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"The smuggling of La Francophonie": Francophone Africans in Anglophone Cape Town (South Africa)

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on Black Francophone migrants in Cape Town, it is argued that a locally based Francophone identity has emerged in South Africa that questions the institutional discourse of La Francophonie as the organization of French-speaking states. The new identity has little to do with the organization's ideology of a transnational community of people united by a common language and culture. This is shown by deconstructing the category of *passeurs de Francophonie* (literally 'smugglers of la Francophonie' as practice) to which the organization assigns migrants in non-Francophone countries who allegedly spread the French language and Francophone culture. It is argued that the notion of "Francophone" must be grounded empirically and approached in relation to the social environment of the relevant speakers. The post-apartheid South African setting assigns it a meaning different from what it has in Francophone states. (Francophonie, identity, migration, South Africa)*

INTRODUCTION

Focusing on identity dynamics within a population of Black African Francophone migrants living in Cape Town, South Africa, I wish to show how a locally rooted notion of "Francophone identity" has emerged that has little to do with the big ideal of an alleged "community" linked by common cultural values and a shared language that is promoted by institutional Francophonie. I argue that this identity is largely determined by the sociopolitical context of post-apartheid South Africa in which the migrants now evolve and situate themselves in relation to native Black South Africans. La Francophonie "in action" is explored here from a point of view that has often been neglected in studies of la Francophonie: identity display. My South African fieldwork makes it almost necessary to assume, reluctantly, a "Francophone identity" that sometimes has nothing to do with the ability to speak French. In the particular ecology of the "new" South Africa, this

identity has emerged from an oppositional discourse in which the migrants situate themselves in relation to the native Black South Africans and to the non-Black populations.

These migrants all fall in the category that the official Organisation Internationale de La Francophonie hails as *passeurs de Francophonie*, literally 'smugglers' or 'couriers of la Francophonie', applied to language and culture. Ironically, the term can have negative connotations, because it suggests illegal activities comparable to the smuggling of forbidden drugs (as observed in the 2006 edition of *Le Petit Robert* dictionary). One may wonder what exactly is smuggled under the name "Francophonie." This is the focus of the next section.

As an officially English-speaking country hosting migrants from former French and Belgian African colonies, South Africa symbolizes a potential threat from the point of view of institutional Francophonie.[1] Indeed, since its inception the organization has expressed worries about the vitality, or rather the endangerment, of French as an imperial language by the increasing geographical expansion of the Anglo-Saxons' language and has particularly sought to protect the purity and integrity of French from massive, unmotivated lexical borrowings from its imperial rival. This is, for instance, the tenor of Etiemble's famous *Parlez-vous franglais?* (1964). The phrase *passeurs de Francophonie* seems to characterize the opposite of that fear, with French being introduced into an Anglophone space. The South African context is therefore an ideal site for investigating the validity of such a perception. It also prompts us to reflect on the very idea of la Francophonie as a community of people united by shared cultural values and a common language.

To my knowledge, although the literature on la Francophonie (at least in French) includes good monographs on the vitality of French, very few studies have been conducted on the way people experience their being "Francophone" and how they relate to the idea of belonging to a transnational space identified as la Francophonie.[2] In fact, the notion "Francophone" has too often been taken for granted in the literature, as different authors assume that people share a common understanding of who qualifies as one. The literature suggests that the indexicalities of "la Francophonie" stay the same across contexts.[3] In this article, I show how necessary it is to ground the notion empirically and to rethink the relation between SPEAKING X and BEING X-phone.

THE *PASSEURS DE FRANCOPHONIE*

The expression *passeurs de Francophonie* first appeared in a 1997–1998 report of the Haut Conseil de la Francophonie, in a chapter titled *Les migrants, passeurs de Francophonie* 'Migrants, smugglers of Francophonie'. The two studies presented in this chapter had been requested by the French minister of social affairs and by the Haut Conseil de la Francophonie. According to Van Schendel (1999:526), one of the two contributors, the studies addressed the following ques-

tions: (i) What role do migrants play in anchoring or developing the Francophonie in their countries of origin when they return for short periods (e.g., summer holidays, family events such as weddings, funerals) or to stay (e.g., for retirement)? (ii) How do migrants contribute to enriching and developing creativity in la Francophonie of the North (in France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada)? In her preliminary study, Helluy 1999, the other contributor underscores the conceptual difficulty of the notion of *passage de Francophonie* ('passing of Francophonie'), as she finds the cause-and-effect relation between migration and Francophonie to be complex. According to her, researchers run the risk of subsuming every "new phenomenon" encountered in the country of migration under the umbrella of passage de Francophonie, even if some of these may not be (directly) related to it. On the other hand, Van Schendel 1999, 2001 argues that the *passage de Francophonie* can enrich the local Francophonie when it occurs in a Francophone country, thus contributing to a redefinition of the migrants' relation to French and their own "francophonity."

Despite Helluy's (1999:507) exhortation to interpret the *passage de Francophonie* as enacting practices and values and not as a stable entity constructed independently of its agents, it still is unclear what is really meant by "la Francophonie." Part of the confusion lies in the fact that the "smuggling of la Francophonie" goes beyond "smuggling French" according to the institutional discourse. The existence of alleged "Francophone values" is postulated without giving any clear explanation of what they are. Moreover, the whole idea of *passeurs* (and more broadly of la Francophonie) rests on the claimed existence of a "common culture" based on a "common language." The relation between language and culture is thus approached as an abstraction and not as constantly reshaped socially, politically, and historically by the practitioners themselves.

