

Feasibility of Nigeria's Future Membership of the "Francophonie"

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Abstract

Nigeria's membership of the Francophonie, the theme of this paper presented at the Retreat organized by the NIIA and Nigeria's Senate Foreign Relations Committee at Victoria Island, Lagos, tagged: "Charting a new Foreign Policy Thrust for Nigeria" (June 1-3, 2014), seeks to examine the urgency of, and the modalities for actualizing renewed ties of Nigeria with France and her former colonies the world over, who make up the "French Commonwealth". The new French politico-cultural family called Francophonie came into being with the inauguration of the famous Agence de Coopération culturelle et technique (ACCT) on March 20, 1970, in Niamey, Niger Republic. Of what significance is the proposed future membership of the Francophonie to the foreign policy of Black Africa's most populous Nation, which Capital, Abuja, serves as the permanent Secretariat of the 16-member sub-regional body, ECOWAS, dominated by French-speaking countries? Cameroun, one of Nigeria's neighbors, although located in the Central African sub-region, is a permanent member of the Francophonie while still belonging to the British Commonwealth in line with her bilingual posture, and Ghana, a traditional member of the Commonwealth like Nigeria, became an Associate Member of the Francophonie in 2006. Desirable as the idea is, this writer opines that in view of Nigeria's cultural and linguistic heterogeneity, and more importantly, in order to ensure that the cultural identity of the World's most populous black Nation is not compromised, her future membership of the Francophonie, if approved by legislation, should be premised on a cultural agreement to be signed by Nigeria and France, compelling French and French-speaking Nationals to study and research into Nigerian culture and either of her three major languages - Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa (WAZOBIA), while French becomes henceforth Nigeria's second official language and a compulsory subject in WAEC examination.

Introduction

Of what relevance is membership of the *Francophonie* to a leading traditional member of the *British Commonwealth* in the 21st century? Is this quest by a section of the Nigerian intellectual elite for Nigeria's entry into the French Club of Nations designed for hegemonic purpose? Or is it in keeping with the growing image of Africa's leading Economic power, a leading member of the Non-Aligned movement aspiring also to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council? And isn't the hypothesis of Nigeria's renewed and reinforced ties with the two major linguistic Blocs - the *Francophonie* and the *Commonwealth*, germane to her foreign policy thrust as the seventh most populous Nation in the world that has for decades been in the vanguard of conflict resolution efforts all over the globe, but whose national cohesion is now threatened by the nefarious, sectarian Boko Haram insurgents?

These posers, if pondered on by the crop of intellectual and political elites that gathered together in the course of the three-day Retreat organized by the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) in conjunction with the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, with contributions from debates to be organized for academics, diplomats and media executives at appropriate fora, will no doubt serve to appropriately re-examine the feasibility of Nigeria's membership of the *Francophonie* in the context of on-going efforts to re-frame Nigeria's foreign policy objectives. And for the programme to succeed, it must be budgeted for and well planned, with widespread mobilization of all stakeholders in the federal and state political administrations and the academia (in the secondary and tertiary sectors), as well as Embassies of all the French-speaking Nations represented in Nigeria and the Nigerian foreign missions in those countries.

Definition of Terms

What do the terms "feasibility" and "Francophonie" mean as political concepts? Feasibility in its simple dictionary rendering means "practicability" or the likely prospects or chances of success of a proposed idea. However, in foreign relations parlance, feasibility is a study of likely positive impact a foreign relations policy could achieve in a prevailing situation, compared to previous policies. It acknowledges the dynamism of foreign policy and implicitly underscores the need for constantly re-appraising the foreign policy of a Nation. "Francophonie"

on the other hand is a dynamic, rapidly evolving, linguistico-cultural phenomenon that emerged in the years of French decolonization (1944-1958) to jettison the oppressive assimilation policy and establish between France and her erstwhile colonies a new spirit of conviviality and fraternity, thus becoming in the post-independence years, a cultural and political family of French-speaking Nations spread across the five continents.

Shift from Assimilation to Collaboration

What was the situation like in Francophone Africa prior to World War II, when the French policy of assimilation relegated inhabitants of French territories in Central Africa and West Africa to the sub-human status of “Subjects”, save for the minority population of the four model posts – Saint-Louis, Dakar, Rufisque and Gorée, referred to as the French “Quatre Communes” of Senegal, whose inhabitants were all unconditionally accorded French citizenship since late 19th century? The populace in these four privileged towns exercised the right to vote and be voted for, just like the French citizens in France, and they were indeed represented in the French National Assembly by a deputy, Blaise Diagne, who, besides his parliamentary functions, was assigned the duty of recruiting black soldiers to fight for France during the two World wars.

