

CfP

Postcolonial Narrations 2025

Inner Circles: Kinship, Inclusion, and Inaccessibility

The family is often conceived in terms of exclusivity, closeness and intimacy. The word 'intimate' – *intimus*, or 'most interior', in the Latin – suggests that this relationship touches our innermost part, that which is deepest and hidden from view. Familial ties are further corporealized in terms of blood, or the physical proximity of shared space, resources, and memories, and acts of care. Broader ethnic, linguistic, cultural and national communities may be framed as extensions of this familial 'inner circle', as the concept of the body politic suggests; the family, for Rousseau, is 'the first model of political societies' (*The Social Contract*). However, just as the notion of the 'inner circle' offers the protection of an enclosure or border, it also raises questions: who belongs to the inner circle, and who is excluded?

In postcolonial studies, the relationship of the colonial core and periphery created a world order built around the policing of centrality and marginality, with Europe itself configured as an 'inner circle' from which its (formerly) colonial subjects were forever excluded. At the same time, however, the colonial potentate is often understood as 'a family state', as Achille Mbembe puts it in *On the Postcolony*, in which 'a "family and filial bond binds the colonies to the mother country"'. And yet colonialism disrupted, overwrote and destroyed pre-existing kinship networks wherever it penetrated, whether through the mass displacement of slavery, with its legacy of 'wounded kinship', to use Saidiya Hartman's term ('The Time of Slavery'), the creation of arbitrary national borders, or the desecration or imposition of cultures, languages, epistemologies, religions, or family structures. Given this history, this conference's theme aims to lead its applicants to consider the myriad implications of the notion of an 'inner circle' in a postcolonial context. How do postcolonial writers, artists and thinkers characterize and/or interrogate the many interlocking 'inner circles' of the domestic, familial, economic and political spheres? In what ways do they battle against the gatekept 'inner circles' of the ongoing divide between 'the West and the Rest'? And when do these actors themselves become an 'inner circle', a financial and cultural elite with their own exclusionary practices?

This is not to suggest that postcolonial thinkers and artists are restricted to a narrow choice between either dismantling or perpetuating the exclusionary, narrow model of the 'inner circle'. This conference also encourages its applicants to consider the re-invention, re-investment in and renewal of inner circles and kinship networks in the postcolonial context. How might new communities be conceived and created? And what do these practices look like on literary, linguistic, and cultural levels? This might be through a recuperation of the idea of literary or cultural inheritance, which often takes the family as its organizing metaphor (Hamish Dalley, 'The Idea of "Third Generation Nigerian Literature"''; Daria Tunca 'Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as Chinua Achebe's (Unruly) Literary Daughter'). It might equally be through the replacement of vertical, horizontal or patrilineal models of kinship with 'circular or rhizomatic thinking, which is open to nonhierarchical becomings and contagions' (Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*), or the reparative understanding of diaspora 'in terms of queerness, affiliation, and social contingency' rather than 'in conventional terms of ethnic dispersion, filiation, and biological traceability' (David L. Eng, 'Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas'). One could consider the translanguistic effects of diaspora, too, and its mediation through what Yasemin Yildiz calls 'the monolingual paradigm,' which insists on 'individuals and social formations['] possession of a "'mother tongue,'" through which they are supposedly 'organically linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation' (Yaesmin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*). Entrenched community models might also be reconceived through the queering of kinship networks, which replaces kinships as reproduction with kinship as an 'intimate alliance' (Elizabeth Freeman, 'Queer Belongings'; Judith Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?'). Or the opening up of kinship networks to include nonhumans (Frances Bartowski, *Kissing Cousins: A New Kinship Bestiary*), moves away from 'heterohomemaking' (Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*), or the rethinking of 'our kinship with other humans and the rest of creation' as 'something that's *done* more than something that simply *is*' (Daniel Heath Justice, 'Go Away, Water. Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative').



We encourage applicants from different disciplines, institutions and linguistic backgrounds. By bringing together our own community, we hope to do our part to reconfigure the bounds of the 'inner circle' – to transform it from a closed loop into a porous and generative nucleus.

We welcome papers by early career researchers on and beyond the following topics:

- Literary inheritance, elites, and 'gatekeepers': marginality and exclusion from the 'inner circles' of literature or slippages at their borders and/or thresholds
- Exits (or exclusions) from the 'imagined communities' of the nation, region, or diaspora and the literary ancestries they invoke or disrupt
- Hegemonic and disobedient models and practices within 'the domestic sphere' of kinship and the family: nonnormative, queer, and Indigenous kinship networks from a postcolonial perspective
- 'The Loop of History' in literary form: repetition, (re)memory, and intergenerational transmission or inheritance as well as circularity and nestedness in narrative modes
- 'Mother tongues' and the linguistic circles forged or compromised by exile, diaspora, migration, the (re)formation of nations/states, the globalised spread of dialects, sociolects, jargon, etc.

Submission Guidelines and Details

Please submit abstracts of no more than 250 words and bios of no more than 100 words to postcolonialnarrations@g-a-p-s.net by June 30 2025.

The conference is jointly organised by members of the University of Oxford and Ludwig-Maximilian Universität. It will take place on the 23rd and 24th of September 2025, at St Hilda's College, the University of Oxford.

For more information on the conference format, please visit:

<https://postcolonial-narrations.net/>

List of sources

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