

32nd Postgraduate Forum of the German Association for American Studies (GAAS/DGfA)

## Remembering: Transnational Memory Cultures and American Studies

November 10-12, 2022, University of Regensburg and via Zoom

### Abstract and Bios

#### **Thursday, November 10, 2022**

*Großer Sitzungssaal des Philosophikums (PT 3.0.79) and Zoom*

15:00 - 16:30      **Panel 1: Environment and Cultural Memory**

Chair: Tamara Heger (Universität Regensburg)

#### **Salvage Watery Memory: Materiality and Memory in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones***

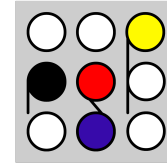
Hanna Masslich (Leibniz-Universität-Hannover)

**Abstract:** Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011) traces how the Batiste family, an African American working class family living in rural Mississippi, prepares for Hurricane Katrina over the span of twelve days. The floodwaters of the hurricane arise in the novel's ending, but the abundance of literal and figurative references to water integrated into the entire story point to an understanding of water that exceeds the environmental disaster. Throughout the novel, water occurs in relation to the body, motherhood, Greek mythology, as well as the protagonist's immediate environment. Water, more generally, expands the time and space of the story significantly. By focusing on the multiple representations of water in *Salvage the Bones*, I will highlight the close relationship between materiality and memory.

In my presentation, I will demonstrate how the narrated water scales up the personal and local experience to national, transnational, and planetary levels by alluding to the hurricane's extensive reach and by underlining water's capability to gestate and destroy life. Moreover, I will show how tangible and intangible memories connected to water recurrently reach from the recent, distant, and deep past into the narrated present. Water conjures up the protagonist's memories of her dead mother as well as historical memories of the Middle Passage and establishes these traumas as crucial backgrounds to how race, class, and gender shape the protagonists's lived experience. In accentuating ecomemory in the experience of environmental disasters, the novel also reaches into the future in which sweeping environmental changes caused by humans will increasingly affect already marginalized communities. I claim that watery memory evolves as a means to grasp the complexity of the naturalcultural disasters of the Anthropocene by presenting memory as material, relational, and fragmentary.



Universität Regensburg



Postgraduierten-  
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**Bio:** Hanna Masslich is a PhD student and research assistant at the Leibniz University Hannover. She completed her Master's degrees in Advanced Anglophone Studies (M.A.) and English and Political Science (M.Ed.) in Hannover in 2021. In her final thesis, she investigated the flood motif in three contemporary novels. She is currently expanding on her previous work on flood fictions and is particularly interested in the ways in which the material environment and the literary imagination are intertwined. Hanna Masslich works as an assistant for the president of the GAAS and is a founding editor of the new graduate journal *In Progress*. Her research interests include Contemporary Literature, Environmental Humanities, the Anthropocene and Climate Change, New Materialism, as well as Postcolonial and Indigenous Studies.

### **Chronicling the Anthropocene: History, Capital, and the Deforestation of the American North in Annie Proulx's *Barkskins* and Michael Christie's *Greenwood***

Fritz Bommas (Universität Augsburg)

**Abstract:** Against the background of a larger project on contemporary North American novels that engage with the challenges posed by the Anthropocene in a realist mode, I want to use the opportunity afforded by this forum to zoom in on two specific works and focus specifically on the question of historicity, of how narrative representations of the/a past interact with a realist paradigm. In both Annie Proulx's *Barkskins* (2016) and Michael Christie's *Greenwood* (2019), trees and forests take center stage, both thematically and formally, and serve to illustrate the dawning of a new age of rampant destruction and exploitation of natural resources on the North American continent. Tracing the emergence and development of the timber industry, decades turn into centuries and generations follow generations, while trees – their growth, their rings, their branches – serve as structural models and vehicles to approach the *longue durée* of nonhuman beings. Before this backdrop, the frightening and destructive changes that human beings bring about in their short lifespans come into focus in both texts, and with them the principle of exploitation that underlies the Anthropocene: Colonialism, industrial extractivism and *laissez-faire* capitalism come together in an effort to clear-cut an entire continent, an effort in which the concept of the corporation is both central and complicit. A specific kind of manifest destiny is enacted here, blatant in its disregard for human and nonhuman life, unceasing, and at times tragically unaware of its consequences. Any examination of the strategies both novels employ to narrate past time thus has to be accompanied by at least a brief look at the staging of capitalist exploitation on the content level, before asking, by way of conclusion, what implications such strategies have for a realist mode of writing the Anthropocene.