Often endowed with little or no political (or socioeconomic) power in their host countries, the Francophone migrants are associated with a wishful expansion of the historical geographic boundaries of French and the Francophone ideology, and they are assigned agency that is not empirically verified. Without apparently subscribing to an essentialist view of la Francophonie, the studies tend to present the Francophones as equal in status and having equal potential to spread the French language and the Francophone ideology. The fact that statistically the so-called smugglers are likely to come from Third World countries and thus likely to occupy underprivileged social positions in the host country does not seem to be an important factor to the authors of the studies, although it bears on the dynamics of the *passage de Francophonie*. Bitjaa Kody 2000 and Maddibo 2006 are somewhat exceptional in showing the complex power relationship between "White" and "Black" Francophones in Quebec and Ontario, respectively. Maddibo, for example, shows how Black Francophones feel exploited by White Francophones, who allegedly use them only for the purposes of promoting French and la Francophonie but otherwise keep them away from key social positions.

The institutional discourse on the *passage de Francophonie* tends to give a "flat" (and therefore idealized) misrepresentation of an otherwise highly stratified sociopolitical and linguistic space. Borrowing from Gal & Irvine 1995, we can say that two simultaneous processes of ERASURE are at work here: an oversimplification of the complex sociolinguistic landscape of the *passeurs*, and a homogenization of French to one and the same variety across various social and geographic contexts. Yet variation is very real in the Francophones' representation of the way French is spoken in different places. Moreover, as Blommaert 2005 aptly observes, different values are attributed to different varieties along a center–periphery parameter. Thus French as spoken in France is rated differently from Congolese French. Although a Congolese speaker of French may be highly regarded in some social circles in the Congo, where, as a former colonial language, French still holds social power and enables one to climb the social ladder, his variety may be underrated in France or Belgium because of its nonnative, colonial accent. If la Francophonie were "smuggled" at all, the nature of smuggled good is certainly not as straightforward as the official discourse wants us to believe. If it is the language that is smuggled, it is not clear whether the varieties in question are those that are acceptable to metropolitan speakers. Moreover, whether or not anything is smuggled into the host country depends largely on the local "population structure" (Mufwene 2005), within which both the Francophone migrants and the host population interact with each other: Who are the migrants likely to interact with, in which contexts, how often, and in what language? The sole presence of French-speaking migrants in non-Francophone countries is not a sufficient condition for French or la Francophonie to be spread geographically, as both the language and the culture may be given up in the new ecology.

One must also ask to what extent the discourse on these *passeurs* is not just a façade for the multiculturalism alleged by institutional Francophonie at a time when it feels threatened by the expansion of English. Any discussion of the organization of La Francophonie's recent interest in these *passeurs* would be incomplete without reference to its new battle against globalization interpreted as Americanization. Aren't the conflation of globalization and Americanization and the exaggeration of the threat of American English to the "linguistic world order" (Fishman 1998–1999) an excuse for France, the central player preoccupied with the superiority of its language and culture, to downplay its hegemonic ambitions and to promote la Francophonie as a defender of cultural diversity while it is seeking allies against Anglo-American cultural and linguistic hegemonization and homogenization? Ironically, the *passeurs de Francophonie* illustrate the suspicion that France's plea for diversity is less for real multiculturalism than for regaining its lost hegemonic cultural position up to the 19th century and spreading French language and culture around the world.[4]

Note, indeed, that the *passeurs* are also byproducts of globalization (Papastergiadis 2000). What has brought about the alleged *passage de Francophonie* is

the fact that African migrants are unwelcome in countries of the North: France, Belgium, and all the other Western countries in which French is spoken as a native vernacular. The *passeurs* seem to be working, ironically, for an organization that both rejects them and appreciates their services. If they are at all spreading French and Francophone culture, they are rendering their services despite themselves. This is one of the little recognized ambivalent facets of globalization, when human traffic to some destinations is not open to all and is highly constrained, consistent with Bauman's (1998) distinction between "tourists" and "vagabonds." Massey (1994:149) captures this phenomenon aptly in observing that many people "come half way round the world only to get held up in an interrogation room at Heathrow" – or Roissy, or Zaventem. This is the experience of 67% of the migrants I interviewed in Cape Town, who declared they had chosen South Africa after several attempts to go to Europe or North America had failed. Despite its attraction, South Africa remains for them a developing country, only slightly better off than their own countries of origin. It is being used as a springboard to destinations of their dreams, access to which is being made harder and harder.

A BRIEF SURVEY OF FRANCOPHONE BLACK AFRICANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa has never been a "traditional" destination for Francophone Africans, in spite of a wave of well-educated Congolese from the Democratic Republic of Congo who came in the 1980s to work as engineers or medical doctors (Bouillon 1996). A conjunction of several factors contributed to changing this state of affairs: (i) After the release of Nelson Mandela from jail in 1990 and the first democratic elections in the history of the country that followed four years later, Black African migrants could now travel to the newly liberated country, where Blacks were no longer barred from decent jobs; (ii) uprisings in the two Congos and in Rwanda and Burundi forced people to flee and seek refuge almost anywhere outside their countries; (iii) new international agreements on migration between South Africa and some other African nations now made it possible for citizens from several Francophone African countries which until the mid-1990s had not severed diplomatic ties no longer to have to apply for a visa to enter the latest independent nation; and (iv) the hardening of migration policies in many Western countries, especially in Europe, made it increasingly difficult for African applicants to get a visa (Bouillon 1999; Vigouroux 2003).

