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**Language, asylum,  
and the national order**

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# Language, asylum, and the national order

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses modernist reactions to postmodern realities. Asylum seekers in Western Europe – people typically inserted in postmodern processes of globalisation – are routinely subjected to identification analyses that emphasise the national order. The paper documents one such case, that of a Rwandan refugee in the UK whose nationality got disputed by the Home Office because of his ‘abnormal’ linguistic repertoire. An analysis of the specific repertoire of the applicant, however, suggests the validity of his life history. The theoretical problematic is one that opposes two versions of sociolinguistics: a sociolinguistics of languages, used among others by the Home Office, and a sociolinguistics of speech and repertoires, used in the analysis in this paper. The realities of ‘modern’ reactions to postmodern phenomena, especially in the field of language, must be taken into account as part of the postmodern phenomenology of language in society.

Key words: globalisation, asylum seekers, Rwanda, repertoires, postmodernity, modernity, inequality.

# Language, asylum, and the national order

## Introduction

In *The Age of Capital* (1975), Eric Hobsbawm described the paradox of the late nineteenth century, where the classic nation-states of Europe were formed at a time when capital became effectively globalised.<sup>1</sup> While the state became less and less of a relevant scale level economically, it became more the most relevant political scale level, and the expansion and solidification of a transnational economic infrastructure went hand in hand with the expansion and solidification of a national infrastructure: new political systems, education systems, communication systems, military systems. High modernism set in. The development of 'standard', national languages was, of course, an important part of this nation-building process, and when the discourse of trade and industry started conquering the globe, it did so in newly codified and glorified national languages.

Processes of globalisation acquired that name about a century later, and while globalisation contributes little new substance to the processes of worldwide economic expansion, it adds more intensity, depth and velocity to these processes, and it expands the range of objects involved in these processes to include people. The phenomenon of refugees and asylum seekers is a key ingredient of the present stage of globalisation, and this paper will address the ways in which such globalisation phenomena again appear to trigger an emphasis on the national order of things. In the context of asylum application procedures, the imagination of language, notably, is dominated by frames that refer to static and timeless national orders of things. So while asylum seekers belong to a truly global scale-level of events and processes, the treatment of their applications is brought down to a rigidly national scale: a very modernist response to postmodern realities. This, to be sure, creates all sorts of problems – problems of justice, to name just one category. It also lays bare some of the threads of the fabric of globalisation – the paradox between transnational processes and national frames for addressing them, for instance.

This paper seeks to document these problems, to draw attention to some of the underlying theoretical issues in decoding them, and to suggest more appropriate ways of addressing them. In doing so, I will discuss at length one particular case of an asylum application in the UK. The case is that of a young man I shall call Joseph Mutingira, a refugee from Rwanda, whose application was refused largely on grounds of the particular sociolinguistic profile he displayed. This profile, the Home Office argued, disqualified him as someone 'from Rwanda'. Joseph appealed against this ruling and provided a very long written testimony documenting his life, the incidents in which he was involved and his escape, and rebutting the arguments that supported the ruling. This document will be the main data I shall use; in addition, I also have the written records of the two interviews Joseph did in the context of his application (dated, respectively, November 2001 and June 2004) as well as a copy of the official decision by the Home Office of November 2005 on Joseph's case.<sup>2</sup> I will argue

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented as a plenary lecture at the annual meeting of the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL), Washington DC, April 2008.

<sup>2</sup> In the UK, the interview record is handwritten by the interviewer and is called 'verbatim account'. Regardless of the actual language of the interview, however, the record is in English (and thus reflects the institutional voice). It contains both the questions and the answers. In the first interview record of the 'screening interview' in November 2001, Joseph initialled all the answers written down by the interviewer as a token of agreement,

that Joseph's life history provides all sorts of clues about his belonging and life trajectory. These clues, however, together construct a new sociolinguistic profile, one that does not fit the traditional national imagination of Rwanda, but one that fits the realities of Rwanda during and after the 1994 genocide.<sup>3</sup> The main point there is that the sociolinguistic repertoire displayed by Joseph is indicative of *time*, not just of *space*: it connects to the *history* of a region of the last two decades, not just to the region. Sociolinguistic repertoires, thus, index full histories of people and of places, not just institutionally genred 'origins'.

The case I shall build is analytical and theoretical; yet it is practical as well. I intend to demonstrate that a particular kind of sociolinguistic analysis can contribute to addressing and critically questioning very 'applied' issues – issues of life and death for many people. Facts such as the ones reported here should (re)open our eyes for the critical relevance of social-scientific research in our world. I shall begin by providing a *précis* of Joseph's life history, as reported in the written testimony mentioned earlier. For reasons that will soon become clear, I will zoom in on the information on languages and language use found in the text.

### Joseph's life history

Joseph's long affidavit reads like a horror story and it grimly testifies to the profound distortion of the social fabric in Rwanda in the 1990s leading to the genocide of 1994. Here comes a very elementary point: we must read his life history against the backdrop of what we know of that dramatic period in that region of Africa.<sup>4</sup> We must try to imagine his life history as set in a real context, and imagine his life as a possible trajectory followed by people in that region at that time. If we don't, his life history makes no sense – and this fundamental disbelief in the possible realism of such descriptions was underlying to the rejection of Joseph's asylum application in the UK. I suggest we accept, and use as an assumption, that in thoroughly distorted conditions of life, thoroughly distorted lives can be realistic.

Joseph claims to be born in Kigali, Rwanda, in November 1986. This, as mentioned before, was disputed by the UK authorities, and we shall come back to the issue of Joseph's age further down. He claims to be a Hutu, even though his mother was Tutsi. His father was a politician and his mother a businesswoman whose activities were mainly deployed in Kenya. She took young Joseph with her to Kenya, where he attended an English-medium nursery school and, in between visits home, often stayed with a friend of his mother's in Nairobi, with whom he spoke English. He picked up a few words of Swahili from classmates. At home in Kigali, his parents insisted that the children speak English too. The family lived in a compound surrounded by walls, and the father forbade them from going out and socialise with other children. The family had a servant who spoke Kinyarwanda; Joseph learned some Kinyarwanda from him. Visiting friends spoke English, Kinyarwanda and French.

