

## Chapter 7

# The Battleground of Language and the Changing Discourse of *Francophonie*

The territories acquired during the various phases of France's imperial conquests are now largely lost to France, whether this happened in the past, as the consequence of inter-imperial rivalry, as in the case of its overseas territories in Canada and most of its footholds in India, or through the struggles of the colonised peoples themselves, as in the case of Saint-Domingue and much of the later empire. The military defeat of France in Indochina, following the battle of Dien Bien Phu, and its inability to achieve victory in the Algerian War marked two particularly bloody moments in the decolonisation process. Elsewhere in Africa, however, the final act of decolonisation was achieved relatively peacefully (Grimal 1978; Chafer 2002). Indeed, Fanon quotes the president of the newly independent Republic of Gabon, arriving for an official visit in Paris and proclaiming that 'Gabon is independent, but nothing has changed between Gabon and France, everything is the same as before' (Fanon (1961)/1987: 47).

In the first flush of anticolonialism and national liberation, much was made by those who were not so happy with the colonial status quo of the cultural imperialism that was an integral part of colonial rule. The imposition of an alien culture, including one of its most important elements, an alien language, was rightly denounced as part of the system of oppression. Fanon, for instance, wrote of the way in which the acquisition of mastery over the language of the coloniser both stemmed from and reinforced the feeling of inferiority that the colonised came to feel towards their own language and culture, as well as their eventual annihilation (Fanon (1952)/1975: 13–14). In the case of Creole, the inferiority of the language was internalised and many families seeking social advancement insisted on their children speaking French, a phenomenon illustrated in Damas's poem 'Hoquet' (Damas 1937).

However, the issues surrounding the question of language were more complex than its use as a simple tool of cultural oppression. In point of fact, the French colonial education system had not been designed as a simple, straightforward

linguistic and cultural indoctrination. Rather, it entailed the implementation of a twofold policy of social and cultural assimilation for a small minority of the colonised, through education in the French system and the French language, on the one hand, and the marginalisation of the vast majority, by dint of their religion and languages, on the other. As Memmi says in his *Portrait du colonisé*, most colonised children did not go to school and those who did found it, in most instances, an alienating experience (Memmi (1957)/1985: 124). This was particularly the case in terms of language, where the learning of French was a dual-edged weapon. On the one hand, bilingualism was a necessity for communication, culture and progress in a colonial context; on the other, it provoked a cultural catastrophe (Memmi (1957)/1985: 126). Memmi emphasises the specific character of bilingualism in a colonial context. It was not the same thing as bilingualism elsewhere, since the two cultural domains to which the languages gave access were in conflict. Their oppositional hierarchy was reflected in the languages themselves, in which the mother tongue was inevitably deemed inferior (Memmi (1957)/1985: 126).

Memmi's view of language was not a purely functional one, in which it was seen simply as a tool for communication. It entailed much more than that: 'Possessing two languages is not simply a question of possessing two sets of tools, it means belonging to two distinct psychic and cultural domains. And in this case, *the two realms symbolised and articulated through the two languages are in conflict*: they are those of the coloniser and of the colonised' (Memmi (1957)/1985: 126). In the colonial situation, the relations of colonialism impinged on the way the language issue was determined. This meant that bilingualism in this context could not be a diglossia, as in other societies, in which a popular idiom coexisted with a 'pure', 'high' or 'elite' language while remaining part of the same psycho-cultural universe. It also meant that bilingualism could not be seen as a key giving access to the benefits that polyglots enjoy when they have an additional instrument of communication at their disposal, but one that is relatively neutral, implying no emotional baggage. In fact, according to Memmi, what it was, in fact, was a real 'linguistic drama' (Memmi (1957)/1985: 127).

This is all quite applicable to the situation in the Maghreb countries under French colonialism, and Memmi's analysis has to be understood as referring primarily to the Maghreb, even though he frames it in the most general terms. Thus, when he says, for instance, that there is no literature in the colonised's own language (Memmi (1957)/1985: 127), this cannot be taken to be a universal characteristic of all colonised peoples.

However, it remains true that his discussion of the language question did, in fact, set the terms in which this question was to be discussed over the next few decades, though some might say interminably, particularly as far as the question of language choice in literature was concerned. The problem facing the (ex-)colonised writer was posed as one of linguistic and cultural ambiguity. On the one hand, Memmi accepted the need for a liberation and revitalisation of the colonised's own language, but he also recognised that those who opted to write in French might be unable to write in their native tongue or find no audience for such writing. He spoke of the

problems of alienation that might result from this choice, of the difficulties of addressing their work to a predominantly French audience. Whatever the case, it was a choice that was never unproblematic or neutral. Speaking of the French language, he asked whether it was merely a precise and effective instrument or a magnificent treasure chest, 'in which are hoarded the discoveries and contributions of writers and essayists, philosophers and scientists, heroes and adventurers, and where these treasures of the mind and spirit of the French people become transformed into a single mythic narrative' (Memmi (1957)/1985: 129). Fanon had also written about the dual aspects of language, although from a more critical perspective: technical mastery of the syntax and morphology, on the one hand, and the adoption of the culture associated with the language, the 'taking on of the weight of a whole civilisation' (Fanon (1952)/1975: 13–14).

However, there may, indeed, be other possibilities, and debates about language cannot be reduced to this simple choice. For instance, when the Queen of England makes a speech in French with a pronounced English accent, this may not necessarily be because of unavoidable limitations or poor linguistic ability, but perhaps to make it clear that she, and others of her background, have learned French in order to be able to communicate in certain situations, but not in order to identify closely with the French and assume their culture or to try to pass themselves off as French. More than a simple tool of communication, it may also be used in such a way as to become a marker of difference.

In Memmi's own case, he clearly chose the French language because he saw it as a treasure chest. In choosing to write in the French language, Memmi saw his choice as one that encompassed a wider cultural and emotional universe. He chose to become a French writer while at the same time recognising that this inevitably condemned him and other writers in his position to divorce and alienation, for colonised writers were bound, in his view, to call for their mother tongue to become the main language (Memmi (1957)/1985: 129). Thus, he predicted that literature written in European languages in the colonies would not survive long in conditions of independence (Memmi (1957)/1985: 130). Fanon had taken a different view, rejecting the view that black writers would turn against the French language, and, at least as far as the Caribbean was concerned, agreeing with Michel Leiris that Creole was doomed to disappear (Fanon (1952)/1975: 21).

In this, Memmi has been proved wrong. Literature, and particularly literature in French, developed as a key form of expression of the nationalist struggle, including the cultural struggle against imperialism. Moreover, in the Maghreb countries and elsewhere in the postcolonial world, not only has francophone literature survived independence, but it has continued to flourish and represents one of the strongest sectors of growth of literature written in French, in terms of both quantity and quality.

This development was integral to the process of regaining a voice after the stifling of expression under colonialism, described in metaphorical terms by Fanon as petrification. Memmi shared with Fanon the notion of the 'petrification' of the colonised. In his analysis in the *Portrait du colonisé*, not only does this petrification turn them into dehumanised objects, deprived of their own voice and capacity for

action, but it also forces them to live outside time. Without freedom of action, they cannot plan and build a future; moreover, their links to the past and their memory of the past become more and more tenuous with the absence or disarray of the institutions that normally preserve a community's collective memory. They are limited to the present, which, because of this divorce from past and future, is impoverished and lacking in real substance (Memmi (1957)/1985). In Sartrean terms, they become reified.

This process of petrification was graphically illustrated by Mohammed Dib in *Qui se souvient de la mer*, where the inhabitants of the colonised city are literally turned into statues of stone. As his narrator says: 'I took a step and a ton of stones fell upon my shoulders. Rage, humiliation. I have always despised this inert matter, which only needs you to be distracted for a second for it to take over your form' (Dib (1962)/1990: 26). Reification and petrification are linked to the silencing of the population. A rock-like silence descends. The inhabitants become incapable of speech. All they can do is spew out stones.<sup>1</sup> This is in stark contrast to the mounting wave of sound coming up from the underground and the sea, symbolising the growing nationalist movement that will eventually engulf the city. Yet the silencing of the colonised could also be turned back upon the coloniser, when silence becomes a tactic used to express revolt, in a relation where the master is the only one with the right of expression. For instance, sullen silence (*mutisme général*) is used as a tactic by the Algerian workers in *Nedjma* to defy those in positions of power over them as representatives of the colonists' camp (Kateb Yacine (1956)/1981: 14, 46, 50).