Demographically, the Francophone Black Africans in South Africa are a very small group compared to other longstanding African groups such as Mozambicans and Zimbabweans. Their numbers do not exceed 40,000–50,000, according to Bouillon 1996, 1999.[5] They constitute a very heterogeneous group with regard to the following factors. The first is country of origin: South African Home Affairs figures show that Congolese from the DRC are numerically the most

important population coming from a Francophone African country, followed by Congolese from west of the Congo River.[6] The migration trajectory may be direct, semi-direct, and transitional. The length of the migratory journey ranges from a few hours to several years, depending on the choice of transportation (plane, bus, truck, foot) and migrants' economic situation. Some have allegedly been robbed on the way, or obliged to work in the countries of transit after exhausting their savings. Rwandans have typically spent several years in transit before reaching South Africa. For the majority of them, South Africa never constituted a planned destination of migration, but rather the end point of a long trajectory marked by several transition points. Feelings of being unsafe or threatened (typically by other Rwandans) were often the main reasons mentioned for their mobility.[7] Also varying are the purposes of migration (ranging from economic, political, and academic goals to exciting adventure); sociocultural differences such as religion (between Animists, Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants); level of education (40% of my informants had only secondary school education, while only 34% attended university); social class – along with a majority of working-class migrants, there are a number of affluent Cameroonian businessmen as well as former associates of the Mobutu regime (Congo DRC) who emigrated to Cape Town after the fall of Mobutu in 1997; and residency status (asylum seekers vs. students vs. permanent residents). Despite their small numbers (around 2,000 in Cape Town, according to the Foreign Affairs figures combined with my own estimate), Francophone African migrants have become, over the past ten years, increasingly visible in Cape Town cityscape.

Until recently, the most visible migrants in downtown Cape Town typically participated in the local economy through the introduction of products that were not provided by South Africans. This resulted in a mushrooming of African craft markets that started mid-1990s with the arrival of African art dealers who brought along crafts from West, Central, and East Africa. As the craft business has become saturated, a new type of entrepreneur has emerged in the migrant-operated economy with people investing in new technologies (opening Internet cafes) or beauty salons, and therefore competing directly with South Africans. After these successful businesspeople comes a large segment of low-wage migrants working in the security sector, a flourishing business in a country where the crime rate is among the highest in the world. They work as guards for private companies or as "car watchers" along the main streets of Cape Town. It is now quite common to overhear French in the Green Market Square, one of the oldest and most popular flea markets of the city, or elsewhere in downtown Cape Town.

In many respects, South Africa represents an *entre-deux* for the migrants: It is not Africa any more, and yet not Europe nor America. Indeed, because of the singularity of its history (more than five decades of institutional apartheid), its European urban architecture and the composition of its population (54.2% of the Western Cape population are of mixed descent and "officially" identified as "Colored"), South Africa does not match their representation and experience of Black

Africa, whose populations are almost completely black. Hence, migrants' encounter with this "other" Africa comes with a unique experience of their foreignness and "Africanness." After presenting my fieldwork, I will show how these conflicting observations bear on the way African migrants express and articulate their Francophone identity in the context of Cape Town.[8]

THE DATA

The data of this study were constructed at different periods between 1996 and 2005, totalizing a two-year immersion among Francophone Africans in Cape Town.[9] This longitudinal approach enabled me to develop a better understanding of the evolution of the social and linguistic dynamics of this recent wave of migrations to South Africa, which spreads over a period of about 15 years. The interactions presented in this paper are excerpts from semi-guided audio-recorded interviews that were conducted with 124 migrants from 12 different countries: Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo DRC, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, and Togo.[10] The interviewees were asked about their migratory trajectories and their lives in Cape Town, including their search for an apartment or a job, their religious practices, the regularity and type of contacts with their relatives back home (through the Internet, letters, or telephone calls), and their short-term projects. Topics about their relationships with the local population as well as with other migrants (Francophone or not) were also explored. By focusing on migrants who had emigrated from officially Francophone countries (thus excluding, for example, French-speaking Congolese who had grown up in Angola), I purposely subscribed to the institutional definition of la Francophonie as a community of people and states linked by common cultural values based on their sharing a common (colonial) language. I should note that throughout these intermittent nine years of fieldwork, the ways African Francophones interacted with me, a French citizen, were often informed by broader sociopolitical factors. The fact of being Francophone and, like them, a foreigner in South Africa didn't appear to justify to them the kind of affinity that I was assuming when I first approached them. For example, some DRC Congolese and Rwandans were reluctant to talk to me in 1997, at a time when France was accused of instigating and participating in the turmoil of the Great Lakes area. In fact, when I addressed them in French, some kept responding in English, despite the fact that they had little command of the language. Their refusal to communicate with me in French was a way of denying me the linguistic and cultural connection I was claiming. The avoidance of French was not merely a linguistic statement. It was a political one. A year later, many people who had been cold to me were more accommodating, after France had won the 1998 soccer World Cup, especially when they learned that I had been in Paris for the big event. As Francophones, they symbolically felt empowered by this victory. Several of them told me that they experienced as personal revenge the resounding defeat of the

South African team by France (3–0) in the first round of the competition. This reaction may be partly explained by the not very hospitable environment Black African migrants find in South Africa. Their experience of being Francophone in Cape Town is shaped by their encounters not only with the host population but also with other Francophone migrants. I show below how the migrants' new ecology reorganizes their patterns of socialization and helps them construct their discourse on the Other (Francophones or non-Francophones).

IS THERE A FRANCOPHONE IDENTITY?

For the majority of the Francophone migrants, South Africa is the locus where they first came in contact with South African languages, especially Xhosa, Afrikaans, and, to some extent, English, the three major languages spoken in Cape Town. This is perhaps also the first place where they experienced regional variation in French and English.[11] As a matter of fact, migration need not be interpreted only in geographical terms (moving from one space to another). It often also implies contact and new patterns of social interactions that may affect, among other things, speakers' language attitudes. For instance, a Congolese university student who would have had only sporadic contacts with the Malian tailor of his Brazzaville neighborhood can become the latter's business partner in Cape Town, where he has had to give up his dream of studying and switch to craft trading in order to make a living in the host country. By producing a redistribution of individuals or population groups along different social scales, the migration process appears to play an important role in (re)shaping African Francophone speakers' ideology of French. In addition, migrants are confronted with their own prejudices or misconceptions toward each other, which they have brought from their own countries. Our Congolese student whose notion of Malians is based only on his experience with his tailor neighbor, who did not attend or finish high school, may conclude that all Malians speak like the tailor, and therefore may develop a negative stereotype. He may assume that Malians do not speak good French or do not speak French at all. The example of our Congolese student and Malian tailor is not so far-fetched. Actually, one of the most striking findings of my interviews rests on such a negative linguistic stereotype among migrants from Central Africa and the Great Lakes area regarding West Africans' competence in French. The following comment made by Stephane (a Rwandan) when I asked him about French variation among other Francophone Africans is a case in point:[12]

