14 *Post-colonialism and language*

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The question of 'post'-colonialism

Perhaps no term in wide circulation in the fields of literary and cultural studies at present finds itself so hotly contested as the term 'post-colonialism'. This is curious, for 'post-colonialism' works not so much to describe a fixed ideological formation, or a coherent critical perspective, or even a specific moment in historical time. Rather, 'post-colonialism' provides a name for a complex and heterogeneous set of critical and theoretical *debates*, all of them centring on the question of how we are to understand European colonialism as a cultural, historical, and political phenomenon, and how we might interpret what takes place *after* colonialism, and *in reaction* to it, both in those nations and cultures once colonised by Europe and within the metropolitan centres of the Western colonising nations themselves. Since European colonialism occupies at least five hundred years of history, and at its apogee in the late nineteenth century involved the establishment of dominating relations over three-quarters of the Earth's land surface, the 'post-colonial' is clearly an umbrella term which is meant to cover an enormous and remarkably disparate critical territory. Needless to say, the extent to which this term is capable of housing such a long and complex history and such a multifaceted set of critical debates, is itself a subject for heated debate within the general field of 'post-colonial' critical theory.

Part of the problem with 'post-colonialism', of course, stems from the general looseness that characterises the way in which so many political terms are used in literary or cultural criticism. Terms such as 'imperialism', 'colonialism', 'post-colonialism', 'decolonisation', and 'neo-colonialism' have a tendency to attract remarkably divergent, and

sometimes voluntary, meanings within critical language, and readers can well be excused for finding themselves genuinely wondering exactly which theory of imperialism a 'post-colonial' critical writer is analysing, to which specific form of colonialism he or she is referring, and which type of post-colonial resistance or reaction to colonialism the post-colonial critic is attempting to examine. In the area of literary and cultural studies, however, most post-colonial critical theorists tend to eschew the specific definitions for these terms that prevail in the political sciences, preferring the more generalist definitions which Edward Said employs in his magisterial *Culture and Imperialism*, where ' "*imperialism*" means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; "*colonialism*", which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory'.[1]

Decolonisation, in most post-colonial writing, refers to that historical process by which formerly colonised peoples, having been organised by colonialism into governing units, at last break free of direct colonialist control and achieve self-governing, sovereign status, thus transforming the 'colony' into the 'nation' at a moment of national or 'flag independence'. *Anti-colonialism* refers to the ways in which resistance to foreign administrative control under colonialism has been organised and articulated within the colony; and usually, the term implies a very direct relation between this opposition and the phenomenon of nascent or emerging 'nationalism'. In much (but by no means all) of Africa and the so-called 'Third World', therefore, the moment of 'direct colonialist control' by Europe has now passed, and in one of its many uses the term 'post-colonialism' refers to the period of a specific national history that takes place *after* this moment of direct colonialism has ended.[2] Few students of contemporary international relations, however, would agree with the hypothesis that the historical demise of this strategy of direct European colonialist administration as a means of securing unequal international relations amounts to anything like a genuine 'End of Empire', as the title of a recent Granada Television series in the United Kingdom would have it.[3] Rather, they would argue, the old regulatory practices of direct colonialism have simply been relocated into new modes and forms of imperialist management – the manipulation of 'third world' national economies through the production and administration of 'third world debt', for example. To describe these new modes and forms, Kwame Nkrumah the former President of Ghana, coined the term *neo-*

colonialism, and his definition still holds in most forms of post-colonial critical writing. 'The essence of neo-colonialism,' wrote Nkrumah, 'is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from the outside.'[4]

It is at this point – where questions of history and politics become inseparable from questions of culture and from the problems that attend the processes of cultural analysis – that these terms become extremely difficult ones, for each of them begins to name a complex set of *relations* between culture, politics, and representations, and these relations are enormously difficult to discern, let alone articulate. It is at this point, we would argue, that the idea of 'post-colonialism' as a critical field – that is, as a set of propositions, as a set of critical methods, and as a set of intellectual and academic debates – enters into the critical language of empire and its aftermath.