French colonization dates back to the Berlin Conference held from November 1884 to February 1885 at the instance of Belgian King, Leopold II, during which the African continent was partitioned and shared among the then Western powers (Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, etc.). However, according to French historians, Hubert Deschamps (1962), and Xavier Yacono (1971), French colonization had commenced in Senegal since 1954, thirty years before the Berlin Conference, making Senegal to become the first French colony in Africa. And so, French Subjects, numbering millions, in the rest of Senegal and other French territories in Africa were denied French citizenship until 1946 when the 4th Republican Provisional Constitution (article 80) conferred on them as well as inhabitants of all other territories in the erstwhile French empire the new citizenship status.

Why the discriminatory treatment and status accorded inhabitants of the four “French Communes” and those of other French territories in Africa, one may ask? Worthy of note is the fact that social and political rights

were gradually restored to the erstwhile “Subjects” as the decolonization process that commenced with the Brazzaville Conference in 1944 progressed. Precisely, a new law officially abolishing the obnoxious assimilation policy by institutionalizing federalism in the French system called *Deferre Loi Cadre* of 23rd June 1956, initiated by Felix Houphouët-Boigny, French Minister of State and deputy representing Cote d’Ivoire, inaugurated local assemblies, government councils and local executives in all overseas territories. The territories which became Administrative Divisions of the French Republic would henceforth be headed by Governors to be assisted by ministers to be elected by the territorial assembly, with one of them serving as vice-president of the government. Also, all adults aged 18 years and above could vote and be voted for as Universal Adult Suffrage was introduced into all the territories under the new law. According to Hubert Deschamps in his book, *Les Institutions Politiques de l’Afrique Noire* (P.U.F, Paris, 1964, 82), Mamadou Dia was the Vice-President in Senegal.

At the outbreak of World War II, Black intellectual elites of African and Caribbean descent resident in Paris, including the fire-brand Négritude school of poets led by Leopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas, had formed a vanguard that vehemently denounced the ills of colonization – racism, slavery, human trafficking, acculturation and oppression of black peoples in the diaspora, which severity varied, being more pronounced in the Caribbean islands than in black Africa, necessitating the publication of Léon-Gontran Damas *Retour de Guyane* (1938), Frantz Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), and Aimé Césaire’s *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950), three satirical essays that depicted the extreme depleting of human and natural resources as well as dehumanizing of the psyche of black peoples in the Latin American islands of Guyane, Guadeloupe, Réunion and Martinique. Aimé Césaire, the pragmatic French poet and deputy-mayor of Martinique could not help defining colonization as a mathematical equation: “Colonisation = Chosification”¹, meaning: “Colonization = Lifelessness”.

However, we must not forget the pioneering role of the Literary Journal, *L’Etudiant noir*, founded by the trio of Senghor, Césaire and Damas in 1934, and their early collections of poems which formally launched the philosophy of black consciousness called *Négritude*, beginning from the years preceding World War II, notably Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un*

retour au pays natal (1939), *Les Armes miraculeuses* (1946), *Et les chiens se taisaient* (1956), *Ferremets* (1959); Léon-Gontran Damas *Pigments* (1937), *Veillées noires* (1943), *Graffiti* (1953), *Black Label* (1956); and Léopold Sédar Senghor's *Chants d'ombre* (1945), *Hosties noires* (1948), *Chants pour Naett* (1949), *Ethiopiennes* (1956). Also worthy of note is the unforgettable inspiration the latter group drew from the *Niagara Movement* and the *Negro-Renaissance* of Negro-American writers such as W.E.B Du Bois (author of *Black Souls*, 1903), Booker T. Washington, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Alain Locke, etc., who led the protests against racism and oppression of the Black peoples in the United States of America in late 19th century, and the Caribbean renaissance writers of early 20th century, in Paris, notably the *Légitime Défense* group, and René Maran, the Martinico-Guyanese black French Colonial Administrator, and author of the great satirical prose, *Batouala*, winner of the prestigious Prix Goncourt (1921) that denounced the dehumanizing oppression of the French colonial policy in Oubangui-Chari (present day Centrafrique Republic), the author's domain.

Léopold Sédar Senghor was to later acknowledge the indebtedness of the Negritude school to both René Maran and W.E.B. du Bois, as the leading representatives of the Negro-American and Caribbean black protest movements. In his contribution to the book, *Hommage à René Maran* (Présence Africaine Paris, 1965, 9-13), Senghor says about René Maran, who was sacked by the Colonial office in Paris immediately the book, *Batouala* came out in 1921, only to be celebrated shortly after, same year, with the highest French literary award, Prix Goncourt : “*C'est que nous sentions en lui, l'Ami, l'Ainé, je dis le Précurseur de la négritude en Francophonie*” (The fact is that we felt in him, a Friend, an Elder, I mean, the Precursor of negritude in Francophonie), and “*René Maran est en Francophonie, le Précurseur de la négritude. Qu'on relise seulement Batouala*” (René Maran is in Francophonie, the Precursor of negritude. One simply needs to read again *Batouala*).

