Abstract

The object of this paper is to examine the changes that have occurred at the heart of ‘la Francophonie’ since the beginning of the 1990s. As a consequence of the collapse of the socialist states of Eastern Europe, the transformation of markets, the service sector, and the shift in political relations at the global level, France has insisted on the transformation of ‘la Francophonie’ into a supranational institution and global actor. This process manifests itself in different ways, such as the expansion of the sphere of influence of ‘la Francophonie’ – through welcoming non-francophone states –, the implementation of a political programme, the reinforcement of bilateral cooperation to the detriment of multilateral relations, and the transformation into a pyramidal structure between 1995 and 1997. However, while it is becoming a global actor and, at the same time, confronted with declining financial resources, a growing gap can be observed between its global commitments on one hand, and the cultural practices followed by francophone communities at the regional and local levels on the other. The aim of this essay is thus to show how (a) the processes of politicization, bureaucratization, professionalization and the transfer of power at the heart of ‘la Francophonie’ have widened the gap between its policies as a global actor and its roots in the different francophone communities of the world; and (b) the current language policies at the core of ‘la Francophonie’ have turned towards multilingualism and cultural diversity.
Introduction

The aim of this essay is to show how

• the processes of politicization, bureaucratization, professionalization and the transfer of power at the heart of ‘la Francophonie’ have widened the gap between its policies as a global actor and its roots in the francophone cultures of the world; and

• the current language policies at the core of ‘la Francophonie’ have turned towards multilingualism and cultural diversity.

A key aspect of this essay its examination of two contradictory processes that will be addressed in three stages: first, I will refer to the tenth Summit of ‘la Francophonie’ in November 2004 in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso); second, I will analyse the resolutions adopted at Ouagadougou in the context of strategic changes in the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) since the middle of the 1990s; third, I will leave behind the domain of transnational and intergovernmental relations to analyse how the processes of globalization manifests itself at the local level and what it implies for francophones.

The question that has presented itself, and for which I will attempt to find an answer, is that of the links that exist between ‘la Francophonie’ at the political level and ‘la francophonie’ as a cultural phenomenon. The following hypothesis has been developed: if ‘la Francophonie’, as a network of intergovernmental and transnational relations, influences the language and cultural policies of its member-states in a decisive manner, then paradoxically, the influence of these on the cultural practices of francophone groups/communities have barely been taken into account up until now; similarly, the existing interactions between ‘la Francophonie’ and ‘la francophonie’ have not been investigated sufficiently.¹

¹ In order to better distinguish between the diverse cultural and political realities of ‘la francophonie’, we must distinguish between at least two meanings of the word. The term ‘la Francophonie’ – capital F – is used when speaking, in political and institutional terms, of the current agreement between 63 countries, including 10 observers, constituting the OIF. However, ‘la francophonie’ – lower case f – represents the cultural spaces in the world within which French is prominent or has an influence on linguistic relations, as is the case for the francophone cultures of North America or the Caribbean, the ‘Maghreb’ or ‘black’ Africa. In terms of geographical distribution, notions of ‘Francophonie’ – capital F – and ‘francophonie’ – lower case f – are not identical. A number of states who certainly share specific values with France, but who are not francophone belong to the OIF: Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Moldavia, Poland, Laos, Vietnam, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau as well as new members like Greece, Austria, Hungary, or Armenia. In other countries, such as in Lebanon or Algeria, French has no official status, but plays an important social role. However, for historical reasons, Algeria is not part of the OIF. Many African countries are officially francophone, even though their populations – with the exception of the social elite – contain a very small percentage of French speakers.
The Ouagadougou Summit in November 2004

At the 10th Summit of ‘la Francophonie’ on the 26th and 27th of November 2004 at Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), the OIF admitted seven new members – Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, and Hungary, bringing membership up to 63 states, of which ten have observer status. Since 1991, the OIF has pursued an enlargement policy through which non-francophone states are accepted and thereby has positioned itself as a global actor.

Secondly, the political conflicts in the region cast gloom over the summit. The main issues included of the conflict in the Ivory Coast, followed by the intervention of the French military and the flight of around 8000 French citizens from the area, as well as the tensions between Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast. At this summit, the politicisation of the OIF reached a new dimension.

Thirdly, the participants at the summit voted for the first time for a “10 year strategy framework of ‘la Francophonie’” which focuses on four goals - the promotion of peace, democracy, and human rights as well as support for the dissemination of the French language and cultural diversity.

It is, so to speak, in the nature of ‘la Francophonie’ that the promotion and diffusion of the French language is part of its fundamental programme of language policies. Conversely, the interest in cultural diversity marks a new turn. This shall be addressed below.

