

# The French Review

## *From The Editor's Desk*

The 17–23 October issue of *L'Express International* (24–25) contains an interesting section devoted to *la francophonie*. The main feature is an interview with Boutros Boutros-Ghali, secrétaire-général of L'Organisation internationale de la francophonie and former Secretary-General of the United Nations. The reason for the interview was the Summit of *francophonie* held in Beirut (18–20 October 2002). This was the first time that the Summit had been held in the capital of an Arab nation in the Middle East, so the symbolism of the meeting was significant. Boutros-Ghali underlined the historic and strategic importance of the meeting by pointing out that there are seven Arab francophone nations and that together they have the greatest population of French speakers outside of France (24). For Boutros-Ghali, who is ending his five-year term as secrétaire-général, the future of the European Union depends on good relations between countries to the north and south of the Mediterranean. *Francophonie* must serve a key role in communications between the Arab and European worlds and between the Arab and African worlds. Indeed, for Boutros-Ghali *francophonie* must play a role in the current Middle Eastern crisis. It has done so to date by supporting United Nations resolutions and discussing Middle Eastern issues such as Palestine and potential American intervention in Irak.

One of Boutros-Ghali's main concerns is that while a majority of schools in the Arab world offer French, few French schools teach Arabic. He sees this as an imbalance that must be righted if we are to have a better understanding of Arabic cultures and maintain the French language, French law, and French influence generally in the Arab world. As a further example he cites the fact that many French books are translated into Arabic but few books in Arabic into French. Boutros-Ghali links the need for mutual transmission of cultures to the fact that there are between 4 and 5 million Arabic speakers in France and that there will soon be between 15 and 20 million in Europe due to the need for cheap labor.

Not surprisingly, Boutros-Ghali cites the threat of globalization and what he refers to as Anglo-Saxon culture, which is "en train de dominer la planète" (24). For him it is not simply a question of language, but of the form that governmental institutions may take. He points to the fact that Egypt is governed by Napoleon's Civil Code and French criminal law, but that French law is no longer taught at the University of Cairo. *Francophonie*, then, is also a means for defending cultural diversity. The historical role of French as an international language must be maintained and strengthened. This can best be done when it is the language of work, as in the United Nations. But it is essential that French be taught all over the world, not just in Francophone countries. Boutros-Ghali points to Korea as a place where 400 universities and other educational institutions teach French. He says that there are more Francophones there than in Vietnam. It is "plurilinguisme" that will serve as a bulwark against globalization ("mondialisation" in French) and against the destruction of national democracies. Finally, Boutros-Ghali states that *la francophonie* must continue to play a role as mediator in hot spots where no other mediator is available. He underscores the work of delegates he sent to meet with the President of Ivory Coast to calm tensions. The result was a declaration published in support of respect for foreign minorities. As long as the mediators themselves are not in conflict such an approach can be productive. Boutros-Ghali emphasizes successful collaborations with the Commonwealth, the European Union, the African

Union, and the Arab League in overseeing the electoral process in a variety of countries. Multilateralism is a key to Boutros-Ghali's thinking, and *la francophonie* is at the center (25).

When we consider that Francophone nations comprise ten percent of the world's population, twelve percent of its productivity, and seventeen percent of world-wide commercial transactions, the need for trained speakers, readers, and writers of French is greater than ever. And so is the need for mediation. For a look at *francophonie* in Africa you should consult the November 2002 supplement to *Le Français dans le Monde*, "Le Français, langue africaine," part of its "Francophonies du Sud" series.

In closing, I want to urge you to attend the annual meeting of the AATF to be held in Martinique in July. Take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to meet the Martinicans *chez eux* and to expand your horizons on the francophone world. Let me also remind you that next month's Special Issue devoted to Martinique and Guadeloupe should provide you with a good introduction to these remarkable islands and peoples.

Finally, I want to thank Elizabeth MacArthur for her years of service as an Assistant Editor for Literature for the *French Review*. "Lizzie" always wrote incisive and complete evaluations of articles in her field of eighteenth-century French literature. We will miss her, but wish her well in her new pursuits. Lizzie's successor, Jonathan Walsh, is no stranger to the pages of the *Review* and has already served as a reader.

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