

# The Association for the Study of Modern and Contemporary France

## VISITING SCHOLARS' SEMINAR SERIES (2016-2017)

**Report presented by:**  
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**School of MLAL, University of Limerick, Ireland**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Issues in Contemporary French Politics and Society

**AMOUNT AWARDED:** £2325 = €2700

**AMOUNT SPENT:** €2695 (Full costing details available from  
Finance Department of the University of  
Limerick)

### PROJECT SUMMARY

The objective of this project was to organise a lecture series at the University of Limerick (Ireland) during Academic Year 2016-2017. Lectures in this series took place on, approximately, a once-a-month basis (September 2016 to April 2017) and formed a basis of post-graduate seminars in contemporary French politics and society at the University of Limerick. The lecture series was intended:

- to enable post-graduate students at the University of Limerick to discuss with leading academics on issues related to social, political and cultural change in contemporary France;
- to provide a platform for these post-graduate students to assess recent events/issues in contemporary France;
- to promote students' learning experience in two of our post-graduate programmes, namely the MA in French and the MA in Modern Language Studies;
- to promote the knowledge of and the engagement with the ASMCF among scholars and students of French studies at the University of Limerick and, further afield, in Ireland;
- to foster/ solidify collaboration between francophone colleagues;
- to further the series organisers' discussions with some of the visiting scholars of a proposal to put together an application for a special issue in the *Journal of Modern and Contemporary France* on the subject of "The French Social Model and the Crisis".

## ASMCF PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

C. KILCLINE (NUIG), R. KUHN (London), M. O'SHAUGHNESSY (Nottingham Trent), F. ROYALL (Limerick), S. WATERS (Leeds)

## LECTURE SCHEDULE

### 21 September 2016

Prof. Antoinette CAMILLERI-GRIMA, Professor of Linguistics, University of Malta, Valetta, Malta  
*Awakening to Languages and Foreign Language Teaching (Éveil aux langues)*

### 27 September 2016

Prof. Manlio CINALLI, Research Professor in Political Science, Institut d'études politiques de Paris, France  
*Citizenship and the Political Integration of Muslims in France*

### 5 October 2016

Dr. Didier CHABANET, HDR in Political Science, École normale supérieure de Lyon, France  
*The Social Economic Sector and the French Welfare State: Towards a Takeover Market?*

### 2 November 2016

Dr. Sarah WATERS, Senior Lecturer in French, University of Leeds, England  
*Liberalisation, surveillance and suicide in the French workplace*

### 23 November 2016

Dr. Anne-Marie BEZZINA, Lecturer in French Linguistics, University of Malta, Valetta, Malta  
*Variation patterns and use of non-standard language in France*

### 15 February 2017

Dr. Cathal KILCLINE, Lecturer in French Studies, National University of Ireland Galway, Ireland  
*Moving Satues: Sport, Crisis Migration and Commemoration in Contemporary France*

### 1 March 2017

Prof. Raymond KUHN, Professor of Politics, Queen Mary University of London, England  
*Hollande and the Media: The Story of a Failed Relationship*

### 8 March 2017

Prof. Martin O'SHAUGHNESSY, Professor of French, Nottingham Trent University, England  
*Contemporary French Cinema: French Film before and in the Crisis*

### 19 April 2017

Prof. Pascale DUFOUR, Professor of Politics, Université de Montréal, Canada  
*The Institutional Foundations of Housing and Education Struggles in France*

## SUMMARY OF LECTURES

**Professor Antoinette CAMILLERI-GRIMA** broached the subject of foreign-language teaching and, specifically, the promotion of French. Drawing on her long involvement in European projects, Prof. Camilleri-Grima discussed the need for pedagogical rigour in two main areas: applied linguistics and sociocultural theory. Her talk drew on the rising tensions between language immersion and pluralistic approaches. She discussed various changes over the years: maintaining exposure to the TL but the promotion of pluri-lingual teaching practices drawing on learners' metalinguistic awareness and

experiences as pluri-lingual speakers. She asked: “how best to support pluralism in foreign-language teaching?” Drawing also on her vast teacher-training experience, Prof. Camilleri-Grima presented an innovative approach currently being implemented in Malta and concluded her talk with the following question: “to what extent will a pluralistic approach be accepted in schools by parents and teachers alike?”