And referring to the Negro-American writers, precursors of the negritude movement, Senghor commends particularly William Edward Burghard du Bois in the following words: “*Comme on le sait, ce dernier, né dans le Massachusetts, finit par émigrer en Afrique, où il prit la nationalité ghanéenne. C'est lui qui avait fondé, avant de quitter les USA, la National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples. En*

vérité, c'est lui le fondateur historique de la Négritude. (As we know, this man, born in Massachusetts ended up migrating to Africa where he took the Ghanaian nationality. He it was, that founded, before leaving the United States, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples. Truly, he is the historical founder of Negritude).

Francophonie, A Synonym or Antinomy of Assimilation?

Onésime Reclus, 19th century French geographer who first used the word “Francophonie” in his book, *France, Algérie et colonies* (1880) described it as “*ayant rapport aux populations et aux pays qui à divers titres utilisent la langue française*” (relating to populations and countries who in diverse ways use French language). However, French parliamentarian, Xavier Deniau who for decades represented Loiret region in the French National Assembly gives the word “Francophonie” a cultural connotation in his book, *La Francophonie* (P.U.F, Paris, 1995, 3-8) describing it as : “*les liens privilégiés entre les hommes et les peuples de langue française*” (having to do with privileged links between French-speaking men and peoples), or “*un moyen de compréhension réciproque et de solidarité entre les peuples*” (a means of reciprocal understanding and solidarity among peoples). The linguistic concept however became a universal, politico-cultural and humanist philosophy as expressed by its founding genius, Senegalese-born French poet, Léopold Sédar Senghor, in an article published in a special edition of *Esprit* literary journal, in Paris in November 1962 in the following words: “*La Francophonie, c'est l'Humanisme intégral qui se tisse au tour de la terre, la symbiose des énergies dormantes de tous les continents, de toutes les races, qui se réveillent à leur chaleur complémentaire*“ (Francophonie is the integral humanism that revolves around the earth, the symbioses of dormant energies of all continents, of all races, that re-awaken with complimentary heat).

A new spirit of collaboration was engendered in 1944 by General Charles de Gaulle, Leader of *France Libre* movement that liberated France from the invading German Vichy, through a new diplomacy adopted by Félix Eboué, first black Governor-general of *French Equatorial Africa* to convene the first imperial meeting of all governors of AEF and AOF colonial regions in Africa. Held from 30th January to 8th February 1944, with the officials of the Overseas Ministry and 9 members of the Consultative Assembly in Paris, as well as 6 Observers sent by the

Governor-general of Algeria and the Residents-general of Tunisia and Morocco, in attendance, in Brazzaville, a new French foreign policy emerged seeking to assuage the feelings of the French Overseas territories.

Hence the Brazzaville Conference of 1944 was followed by the 1946 Provisional Fourth Republican Constitution tagged “Union Française” and the 1956 *Deferre Loi-Cadre*. The decolonization process was finally concluded in 1958 with De Gaulle’s new Constitution tagged *Communauté Française* and the Referendum conducted by the first Fifth Republic French President during his historic visit to the capital cities of all the colonies of France in Africa, in September of that year. De Gaulle’s mission was to ask if the people in the colonies wanted to go it all alone or to remain part of the new French Republic, and quite expectedly, only Sékou Touré’s Guinea opted for immediate independence.

Worthy of note here is the fact that the gradual moves towards internal autonomy and independence called “decolonization” were made possible by the emergence of deputies representing all the colonies in the French Constituent Assembly and the French National Assembly as early as 1945. Some African deputies notably, Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), Modibo Kéita (Mali) and Houphouët-Boigny (Cote d’Ivoire) were appointed Ministers of State under various governments of the French 4th Republic.

