

*SAFARA*

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## **REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE LANGUES, LITTÉRATURES ET CULTURES**

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*Francophonie in Africa South of Sahara:  
Specificity, Challenges and Perspectives*

*Chaïbou Elhadji OUMAROU\**

### **Introduction**

What do we mean when we talk about Francophonie? For Jean Claude Blachère (1993: 7), francophonie is a concept “not stabilized, its geography is fuzzy, its history poorly known, and its definition feeds perplexity.” This is especially because “It is difficult, indeed, to say who speaks French in black Africa- to limit ourselves to this space- and what it means to speak French: a little, a lot, passionately ”? Even the concept of "francophone," says Jean Claude Blachère (1993: 7), is ambiguous because it "should cover only situations of orality<sup>1</sup>" while it is used without question to describe an opaque monster called "francophone literature<sup>2</sup>."

Ambroise Kom (2000) describes Francophonie as a machine with three speeds. First there is the Francophonie of the North whose space covers France, Quebec, Acadia, Belgium and Switzerland in particular. In all these countries, he adds, French, as a mother tongue, is an ancient heritage of which the heirs and custodians are trying to manage in the best of their skills with the aim to making it grow and expand beyond their borders and leave it

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<sup>1</sup> La francophonie est un concept « non stabilisé, sa géographie est floue, son histoire mal connue, et sa définition alimente la perplexité, » d'autant plus qu' « Il est bien difficile, en effet, de dire qui parle français en Afrique noire- pour s'en tenir à cet espace- et ce que c'est que parler français : un peu, beaucoup, passionnément ? » (p.7)

<sup>2</sup> See also Jean-Louis Joubert et al. *Les Littératures francophones depuis 1945*. Paris : Bordas, 1986.

thus enriched for their progeny. Then there is the Francophonie of the Arab world, that of Lebanon, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and even Egypt. This Francophonie is similar with that of Asia. Finally, there is the Francophonie of Africa south of Sahara.

The latter is the focus of this paper, especially its specificity, its challenges and its future prospects. To better understand that specificity, we have to go back in history and reopen the issue of the cultural and linguistic policy of France in order to look for and explain the historical, political and cultural roots of the Francophonie in sub-Saharan Africa. The challenges to this Francophonie will then be analyzed through the colonial policy of France and its consequences on the educational and cultural development in the countries concerned. The analysis will allow us to project the future of a new and more dynamic Francophonie for Africa. Note that if necessary the cultural and linguistic policy of France will be compared to that of Great Britain. The purpose of this comparison will be to better identify the "mistakes" of the Francophonie and learn from the Anglophone experience.

### **The specificity of the Francophonie in Africa south of Sahara**

As already explained above, with the francophone of the North the expansion of the French language is always received with some satisfaction. What is more, in all these countries the people rightly claim the right and freedom to live, to dream and develop their "daily life in French;" which, briefly, defines the Francophonie of the North in opposition to the one of the South.

The latter in turn has different characteristics depending on geography and history. Indeed, in Africa Ibnlfassi Laila and Nicki (1996: 6) have found the Francophone literature from both sides of the Sahara "fascinating because of the differences emerging from the two corners of a shared continent which experienced similar colonial histories, albeit in slightly different forms." Thus the central question that interests us at this point in terms of definition is to know what the Francophonie in Asia and in the Maghreb have in common and what distinguishes them from both the Francophonie of the North and the one of black Africa. Unlike in the North, in Asia and in North Africa French is either a second language or a

foreign language, not a mother tongue; which is also the case in Africa south of Sahara. But unlike black Africa, the Arab world, it is said, is culturally and linguistically homogeneous. Here in the Arab world language, culture and religion intermingle against the background of centuries-old Islamic civilization recognized as such by the colonizer<sup>3</sup>.

A. C. Brench (1967 :100-101) suggests that recognition when he explains how the perception and approach of the colonizer toward the Muslims were colored by the expansion of Islam into Europe where it took roots and even came into conflict with the Christian religion. So for Brench (ibid.), "This is one of the many and varied reasons why it [Islam] has been treated with circumspection and respect by the various administrations. During the colonial period, Muslims were permitted a certain amount of religious and political autonomy by the administration and missionaries. They were not treated as unsophisticated pagans and their beliefs, although considered erroneous, were respected<sup>4</sup>."