This form of 'post-colonialism' – this set of debates that lie at the intersection between colonial politics and the problems of understanding colonising and colonised 'cultures' – is very different from the 'post-colonialism' that identifies a specific historical period which comes *after* decolonisation. This 'post-colonialism' refers not to a moment in history but rather to a heterogeneous field of critical and intellectual *work* – a set of competing and overlapping strategies for cultural analysis within the framework of European colonisation. Increasingly, this difference between 'post-colonialism' as a temporal term and 'post-colonialism' as a term for a field of intellectual labour is finding itself distinguished at the level of orthography. The term 'post-colonialism' (with a hyphen) is being used to denote the historical period in a former colony that comes *after* the period of direct colonialist control. And the term 'postcolonialism' (without the hyphen) is being used to denote the many analytical strategies and interpretive positions which attempt to read exactly what it is that takes place in culture, politics, and history within and between the many and varied encounters of Europe with its colonial Others.[5]

Any attempt to summarise the *kinds* of intellectual labour that go on within the field of postcolonialism (without the hyphen) is bound to be reductive and misleading. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify, at least at a very blunt level, rather different *objects* of critical attention within postcolonialism – though of course most work, which begins with the analysis of any one of these objects in the first instance, finds

itself shading into the others as it proceeds. One mode of postcolonial analysis – a mode often called 'colonial discourse' analysis or theory – takes as its primary object of study the wide range of literary, figurative, and governmental documents that comprise the 'cultural text' of European imperialism, with a view to discovering the ways in which various forms of colonialist governmentality are promulgated and secured through representations, and to discovering the ways in which European self-fashioning is predicated upon an 'othering' of its colonial subjects.[6] Another mode of postcolonial critical work takes as its primary object the ways in which colonised, and formerly colonised, cultures *resist* colonialism and its discourses at the level of cultural representation.[7] A third mode of analysis within post-colonialism examines – to use Frantz Fanon's terms – that 'zone of occult instability' that resides *between* coloniser and colonised, or *within* the complex and overdetermined 'contact zone' of the 'colonial encounter' itself.[8] Each of these modes of postcolonial analysis, of course, needs to be understood as a field for critical debate in and of itself.

But more to the purpose, each of these postcolonial critical modes is in large part comprised of a long-standing and vigorous debate about the cultural politics of *language* and its uses. Partly this is because almost every theory of culture puts language at the centre of debates about power, ideology, subjectivity, and agency; partly this is because the question of language, in the cultures formerly colonised by Europe, is of necessity overdetermined and bound to ongoing tensions between traditionalism and modernity, or between freedom and social determination, in their many guises and articulations. In Africa, each of these modes of critical postcoloniality continues to play a role in cultural and intellectual life, and each addresses a critical endeavour which continues to be played out in debates about language and its uses. We now want to turn to the language of 'Africa' in order to examine some of the ways in which the politics of literary *writing* have been debated within what might loosely be called a postcolonial critical field. At the centre of these debates is the question of what it is, and what it might be, that comprises the idea and the reality of 'Africa', after, and because of, its encounters with European colonialism.

The language of 'Africa'

The term 'Africa' is a colonial tag, one that was imposed upon the continent from the outside through colonialism, and one that now

implies a critical endeavour to define a particular idea of collective and consensual being. 'Africa', in other words, is an object of ongoing critical inquiry and knowledge, the subject of a set of overlapping cultural debates taking place at the intersection between 'post-colonial' time and 'postcolonial' meaning; and at the heart of *this* 'Africa' one will find – in sustained and belligerent opposition to the darkness Joseph Conrad thought he might find – a long-standing history of energetic and deeply mindful debates about what a postcolonial 'Africa' might mean.

These debates, from the beginning, have involved not only Africans from the 'home' continent but also diasporic Africans from the Caribbean and the Americas. Edmund Blyden, for example, originally from the Danish West Indies, is widely perceived to be the 'father of African nationalism': his ideas of 'nativism'[9] influenced Casely-Heyford, from the Gold Coast (later Ghana), at the turn of the century, and helped shape the debates over 'Negritude' that took place in the 1930s, involving such figures as Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal and Aimé Césaire of Martinique.[10] The debates over nativism and Negritude, in turn, helped shape post-colonial debates about nationalism, traditionalism and modernity, and they continue to echo in contemporary debates over language-use in Africa and over the shape and form of what might comprise an 'African' literary tradition. This means that questions of writing and language-use in Africa have been debated, from the beginning, by a remarkably widespread set of participants, diverse in their politics, historical moment and geographical location, and each responding to differing structures and forms by which Europe imposed its several colonial languages and its differing political forms on 'Africa' and on African peoples. It should not surprise anyone that no single consensus, no monadic definition, for 'Africa', or for African writing, has yet to emerge from this vigorous and enduring history of intellectual debate.