And so the concept of Francophonie has many dimensions – linguistic, cultural, political, and philosophical – all of which have since 1945 been explored scientifically by scholars from across the diverse francophone geographical regions on the planet, leading to the emergence of what has become known as “La Francophonie Institutionnelle”. According to Xavier Deniau in his book, *La Francophonie* (P.U.F, Paris, 1995, 55-57), we have first, the pre-historic period when preliminary steps taken by scholars led to the setting up of “Association des Pédagogues de langue française” (1899), research findings by Onésime Reclus, French geographer, about the situation in the francophone world in different publications (1890-1904), publication of the book, *La Défense de la Langue Française* by Albert Dauzat (1912), creation in 1906 of “Fédération internationale pour la Culture et expansion de la Langue

française” which three Congresses took place in Liège (1906), Arlon (1908), and Gand (1913), as well as the creation of “Association internationale des Ecrivains de langue française”, in 1937, in Paris, under the patronage of P. Y. Sebillot and Maurice Wilmotte, four major evolutionary stages of the phenomenon called *Francophonie* were mapped out, as follows:

1). **The period: 1945-62**, when Francophonie attracted the attention of all, an era that was characterized by the following:

- L’Association Internationale pour la Culture française à l’étranger, created in 1960, and has since 1962 published the journal, *Culture française*, a francophone mouth piece
- L’Association international des Journalistes de langue française (UIJPLF), established in 1952
- L’Union culturelle française, established in 1954, at the instance of French Canadians notably J. M. Léger
- L’Association internationale des Sociologues de langue française, established in 1958
- L’Association des universités partiellement ou entièrement de langue française (l’AUPELF), which became known later as AUPELF-UREF, and Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), both of which were set up in 1961
- Publication of a special edition of Esprit journal, in 1962
- L’Institut international de droit d’expression française (IDEF), set up in 1964, under the chairmanship of René Cassin, winner of Nobel Peace Prize

2). **The era of proposals** (1965-1967) noted for, among others, the creation of International Ministerial Conferences such as the Conference of Ministers of Education of France and of African states and Madagascar, and the Conference of Ministers of Youth & Sports; creation of a High Commission for the Defense and the Promotion of French language (1st December 1965); the 1st Biennial of the Francophonie held in Namur (10-15 September, 1967); Québec declares itself a “Francophone Nation” since 1960; L’Union Africaine et Malgache is renamed in 1965 as l’OCAM (Organisation Commune Africaine et Malgache), a formidable group specially promoted by three African

Heads of State - Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), Habib Bourguiba (Tunisia), and Hamani Diori (Niger), and described by Xavier Deniau as “*Le noeud des projets francophones*” (The knot of francophone projects); creation in Luxembourg (1967) of the International Association of Parliamentarians in French language (AIPLF), which later became known as the Parliamentary Assembly of Francophonie (APF); and the 11th Biennial of French language during which decisions were taken on the creation of the International Council of French language (CILF), and of the International Federation of French Teachers (FIPF) in 1969.

3). **The Period of Decisions**, announcing the new wave of political consciousness that began in 1968, thus defining the role of “*médiatrice culturelle et politique entre les nations comme fut la civilisation grecque*” (cultural and political mediator between nations as did Greek civilization) assumed by the Francophonie. Highlights of events here include, Invitation of Québec to the Conference of Ministers of Education in 1968; creation of the Franco-Québécois Office for Youths; Inauguration by 26 countries of the Agence de Coopération culturelle et technique (ACCT) on March 20, 1970, in Niamey, Niger Republic (Jean-Marc Léger, Québécois, served as the first Secrétaire Général of ACCT till 1974); creation of the Francophonie Commission in 1973; the 5th Biennial of French language held in Dakar, presided over by Léopold Sédar Senghor, president of Senegal; the Super Franco-Festival (an artistic entertainment show par excellence) held in Québec in July 1974, etc.

4). **Era of goals**, characterized first by, the hosting in Paris, in February 1986, of the 1st Conference of Heads of State and government of countries “*having in common the usage of French*“. Other highlights spelt out in the Foreword to Xavier Deniau’s book, *La Francophonie* (P.U.F, Paris, 1995, 4), include the following: Creation in 1986, in Paris of a Secretariat of State, in charge of Francophonie, in the office of the Prime Minister (the post that was assigned to a dynamic Antillais woman, Lucette Michaux-Chevry); appointment of Alain Decaux as Minister delegate in charge of Francophonie, in the office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in 1988; creation of a Commission of Francophonie, assigned to award prizes in the field of science, within the Academy of Science for Overseas; and lots of cultural, sporting and artistic shows such as ministerial meetings, colloquia, artistic and cultural events, and also the Francophonie games that have been on since June 1994.

A New Complementarity of Cultures

And so a new French politico-cultural policy pioneered by three of Africa's francophone presidents – Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), Habib Bourguiba (Tunisia) and Hamani Diori (Niger), gave birth to the *Francophonie*, the French Cultural family, with the inauguration of the famous *Agence de Coopération culturelle et technique* (ACCT) in Niamey, Niger Republic on 20th March 1970. This cultural family grew in strength, with the inauguration of the *Haut Conseil de la Francophonie* in 1984, having as President, the incumbent French president, François Mitterrand, and the immediate past president of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor (elected first black French Academician a year earlier), as Vice-President of the Haut Conseil. And from 1986, the Summit of Heads of State and government of countries that are partially or fully French-speaking, has held regularly every two years, on rotational basis, in the capitals of the member states, with the Secretary General of the Francophonie presiding.