Indeed, in the eyes of the French colonizer, there is one major difference that distinguishes the colonized peoples of Black Africa from the ones of Asia and North Africa. For example, unlike the former, the latter are considered as peoples "of ancient civilization, but vanquished (Antoine Leon 1991: 266), as it is the case in Indochina and North Africa. This recognition by the colonizer of the ancient nature of the civilizations of these peoples has therefore been one of the major reasons that led to adopt an attitude more conciliatory and respectful of their cultural and linguistic identities in comparison to the attitude of the same colonizer in non Islamized black Africa.

The most illustrative example of this attitude was the conciliatory approach to teaching in elementary education. Indeed, Leon (ibid.) tells us that in Indochina the instruction is given in the native language during the first three years of primary education. It

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<sup>3</sup> See also Jean-Marc Moura. *La littérature des lointains: histoire de l'exotisme européen au XXe siècle*. Paris : Honore Champion, 1998.

<sup>4</sup>See also Birgit Meyer et al., eds. *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure*. Oxford: Institute of Social Studies/Blackwell Publishers, 1999: 75.



is also the case in the Maghreb, especially in Morocco, where "the language of the colonizer and that of the colonized [Arabic] are used jointly" (266, emphasis added).

This educational approach is reminiscent of the one adopted by Great Britain in all its African colonies. Maybe we can also read some influence of the British policy of Indirect Rule on the French colonial administration as well as a recognition, even implicit, by the French, of its effectiveness. In all cases, Mahmood Mamdani (1996 :82-3) confirms this hypothesis when he writes that the change from the French policy of assimilation to that of association in Africa south of Sahara was inspired by both the experience of France in Indochina and Algeria, but also by "the British example next door". This, Mamdani says, has enabled France to appreciate "the need for a native cultural policy rather than assimilation."

Unfortunately, despite the good educational outcomes produced by this method, which involves the teaching of local languages in primary education before the language of the colonizer, France did not implement the teaching of local languages in its system of education in Africa South of the Sahara, preferring a policy of assimilation much more rigorous and glottophage, to paraphrase Jean-Louis Calvet (1993). Now the question is why, of all its colonies, it was only in those in Africa south of Sahara that France rigorously applied its policy of assimilation?

In response to this question, the chief colonial administrator in charge of education in Cochin China first recognizes that "it is a common sense that the teaching of early childhood education is given in the mother tongue of the child." Of course he means when the teaching concerns "civilized" people with "ancient civilization" like the ones from Asia and North Africa. But the same philosophy does not apply in Black Africa because, according to the same colonial administrator, French is essential, in the first years, for "*the education of barbarous or semi-civilized peoples*." (Leon, 1991: 288; emphasis added) Michael Crowder (1962: 3) also observed that the attitude of the French colonizer towards the Africans south of the Sahara was different because this part of the continent was regarded as having "no indigenous culture worthy of the name." So in the

eyes of the colonizer, Africa south of Sahara would be the habitat of "barbarians"; "a cultural desert," would say Gabriel Manessy (1994).

To materialize this approach to cultural and linguistic policy of assimilation, the French developed a colonial educational system first in the metropolis and then in the colonies. Even in France some explained that this policy of assimilation was the result of the spirit of the Revolution of 1789. Thus, in her analysis of the institutional framework of Francophonie, notably through what she calls the "Traditional French Linguistic Policies, Their Extension to Her Colonial Empire and Their Legacy Today" Anne Judge notes that it was after the questionnaire developed by Abbé Grégoire in 1790 which shows the existence of many languages and dialects spoken in France that the Revolutionaries, in a spirit of justice and equality, "decided that [languages and dialects of France] should be suppressed in the name of equality of opportunity<sup>5</sup>. This began a movement to establish state schools for the teaching of French." (In Laila Ibnlfassi et al, eds. 1996:13)

