

guages?" by students and colleagues unaware of the "three traditions in the imaginative verbal production of Africa" (Ngũgĩ 1998, 103).

But as the mixed reception of Ngũgĩ's Gikuyu writings in Kenya, a decidedly multilingual country, illustrates, the dilemmas of linguistic nationalisms are as complex as the legacy of colonialism itself. Contrasted with the case of Tanzania, another multilingual country where writing in European languages hardly exists, Kenya's example challenges us to reexamine the issue of linguistic nationalism vis-à-vis the idea of nationhood, for even if the national boundaries are arbitrary and fictional colonial constructs, there is a sense in which people living within these constructed boundaries have come to perceive themselves as belonging to that nation and simultaneously to resist what they perceive as an emerging *hegemonic* version of linguistic nationalism. Second, Kenya's example also unintentionally foreshadows the conciliatory position that Ngũgĩ himself has taken in his later writing, especially *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, where he claims that "nearly all African writers have returned to African languages. What they write in whatever language derives its stamina, stature, identity from African languages" (1998, 103). There is no denying that Ngũgĩ's writing in Gikuyu has proved as popular as it is polarizing, *at least in Kenya*. This is a reality that many admirers of Ngũgĩ outside Kenya may not be aware of (see, e.g., Ernest Emenyonu 1994, 91). Ngũgĩ's radical and even visionary decision to take part in the debate raging at the University of Nairobi—over whether European literatures should continue to be taught at the expense of African literatures—by writing in Gikuyu had complicated consequences. At a time when the Kenyan nation was increasingly becoming polarized because of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta's openly tribalist administration, a time when Kiswahili language and literature were inextricably associated with national cultural awareness, Ngũgĩ's act was perceived as a betrayal of the nationalist cause by a cross-section of Kenyan intellectuals and a sizable non-Gikuyu-speaking public. The resentment of what was seen as a bid for Gikuyu hegemony cannot be blamed *entirely* on an opportunistic regime manipulating public opinion. Rather, the cause must be sought in the history of Kenya as a country and Africa as a continent. Tanzania across the border had proven a successful example of what Kiswahili could do for a nation struggling to shake off the legacy of colonialism.

Further Reading: E. Emenyonu 1994; Ngũgĩ 1998.

Katwiwa Mule

Agency Agency has been an important and prevalent concern within colonial and postcolonial studies since its emergence as a discipline, approximately with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Its prevalence is also attributable to the school of criticism known as New Historicism, insofar as it, too, was invested in locating traces of **resistance** to dominant discourses and power structures. Agency presumes a certain autonomy and emancipatory possibilities for the subject, usually identified in terms of either insurgency or com-

licity. Such an inscription of free will rebuts the narratives of the passive, uninstructed, and duped colonized subject, and it dismantles the attendant binary, which holds that the West wields monolithic power and that the "Third World" is utterly dominated. However, allowing for a narrative of insurgency seems to suggest that colonial power may be easily dissolved through the conscious and revolutionary return of the dominated classes to their rightful state, while, on the other hand, allowing for a narrative of simple compliance seems to suggest that the dominated classes are somehow Rousseauistic—outside the production of knowledge and trapped within civil and social relations that inhibit their natural state of being. The more complicated understanding of agency as operable within moments of both coercion and consent has been shaped by the work of **Antonio Gramsci**, and this insight has served as a means of solving the problem of interpreting the resistance to revolution on the part of the **subaltern** subject. One theoretical pitfall for work on agency and the state of the subject, then, is that it often poses a delimited dialectical model of false versus self-consciousness. Another pitfall is that it relies on Western narratives of agency in its emphasis on autonomy and Enlightenment ideas of the inherently free and reasoning subject, and the problems of mapping this Western model onto a discussion of the subaltern are numerous. Ultimately, agency can be understood as a theoretical abstraction that is based on particular narratives (e.g., "revolution") and particular categories (e.g., "the subject"). In this respect it is paradoxically removed from what it means to represent: the materiality of everyday lives.

Further Reading: D. Haynes and G. Prakash 1992; R. O'Hanlon 1988.

Rita Raley

Aijaz Ahmad Currently a professorial fellow at the Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi, Aijaz Ahmad is a specialist in postcolonial literature and theory. He is widely recognized for his polemical *In Theory: Classes, Nations, and Literatures* (1992), which is an exacting critique of literary developments in the field popularly known as **colonial discourse** analysis. An expert on Urdu poetry, Ahmad has also edited *Ghazals of Ghalib* (1971).

In Theory gathers together almost all of Ahmad's postcolonial theorizing. In this work, the rigorously Marxist Ahmad openly denounces poststructural theory's clear complicity with the dogma of the bourgeoisie. Ahmad views the project of poststructuralism, particularly its debunking of all "origins, collectivities and determinate historical projects" (2), as inherently opposed to any coherent analysis of colonialism and holds Western Marxism responsible for contributing to the rise of poststructuralism and thereby paving the way for its consequent near banishment from the American academy.

Commenting on the paucity of Marxist thought in American literary theory following 1975, Ahmad insists that the history of materialities is important in