What the Francophonie set out to do, which it did successfully, was to give the obnoxious French policy of Assimilation, decried as oppressive and dehumanizing, a human face, because not only did the French Africans remain culturally annihilated after the independence of the erstwhile colonies in 1960, Léopold Senghor's interpretation of the Negritude humanistic philosophy tagged "Dialogue of cultures" or "Cultural diversity", as a tool for promoting the expansion and dominance of French culture all over the globe in the 21st century, rendered Africa's indigenous languages a nullity just as it bastardized African culture which became subservient to French culture. Although Aimé Césaire's *Rendez-vous du donner et du recevoir* (a Give and Take round table) which humanistic philosophy was spelt out in an article titled "Négrérie", published in *L'Etudiant noir* journal in 1935, proved to be not just a slogan in hypocrisy, but a practical affirmation of an authentic philosophy of black cultural renaissance:

C'est pourquoi la Jeunesse noire tourne le dos à la tribu des Vieux. La tribu des Vieux dit : Assimilation. Nous répondons Résurrection. La Jeunesse noire veut agir et créer, elle veut avoir ses poètes, ses romanciers qui lui diront à elle ses malheurs à elle et ses grandeurs à elle :

elle veut contribuer à la vie universelle, à l'humanisation de l'Humanité ...

(That's why the black Youth turns its back to the club of the Elders. The Elder's club says: Assimilation. We say in response Resurrection. The black Youth wants to act and invent, it wants to have its poets, its novelists who will say to its face its own misfortunes and its own achievements: it wants to contribute to universal life, to the humanization of Humanity)

Aimé Césaire, described by the Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, as one of the best Sages the world had known since antiquity 2, confessed early enough knowing very little about Africa before meeting Senghor in Lycée Louis-le-Grand and Sorbonne University in 1931. He however remained dogged in his belief that he and his people in the Caribbean's originated from Africa. He is known to have said: "*Mes ancêtres ne sont pas les Gaulois, ils sont les Africains*" (My ancestors are not the early French fathers, they are Africans)

And so Léopold Sédar Senghor's dream of "métissage culturel" and Aimé Césaire's "Rendez-vous du donner et du recevoir", both, a hybrid or symbioses of diverse cultural values of different races (African, European and Asian) coming together for mutual, multiracial relations, seems to have materialized, as the *Francophonie* now has about 80 member countries, including Ghana that became an Associate member in 2006. But is the cultural hybrid merely cosmetic or is it truly a mutually beneficial partnership among nations whose diverse cultural identities are duly protected?

In what appeared like an answer to this question, French president François Mitterrand said in his address to the first Francophone Summit held in Paris-Versailles in February 1986, that all member nations of the Francophonie were "free" and "equal", and that the master-servant relationship of the colonial era was a thing of the past. And speaking in the same vein during his address to the Francophone Summit held in Cotonou, Benin Republic in 1995, French president Jacques Chirac pledged to continually provide financial support for France's former colonies, her most dependable allies during the two world wars to whom

she felt greatly indebted, « *en raison d'une histoire partagée, du sang versé aux heures les plus sombres* » (on account of a historical partnership, and the blood that was shed in the most sober hours).

Also while declaring open the 10th International Colloquium on Creole language studies held in Reunion University on 29th October 2002, M. M. Cheymol, Programme Coordinator of Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), said that the word “créole” has nothing to do with the old debate about skin colour or pigmentation, and that the real issue of debate in the postcolonial era should center on cultural alienation which is giving way to a new concept called “cultural hybrid”. And in his address as the chief host of the Francophone Summit held in Cotonou, shortly after his election as French president in 1995, Jacques Chirac expressed the support of France for the promotion of national indigenous languages in member states, affirming that : “*L’usage du français ne veut et ne doit en aucune façon menacer la vitalité des langues nationales ou locales, essentielles à la sauvegarde et à l’épanouissement de chaque culture*”, (Usage of French should not and cannot in any way threaten the growth of national or local languages which are essential for the protection and promotion of each culture), adding, “*chaque langue a son génie*” (each language has its spirit), and warning against future disappearance of several languages : “*Cependant, le danger existe d’une perte d’influence des autres langues vernaculaires, et d’une éradication complète des langues vernaculaires*” (However, there is the danger of a loss of influence of other vernacular languages, and of total eradication of some vernacular languages).