In the case of women, this silencing took on its own particular characteristics. Again, Assia Djebar has focused much of her work on giving a voice, or voices, to the many women who have formed part of this '*monde muet*', the 'dumb world' of 'generations of women, women who have been masked, not allowed to be gazed upon or to gaze, treated as "things"' (Djebar 1997: 377). The women themselves 'are seeking a language', as a receptacle and cache for their own potential for revolt and for life (Djebar 1997: 377).<sup>2</sup>

With the regaining of their own voice, the question of the choice of language became a key issue of conflict and debate. For most writers, this was not a matter of deliberate choice. They wrote in the language that came naturally to them as a medium of literary expression as a result of their family upbringing or, more usually, their education. In most cases, it had become normal to articulate certain types of ideas and emotional relations through one language rather than another. When they faced up to the options available, they had recourse to a number of arguments to rationalise the language selected. Kateb Yacine famously referred to the French language as one of the 'spoils of war', although he also turned to the use of colloquial Arabic for his work in theatre. He was clear that his attachment to the French language did not bind him, as an Algerian intellectual, to France, but 'inspired an unquenchable thirst for liberty' (Salhi 1999a: 59). Nabile Farès has argued for writers to make use of all the linguistic instruments they have inherited (Chikhi 1996, 1997). Malek Haddad, on the other hand, abandoned the use of French after independence, seeing it as a 'language of exile' (Bekri 1986; Smail Salhi 1999). The

poet Tahar Bekri has made the point, following Barthes, that every language is in fact a foreign language for the creative writer, who has to create his/her own language (Anoll and Segarra 1999: 292).

For Assia Djebar, the language issue has been a source of ambiguity, in which the use of French may offer the potential for education and liberation, while at the same time acting as a factor of alienation from her maternal roots (Kelly 2004). This takes on a further dimension, given her project to give back their voice to women who have been silenced, when the issue of language choice becomes embroiled with the issues surrounding the possibilities and modalities of representation.

Anxiety regarding language issues is also a large source of inspiration for the literary and theoretical writings of Abdelkebir Khatibi, author of *La Mémoire tatouée* and *Amour bilingue*, amongst many other works (Khatibi 1971, 1983a, b). Khatibi uses the tools and techniques of deconstruction to subvert the hegemonic pretensions of the French language. He attempts to address the problem through the 'deterritorialisation' of the language and the promotion of an alternative way of thinking, in which signs and nuances interact and interpenetrate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This new form of hybridisation or *métissage* is applied to the post-independence scenario of the Maghreb countries, in *Maghreb Pluriel* (Khatibi 1983b), though the significance of his work extends far beyond, to include more generally applicable themes of diasporic exile and alienation, without ultimately resolving the tensions involved (Gontard 1981; McNeece 1993; Hiddleston 2004).

The issues raised in connection with language in the sphere of literature represent, of course, only one aspect of this contentious question. The policies of the newly independent states with regard to language and cultural matters have also formed a key arena of struggle. The relationship to the French language is integral to all the debates on this question, which also brings into play the ongoing relationship of the former colonies to France itself, as well as to the organisations and cultural tendencies linked to the wider notion of *La Francophonie*.

If most of the former colonies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, have opted for a continuation of the dual system operating under colonialism, where French has remained the official language, coexisting with one or more local languages, there have been significant exceptions to this practice, particularly in the Maghreb, where a policy of Arabisation was instituted in all the countries concerned.

### **Creole, *Créolité* and Creolisation**

There has also been some conflict arising from the subordinate status of Creole in the French Caribbean islands, although, as these have not attained independent status, this has taken a different form. The demand for Creole-speaking rights, voiced, for instance, by the Martiniquan député Camille Darsières in the National Assembly on 3 May 1984, has led to measures to safeguard the language and include it in the educational curriculum. In Haiti, Creole was made an official language on the coming to power of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1990. There had been significant work to develop a literature in Creole in Haiti, notably by the poet and playwright

Félix Morisseau-Leroy, who died in 1998 (*Guardian*, 11 September 1998). This endeavour was also taken up elsewhere in the Caribbean, most recently in Martinique by Raphaël Confiant, although he has now abandoned writing in Creole and reverted to French. On a more theoretical plane, the movement associated with Confiant, together with the Martiniquan linguist Jean Bernabé and the writer Patrick Chamoiseau, attempted to extend the defence of the Creole language into a whole new cultural aesthetic, most notably in their manifesto *Eloge de la créolité* (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant 1989). This was a perspective that gave value to all the different strands that made up the complex mosaic of Caribbean identity, or, as the authors of the manifesto were to put it, ‘our primitive soup’, ‘our original chaos’, ‘our mangrove of potentialities’ (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant 1989: 28). It highlighted the way in which Creole society had, from the beginning, formed itself into something new, transcending the binary oppositional divide of slaves and slave owners, and adapting to a new environment, in a cruel, but creative tension (Braithwaite 1978).

The role of the Creole language was crucial in this process in the Caribbean, where the silence imposed on the colonised elsewhere had taken an absolute form. When slaves were transported from Africa and uprooted from their own cultures and language communities, they were often literally deprived of their language and their voice. While communication with the slave owners was usually limited to receiving orders and there were other means to convey these one-way messages, it was also the case that the slaves were unable to communicate with other slaves who did not speak the same language; they could only suffer in silence or, at any rate, in the incomprehension of others. So the creation of Creole not only served a utilitarian purpose related to labour, but it was a real case of refinding a voice after being condemned to silence, what Confiant has called a ‘*mutisme forcé*’ (Confiant 1996: 133). This lends a special character to the language, which already bears the marks of earlier struggles.

The Martiniquan Creole movement had the ambition to transcend the essentialising Negritude associated in the islands with Aimé Césaire (Burton and Reno 1995), though those involved acknowledge their debt to him, referring to Negritude as a ‘baptism, the primal act of the restoration of our dignity’, and claiming to be ‘for ever, the sons of Aimé Césaire’ (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant 1989: 18). Nonetheless, they break with a simple, linear notion of identity, traceable to origins or roots in the African past, which they associate with Césaire, although, in fact, Césaire had also attempted to reinforce ties with the African present through his links with Senghor and others, as well as to develop links with the American black movements. Moreover, there were also elements in Césaire’s thought that were very sympathetic to the notion of hybridity, such as his concept of the concrete universal (see Chapter 2).

The Creole movement was able to build on the notion of ‘*antillanité*’, or a more specific identity, which celebrated the ‘West-Indianness’, argued for by René Ménil in 1964 (Burton and Reno 1995) and, later, by Edouard Glissant (Glissant (1980)/1997, 1990). It is characterised by the acknowledgement of the specificity of

the Caribbean territories and a break, not just with Negritude but also with assimilation into France. For Glissant, it is first and foremost a case of situating these territories where they actually are, in the Caribbean, from a geographical, economic and cultural perspective. This means breaking with a notion of identity, characterised by what he terms a 'double alienation': on the one hand, that arising from being irreversibly 'cut off' from their origins in Africa (*'coupure béante'*); on the other, one that will involve the painful, but necessary, even if improbable, 'breaking off' the relationship with the dreamland of France (*'cassure douloureuse'*) (Glissant (1980)/1997: 26). It means taking stock of the Caribbean realities, to put an end to the illusion of a return to African roots, as well as the impossible utopia of full assimilation within the Hexagon.

Glissant's work developed a polemic against the universal, or 'the same', in other words, the domination of the 'West', imposing what he termed *'l'universel de la transparence'* (Glissant (1980)/1997: 14) in the name of *'le Divers'*, a complex, heterogeneous difference characteristic of the 'annihilated peoples' (*'peuples néantisés'*), unlike the single monolithic essence associated with Negritude, based on the notion of the 'authentic' or the 'pure'. *'Le Divers'* is a much more fluid notion than that of oppositional difference and one in which the processes of interaction and *métissage* have become paramount. Richard Burton defines it as 'a multiplicity of relations, a constellation of forces held in place by a complex process of attraction and repulsion. In contrast to Négritude's obsession with the 'pure', Antillanité makes of le métissage, understood both culturally and, presumably, racially, a supremely positive, indeed constitutive, principle' (Burton and Reno 1995: 147).

