

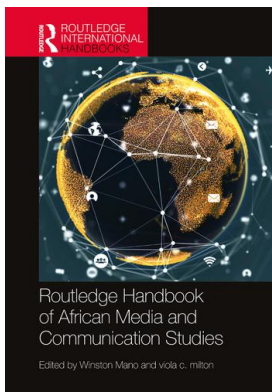
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Pier Paolo Frassinelli

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Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and African media and communication studies

Pier Paolo Frassinelli

Introduction

This chapter aims to contribute to writing a decolonial history of African media and communication studies by focusing on two authors, Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, who are often referenced in debates on decolonisation but are not normally seen as part of this field. This inclusion will help to historicise African communication and media as social and cultural practices and fields of study, rather than academic disciplines whose histories glorify experts and specialists. After all, Fanon worked as a journalist and editor, wrote on media and communication, and was acutely aware of the role of communication in political struggle, while Ngũgĩ has written extensively on language, communication, and popular culture, and his involvement in popular theatre was dictated by the need to develop new communicative practices.

Jürgen Habermas and Marshall McLuhan, two of the most widely cited media and communication theorists, were, respectively, a social theorist and philosopher and a literary-trained interdisciplinary scholar. I see no reason why Fanon and Ngũgĩ cannot also be inserted into the genealogy of media and communication studies on the African continent.

Needless to say, in the brief space of this chapter I will only be able to sketch, in the barest outline, a basic introduction to some aspects of Fanon’s and Ngũgĩ’s work that are especially relevant to this volume. Readers who want to pursue this line of research are encouraged to consult and read the texts included in the bibliography – beginning, of course, with Fanon’s and Ngũgĩ’s own writings.

Frantz Fanon

More than 50 years after his death, Fanon’s thought and politics are still a point of reference and source of inspiration for many of the popular movements and struggles that take on socioeconomic inequalities and the power of postcolonial elites across the African continent. Fanon’s name was one of the most frequently evoked by student activists during the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests that spread across South African campuses in 2015 and 2016 (see Gibson 2017). As South African scholar Richard Pithouse wrote during the protests, “Fanon offers compelling accounts of the pathologies of both the colony and the

postcolony – spaces that some of the young people at the fore of the new ferment in South Africa feel they must inhabit simultaneously” (Pithouse 2016a).

Frantz Fanon, who was born on the Caribbean island of Martinique in 1925, had trained as a psychiatrist in Paris before moving to Algeria, where in 1953 he took the position of head of the psychiatry department at Blida-Joinville hospital, only to resign three years later to join the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) in the Algerian war of liberation. He was expelled from Algeria in 1957 and worked first in Tunisia as an editor of the FLN newspaper, *El Moudjahid*, and then as FLN ambassador to Ghana and Mali. He would die of leukaemia in 1961, at the age of 36, just one year before Algeria gained independence.¹ Fanon’s main role in the FLN was to supply material for its international political campaigns and newspaper. He wrote political pieces for *El Moudjahid* as well as for several other reviews and magazines. Four books authored by Fanon have been translated from French and published in English. They are: *Black Skin, White Masks* – originally published as *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952); *A Dying Colonialism* – originally published as *L’an V de la révolution algérienne* (1959), or *Year Five of the Algerian Revolution*; *The Wretched of the Earth* – first published in France under the title of *Les damnés de la terre* (1961), or *The Damned of the Earth*; and *Toward the African revolution* (1964) – a collection of articles, essays, and letters that spans the period between *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Fanon’s first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, was written when he was a 27-year-old student in medicine, originally as his thesis, titled “Essay on the disalienation of the black”, which was not approved by his supervisor, and Fanon ended up replacing with another study more in line with academic conventions. In this text, written in a plurality of voices and mixing anecdotal and autobiographical narratives with theoretical elaboration, Fanon sets out to outline a “psychoanalytical interpretation of the black problem” (Fanon 1986, 12). Fanon’s focus is the combination of psychological, existential, and cultural effects of colonial violence and oppression. He describes this approach and the object of knowledge it produces as “sociogeny” (Fanon 1986, 13), a term that draws attention to the social, intersubjective, cultural, historical, and economic factors responsible for the origin and development of a person and her or his pathologies. In the English translation of Fanon’s words, “the black man’s alienation is not an individual question” (Fanon 1986, 13). It is the product of the structure and manifestations of a colonial and racist order. Fanon’s key interests in this context are embodied forms of alienation and the objectifying racist gaze that annihilates the black subject’s desire to freely inhabit the world and find meaning in it: “I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects” (Fanon 1986, 109).

