

**Community – the career of a concept between compassion, tribalism and intention**  
**Dates: from May 16 to 18, 2018 at the ENS Lyon and the University of Lyon**

A key concept in the constitution of modernity which has been influential in all the human and social sciences is that of *community*, which, according to Raymond Plant's judgement in 1974, suffered from insufficient questioning, analysis and theory. While we find the term community, *Gemeinschaft*, *communauté*, *comunidad* in use in the cultural areas we propose to deal with primarily, we find that the social and political debates have, to an extent, been cloistered within languages, with periodic openings through cultural transfers, notably through the translation of academic works, leading to international debate.

*Community* shall be at the centre of an international conference, entitled "Community: the career of a concept between compassion, tribalism and intention" organized at the research centre IHRIM within the excellence cluster, *Constitution de la Modernité* (COMOD) at the *Institut des Sciences de l'Homme* in collaboration with numerous partner research centres. It will take place at the ENS de Lyon and the University of Lyon. We shall consider the political and social terms within their historical development, while rendering our questions *international and intercultural*. Areas of *impact* include studies of such discourse, community identities and identity politics, but go well beyond them; the Harvard Grant Study has established that "warmth of relationships throughout life" was the decisive factor behind life satisfaction, and a central aspect to be focussed upon is "community" as a human need, as understood e.g. in the development of "community therapy". "Community" has consequences for individual and collective health. It also involves stakes in social, political and economic debates.

The conference primarily retraces the uses of the concept and the realities to which it corresponds in the German and French-speaking worlds, but is also open to other areas. A starting point of this enterprise is the work, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* by Ferdinand Tönnies of 1887. A lasting aspect of discussions on "community" is the question of which *human relationships*, or more generally, which aspects of the *world* lying outside the subject are subjectively *essential*, and which aspects are *arbitrarily* alienable. The *critical analysis* of thought on community shall look at the *roots*, *receptions* and *transformation* of this thought mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however no period is precluded. A key driver behind the Tönniesian notion of "community" is compassion, a concept which Schopenhauer believed was the foundation of all ethical reflexes; however, the term, "community" is often evoked to emphasize the selective nature of compassion, deemed as legitimate particularly regarding a tribe defined according to blood bond and place, according to various forms of tribalism. This enquiry is particularly pertinent during an epoch of retribalisation.

The conference shall focus on the *career of this concept* in various cultural areas Tönnies established a distinction that was both typological and a foundation for a new linear philosophy of history in his assumption that there was an ineluctable rise in individualism, typical of the philosophies of history of the nineteenth century such as that of status to contract (Maine). However, Tönnies applied values that called into question a purely progressivist reading of history. What philosophies of history, implying *normative orders*, are related to a decline or rise in community bonds? Various values of modern liberalism – individual freedom, the pursuit of happiness and individual comfort at the expense of commitment – are not presented as unambiguously positive values in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, and while Tönnies was politically committed for example to individual liberty, tolerance, equality, the religious neutrality of the State, and the freedom of thought and of science, questions he raised in his work pointed to fractures in this consensus of modernity, accounting for its motley reception by oftentimes opposing political and social forces. Those fractures also point to the pressing urgency of the questions it raises today. What philosophies of history revolve around the decline

or advent of community bonds? Where do we find “authentic” community”? Which thinkers and movements do not defend the idea that rationalization necessarily entails a *loss of emotivity*?

With a view to the question of the *quality* of human relationships and the extent to which certain types of relationships are *essential*, what other constructions of humans and of community are to be found in modern thought? The anthropological question of the foundations of community points to the bases of our most intimate desires. The *quantitative determination of the social group* leads to the question: what is the *scale* of community? Community bonds are visible in relationships of equality but equally in relationships of power and hierarchy. We shall consider in which thought and which movements the community bond is conceived of as being founded on *equality*, and where it is *hierarchical by nature*.

If Tönnies constructs his concept of community upon the foundations of a conservative, normative representation of the cell of community or the traditional nuclear family – the representation of his epoch – what do contemporary human sciences tell us about family bonds and the possibility of living in community in today’s societies? How do perceptions of the signifier “community” evolve with new social configurations and practices and the development of thought on gender? We shall not merely be studying the evolution of an idea, but also its anchoring in practices and their legitimacy in contemporary discourse.

Defenders of an *exclusivist* acceptance of the notion of community, despite certain readings of universal inclusion, some of which go so far as *to transcend the border between humans and other species*, find a justification in the very definition of “community” in Tönnies’ *Community and Society*: all “exclusive” living together. *Imaginary communities* were constituted in the conflictive histories of class and of nation, either of which are related to myths, as Carl Schmitt has pointed out. What are the uses of “community” in movements which related political identity to class and nation? What are the *borders* and *limits* of community both in terms of intensity and extent?