Post-colonial debates about African 'writing' or 'literature' need to be understood as comprising far more than simply a set of debates over the ways in which African oral literatures and indigenous representational forms can be carried into new modalities of expression. In Africa the question of 'writing' is *already* positioned within larger debates about the politics of language use. Because of European colonialism, present-day African nations comprise peoples speaking different languages, and this immediately raises the question of which group, which language, within a national society initiates and controls

the means and media for representing a people to itself. During the direct colonial phase of African history, some of the most urgent claims for the recognition of African national status found themselves in a position of social contradiction: first, because they necessarily represented the emerging African nation as being coterminous with a specific social *group* within the 'nation'; and secondly because, as Lewis Nkosi describes it, 'in asserting their right to self-determination Africans had to employ the language of their colonial masters. . . . [T]he rhetoric of political demand they adopted was better understood in Europe among rulers and the common people, than among the African masses for whom, presumably, the demands were being made.[11]

This structure of social contradiction has continued to inform, and vex, post-colonial debates over language and writing in Africa, and a good place to begin examining these debates is with the position taken in June 1962 by a group of African writers using English as their literary language, who met in Kampala to discuss the question of what might comprise and define an 'African' writing in English. These writers achieved a consensus, and a joint resolution – as reported by Ezekiel Mphahlele – that 'it is better for an African writer to think and feel in his own language and then look for an English transliteration approximating the original'.[12] Gabriel Okara put the argument this way:

> As a writer who believes in the utilisation of African ideas, African philosophy and African folk-lore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as his medium of expression.[13]

The results of this attempt to 'translate' the syntax of a native language 'almost literally' into English can be seen in Okara's own experimental novel, *The Voice*. The following passage, where the hero of the novel, Okolo, muses on the meaning of an unnamed 'it', is indicative of this attempt to render 'African' philosophy and linguistic structure within a 'European language':

> Is it possible to make your inside so small that nothing else can enter? Are spoken words blown away by the wind? No! Okolo in his inside saw. *It is impossible not to touch another's inside. It is impossible to*

> *make your inside so small that nothing else can enter.* . . . There may be only one meaning in life and everybody is just groping along in their various ways to achieve it like religion – Christians, Moslems, Animists – all trying to reach God in their various ways. What is he himself trying to reach? For him *it* has *no name. Names bring divisions and divisions, strife. So let it be without a name; let it be nameless* . . . [14]

It is worth paying attention to what Okara is trying to achieve in this passage. Okara is after a distinct 'African' style that is capable of expressing a specifically 'African' philosophy, as well as the cadences of his own native Ijaw language, *through* English. He is also attempting to render an idea of 'Africa' as a territory in the *world*: a territory that comes *after* the colonial moment and which remains 'without a name'. In this passage 'it' – Africa – cannot be named purely, since 'it' appears in a philosophy and style of cross-cultural interaction. And when names harden, Okara implies, they impede cross-cultural understanding.

The Kampala resolution, therefore, is not simply an aesthetic manifesto concerning literary technique. Rather, the Kampala resolution is a commitment to a specific mode of cultural *negotiation* with the colonial legacy at the level of representation, one that seeks to establish an 'African' uniqueness within a 'standard' global language (English) and a 'common' human endeavour ('literature'). It was this aspect of the resolution – its implicit gesture, as it were, towards the rehabilitation of an original 'African' endeavour within the power-laden uniformities of 'standard' English – that provoked the Nigerian critic Obiajunwa Wali into joining the postcolonial debate. The Kampala writers, Wali argued, were in effect betraying 'Africa', playing into the hands of 'Western midwives', because they were promulgating a literary practice which could *only* give birth to an African literature that remained 'a minor appendage in the main stream of European literature'. 'The whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing,' Wali wrote, 'is misdirected and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture.' Such a literary practice, argued Wali, can only produce 'sterility, uncreativity, and frustration', and comprises nothing less than 'the dead end of African literature'. Instead, Wali insisted, a 'true African literature' *requires* the use of African languages.[15]