Strategic changes at the heart of ‘la Francophonie’

How can the resolutions of Ouagadougou be implemented into the processes of strategic transformation of ‘la Francophonie’? ‘La Francophonie’ reacted to the new situation in the international arena at the end of the 1980s relatively late, only in the mid-90s. The global situation was radically transformed: the fall of the Soviet Union, the collapse of the socialist societies in central and eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War and the resulting impact on numerous Asian and African countries. All of these events led to a political void in a large number of states that would stimulate competition among the Great Powers, which included France and the United States, and would entice them to act. From this point on, which correlated with the Paris summit in November 1991, ‘la Francophonie’ welcomed non-francophone states, such as Romania, Bulgaria and Cambodia, and so began the expansion of its sphere of influence. Later, Albania, Macedonia, Moldavia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia joined. It was therefore in the mid-90s that ‘la Francophonie’ started to reorganize its structure and to redistribute power. How should it prepare for the new division of spheres of influence at the global scale, for the effects of globalisation and neo-liberalism? In 1995, at Cotonou (Benin), the heads of state and government adopted the Projet francophone pour le temps
présent et le siècle à venir to give ‘la Francophonie’ “its full political dimension”. What is understood by that can only be indicated briefly by key words such as rationalisation, efficient management structures, subsidiarity and operationality. In the end, this signifies that ‘la Francophonie’ is transforming itself into an agent of globalisation, by having the ability to intervene actively in the structure of international relations. The Cotonou summit decided, among other things, to elect a Secretary General of ‘la Francophonie’ at the next summit in Hanoi. At the same time, the “development of its full political dimension” implied that the charter of Agency for the French-speaking Community (ACCT) dating from 1970 would be completely revised since it prescribed an attitude of strict neutrality towards all political questions. Functioning up until then as the coordination and power centre, and acting largely in a supranational fashion, the ACCT was in an operational process put under the tutelage of the Secretary General. In 1996, the ministerial conference of ‘la Francophonie’ adopted the new Charte de la Francophonie. At the seventh summit in 1997, in Hanoi, the beginning of the reorganization was made official. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the last Secretary General of the UN, was named Secretary General of ‘la Francophonie’ under the authority of the President of the French Republic, Jacques Chirac (cf. Kolboom 2002: 465).

At the end of 1999, after the Moncton summit, the new guidelines of ‘la Francophonie’ took shape. This consisted of the introduction of its self-definition as a political actor that, in order to stay credible itself, had to also prove itself to be up to the task of promoting principles like democracy, human rights and the rule of law. For almost half of its members, the realization of these principles represents a challenge in that they do not want to be pilloried and forced to respect norms and values representative of the political culture of the North. There, yet again, the divergence of interests and the existing tensions between North and South become very evident. At the same time, the member-states commit themselves to promoting French within the organization and to participate actively in the elaboration of UNESCO’s international convention, which was adopted in 2001, and whose aim is to encourage cultural diversity. “La Francophonie” therefore reflects France’s position, which pioneered cultural diversity within trade negotiations, fighting not long ago for the idea of a cultural exemption from obligations vis-à-vis the European Union and the GATT/WTO, in its geopolitical engagements. It worked with the Lusophonie and Hispanidad organizations to promote, in the framework of cultural dialogue, a strategic alliance for “plurilingualism on an international scale”. This was a reaction against the apocalyptic vision, which France itself propagated, of a world menaced by American English, “the unique language of a residual culture, a vehicle of planetary uniformisation leading to homogenous thinking and acting” (Oillo 2004, 187).

Comparable to the Commonwealth, ‘la Francophonie’ has a very heterogenous composition. Among its members are some of the richest and most powerful states in the world, such as France and Canada who belong to the G8, or countries such as Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Belgium. Many other countries however are among the poorest in the world and are moreover the sites of unimaginable scenes of genocide, economic pillage, and crimes committed by groups of looters or child soldiers. According to the UN Report on Human Development 2004, out of the 35 out of 177 countries with weak economic development, 26 are member-states of ‘la Francophonie’; this includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Cambodia, Laos, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Togo, Chad and the Central African Republic. From a linguistic and cultural point of view, these countries are extremely varied and far from any concept of linguistic homogeneity. The question that ‘la Francophonie’ must now ask itself is the following: is it possible to integrate in one and the same basic conceptual approach ‘la Francophonie’ as a global actor, and, at an adequate hierarchical level, the traditional local cultures and modernity brought by globalisation?