Fanon elaborates a theory of disalienation that starts by accounting for the psychological harm done by colonialism on both the colonised and the colonisers. His project is to transform psychically pathologised subjects and their circumstances in a world dominated by the psychosexual oppression and racism engendered by the colonial order and racialized capitalism. Built into this project there is an exposure of the limits of psychiatry’s individualisation of psychic pathologies: “There will be an authentic disalienation only to the degree to which things, in the most materialistic meaning of the word, will have been restored to their proper places” (Fanon 1986, 13–14). The “solution”, Fanon writes, “implies a restructuring the world” (Fanon 1986, 82).

This restructuring passes through the recognition of black subjectivity – “What does the black man want?” (Fanon 1986, 10) – negated by the colonial world. Fanon’s “response to the impossibility of a dialectic of recognition”, however, “is not to give up on the aspiration for a world of mutuality, of universal humanism” (Pithouse 2016b, 126) – even though Fanon

recognises that this aspiration can only be brought into being through a commitment to struggle and action. Significantly, at the end of the book, Fanon's humanism, his hopeful commitment to a "human world", is expressed as an invitation to both the "Negro" and the "white man", both of whom "[are] not", to "turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible. Before we can adopt a positive voice, freedom requires an effort at disalienation" (Fanon 1986, 231).

I have guided the reader through some aspects of Fanon's elaboration in *Black Skin, White Masks* to show how opening up possibilities for "authentic communication" across the racial divide that dehumanises all human beings plays into Fanon's vision of a disalienated world. As we will see, contra caricatures of Fanon as a theorist and apologist of violence (for a refutation of this view, see Gibson and Beneduce 2017, 4–8; Pithouse 2016a), this is a theme that will recur throughout Fanon's writing, all the way to his last book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, where Fanon argues that the "consciousness of self is not the closing of a door to communication" (Fanon 1965a, 179).

Fanon's second book, *A Dying Colonialism*, was written and published after Fanon had resigned from his post as a psychiatrist on the ground that he could not psychiatrically cure the psychic wounds inflicted by colonialism. As he stated in his resignation letter, if "psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization" (Fanon 1967, 55).

A Dying Colonialism chronicles the progress made by the Algerian revolution in its first five years. Of particular interest to media and communication scholars are the first two chapters, "Algeria unveiled" and "This is the voice of Algeria", where Fanon analyses the veil and the radio as communication devices embedded in historical and social relations.

"Algeria unveiled" presents a historical semiotic analysis of how the veil, "one of the elements of the traditional Algerian garb, was to become the bone of contention on a grandiose battle" between the colonial occupying forces and the Algerian people (Fanon 1965, 36). For Fanon, French colonial power had waged a war on Algerian culture and identity by portraying the veil as an instrument of oppression and subjugation: "Converting the woman, winning her over to the foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of deconstructing Algerian culture" (Fanon 1965, 39). Fanon's account divides this battle of the veil into distinct phases. By trying to "save" and unveil the Algerian woman, the colonising forces had hoped to subjugate and domesticate Algerian society. The colonised responded by defending the veil as a symbol and instrument of resistance. At first they reacted to French cultural imperialism by defensively protecting the traditional cultural and religious value of the veil and turning it into a "cult" (Fanon 1965, 47). But when women became involved in the Algerian revolution the symbolism of the veil became part of the combat in new, semiotically subversive ways. Algerian women recruited into the liberation army unveiled. The unveiled woman entered the European areas of the city to carry out military attacks together with men. She took advantage of European perceptions of Arab unveiled women:

Carrying revolvers, grenades, hundreds of false identity cards or bombs, the unveiled Algerian woman moves like a fish in the Western waters. The soldiers, the French patrols, smile to her as she passes, compliments on her looks are heard here and there, but no one suspects that her suitcases contain the automatic pistol which will presently mow down four or five members of one of the patrols.