It is therefore not surprising that in 1829 the Governor of Senegal undertook to establish schools where instruction was intended "to wipe out through a common education the difference

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<sup>5</sup> Mais le rêve révolutionnaire s'est vite transformé en un rêve impérial dont la francophonie va devenir le support principal. C'est du moins ce que nous apprend J-C. Blachère (1993 :25) à travers un discours d'inauguration d'une école coloniale en Afrique noire à la fin du 19eme siècle. Ainsi, pour le gouverneur de l'époque, « Le jour n'est peut-être pas éloigné où depuis le littoral de la Méditerranée jusqu'au golfe de Guinée un voyageur pourra, en tous lieux, entrer en relation avec les principaux habitants des pays parcourus au moyen de la langue française. Ce jour-la, notre œuvre sera devenue indestructible comme le fut celle des Romains dans l'Espagne et la Gaule antiques. Le nord-ouest africain tout entier sera pour toujours une terre imprégnée des souvenirs et de la civilisation de la France. » Le rêve impérial transparaît ici à travers la comparaison de l'œuvre civilisatrice de la France à celle des Romains, donc de l'empire romain avec le futur empire français.

in customs and language” (in Spencer 1974: 163). About a century later, precisely on December 20, 1920, the Governor General of AEF signed an order which states that "No school will be allowed where the instruction is not given in French. The teaching of any other language is forbidden" (In-Tabi Manga 2000: 42). Henri Labouret (1938) is therefore right to say that, generally, the cultural and linguistic policy in France was influenced by its history. And F. Michelman (1995: 219) adds that this history is the legacy of the Roman Empire, particularly its tendency "towards linguistic and cultural centrism." So it is no surprise that Thomas Spear (2002: 11) tells us that of all the languages of colonization, French is the only one "whose old European capital remains the epicenter." And Spear adds that "only the French language has a European-based linguistic headquarter- from which the basic dictionaries are published<sup>6</sup> ...." (My translation) This headquarter is the French Academy founded in 1635 to regulate the use of French in France and around the worldwide.

Indeed, it is Richelieu who created that academy, which, according to Harriet Walter (1994: 244), "will have the mission to decode the vocabulary and fix grammar. The first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* prescribed in 1694 a "good usage," [meaning] the one of the court and of high society, as well as orthography respectful of etymology<sup>7</sup>." (My translation) A century later, in 1794, Father Gregory demanded the abolition of all other "dialects" in favor of French. And finally, in 1964 De Gaulle created the Haut Conseil de la Langue Française thus taking, in the words of Rubango (1999: 572), "the Francophonie to the baptismal font." This Haut Conseil later became the Haut Commissariat and then the Delegation a la Langue Française before becoming Francophonie under Francois Mitterrand.

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<sup>6</sup> « Seul le français a un siège linguistique européen—d'où viennent les dictionnaires de base... ».

<sup>7</sup> « aura pour mission de décoder le lexique et de fixer la grammaire. La première édition du *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* consacre en 1694 un «bel usage», celui de la cour et des gens de qualité, ainsi qu'une orthographe respectueuse de l'étymologie».

Irene d'Almeida (Spear in 2002) is therefore right to believe that the French language policy has its origins in the creation of the French Academy, whose main purpose is to ensure the purity of the French language. For Christian Valentin (2001: 55), Francophonie recalls "the assimilating dream of the Third Republic [which was] to bring together the peoples of the Empire around the same language spoken by all, in the same cultural melting pot<sup>8</sup>." (My translation) This is probably the same project that inspired the French colonial policy of assimilation and glottophagie in Africa south of Sahara and brought about the challenges facing Francophonie today.

### **The Challenges Facing Francophonie in Africa south of Sahara**

"In less than ten years, the Africans will speak English, the technology they will use will come from America, their elites will be educated in the United States, as for we [the French], we will remain cut off from our African roots, curled up on a chilly Europe, incapable of being a competitive power<sup>9</sup>." (Bernard Debre, a former French Minister of Cooperation, "Plaidoyer pour l'Afrique", *Le Figaro*, 9 février, 1998)

"Between the African intellectuals and the negro kinglets [roitelets] Paris had chosen long ago. Calls, pressing sermons, institutions, as rich as they are, will not help: the official Francophonie is bound to be the flag parade of hack mercenaries,

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<sup>8</sup> «le rêve assimilateur de la III<sup>ème</sup> République [qui était] de rassembler les peuples de l'Empire autour d'une même langue parlée par tous, dans un même creuset culturel».