There is also a negative side, which Glissant himself has described through the metaphor of weaving. This is not to conjure up a many-textured fabric, as in the case of other writers (see Chapter 6), but to create, through a multitude of processes and intertwined forces, a 'web of nothingness', in which a people becomes trapped and unable to move forward, in spite of a preponderance of intellectuals and educated people.<sup>3</sup>

*Créolité* or *métissage*, in the more positive conception, is understood as a process, or rather any number of interrelating processes, in which a multiplicity of relations and forces are at work. Identity is understood in terms of 'relation', open, multidimensional, polyvalent. Again, as Burton describes it, this type of identity is like an 'archipelago or constellation of signifieds, none of which enjoys primacy over the others and whose unity lies not in the fact of possessing a single source but in the complex of gravitational forces that hold them in relation to each other' (Burton and Reno 1995: 148). It no longer takes single substances or essences as the building blocks of a new hybrid entity, but highlights the processes and the multiple relations in which the complex, heterogeneous forces at play in the diverse interrelate with each other, in a constant movement of renewal and transformation or 'unlimited *métissage*' as 'a combinatoire of diverse cultural materials that can never be halted, fixed or tied down, forever in the process of renewing and transforming itself' (Burton and Reno 1995: 148).

Adopting Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between the type of thinking and identity associated with the metaphor of the single root origin and that associated

with the metaphor of the rhizome and its multiple offshoots (Deleuze and Guattari 1980), Glissant not only broke with the problematic of 'roots', but also associated the new type of thinking with a specifically Caribbean organic metaphor, that of the mangrove swamp. The mangrove, with its dense, tangled forests and free-floating, intertwining and interlaced anarchic root systems, most aptly expressed the new conception of the potentialities of a myriad multi-connected identities and opportunities. Identity was no longer seen in binary oppositional terms, but through a multi-relational set of processes.

The authors of the manifesto took over much of Glissant's perspective on *créolité*. Rather than looking towards a lost past and attempting to reclaim it, the advocates of *créolité* see Caribbean society and culture in its fundamental newness. The different elements of its population in terms of racial and geographical origins, the different cultures and languages have made a heady mix of native American, European, African and Asian influences. However, these have not just been brought together to form a mixture. The process of synthesis, or hybridisation, has in fact resulted in the emergence of a society, a culture and a language that are qualitatively new and radically different from the sum total of all the separate parts that have gone into the brew. This phenomenon is seen in the racial hybridisation of the people themselves, as well as the symbols of their cultural universe, where a notable example is the merging of the Christian Virgin Mary into the pantheon of Hindu gods, brought to the islands by East Indian indentured labourers, where she is worshipped as a new deity, Mariémen, by both Hindus and non-Hindus. The Creole language itself is not just a combination of elements of syntax and lexis from its component languages. These have been transformed in the interaction to form a new language.

However, there was a tension between the view of *créolité* in which diversity, pluralism and hybridity were the key features and which extended beyond the boundaries of *Antillanité* to embrace all Creole societies, on the one hand, and the defence of the Creole language against the encroachment of French, on the other. The advocates of *créolité* were well aware of these dangers, including that of ossifying the language and culture into a fossil to be preserved, and attempted various strategies to mitigate the problem, including seeing the language as an 'ecosystem' (Burton and Reno 1995: 157–58).

The view of Creole in an antagonistic relation to French was particularly strong in Guadeloupe. Dany Bébel-Giseler's *Langue créole, force jugulée* (1976) emphasised the role of Creole as the language of resistance and the core of a repressed cultural identity linking Guadeloupeans to their African origins and was later to describe it as the 'umbilical cord binding us to Africa, to others, to ourselves' (quoted in Burton and Reno 1995: 151).

Those who emphasised the hybridity of the Creole language followed this logic through to recognise that the French contribution to the hybridised language was to be valued, just as the African one was. It was not French in itself that was to be rejected, but its position of hegemony, its claim to universality and the right to be the single language. Given that the islands remain part of France, the language issue has also to be seen in this context. In fact, the influence of the *créolité* movement has



been greater in terms of making the case for *métissage*, rather than through the use of the Creole language and culture as mobilising tools for fighting linguistic and cultural imperialism. As we shall see later in this chapter, there is much in this Creole perspective that which would not sound out of place in the modern discourse of *La Francophonie* or indeed in much postcolonial theory elaborated elsewhere.

The implications of this thinking are not confined to the intellectual sphere, but impinge directly on the definition of political outlooks and potential strategies, not least in the definition of the nation and national identity, where it posits a new type of nationhood, built not on homogeneous linguistic, cultural, religious or ethnic origins, but on a heterogeneous, hybrid identity, which acknowledges all the elements that have constituted the national body. This has been proposed for the very diverse populations of the Caribbean, but also forms a powerful strand of thinking in the Maghrebian context, most notably, as we have seen, in the work of the Algerian writer Kateb Yacine (see Chapter 6). There are also implications for the redefinition of relations with other nations, most notably, the metropolitan power, or the 'West' generally, and the implications for the choice of political strategies.

### **The Battleground of Language - Algeria**

In Algeria, the language question became highly politicised as a result of the particular circumstances and influences through which it acquired its independence. The choice of Arabic as both the official and the national language has been fraught with problems, some of which relate to the diglossia existing between, on the one hand, the classical, written Arabic, which was the language of sacred and learned texts and thus restricted to a particular, educated milieu, and, on the other hand, the specific forms of colloquial Arabic in use in Algeria as an oral, spoken language. This particular diglossia was further complicated by the widespread use of different forms of other languages, such as Tamazight,<sup>4</sup> and, of course, French. Indeed, the number of French speakers in Algeria make it the second francophone nation after France. Moreover, as in many other countries that have experienced different cultural influences, the usage of these different languages and dialects cannot simply be allocated to specific regions, diverse groups of people or social classes. On the contrary, the different linguistic influences impinge on the actual language used to create various hybrid patterns of language use.

During the Algerian war of liberation, this hybridity had been reflected in the radio broadcasts by the Voice of Fighting Algeria from the end of 1956. Arabic, Tamazight and French were all used for these broadcasts and, as Fanon has pointed out, this was actually an important factor in consolidating and unifying the nation.

the use of the Arab, Kabyle and French languages which, as colonialism was obliged to recognize, was the expression of a non-racial conception, had the advantage of developing and of strengthening the unity of the people, of making the fighting Djurdjura area real for the Algerian patriots of Batna or of Nemours. The fragments and splinters of acts ... lost their anarchic

character and became organized into a national and Algerian political idea, assuming their place in an overall strategy of the reconquest of the people's sovereignty. The scattered acts fitted into a vast epic, and the Kabyles were no longer 'the men of the mountains', but the brothers who with Ouamrane and Krim made things difficult for the enemy troops. (Fanon (1959)/1970: 68)

Indeed, Fanon stressed that the French language itself had become transformed through the Algerian struggle:

The French language, a language of occupation, a vehicle of the oppressing power, seemed doomed for eternity to judge the Algerian in a pejorative way. Every French expression referring to the Algerian had a humiliating content. Every French speech heard was an order, a threat or an insult. The contact between the Algerian and the European is defined by these three spheres. The broadcasting in French of the programmes of Fighting Algeria was to liberate the enemy language from its historic meanings. The same message transmitted in three different languages unified the experience and gave it a universal dimension. The French language lost its accursed character, revealing itself to be capable also of transmitting, for the benefit of the nation, the messages of truth that the latter awaited. Paradoxical as it may appear, it is the Algerian Revolution, it is the struggle of the Algerian people, that is facilitating the spreading of the French language in the nation. (Fanon (1959)/1970: 73)

For Fanon, this was a way of 'exorcising' the language. He also saw it as a way of sowing confusion and disarray in the colonial camp, through appropriation of the enemy's linguistic system, particularly when French was used in the service of the nationalist cause, as at the Soummam Conference of 1956, instead of the Arabic used for earlier nationalist congresses.

After independence, however, the state adopted a voluntaristic policy to establish a national language to replace the language of the colonial power. As in France, the notion of a national language was considered essential for the unity of the nation. It was altogether normal for the choice to be Arabic, in spite of the difficulties of educating the nation's children in a standardised version of the language that had not been the 'natural' tongue of anyone. However, as Mohammed Miliani has said, in a balanced analysis of the language question in contemporary Algeria, it is not the introduction of a policy of Arabisation per se, that has caused the problems, but its implementation, in the face of a number of serious difficulties (Miliani 2005).

Not least of these difficulties was the extreme shortage of qualified teachers and the need to import these and their ideologies from other countries in the Arab world. The language thus came with an attached set of values, which were also imbued in the children. Also, the language taught as the national language of Algeria had, in fact, been divested of the specifically Algerian characteristics of Arabic as spoken in

the country. Even more fundamentally, the combination of factors impinging upon the development of the national language have run counter to the natural processes involved in language acquisition. According to Miliani, ‘language policies have run counter to the existing linguistic processes (assimilation, learning cultures, cross-fertilisation), which are nonetheless natural, more complex and far from being completed’. These processes could be seen in terms of creolisation.