(1) quand des Ouest Africains parlent français tu prends du temps pour comprendre qu'ils parlent français – même chez nous quelqu'un qui n'est pas allé à l'école – il se débrouille mieux qu'un Ouest Africain

'when West Africans speak French it takes you some time to understand that they are speaking French – even back home somebody who didn't attend school – gets by [in French] better than a West African'

My data show that linguistic devaluation often goes along with sociocultural devaluation and tends, on the ground, to structure people's relationships. Indeed,

Congolese tend to limit their relationships with "West Africans" to business relationships. The latter are indeed often praised by other migrants for their business skills, as acknowledged by Geneviève, a successful Congolese trader at the Green Market Square. Note, however, that while she praises West Africans' business skills, Geneviève also points out their lack of education:

(2) les Ouest Africains sont de bons business men – c'est normal ils sont habitués à vendre sur le marché depuis l'âge de onze ans

'West Africans are good business men – it's normal they are used to selling at the market since they were eleven years old'

By indexing symbolic capital, linguistic variation in French is indeed reinterpreted in terms of social class, grounded both in social practice previously constructed in the country of origin (as illustrated by the relation between the Congolese student and the Malian tailor), and in the ideology of "good French" constructed through education.[13] Attitudes to language variation thus come along with a practice of social differentiation that regulates how speakers position themselves (Irvine 1989, 2001).

In Cape Town, the sharing of French didn't seem to bear significantly on who the migrants chose to live with and whom they socialized with. The most significant factor in their choices seems to have been country of origin. For some highly divided groups such as the Congolese from the DRC, Rwandans, and Burundians, the decisive factors are the region and sometimes the city of origin (e.g., Kinshasa vs. Lubumbashi), religion (e.g., DRC Congolese Pentecostal churches), and income-producing activities (e.g., craft traders or students). Nonetheless, two recent trends have been observed since my first fieldwork in 1996. First, transnational associations among Francophone Africans have developed, especially among long-term migrants who have been granted permanent residence in the country. They share space for activities to cut down on rent costs; Cameroonian aesthetician may rent a chair in a Congolese-owned salon where she uses the facilities (driers, brushes, water) and operates her own business. Space may also be used for several unrelated activities, as in the case of Internet Café Nwambo in downtown Cape Town, which hosted a hairdresser, an international phone service, and an art retail business. Although there are some, such as craft stores primarily designed for tourists, migrant-run businesses are generally small and tend to attract African Francophone customers. They are transnational places where migrants interact most with each other (Vigouroux to appear). Second, several region-based community organizations (e.g., the Bafia for Cameroonians) have emerged among African Francophones in Cape Town. While ethnicity did not seem to play a particularly significant role compared to nationality in 1996, population increase among the migrants seems to have produced critical masses favorable to the mushrooming of these region- or ethnicity-based associations.[14] Many of these associations act as support groups. For example, when one of their members dies, the community collects money to repatriate the

body to the home country. They also organize cultural events such as soccer matches with other migrant groups.

French is often used as a lingua franca of convenience but not necessarily as a preferred choice among the Francophone migrants. It is preferred to English for a variety of reasons, including poor command of the host country's primary official language, ignorance of and lack of interest in the indigenous languages, or not knowing the African language the interactant speaks even if they all come from the same country. Questions about ethnic origin or regional background are typically avoided by people from the same country, especially from countries with intense ethnic conflicts such as the Republic of Congo, DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi. Surnames and phenotypes may sometimes be used as indicators of ethnic or regional origin. If the interactants discover that they share an African language, the latter prevails over French.[15] It could also be that the marginal competence of some migrants in French is a good reason for not keeping it as a top choice among the languages of their repertoires. Still, one must bear in mind that French remains a foreign language to them, and their primary identity, within a vast repertoire of other dynamic identities, is ethnic or national but not Francophone.

It should be noted, however, that the management of linguistic repertoire seems to undergo a shift among longstanding migrants with whom I have been working for the past ten years. During my latest fieldwork in August 2005, I noticed an increasing number of cross-national interactions between Francophone migrants taking place exclusively in English or in both French and English with a high degree of code-switching. This shift indexes important social changes that occurred over the past ten years for many migrants, such as obtaining a resident status, getting married to a South African (these often go together, especially for male migrants), or having a more stable job in a local company. It is clear that prolonged immersion in a broader array of South African networks has certainly helped increase some migrants' proficiency in English. This has also affected the management of their linguistic repertoires with other identified Francophones. But at the same time, it seems that their choice to communicate in English only (even with an approximative competence) or in combination with French may be directed toward other Francophone newcomers as a claim of "rootedness" or self-achievement in South Africa. We have here an interesting case in which the management of speakers' language repertoires is not primarily oriented to the *hic et nunc* of the interaction but bears symbolic meaning oriented to a broader time-space.

Nonetheless, one can speak of a FRANCOPHONE IDENTITY constructed in the particular setting of South Africa. This "new" identity emerges in the context of South Africa and did not exist before the migrants' arrival in the host country.[16] Many of them may not have considered themselves Francophone at home, either because they have little competence in French or because speaking French as one of the lingua francas with compatriots was so much part of their language routines that there was no point in thinking of a particular Francophone identity.

Because of all the challenges the migrants face in South Africa, this new setting plays an important catalyst role in the emergence of this new identity as a relational or oppositional one. The new identity must be understood within a complex set of historical and cultural factors. As pointed out by Hall (1996:4): "Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies." This is what I intend to do in the next section.