<sup>9</sup> « Dans moins de dix ans, les Africains parleront anglais, la technologie qu'ils emploieront sera américaine, leurs élites seront éduquées aux Etats-Unis, nous resterons quant à nous [les Français] coupés de nos racines africaines, recroquevillés sur une Europe frileuse, incapable alors d'être une puissance écoutée.

and the laughing stock of independent creators<sup>10</sup>. "(Mongo Béti," Seigneur, deliver-nous de la Francophonie, " In *Peuples noirs-Peuples africains*, nos 59-62, sept-déc.1987/janv.-avr.1988, 106; My translation)

The concern of the Minister Debré and the judgment without appeal of Mongo Béti are the consequences of the cultural and linguistic policy of colonial France of which Francophonie is a new manifestation. This is so much so because the weight of regulation of the colonial and now postcolonial school, with its educational reflexes, continues to weigh heavily on the minds and lives of the elite in particular (see also Blachère 1993) and on the socio-economic and cultural development in general. The challenges, as they will be discussed later, are enormous; and although they cover all the aspects of the lives of Francophone Africans, the language issue remains the greatest concern.

Already in 1961, Pierre Alexandre, in an article entitled "Les problèmes linguistiques des Etats négro-africains à l'heure de l'indépendance" [The Linguistic Problems of Negro-African States at the Time of Independence], established a link between these challenges and the language policy of France. He particularly emphasized how the exclusive use of French in colonial and now postcolonial schools, explains without doubt, on the one hand, the

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<sup>10</sup>« Entre les intellectuels africains et les roitelets nègres, il y a longtemps que Paris a choisi. Les appels, les sermons pressants, les institutions, aussi riches soient-elles, n'y feront rien : la francophonie officielle est condamnée à être l'étendard de parade de plumitifs mercenaires, et la risée des créateurs indépendants. »

delay in African studies in France<sup>11</sup> compared to what happened in London or Brussels; and on the other hand, the fact that French, because of its glottophagie, to paraphrase Louis-Jean Calvet, "penetrated much deeper [into the being and identity of the colonized] and was *qualitatively better known in French colonies than English in the English colonies*. [*The language policy of France*] may also explain why the "petit Nègre" or "Français tirailleurs" has never grown like the *Coastal English or Pidgin*<sup>12</sup>." (183, emphasis added, my translation).

But the most serious challenge, as Ambroise Kom (2000: 108) noted with bitterness, is that forty years after independence African countries have not yet really begun the "decolonization of the French language and its tools. Because of inadequate facilities, poor management of local staff and, above all, the lack of a rigorous and rational policy of appropriation of the colonial legacy, French, no

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<sup>11</sup> En effet, Jacqueline Bardolph a relevé avec regret le fait que des théoriciens et intellectuels comme Dérída, Lacan, Foucault, Kristeva et Irigaray, pourtant bien connus sur le plan international, ne lui étaient pas d'un grand secours dans ses recherches sur les littératures du Commonwealth. Et elle avance que cela est dû au fait que les débats sur les littératures postcoloniales ont pris forme d'abord en Amérique du Nord et dans les pays anglophones du Commonwealth. Elle ajoute que les littératures postcoloniales ne sont pas encore enseignées dans les universités françaises. Pareille avec le féminisme, ce qui, dit-elle, est pour le moins paradoxal dans le pays de Beauvoir, Cixous, Kristeva et Irigaray (in Rowland Smith, ed. *Postcolonizing the Commonwealth: Studies in Literature and Culture*. Waterloo. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000:39-47).