In 1992, at the age of five, Joseph returned to Rwanda with his mother. Shortly after their return, his mother was murdered in circumstances unknown to Joseph. She was buried in their garden, and shortly afterwards the servant left the house. About six months later, the house was attacked at night. Hearing shouting and noise of people breaking things, Joseph jumped out of the window and ran away. His father and the other children in the house were

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though he later argued that the interviewer presented the initialing routine as just a matter of proving that the interview had effectively taken place. The first interview was conducted partly in Kinyarwanda, partly in Runyankole; the second one was conducted completely in English. In the second ('substantive') interview as well as in the official verdict letter, Joseph's nationality and his date of birth are qualified as 'disputed' or 'doubted'.

<sup>3</sup> I am deeply grateful to the man I call Joseph Mutingira here, as well as to his legal counsel Anna, for allowing me to publish elements from his case. I came across these materials in the spring of 2006, when I was asked to provide an expert report for the appeal case, on the treatment of language in Joseph's application.

<sup>4</sup> A very good source for this is Colette Braeckman's (1996) book *Terreur Africaine*.

all killed during the raid. Joseph ended up in a group of other people trying to escape from the area where they lived. He told them that he had an uncle living in Gisenyi, a town on the border with the D.R. Congo and next to the Congolese town of Goma. They took him on board of a lorry and, after several hours, dropped him off in Gisenyi, where he found the way to his uncle's house. In that house, French and Kinyarwanda were spoken most often, but Joseph's uncle consistently spoke English with him. His uncle told him that his father was a politician, that his father killed his mother because she was a Tutsi, and that Tutsis murdered all members of his family out of revenge. In his uncle's house, Joseph slept in the basement, and hardly communicated with anyone (remember, he was a small child). But Joseph saw many people visiting his uncle and heard them speaking 'Kinyankole' (Runyankole), a language similar to Kinyarwanda. Joseph picked up a bit of Runyankole, and started speaking it with his uncle. Given his uncle's proficiency in English, French, Kinyarwanda and Runyankole, Joseph suspected that his uncle had lived in another country, and given the proximity of Gisenyi to Goma he believed it must have been the D.R. Congo. (Runyankole is, in fact, spoken mainly in Uganda and the border areas of Uganda, Rwanda and Congo, but as we shall see it is also a diasporic language among Rwandan migrants and refugees). After some time (Joseph was six years old), his uncle started sending Joseph on errands. He had to carry a bag to a certain place, where someone would tap on his shoulder and take the bag from him. Joseph later came to believe that his uncle was involved with "people from another country", with whom he was plotting something. Gisenyi is adjacent to the Congolese town of Goma, which was the gateway to the Interahamwe rebel-dominated Maniema and Kivu regions in Congo, so this scenario (in 1992-1993) is not unthinkable (e.g. Vlassenroot 2000, Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers 2004).

Joseph did this "for several years" until "one day in 1996 (I think)" he was stopped by RPF Government soldiers. They challenged him in Kinyarwanda, but since his Kinyarwanda was still very basic, he answered them in Runyankole. The bag was confiscated and proved to be full of weapons and ammunition. One of the soldiers then interrogated him in Runyankole, and they suspected that Joseph came from the other side of the border and was a child-soldier of the Interahamwe. They arrested him and took him to his uncle's house. They called his uncle out, exchanged some words, and then summarily executed him in front of the (now 9 or 10 year old) boy. Joseph was brought to a detention camp where he was beaten every day and interrogated about his involvement in rebel activities, about other members of his group, and so on. The interrogations were held in Runyankole, and the fact that Joseph did not have a fluent proficiency in Kinyarwanda was held against him, as grounds for suspicion of being a foreign 'infiltrant'. After some weeks, he was brought to a prison, presumably in Kigali. He found himself in a cell together with another, older, boy named Emmanuel. The latter had been an Interahamwe member, and he spoke Runyankole as well as Kinyarwanda. Like the prison guards, Emmanuel first thought that Joseph came from another country, given his proficiency in Runyankole. Joseph was routinely and very brutally tortured; in addition, he was repeatedly raped by Emmanuel. "After some years" Joseph was put on a forced labour regime; given that the guards' orders were in Kinyarwanda, he learned the language to some degree, and he also learned the Kinyarwanda and Swahili songs they would have to sing during work.

After four years in prison, in 2001, he received a visitor: a lady he vaguely remembers. A short while later, during work, a guard told him to go in the bush, and there he met the same lady. She urged him to follow her, together with another boy in prison uniform. They got into a bus; after a while the other boy got off. The lady and Joseph continued their journey to a coach station, where they caught a bus that took them "to another country". There people "were speaking languages I couldn't understand". They got to an airport, and the lady produced travel documents for Joseph. Together they boarded a flight that took them to the

UK, where the same travel documents enabled Joseph to enter the country. During the whole journey, the woman discouraged Joseph from speaking or asking questions, and in order to gain and reaffirm his trust she repeatedly mentioned the name of Joseph's mother (Joseph afterwards thought she was the Kenyan woman who took care of him in Kenya during his early infancy). They took a bus, got off at some place (presumably central London), and the lady vanished.<sup>5</sup> After several hours of waiting for her, Joseph started walking around, asking people for help. One man took him to the Immigration Service. Joseph was now about 14 years old. When he stated his age to the official ("an Asian lady who spoke Kinyarwanda"), she called in a Medical Officer who, after the briefest and most summary of inspections, declared that Joseph was over 18 and should, consequently, be treated as an adult. Here lies the origin of Joseph's 'disputed' age.<sup>6</sup> One week later, a first 'screening' interview was conducted, and Joseph describes the event as intimidating: the officials insisted on short and direct answers, did not make notes of some of his statements (especially on his linguistic repertoire), and threatened to throw him in prison, something which, given his background, was to be avoided at all costs. When the interviewer asked him about his 'mother tongue', Joseph understood this as his 'mother's tongue' and answered 'Kinyarwanda'. A Kinyarwanda interpreter was called in, and in spite of Joseph's insistence that he would be more comfortable in English and his explanations for his lack of proficiency in Kinyarwanda (not recorded in the verbatim account of the interview), the interview started in Kinyarwanda. Joseph's restricted competence was quickly spotted, and after he declared that he also spoke Runyankole, an interpreter fluent in Kinyarwanda and Runyankole was called in and the interview was continued in Runyankole. Interestingly (and an implicit acknowledgement of Joseph's linguistic repertoire), supplementary questions were asked and answered in English and noted down in the verbatim account. Joseph's case was dismissed as fraudulent, and both his age and his national belonging were disputed.