In effect, what Wali was asking in this response to the Kampala writers was this: Why were they content, in a politically decolonised

Africa, merely to approximate an African original in their writing? Did not the practice of transliterating African realities into the languages of the colonisers contain the dangerous implication that Africans were only 'free' to be original *within* the limits imposed upon them by their colonialist past? Wasn't their literary practice of attempting to harmonise pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial 'Africa' within the framework of a 'world language' really nothing more than a capitulation to European standards disguised under the banner of 'universalism'?

For some writers, however, the problem with Wali's turn to African languages as the *only* appropriate media for the expression of African realities was that – as Chinua Achebe put it – 'there are not many countries in Africa where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial master and still retain the facility for mutual communication'.[16] Wole Soyinka extended this argument to the continental level: the use of English 'creates no conflict whatever,' he declared, 'especially as I want to be able to speak to the Ngugi wa Thiongos [Kenya], the Taban lo Liyongs [Uganda], the Nuruddin Farahs [Somalia]'.[17] Nevertheless, for many of the writers who argued along these lines, the Kampala resolution did seem to imply that a writing approach grounded upon the single, over-arching principle of linguistic transliteration would in fact produce a sub-standard literature, both in African and in European terms. Achebe, who had attended the Kampala conference, later offered a modified position on the Kampala resolution, while at the same time actively avowing the usefulness of languages forced on to Africa through colonialism, by claiming, 'I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.' Achebe would declare: 'The English language has been given to me and I intend to use it.'[18]

Decolonisation and language

But how was English 'given', and what political residuum does it carry into neo-colonial times? At the same time that Okara was reproducing 'Africa' in his generous, post-independence, 'gift-giving' style of transliteration, Frantz Fanon, in an essay entitled 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness', was arguing that the easy transportation of Western liberal humanism into colonial territory amounted to the *giving away*

of a cognitive space for freedom, and warning that the establishment of national independence was in no way equivalent to a liberation from imperialist forms of control by the West.[19] One of the most vigorous contemporary voices to apply Fanon's arguments to the level of language-use is Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer and critic whose book, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), considers the ways in which language shapes the political consciousness of its users. Ngugi's argument is that language constitutes a storehouse or 'memory bank' that holds the collective experiences of a people, and as such makes and *re*makes peoples by giving them integrity and direction. The European languages, therefore, were not simply the media through which European imperialism operated during the pre-independence phase of African history, but part and parcel of the violence European colonisers enacted upon the continent. For Ngugi, English, French and Portuguese were more than just languages in Africa: they became *the* languages, and indigenous African languages were actively devalued in relation to them. The colonisers' languages played a formative role, as Ngugi sees it, in remaking African subjects in the image of European speakers, and this has produced an enduring condition of *alienation* in Europhone African elites. Since these elites comprise the very groups charged with the post-colonial task of shaping and directing the new national societies of Africa, African nations *still* find themselves incapable of working meaningfully towards their own best interests, the integral structures of African communities *remain* fractured and compromised, Africa *continues* to be exiled in language and out of place on African soil, and African peoples *remain* bound to a cultural and cognitive structure of dependency which has its economic correlative in neo-colonialist structures of political control.[20]

How then, Ngugi wonders, might literary language work to *renovate* African communities and help turn the corner on neo-colonialist modes of control? Ngugi's answer is that African literary languages must first and foremost be representative of what African communities at large actually speak – languages adapted to place, in tune with, and historically grounded in, indigenous African realities. 'To neglect our languages,' Ngugi asserts in his introduction to *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*, 'and grab those of foreigners is tantamount to blasphemy. People without their own language are but mere slaves.'[21] Having become one of the most internationally celebrated African writers in English, Ngugi nonetheless follows his own critical

logic scrupulously and denounces the whole genre of 'Afro-European (or Euro-African) literature' for its bad faith in calling itself *African* literature.[22] 'This book,' writes Ngugi in *Decolonising the Mind*, '. . . is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way' (p. xiv).