<sup>12</sup> « pénétrait beaucoup plus en profondeur [de l'être ou de l'identité du colonisé], et était *qualitativement mieux connu dans les colonies françaises que l'anglais dans les colonies anglaises*. [*La politique linguistique de la France*] peut aussi expliquer pourquoi le « petit negre » ou « français tirailleurs » n'a jamais pris l'extension du *Coast English* ou *Pidgin* »

matter what is said, is far from being considered as part of the African heritage.<sup>13</sup>" (my translation)

In the foreword to his book: *Le français en Afrique noire: mythes, stratégies, pratiques* (1994), Gabriel Manessy rightly notes that the school and the political and administrative structures "have somehow limited negatively the other side of French in Africa, that is to say, the popular French also called "petit negre"<sup>14</sup> " (8, emphasis added). As Pierre Alexandre and others had already done, Manessy did not resist the temptation to compare the past with the present to better understand the latter. Thus, he notes that unlike in the countries colonized by Belgium, Germany or Great Britain, in all French-speaking countries that were under French rule, French, today as yesterday, "does assume there only unequally the role of *lingua franca* among communities speaking different mother tongues. This is obviously a direct legacy of colonization; the remarkable fact is that the legacy has survived the abolition of colonization and it actually seems not to be questioned anywhere<sup>15</sup>... "(18; my translation). And Manessy comments that, unlike in the English-speaking countries where a pidgin developed as a *lingua franca*, there is in Francophone Africa, a "relative unity of French (...) rather more surprising than its

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<sup>13</sup> « la décolonisation de la langue française et ses outils. Du fait de l'insuffisance des structures, de la mauvaise gestion du personnel local et, par dessus tout, de l'absence d'une politique rigoureuse et rationnelle d'appropriation de l'héritage colonial, le français, quoi qu'on dise, est loin d'être considéré comme faisant partie du patrimoine africain ».

<sup>14</sup> « ont en quelque sorte délimité négativement l'autre face du français d'Afrique, c'est-à-dire le français populaire appelé aussi « petit nègre »

<sup>15</sup> « n'y assume que fort inégalement le rôle de *lingua franca* entre les communautés de langues maternelles différentes. Il s'agit là, bien évidemment, d'un héritage direct de la colonisation ; le fait remarquable est qu'il ait survécu à l'abolition de celle-ci et qu'il ne paraisse être nulle part effectivement remis en question ... »

diversification<sup>16</sup> (33; my translation; see also Calvet, *L'Europe et ses langues* (1993).

Cote d'Ivoire is an exception with the development of “petit nègre” in the major urban centers (Walter 1994: 153). This explains in part why in Francophone Africa, in the words of Kom, language awareness is the lowest. Some argue that the continent has more pressing concerns than dealing with language issues. Perhaps, but "is it not illusory, wonders Ambroise Kom, to think that Africa can escape the simultaneous search for solutions to her problems while facing the risk of deteriorating situations that could have been remedied otherwise<sup>17</sup>? (Kom 2000:108-9; my translation).

In any case, adds Kom, "it (...) seems difficult to separate the fate of African languages from the continent's political future<sup>18</sup>" (6; my translation). As for Calvet (1993), he binds the continent's economic future to the development of African languages along side French. After that, the issue of the revaluation of African languages conceived and perceived as a condition for a genuine

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<sup>16</sup> « relative unité du français (...) qui surprend plutôt que sa diversification »

<sup>17</sup> « n'est il pas illusoire, se demande Ambroise Kom, de penser qu'on peut ainsi échapper à la recherche simultanée des solutions aux problèmes qui se posent au risque de voir se détériorer des situations auxquelles on aurait pu remédier en s'y prenant à temps ?

<sup>18</sup> « il (...) semble difficile de séparer le destin des langues africaines de l'avenir politique du continent »



liberation is well documented<sup>19</sup>. But their importance as a challenge for Francophonie in Africa South of the Sahara deserves a brief attention and review of the literature about the language debate.

Kom and other researchers have in fact shown the importance of seriously taking into account the question of African languages in educational systems for the simple fact that there is no evidence that French has really solved the problem of communication among the language groups present in many Francophone countries. Language of the elite and administration, French is used by the happy few who were privileged to have attended school to a certain level. In addition, despite all the campaigns for literacy, the school benefits only a tiny fraction of the population. Therefore the development of popular French that can strengthen the national unity is limited.