Language, as a cultural manifestation (language is culture), has not escaped unscathed from all types of manipulation (political, social or educational). Very often decisions implying the management of languages or dialects have not taken into consideration the parameters rooted in the social reality of the country. Mainstreaming, as it is understood in this country, i.e. the ironing out of all idiosyncrasies characteristic of the Algerian society, has been on the political agenda for decades now. All decisions concerning the management of languages, rarely their development or their promotion, have involved the pruning of any element not concerned with the Arab–Islamic dimension of the country. What was ignored was the richness of the acquired heritage of centuries of contacts, tensions and commerce with other civilisations. The language situation of the country is therefore a tangled one, partly due to the number of dialects and languages in contact, but mostly because of the manipulation directed towards them. Besides, the diglossic dimension of the country (presence of a high and low variety of Arabic: the language of the Koran along with the Algerian dialect) has added to the complexity of the language situation, already problematic with the presence of French–Arabic bilingualism. (Miliani 2005: 133–34)

Far from the intended effect of uniting the nation, one of the consequences of the national language policy, the alienating effects associated with the stifling or devaluation of the ‘natural’ or ‘mother tongue’ under colonialism, has continued in a new form under the post-independence regimes, where the young ‘seem to be torn between the “language of the mother” and the “language of the school”’ (Miliani 2005: 134). In an interview with Jean Du Flot for *Jeune Afrique* in 1967, Kateb Yacine had referred to language as ‘another umbilical cord joining us to our mother, that is, Algeria’ (quoted in Salhi 1999a: 60). In effect, the language policy adopted by the state did not make full use of the potency of this natural link to reinforce national cohesion, but followed rather the French model of constituting national identity through the public education system, acting as the mediator of language acquisition. The opposition of the two conceptions of language as ‘natural’ or ‘mother tongue’ on the one hand, and an acquired, socially mediated, ‘public’ set of tools and identity system, on the other, mirrors the dual notions of nationalism of the maternal and paternal varieties, already discussed in Chapter 1.

Language policy has also extended to the teaching of foreign languages. The logic of the Arabisation policy had relegated French to the status of a foreign language. However, its status was to be further reduced when English supplanted

French as the required foreign language in April 1993 (Ager 1996), in a move that was questioned in the *Année Francophone Internationale* (1994) as a possible concession to Islamic fundamentalists. This interpretation is indicative of the extent to which the language question had become politicised.

As Memmi had pointed out, language is, on the one hand, a vehicle of communication and a tool for the transmission of a certain cultural heritage, as well as an element of that cultural heritage, a storehouse for the riches of particular cultures. However, its capacity to serve as a key factor of national unity cannot be taken for granted. While it is obvious that languages may have a part to play in creating solidarity between those who belong to the same language community, it is less likely that they will be able to achieve this in isolation from other linking factors, particular those that relate to common interests. When a language is under threat, it is an understandable reaction to emphasise its role as a repository of culture. In an article entitled 'Death Sentence', discussing the threat to many of the world's languages, David Crystal quotes Oliver Wendell Holmes to the effect that 'Every language is a temple ... in which the soul of those who speak it is enshrined' (*Guardian*, 25 October 1999). However, this view of language as cultural essence, constitutive of identity, only expresses the passive aspect of language, which is crucially also an active, creative cultural practice. Indeed, language does not exist apart from communication and interaction with others. As Fanon claimed, 'speech is to exist absolutely for the other' (Fanon (1952)/1975: 13).

### Language and Alienation

There are fundamental issues involved here relating to the nature of language. Language is clearly a 'given', a part of the contingent social and cultural reality into which one is born. There is such a thing as a 'natural' language, normally associated with the mother tongue. Nonetheless, it is only partly 'natural', as all language has to be acquired through a process of social interaction. This applies to the 'mother tongue' just as much as to other languages that can be learned, with a greater or lesser degree of choice. For instance, in certain circumstances, bilingualism, or even multilingualism, can be part of the 'given' social and cultural reality. The impact of the 'natural' language theory is thus tempered by the fact of (1) the social acquisition of language; (2) the ability to acquire other languages to a high and even the same degree of fluency; and (3) the contingency which governs the first language acquisition.

Jacques Derrida, himself the product of a complex linguistic background as a result of his birth in a Jewish family in Algeria, discussed some of these issues at length, notably in his book, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* (Derrida 1996). This was a highly personal book, dealing with the problematic issues of language in the Franco-Maghrebian context. The analysis of language as a form of alienation permeates Derrida's text, where he constantly returns to the aphorism, 'Je n'ai qu'une seule langue; ce n'est pas la mienne' ('I only have one language, it is not mine').

The text is thus situated in a critical relation to the position of Khatibi, whose alienation derives from the tensions provoked by his bilingualism. Derrida stresses

over and over again that, unlike Khatibi, he has only one language. Yet this monolingualism is equally the source of alienation for him, as this language is one that is not his. Though he has no other, French is not and cannot be his mother tongue (or natural language). This is because of his situation as a French Jew. More precisely, Derrida locates his alienation in a historical event, the withdrawal of French citizenship from French Jews in 1940, which entailed him being excluded from French schooling (Derrida 1996: 33–35).

Like Glissant, who has also written on the authority, if not authoritarianism, of the French language (Glissant (1980)/1997), Derrida emphasises the tyranny that the French language wielded over him. Language is seen in terms of the law; its rules and structures are there to be obeyed. However, in the colonial context, the tyrannical nature of the French language is reinforced and given an extra dimension through its association with the colonial power. It is integral to the colonial apparatus. It owes its prestige to this, as well as the fact that it is inescapable, although Derrida claims that the authority of language is at the root of all culture and that all cultures are constituted by the ‘unilateral imposition of a language “policy”’ (Derrida 1996: 68).

He experiences the language as an imposition. Forced to study in French, in a school system that did not permit him to learn Arabic or Berber (Derrida 1996: 65–66), he is taken over by the dictates of the language and has to conform to its law. Even if he were inclined to rebel, his questioning and challenging of the French language have to be articulated in the language itself (Derrida 1996: 14). When he ‘surrenders’ to the language, he internalises the law and engages in a form of self-policing. He endeavours to attain the ultimate degree of linguistic purity, to become ‘more French than the French’, while acknowledging the absurdity of what he is doing (Derrida 1996: 80–82).

Yet, as a Franco-Maghrebian, French could never be his mother tongue. It came from elsewhere, along with its rules and norms and laws (Derrida 1996: 72). The question of ‘origins’ appears to have a special importance in this perspective, which is not restricted to language. When he refers to Hélène Cixous (‘this great French Jewish writer of Sephardic Algeria’), he defines her according to her parents’ languages in what amounts to a kind of linguistic determinism – on the one hand, she has inherited the French language from her father, but, at the same time, she is also a German Ashkenazi Jewess ‘through her “mother tongue”’ (Derrida 1996: 113–14, note).

In this, his sympathies appear to lie with the views of the German Romantics, as expressed for instance in Herder’s *The Origin of Language*, seeing language and culture as ‘givens’ (Herder (1772)/1986; see also Heidegger 2004). Perhaps surprisingly, this was also the view of Jean-Paul Sartre, who thought that language was ‘imposed on each of us as a practico-inert’ (Sartre 1969: 59), in much the same way as in the relationship between individuals and other ordered structures, such as institutions and ideologies.

There is an institutional order which is necessarily – unless we are to believe in God the father or an organicist mythology – the product of masses of men constituting a social unity and which at the same time is radically distinct from all of them, becoming an implacable demand and an

ambiguous means of communication and non-communication between them. Aesop once said that language is both. The same is true of institutions. (Sartre 1969: 60; see also Sartre (1943)/1994: 412–13)

Yet Derrida also reacts against linguistic determinism and appears to agree with Emmanuel Lévinas, whom he quotes, that language, even when it is the mother tongue, cannot be seen as the ‘generator or founder of meaning’ (Derrida 1996: 111, note), along with its corollary that meanings can be translated from one language into another. This entails a critique of the essentialising tendency, which has led to the association of certain languages with a religious mission, a role in revealing the sacred, or with a particular world view or mindset, as displayed by those who link rationality or modernity as a fixed characteristic to the French language. The choice of language medium may be associated with a particular agenda when it is associated with a set of political interests. The politicisation of the language issue(s) has therefore to be viewed with caution, without discounting all the multiple factors that impinge upon language practice and policy.

