

Communication in and beyond the Francosphere

On Thursday and Friday 12th and 13th January 2023, the French Graduate Research Seminar hosted a two-day graduate research conference entitled 'Finding Community In and Beyond the Francosphere' at the Alison Richard Building, University of Cambridge. It was organised by Ian Boyd, Rebecca Courtier, Xinyi Wang and Cat Watts, and generously funded by the ASMCF, SFS and the MMLL Faculty of Cambridge. It benefitted from 25 in-person attendees, and a further 16 online participants.

The event formed part of a tradition at the University of Cambridge of French Graduate Conferences, which have been held for more than 20 years. Each year is defined by a theme relevant to the research of the graduate students in French and to Francophone studies more generally. The theme this year was therefore community, reflecting the network turn, increasing collaboration with sociological concerns, the recent centenary of Proust's reflections on the collaborative experiences that forge an individual, and ongoing discussions in France around *communautarisme*. Most crucially, the theme reflected our hopes for the conference: that it would enable collaboration and a sense of collegiality between graduate students who, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, had not had a chance to meet one another in person.

Our event consisted of two days of three-person panels. Presenters were from a range of institutions in the UK, France, and the USA, and presented in-person and online. Topics ranged from francophone philosophies of community to their literary, social, and historical applications from the medieval period through to the present day. Each panel was chaired by a graduate student or early career researcher at the University of Cambridge, enabling further links between students researching related themes and encouraging collaboration.

The keynotes took place at the end of each of the two days. In addition to forming part of the conference, they were advertised separately as free events, resulting in wider public engagement. The first was our internal speaker, Mary Franklin-Brown, the University Associate Professor of Medieval French and Occitan Studies. Drawing on material from her current projects, she explored the community turn in medieval French studies and the importance of orality in community formation in the early French medieval imagination through her paper "Oath, Language and Community". We closed our conference with our external speaker, Mame-Fatou Niang, Associate Professor of French and Francophone Studies at Carnegie Mellon University. Her keynote paper "Critical Hope and Ceramic Memories: Repairing Frenchness for the 21st Century" offered an academic grounding for the journey of her life experience as a scholar, writer, filmmaker, artist and mother. The ceramic metaphor from Kintsugi art shows a way to repair, reshape and rebuild Frenchness.

The event was a success, with favourable reviews from participants, speakers, and attendees. Shared themes regarding the importance and (im)possibility of community formation emerged, alongside related themes of community knowledge, language. Informal discussions during lunches and tea-breaks enabled participants to share other projects and to discuss papers more informally. The conference dinner was particularly useful in enabling panellists to spend time with their fellow presenters without the pressure of the conference presentation. We anticipate two further outcomes of the conference: the publication of an edited volume of conference proceedings, and a handover to next year's organisers, who will

inherit a system for organising a future event and working relationships with faculties and societies.