In fact, linguists agree that in the best case, not more than 10% of the populations of French-speaking Africa are truly fluent in French, even if the official rates are higher for reasons very well known. As an illustration, Kom took the case of Senegal and Algeria, two countries where the French presence was the longest in Africa. In the case of Senegal, Kom explains, after three hundred years of French colonization, the country has

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<sup>19</sup> See K. Barber, « African Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism, » in *Research in African Literatures*, 24/4 (1995) :3-30 ; E. Ngara et al, eds., *Literature, Language, and the Nation*, ATOLL/Baobab Books, 1989; R. Fardon et al , eds., *African Languages, Development and the State*, Routledge, 1994; *Research in African Literatures*, 23/1 (1992): numéro spécial sur la question des langues africaines dans leurs rapports avec la littérature et le développement; W. Safran et al, eds., *Language, Ethnic Identity and the State*, Routledge, 2005; Calvet, *L'Europe et ses langues*, Plon, 1993; *La guerre des langues et les politiques linguistiques*, Payot, 1987; Tabi-Manga, *Les politiques linguistiques au Cameroun*, Karthala, 2000; Collectif, *Language in Education in Africa*, Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, 1986; *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, vol. 137 (1999); Gérard, *European-Language Writing in Sub-saharan Africa*, Budapest, 1986; Fishman, ed. *Advances in Language Planning*, Mouton, 1974.

only about 10% of the population that truly masters the language of Voltaire. It is also the case in Algeria where, after one hundred twenty-six years of colonization, the country had about 15% of boys and 6% of girls who attended school in 1954 (Kom 2000:110-111). Note that among these literate boys and girls, at least in the case of Niger, many can barely write and sign their names!

The case of Niger is also good to think about by those who want to sell Francophonie, claiming the role of the French language as a tool of interethnic communication and the role it played in the national unity. For if it is admitted that only 10% of the population uses French, we must also add that there are ten ethnic groups in the country. Assuming that the ten groups had equal access to school, which is not certain, how many elites of each group are fluent in French? Logically no more than 1%! This is to say that in reality only 1% of the population of each group can communicate effectively in French with all the other nine ethnic groups. In light of the above facts, the opportunities for national unity by the French language are rather slim<sup>20</sup>.

In the same vein, William Safran argues that "a common language does not guarantee national unity" (in Landau, ed. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, vol.137 (1999:61). Indeed, the case of Somalia illustrates the argument defended by Safran because this country is, according to Gerard (1990: 73), "the only sub-Saharan country with full ethnic homogeneity"; except, to some extent, Burundi and Lesotho. And yet Somalia seems now more than ever torn by internal conflicts. This means that other

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<sup>20</sup> Dans l'avant-propos de sa pièce théâtrale *Tanimoune*, l'historien Nigérien André Salifou écrit: « Je n'ai absolument rien contre la « francophonie », ni même contre la « francité », mais personne n'est dupe : quand on dit d'un pays comme le Niger, par exemple, qu'il est francophone, tout le monde sait qu'il ne s'agit là que d'une certaine façon de parler de ce qui n'est pas. Les Nigériens capables de lire un ouvrage- ou même le moindre texte- écrit en français, ne représentent encore qu'une poignée de privilégiés. » (cite par Bokiba dans *Ecriture et Identité dans la Littérature Africaine*. Paris : L'Harmattan, 1998 :29-30)

reasons have to be looked for outside multilingualism (see also Bamgbose 1994). What then?

### **The future of Francophonie in Africa South of the Sahara**

Ambroise Kom and others have proposed a change in the educational systems, a change whose primary purpose will be "the domestication of the French language" which necessarily entails a certain valorization and development of African languages. Especially because linguists and educators are unanimous that the teaching of mother tongues in primary school education plays a significant role in the transmission of theoretical and professional knowledge and above all in the learning of a second or foreign language like French in Africa. That is one of the conclusions that Tabi-Manga (2000) and many others have learned from the British experience. Moreover, that experience has been confirmed by all the experimental schools of Francophone countries which nevertheless continue to exclude the local languages from teaching in the other schools. So teaching the African languages alongside French in our schools must be the condition of our presence in a new Francophonie that is fair, balanced, supportive and respectful of our identity. It is also one of the major challenges facing Francophonie in Africa south of Sahara.