However, language can never be all-embracing or all-determining. Desire, emotions, thought even, all can exist prior to language at a preverbal level and communication may take place without language coming into play at all, or, in a play of words, ‘la langue qui goûte en silence, avant le mot’ (Derrida 1996: 3). Moreover, through translation, language barriers may be transcended and the content of the communication, verbal as well as non-verbal, communicated, regardless of the particular language in which it is articulated. The transfer of meaning is possible across the language barrier; discursive boundaries are not absolute but can be crossed.

At the same time, the alienating potential of language(s) remains. For Derrida, it is almost as though he feels doomed to experience language as an absolute form of translation. In the absence of a mother tongue to act as an originating reference point, all language becomes translation. Yet he also admits that this is not unique to his particular type of monolingualism. All language, as all culture, is, potentially, the source of alienation, since it is always the language or the culture of the other.

The centrality of the language issue remains a characteristic feature of the way in which relations between the components of the former French Empire continue to be articulated. Nowhere is this more crucial than in the evolution of the Francophone movement. The domain of *La Francophonie* has also been one of the key sites for the development of ideas on the postcolonial relationship. The remainder of this chapter looks at the way in which the ideas associated with the *Francophone* movement have evolved over the course of the last forty years, in line with wider developments associated with the relations of France with its former colonies and their relations with each other.

## The Origins of the *Francophone* Movement

The *Francophone* idea was launched in the immediate aftermath of decolonisation in Africa and Asia. It had its origins in an intellectual movement, and was, by and large, the brainchild of a group of intellectuals and political leaders of the newly

independent countries, such as Senghor, Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, Hamami Diori of Niger. The term itself first found expression in the pages of the review *Esprit* in November 1962, in an issue, 'Le français dans le monde', which contained contributions by many of this new political elite, as well as artists and writers, including Kateb Yacine. Senghor set the tone, arguing for the creation of a community based on the common French language and culture. This notion of a *Francophone* community had already been defined by the geographer Onésime Reclus (1837–1916) in his book *France, Algérie et colonies* (1880), but it was only with its adoption by Senghor that it began to acquire its present significance.

At first sight, this might seem a response to decolonisation very much akin to the development of the British Commonwealth movement and institutions. However, it differed in significant respects. The Commonwealth came into being as a result of a clear strategy to maintain institutional ties between Britain and its former dominions, such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, retaining the Queen as the head of the Commonwealth, and indeed head of state in the case of these dominions. It was primarily to provide a new constitutional framework for political and economic relations between Britain and these countries and Britain played a leading role within it from the outset, and continues to do so. It later evolved to include the colonies of Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, which achieved independence in the post-war period – countries that became known as the 'New Commonwealth', a euphemism for 'black' to distinguish them from the 'white' dominions of the 'Old Commonwealth'. The fundamental remit of the Commonwealth remains defined by this structural relationship, although idealistic notions of community are not absent from it and have played a significant role at certain moments of its history.

Unlike the Commonwealth, the notion of a *Francophone* community was founded in the first instance on the basis of the common French language and culture, whereas, for the Commonwealth, cultural considerations, while not entirely lacking, have always been of secondary importance and have certainly never been articulated in terms of a single common culture or even language. This is not to say that there are no common cultural factors. Indeed, the English language plays a very important role and sport, particularly cricket, has been a privileged site for the celebration of commonly held values and a shared history. However, this communality is not the basis for the institutional apparatus of the Commonwealth, in which the role of Britain has been central to the enterprise from the beginning.

What was striking about the birth of the *Francophone* idea is that it came, by and large, from the colonised themselves, although critiques have been integral to its development from the early days (Kazadi 1991; Ager 1996). In the first years, France had very little part to play in the development of the notion, although it was articulated in terms of the universal humanism of French Enlightenment philosophy, which had, as we have seen, formed a major strand in the rationalisation of French colonial policy and practice.

One of the reasons for France's lack of involvement was almost certainly the failure of its earlier attempt to refound the empire on a basis that was more akin to

the British Commonwealth (Deniau 1983). In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the empire was renamed the Union française, and the relations between the colonies and the metropole redefined in the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, established in 1946. These measures, along with other reforms, were widely seen as mere tinkering and as too little, too late, and did little to stem the nationalist tide surging forward in the colonies. Like the later version of a French Community (Communauté française), offered to the colonies as an alternative to independence in de Gaulle's 1958 referendum, it was an attempt to keep the ideal of assimilation alive, to maintain the position that the future of the colonial peoples was as part of a wider French community. Although most accepted the proposal, with the notable exception of Sékou Touré's Guinea, which opted for full independence, it was not long before, one by one, the others followed suit and asked for independence. The Community, like the earlier Union, and indeed the empire itself, had been presented as alternatives to independence, as a means to stave off the end of the colonial link, unlike the British Commonwealth, to which the colonies gained accession after independence. It is hardly surprising that it would, under the circumstances, be some years before France would be able to take any significant role in the development of *Francophonie*.

It was the French language that provided the basis for the definition and ethos of the new *Francophonie*. Senghor's definition was 'an intellectual or spiritual community whose national, official or working language is French' (*Esprit* 1962). However, in less prosaic terms, the new *Francophone* community was also inspired by an idealistic vision of the brotherhood of man, which would replace the relations of domination between coloniser and colonised, though these were hardly alluded to. The discourse of the founding fathers was marked by a chorus of optimistic utterances, ranging from wishful thinking to spiritual mysticism. Senghor waxed eloquent about 'this integral humanism which is weaving its threads around the globe, this symbiosis of dormant sources of energy arising from all the continents, all the races, which are awakening to their shared warmth' (*Esprit* 1962).

In the case of Senghor, in particular, the notion was specifically cast in the mantle of universalism, counterbalancing his own earlier promotion of Negritude and laying himself open to the criticism that he had reduced the latter to mere exoticism. The key factor was the notion of the universalism of the French language.<sup>5</sup> This was not seen primarily as a practical matter, facilitating communication with the wider world, though this was certainly part of the attraction. More than this, French was not just seen as an 'international' language. It was imbued with particular characteristics, which gave it an almost venerated status. It was linked, by association, to the political ideals of Enlightenment philosophy, in terms of the universal Rights of Man to freedom, liberty and equality. Or, as Xavier Deniau expressed it: 'The French language transcends the framework of linguistic categories to become the mystical ferment of ideals that are specifically French and particularly that of freedom (Deniau 1983: 9).

For Bourguiba, speaking to the Assemblée nationale du Niger in December 1965:



for you, as for us, the French language constitutes a special addition to our cultural heritage, enriches our thinking, expresses our action, contributes to the forging of our intellectual destiny and to making us into fully fledged human beings, belonging to the community of free nations ... the criteria are above all philosophical, based on the great ideals of the France of 1789, aspirations of Humanity going by the names of 'liberty, dialogue, mutual support'. (quoted in Deniau 1983: 17)

Similarly, for Edgar Faure, *Francophonie* could be nothing more or less than a '*libérophonie*' (quoted by Deniau 1983: 21–s22). Speaking in 1993, the Lebanese Minister of Culture and Higher Education was still making the link between these universal humanist values and the French language: 'If Lebanese maintain French as a second language, while English is the world economic language and has become practically universal, it is because *Francophonie* is a social choice: a choice for freedom, justice, fraternity and democracy' (quoted in Ager 1996: 27).

Yet the claims to the special status of the French language were not just based on its association with Enlightenment ideals. There has also been a long-standing school of thought that situates the superiority of the language in terms of its own supposed characteristics of clarity and rationality, based on the notion underlying Rivarol's well-known claim that 'if it is not clear, then it is not French'. From here it is but a short step to claim, as many have done, that it is the specific character of the language itself that has contributed, or indeed generated, the quality of French thought and culture. Georges Pompidou, for instance, claimed that 'it was because of the French language that France stood out in the world and was not a country like any other' (quoted by Deniau 1983: 21). De Gaulle also proclaimed the special status and universality of the French language: 'France has always ploughed with passion the furrow of intelligence and offered the entire earth a rich harvest; it is also true that she has given the world a language that is perfectly well-suited to express the universal character of thought' (quoted by Deniau 1983: 21).

The claim to the universality of the French language was, in fact, beset with difficulties. The most fundamental issue related to the contradictions between its status as a particular language, associated with a particular nation-state and territory, or rather territories (when one includes the wider French-speaking world), and the role wished upon it as a vehicle of universality. Moreover, any argument in favour of a universal role for the language had to contend with the fact that it had already been tainted, as a result of its close association with colonisation and the *mission civilisatrice*. Jaurès, for example, had advocated an important role for the Alliance française and had stressed that 'particularly for France, the language is the necessary instrument for colonisation' (quoted by Ager 1996: 12).