INTERSECTING DISCOURSE AND MULTI-LAYERED IDENTITIES

The emergence of a "Francophone identity" in the South African post-apartheid context highlights social dynamics between the migrants and the host population and their perception of their status in South Africa. In the language of Bourdieu 1991, Francophone identity seems to function as a sign of distinction in a society where African migrants feel unwelcome and threatened, especially by some South African Blacks, simply because they are outsiders. This distinction is often correlated with the migrants' own underrating of Black South Africans, as is evidenced by the following comment made by Organ, from Côte d'Ivoire, which reflects a prejudice widely shared among migrants:

(3) Cécile: et est-ce que tu t'es fait des amis Sud-Africains/	Cécile: 'and have you made any South African friends/'
Organ: on se méfie beaucoup des Sud-Africains – parce que on se dit qu'ils sont – ils sont très – ils sont pas instruits – ils sont bandits – et puis vraiment c'est des préjugés qu'on a sur eux – des mauvais préjugés – c'est des paresseux – des criminels – donc vraiment on s'éloigne beaucoup d'eux – personnellement moi j'ai pas d'amis\	Organ: 'we distrust South Africans a lot – because we say they are – they are very – they are uneducated – they are bandits – and it's really prejudice that we hold against them – negative prejudice – they are lazy – criminals – thus we really stay away from them – personally I myself don't have friends\'

An interesting point to notice is that Organ seems to act as a spokesperson of an unidentified group by responding to my question with the inclusive third person singular *on* 'one/we', whereas I addressed him with the second person singular *tu* 'you'. The first part of his response functions as a preface to his more personal answer, introduced by the adverb *personnellement* 'personally' followed by the tonic pronoun *moi* 'me'. It is not clear whether his response should be interpreted as a compensatory discourse constructed after several unpleasant experiences in the host country. Yet what is clear is that the sign of distinction seems to operate only toward Black South Africans. The Francophone migrants usually use the label *South African* only in reference to Black South Africans. They typically identify other groups with labels inherited from the apartheid classification such as *White* or *Colorés* (French translation of C*olored*) or with some variants of the designations for the former descendants of Dutch settlers: *my bru* (literally 'my bro(ther)' in Afrikaans) or *Boers* [bur].[17]

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In the South African context, it seems appropriate to argue that the Francophone identity is part of a counter-discourse to a locally rooted discourse against African migrants, which is itself embedded in a broader political anti-immigration discourse. A 2004 *Washington Post* and Kaiser Family Foundation survey reports, indeed, that 52% of the South African population is opposed to African migrants' presence on South African soil.[18] Many studies, such as Mattes et al. 1999 and Reitzes 1995, have also highlighted the rise of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa, which sometimes results in physical violence toward African foreigners.[19] Although rooted in the South African context, the rhetoric of anti-immigration discourse clearly echoes current xenophobic discourse in the West, where "Third World immigrants" are presented as a burden on local economies and are associated with crime and thus with increased insecurity.[20] Migrants' claim to Francophone identity in such an adverse environment can therefore be considered a defense mechanism against not feeling welcome rather than as an acknowledgment of la Francophonie as part of a linguistic and cultural identity. In order to be fully accurate, it is important to underscore that the feeling of being rejected expressed by many migrants is counterbalanced by their strong claim of legitimacy on South African soil on the grounds that they are Black and "Africa is for Black people." (By doing so, they also contest the legitimacy of South Africans of English and Dutch descent as well as of mixed-race people.) As I show in Vigouroux 2005, migrants reconstruct a symbolic space that transcends national boundaries and compensates for the adversity they experience in their local social spaces.

A second, complementary explanation may be that Francophone identity functions in the South African context as a subjective class distinction. It helps the migrants to distinguish themselves from the Black population, which remains, in the local value system, the most socioeconomically and educationally underprivileged. Some of my interviewees' comments, such as Edmond's from Côte d'Ivoire, tend to corroborate this explanation. In my translation of his own words: 'We [the Francophones] we came to educate them [the Black South Africans].'

Whatever explanation one prefers, what appears salient is the complex interlocking of local and global discourses in which African Francophones implicitly position themselves. The over-valorization of their "Francophonity" goes hand in hand with a linguistic devalorization of Black South Africans, whose English competence is often considered the poorest of all groups, even by those who have a very approximative command of English and have limited contact with different sociocultural groups. Linguistic ideology serves interests that have little to do with objectivity.

The value assigned to French is more symbolic than is justified by the migrants' experience in the host society. At the local level, the migrants experience a reordering of the "order of indexicalities" in which French is no longer perceived as an asset, contrary to the situation in their countries of origin.[21] It doesn't

carry a significant market value, as it provides few job opportunities and does not help them climb the social ladder. There is thus an interesting disjunction between the value that migrants assigned to their being Francophone and the value assigned to French, a language that they find useless in the South African context. What perhaps seems to matter in this local context is the symbolic or imagined, rather than socioeconomic, capital associated with French. Nonetheless, many of my interviewees think it is important to know it in order to compete on the South African job market, as is evidenced by the following exchange with Aurélien:

(4)	Cécile: c'est un avantage pour un étranger africain de parler français en Afrique du Sud/	Cécile: 'is it an advantage for an African foreigner to speak French in South Africa/'
	Aurélien: un étranger comme moi/ oui un avantage\	Aurélien: 'a foreigner like me/ yes an advantage\'
	Cécile: pourquoi un avantage/	Cécile: 'why an advantage/'
	Aurélien: parce que vous allez dans certaines compagnies-là – dans les hôtels-là – si vous cherchez un boulot dans un hôtel – – on peut vous demander parlez combien de langues – – tu peux dire je parle le français je parle anglais c'est déjà beaucoup – y a des Français qui peuvent venir – on te présente celui-là il parle français il peut servir de – catalyseur entre vous et l'hôtel – voilà pourquoi c'est important de parler – français et anglais – deux langues – – ça peut t'aider à quelque chose de bien	Aurélien: 'because you go to some companies – to hotels – if you are looking for a job in a hotel – – they can ask you how many languages [you] speak – – you can say I speak French I speak English it is already a lot – there are French people who can come – they introduce you that one he speaks French it can act as a catalyst between you and the hotel – that's why it's important to speak – French and English – two languages – – it may lead you to something good'