The terms, *Gemeinschaft* and more particularly *Volksgemeinschaft*, because of their use during the Third Reich, were repressed and various denials of community occurred in Germany after the second world war. The ambivalent relationship of the Frankfurt School and German post-war sociology to community deserve particular attention. Another approach was to neutralise and devitalise the notion of community, as when Karl Deutsch coined the term, *security community* in the 1950s; some consider the term “European Community” to have been inspired by this desire to neutralise.

Charles Taylor situates the debate that later opposed “communitarians” and “liberals” in a controversy that had existed for three centuries. Our strategy is to take up the real history of the concept, community in order to analyse the historic genesis, contradictions, limits and conditions of its reception. We intended to go into greater depths of the reception of the notion of community, which was borne forward by a variety of political, social and economic currents. We propose working on the aspect of language by asking terminologists how they constitute a corpus deemed to be representative not just of canonical texts but also non-canonical writing spread in civil society. Linguists will also be interested in communities as a condition for the existence of languages and of dialects which in turn condition appurtenance to communities. What are the reasons for the rise and decline of the use of a word? Today, in German, the term “*die Community*” is used as an alternative to “*die Gemeinschaft*”; why?

Over the century that followed the publication of Tönnies’ work, numerous French-speaking authors have written on community - Emmanuel Mounier, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Nancy, Dominique Schnapper, to name but a few. Assumptions behind thought on belonging differ in Germany, France and elsewhere: where are the differences along with the influences in thought on community between linguistic cultures? What do relationships between debates in the French-speaking and German-speaking worlds lie, if we compare, for instance, the polemics surrounding the idea of “*communautarismes*” and

the “*communauté nationale*” in France with the polemics surrounding the term “*Volksgemeinschaft*” in Germany? The idea of community became central in French and French-speaking philosophical debates from the 1980s, and French thought on community, inter alia in the thought of Bataille, Nancy and Schnapper, is related to another state of society than German thought, the origins of which reach back to the Second Empire and yet further back to Romanticism. What influence has the history of mores, sciences and philosophy exercised in our way of grasping “community”?

The term, community is evoked at times at which the limits of liberalism have been reached. Our *cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural reading* is intended to offer and confront perspectives on issues of the *integration of minorities in multicultural* states and the *evolution of society* which will enrich debates of which the terms have often been erased. The scientific objectives are 1) an analysis of the need of others among human beings, 2) an open discussion of mechanisms involved in forming and maintaining communities while taking account of both advantages and drawbacks, 3) a stocktaking of debates in the German-speaking and French-speaking world on the nature and limits of community, 4) the opening up of these debates in other cultural areas, 5) the gaining of a historical perspective of political, social and economic discourses around the concept of community, 6) the surmounting of taboos which have existed for historical reasons in this debate – a surmounting which has become necessary to deal with abusive arguments to be found in populist discourses.

We shall be looking for papers which illuminate the concept from all the disciplines in which the term “community” is mobilised. What forms of life in community can we find in the history of our cultures? What reflections do we find on community and the distribution of wealth, on community and economy? On the necessary complicity or opposition of community and power? On community and social organisation, whether vertical or horizontal? On belonging and rights (e.g. civic) which are derived from such appurtenance? On the multiplicity or exclusivity of community appurtenance in multicultural societies? On community and gender, on the attribution of roles based upon the assumption that certain “genders” are predestined to experience community in certain ways? On community and health, for instance in thought on therapeutic communities? On the opposition of “community” and “society” and its relationship in history? On the nature of “communities” under the impact of social density, the evolution of mores, technology, trade, globalization and other factors? On the importance of this concept in the diverse disciplines of the human sciences? What historical and present-day mobilisations of community are to be found in political debates on identity?

The conference shall take place in French, German and English with simultaneous interpretation between these languages. Papers can be submitted in French, German and English with an abstract of no more than 1000 signs and a brief CV mentioning institutional affiliation (*Times New Roman 12 font*) should be uploaded to the site [www.sciencesconf.org](http://www.sciencesconf.org) and sent simultaneously to [niall.bond@univ-lyon2.fr](mailto:niall.bond@univ-lyon2.fr) before Friday, October 27, 2017. The papers that have been accepted shall be announced before Friday, December 15, 2017. To allow for the professional simultaneous interpretation of the papers, the version that will be presented must be sent to the organizers prior to April 21, 2018. The deadline for the final version for publication is September 3, 2018.