(Fanon 1965, 58)

When the occupying forces found out and Europeans joined the liberation struggle a change of tactics was required, and so the veil was now turned into a protective garb to hide weapons and other material to be smuggled into the European city: “Removed and reassumed again and again, the veil has been manipulated, transformed into a technique of camouflage, into a means of struggle” (Fanon 1965, 61). The veil was now donned and embraced as an instrument of material and symbolic resistance. It was resignified, its traditional connotations altered. Fanon concludes that there “is a historic dynamism of the veil that is very concretely perceptible in the development of colonization in Algeria” (Fanon 1965, 63).

In the documentary *Black Skin, White Masks* (1998), Stuart Hall subjects Fanon’s chapter to a typically perceptive analysis. Hall unpacks how Fanon semiotises and historicises the veil and its communicative function:

I think the essay on the veil . . . represents a real insight of Fanon, which is that you can’t abstract the cultural sign from its context, and that no cultural sign is fixed in its meaning. So you can’t say just because the veil has functioned in the relation between men and women in Islamic societies in this way in the past that is going to be exactly the same forever more. It always will be. . . . The veil is a sort of bar, but it doesn’t actually prevent something being seen. Women sometimes, involved in the armed struggle, appropriated the veil as a way of taking arms from one place to another, of delivering explosive. And that is because they could depend on the reactionary reading by the French! They would say of course, a woman in the veil is a dependent woman who would never be brave enough to act. So, in a sense, they could turn the veil against its meaning, return the look in the opposite way.

At the same time, Hall reminds us of the complex positionality of Fanon in Algeria, which is revealed by Fanon’s silence on religion and his blindness to the “way in which this is going to impact on the revolution” (Hall in Julien and Nash 1996).²

The second chapter of *A Dying Colonialism*, “This is the voice of Algeria”, follows a similar historical path. Fanon traces the changes of attitude of Algerians towards the radio. He looks at the social and political dimensions of the use and appropriation of what he calls “a technical instrument” (Fanon 1965, 69). Fanon starts with Algerian people’s resistance to this medium, when it was used to disseminate French propaganda via Radio Alger and the great majority of receiving sets were owned by Europeans. In this initial phase, while for Europeans settlers the radio represented a link to “civilisation”, for the native population the refusal to listen to the radio was, according to Fanon’s reconstruction, originally motivated by traditions of respectability. The radio was perceived as a tool in the hands of the occupying power, a symbol of French presence in Algeria, which did not fulfil any need for the native population. The radio broadcasts were a closed semiotic system from which the colonised felt excluded.

Things however radically changed with the beginning of the war of liberation, when Algerians began to feel “the compelling and vital need to be informed” and enter the “network of news” (Fanon 1965, 75). Algerians first turned to the democratic French press but it was when the *Voice of Free Algeria* broadcasts were publicised among the local population in 1956 that the radio became a vital means of communication and access to news. Fanon recounts that the entire Algerian stock of radio sets was bought up in less than 20 days (Fanon 1965, 82–83). As the war of liberation progressed, the function of the radio changed. From a means of accessing news, the radio became a tool to stay in touch with the revolution. The technical instrument was politicised. It was enmeshed in new social relations and political struggles. French censorship tried to clamp down on this revolutionary use of the radio by prohibiting its sales and

jamming the sound waves, which became a battleground. Listening to the radio was now to clandestinely participate in the revolution. Fanon writes that after the beginning of the revolution “the radio assumed totally new meanings”: from an extraneous and hostile device into an instrument and technique of the liberation struggle (Fanon 1965, 89).