However, the various official pronouncements coming from metropolitan France in favour of cultural hybrid and whole-hearted acceptance of other national languages within the French cultural family seem insufficiently satisfactory to critics from Canada-Québec, the Caribbean’s and black Africa who readily point at the reluctance of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of countries having French in common (the Francophone Summit), and especially the Secretary General, president Abdou Diouf of Senegal, whose third, 4-year term is to end in the first quarter of 2015, to shift ground on the use of French as the sole language of the French cultural assembly.

The first reaction came from Jean-Marc Léger, pioneer Secretary General of l'AUPELF and ACCT, who, in his foreword to Michel Tétu's book, *La Francophonie: Histoire, Problématique et Perspectives* (Ed. Hachette, Montréal, 1988), drew attention to the danger of having French as the sole medium of linguistic expression in the French cultural family:

Mon inquiétude est à la mesure de l'ampleur de la tâche à accomplir, des périls qui montent du retard que nous avons pris, collectivement ... La langue française est menacée tout comme les cultures représentées au sein de notre communauté se trouvent mises en cause par la diffusion constante d'un seul modèle socio-culturel, par le risque mortel de l'uniformisation, négation de l'universel ...

(My concern is *about* the magnitude of the task ahead, about the increasing dangers regarding our late actions ... French language is threatened just as the cultures represented within our community are being questioned by the constant dissemination of one single socio-cultural model, by the deadly risk of uniformity, a negation of universality ...)

In like manner, the Canadian Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, had in his speech read at the first Francophone Summit of 1986, pleaded the cause of the diverse peoples of the Francophone world whose aspirations constitute the major issue for discussion at the Francophonie. He said inter alia: "*La Francophonie, c'est d'abord et avant tout des hommes, des femmes, des jeunes. Elle impose de garder à l'esprit leurs aspirations et leurs rêves, et d'apporter réponse à leurs besoins fondamentaux* » (Francophonie is first and foremost about men, about women, about young people. It compels us to keep in mind their aspirations and their dreams and to bring answers to their basic, essential needs).

And Michel Tétu, in his book, *La Francophonie: Histoire, Problématique et Perspectives* (Ed. Hachette, Montréal, 1988, 199), quotes Jacques Rabemananjara (Malgache), writer, and Ali Moindjie (Comorian), journalist, both as condemning the omnipresence of French in the Francophone family. Rabemananjara says: "*La langue française a été un*

objet de répulsion tant qu'elle représentait une langue de domination" (French language has been an object of repulsion for so long as it represented a language of domination). But Ali Moindjie, sounding bitter in his article in *Le Devoir* newspaper of 21st June 1986, says: « *Le Français est un instrument de pouvoir dont se sert une élite pour tenir à l'écart la population dont il détruit les particularismes et provoque une certaine uniformisation* » (French is an instrument of power used by the elite to keep at bay the populace whose peculiarities are destroyed, and it engenders some measure of uniformity), adding :

La francophonie serait un espace qui laisserait s'affirmer le polymorphisme des peuples, un carrefour où se rencontreraient les particularités pour s'enrichir mutuellement. Hélas ! Entre les discours et la réalité, il y a un fossé : Le français tue nos langues

(Francophonie should be a space that would allow for free expression of diverse voices, a cross-road where peculiarities would meet to mutually enrich one another. But! Between speeches and reality, there is a wide gulf: French is killing our languages).

Franco-Nigerian Economic and Political Relations

One major index of a favorable climate for Nigeria's future entry into the Francophonie is the steadily increasing growth of trade between Nigeria and France that has made Nigeria become France's largest trading partner in Africa. A long list of French companies - CFAO, SCOA, TOTAL/FINA/ELF, Spi Batignolles, Fougerole, Michelin, Peugeot-Automobile, are visibly present today in Nigeria, in addition to the Franco-Nigerian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Coupled with the fact that Nigeria, on the strength of the volume of her trade with France now belongs to the *Zone de la Solidarité Prioritaire*, and lots of Cooperation Agreements signed by France and Nigeria since 2009 have enhanced teaching of French as well as cultural and scientific exchanges. It is on record that in 2009, French Prime Minister, François Fillon, paid a historic visit to Cameroun and Nigeria. According to Fillon, representing president Nicolas Sarkozy, his visit to Cameroun was to

consolidate existing relations, while his coming to Nigeria was to chart a new course in boosting bilateral relations.

