocates for a psychological revolution anchored in an anti-intimidation and anti-surrender political consciousness. To Babu, revolutionary violence is not the same as terrorism. He calls it a therapy that cleanses the oppressed.

To Adolfo Gilly, revolution was mankind's way of life during the time of his writing. The aim was to end exploitation. He posits that liberation never comes as a gift but it is forcefully seized by the masses. To him, it is not the leaders or the system that will determine a revolutionary history but the masses exerting violence from below and countering violence from above. The only magic of the guerrilla that defeats even sophisticated modern armoury is the support of the masses in various ways including refusal to collaborate with the oppressor. The radio is presented as an important tool of the struggle with examples of its success cited from Nigeria and Bolivia.

One very strong point raised by Fanon is that of the role of culture in uniting the masses against oppression. In chapter one the author stresses the importance of culture (in his case the Arab culture) and African identity. The author stresses that culture, like truth, is concrete and the most elevated culture is that of resistance against oppression and imperial exploitation. Fanon does not dwell only on the torture and suffering of the Algerians but describes and deals with the essence of their inner strength. To him the essence of revolution is not the struggle for bread but for human dignity. He praises the Chinese strategy of mobilizing the masses against the fear of atomic war as well as the Cuban complex summarized as: *we'd rather have them kill us all than go back to the old life.*

In chapter two the role of the media (radio) as an instrument of psychological uplifting is discussed. Chapter three presents the role of family relations and commitment to the struggle. Different roles of boys and girls, fathers and sons, husbands and wives in the struggle are elaborated. Chapter four raises the interesting subject of medicine. The author presents medicine as one of the most tragic features of the colonial situation. Military conquest enforced technical domination, commercial exploitation and lack of trust. Colonial medicine forced the oppressed to appraise the colonizer's contributions in a pejorative and absolute way. In the colonial situation the doctor always belonged to the dominant class. The new medical technique took over completely and did not tolerate any persistence of any shred of tradition. In the traditional African society, the people trusted the medicine persons. In the colonial situation, the colonized is faced with a dilemma. There was a confrontation between the African way of thinking about medicine and the rational logic of the modern hospital. Some Algerians referred to hospitals as 'hospitals of the enemies' where they had to go and meet a technician and a colonizer in the same person. The doctors were also settlers who owned land and were interested in the perpetuation of the colonial system. Psychologically, they remained part of the oppressor class. The profession was also politicized. Doctors sold medicine and influenced medical policies. Science in the service of man did not exist in the colonial system. To them, colonial treatment was not 'brotherly' but objective and rational. Unlike the traditional African healers, these doctors could not even tell you where you were paining! They would ask the patient for information. In many cases, the colonised Africans had to follow two parallel prescriptions: hospital and custom. The author advocates for the training of African doctors that embody both mastery of new technology and trust of their fellow Africans since the people who take their destiny into their own hands assimilate the most modern forms of technology in an extraordinary rate. He also urges Africans to develop the habit of separating the wheat from the chaff and be able to refuse only the oppressor's contribution aimed at justifying exploitation, and not otherwise. Of course, the theme of medicine is politically sensitive and contested but the importance of Africans to produce their medicine cannot be overemphasized.

In chapter five, the author discusses the role of the Algerian minority – Europeans and the Jews. They are described as spies and brain washers pretending to support the revolution but also conducting secret collaboration with the oppressors. In his conclusion, the author asserts that colonialism is wounded to death; the revolution has become oxygen that creates and shapes a new humanity and it is no longer breakable!

The book has several strengths. One is in its form of presentation. Its inclusion of intellectual collaboration is commendable – writing with others. The author solicits two introductions from two other equally staunch revolutionaries. Writing together is something that is missed out in many African writings but it is of crucial importance especially in radical revolutionary argument.

The major theme of unity through culture is of paramount importance and enduring relevance. One major tactic of the colonialists was an attack on

people's culture. Wherever there is a systematic oppression, there also exists a manifestation of one form or another of cultural segregation and subjugation. Black lives matter and the tragic experience of George Floyd in America bear witness to what is actually possible in situations of racial inequality.

The argument that revolution is not the struggle for bread but for human dignity is well exemplified in such leaders as Julius Nyerere. But, in many parts of Africa, corrupt leadership has not been rare. The need to commit what Amilcar Cabral calls 'class suicide' is still a relevant argument in African struggles against neo-colonialism. The importance of unity can also not be overstated. It has been the heartbeat of Africa's struggles since the early 1960s and continues to be embodied in the many regional integration schemes that exist on the continent. Self-consciousness is the impetus that unleashes the power and the zeal to fight for freedom from oppression. It is a timeless tool of the fight against exploitation and oppression.

But the refusal to collaborate with the oppressor may be a bit complicated. The oppressor is tactical and uses subtle means through business and international contracts to continue to perpetuate the system of oppression. We need education for negotiation. Some of the proponents of dependency theory have proposed for a move in the direction of de-linking. Amin (1990) argues for the process of 'delinking' from all Eurocentric approaches to development in order to pursue African alternatives. Others, like George Ayittey of Ghana proposed a return to traditional African local 'free' market systems. But in general, authors in this direction acknowledge also the complexity of the whole project. The history of Africa attests to the fact that dealing with the problems of oppression would include dealing with several internal factors related to African leadership as well. The admonition is convincing but the praxis may be haunted by corruption, Another eyebrow raiser is the advocating of violence. Violence may not always lead to stable free societies (Nelson Mandela had to walk the 'long walk to freedom'). To build a good nation may mean a lot of tolerance. As West (2001) puts it: the race embracing black intellectuals who follow the tradition of W. E. B. Du Bois sometimes find themselves falling into the stereotypical tradition of big fish in a small pond – in which case they express resentment of the whites but reproduce similar hierarchies headed by themselves within a black context! Long nasty civil wars have been fought in some countries of Africa between the same factions that once had cooperated against the colonial oppressors.

The author concludes that colonialism is wounded to death. To be a bit lenient, writing in 1959, Fanon was influenced by the state of affairs in Africa at that time. By that time, African countries were starting to break the shackles of colonialism and getting independent. Hopes were high. But the imperial system has a hidden characteristic of self-reproduction and mutation. It has ways of luring the revolutionary elite into its own fold. It is a pity that the author did not live to witness the independence of Algeria and the politics of neoliberalism that followed soon after.

Notwithstanding these few notable flaws, the book remains an important theoretical contribution to African intellectualism. As it inspired the struggle for the independence of Algeria, the book is relevant for inspiring the continuing struggle against imperialism.

References

- Amin, S. (1990). *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World*. London: Zed Books.
West, C. (2001). *Race Matters*. New York: Vintage Books.