“This is the voice of Algeria” invites us to pay attention to the interactions between media, social and political actors, communicative practices, and the political and social role media play in specific political and social contexts and circumstances. More broadly, in the two chapters that I have discussed, Fanon shows how semiotic and historical readings of communication and culture can be used as a critical tool to analyse the reification of identity and culture in situations marked by the cultural and epistemic violence that go hand in hand with colonial oppression and its legacies.

Fanon's last book was *The Wretched of the Earth*, which he completed in ten weeks as he was struggling with leukaemia. The French edition was published and confiscated in the same week that Fanon died. A reflection on the Algerian war of liberation, *The Wretched of the Earth* describes not only the resistance to colonialism, but also how this emancipatory struggle “brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization,” Fanon sums up, “is the veritable creation of new men” (Fanon 1965a, 36).

Throughout the book, Fanon's qualities as a political writer and communicator shine not only in the incisiveness and clarity with which he outlines his political arguments, often delivered in the modality of critique, but also at the level of the individual sentence or dictum:

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder.

(Fanon 1965a, 36)

“The last shall be first and the first last”. Decolonization is the putting into practice of this sentence.

(Fanon 1965a, 37)

[C]olonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence.

(Fanon 1965a, 61)

Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.

(Fanon 1965a, 206)

This selection of oft-quoted phrases is not meant to suggest that Fanon was adept at sloganeering. But he was alert to the power of language in political communication. Perhaps nowhere does the haunting quality of Fanon's prose come alive more vividly than in Göran Hugo Olsson's documentary film *Concerning Violence* (2014), where Fanon's words, excerpted from the first chapter and the conclusion of *The Wretched of the Earth*, are recited by African American singer and rapper Lauryn Hill as a narrative accompaniment to the film's historical footage of chilling colonial brutality and anti-imperialist resistance across the African continent.

Although it has been read as a celebration of violence, *The Wretched of the Earth* in fact champions a popular politics based on democratic and participatory forms of communication. Fanon insists on the role of community and its participation in inclusive and democratic meetings not only as the organisational and political foundation of the liberation struggle, but also as a

humanising practice. He describes branch and committee meetings as opportunities for people to come together to

discuss, propose, . . . receive directions. . . , and to put forward new ideas. . . . They are privileged occasions given to a human being to listen and to speak. At each meeting, the brain increases its means of participation and the eye discovers a landscape more and more in keeping with human dignity.

(Fanon 1965a, 195)

This extends to participatory forms of communication, such as those taking place in production and consumption committees in which peasants become “experts” and “theoreticians”, so as to undo the historically sedimented compartmentalisation of intellectual and manual labour:

We did not have any technicians or planners coming from big Western universities; but in these liberated regions, the daily ration went up to the hitherto unheard-of figure of 3,200 calories. The people were not content with coming triumphant out of this test. They started asking themselves theoretical questions: for example, why did certain districts never see an orange before the war of liberation, while thousands of tons are exported every year abroad? Why were grapes unknown to a great many Algerians whereas the European peoples enjoyed them by the million? Today, the people have a very clear notion of what belongs to them.

(Fanon 1965a, 192)