### **Conclusion**

"It is Hamani Diori, former president of the Republic of Niger, who is cited as the architect of the institutional Francophonie for having been credited with the initiative of ACCT and it is indeed Leopold Sédar Senghor, poet, Academician and former president of Senegal who is recognized as the greatest theorist and ideologue in

chief of the Francophonie movement.<sup>21</sup>» (Kom 2000:111; my translation)

So born in Niamey on the banks of the River Niger and weaned in Dakar on the banks the River Senegal before joining its ancestors on the banks of the Seine in France, it is still in Africa that Francophonie is facing its greatest challenges. Growing pains or crises of identity, Francophonie is facing challenges and paradoxes that are threatening to destroy it in the absence of necessary reforms. For Jean-Pierre van Deth, the Francophone countries "have contributed in their way, and for various reasons, to the current supremacy of English<sup>22</sup>" (in Calvet 1993: 133; my translation). Indeed, in Africa south of Sahara, the decline of the French language is mainly due to the linguistic and cultural policy that France conducted during colonization and continues to practice after independence with the complicity of African leaders. Already in 1985 Mohamadou Kane lamented the fact that some French cultural assistants and African nationals "with the support of the local political power, can deprive the education specialist of the country of any pedagogical initiative<sup>23</sup>" (in Beniamino 1999: 182; my translation).

Fifteen years later, Ambroise Kom (2000: 52) notes with regret that *Notre Librairie* "is a creation of the French Ministry of Cooperation and Foreign Affairs and the Commissariat Général de la Langue Française. Its objective is to popularize African literary production in the continent and in the other French-speaking nations of the world. The offices of *Notre Librairie* are located in the

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<sup>21</sup> « C'est bien Hamani Diori ancien président de la République du Niger qui est cité comme l'artisan de la francophonie institutionnelle du fait que l'initiative de l'ACCT lui revient et c'est bel et bien Léopold Sedar Senghor, poète, académicien et ancien président de la République du Sénégal qui est reconnu comme le plus grand théoricien et l'idiologue en chef du mouvement de la francophonie. »

<sup>22</sup> « ont contribué à leur manière, et pour diverses raisons, à la suprématie actuelle de l'anglais »

<sup>23</sup> « acquis au pouvoir politique, peuvent priver les spécialistes du pays de toute initiative pédagogique »

Ministry of Cooperation and its editors are all staff of that Ministry. Although *Notre Librairie* requests numerous [external] scientific collaborations, the journal is primarily an instrument of propaganda; extremely attentive to the image that African states want to give of themselves and of their culture<sup>24</sup>." (my translation)

Given the poverty of African countries and the low level of the linguistic consciousness that characterize them and the financial and political means available to the Francophonie, we can say without any risk of error that the image of Africa, and especially of their respective countries that these leaders will give is largely created by and for the needs of the Francophonie. (See also Serge Bourjea in Beniamino 1999: 189-190). But if in spite of all of the above facts, one can still conclude that Francophonie is a failure then it becomes necessary to draw the appropriate lessons.

The fundamental lesson comes from the experience of the British or Anglophonie: namely the need to change the education systems in Francophone Africa south of Sahara. The aim is to introduce the teaching of local languages as a necessary complement to the French language. Without this complementarity, warns Calvet (1993: 167), "there will be no future for the French language" (my translation), especially since the introduction of African languages in primary education in the former British colonies has not stopped English from flourishing. Instead the language of Shakespeare is thriving so well that it has become a point of concern for the Minister Debré (Kom 2000).