‘La Francophonie’ at the local level

After having examined ‘la Francophonie’ in order to better understand its transformation into a transnational actor of globalisation, I will now focus on language practices and language policies at the local level. The discussion is based on data collected by a team of researchers studying francophone minorities in Canada. We asked ourselves how the francophone communities transformed themselves under the impact of globalisation and neo-liberalism and what being francophone and living as such in Canadian society signifies for French speakers. How does demarcation of the community boundaries take place? How do individuals and communities live along an ethnolinguistic border drawn between anglophones and francophones? What other borders are drawn after social restructuring? What is the impact of immigration on the francophone communities in Canada? I will try to shed light on these questions with the help of two case studies.

> The first study takes us to southern Ontario, in an industrial city of about 45,000, 16% of whom consider themselves francophones. Here, the history of the francophone community goes all the way back to the 1920s. During the interwar period, the metallurgical
and textile industries grew rapidly and attracted workers. Lured by offers of work in southern Ontario, many farmers left their birthplaces in Quebec to earn a living in the heavy industry of the neighbouring anglophone province. When they arrived in the city near Niagara Falls, they formed a relatively homogenous community in an industrial area dominated by anglophones. To this day, this neighbourhood is still called ‘Frenchtown’. The community regrouped itself around its Catholic parish and founded francophone associations. The only chance of maintaining their culture, their language and their community consisted of living in a solid network of institutions that were controlled by the Church and a small social elite consisting of doctors and insurance agents. Life within the metallurgical and textile industries guaranteed for decades the continuity of the local francophone community, up until the region experienced a serious economic crisis in the 1970s. Many people in the community lost their jobs: some looked for work elsewhere, some in the primarily anglophone job market which, being bilingual, they were easily able to access. Others started small businesses to create a francophone job market and to serve francophone clients.

After the recession years in the early 1990s, the city underwent restructuring due to the growth of service sector businesses and new communication and information technologies that included call centres. “Francophones are projected into a global discourse that values their language skills. Thanks to these new sectors, they can now access the dominant market because of their bilingualism, which had not been the case for many years in the industrial sectors” (S. Roy 2003, 368).

What then, are the new challenges faced by francophones and what are the new conflicts for them to resolve? The bilingualism provides them with relatively easy access to employment in call centres aimed at anglophone as well as francophone and on occasion hispanophone clients in North America and elsewhere, as well as access to other new economic sectors. Nevertheless, their language skills are fastidiously evaluated during the hiring process, in the form of partly problematic linguistic tests that are only the beginning of a whole series of selection mechanisms.

For the entrepreneur, the manner with which employees communicate with clients is an integral part of the quality of services rendered. That is why they expect language competencies corresponding to the norms, or at least, close to them in order to be equally competitive linguistically. Even if the business does not define to what normative representations these language skills must correspond, it expects nevertheless that the staff speak English- and French-varieties according to the established norms. The linguistic variation, in this case the French spoken by the francophones in the city examined in the research project, however, only rarely corresponds to the norm expected by the entrepreneurs.

This represents a challenge to the francophone minority of labour origins who live in a majority anglophone environment and feel more at ease with the vernacular French and the code switching than with standard French. “What’s more, bilingualism only seems to be important for jobs in customer service. Despite the fact that French
constitutes an asset in different positions within the company, most of the francophones are confined to the lowest hierarchical level in the company, because it is at that level that the demand for bilingualism is the greatest. […] The preset norms for the company have as a consequence the devaluation of the linguistic varieties of francophones because they produce anglicisms and code switching. They are not apt to show the professionalism of the company. To sum up, the francophone community sees new economic sectors as beacons of hope for its linguistic and cultural reproduction. At the same time, the new social and economic conditions marginalise the francophones who are selected during the hiring process. Those who are hired stay relegated to the lowest hierarchical level of the company. In addition, the value of the linguistic variations in members of the community who do not seem to respond to the new criteria permitting access to the national and international markets is questioned” (Roy 2003: 370-371).

The second case study was conducted in Toronto, the economic metropolis of Canada, a multiethnic city of about 3.5 million inhabitants. In Toronto, the majority speaks English: 2% of the population is francophone, and most of them are bi- or plurilingual. As a minority speaking one of the two official languages of Canada, they benefit – in Toronto as they do throughout anglophone Canada – from a recognized status through linguistic policies that guarantee rights, where they constitute a certain percentage or number of people per municipality.