The Wretched of the Earth, like the other writings that Fanon produced during the period of his involvement with the Algerian liberation struggle, is a political intervention in the world and struggles from which it originates. As Stuart Hall comments, it “is very much a text of a moment – the moment the rising tide of national liberation movements, and of decolonisation – and it addresses problems and questions which all the national liberation movements have to face” (Hall in Julien and Nash 1996). This is surely so, but the enduring relevance of Fanon’s texts shows that decolonisation remains on the agenda long after national independence. Fanon’s works provide us with still significant ideas and concepts about colonialism, postcoloniality, and the politics of decolonial revolutionary humanism. As I have briefly outlined, they also offer important insights for African media and communication studies. These include the relation between alienation, disalienation, and communication in a racist world; how the cultural sign is fixed by colonial and neocolonial epistemic violence and can be unfixed and subverted by emancipatory struggles; and the role of inclusive, democratic, and participatory communication in emancipatory forms of struggle and organisation.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o was born in Kamiriithu, Kenya, in 1938, and baptised James Ngũgĩ. He graduated in English from Makerere University College in 1963. His career as a writer is mainly associated with his work as a novelist. Ngũgĩ’s debut novel *Weep Not, Child*, published in 1964, was the first novel in the English language by a writer from East Africa. His second novel, *The River Between*, came out the following year. Ngũgĩ subsequently changed his name to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and started writing in Gikũyũ and Kiswahili. Among his other critically acclaimed novels are *A Grain of Wheat* (1967); *Caitani mũtharaba-inĩ* (1980) – translated into English as *Devil on the Cross* (1982) – the first modern novel in Gikũyũ, originally written on prison-issued toilet

paper during a period of detention resulting from his activities as a dissident community theatre practitioner; *Matigari* (1986b), translated from the original in Gikũyũ by Wangũ wa Goro; and *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), translated into English from Gikũyũ by the author. In addition to his novels, Ngũgĩ wrote many essays on African and postcolonial writing, politics, and culture. They are collected in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of African Language and Literature* (1986a); *Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature and Society* (1981); *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993); and *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (2012).

Among these, *Decolonising the Mind* remains one of the most widely read and discussed documents of the African debate on decolonisation. Ngũgĩ's main focus in this text is the issue of language in postcolonial African societies, which he frames in terms of the conflict between the neocolonial mindset embodied by African writers' use of European languages – or what Ngũgĩ calls “Afro-European literature” – and the adoption of “African languages” that by “addressing themselves to the lives of the people become the enemy of a neo-colonial state” (Ngũgĩ 1981, 30). Ngũgĩ's text, which he announces in an opening statement as his last in the English language (Ngũgĩ, xiii), argues for the use of African languages in African literary and cultural production. To express the rationale of his critique of African writers who write in colonial and formerly colonial languages, Ngũgĩ uses an economic metaphor. He argues that by representing and conveying local realities, idioms, and cultures in Western languages African writers enrich these languages while African languages get nothing back. As he writes in *Moving the Centre*:

In the area of economics and geography, it is the raw materials of gold, diamonds, coffee, tea, which are taken from Africa and processed in Europe and then resold to Africa. In the area of culture, the raw material of African orature and histories developed by African languages are taken, repackaged through English or French or Portuguese and then resold back to Africa.

(Ngũgĩ 1993, 38)

By contrast:

It is revitalised African languages rooting themselves in the traditions of orature and of written African literature, inspired by the deepest aspirations of the African people for a meaningful social change, which will also be best placed to give and receive from the wealth of our common culture on an equal basis.

(Ngũgĩ 1993, 41)

Ngũgĩ has a dual view of language as a means of communication and as a carrier of culture. He describes the communicative function of language as an expression and mediation of human relations. Language not only represents life but produces sociality through communication (Ngũgĩ 1993, 11–14). This communicative function is the basis of culture, which embodies the moral, ethical, and aesthetic values of a society and is carried by language. Languages define people's cultural identities – their particularities as members of the human species (Ngũgĩ 1993, 15). It follows that colonial imposition and postcolonial self-imposition of the languages of the colonisers alter colonised people's perceptions of themselves and their world. They alienate colonised and neocolonised people from their environments and cultures and make them see the world through someone else's eyes.