This kind of self-assessment shows that language attitudes toward French are largely inherited from colonial structures in the migrants' countries of origin, where French carried a lot of prestige. Blommaert 2005 characterizes it as a "transnational hierarchy" in which French becomes a symbolic power in a value system that goes far beyond the South African context (see also Bourdieu 1977). It is quite telling that it is mostly self-employed or freshly arrived migrants who are not (yet) directly confronted with the harsh and discriminatory South African job market who tend to see French as an asset. As is evident from Aurélien's use of the modal *peut* 'can', it is more a matter of potential than likelihood.[22] Migrants like Christian who have struggled long to find jobs have a different view. Note how, in the excerpt below, he delays his response (line 3, repetition of parts of the interviewer's question) to the question about the usefulness of French in the South African context. Fearing to threaten my face by revealing that my language is useless to him as a migrant (see "laughter" in many of his turns), he also distances himself by ascribing a different ethnolinguistic identity to me: that of "French." I accept it by playing along his frame (line 7):

(5) Cécile: et est-ce que tu penses que c'est un avantage pour un étranger ici de parler français/	Cécile: 'and do you think that it is an advantage for a foreigner here to speak French/'
Christian: ici/ – de parler français/ – – {rire} pas du tout hein/ {rire} – – non il faut que je le dise franchement\	Christian: 'here/ – to speak French/ – – {laughter} not at all/ {laughter} – – no I must tell it frankly\'
Cécile: ça me vexe pas je m'en fous {rire}	Cécile: 'I'm not disturbed by it I don't care' {laughter}
Christian: {rire} n'est-ce pas/ {gros éclat de rire}	Christian: {laughter} 'really/' {big laughter}
Cécile: n'aie pas peur de me vexer/	Cécile: 'don't be afraid to upset me/'
Christian: ok:	Christian: 'ok:'
Cécile: il y a pas de problème\	Cécile: 'there's no problem\'
Christian: d'accord	
Cécile: {§}ok\ donc la langue française – zéro\	Cécile: {§}'ok\ so the French language – [it's] nothing\'
Christian: ouais\	Christian: 'yeah\'

Many interviewees take advantage of the prestige of French as an international "language of culture" to overrate themselves in the host society, even those whose poor competence would be derided in the country of origin. In the migrants' discourse, "Francophonie" hardly means what is promoted by the political discourse of the Organisation Internationale de La Francophonie. It is not that ideal of a big community that unites, through the French language and the cultural values associated with it, people from different countries. As a matter of fact, the migrants associate la Francophonie primarily with France and Belgium, to which they still feel connected by their colonial history. But they see no particular connection among the former colonies themselves. Their explicit references to French are usually to the metropolitan varieties, in relation to which they show a certain amount of linguistic insecurity. French largely continues to be perceived primarily as a European language, and thus it remains dissociated from the African context, as suggested by Stéphane from Rwanda:

(6) Stéphane: les Sud-Africains considèrent que les Africains francophones sont extraordinaires car nous parlons français – quand ils voient un Noir parler français – ils pensent que tu viens de la France – que tu n'es pas Africain	Stéphane: 'South Africans consider Francophone Africans as extraordinary because we speak French – when they see a Black person speak French – they think that you come from France – that you are not an African'

Stéphane entertains the idea that South Africans are able to recognize French from among the wide range of languages spoken by the migrants. This "distinguishability" is an acknowledgment of the special status associated with the language. This comes with a gain of prestige for its speaker, who is "deterritorialized" (marked as a non-African) and "reterritorialized" (with the remark 'you come from France'). My field notes suggest that the category "Francophone" is merely an "inhabitable identity," not an ascriptive one assigned by South Africans. In

fact, an examination of private or public discourse on African immigration to South Africa shows that African foreigners tend to be assigned indiscriminately to the homogenizing category "refugee," regardless of their legal status in the country. In some cases they are referred to with the xenophobic term *makwere-kwere*, an onomatopoetic word typically interpreted as 'barbarian'. The indiscriminate category of "refugee" conjures up the connotations of "needy" and "job-" or "asylum-seeker", among other things.[23]

The implicit "whiteness" associated with 'French' in Stéphane's discourse is made explicit in Célia's narrative when she gives an account of her experience on the phone with South African landlords.[24] Note Célia's different self-categorizations as *noire* 'Black', *étrangère* 'foreigner', and *Francophone* and how their combination creates the new category *blanche* ('White'):

(7) Cécile: c'est dur quand on est étranger africain de trouver euh un logement – au Cap/	Cécile: 'is it hard for an African foreigner to find eh housing – in Cape Town/'
Célia: oui mais c'est pas c'est p- j'ai pas l'impression que c'est parce que c'est pas parce que je suis étrangère c'est parce que je suis noire – et le fait que je suis étrangère – et que je suis francophone et euh les gens pensent que je suis blanche au téléphone – et alors° ils sont tout tout gentils mais je leur dis au téléphone ça vous dérange que je suis noire ils font des – des excuses – _ euh:	Célia: 'yes but it's not it's n- I don't have the impression that it is that it is not because I'm a foreigner it is because I'm Black – and the fact that I'm a foreigner – and that I'm a Francophone and eh people think that I'm White on the telephone – and then° they are all all kind but I tell them on the telephone does it bother you that I am Black they make – excuses – eh:'
Cécile: tu leur dis au téléphone/	Cécile: 'you tell them on the phone/'
Célia: oui – _ parce que si si euh: si je vois des euh – des – gens qui sont racistes – ça me ça me fait mal – tandis que si je les ai pas encore rencontrés – on a pu discuter rigoler au téléphone et puis après je me rends compte qu'ils sont racistes euh – je – ça me fait pas mal je les trouve très bêtes mais ça me fait pas mal	Célia: 'yes – – because if if eh: if I see eh – people who are racist – it it hurts me – whereas if I haven't met them yet – we could speak laugh on the phone and then I realize that they are racist eh – I – it doesn't hurt me I find them very stupid but it doesn't hurt me'