In November 2003, Joseph's case was reopened by the Home Office, and a second interview took place in June 2004. This interview yielded the usual set of 'contradictions' in comparison with the first, notably with respect to Joseph's language repertoires. In addition, Joseph was not able to give details about Rwanda and Kigali (he could not, for instance, describe the nearest bank to his house in Kigali). He was also asked to provide the numbers from 1 to 10 in Kinyarwanda; since no interpreter was around, he was asked to write these words 'phonetically'. He produced a written list which was half Kinyarwanda and half Runyankole. The result was easy to predict: his application was rejected again. Joseph was ascribed Ugandan nationality and was to be deported to Uganda.

### **From a strange life to no life**

Towards the end of his affidavit, Joseph writes "I may have an unusual history, but this does not make me a citizen of a country I have never been to". Certainly, what transpires from the summary above is that his life was dominated by a kind of Shibboleth-predicament, in which his linguistic repertoire continuously played against him. When he was arrested, his proficiency in Runyankole suggested to the soldiers that he was an agent of the Interahamwe

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph's account of the lady's involvement is vague and evasive. It is not unthinkable that he deliberately tried to shield her from the probing eyes of the Home Office. It is a common problem for asylum applicants that they have to narrate the details of their escape, as this may endanger persons who assisted them in their escape and/or expose valuable networks of migration support. At the same time, vagueness and contradictions in this part of their story work heavily against them in the asylum procedure (see Maryns 2006 for examples and a detailed discussion of this problem).

<sup>6</sup> If Joseph had been accepted as a minor, the application procedure and the legal framework in which he would have found himself would have been significantly different and far more lenient. The way in which Joseph was declared an adult is a gross violation of his rights, of course.

from neighbouring Congo; to Emmanuel, that proficiency suggested the same affiliation; and in the UK his knowledge of English and Runyankole were taken as strong evidence that he is from Uganda, not from Rwanda (where proficiency in Kinyarwanda and French would be expected). So his linguistic repertoire – both positively through what is there and negatively through what is absent from it – perpetually gives him away, categorises him and creates confusion and suspicion about the veracity of his story. In technical jargon, Joseph’s language repertoire is continuously seen as *indexical* of certain political and historical positions, defined from within the synchronic universe of meanings, social categories and attributive patterns in which his interlocutors operate. His proficiency in the particular languages and language varieties he knows continuously ‘gives off’ information about him, it allows his interlocutors to make quick interpretive jumps from speech to society, to provide contextually loaded readings of his words, and to build an image of Joseph on the basis of how he communicates.<sup>7</sup>

### *Life on an exit strategy*

The key to Joseph’s “unusual history” lies in his early childhood. Sociolinguistically as well as in more general ways, Joseph’s life becomes “unusual” right from the very beginning. As said from the outset, we shall assume that Joseph does not lie about the main lines of his story. And if we follow that story, what becomes very clear is that his family was somewhat aberrant. His father was “a politician but I have no knowledge of what he did”; in terms of the essentialized categories of ethnic politics in Rwanda, he was identified as a Hutu as well. The father shielded his family from the outside world by prohibiting the children from playing outside their compound, and by insisting on an English-only policy at home. According to Joseph’s statement, their father was very strict on the use of English at home, and actively forbade the use of other languages for his children: the father “thought that speaking English set us apart from other people and showed that we were more civilised”. In his affidavit, Joseph suggests the following:

“Looking back, I wonder whether my parents had lived abroad when they were younger and that is why they spoke English.”

Given the troubled history of that region, and given his father’s prominence and visibility in public life, this may very well be true. It is not unlikely that his parents had lived abroad as exiles or refugees, for a while during one of the many periods of crisis in Rwanda since independence. The fact that Joseph’s mother appears to have business interests and networks in Kenya could be further circumstantial evidence for that. Mamdani (2000: 307-312) shows that large numbers of so-called ‘Banyarwanda’ (Rwandans, both Hutu and Tutsi) were present as labour migrants in Uganda since the 1920s. Many of them were employed in the cattle-herding Ankole region, where Runyankole is spoken. Refugees of the 1959 and 1964 conflicts also found their way to the same region. A number of these refugees got UNHCR scholarships for schools in, among other places, Nairobi, which became a centre for Rwandan exiles (the exiled king of Rwanda resided in Nairobi). Given the envy this generated among the local population in Uganda, refugees often had to “pretend to be what they were not: Banyankole, Baganda, Banyoro” (Mamdani 2000: 312). So-called Banyarwanda were also prominent in Museveni’s rebel army (and prior to that in Idi Amin’s secret police): up to a quarter of the Museveni rebels who marched into Kampala in early 1986 were Banyarwanda (Mamdani 2000: 321). The point is: the history and politics of Rwanda have since long been

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<sup>7</sup> A very good concise introduction to the notion of indexicality is Silverstein (2006). See also Blommaert (2005).

entangled with those of Uganda, Kenya and other neighbouring countries. That Joseph's family had some involvement in neighbouring countries, and that Runyankole may have entered the family repertoire (e.g. his uncle's) should not be seen as something exceptional. In fact, many Rwandans (Hutu as well as Tutsi) who have a diaspora background are fluent in Runyankole, and that includes the current Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who grew up in the Ankole region.<sup>8</sup>

It is, thus, also not unlikely that the family lived on an exit strategy. The father – a politician – must have been aware of the volatility of the political climate in Rwanda and (given Joseph's uncle's involvement in the Interahamwe) may have been active in particularly sensitive and dangerous (radical Hutu) politics: the kind that could have warranted a permanent readiness to escape from Rwanda and settle elsewhere, in a country such as Kenya where English is widely spoken. Remember: The time-frame described by Joseph (1986, the year of his birth, until his arrest in 1996) covers the victory of Museveni in Uganda (1986), the RPF invasion in Rwanda (1990), and the genocide of 1994: an extremely tumultuous period in the region. The fact that Joseph was put in a nursery school in Kenya adds weight to that suggestion. And the fact that, as Joseph later learns, his Tutsi mother was killed with at least the passive involvement of his Hutu father also bespeaks deep and active involvement in Hutu radicalism. The Tutsi raid on Joseph's house, during which the whole of his family is murdered and the house is set alight, also fits this picture – we see a foreshadowing of the genocide of 1994 here, and radical Hutu are already pitted against radical Tutsi groups in murderous incidents. If we believe Joseph's story, we see that it starts making sense.