**Bio:** Fritz Bommas studied English and American Studies (Major) and Comparative Literature (Minor) for his BA at the University of Augsburg, and finished his MA in English and American Studies toward the end of 2021 at the same institution with a thesis on nonhuman agency and networks in Richard Powers' *The Overstory*. He is at home at Augsburg's Chair of American Studies, where he continues to work after serving in various roles as a tutor, student assistant and research assistant during his studies. From

October 2022 to September 2023 he is a lecturer at the Chair of American Studies in Augsburg, standing in for a colleague on parental leave, and works on the exposé for a PhD project on contemporary realist novels in/of the Anthropocene.

## **“England Hath Seene Her Best Dayes, and Now Evil Dayes Are Befalling Us”: Nostalgia in Puritan Culture**

Katerina Steffan (Leibniz-Universität-Hannover)

**Abstract:** In 1998 Benedict Anderson quoted from Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative to emphasize the importance of exile and memory in the formation of “nationality”. Held captive during King Philipp’s War, Rowlandson, who had left England as a child, suddenly felt “*comfort*” when “[she] saw a place where English Cattle had been” and “an English Path”. This “*so took with me,*” she said, “*that I thought I could have freely lyan down and dyed*” (21). Rather than only recalling a faint childhood memory, Rowlandson also partook in a collective memory, and like many Puritans of the second half of the seventeenth century lingered in a nostalgic reverie of a better English past.

Scholars have long highlighted the Puritan ambition to archive memory, be it in diaries or chronicles. Yet, they have traditionally read Puritan archiving as ‘rational,’ foregrounding religious, social or political motivations and disregarding the driving force of emotions such as nostalgia. My talk will thus stress the emotional component of Puritan transatlantic memory culture. Indeed, what Anderson neglected is that in Rowlandson’s fear and solitude, her nostalgic daydream of England primarily brought her *comfort*.

Psychologists characterize nostalgia as ambivalent emotion that is triggered by a sense of loneliness, isolation and existential threat (Sedikides et al. 305). “Nostalgia is a social emotion,” Sedikes et al. emphasize, through which “[s]ymbolic ties with close others are affirmed,” who “come to be momentarily part of one’s present” (305). This “counteract[s] the effect of loneliness” and helps “coping with existential threat” (306). Furthermore, nostalgia was found to motivate and inspire individuals giving them “a sense of continuity and meaning” (306).

Corresponding to these findings, I argue that nostalgia was the key emotion that connected, strengthened and motivated the Puritan community in times of existential crisis such as the Reformation or the economic and social crisis of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. In light of these upheavals, Puritans vehemently promoted a romanticized past of peacefulness and stability and attempted to rebuild this blissful past in their *New England*. Nostalgia was thus an affective force that unified and inspired ten thousands to cross the Atlantic and Puritan public figures consistently evoked nostalgia to motivate their audience to political action.

**Bio:** After having completed her vocational training as a women's tailor and fashion designer, Katerina Steffan worked as a fashion designer in Hannover for three and a half years. She then started studying at the Leibniz Universität Hannover beginning with English and History (fächerübergreifender Bachelor). While continuing her teacher training in her masters she also studied Advanced Anglophone Studies and graduated in October 2021. She is currently a doctoral candidate at Leibniz Universität Hannover, working on her dissertation entitled “Vulnerable Bodies: Anger and Sorrow in New

England Puritanism.” This project will explore how normative religious, medical and philosophical discourses on the emotions intersected with the emotional practices of New Englanders to shape the emotional climate of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England. By merging theories of practice, affect, and space and examining the intersection of emotions, the body and space, this project will show the dynamic relationality between representations, practices and identities. Katerina is currently part of the DGF-funded early Americanist network “Voices and Agencies: America and the Atlantic, 1600–1865.”