Networks and affinities

Ngugi's argument has obvious affinities with Wali's rejection of the Kampala resolution in preference of an indigenous and 'true African literature'; but debates over the present and future structure of 'Africa' have always found themselves in negotiation with the *question* of post-colonialism, and at this point it might be useful to consider the counter-arguments of Kwame Anthony Appiah, an African philosopher and literary critic based in the United States of America. Appiah's critical and cultural identity, he tells us, comprises *both* Ghanaian and English 'worlds', and '[i]f my sisters and I were "children of two worlds" ', he writes,

> no one bothered to tell us this; we lived in one world, in two 'extended' families divided by several thousand miles and an allegedly insuperable cultural distance that never, so far as I can recall, puzzled or perplexed us much. . . . I am used to seeing the world as a network of points of affinity.[23]

Appiah thus finds himself rejecting the philosophical position that imagines post-colonial Africa as a state of uncontaminated cultural autonomy. Such a position, Appiah argues, is at heart a nativist one, and so is 'the claim that the African independence requires a literature of one's own' (p. 56). Appiah rejects the basic cultural binarism of 'nativist' positions such as Ngugi's – the establishment of oppositions between 'universalism' and 'particularism', 'inside' and 'outside', 'us' and 'them' (p. 56) – and he argues that such positions make language and literature into a mystique, for they require these constructs to *stand in* for autonomous and pure notions of culture, community, nation and tradition. A nativist critical position, according to Appiah, authorises the critic to say, in effect: we can know, and be at home in, *only* what our language has created. And as Appiah sees it, such a position, falling back as it does on an insular and inward-looking concept of tradition and imagining it to be the source of *all* authentic

knowledge and being, is simply not tenable as an intellectual or philosophical stance.

Appiah thus joins the postcolonial debate over African language and literature by questioning the assumptions behind nativism and African cultural autonomy. But like Ngugi, Appiah does not want to lose sight of the ways in which the 'might of the legions of Europe' has been, and is, represented within the colonial languages. Appiah wants *also* to question the intellectual position that sees European languages as 'mere tools; tools that can be cleansed of the accompanying imperialist – and, more specifically, racist – modes of thought', and he recognises that within post-colonial cultural life, the European languages work like 'double agents' and must therefore remain 'perpetually under suspicion' (p. 56).

What results from this double order of critical questioning is a carefully balanced definition of a post-colonial Africa adapted to the widest demands of cultural modernity: a postcoloniality, that is, which makes room for both Okara and Ngugi. At the heart of this definition is a peculiar conception of the postcolonial which Appiah articulates around the structure of *intellectual* work. Intellectuals everywhere, he believes, 'are now caught up – whether as volunteers, draftees, resisters – in a struggle for the articulation of their respective nations'. And everywhere, 'language and literature' appear to be 'central to that articulation' (p. 53). Therefore, Appiah's postcolonial Africa – *his* 'nation' – must strive for a cultural room of its own, but the demand for that cultural room must be cast not in absolute or autonomous terms but, rather, in comparative and relative ones. Appiah's 'Africa' is a necessary party to an international and cross-cultural set of exchanges, and his African 'intellectual' is a product of these cross-cultural exchanges. But since the intellectual struggle to articulate an African nationality appears on the *periphery* of international modernity, that struggle begins to make sense only in, and as a search for, *fair* exchange, equitable dealing, within a global politics. Appiah's African intellectual *knows* that Africa's colonial encounter with Europe comprised *un*fair exchange, and that a language of colonial racism helped produce that sustained structure of unfairness. This intellectual therefore works to revalue 'Africa', and to make that revaluation relevant to *both* African cultures and the world at large. *This* intellectual work, as Appiah formulates it, goes beyond the opposition between the 'local' or 'national' and the 'universal', and enacts an exchange between them. And this *style* of intellectual work

reveals itself in the very tension, the double-facedness, within the Euro-African (or Afro-European) literatures that Ngugi denounces as a symptom of bad faith.