When Joseph escapes to his uncle's place, the pattern of political involvement of course becomes clearer. His uncle keeps Joseph out of sight and continues the English-only policy with him, but he also receives many visitors who speak French, Kinyarwanda and Runyankole. We know that both Hutu (Interahamwe) and Tutsi (RPF) rebels had their bases in the neighbouring countries Uganda and Congo (Mamdani 2000, Vlassenroot 2000). Runyankole, as we know, is spoken in Uganda (and is part of the 'Runyakitara' cluster, along with Kinyarwanda, Runyoro and other languages), and with the perpetual movements of groups of migrant, exiled or refugee Rwandans, its spread to particular pockets in Rwanda and Congo is a given. It explains why Joseph meets so many people in Rwanda who speak Runyankole: apart from the people in his uncle's house, some of the RPF soldiers and prison guards also speak the language; so does Emmanuel (an Interahamwe militant), as well as later in the UK the second interpreter in Joseph's application interview, who was fluent (like the Rwandan soldiers and guards) in Kinyarwanda and Runyankole. The 'foreignness' of Runyankole, thus, is not a matter of spatial distribution of the language. Joseph's proficiency in Runyankole is interpreted, quite systematically and by all the people he describes in his narrative, as a sign of being from another country *as well as* a sign of membership of a radical Hutu movement. The language is, by those who in interaction with Joseph project synchronic indexical meanings onto it (the soldiers, Emmanuel, the interrogators, the prison guards), understood as a sign of Hutu rebel involvement imported from neighbouring countries. The geography of the language is a *political* geography, something which does not come as a surprise now that we know something about the history of migration and rebellion in the region. We shall come back to this below.

Joseph's childhood is likely to be spent in a family living on an exit strategy and acutely aware of the danger of their times. Let us not forget that most of the critical period described by Joseph is indeed his childhood, and that this childhood is spent in a deep political crisis in Rwanda. As a toddler, he is raised in Kenya; at the age of five (too young to

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<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to Dr Pamela Mbabazi of Mbarara University in Uganda who, in a personal communication (Cape Town, 18 March 2008), provided me with invaluable insights into the spread of Runyankole as a diaspora language among 'Banyarwanda'.

enter school, where French and Kinyarwanda would be the dominant languages) he returns to Rwanda. Shortly afterwards, and after an interval in which he informally learns some Kinyarwanda from the family's servant, his mother is killed, his family is murdered, and he flees to his uncle in Gisenyi where he lives in hiding and, thus, does not enter school at the normal age of six. For all practical purposes, he is dead, and his uncle probably banks on this when he starts sending him on errands providing arms and ammunition to rebel groups from Goma. His communicative network is extremely narrow. He still does not socialise with other children, and only meets his uncle's fellow rebels, with whom he interacts in Runyankole. His uncle gives him some books to read, in English mostly and some in Kinyarwanda (this provides evidence of reading skills, not of writing skills). Language learning, however, proceeds exclusively through informal channels. The bit of Kinyarwanda he already knows allows him to start picking up some Runyankole, and the English he speaks is solely deployed with his uncle. The reading of books provides some back-up to these learning trajectories, but overall they are informal – that is, they develop outside the collective, regimented and literacy-based pedagogies of the classroom. The latter may be part of the explanation for why he fails the number writing test (and thus must revert to 'phonetic' writing) during his second interview: in all likelihood, Joseph never acquired full literacy in either of the languages he speaks, and during the interview he is asked to write a language which, in his experience, has had very limited functions and is quite close to the language which had more extended functions, Runyankole.

Joseph was arrested at the age of 9-10, and at that age he has not had any formal schooling. His multilingual repertoire is constructed through informal learning processes, and is highly 'truncated', i.e. organised in small, functionally specialised chunks (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck 2005). We shall return to this topic below. For the moment, it suffices to note that Joseph has had indeed "an unusual story", but that such a story may not have been all that unusual in the Rwanda of the early 1990s. This is not how the Home Office saw it.

### *The grounds for rejection*

The Home Office, in its rejection announcement letter of November 2005, saw Rwanda in a very different light: as a relatively stable and relatively uniform nation-state characterised by 'national' features such as a relatively stable regime of language (Kroskrity 2000).

The letter begins by describing the linguistic operations governing the interview procedures (in giving these examples, I shall not be concerned with the grammatical or rhetorical consistency of the text):

(1) "It is noted that you claim you were born in (...) Kigali and that your principal language is English. However, you say you also speak Kinyarkole [sic] and a little Kinyarwanda. It is noted that when you were substantively interviewed, it was conducted in English [reference to the 2004 interview] and when you were interviewed by an Immigration Officer [reference to the 2001 interview], you started the interview speaking in Kinyarwanda then after ten minutes, the interview was continued in the Kinyarkole language (...)"

This description is followed by an authoritative statement about language in Rwanda:

(2) "Although English (and Swahili) are spoken in Rwanda, English is spoken by the Tutsi elite who returned from exile in Uganda post-1994. The BBC World Service, however, advises that a genuine Rwandan national from any of the ethnic groups will normally be able to speak Kinyarwanda and/or French. Kinyarwanda, the national

language, is the medium of instruction in schools at primary level while French is used at secondary level. Kinyarwanda is also spoken in the neighbouring countries of DRC, Tanzania and Uganda. (Rwanda country report April 2004). Whereas, Runyankole, is a dialect mainly spoken in the West and South of Uganda (Uganda country profile April 2005). (...) Based on the information above, it is considered that the language called Kinyarkole used at your screening interview is more widely known as Runyankole, therefore, Runyankole will be referred in the rest of this letter”.

Observe for the moment (a) the reference to formal and institutional language regimes, such as the dominant languages in the education system (which, as we know, was unknown to Joseph); (b) The way in which languages are seen as distributed over *countries*; (c) the sources of evidence used here: the BBC World Service and two unidentified country reports; (d) the fact that the Home Office states that the language (or “dialect”) ‘Kinyarkole’ is more widely known as ‘Runyankole’. Several of these points will be addressed more fully in the next section. Now as to Joseph’s own performance as a subject set in this tight and stable nation-state institutional language regime, this is what the Home Office observes:

(3) “Reasons to doubt your nationality can be drawn from the fact that you are unable to speak Kinyarwanda and/or French. As already stated (...), you were screened for the main part in the Ugandan dialect [sic] and then were substantively interviewed in English. It is noted that you were able to answer a few questions asked in Kinyarwanda at the start of your screening interview. However, in your substantive interview you were asked to state the numbers one to ten in Kinyarwanda (...) and also asked for the phrases ‘Good Morning’ and ‘Goodbye’, you wrote your answers down phonetically because you could not write in the language (...). [I]t has been decided that although written phonetically you did not get all of them correct. (...) Your lack of basic knowledge of the Kinyarwanda language suggests that you are not a genuine national of Rwanda.”

