



University of Malta

Department of English International Postgraduate Symposium



CALL FOR PAPERS: COMMUNITIES

Literature, Culture, Environment

Whether to our comfort or horror, the communities we are inextricably part of make themselves *felt* in myriad ways. There are communities we consciously participate in, and others we may not be fully aware of: spaces of belonging that appear so intuitive they remain out of sight. We might actively seek out a community, work to form new relationships, create common ground. More often, we find ourselves already willing or unwilling members of something. But whether or not we are conscious of them, and whether we cultivate them or not, these connections shape our lives: they provide us with forms of identity and belonging, with duties and responsibilities. They may create antagonisms, or the need for boundaries. There are communities we value and wish to strengthen; others that we fear and want to curtail. At times we take up the mantle, pick up the torch, fly the flag; at others we are heretics, even exiles. Our identities are constellations of these points of connection and exchange, intersecting nodes of belonging and estrangement that shape who we are.

Hosted by the Department of English at the University of Malta, this Postgraduate Symposium invites us to turn our attention to these communities, to think critically about the diverse discourses, spaces and structures they make possible, and to consider our positions within them.

Perhaps because of the current political milieu, the relationships and antagonisms that shape different sociopolitical groups immediately spring to mind. What kind of community is fostered by political division? How is our contemporary culture of threats and tensions reflected in (and shaped by) literary, transmedial, and online discourses? What kinds of communities are being formed online, and what are the very tangible effects of this on people's lives? How are communities, peoples, religions and ideologies decimated by conflict, or even by war? And what kind of visibility is afforded to these communities in the very way we speak about them, and in the way they speak about themselves, whether linguistically, musically, or with images?

Of course, recent events exist within a historical continuum, and the very notion of community itself suggests a sense of belonging that persists over time, or an identity that is preserved in the face of a changing world. What do our different histories tell us of communal formations and dissolutions? In this same vein, what do historically relevant thinkers, philosophers and writers have to say on communities, as unavowable or yet-to-come as they might be? After all, these very writings, these thoughts and philosophies *themselves* also constitute communities of sorts – scholarly traditions, academic disciplines and intellectual legacies that we may or may not feel like we belong to.



Communities differ in size and configuration; they necessarily *include* and *exclude*, and the ways that these lines are drawn matter. We are all familiar with that rather inane consideration: that we are all part of one community, the human race. But how does this appeal to a unified or universal humanity often conveniently occlude questions of race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, ethnicity, language? And how do these categories themselves create and correspond to different communities, ones that themselves also include or exclude others?

Community, in this light, can paradoxically come to be synonymous with exclusion. And while we may be very aware of the political, personal, social, linguistic, and economic communities that form around us, other forms of belonging might be less obvious. What happens to the notion of community once it is extended beyond the parameter of the human? What might it mean to speak about nonhuman communities, or of ecosystems as communities in their own right? How might such thought invite or even necessitate other ways of thinking notions of belonging and entanglement? What might we, as human communities, gain from such thought? What do we lose if we exclude the animal, the plant, the landscape, the object, the thing?

There are other questions, and many answers. We look forward to hearing them. We invite speakers to present a 20-minute paper around the following broad thematic:

- Representations of community in literature and textual works
- Discourses of and around the community; language and its communal uses
- Community as political society, community as global society, community as exclusivity
- Community and the arts: music, visual art, film, performance
- New media, transmedial, and AI-driven narratives of community
- Anthropological and sociological approaches to community
- Communal histories (with perspectives beyond the Anglo-American encouraged)
- Philosophy and communities
- Community and disability
- Community from the lens of feminist, queer, Marxist, and postcolonial theories
- Community as non-human ecology
- Communities of/and creative writing

The deadline for submissions is April 7th, 2025. Submitted abstracts should be **no longer than 250 words** and should be **accompanied by a brief biographical note**. Please send abstracts to englishpgsymposium@um.edu.mt.

This symposium will take place in **Valletta on the 6th and 7th of June, 2025**, and is **open to postgraduate students** following courses at M.A., M.Phil., and PhD levels. Accepted speakers will be notified within a fortnight of their submission. **This symposium will accommodate both in-person and online speakers – please indicate your preference in the submission email.**

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