**Professor Manlio CINALLI** presented research results drawn from several years of work and based on a recent European Union project (EURISLAM (EU FP7)). This research forms the basis of his new book *Citizenship and the Political Integration of Muslims in France* (Palgrave Macmillan). Prof. Cinalli first presented broad citizen models across Europe (assimilationist, multicultural and republican) before comparing and contrasting the French republican model with those of its near European neighbours, notably Switzerland and Germany (assimilationist) and Britain (multicultural) with respect to the role and place of Muslims. Prof. Cinalli argued that although there exists no ideal and fixed model (for instance the German assimilationist model has evolved very much these past 20-odd years), the models do help explain the views, ideals and expectations of Muslim and non-Muslim populations towards one another. In short, his talk pointed to interesting and important findings specifically with respect to France.

**Dr. Didier CHABANET** presented a nuanced assessment of recent developments in the French welfare state particularly with respect to a common perception that it is being dismantled. Starting with an historical review of the main pillars of the French welfare state models (assistance and insurance), he discussed the 1980-developments and the subsequent rise of assistance policies as a response to the increase in precariousness (*nouvelle pauvreté*) of large swath of the population. He argued that although profound changes started to take place in those years, the dismantling of the French welfare state is perhaps overly simplistic. An important development has nonetheless taken hold – the growth in the influence in market forces due to a process of decentralisation and an upsurge in a social-entrepreneurship conception of the social economy. The final part of Dr. Chabanet’s presentation focused on the social economy and notably on post-2008 (post-crisis) developments. His analysis dealt with two key issues: internal development (especially a 2014 French law on the social economic sector) and external development (specifically European Union-led initiatives on the social economy). Both aspects, Dr. Chabanet argued, are promoting a very specific market-led conception of the social economy and have the potential to change profoundly the bases of the French welfare state model.

**Dr. Sarah WATERS** discussed the background to an international project that she is leading and that focusses on suicides in the workplace and, particularly, those in France in recent years. Dr. Waters started her discussion by reviewing examples of the rise in workplace suicides in France over the past 10 years and the national debate that this has generated. She argued that suicides were at their highest in former state-owned utilities undergoing privatisation or restructuring. Drawing on works by noted scholars such as Emile Durkheim, she argued that suicides need to be framed within their social contexts that reveal the fundamental nature of the social order at a given historical juncture. The main part of her talk dealt with her research on recent waves of suicides in the French postal service (La Poste) following an intense period of draconian restructuring plans. Suicides in La Poste are particularly interesting given the highly symbolic historical role of the postal workers are embodying symbols of community, tradition and familiarity. The imposition of neo-liberal managerial practices were at the heart of the changing social order and (public sector) workers’ consequent feelings of despondency as in the following suicide note left by a postal worker : “In recent years, La Poste has slowly destroyed its employees, the true postal workers, those who were in touch with people. In my case, they have totally destroyed me”.

**Dr. Anne-Marie BEZZINA’s** presentation focused on stylistic variation that sets itself apart from other types of language variation, such as diachronic, regional and social types of variation. She argued that stylistic variation manifests itself within the linguistic production of individual speakers according to the degree of formality characterizing the communicative situation, and also concerns differences

between the written and spoken styles. Stylistic variation appears to be wider in French than in other main European languages. She explained that one possible explanation for this lies in the particularly negligible regional phonological variation in (northern) France. Paradoxically the cause of the exceptional variability of French also resides in the importance given to normative language and the respect of the standard form, due to France's culture of literacy: written forms and literature are given a lot of value. This stems from cultural beliefs going back as far as revolutionary heritage, and the domination of Paris in all aspects of social life also propagated the standard form. Protectionist, expansionist and normative objectives underlie the formal standardisation process of French, and government interference in linguistic matters is particularly strong in France. The wide linguistic palette in French reveals itself in many linguistic traits: utterance structure, verb tense and pronoun use, pronunciation of consonant groups, realization of the liaison phenomenon, and, on the supra-segmental level, in the position of stress and the shape of intonation curves. In her view, variation is mostly evident on the particularly rich lexical level, because of the existence of parallel terms for the same concept. Social acceptance of variation tends to be different at the different levels of language analyses: variation on the lexical and grammatical levels is less stigmatizing in French than phonological non-standard realizations. Dr. Bezzina thus compared the French case, with its present-day prominence of stylistic variation, to the Italian situation (prominence of regional variation), the British and Maltese situations (prominence of social variation), and to that of the French situation of the past (prominence of regional and social variation).

**Dr. Cathal Kilcline's** talk centred on the proliferation of sport-themed artistic, commemorative and pedagogical productions that interpret and illuminate identity-based debates in France, particularly in relation to immigration and ethnic diversity. His presentation analysed a series of these exhibitions, monuments and texts, demonstrating the relevance of sport in the contemporary commemorative landscape, and investigating why sporting tropes may be considered a particularly potent means of illuminating issues related to mass migration. He also pointed to evolutions in the processes of memory-making globally, and explored how the mediatisation and aesthetics of sporting practices may relate to these developments. In particular, his presentation discussed how the cultural production in question has foreshadowed debates about the migration crises in the Mediterranean and English Channel that are now the forefront of political agendas globally.