As suggested by Blommaert (2005:210), identity "should be seen in the same terms as semiosis: as organised by topic, situation, genre, style, occasion, purpose and so on." In the case of African migrants in Cape Town, the category "Francophone" must be articulated in relation to other categories such as "migrant," "Black" (which I just discussed), and "male." Being a Francophone is also perceived by some male interviewees as an asset to seduce South African women, as illustrated by the following example from my interview with Koffi from Côte d'Ivoire:

(8) Cécile: et est-ce que le fait de parler français c'est un avantage ici en Afrique du Sud/	Cécile: 'and is the fact of speaking French an advantage here in South Africa/'

Koffi: ouais ouais ouais c'est vraiment un avantage euh: – mais moi je te dis même que c'est: – c'est parce que je suis je suis francophone – que même j'ai pu même décrocher moi ma petite\	Koffi: 'yeah yeah yeah it is really an advantage eh: – but me I'm telling you that it is – it is because I am I am a Francophone – that even I could even pick up my girl\'

This particular imbrication of "Francophonity" and gender can be explained in two nonexclusive ways. The first explanation may have to do with the process of the interview itself. This is a speech event in which both the interviewee and the interviewer are performing gender, a topic discussed in detail in Vigouroux 2004a. Second, the migrants exploit to their advantage the old and persistent stereotype that French is a romantic language, the language of love, a myth spread by the French themselves through their films and novels. It is noteworthy that through French what is promoted here is male refinement and delicacy. These two qualities are opposed to those generally associated with Black South African males, who are characterized by male and female migrants as violent and disrespectful toward women. Interrelations or marriages between female migrants and male Black South Africans are therefore rare. On the other hand, relationships with Black South African females play a major role in male migrants' socialization in South African society, especially in a social environment that has not been very welcoming to African outsiders. This tends to give credence to an opinion shared by some South Africans: that migrants came to take away their women in addition to their jobs. This is a rhetoric that echoes the common xenophobic discourse noted above.

CONCLUSIONS

This study of Francophone Africans in Cape Town shows that institutional Francophonie's ideal of a community united by a common language and culture across national boundaries is not empirically grounded. Immersion in a multilingual ecology does not seem to create any sense of communality among Francophone Blacks. My longitudinal study shows that despite the emergence of some transnational business associations, the migrants' social networks are still organized according to national origins and, increasingly, along ethnic lines.

The notion of *passeurs de Francophonie* assigned to migrants such as those in Cape Town unveils one of the major contradictions and perversities of la Francophonie's institutional discourse. The very existence of these *passeurs* highlights the great divide of the Francophone space, in which countries of the North where French is spoken as a native language are increasingly made inaccessible to the Francophones of the South. The majority of people who justify the very existence of la Francophonie all know from direct or indirect experience that speaking the same language doesn't guarantee a visa to some member states of la Francophonie. Yet the very idea of *passeurs de Francophonie* presupposes the existence of a "lived Francophonie," a Francophone language and culture that is actually practiced by all people of the member states. As a matter of fact, it is not

clear that many of the Black migrants would consider themselves as Francophone outside the Cape Town context.

The notion of *passeurs* also assumes that the indexicalities of la Francophonie and of French stay the same across contexts. My fieldwork suggests that despite its transnational reference, being Francophone is a locally rooted identity that doesn't exist prior to the migrants' South African experience. Rather, it emerges from it. Therefore, I argue that the notion "Francophone" should be approached as a social category, constructed under particular sociopolitical and historical conditions and not postulated a priori as is usually the case. This position questions the correlation traditionally assumed between SPEAKING X and BEING X-PHONE. The former does not imply the latter. La Francophonie is mistaken in counting as Francophone anybody who is a citizen of an officially Francophone country. In member states of the South, the vast majority of citizens are not French speakers and therefore not Francophone. Institutional Francophonie's discourse is as much constructed for the convenience of particular interests, which vary according to historical and/or local circumstances, as around the real experience of migrants in Cape Town.

The claim of being Francophone in South Africa should not be confused with the neocolonial identity of Francophone promoted by the institution of La Francophonie. The migrants' claim of a Francophone identity should be approached in dynamic terms, as part of their strategies to position themselves in their new, often adverse ecology. It is most adequately interpreted in relation to other identity categories such as "migrant," "male," and "Black," which emerge from the setting in which the migrants evolve. Paraphrasing Bauman (2004:15), it can be argued that Francophone identity "is revealed to [the migrants] as something to be invented rather than discovered."

NOTES

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[1] According to Salikoko Mufwene (personal communication, June 2007) who, for many years, was a member of the Conseil International Francophone des Langues (a committee in charge of strategies for promoting French and indigenous languages within the Francophone states), one of the main fears of institutional Francophonie has been the endangerment of French by English as an official language in France's former African colonies. As Mufwene 2002 aptly explains, this is an abusive exploitation of the concern with endangered languages in their vernacular function to protect the imperial expansion of French. The competition between French and English in Africa is indeed at the imperial level, at which they can both threaten the vitality of indigenous African languages.

[2] Quebec is certainly an exception because of its long history of language and political struggle within the national boundaries of Canada and next to its giant Anglophone American neighbor. For recent publications on the subject, see Heller 2003 and Heller & Boutet 2006, especially regarding the way French is redefined in Quebec within the globalized economy. Indeed, a new ideology of

French seems to have developed in which English/French bilingualism is increasingly associated more with economic power than with an identity thread. Other noteworthy studies that directly address the question of immigrants in Canada include Van Schendel 2001 on Francophone migrants in Montreal and Maddibo 2006 on Africans in Ontario.