There were other problems associated with the original, idealistic, universalist discourse of the founding fathers of *Francophonie*. One key notion of Enlightenment modernism, history, was strikingly absent from the discourse. On the practical level, the reasons for this were understandable, given the roots of *Francophonie* in the history of colonialism and the often violent process of decolonisation. However, there was also

another dimension to the absence of history. *Francophonie* was not so much presented as a project to be achieved, 'a permanent cultural struggle' along the lines envisaged by André Malraux, but rather as an already existing community. This community was bound together not by a shared, if conflictual, past, but rather through common cultural and linguistic ties, which implied a wider common philosophy. As an ideal, it was already embodied in this rather grandiose version of paradise on earth.

It will be clear from this type of discourse that *Francophonie* was characterised, in the main, by an abstract universalism, on a different plane from the economic and political realities facing its members. This abstract nature was further compounded by the elimination of geography as a significant element in its formulation. Habib Bourguiba, for instance, defined *Francophonie* as an ideal community 'beyond politics or geography' (quoted by Deniau 1983: 17).

Furthermore, in the early stages, there was no attempt to use the *Francophone* movement to establish new types of political relations between France and its former colonies through the creation of a new institutional framework for managing those relations. Indeed, relations with the former colonies were conducted on a strictly bilateral basis.

This can be explained in part through the reluctance of France herself to become involved in the movement. This reluctance has been attributed to a desire to deflect charges of neocolonialism on its part, as well as the fact that the perceived failures, already mentioned, with the short-lived historical experience of the *Communauté française* had no doubt made the French wary of any further attempts to recast the empire into a new type of institutional configuration. However, explanations that are more convincing are to be found elsewhere. The bilateral aid and cooperation policies that France pursued allowed it to exert greater control over its relations with the African countries in particular, in the economic, political and indeed military domains, in accordance with its own perceived interests. Indeed, France's involvement in Africa following formal decolonisation did not show any evidence of disengagement, but a very active hands-on commitment. The interests of France and *Francophonie* were not to be confused. As Dennis Ager has said, 'Africa is still central to France, if not to *Francophonie* – and the distinction is worth making' (Ager 1996: 191).

In the absence of France, it was left to the Canadians to provide some of the impetus for a more concrete economic, scientific and technical cooperation within a multilateral framework, through the development of the ACCT, the Agence de coopération culturelle et technique, now known as the Agence intergouvernementale de la Francophonie (Mworoha 1995; Ager 1996; Majumdar 2002).

In spite of the formal absence of France in a leadership role, its presence was nonetheless assumed as integral to the notion of *Francophonie*. The linguistic and cultural ties that supposedly bound the francophone countries together were, after all, inextricably linked to France itself, as the source of that language and culture. While maintaining their distance from *Francophonie* as such, representatives of the French state and political class recognised and promoted the value of the French language, not just as a cultural vehicle, but also with wider policy advantages, marking a clear distance between France, together with those in the French-speaking orbit, and the superpower polarisation of the Cold War period.

## The Evolution of *Francophonie*

It was not too long before it became evident to French policymakers that there might be some benefits to be gained from a more active participation in the development of *Francophonie*, although this did not necessarily mean replacing the focus on bilateralism. Counted as one of these benefits was the perception of *Francophonie* as a means through which France could exist on the world stage independently of Europe. Thus, the French began increasingly to take the initiative in respect of *Francophone* developments, culminating in the first *Francophone* Summit called at Versailles by François Mitterrand in 1986. Franco-African summits involving France and francophone African countries had taken place since 1973 and would continue at first annually and then biannually from 1988. In contrast, the Versailles Summit was the first summit to be organised under the aegis of the *Francophone* movement. It was followed by the Quebec Summit in 1987 and thereafter has been a regular biannual event, although the 2001 Beirut Summit was postponed until 2002, following the events of 11 September in New York.

There was also prestige to be gained and prestige has always formed an important element of French ideologies of power, as Edward Said pointed out (Said 1993: 204). Thus, if France could no longer vaunt the possession of a considerable empire overseas, it could now take up the discourse of *Francophonie* to proclaim, in what might be considered more acceptable terms, the presence of the French language and culture 'on all five continents'.

The value of *Francophonie* as a useful counterweight to American global power was more and more highlighted in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The battle lines were drawn up in the domain of culture, where the defence of the French language as a world language was promoted to counteract the threat of the spread and growth in importance of the English language (Crystal 1997), but also the global dominance of Americanised mass culture. Increasingly, the alarm was sounded to warn of the threat posed by the homogenising tendencies of the influence of American consumerism in terms of film, fashion, food and drink on the rest of the world. The French language and culture were not only portrayed as under attack and therefore to be defended; it was the same French language and culture that were also heralded as the weapon for the counter-attack against the culture of Disney, Coca Cola, Levis and McDonalds. Although the main cultural threat was that facing France itself, where the American influence had become deeply implanted by the end of the 1980s, *Francophonie* was seen to provide useful allies in this cultural struggle, which replaced to a large extent the more direct opposition to American political and military supremacy that had dominated Gaullist foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s.

However, the struggle itself was to show up the basic flaw in the universalist pretensions of the French language and culture, which were in danger of revealing their own particularity when the fight inevitably expressed itself in terms of the defence of the particular against the dangers of Anglo-Saxon global uniformity.

Although the struggle was conducted in terms of a defence of culture, the real battle lines were in fact being drawn up on the planes of the economy, finance and politics, where France was attempting to assert global influence against the US,

particularly in the spheres of African and Middle East policy, as well as in the conflict over matters of control in international bodies, such as the UN and NATO. For instance, the French engaged in unsuccessful efforts to block the selection of Kofi Annan as UN Secretary in December 1996, against the backing of the US and Britain. On the level of policy, differences and disputes related to Africa and the Middle East have erupted over many years and over a variety of specific issues. For instance, George Moose, as American Under-Secretary of State in charge of African affairs, attempted to play down the tension between the two powers in the course of a visit to Paris in January 1997, notably in relation to the situation in the Great Lakes region and Zaire (*Le Monde*, 17 January 1997). The culmination of these battles was to come when the differences over the crisis and impending invasion of Iraq erupted in spectacular fashion and overt political terms in 2003, with the French refusal to support the invasion of Iraq and the hysterical American reaction to the ‘cheese-eating surrender monkeys’, to quote a phrase first coined by the cartoon character, Bart Simpson, but widely taken up, along with the boycott of French produce. Until that point, the apparent play-off had been restricted, at least as far as the spectators were concerned, to the arena of language and culture, even though the most important underlying issues in the fight for global influence were situated elsewhere.

### **The Defence of Cultural Identity**

Nonetheless, the cultural struggles were not devoid of significance. In choosing to make a stand on the question of culture, particularly in the field of the audio-visual media with the defence of the ‘cultural exception’ at the time of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) negotiations as part of the Uruguay round of 1993, a fight had been engaged, not least because the chances of winning it appeared to be realistic ones and a victory here had great symbolic value, going beyond the actual terms of trade (Godin and Chafer 2004). The recognition of the notion of the ‘cultural exception’ as a special case, for which the normal rules prohibiting state subsidy were not applicable, and which allowed the establishment of quotas favouring domestic production over imports, opened up a breach in the overarching regulatory system of the global market, creating a space for French specificity and influence to develop or, at the very least, to hold their ground.

This was the culmination of a period of struggle to maintain the singularity of French culture in the face of what was portrayed as the spread of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ hegemony across the globe. During this time, the French had come to realise the value of the francophone community as a vital resource in the defence of the French language and culture against the domination of English. In all respects, the ‘French way’ was promoted as the polar opposite of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’, which was a label used to suggest a ‘non-existent, monolithic, imagined identity, represented as a united, dominating presence’ (Ager 1996: 171). At times, this appeared to amount to a form of paranoia, with talk of an international plot against *Francophonie* (*Etat de la Francophonie dans le monde* 1994). Underlying the approach to the issues at stake was a dualistic perspective, in which there was a binary opposition between two cultural

protagonists. The French hoped to mobilise the resources of the worldwide francophone community in a straight contest between France as the defending champion of its universal language and, in the other corner, the rampant challenger, Anglo-Saxon hegemony, threatening to usurp its title.

However, this was always a phoney war. Not only was the supposed challenger unaware that the fight was on and so was oblivious, if not dismissive, of the so-called enemy champion. It was also the case that it was becoming increasingly clear to the French and francophone lobby that, in spite of their success in defending the *exception culturelle* at the time of the GATT negotiations, there was little likelihood that the fight would succeed in turning back the tide sweeping English to the fore as the major international language, not to mention the universal popularity of the icons of American popular culture. A new approach was needed, which involved changes in the discourse of the *Francophone* movement. Thus, during the 1990s, there was a series of subtle shifts.