**Professor Raymond KUHN** examined the story of a failed relationship between President Hollande and the media. In his view, the French president benefits from significant resources structurally embedded in the supreme office, while exercising power within a set of institutional constraints, both political and media. Any incumbent of the presidential office needs to mobilize the resources as effectively as possible so as to overcome the constraints. News media management and public communication form an integral part of the presidential 'toolkit' in this regard; they form part of any incumbent's incarnation of the presidential role. His presentation analysed, explained and evaluated the news media strategies and public communication activities undertaken by President Hollande during a five-year term that has been punctuated by certain high-profile events and was played out against the backcloth of low economic growth and high levels of unemployment. With a focus on the front stage part of the political process (politics) rather than the backstage part (policy), the presentation included consideration of Hollande's news management, his image projection and the status of the public/private boundary in media coverage. Prof. Kuhn central argument was that for roughly the first two years of his presidency, Hollande largely failed to integrate a coherent public communication and news media strategy into his conception of the functioning of the presidential office. After a relaunch of his presidency in the spring of 2014, a professionalization of presidential news management and image projection somewhat belatedly took place. The presidential response to two major terrorist incidents in Paris in 2015 symbolized this more professional approach to presidential communication. Yet despite these efforts, the president's popularity in opinion polls made no lasting improvement; the presidential message was not favourably received by the target audiences of journalists and voters. Instead, Prof. Kuhn argued, the Hollande presidency represents a case study of the myriad problems facing executive leaders across established democracies in respect of their news media management and public communication activities: a divided executive,

competition from alternative elite sources, critical, and at times hostile, media commentary and a switched-off public.

**Professor Martin O'SHAUGHNESSY** presented a general overview of selected recent French films and asked what they can tell us about the current period of "crisis". the key figures and forms of subjectivity that characterize it (entrepreneurs of the self, indebted subjects, the precarious, the migrant, the suicidal worker); the loss of any explicit language of opposition and the direct collision between global forces and vulnerable bodies that ensues; the loss of the collective, political dimension of struggles and the rise of the ethical; more recently, the reappearance of explicit class struggle but often in terms of reductive contrasts (noble workers, bad bankers etc.). Although the larger picture is a bleak one, Prof. O'Shaughnessy's talk was attentive to films that seek to look beyond present miseries: workers who kill the worker in the self not the self in the worker; gift economies that arise alongside debt; films that seek to keep the memories of struggle alive and do not just condemn it to the past.

**Professor Pascale DUFOUR** spoke on the issue of contemporary social movements in France and thereby presented the preliminary results of an ongoing research project on the social struggles in France in the areas of housing and education between 2005 and 2015. She argued that in many advanced industrial countries, the post-2008 mobilizations highlighted the centrality of economic issues in contemporary social movements. Whether the 15M movement in Spain in 2011, the Occupy movement in United States the same year or the student strike in Quebec in 2012, economic transformations were not only integrated to the claims of activisms, but also operated as triggers of collective action. Beyond the classic neo-institutional argument about the political opportunity structures created by the economic crisis, this new context invites us to turn to political economy to explain the contention phenomena. Developing the concept of policy regime, she argued that political economy can indeed help to understand more substantively the forms and variations of protest. The first section of her paper was devoted to a quantitative comparison of the intensity and the forms of protest (claims, types of actor, contentious repertoires, etc.) at the national context in each sector over the past decade. She then identified some plausible elements of policy regimes that could influence these protests.

## **OUTCOMES:**

There were several outcomes from this project:

- Enhanced students' learning experience;
- Presented staff and students to expert voices on contemporary France in areas such as politics, sociology, economics, linguistics, cinema, etc.;
- Established key research and teaching networks with the invited speakers (e.g. an Erasmus link was re-established with the University of Malta; a research project was set-up with Sciences Po, Paris);
- D. Chabanet (ENS, Lyon) and F. Royall are drafting an article on the subject of French social movement organisations;
- Series organisers are in discussions with M. Cinalli (IEP, Paris) and D. Chabanet (ENS, Lyon) to propose a special issue for the *Journal of Modern and Contemporary France*: "The Changing French Welfare State Model".

DATE: 3 May 2017

SIGNED: F. ROYALL and L. MURRAY