Joseph had written some words in Kinyarwanda, and others in Runyankole. The Home Office continues hammering away at Joseph’s linguistic repertoire and performance during the interviews:

(4) “When asked how you were able to understand Kinyarwanda if you were never taught it and only taught to speak English (...), you did not answer the question directly, instead you said that you wanted to speak English, but you can also understand Kinyarwanda and Runyankole as well. It is believed that if you were able to pick up and speak fluent Runyankole from your uncle with whom you alleged to have stayed for four years in Gisenyi yet unable to pick up Kinyarwanda, even though you claim to have lived in Rwanda for thirteen years [sic]. Your inability to give the correct (phonetic) translations for the general greetings in Kinyarwanda, damages the credibility of your claim (...). Based on this assessment, it is not accepted that you are a genuine Rwandan national as claimed.”

Language is the key element in the argument of the Home Office. But it is not the only one:

(5) “It is noted that you were able to describe the old Rwandan flag (...), however, when you were questioned about the basic geography of your home in (...) Kigali, you were unable to give any information. For instance, you were unable to state any well known landmarks, sites, places, and buildings to your home (...). You did not know of

the nearest bank to your home (...). You were also unable to name any of the major roads nearest to your home in (...) Kigali. (...) It is not accepted that you have sufficiently demonstrated your knowledge of the basic country and local information regarding your alleged place of birth, as such, it is not accepted that you were born and have lived in Rwanda as claimed.”

This, then, leads to the following conclusion:

(6) “It is the opinion that a Rwandan national should be expected to know something about their country of origin and place of birth. Moreover, it is believed that you could be a Ugandan national as result of your knowledge and use of the Runyankole language at screening (...). Or, you could possibly be a national of a different East African country where English is much more widely spoken. Your true nationality, however, cannot be determined at this point in time”.

There we are: Joseph’s “unusual” life has been reset in a different country and in a different time frame, because the Home Office doubts his age as well. From someone with a strange life, Joseph has now been redefined as someone with no life at all.

### **Defying the monoglot ideal**

In a seminal paper, Michael Silverstein (1996: 285) distinguished between a ‘speech community’ characterised by “sharing a set of norms or regularities for interaction by means of language(s)”, and a ‘linguistic community’. The latter is described as

“a group of people who, in their implicit sense of the regularities of linguistic usage, are united in adherence to the idea that there exists a functionally differentiated norm for using their language denotatively (...), the inclusive range of which the best language users are believed to have mastered in the appropriate way.”

Consciousness of a standard (the ‘best’ language) would typically be something that falls within the realm of linguistic communities, and while speech communities are characterized by bewildering diversity, linguistic communities as a rule pledge allegiance to a single norm, and define subjects as ‘(ab)normal’ depending on their degree of fit with that single norm. This pattern of categorization, in which subjects are placed ‘in’ or ‘outside’ normalcy depending on how ‘normal’ their language repertoire is, belongs to what Silverstein calls a ‘monoglot ideology’. A monoglot ideology makes time and space static, it suggests a transcendent phenomenology for things that define the nation-state, and presents them as natural, neutral, a-contextual and non-dynamic: as facts of nature. Such a monoglot ideology is applied by the Home Office in judging and categorizing Joseph as a language-using subject, and it is the fact that Joseph defies this monoglot ideal that serves as the basis for disqualifying him and his claims.

In what follows I shall try to decode this process in which two ‘profiles’ are opposed to one another. In order to do that, I shall have to give sociolinguistic-analytic attention to two different phenomena: the language-ideological work of the linguistic community used as a conceptual backdrop by the Home Office, and the practical, pragmatic repertoire displayed and narrated by Joseph, and the speech communities we can see through that. Both views, as I see it, represent different kinds of sociolinguistics: the first one is a sociolinguistics of language, the second a sociolinguistics of speech or of resources. The first sociolinguistics is a sociolinguistics of stable distribution of ‘languages’, the latter is a sociolinguistics of

mobility, in which actual resources move around through time and space (Blommaert 2003). I will recapitulate this theoretical distinction in my conclusions.

### *The national sociolinguistic horizon*

Let us now return to some of the fragments from the Home Office letter above, and observe how strongly they define languages in terms of national circumscription. In fragment (2) above, for instance, we read

(7) “The BBC World Service, however, advises that a genuine Rwandan national from any of the ethnic groups will normally be able to speak Kinyarwanda and/or French. Kinyarwanda, the national language, is the medium of instruction in schools at primary level while French is used at secondary level.”

In fragment (3), we encountered

(8) “Your lack of basic knowledge of the Kinyarwanda language suggests that you are not a genuine national of Rwanda.”

In fragment (4), we saw

(9) “Your inability to give the correct (phonetic) translations for the general greetings in Kinyarwanda, damages the credibility of your claim (...). Based on this assessment, it is not accepted that you are a genuine Rwandan national as claimed.”

And in fragment (6), finally, we read that

(10) “it is believed that you could be a Ugandan national as result of your knowledge and use of the Runyankole language at screening (...). Or, you could possibly be a national of a different East African country where English is much more widely spoken.

The space in which languages are situated is invariably a *national* space, the space defined by states that have a name and that can be treated as a fixed unit of knowledge and information (as in the ‘country reports’ quoted by the Home Office). It is also a unit of power, control and institutionalisation, as testify the frequent references to formal institutional environments (such as the education system) for the proliferation and distribution of the languages here mentioned.