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<sup>24</sup> « est une création du Ministère français de la Coopération et des Affaires Etrangères et du Commissariat Général de la Langue française. Elle se donne comme objectif de faire connaître la production littéraire africaine sur le continent et dans les autres Etats francophones du monde. Les bureaux de *Notre Librairie* se situent au sein même du Ministère de la Coopération et ses éditeurs sont tous fonctionnaires dudit ministère. Bien qu'elle sollicite de nombreuses collaborations à caractère scientifique, la revue est avant tout un instrument de vulgarisation ; extrêmement attentif à l'image que les Etats africains veulent donner d'eux-mêmes et de leur culture »

Moreover, local cultures are much more developed in the English speaking countries than in Francophone countries. For Abdou Moumouni, the possibility of a flowering of African cultures on the side of English was finally the mark of the difference between the British colonization, with its education system tolerating the teaching of local languages, and that of France which dreamed of a universal language, French. Moumouni explains that this difference is "*not in any philanthropic tendency of English colonization compared with the French, but in the objectively greater possibilities of cultural development which flow from even the partial use of African languages in schools*" (in Michelman 1995:220; emphasis added).

In addition, the teaching of African languages will enable students to have a better perception of their languages and identities, without forgetting that it will allow an increase in enrollment rates. It is probably no coincidence, says Gabriel Manessy (1994: 26), if Togo and Benin, two countries where the schools of the German missions kept the traditions of teaching in local languages, quickly became, according to a famous formula, the "Latin Quarter" of francophone west Africa while Senegal, even after three hundred years of French colonization, is not very far from Niger, often showcased as the worst example in Africa in terms of schooling.

After the reform of schools, universities in francophone Africa south of the Sahara as well as in the metropolis must in their turn be reformed to become more interested in African Francophone literature. Because they have been created in the image of French universities, Kom (2000) reminds us, Francophone African universities do not give enough importance to their own cultures through the teaching of national literatures in French as well as in local national languages. For example, none of these universities, with the exception of the University of Yaoundé (although the case of Cameroon is unique because of its bilingual situation: French and English), has within it a department of African languages and / or national literatures. By contrast, in Nigeria, for example, some universities have curricula in Master (MA) and doctorate (PhD) degrees in the three languages of wider communication: Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo. And for many years it has been possible to have a

Master or a PhD entirely written and defended in these languages. Akinwumi Isola informs us that at the University of Ife, for example, the first PhD entirely written in Yoruba was defended on March 7, 1991 (in *Research in African Literatures* 23 / 1 (1992: 21).

By contrast, adds Kom, in Dakar, Abidjan, and Ouagadougou as well as in Brazzaville and Niamey, some go out of their ways to ensure that the place given to national and African literatures does not exceed the tolerable threshold for those who will judge the equivalence or integration across the different administrations. The reference is still to the French curriculum. And Ambroise Kom (2000: 168) concludes that "There is no irony to say that the example should still come from France. [For] ... the reality is that African universities, although they are autonomous, have a cultural contract to honor: that of not taking the risk of straying too far away from the old model of the metropolis. It is therefore important that the example comes from elsewhere and that French universities themselves set the tone [see also Alexandre 1961] and serve as models for their African counterparts. Because if the French university had granted the Francophone literatures of Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere a special place in their programs, Africa would not have hesitated as to develop the teaching of its own literatures and that of other francophone countries around the world<sup>25</sup>."

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<sup>25</sup> « Il n'y a pas d'ironie à le dire : l'exemple doit encore venir de France. [Car]... tout tient au fait que les universités africaines, bien qu'autonomes, ont un contrat culturel à honorer : celui de ne point prendre le risque de trop s'éloigner du modèle de l'ancienne métropole. Il importe donc que l'exemple vienne d'ailleurs et que les universités françaises elles-mêmes donnent le ton [voir aussi Alexandre 1961] et servent de modèles à leurs homologues africaines. Car si l'université française avait accordé aux littératures francophones d'Afrique, des Antilles et d'ailleurs une place spécifique dans ses programmes, l'Afrique n'aurait pas tant hésité à développer l'enseignement de sa propre littérature et de celle des autres contrées francophones du globe ».

(my translation) It is also our conviction. Moreover, the future of the Francophonie in Africa south of Sahara will largely depend on these reforms.

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