Recently French president François Hollande met with the Nigerian president Dr. Ebele Goodluck Jonathan on 25th September 2012, during the 67th session of the United Nations General Assembly, and again, on 11th February 2013 in Paris (with French foreign minister, Laurent Fabius present) as well as on 6th and 7th December 2013, at the Elysée Summit for Peace and Security in Africa. French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius came to Nigeria on two occasions, in March 2013 and in November 2013, and he was received by President Goodluck Jonathan. On the 15th and 17th September 2013, French Minister of Foreign Trade, Nicole Bricq, visited Abuja and Lagos. Notable initiatives were taken on this occasion including the inauguration of the Franco-Nigerian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Also, the French Minister for Development, Pascal Canfin, came to Nigeria on 17th January 2014, on the occasion of the 12th plenary Session of the pilot group on innovative financing of development, presided over by Nigeria in 2013.

And most significantly, during his recent official visit to Nigeria as Special Guest at the ceremony marking the Centenary of the Amalgamation of the two protectorates of Nigeria, North and South, on 27th February 2014, on the questions de security, the war against terrorism and economic diplomacy, French President, François Hollande, pledged the solidarity and support of France for Nigeria in the on-going war against the Islamic terrorists tagged «Boko Haram».

Nigeria's Membership of Francophonie Anchored on a Linguistico-Cultural Agreement

But what form should Nigeria's membership of the Francophonie take? We opine that our membership of a linguistic and cultural family such as the Francophonie should be premised on a mutually-agreed cultural and linguistic accord that will be signed by both the Nigerian and French authorities, compelling nationals of France and other Francophone countries to learn and research into either of Nigeria's three major languages - Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo (WAZOBIA), while French will become our second official language and a compulsory subject in WAEC examinations. This will necessitate the three Social-Cultural

Organizations representing the three language blocs - *Yoruba Council of Elders*, *Arewa Consultative Forum*, and *Eze Ndigbo*, acting positively, in conjunction with the Governors of their Regions to fund each a gigantic Center for Studies and Research into the Language and Nigerian Culture, here in Nigeria, in addition to setting up Research Institutes in Francophone Universities. Such an arrangement will promote continental collaboration while not compromising our indigenous cultural identity.

Legislation and Budget

Nigeria's membership of the Francophonie here advocated should be a planned and structured arrangement to be backed by appropriate legislation at the National Assembly (with the unanimous support of at least two-third of the 36 States Houses of Assembly, and if need be, a Referendum will be conducted in the six geopolitical zones in the country). This long-term project will also necessitate researching into Nigeria's three major languages, their registers for science, technology and the professions, updating the dictionaries and linguistic structures, at separate workshops to be organized by the socio-cultural organizations hosting leading scientists, literary giants, translators and linguists. Quite unlike the unscientific approach adopted by late General Sani Abacha, former military dictator, who on his return from the 1997 Francophone Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, which he had attended as Observer, made a political declaration that French would soon become Nigeria's second official language and a compulsory subject in WAEC examinations, without any formal consultations with the Nation's foreign policy actors and other stakeholders, and in the absence of a scientific framework sketched out by the Nation's linguistic and literary experts.

In an article published in the *Ethiopiennes* journal, in French in 2003 (no. 70, 1er semestre), Stella M. A. Johnson, Nigeria's first female professor of French, states: "General Abacha merely declared on his return from Hanoi that French would become Nigeria's second official language without signing any decree to back up the declaration, nor sending a formal application for membership to the *Haut Conseil de la Francophonie*" (our translation).

Furthermore, the new linguistico-cultural project proposed for Nigeria, a 15-year master plan to be budgeted for on the concurrent legislative list by both the Federal and State governments, if so approved, will entail a

number of trilingual training programmes (involving English, French and either of Yoruba, Hausa or Igbo depending on the linguistic zones) for administrative, secretarial staff to serve in both public and private sectors, as well as translators and interpreters. In addition to the regular French programmes to be introduced in secondary schools and intensified in the universities for students who opt for such courses (with increased support of the French and Francophone governments by way of appropriate equipment and scholarship for concerned Nigerian students and researchers), that will run side by side with English and Nigerian language programmes in the school curriculum.

Criteria for Membership of the Francophonie

An official publication of the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* titled: “Adhésion d’un Etat ou gouvernement à la Francophonie institutionnelle”, states clearly the basic criteria to be met by any country aspiring to become a member of the French Commonwealth of Nations. Titled: “Une démarche active” (An active step), the 2-paragraph statement says thus:

L’Etat ou le gouvernement qui souhaite adhérer à la Francophonie Institutionnelle doit en faire officiellement la demande. C’est le Sommet de la Francophonie sur la base des recommandations de la Conférence ministérielle, délibérant à huis clos, qui décide d’accueillir ou non le nouveau requérant. Cette décision doit être prise à l’unanimité.