In a more recent contribution – “The politics of translation: Notes towards an African language policy” (2018) – Ngũgĩ returns to his lifelong concern with power relations between colonial and indigenous African languages to underscore how language choices on the African

continent still bear the imprint of the legacy of colonialism: what “began in the colonial era, the delegitimization of African languages as credible sources and basis of knowledge, was completed and normalized in the post-colonial era” (Ngũgĩ 2018, 125). Just as the colonial state can be theorised as an imperfect replica or translated copy of an original, so, too, does a postcolonial one that continues to deploy Western languages to mediate its linguistic diversity. In these circumstances, the relation between local and global languages is the site of an unequal exchange that hampers the radical potential of translation, the “language of languages”, and multilingualism for “enabling mutuality of being and becoming even within a plurality of languages” (Ngũgĩ 2018, 131). For Ngũgĩ, this potential is today displayed by language use among “border communities” that operate across a variety of languages in a “networkingly” rather than hierarchical relationship. Among the communication strategies adopted by these communities are practices of translation and multilingualism that include developing a shared lingua franca that coexists with their other languages without displacing them (Ngũgĩ 2018, 127–128).

Conversely, instead of valorising their linguistic diversity, many postcolonial African states have explicitly or implicitly adopted a monolingual norm, often based on privileging the former colonial language. Ngũgĩ describes this norm as “the fundamentalism of monolingualism”. This is the view that a “nation is not really a nation without a common language to go with the commonality of territory, economy and culture”. As a result, the different African languages used by people who live in the same nation are seen as a threat to the integrity of the nation: “Monolingualism is seen as the centripetal answer to the centrifugal anarchy of multiplicity of languages. European languages are seen as coming to the rescue of a cohesive Africa, otherwise threatened by its own languages”. But in reality, “there are very few, if any, monolingual nations in the world. What most have is an officially imposed language as the national language: the language of power” (Ngũgĩ 2018, 125).

In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ also underscores how in Africa language hierarchies correspond to hierarchies of expressive forms. Colonial languages are the languages of elitist forms of literary expression, but along with them there are popular arts, such as drama, oral storytelling, song and dance that are part of the cultural tradition of African languages and that came under attack from missionaries and colonial administrations in the colonial period. Ngũgĩ’s turn to popular theatre in Gikũyũ with the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre in the 1970s, which he describes in the second chapter of the book, “The language of African theatre”, was both a rediscovery of these traditions and an attempt to create a popular and participatory form of cultural expression for the postcolonial moment. This was a theatre that created a rural African public sphere (Tomaselli and Mboti 2013, 525–526). It is worth reading Ngũgĩ’s evocative description of that experiment to get a sense of how this innovative African public sphere came about:

there was an actual empty space at Kamiriithu. The four acres reserved for the Youth Centre had at that time, in 1977, only a falling-apart mud-walled barrack of four rooms which we used for adult literacy. The rest was grass. Nothing more. It was the peasants and workers from the village who built the stage: just a raised semicircular platform backed by a semi-circular bamboo wall behind which was a small three-roomed house which served as the store and changing room. The stage and the auditorium – fixed long wooden seats arranged like stairs – were almost an extension of each other. It had no roof. It was an open air theatre with large empty spaces surrounding the stage and the auditorium. The flow of actors and people between the auditorium and the stage, and around the stage and the entire auditorium was uninhibited: Behind the auditorium were some tall eucalyptus

trees. Birds could watch performances from these or from the top of the outer bamboo fence. And during one performance some actors, unrehearsed, had the idea of climbing up the trees and joining the singing from up there. They were performing not only to those seated before them, but to whoever could row see them and hear them – the entire village of 10,000 people was their audience.

(Ngũgĩ 1986a, 42)

In a subsequent interview, Ngũgĩ would remark that he was drawn to theatre because it represented a “communal effort” and because of “its capacity for immediate communication” (Ngũgĩ 2006, 201).

The issue of language, and specifically of the hierarchy between colonial and indigenous languages, for Ngũgĩ is linked to broader questions to do with epistemic, sociopolitical, economic, and cultural inequality. One of the phrases he uses for challenging and undoing these systemic inequalities is “moving the centre”. If under colonialism Europe and the West were assumed to be the centre of the world, we must now abandon this idea and reimagine a world with a multiplicity of centres. This is what Ngũgĩ describes as creating a world enriched by linguistic and cultural diversity: “The wealth of a common global culture will then be expressed in the particularities of our different languages and cultures very much like a universal garden of many-coloured flowers” (Ngũgĩ 1993, 42). In fact, Ngũgĩ’s phrase “moving the centre” does not refer only to the geography of knowledge production, nor is it just a metaphor. It also points to the need to challenge the hierarchies of race, class, gender, language, and culture that still structure postcolonial societies.