Appiah's critique of pure language is, as he puts it, calculated to yield an 'ethical universal', a postcolonial 'humanism' whose literature is 'post-realist', whose politics are 'postnativist', and whose solidarities are '*transnational* rather than . . . *national*' (p. 155). The 'post' in Appiah's 'postcolonialism', then, appears in this respect as a 'space-clearing gesture' (p. 149) – an attempt, in and through a colonially imposed language, to go beyond those hierarchies of self over other, identity over difference, centre over periphery, sovereign over subordinate, that the language of colonialism has imposed and which reproduce themselves in unexamined form within the seemingly autonomous and pure languages of nativism and nationalism.[24] Appiah's critique of pure language is thus meant to 'post' for African critical and cultural practice a space *after* colonialism – a colonialism that appears and reappears in the entrancing binaries of colonialist language, and one that has long held the language of 'Africa' spellbound. As such, his critique recalls the efforts of the great social theorist Mikhail Bakhtin to locate cultural agency in a *dialogics* of language. 'The word in language', Bakhtin wrote,

> is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language . . . but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.[25]

Language and emergency

Appiah's engagement with the question of language addresses African cultural modernity at a high order of philosophical negotiation, but it needs to be remembered that not all of the voices that contribute to postcolonial debates in Africa are articulated from within, and in response to, a fully 'post-colonial' time. For the writer and critic Njabulo Ndebele, writing about South Africa, the question of post-colonialism and language produces a rather different set of answers than it does for Appiah, for of course in South Africa the formal

moment of political decolonisation from white settler male has only just come. Writing under apartheid and – to borrow the white South African writer André Brink's phrase – 'writing in a state of emergency', Ndebele chooses not to reach for transnational terms in quite the way that Appiah does, although both writers share broadly humanistic and ethical concerns. Rather, in a powerful essay entitled 'The English Language and Social Change in South Africa',[26] Ndebele sets out *another* modality of negotiating between the claims of linguistic 'nativism' and those of Europhonic 'universalism'. We will conclude this short chapter on language and postcolonialism in Africa with an examination of his argument.

The corner-stone of Ndebele's position is that English in South Africa, despite its many poses of political innocence, is inevitably the carrier of social perceptions, attitudes and goals that perpetuate unequal relations in race and class, and is functionally bound to social mechanisms for the manufacture of consent to oppression. English works hegemonically in South Africa, Ndebele argues, partly because it is equated with authority – 'education appears to have become synonymous with the acquisition of English' (p. 232) – and partly because it is already positioned within international capitalism as *the* language of corporate globalism. 'English is an international language', Ndebele notes,

> but it is international only in its functionally communicative aspects. For the rest of the time, indigenous languages fulfil the range of needs that English similarly fulfils for its native speakers. From this point of view, the functional acquisition of English in a capitalist society such as ours can further reinforce the instrumentalization of people as units of labor. So it is conceivable that the acquisition of English, precisely because the language has been reduced to being a mere working tool, can actually add to the alienation of the work force.
>
> (pp. 232–3)

Despite this, however, Ndebele wants to recognise that the consolations of linguistic nativism may not fully address the contemporary sensibilities of the urban and 'detribalized' communities in South Africa. Ndebele, therefore, despite his rigorous critique of English in South Africa, is nonetheless prepared to accord English speech and writing a viable place within South African cultural life. In order to negotiate this gap, he attempts to imagine a South African English 'freed from the functional instruction of corporate English', and 'open

to the possibility of becoming a new language' (p. 231) – renewed both in vocabulary and in grammatical structure to accord to 'foundations rooted in the experience of the people themselves' (p. 224). Ndebele's position differs from those discussed above, in that it grounds this 'new English' within an *emergent* racial or group sensibility. His position is 'nationalist' to the extent that it seeks an expressivist capacity for language to represent the 'experiences of the people' who use it, but the *authority* for this nationalism is discovered within traditions shaping themselves *in the present*, not ones associated with a fixed and immemorial past. The traditions that are shaping, and will continue to shape, Ndebele's 'new English' are ones that emerge from the experiences of struggle for cultural, linguistic and political survival in a state of emergency; and the orientation of this 'new English' is towards the future: towards what must emerge *beyond* apartheid, in a fully 'post-colonial' political state.