Toronto is one of the large immigration centres of Canada. A large number of immigrants arriving in Canada, have French in their linguistic repertoire. They come from Europe or Africa, the Caribbean or even Asia and use French language skills to receive access to the job market as well as to institutions and networks, such as the Catholic Church and francophone associations. As francophones, these migrants benefit equally from the rights that the state has accorded to French-Canadians. Within ‘la francophonie’, they try to emancipate themselves by creating a ‘new francophonie’ that, through its history, its linguistic and cultural resources, and its identity of ‘neo-Canadians’ distinguishes itself clearly from the traditional Canadian ‘francophonie’. From the francophones having lived for several generations in Ontario, we often noted a discourse within which they define themselves as being ‘francophone de souche’, that is to say francophones with roots in the region, calling themselves ‘Franco-Ontarians’ or ‘French-Canadians’ and within which they distinguish themselves from ‘neo-Canadians’ coming from outside of Canada. While, it is important for the francophone minority in Ontario to strengthen its minority community networks and status to be able to live in a francophone environment, there is at the same time a growing schism at the heart of this same community concerning cultural and political interests, as well as different francophone discourses.

The number of francophones who regard themselves as members of what they call ‘ethnocultural and racial minorities’ grew continually during the 1990s. As immigrants coming from Algeria, the Congo, Djibouti, Somalia, Haiti, etc., they founded
associations destined at first to facilitate the integration into Canadian society of their newly arrived compatriots. Following a decline in state subsidies for official language minorities, fierce discussions erupted from within the francophone associations. They disagreed among themselves about the distribution of increasingly fewer resources and the power over who could legitimately make decisions over the budget. As a result, a questioning of traditional discourses took place among the francophones, to which other social and minority groups such as artists, feminists, homosexuals and especially the associations of francophones immigrants contributed with insistence (see Labrie/Grimard, 2000).

What does this case study, discussed elsewhere in greater detail (cf. Erfurt, 2000), show?

First, within ‘la Francophonie’ in Ontario, many factions formed to defend their respective interests through different discourses. The following two are in clear opposition:

a) The dominant discourse of the francophones de souche aims at hegemony and homogeneity and pursues, with regard to their own faction, a minimalist strategy: we are Canadian, Ontarian, and francophone. Related to others, especially the ethnocultural and racial minorities, this discourse attempts to undermine their identity and diversity.

b) The ‘disintegration’ discourse of the ethnocultural and racial minorities emphasises their aim to distinguish themselves from the francophones de souche community: we belong but we are different, we seek the recognition of this difference and do not want others to decide for us.

Secondly, the bias of the French language reproduces tensions of the colonial and post-colonial periods at the core of the ethnocultural associations. Even in 2000 or 2005, the French language continues to be a “sociolect” of the African cultural elite; all non-intellectual migrants from the Congo or other African countries continue to be excluded from interactions in French. In Ontario, those who are excluded have English at their disposal as the language of prestige and due to that are not required to socialize in French to receive social recognition. This configuration, provokes on one hand the questioning of the dominant position of francophone elites in these ethnocultural communities. On the other hand, the challenge of French as a language of association has as a consequence that state subsidies coming from funds earmarked for francophone minorities are no longer guaranteed. Congolese and other Africans thus risk losing financial resources that could facilitate their integration.
By way of a conclusion

Let us return to the point of departure, that is to say the relationship between the policies of ‘la Francophonie’ as a global actor and its roots in francophone and non-francophone cultures at the local level. If we consider against this backdrop the social dynamics observed in francophone communities – which I discussed with the help of the two case studies – a great divide is created between francophone elites working in governments of member-states and the institutions of the OIF on one hand, and the civic and cultural life of francophone communities on the other. The OIF represents ‘la Francophonie’ as an interdependent and homogenous entente; this however can only be seen to a limited extent at the local level where francophone cultures interact and perceptions of each other meet. What links the francophones of Ontario or the Seychelles with the Valdôtains, the Moroccans, or even the Madagascans, who all speak French? More often than not, only a very general notion of each other. They hardly define themselves as a community of French-speaking citizens and unless they are part of the limited circle of political actors or elite, they identify even less with the summits, new strategies or programmes of the OIF. The dilemma of the current policies of ‘la Francophonie’ is above all the fact that the existing links between the institutions and political actors on one hand, and between the discourses and communities at the heart of ‘la Francophonie’ on the other, remain vague and under-analysed. In its struggle for transnational recognition, ‘la Francophonie’ has not (yet) added a deeper study of these issues to its agenda. It is important to recognize these new and mostly undiscovered discourses and forms of identification, which with the changes wrought by globalisation are also entering into the consciousness of francophone groups, communities, and states.
Bibliography


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