In *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (2012), Ngũgĩ turns to the opportunities offered by cyberspace and digital media’s convergence of modes and expressive forms for African cultural production. He highlights the challenge cyberspace poses to the “aesthetic feudalism” that in modern Western culture and its colonial outposts established a hierarchy between the written and the oral whereby the latter, “even when viewed as being ‘more’ authentic or closer to the natural, is treated as bondsman to the writing master. With orality taken as the source for the written and orature as the raw material for literature, both were certainly placed on a lower rung in the ladder of achievement and civilization” (Ngũgĩ 2012, 63).

Ngũgĩ argues that the multimodal and transmedia forms of expression and communication we encounter online interrupt the hegemony of writing the West imposed on African cultural forms and open up new possibilities for its hybridisation with the oral and other expressive modes:

The lines between the written and the orally transmitted are being blurred in the age of internet and cyberspace. This has been going on for some years with the writing down of the orally transmitted; the electronic transmissions of the written as spoken through the radio and television; or simply the radio as a medium of speech. But it has surely accelerated with all corners of the globe becoming neighborhoods in cyberspace. Through technology, people can speak in real time face to face. The language of texting and emailing and access to everything including pictures and music in real time is producing a phenomenon that is neither pure speech nor pure writing. The language of cyberspace may borrow the language of orality, twitter, chat rooms, we-have-been-talking when they mean we-have-been-texting, or chatting through writing emails, but it is orality mediated by writing. It is neither one nor the other. It’s both. It’s cyborality.

(Ngũgĩ 2012, 84)

From his coinage of the term cyborality, Ngũgĩ derives “cyborature” to name the permutations of orature and literature in the age of internet and cyberspace (Ngũgĩ, 85). Digital media have offered a platform for the production, circulation, and reception of diverse texts and performances through modes of delivery that make them travel outside of the literary establishment and its canonical forms. From there, Ngũgĩ predicts, will emerge forms of cultural expression born from a new synthesis of the written and the oral, literature and orature:

writing and orality are realizing anew the natural alliance they have always had in reality, despite attempts to make the alliance invisible or antagonistic. I hope that this means that no cultures and communities need be denied history because they had not developed a writing system; that the oral and the written are not and have never been real antagonists. Certainly, the powers of their products, orature and literature, will continually be harnessed to enrich creativity in the age of internet and cyberspace. The problem has not been the fact of the oral or the written, but their placement in a hierarchy. Network, not hierarchy, will free the richness of the aesthetic, oral or literary.

(Ngũgĩ, 85)

It thus seems fitting to conclude this section with an initiative by *Jalada Africa*, an online journal out of Nairobi that published a short story originally written in an African language and subsequently translated into 30 other African languages. Titled “Ituika rĩa mūrũngarũ: Kana kĩa gĩtũmaga andũ mathiĩ marũngii”, and authored by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, the story was published in March 2016 in Gĩkũyũ and translated into English by the author as “The upright revolution: Or why humans walk upright”. According to its publishers, this is the African language story most translated into other African languages (see Flood 2016).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief introduction to Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and argued for their relevance to African media and communication studies. I have show that there are significant aspects of their work that are pertinent both to the field and, more specifically, to current calls for its decolonisation. In this spirit, I hope to have provided a useful rough guide to some of Fanon’s and Ngũgĩ’s work that will invite African media and communication scholars to a closer and more sustained engagement with these authors.

Notes

- 1 For a biography of Fanon, see Macey 2012.
- 2 Fanon’s chapter also needs to be read in light of Fanon’s position within FLN internal politics – see Gibson 2012; Macey 2012, 262–264, 297–298 for more details.

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