[3] A pilot study I conducted among 17 people from six different countries (France, Quebec, Canada, China, Korea, Switzerland) shows highly varying conceptions of "Francophone," including being a native speaker of French, having at least one French-speaking parent, having a near-native command of French, coming from an officially Francophone country, and being able to "express oneself adequately in French."

[4] Indeed, for centuries, France has never been a good example of linguistic and cultural diversity within its own national borders, having driven its *patois* to extinction. Moreover, it imposed French as a language of education and administration in its former colonial empire, thereby marginalizing the indigenous languages.

[5] One should normally refrain from providing or relying on figures alone about migrants. They do not give us an accurate idea of their presence in the host country. As I observed in Vigouroux 2005, it may be more informative to discuss this in terms of visibility – what Simmel 1908 characterizes as consciousness of the "stranger." Visibility or attempts by the migrants to dissolve into the host population affect their social practices and ultimately their language. Highly visible migrants may also affect the way the host population experiences the presence of others.

[6] My own fieldwork seems to confirm this trend. Figures provided by the South African Home Affairs office are nevertheless approximative, since many migrants change their citizenship after their arrival. They tend to "borrow" the nationalities of war-ridden countries such as Sierra Leone or Angola to increase the chances of success of their applications for asylum.

[7] In Vigouroux 2003 I explain how the migrants' trajectories have constructed their representations of South African English varieties, depending on whether or not they had been exposed to other Englishes prior to their arrival. Patterns of socialization in the host country bear on these representations, particularly in still racially divided South Africa, where African migrants' interactions with the host population are limited.

[8] Because of fieldwork constraints (particularly the impossibility of mastering all the lingua francas of the interviewees and hiring an interpreter for each linguistic community), all my informants were chosen on the basis of a minimal competence in French, which enabled them to understand and respond to my questions in face-to-face or group interviews.

[9] I use the expression "data construction" instead of "data gathering" on purpose, because data are not givens. Rather, they are produced by the researcher's methods and agenda. As in Vigouroux ms, I make a distinction between "language material" and "data," with the latter being the result of transformations through the process of transcription – what Bauman & Briggs 1990 and Silverstein & Urban 1996 call "entextualization."

[10] The distribution of the interviewed population – 31% from the Great Lake area, 33% from West Africa, and 42% from Central Africa – tends to reflect my differential access to the migrant population, although the proportions of my sample mirror the official figures given by the South African Home Affairs office.

[11] The majority of my interviewees had had only basic English classes. Although their competence was still minimal, the migrants used their limited scholastic knowledge as a yardstick to evaluate South African varieties of English, exposing their own linguistic prejudice, as explained in Vigouroux 2001.

[12] Curiously, West Africans do not have the same negative attitude toward the others.

[13] Chaudenson (personal communication, April 28, 2005) observes that French in urban West Africa tends to be more indigenized (e.g., Nouchi in Côte d'Ivoire) than in Central and East Africa, where there are major African lingua francas such as Kituba and Lingala in the two Congos, Kiswahili in East Africa and the eastern part of DRC, and Lingala and Tshiluba in DRC, or ethnic languages spoken by the vast majority of the population, such as Kinyarwanda in Rwanda and Kirundi in Burundi. While French remains primarily the official language and the lingua franca of the elite in former French and Belgian colonies, it is also approximated by the lower class with little schooling in West Africa. One may also wonder to what extent linguistic stigmatization among speakers could also be interpreted as a legacy of colonial divisions between French West Africa (FWA) and French Equatorial Africa (FEA). Between the two federations of the French African empire, FEA was the pillar of French colonization, as evidenced by de Gaulle's famous discourse in Brazzaville (October

27, 1940), where he announced the creation of a committee for the defense of the empire threatened by the Nazis.

[14] Conversely, the Senegalese in Cape Town who previously were divided along religious lines (Mourides vs. non-Mourides) now form a single community, under the umbrella "Senegalese." Senegalese identification is the only prerequisite for joining the association.

[15] This applies also to Swahiliphones coming from the Congo DRC or Burundi, who will favor Swahili over English when communicating with Kenyans or Tanzanians.

[16] Further studies still need to be conducted on those migrants who have spent years in transit in non-Francophone countries before reaching South Africa. They should shed light on how their transit experiences have helped shape their identity repertoires.

[17] For example, *J'ai parlé avec un my bru de mon problème* 'I spoke about my problem with a my bru' (Isabelle, Congo DRC).

[18] Despite figures showing that Black South Africans are more welcoming of African migrants (49% have an unfavorable opinion about them) than are the Whites (62%) or the Coloreds (64%), migrants feel generally more threatened by the former.

[19] Since July 2006, around 30 Somali businessmen have been killed and more stores burned down in the townships around Cape Town. See http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=284263&area=/breaking_news/breaking_news__national/

[20] According to McDonald & Jacobs 2005, there is a common (mis)representation of cross-border migration (especially coming from African countries) in the South African print media as well as in public opinion. It is hard to decide which one of them feeds the other.

[21] Blommaert (2005:74) defines "orders of indexicality" as "stratified patterns of social meanings." According to him, not only are signs and meanings connected to a wider sociocultural space (what Silverstein 2003 calls "indexical order"), but also "such ordered indexicalities themselves occur in the form of stratified complexes, in which some kinds of indexicalities are ranked higher than others".

[22] This observation also applies to English (Vigouroux 2005).

[23] Exceptions to categorization as "refugee" are Nigerians and Angolans, who are much more stigmatized and are often identified specifically by their nationalities.

[24] In 1999, when Célia was interviewed, South Africans were still not accustomed to African migrants' foreign accents. Things have changed and "linguistic profiling" seems to have increased, based on what many of my informants report.

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