Ndebele's assault on English *as it is* demonstrates his need – in a Bakhtinian act of appropriation – to reshape English into the way it *must be*: a reconstituted language of the future. 'The inherently subversive quest for freedom by the oppressed of South Africa,' he writes, 'is even more evident today where their erstwhile demand merely to be allowed to participate in the various structures of government has clearly given way to an insatiable desire to create: to create comparable structures on the basis of a new human sensibility' (p. 227). For Ndebele, the fulfilment of this quest calls for nothing less than a reshaping of those social forms – such as language – in which power is *already* invested, and in which resistances are already taking shape. For within the field of language, as Ndebele reads it, the struggle for a viable post-apartheid postcolonialism is already taking place.

Ndebele's argument carries the question of language-use squarely into the many debates that now take place about the prospects for genuine social change for Africa – that is, change not only from the colonial past but also from a neo-colonial present. His insistence upon a future-directed orientation to this debate suggests that the remarkable tradition of intellectual engagement with the vexed questions of postcolonialism and language in Africa not only will continue, but will continue to find new voices, new articulations, new modalities of cultural and political negotiation. For, of course, there can be no end to these debates until there emerges some future world order that renders the critical terms of postcolonial studies – terms like colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism – genuinely historical ones,

with no descriptive purchase on contemporary inter-cultural relations. And as Gabriel Okara has pointed out in the passage earlier in this chapter, a genuinely *post*-colonial world order remains, at present, an idea we only grope towards, a space without a name.

Notes

1. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993), p. 9, emphasis ours. Said's fairly typical 'post-colonial' definition of imperialism, for example, departs not only from orthodox Marxist definitions, such as Lenin's theory of imperialism as that *specific* stage within capitalism marked by a turn to overseas markets and labour resources in order to counter the effects of the domestic accumulation of capital, but also from a range of quirky uses, such as that given by Lewis S. Feuer in *Imperialism and the Anti-Imperialist Mind* (New Brunswick, Canada, 1989), where 'imperialism' defines that 'progressive' force that causes 'civilisation' to move 'forward'. Useful discussions of the meanings of 'imperialism' and 'colonialism', as they appear within historical and political studies, are given in Anthony Brewer (ed.), *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey* (London, 1989); Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present* (New York, 1978); and Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism*, trans. P.S. Falla (Chicago, 1977).
2. See, for example, Partha Chaterjee's *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ, 1993).
3. See Brian Lapping's companion volume to this series, *End of Empire* (New York, 1985).
4. Kwame Nkrumah, in *Neo-colonialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (London, 1974), cited in Kofi Buenor Hadjor, *The Penguin Dictionary of Third World Terms* (Harmondsworth, 1992), p. 215. Ella Shohat, in 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial" ', *Social Text*, vols 31/32 (1991), pp. 99–113, argues against the concept of 'post-colonialism' because of the way in which it implicitly 'undermines a critique of contemporary colonialist structures of domination, more available through the repetition and revival of the "neo" ' (p. 107).
5. See, for example, the Introduction to Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester, forthcoming), pp. 3–4; Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, 'What is Post(-)colonialism', *Textual Practice*, vol. 5 (1991), pp. 399–414.
6. As yet, there is no single text which sets out a thorough summary of the kinds of work going on within the field of 'colonial discourse' theory. The larger principles of discourse analysis are laid out in Michel Foucault's 'archaeological' texts: *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London, 1970), and *The*

Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London, 1972). Edward Said's *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London, 1978), which applies Foucault's theories to the ways in which British and French writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constructed the 'Orient' as a contradictory field of both desire and knowledge, is often thought to be the ur-text of colonial discourse theory. Robert Young lays out a useful genealogy of this field in terms of Europe's crisis with 'historiography': *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London, 1991). Compelling accounts of the ways in which European colonial discourse has applied itself to sub-Saharan Africa are provided in Christopher L. Miller's *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago, 1985), his *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago, 1990), and in V.Y. Mudimbe's, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN, 1988).

7. A useful introduction to this form of work is provided by W.D. Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back: The Theory and Practice of Post-Colonial Literature* (London, 1989). These writers advance an argument for comparative studies across 'all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day' (p. 2). Other work in this field advances the concept of 'minority discourse' as a way of examining how peoples and groups of different places and persuasions – long oppressed into silence and made 'minor' and invisible by various forms of colonial power – find voices with which to carve out their own cultural territory and shape their own self images. See 'Introduction: Toward a Theory of Minority Discourse: What Is To Be Done?', in Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd (eds), *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 1–16. Almost all work in this form of postcolonial criticism has been influenced profoundly by the work of the late Frantz Fanon: see *Black Skins, White Masks*, trans. Charles Markmann (1952; New York, 1967), and *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth, 1969). Fanon's influence on African political figures, too, is an immense one: see Amilcar Cabral's *Unity and Struggle* (New York, 1979), for example, or Steve Biko's *I Write What I Like*, ed. Aelred Stubbs (London, 1978).