We have also seen how language itself is totalised and strongly associated with levels and degrees of proficiency: Joseph does not speak *enough* Kinyarwanda, or doesn’t speak it *well enough*, his answers were *not correct*.<sup>9</sup> Even if part of the first interview was done in Kinyarwanda, and even if Joseph wrote some words down in Kinyarwanda, that level of proficiency is deemed to fall below the standards of normalcy in terms of national belonging. As (reliably, one assumes) affirmed by the BBC World Service, “a *genuine* Rwandan national from any of the ethnic groups will *normally* be able to speak Kinyarwanda and/or French”, and that means *a lot of correct* Kinyarwanda and French. And given the assumption that a ‘normal’ Rwandan national would have gone through the national education system (and

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<sup>9</sup> We see a form of governmentality here in which ‘order’ (here: national order) is policed all the way down to the microscopic (or ‘capillary’) levels of pronunciation and writing. This form of policing, to Foucault, would fit in a system of security (Foucault 2007).

would thus have had exposure to formal learning trajectories for the national languages), ‘speaking’ a language equals ‘speaking and writing’. Joseph is asked to *write* numbers in Kinyarwanda, as part of an assessment of whether he *speaks* the language. The highly regimented nature of literacy is simply overlooked, regardless of the fact that Joseph had clearly stated that he had not attended any schools in Rwanda, and regardless of the fact that his problem with literacy had led the interviewer to ask him to write phonetically. The Home Office should have known that they were facing a young man for whom literacy was a hurdle.

A reverse line of argument is used with respect to Runyankole. Since Joseph knows that language *well enough*, and since that language is ‘officially’ spoken (as a ‘dialect’, according to the Home Office) in Uganda, Joseph could be a Ugandan national. The fact that, in Joseph’s account, many other Rwandans were reported to use Runyankole, and given the fact that even in the Immigration Authorities’ offices the Home Office had no problem finding an interpreter fluent in both Kinyarwanda and Runyankole – all of this is overlooked or disregarded. The fact that languages can spill over borders, that such phenomena may be rife in regions where a lot of cross-border traffic exists, that such cross-border traffic is frequent in regions such as that of the Great Lakes where there are large numbers of ‘old’ and ‘new’ refugees (Mamdani 2000, also Malkki 1995), and that people, consequently can have densely mixed, *polyglot* repertoires, are elementary sociolinguistic facts that are not taken into account in the Home Office’s use of language as an analytic of national belonging. This is why we need to shift our focus now from language to speech, and towards the real, practical resources that Joseph has.

#### *A polyglot repertoire*

All of the above is of course reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu’s observation in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991: 45):

“To speak of *the* language, without further specification, as linguists do, is tacitly to accept the *official* definition of the *official* language of a political unit. This language is the one which, within the territorial limits of that unit, imposes itself on the whole population as the only legitimate language, especially in situations that are characterized in French as more *officielle*” (italics in original).

And he continues, “this state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured” (ibid). The political unit that is the target of the Home Office’s ‘objective measurement’ is Rwanda, and ‘the’ languages of Rwanda are (normative, standardized and literate varieties of) Kinyarwanda and French. The Home Office overlooks the fact that when a state is in crisis (like Rwanda for most of its post-colonial history and certainly in the period covered in Joseph’s story), symbols of the state and its power such as the national language can be heavily contested as well. In fact, speaking the national language may in itself be an expression of political allegiance, which, in circumstances of violent conflict, requires dissimulation or denial for one’s own safety, and as mentioned earlier, speaking a ‘rebel’ language such as Runyankole induces a political semiotics.<sup>10</sup>

Joseph did not have a repertoire that accords with the expected ‘official’ and ‘national’ one. But what was his repertoire? It was, undoubtedly, a ‘truncated multilingual’ repertoire, composed of functionally specialised ‘bits’ of language(s) which he had picked up in informal

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<sup>10</sup> This makes the position of interpreters in asylum applications quite precarious. Cases have been reported in which (government-appointed) interpreters identified applicants’ accents as being a ‘rebel accent’. See Maryns (2006) for a general overview of the linguistic aspects of the asylum application in Belgium.

learning trajectories during his life. Remember, of course, that given the particular chronology of the events in his life, Joseph did not attend school apart from the nursery school in Kenya. The linguistic repertoire he reports in his affidavit is the repertoire of a child or an adolescent who grew up in extraordinary conditions, outside any form of ‘normalcy’.

Joseph provides lots of information, and very detailed information, on how he acquired and deployed the multilingual resources he had. In fact, given the prominence given to language issues by the Home Office, his affidavit is replete with descriptions of how and why he acquired linguistic resources, and how he related to them. Here is a little selection of statements on language, and I follow the biographical line reported in the affidavit.

(11) “My first language is English. This is the first language I can remember speaking. Ever since I was a small child, as far back as I can remember, my parents spoke to me in English.”

(12) “It was very important to my father that we children always spoke English as he thought that speaking English set us apart from other people and showed that we were more civilised.”

(13) “The servant would speak Kinyarwanda. I remember sometimes when my parents were both out, the servant would tell us little Kinyarwanda poems and sayings, and so I picked some Kinyarwanda up from him. He also understood and spoke a little English, but he was not fluent.”

(14) “At school in Kenya we were taught in English. All communication was in English and if you spoke to the teachers you had to talk to them in English. (...) Some of the children did speak to each other in Swahili or Kikuyu in the playground (...)”

(15) “When I had been to my uncle’s house with my parents they had spoken French and Kinyarwanda, but mostly Kinyarwanda. However, my uncle had always spoken English to me and my brothers”.

(16) “My uncle spoke lots of languages. He was very good in English, French, Kinyarwanda and Kinyankole. (...) When I first got to his house I couldn’t understand the languages he was speaking and I thought he spoke a different language with every person that came to his house.”

(17) “I did not have a lot to do, and so I would listen to my uncle and his friends talking and I began to learn some of the words they were speaking. The language [Runyankole, JB] is quite similar to Kinyarwanda, and so it wasn’t difficult to learn more, since I already understood some Kinyarwanda. (...) Eventually I knew enough to speak a bit of Kinyankole to my uncle. I think he was surprised about this. At that time I didn’t know the name of the language that my uncle spoke. I knew he had lived in another country because my parents had told me that he lived in another country. I guessed that this is why he spoke that language. I didn’t know where the language come from [sic] as I had never heard the language before. I assumed it was from a nearby country. I thought maybe it was a language from the DRC (Zaire) but I had no reason for this except that I knew it was a country which was next to Rwanda.”

(18) “After I had been there a while I told him [Joseph’s uncle] that I wanted to learn, and so he brought me a few books. Mostly the books were in English. Sometimes they were in Kinyarwanda, and some had both languages in them.”