First, the French language began to be portrayed, not just for its universality, but more specifically for its quality and appeal to the elites of the French-speaking world as the 'language of culture', by which was meant a highbrow, intellectual culture, far removed from the popular mass culture of the 'Anglo-Saxons'. This approach was notably summed up by François Mitterrand's famous dismissal of Eurodisney in 1992 as not his '*rasse de thé*'.

Secondly, the French language and culture, together with the Francophone movement began to be portrayed, not just for their own inherent qualities, chief of which had been the claim to universality, but also as the best means available for the defence of cultural diversity. Then, *Francophonie* was increasingly represented not just as the champion of the French language and culture alone, but as a major global site for the defence of cultural and linguistic diversity worldwide. No longer was it a case of French against English, or even French (high) culture against American dumbing-down. *Francophonie* now adopted a more pluralist line, in which the right of all languages and cultures to exist was promoted, in a celebration of multilingualism and cultural diversity, referred to by Stélio Farandjis as '*Francopolyphonie*' (Ager 1996: 58). This new turn had been heralded by the tone of the *Francophone* Summit held in Mauritius in 1993, which proclaimed as its slogan the need for 'Unity in Diversity'. Commenting on this development, an article in *Le Monde* was titled 'Pour le salut de la diversité' (*Le Monde*, 15 October 1993). Jacques Toubon, as Minister for Culture and *Francophonie* declared:

the use of the French language which our peoples have in common provides us with the means to refuse the increasing uniformity of the planet which is being accomplished in accordance with the Anglo-Saxon model under the cover of economic liberalism ... There can be no true liberty without a respect for cultural and linguistic identities, the kind of respect that exists within *La Francophonie*. (*Le Monde*, 15 October 1993)

There is no doubt that this shift was also partly in response to criticism from within *Francophonie*, that the emphasis on the French language obscured the real linguistic diversity that existed in its member countries. This point had already been taken on board at the 1989 *Francophone* Summit held at Dakar (Ager 1996). Not all were in agreement, however, with this watering down of the central importance of the French language. For some, their own linguistic identity was intimately connected to the wider issues surrounding the status of the French language in the world at large. These concerns in fact led a group of Quebec intellectuals to issue an appeal to France to do its utmost to maintain the position of French, to coincide with the Mauritius Summit (*Le Monde*, 15 October 1993).

However, following on from this, the language criterion for membership was considerably watered down, particularly as the scope of *Francophonie* was extended to bring in members from Eastern Europe, whose francophone credentials were fairly tenuous. The current *Charte de la Francophonie* does not spell out any language criterion for membership of the organisation.

Yet, while the new pluralism of the *Francophone* discourse has its undoubted attractions, as the steady increase in the number of its members confirms, there are, at the same time, serious flaws in the arguments put forward and problems with its credibility.

First, the depiction of Anglo-Saxon as a homogenised monolith of language and culture fails to take into account many of the complex and diverse realities operating within the English-speaking world and particularly within American society, which also impinge on the global influence of that culture. The globalising, homogenising effects of the economic phenomenon of the spread of the system of global capitalism have been displaced in this discourse into another realm, the realm of culture, submerging the very real diversity that actually operates in that culture and the ideologies and discourses of difference (for instance, in the areas of race, gender, sexuality) that articulate this diversity. Thus, while it is certainly true that the cultural influence of the USA, in terms of a dominant mass popular culture, has extended to the far reaches and hidden backwaters of the planet, along with its branded products and lifestyle, its Hollywood characters and imaginary universe, it is equally true that the forces subverting and challenging the dominance of this particular set of cultural forms and values are also available for export.

If globalisation is used as an all-embracing concept stressing the unity of the contemporary world on the economic but also on the cultural plane, it has, at the same time, been accompanied by the rapid and radical transformation of communications into a planetary system that is readily accessible and instantaneous. This communications revolution, while no doubt constituting a major driving force propelling the planet towards uniformity, is also a potent means for the subversion of the uniformisation process, presenting opportunities to bypass the control of monopolies up to a point.

It is clear that Francophonie does not have a monopoly on the defence of pluralism and diversity. Moreover, when this discourse is taken up by France, its force of conviction can be severely undermined by France's own record in this connection.

Far from encouraging diversity in its own society, France has clung to a political ideology that posits the indivisibility of the Republic and has ruthlessly suppressed any challenge to its national political, social and cultural identity.

As recently as 1992, there was a heated debate in France concerning the insertion of a language clause into the Constitution, as an amendment to Article 2, and the wording of this clause, when 'French is the language of the Republic' was to be replaced by 'The language of the Republic is French' (Wilcox 1994; Ager 1996). There has been a long history of French interventionism with regard to language policy, which is seen as a legitimate preoccupation of the state (see Chapter 1). Notable recent attempts to control and police the use of the language through legislation have included the *Loi Toubon* of 1994, making French the compulsory language of all aspects of public life in France (Ager 1996; see also Judge 1993). In addition, official bodies (such as the Académie française, the Haut Conseil de la langue française, the Délégation générale à la langue française, various ministerial departments) have been established by the state since the seventeenth century to carry out the centralised codification and policing of the norms and rules of the language and the control and defence of the linguistic purity of the nation's language usage, as well as the surveillance of linguistic borders and the repulsion of infiltration and incursions by 'foreign' languages.

The incorporation of minority and regional languages as part of the linguistic heritage of the nation has been staunchly resisted, notably through the public education system from the end of the nineteenth century. Schooling was a key element in promoting and enforcing linguistic uniformity across the nation. In June 1999, Jacques Chirac refused to allow the modification of the French Constitution that would have been necessary for France to ratify the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, to which it is a signatory (*Le Monde*, 25 June 1999), and it is only belatedly and with singular reluctance that France has given any sign of extending the defence of 'cultural diversity' to France, at least as far as the 'regional' languages are concerned, with the *Assises Nationales des langues de France*, organised on 4 October 2003 (*Le Monde*, 3 October 2003). This is the same Jacques Chirac who made a speech in Hungary in 1997 in which he appealed for a worldwide mobilisation of what he called the 'militants of multiculturalism' to safeguard the diversity of the world's languages and cultures against their stifling by a 'single language' (see [www.ambafrance-cm.org/html/france/langue.htm](http://www.ambafrance-cm.org/html/france/langue.htm)).

In October 2004, the parliamentary committee on the prevention of crime, chaired by UMP (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire) *député*, Jacques-Alain Bénisti, published their interim report. One of the conclusions of the Bénisti report was that bilingualism was harmful to children from a non-French family background. It was alleged that it not only contributed to poor performance at school and prevented their integration, but was also a major cause of the development of criminality. The recommendation was that families should communicate only in French in the family home and this should be backed up by monitoring and visits from social workers and medical personnel ([www.afrik.com](http://www.afrik.com), 28 February 2005).

Given this background, it is hardly surprising if a certain cynicism is the inevitable reaction of many to the fine rhetoric in support of cultural diversity and linguistic pluralism.

### **La Francophonie Today**

In a further shift at the end of the 1990s, the impetus was given to provide *Francophonie* with a permanent political, institutional framework, which it had hitherto eschewed. In line with the decisions taken at the Hanoi *Francophone* Summit in 1997, an umbrella organisation, the OIF (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie), was established, along with the post of Secretary-General, with the former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as its first incumbent. Since then, Abdou Diouf of Senegal, has taken over as the second to fill this post. While retaining the emphasis on the cultural dimension to cooperation between its members, it now embraced a more political agenda, which also made economic development one of its stated goals. For instance, for the 2004 *Francophone* Summit held in Ougadougou, the theme was one of 'sustainable development'. In the current discourse associated with the complex of *Francophone* organisations, there remains a strong current of idealism, in which the goals of democracy, human rights and fraternity remain paramount themes (Judge 1999: 3).

Thus, while retaining a core membership drawn from the former colonies, the new *Francophonie* has become a more diverse club of nations, all of which are joined together by a desire to align themselves within the French sphere of influence, for historical or other reasons. For France itself, the value of the club is now proved. While certainly not the sole, or even the main, vehicle of French postcolonial and international policy, it represents a useful adjunct as another forum through which France may assert its influence on the world stage.

It remains an attractive option for both old and new members, offering countries, and indeed subregions, access to an alternative forum for lobbying and support, material help in the form of cooperation and exchange in the educational, cultural and technological sectors, aid with funding for specific projects and some protection against bullying by other powerful groupings or powers.