8. Mary Louise Pratt employs the term 'contact zone' in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992); Peter Hulme employs the term 'colonial encounter' in *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London, 1986). Work in this third mode of postcolonial analysis attempts to move away from the kind of absolute separation between coloniser and colonised that characterises, for example, Albert Memmi's influential study, *The Colonizer and the*

Colonized, trans. Howard Greenfeld (1957; New York, 1967), and examines the ways in which power and its resistances are both fragmented and distributed across 'Western' and 'non-Western' worlds. Much of the work in this area indexes itself back to the philosophical novels and cultural criticism of the Guyanese writer, Wilson Harris. The most widely quoted critical theorist of this form of postcolonial analysis is Homi K. Bhabha, who argues that historical subjectivity and agency is the product of cross-cultural negotiation and, as such, is always paradoxical and ambivalent in affect and address – 'less than one and double', to quote Bhabha. Postcolonial work in this area comprises a sustained effort at defining a postcoloniality capable of challenging ideas of cultural purity at almost every level. A number of Bhabha's essays are collected in the volume *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994).

9. For a comparative account of nativism in African cultural thought, see Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism', in his *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York, 1992), pp. 47–72.
10. For a useful discussion, see Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (London, 1981), pp. 67–117.
11. Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature* (London, 1981), p. 1.
12. Cited in Obiajuna Wali, 'The Dead End of African Literature?', *Transition*, vol. 4, no. 10 (1963), p. 14.
13. Gabriel Okara, 'African Speech . . . English Words', *Transition*, vol. 4, no. 10 (1963), p. 15.
14. Gabriel Okara, *The Voice* (London, 1964), pp. 110, 112, emphasis ours.
15. O. Wali, 'The Dead End of African Literature?', p. 14.
16. Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London, 1975), p. 57.
17. John A. Stotesbury, 'Interview with Wole Soyinka at the Second Stockholm Conference for African Writers, April 1986', *Kunapipi*, vol. IX, no. 1 (1987), p. 61.
18. C. Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, p. 62. See also the letters that were written in response to Wali's 'The Dead End of African Literature?', in *Transition*, vol. 3, no. 11 (1963), pp. 7–9, and vol. 3, no. 12 (1964), pp. 6–10.
19. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 119–65.
20. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London, 1986), pp. 5–15. A similar argument concerning the divisive nature of European languages within African societies is provided by Lewis Nkosi in *Tasks and Masks*, p. 2ff. Ngugi's stance is shared by the participants in the Colloquium on Black Civilization and Education held in Lagos in 1977. They argued that 'the psycho-physiology of knowledge would confirm a built-in handicap for

any human group who cannot work in their indigenous language form. The standing tragedy of all blacks and Africans wherever they may be is that their tongues have been pulled out and they must speak strange tongues': cited in Chantal Zabus, *The African Palimpsest* (Amsterdam, 1991), pp. 39–40.

21. Cited in Al-Amin Mazrui, 'Ideology' or Pedagogy: The Linguistic Indigenisation of African Literature', *Race and Class*, vol. XXVII, no. 1 (1986), p. 65.
22. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, pp. 26–7, 33n.
23. K.A. Appiah, *In My Father's House*, p. viii. Further page references are given in the text.
24. For a reading of the 'politics of post-colonial narratives', see Simon Gikandi's 'The Politics and Poetics of National Formation: Recent African Writing', in Anna Rutherford (ed.), *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial* (Sydney, 1992), pp. 377–89.
25. Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX, 1981), pp. 293–4.
26. Njabulo Ndebele, 'The English Language and Social Change in South Africa', in David Bunn and Jane Taylor (eds), *From South Africa: New Writing Photographs and Art* (Chicago, 1987), pp. 217–35. Further page references are given in the text.