(19) [The soldiers] “started questioning me in Kinyarwanda asking me what was in the sack. I understood what they were saying to me, but I couldn’t reply. I was very shocked, and I didn’t have good enough Kinyarwanda to explain, and they were all talking at once so I just froze. I spoke to them in Kinyankole to reply to their questions because that was the language I was using most commonly at the time. The soldiers called another soldier over. This soldier spoke to me in Kinyankole and asked me questions. (...) I now think that they thought that I was a child who had been brought up abroad, and was part of the Interahamwe who was training to come back to Rwanda and fight. (...) The soldier who spoke Kinyankole would translate for the others and tell them what I said.”

(20) “I kept telling them [the prison guards] I didn’t know, but they said that the fact that I didn’t speak good Kinyarwanda was evidence that I was a rebel.”

(21) “He [Emmanuel] spoke Kinyankole and Kinyarwanda very well. (...) He told me that he had been working for a Hutu rebel group and had been a soldier in a different country. I thought that this was DRC or Uganda (...) I think that is how he learned Kinyankole.”

(22) “We would be given orders in Kinyarwanda. My Kinyarwanda was good enough to understand what they said and so I would know what to do. There was no talking to each other so I didn’t get to learn any more Kinyarwanda or talk to anyone. (...) The prisoners would sometimes have to sing songs on the way (...). Usually the songs were in Kinyarwanda, but sometimes they would sing Swahili songs”.

(23) “I have bad associations with the Kinyankole language. I feel that learning Kinyankole has been a disaster for me. I wish I had never learned that language. (...) I want to keep myself apart from that language. Anyway, I do not speak Kinyankole as well as I speak English. I can communicate at a much more basic level. I can make myself understood, and I can understand what someone else says in Kinyankole, but it is not like speaking in English which I find much easier, and which allows me to express myself more clearly. (...) My Kinyarwanda is not a good language for me to communicate in either. I do have basic Kinyarwanda, but I cannot speak it fluently. When someone talks to me in Kinyarwanda I can understand what they mean, but not every word that they say. However, I cannot reply easily.”

Joseph, to be sure, is generous with information on how he acquired languages (fragments 11, 13, 14, 17 and 18), as well as on the particular, specific, skills he acquired in these languages (fragments 22 and 23). But he also gives us rather precise micro-descriptions of sociolinguistic environments, in which different people use different languages and use them in different ways, often including reflections on how people acquired the languages they mastered as well as elements of the specific genres in which the languages were deployed (fragments 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21 and 22). And finally, Joseph also appears to be quite aware of the indexical values of some of these languages: English sets them apart and suggests a superior level of ‘civilisation’ (fragment 12), Runyankole suggests an identity as a foreign Hutu rebel (19, 20 and 21), and he himself has very negative attitudes towards that

language (fragment 23). Here is the political geography of the language again: Runyankole, in the crisis-ridden Rwandan context in which his story is set, naturally signalled enemy identities to those whom he encountered on his way.

Observe how specific and precise Joseph is in all of this. He specifies that he can ‘understand’ people but not ‘reply’ to them in Kinyarwanda; that he has a ‘basic’ active knowledge in Runyankole; that Swahili was used in RPF songs sung in prison (but not for commands, which were in Kinyarwanda), and so on. Joseph articulates a fairly well developed ethno-sociolinguistics, in which various highly specific resources – ‘bits’ of languages – are assembled into a truncated repertoire, the ‘best’ language of which is English (which “allows him to express himself more clearly” than Kinyarwanda or Runyankole). We see how Joseph specifies lines ‘into’ particular languages, genres, registers. These lines are situational and dependent on the highly specific communicative networks in which he gets inserted. He grew up ‘outside’ Kinyarwanda, except for the poems and sayings he picks up from the servant; he acquired English in a schooled and rigorous home context; his Runyankole came into existence by eavesdropping on conversations between his uncle and visitors in the house, and was later used in interactions with the soldiers and with Emmanuel. And his Kinyarwanda (as well as bits of Swahili) developed when he got into prison. As already mentioned before, there are hardly any formal learning trajectories here (except, minimally, for English), and he learns the particular pieces of language in the context of a deeply distorted life. The result is a very distorted repertoire, but a ‘normal’ repertoire can hardly be expected under such conditions. Let me underscore that this repertoire is not tied to any form of ‘national’ space, and neither to a national, stable regime of language. It is tied to an individual’s life and it follows the peculiar biographical trajectory of the speaker. When the speaker moves from one social space into another, his or her repertoire is affected, and the end result is something that mirrors, almost like an autobiography, the erratic lives of people.

### *Runyankole or Kinyankole?*

We have seen that the Home Office bases its arguments for rejecting Joseph’s claims on his partial knowledge of Kinyarwanda and his (unqualified) knowledge of Runyankole. It is the latter language that situates him in Uganda according to the Home Office (and in spite of evidence that shows that the language is also used by Rwandans, including the Home Office interpreter). In fragment 23 above, we saw, however, how strongly Joseph qualified his own proficiency in Runyankole: “I do not speak Kinyankole as well as I speak English. I can communicate at a much more basic level.” He can “make himself understood” and understand what other people say. In addition to the fact that he (rightly) considers that language to be one of the severe problems in his life, he self-qualifies as a non-native speaker of Runyankole.

This is further evidenced by something that the Home Office failed to pick up, in spite of the fact that they themselves mention it. We read in fragment 2 above:

(24) “Based on the information above, it is considered that the language called Kinyarkole used at your screening interview is more widely known as Runyankole, therefore, Runyankole will be referred in the rest of this letter”.

The use of the term ‘Kinyarkole’ in the Home Office’s letter is strange, and it does not reflect Joseph’s own consistent use of ‘Kinyankole’. The point, however, is that the Home Office redefines what is named in the reports as ‘Kinyankole/Kinyarkole’ as ‘Runyankole’ – using a different prefix to the stem ‘-Nyankole’. *Runyankole* is the official name of the language, and

it is the name used for the language by its native speakers.<sup>11</sup> Using the prefix ‘Ki-’ for the language would mimic the use of that prefix in language names such as ‘Kinyarwanda’, ‘Kirundi’ and ‘Kiswahili’, and would rather obviously mark non-native, diasporic usage and identification of that language. It would be a rather predictable *Rwandan* way of identifying Runyankole. The upshot of this simple observation (but one missed by the Home Office) is that Joseph’s consistent use of the name ‘Kinyankole’ places him outside the national sociolinguistic order of Uganda, where the language would be called Runyankole.<sup>12</sup>

It’s, in a way, an elephant in the room, but such elementary errors disqualify Joseph as a native speaker of Runyankole, and thus (in the logic of the Home Office), would rule out Uganda as his place of origin. The use of Kinyankole, in addition to Joseph’s account of his limited proficiency in the language, would clearly point towards a position as a speaker of a local (Rwandan or cross-border) lingua franca, diaspora, variety of the language. It would in effect be evidence for a totally different sociolinguistic image of the region, in which languages and speakers do not stay in their ‘original place’ but move around on the rhythm of crises and displacements of populations. That image, needless to say, corresponds far better to the historical realities of the Great Lakes region after independence.