Le fait que le Français ne soit pas la langue officielle du pays requérant ne constitue pas un obstacle à son adhésion. Cependant la place qu’occupe la langue française dans le pays candidat est un critère déterminant d’admissibilité.

(The State or government wishing to become a member of the Institutional Francophonie must submit a formal application. It is the Summit of Francophonie, acting on the recommendations of the Ministerial Conference, at a close-door meeting, which will decide to welcome or

not the new applicant. Such decision ought to be unanimous.

The fact that French is not the official language of the prospective country cannot be an obstacle to its membership. However, the prominence given to French language in the candidate country is a major criterion for admissibility)

Paragraph 2 of the criteria for membership of the Francophonie above clearly indicates that Nigeria's application, if formally submitted to the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) which has since 1997 replaced the *Haut Conseil de la Francophonie* referred to in Prof. Stella Johnson's article published in *Ethiopiennes* journal of 2003, would be approved instantly with Nigeria adopting French as her second official language and a compulsory subject in the yearly WAEC ordinary level examination which the French government has over the years approved as the equivalent of its *Baccalauréat* certificate (a requisite qualification for admission into degree programmes in French universities).

This new status of "second official language and compulsory subject in WAEC examination", to be officially accorded French by the Nigerian government (after due legislative process and approval) on submission of a formal application for membership of the Francophonie, is the clause referred to as "*the prominence given to French language in the candidate's country*", in paragraph 2 of the criteria for membership above.

A Major Challenge

One major challenge ahead of Nigeria's Federal Ministries of Culture and Francophonie, Education, and External Affairs, as well as the National Assembly, States Houses of Assembly, and all other federal and state government agencies and socio-cultural organizations to be involved in the planning and execution of the proposed membership of the Francophonie, is the need to map out a long-term national, linguistico-cultural programme, to be planned and budgeted for. Nigeria's bid to promote the development of her three major languages as emerging world languages to run side by side with the adoption of French as second official language should draw lessons from the age-long language

programmes of the *British Council* and the *Alliance Française* (agencies of the British and French governments for spreading the teaching and learning of the two languages in foreign countries) embarked upon right from the early years of colonization.

And may we add that the reconstituted Federal Ministry of Culture and Francophonie, the Federal Ministry of Education and the Ministry of External Affairs that will coordinate the research and planning of this national cultural renaissance programme, need to be well funded and equipped to assume the arduous task.

Benefits of Nigeria's membership of the Francophonie

Besides enhancing multifaceted global peace as well multilateral relations among Nations and races, Nigeria's membership of the Francophonie will, if and when operational, usher tremendous benefits to both Nigeria and her numerous neighbours in the African continent as well as the Sub-Regional groupings notably the ECOWAS which regional integration programme will receive an added boost as children of the secondary school age on both sides of the divide become bilingual in the not-distant future (teaching of English being compulsory in most French-speaking countries in Africa). Besides, Nigeria's insistence on French and Francophone youths learning and researching into Yoruba, Hausa or Igbo as a pre-condition for her membership of the French cultural family, will inspire the new generation of francophone African elites to focus on indigenous language development and halt their sole dependence on French as medium of expression even in the home.

Conclusion

Finally, Nigeria's membership of the *Francophonie*, so proposed will augur well for integration in the African continent as issues of security and peaceful co-existence will, on the long run, be resolved much easily as language bottle-necks arising from Franco-British rivalry gradually fizzle out. And closer home, in the ECOWAS sub-region, interpersonal and trade exchanges will be enhanced as time goes on, with citizens of member countries mixing much freely, speaking one another's languages. Besides, obvious barriers to customs, monetary and other agreements in the Sub-Regional body will become issues of the past as our three Socio-Cultural Associations pursue vigorously the language and culture programme, with the collaboration of the Federal Government. And we

make bold to say that despite what seemed to be the *faux pas* of late General Sani Abacha who attended the Francophone Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 1997 as an observer, at a time when Nigeria became a pariah State as a result of the Head of State's tyrannical rule, Nigeria's current cordial relations with France and the ECOWAS partners are indices that should encourage us to join the Francophonie.

And once the Federal government and the State governments of the WAZOBIA zones commit themselves to this programme of language and cultural development and adopt relevant national and state policies, approved by the relevant national and state assemblies, with adequate budgetary provisions, there is great optimism that Nigeria will come of age and emerge as the true pride of Africa in no distant future.

Endnotes

1. *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Ed. Présence Africaine, Paris, 1955, 19)
2. Full text of Wole Soyinka's tribute to Aimé Césaire titled: « A Protagonist for Race Validation », in "Annexe 2" of Pierre Akinwande's book: *Négritude et Francophonie, paradoxes culturels et politiques* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 2011, 306-308)

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