



Academic Event Report

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Event: 2025 SOFEIR Annual Conference: “Ireland and Transnational Solidarities”

Venue: University College Cork

Date: 21st to 22nd March 2025

University College Cork (UCC) hosted the 2025 SOFEIR (Société Française d’Études Irlandaises) Annual Conference, marking a departure from the usual setting for SOFEIR events, which are usually held in France. SOFEIR’s 2025 conference focused on the topic of “Transnational Solidarities”, and included two plenary sessions, seventeen workshops, an exhibition in conjunction with UCC Library Special Collections and a poetry reading.

This conference was generously supported by the Ambassade de France en Irlande, the UCC Department of French, the UCC Future Humanities Institute, the UCC School of English and Digital Humanities, the UCC School of History, G.I.S. Eire and SOFEIR. It was organised by Dr Heather Laird (UCC), Dr H  l  ne Lecossois (Universit   de Lille), Hope Noonan Stoner (UCC), Dr Oliver O’Hanlon (UCC), Dr Danny Shanahan (UCC) and Dr Luke Watson (UCC). Due to the interdisciplinary and international profile of its sponsors, organisers and attendees (which included postgraduate students and faculty members), the 2025 SOFEIR Conference was a densely packed event.

Day One

The first day of the conference began with a plenary address from Professor D  nal Hassett of Maynooth University (MU) titled “Colonial Complicity and the Limits of Irish Anti-Imperialism: The Scheme to Settle Irish Peasants in French Algeria”. After the talk, attendees visited the library

exhibit, “Ireland and France: Transnational Nations”, organised by Professor Emeritus Patrick O’Donovan (UCC) and Dr Watson (UCC), with support from the staff of UCC Special Collections. This exhibit explored Ireland’s many-sided relations with the wider Atlantic world, featuring artifacts in French, Irish, Latin and English, demonstrating Ireland’s innate liminal nature in both the past and the present.

This day featured six workshops on a variety of topics. These all addressed the issue of transnational solidarity, but each presenter adopted an interesting and novel approach. Dr Watson, Dr Sylvie Kleinman (Trinity College Dublin) and Dr Raphaël Willay (Université du Littoral Côte d’Opale) spoke on Ireland’s historical connections with France from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, while Dr Marie-Violaine Louvet (Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès), Adrian Kane (SIPTU) and Ugo Rychman (Université de Pau) considered Ireland’s links not only with Palestine but also with the cause of transnational solidarity generally. Professor Pauline Collombier (Université de Lorraine), Dr Martin O’Donoghue (Max Planck Institute) and Professor Valérie Morisson (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier) offered an analysis of Ireland’s political links with other national movements, for example India and New Zealand, as well as the role of Irish art movements, such as EVA International, in fostering solidarity across borders.

Other workshops on the conference’s first day dealt with the issue of transnational solidarity in the context of literature and linguistics. Professor Emer Nolan’s (MU) and Dr Ellen Howley’s (Dublin City University) papers, which argued for a transnational examination of Séamus Heaney’s works, dovetailed with Professor Przemysław Michalski’s (Jagiellonian University) discussion of the similarities between Heaney’s poetry and that of Polish-American poet Czesław Miłosz. Andrea Zvoníčková (Charles University), Sarah Levy Volensi (University of Caen Normandie) and Dr Adam Hanna (UCC) expanded the literary focus, with papers on the works of Elizabeth Bowen, the McCourt brothers and Yan Ge respectively. Another workshop considered linguistic and ecological solidarities, with Dr Marion Naugrette-Fournier (Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle) discussing the ecopoetry of Grace Wells and Kerron Ó Luain and Verena Commins (University of Galway) examining Irish language activism.