To a large extent, it has taken on the role of defender of the weak and powerless, in an endeavour, which seems at times to have the mission of providing alternative global leadership, somewhat to the Left of the United Nations, at least in terms of its rhetoric. The tone was set by the slogan adopted for the Cotonou *Francophone* Summit of 1995 and which appeared on the official French website for *Francophonie*: '*Francophonie* will be subversive and imaginative or it will not survive!' ([www.france.diplomatie.fr/francophonie](http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/francophonie)). The promotion of *Francophonie* as a radical, indeed subversive, alternative has been an essential part of its appeal. This appeal is still, as at the beginning, largely founded on ideas and values, even though the content has significantly changed. Thus, the importance of *Francophonie* as a counter-discourse at a global level needs to be recognised. The precise form and content of the discourse are liable to change. For instance, at the time of the Beirut



Summit of 2002, it was made clear that *Francophonie* was proposing dialogue and pluralism, in the face of the events of 11 September 2001, to avoid ‘intolerance and isolationism’, as well as the risk of falling prey to ‘the aberrations of hegemony’.<sup>6</sup> Huntington’s thesis of the *Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington 1996), which appeared to have found favour with the American administration, was particularly rejected by Jacques Chirac, who invited the participants to become the pioneers of the dialogue of cultures (*Le Monde*, 25 October 2002). The target of this discourse was clear, if not spelled out.

The *Francophone* discourse is, of course, more subtle and infinitely more attractive. Whilst the priority that it accords to culture downplays the real divides in an ideological level pegging that does not provide an adequate explanation of global reality, it nonetheless stresses cultural diversity as a factor in economic and political cooperation and development – working towards the resolution rather than the exacerbation of conflict. Moreover, it differentiates itself from Huntington’s rather simplistic view of civilisations as closed and homogeneous, linked to a conception of identity as an absolute given, unchanging and non-negotiable, for which he has been much criticised. Thus, the *Francophone* model promotes a conception of culture that is open and hybrid, existing in a complex interrelation with the cultures of other societies.

*Francophonie* was also officially described as a ‘postcolonial concept’ on the summit website, further emphasising its radical potential.<sup>7</sup> Yet, it was somehow ironic that this happened only in 2003, when *Francophonie* had started out as an expression of a postcolonial perspective, in other words, the continuation of colonial relations in a new form. Moreover, it happened at a time, when the shift away from postcoloniality has intensified, with the extension of the organisation and movement to countries that have never been colonies of France, particularly those in Eastern Europe.

As has so often been the case, Algeria has been the exception amongst the former colonies, this time in its attitude to *La Francophonie*. Algeria refused to join because of fundamental ideological disagreements with its founding rationale, i.e. the primacy of the French language, as well as because of the political choice to keep its distance from the former colonial power and a body whose *raison d’être* has appeared to be based on the ties and relations established by colonialism. However, the very distinctiveness of the relation between Algeria and *Francophonie* can also provide insights into the way in which the body has evolved.

Algeria, which is the country with the second largest number of francophones after France, has been slowly moving towards a less hostile stance towards *La Francophonie*. The Algerian President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, attended the 2002 *Francophone* Summit in Beirut at the personal invitation of the Lebanese President, Emile Lahoud (*Liberté*, 23 January 2003). He also attended the 2004 Summit in Ougadougou, at the invitation of the Burkina Faso President, Blaise Compaoré, where he made a speech on 26 November in a closed session ([www.sommet-francophonie.org/ouga2004](http://www.sommet-francophonie.org/ouga2004)), although the text of his talk, in which he linked the new agenda of the OIF to the development policies of Algeria, has been published at the website of the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs ([www.mae.dz](http://www.mae.dz)). At the time of writing, it does, of course, remain to be seen whether Algeria will take the plunge and

become a member (*L'Expression*, 22 November 2004; *Quotidien d'Oran*, 27 November 2004; www.afrik.com, 26 November 2004; *El Watan*, 27 November 2004).

If it does, it will not be the only body to which it turns. Algeria is learning to play its cards skilfully, with a whole array of partnerships and alliances being developed to counterbalance the influence of any one of them. As in the case of France, membership of *La Francophonie* is rarely the sole option. Member countries mediate their access to the wider, international sphere through a number of bodies, including the United Nations and appropriate continent-wide or regional blocs, such as the European Union, the African Union, the Arab League and so on. These issues are further dealt with in Chapter 11.

## Notes

1. La ville s'était noyée dans le basalte ou plus exactement que le basalte l'avait recouverte. Le résultat aussi fut que les mots renoncèrent à être des paroles et se changèrent en certaines choses qui ressemblaient à des galets avec lesquels nous allâmes cogner partout, essayant de sonder jusqu'où allait la profondeur des strates. Il se propagea ainsi une musique qui ne manquait pas d'une curieuse douceur mais qui se pouvait facilement confondre avec les pas de la taupe si l'on ne jouissait pas d'une ouïe exercée – et même les coups de boutoir de la mer qui régnait beaucoup plus bas. La voix devenant un sens inutile, certains d'entre nous, lorsqu'ils l'eurent constaté, tremblèrent de rage, serrèrent les mâchoires et connurent l'impuissance. Les murs ne cessaient d'improviser des nœuds inextricables pendant ce temps et, sur beaucoup, de s'enlacer sans souci de ce qu'il advenait de leurs captifs. La colère tourna, s'égara, revint sur ses pas dans ces boyaux et s'avéra inutile en fin de compte. Pourtant, et c'est le plus étonnant, nous ne voulûmes pas croire à tant de cruauté. J'étais du nombre, je le reconnais.

Rentrant à la maison, durant ces journées occupées par d'interminables, d'imprévisibles marches dans le labyrinthe, j'étais aussitôt soumis aux questions de Nafissa et des autres femmes. Je gardais le silence ou grognais n'importe quoi; – les mots ne me sortaient plus. Forcément, mon gosier n'était plus apte à former des sons mais exclusivement des pierres. Elles me harcelaient toutes cependant, comme elles harcelaient les autres hommes, ne sachant pas à quoi elles s'exposaient: j'étais prêt à vomir un torrent de pierres. (Dib (1962)/1990: 18–19).

2. A propos de l'Algérie et dans son sillage, 'le monde muet' serait pour moi non seulement celui des choses (de la crevette, de l'orange, des figues ...), mais aussi, depuis des générations, celui des femmes, masquées, empêchées d'être regardées et de regarder, traitées en 'choses'.

Or, dans la tourmente et de la dérive actuelles, les femmes cherchent une langue: où déposer, cacher, faire nidifier leur puissance de rébellion et de vie dans ces alentours qui vacillent. (Djebar 1997: 377).

3. 'Il s'agissait de pister à force les processus multiples, les vecteurs enchevêtrés qui ont à la fin tissé pour un peuple, lequel disposait de tant de cadres et d'individus "formés", la toile de néant dans laquelle il s'engluait aujourd'hui' (Glissant (1980)/1997: 14).

4. After much agitation over many years, the recognition of Tamazight as one of the languages of Algeria has been grudgingly agreed, but its actual implementation was still stalled in 2005 over the issue of whether there should be a national referendum on this or whether it could be decided by parliament, amongst other political reasons.
5. On the universality of the French language, see Fumaroli 1992.
6. Après les événements du 11 septembre 2001, ce dialogue est impérieux face aux risques d'intolérance et de renfermement. Afin d'éviter les dérives hégémoniques qui en résultent, la Francophonie se doit d'aménager un nouvel espace de concertation et de plaider en faveur d'une approche ouverte et plurale de la culture et des civilisations. Le dialogue est la seule possibilité de fonder une société internationale où les identités les plus diverses s'enrichissent au profit de chacun et de l'ensemble.  
Favoriser une cohérence harmonieuse des cultures dans le cadre d'une complémentarité partagée préviendrait l'écueil d'un modèle culturel dominant et exclusif tendant à ravalier les cultures dites périphériques au rang de réserves culturelles.  
(...)  
Vivre ensemble et différents, vivre ensemble nos différences, c'est le pari des pays francophones! (<http://www.sommet2001.org>).
7. C'est à Onésime Reclus, géographe français (1837–1916) que nous devons la première définition de la Francophonie, comme étant 'l'ensemble des personnes et de pays utilisant le français à des titres divers'.  
Mais, 'c'est après 1960 qu'elle s'est affirmée dans les faits comme dans les prises de conscience'. Ce dernier définit également la Francophonie comme un concept post-colonialiste qui n'a pris de l'essor qu'après l'indépendance des anciens pays colonisés. (<http://www.sommet2001.org>).