### **Modernist responses**

We have reached the conclusion of the disturbing story of Joseph’s life and his asylum application, and what remains is to observe how in the face of postmodern realities, such as the globalised phenomenon of international refugees from crisis regions to the West, governments appear to formulate very old modernist responses (see also Maryns 2006). We have seen, in particular, how in Joseph’s case, the Home Office relied on a national sociolinguistic order of things in assessing his linguistic repertoire.

To begin with, his repertoire was seen as indicative of *origins*, defined within stable and static (‘national’) spaces, and not of biographical trajectories that develop in actual histories and topographies. The question as to which (particular and single) language Joseph ‘spoke’ was a question that led to statements about where he was born, about the point in the world where his origins lie. The fact is, however, that someone’s linguistic repertoire reflects *a life*, and not just birth, and it is a life that is lived in a real sociocultural, historical and political space. If such a life develops in a place torn by violent conflict and dislodged social and political relations, a pristine image of someone being born and bred in one community with one language as his ‘own’ is hardly useful. In fact, using such a pristine image is unjust.<sup>13</sup> If we accept that Joseph led the life he documents in his affidavit, then very little in the way of a ‘normal’ sociolinguistic profile can in fact be expected. To put it more crudely: if the Home Office had assumed that Joseph *may* have been a genuine refugee, deviance from a ‘normal’ sociolinguistic profile would have been one of the key arguments in his favour. Imposing such sociolinguistic normalcy (with the deeper implications specified by Bourdieu above) amounts to an a priori refusal to accept the possible truth of his story. In fact, it creates a catch-22 for Joseph. If his sociolinguistic profile would have been ‘normal’, that would be strong evidence that the life history he told was untrue. If he would have had a command of

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<sup>11</sup> Languages of that cluster in the Great Lakes region often carry the prefix ‘Ru-’, such as Runyoro, Ruhaya, Runyakitara, and so on, or the related ‘Lu-’ prefix such as in ‘Luganda’.

<sup>12</sup> The Home Office did not display much sensitivity to African language features in general in this case. Thus, the name of nursery school in Kenya which Joseph mentions is systematically written as ‘Kinyatta’, whereas it is no rocket science to know that the school would very likely be called *Kenyatta*, after Kenya’s first president and independence hero

<sup>13</sup> A group of linguists to which the present author belongs launched a series of guidelines for the use of language in determining people’s identities. See Language and National Origin Group (2004).

schooled and literate varieties of Kinyarwanda and French, this would naturally mean that the account of his troubled childhood was a concoction.

As we know, such imageries of sociolinguistic normalcy belong to the instrumentarium of the modern nation-state. In fact, in the sort of Herderian twist often used in nationalist rhetoric it is at the core of modern imaginings of the nation-state, and it revolves around a denial or rejection of what Bauman & Briggs (2003) call linguistic hybridity: impurity, non-standard forms, mixing and transformation of language resources (see also Zygmunt Bauman's 1991 discussion of the relationship between modernity and ambivalence). It comes with the monoglot package described by Silverstein (1996, also 1998), in which language testing and emphases on literate 'correctness' assume a prominent place – witness the little literacy test administered to Joseph in order to ascertain his 'knowledge' (totalised) of Kinyarwanda (see also Collins & Blot 2003). The paradox of this modernist reaction to postmodern realities is sketched above: injustice is almost by necessity its result. Imposing a strictly national order of things on people who by their very nature are de-nationalised and trans-nationalised, is not likely to do justice to their case. In particular, it produces tremendous difficulties with coming to terms with

“the logical intersection between mobile people and mobile texts – an intersection no longer located in a definable territory, but in a deterritorialized world of late modern communication”. (Jacquemet 2005: 261).

Not just their case is harmed, but their subjectivity as well, as deterritorialized people whose existence cannot be squeezed in the modern frame of national units and institutions. It is remarkable to see how powerful the nation-state is for and towards people whose lives defy the salience of national units.

It is far too easy to rave about the ignorance or absurdity displayed by the Home Office in this case. The point that needs to be made is wider and graver than that. It is ultimately about the way in which anomalous frames for interpreting human behaviour – the modernist national frames referred to here – are used as instruments of power and control in a world in which more and more people no longer correspond to the categories of such frames. This problem is not restricted to asylum cases; we can also see it in the field of schooled instruction (e.g. Collins & Blot 2003), media regimes and various forms of language policing therein (Blommaert *et al* 2008), and so many other places and events where institutions have to address the forms of cultural globalisation so eloquently described by Appadurai (1996) or Castells (1997). The dominant reflex to increases of hybridity and deterritorialisation, unfortunately, too often appears to be a reinforced homogeneity and territorialization.

The theoretical questions this raises are momentous, and we should pause to consider one of them. It is clear that a sociolinguistics of languages doesn't offer much hope for improvement. It is precisely the totalising concept of language which is used in cases such as these to disqualify people, often on the basis of the flimsiest of evidence. What is needed is a sociolinguistics of *speech* and of *resources*, of the real bits and chunks of language that make up a repertoire, and of real ways of using this repertoire in communication (Hymes 1996). Sociolinguistic life is organised as such: as *mobile speech*, not as static language, and lives can consequently be better investigated on the basis of repertoires set against a real historical and spatial background. It is on the basis of such an analysis of resources that we were able to answer the language-based claims of the Home Office about Joseph's national belonging. Work in this direction is underway (e.g. Jacquemet 2005, Blommaert 2005, Rampton 2006, Agha 2007, Pennycook 2007). But in such work, we should keep track of the strong definitional monoglot effect of the modern state – of the way in which time and space are made (literally) 'static' (i.e. a feature of the state) in relation to language – and part of any

postmodern phenomenology of language and culture should be devoted to understanding the very non-postmodern ideologies and practices that shoot through postmodern, globalised realities. It is when we are able to balance both, and understand that a totalised, modern concept of language is very much part of postmodern realities, that we may offer analyses that have the practical punch they need.

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