Day Two

The conference's second day consisted of eleven workshops, an engaging and interactive plenary session—"Postcolonial and Partitioned Displacement: Interdisciplinarity, Co-creation and Solidarity from the Balcony of the Mediterranean Sea"—led by Dr Bahriye Kemal (University of Kent) and a thought-provoking poetry reading by Irish poet Sarah Clancy. Workshops on this day considered transnational solidarity from a variety of perspectives. Professor Adrian Mulligan (Bucknell University), Dr Joanna Wharton (UCC) and Dr Susan Manly (St Andrews) considered Ireland's role in the abolition movement, while also highlighting Ireland's complicity in the Atlantic slave trade. Dr Michael G. Cronin (MU), Dr Olivier Coquelin (University of Caen Normandy) and Professor Emeritus Lionel Pilkington (University of Galway) expanded on the idea of international liberty in Irish thought and political activism, discussing Ireland's involvement in anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements. Dr Alexandra Maclennan (University of Caen), Professor Phillippe Brillet (University of Tours) and Dr Molly-Claire Gillett (University of Galway and Trent University) mirrored this focus with papers discussing the role of the Catholic Church in buttressing Irish transnational solidarity and the role of the Irish Countrywomen's Association in fostering international curiosity and solidarity among rural women.

Considerations of transnational solidarity between France and Ireland and Palestine and Ireland continued through the second day of the conference. Dr Flore Coulouma (Université Paris Nanterre), Dr Mark Walsh (MU) and Dr John Murray (MU) considered the practical and emotional links between Ireland and Palestine, while Dr Oliver O'Hanlon, Dr Claire Dubois (Lille University) and Kevin Doyle (University of Limerick) discussed the links between Ireland and France in the twentieth century. Dr Chandana Mathur (MU), Hope Noonan Stoner (UCC) and Hafsa Askar (La Sorbonne Nouvelle) added to this dialogue on solidarity through their analysis of the relationship between the United States and Ireland, both in the context of the Irish-American diaspora and in the similarities between organisations like the Black Panthers and the Provisional IRA.

The conference also included significant consideration of transnational solidarity outside of Ireland, France and Palestine, and from unusual

epistemological contexts. Professor Fabrice Mourlon (La Sorbonne Nouvelle), Dr Charlotte Barcat (Nantes Université) and Dr Magali Dexpert (Institute Universitaire de Technologie (IUT) de Valence) brought the discussion to Northern Ireland, with papers on Belfast, Derry and the Northern Irish peace process. Meanwhile, Dr Hiram Morgan (UCC), Dr Alfred Markey (University of León), Dr Tadhg Ó hErodáin (University of Strasbourg) and Lugh Ó hErodáin (Herbal Alliance), presented on Hugh O'Neill; the links between Ireland, Equatorial Guinea and Palestine; and the ties between Ireland and France in the context of traditions of herbal medicine, respectively. Kamel Salmi (La Sorbonne Nouvelle) and Dr Evi Gkotsaridis (University of Versailles Saint Quentin-en-Yvelines) considered Irish connections to the Mediterranean, specifically the Ottoman donation to Ireland during the Famine and Irish solidarity with Greece during the 2008 IMF Bailout.

While the solidarities between nations, nation-states, activist groups and artistic movements dominated much of the conference, some presentations considered transnational solidarity from a more embodied and visceral perspective. Dr Danny Shanahan (UCC), Louise Gerbier (Université de Tour) and Paddy Brennan (University of Liverpool) focused on the stomach, with papers on the role of famine and hunger strikes in transnational solidarity movements. In a similar vein, Dr Angela Flynn (UCC) brought our discussion towards solidarity and physical health with papers on reproductive justice and global healthcare solidarity in times of crisis.

Conclusion

The Irish government's recognition of the State of Palestine in May 2024 partially inspired the theme of "Transnational Solidarities" for the 2025 SOFEIR Annual Conference. This event did not shy away from the central political issues of the contemporary moment, both in Ireland and globally. Instead, speakers employed diverse historical, literary, sociological, medical and ecological perspectives to comment on contemporary political events and to explore historic discourses that continue to influence and infiltrate the current political moment. The presentations and plenaries reflected the conference organisers' belief in the potential of interdisciplinary engagement to prompt fruitful academic discussion and

tangible activism in response to pressing political questions. We hope that this report, written by two members of that interdisciplinary organising committee, reflects the rich and thought-provoking perspectives offered by the interdisciplinary SOFEIR: “Ireland and Transnational Solidarities” Conference.

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DR LUKE WATSON is an early-career researcher from University College Cork who has just recently completed his PhD, which concerns the impact of the French Revolution on Irish political discourse. His research interests include Franco-Irish history, social history and post-colonial discourse in particular in the context of revolutionary organisations.