17:00 - 18:45

### **Panel 2: Cinematic Memories**

Chair: Lea Espinoza Garrido (Bergische Universität Wuppertal)

### **Beyond “Hollywood” Borders: Audiences’ Memories and Identities**

Alejandra Bulla and Stefan Dierkes (DFG-Funded Research Group “Hollywood Memories”, Leibniz-Universität-Hannover)

**Abstract:** The Hollywood Memories project aims to understand how products of cinematic remaking –remakes, sequels, spin-offs – influence individual memories, lived experiences, and generational identities in the movie-viewing population of the globalized world. We argue that the practice of remaking is crucial to understand processes of cultural memory, as the decade-spanning remediation of texts – think *Star Wars* or *Lord of the Rings* – broadens the temporal range of remembrance, recycling formative texts at different life stages. This results in a constant interplay of past and present, re-arranging or challenging the audiences’ experiences and memories.

Following the groundwork laid by New Cinema History, we aim to represent movie memories of actual audiences, broadening the methods of approaching memory studies. The project carries out cross-generational audience research in four countries – the USA, Germany, China, and Mexico – by conducting online questionnaires and group interviews. In addition, the historical-political background of each case study will be taken into consideration, to help us understand past and current trends of the film making market, and particularly important for us, how film remaking trends are connected to the audiences' memories.

In the specific case studies to be discussed here (Germany and Mexico), the influence Hollywood exercises on them relies greatly in the distinct historical backgrounds each country shares with the US, showing also the transnational factor of cultural memory. We hope to better understand how changes in the film industry have shaped audiences, their memories and identities, taking into consideration factors like the fluctuation of content and technological developments over time. Eventually, by employing audience research, we can also critically reflect our own position as scholars in researching cultures of memory.

**Bios:** Alejandra Bulla studied at the Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas in Bogota, Colombia, where she obtained a bachelor’s degree in education with emphasis in

English. After finishing her bachelor, she moved to Germany where she worked and studied the language before applying for a master's degree at the FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg. She graduated from the program M.A. The Americas with the thesis "English Language Instruction in Colombia: A Critique of US Neocolonialism". Currently she is pursuing her PhD at the English Department of Leibniz Universität Hannover. In April 2022 she joined the research group "Hollywood Memories: Cinematic Remaking and the Construction of Global Movie Generations," funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) where she focuses on the Mexican audiences.

Stefan Dierkes obtained his B.A. in Applied Literature und Cultural Studies, Journalism, and Politics at TU Dortmund. He finished his M.A. at University Duisburg-Essen in Literature and Media Practice and Anglophone Studies with a thesis on Postcolonial Literature and paratexts. Currently, Stefan is a doctoral student in the DFG-funded research group "Hollywood Memories: Cinematic Remaking and the Construction of Global Movie Generations" at Leibniz Universität Hannover, where he focuses his research on German movie audiences.

### **"Stuck in a Cycle We Can't Fucking Break" – African American Cultural Memory in the Short Film *Two Distant Strangers* (2020)**

Jana Rosebrock (Europa-Universität Flensburg)

**Abstract:** The concept of memory has a great impact on what a society understands as its history and is thus crucial to the formation of cultural identity. The question which parts of the past are remembered within a society and secured in its history is especially important with regard to marginalized groups, since they are often faced with an oblivion of their perspective and the challenges of securing traumatic memories within the narratives they tell themselves.

This paper is concerned with the cultural memory of African Americans and how their – partly highly traumatic – past experiences are secured within contemporary narratives. To discuss this, it will analyze the American short film *Two Distant Strangers* (2020), which takes up contemporary discussions of the Black Lives Matter movement and problematizes racial profiling and police violence in the United States. By taking up theoretical discussions about cultural memory, the representation of memory and trauma in media, and the specific characteristics of African American cultural memory, this paper will address the question how contemporary cinematic representations of African American memory display traumatic memories, how they discuss existing memory processes, and how they themselves can be seen as a contribution to cultural memory and thus change the predominant narratives about African American histor(ies) and identit(ies). The paper will reveal how with the help of cinematic productions, central issues of African American life in the US are not only focused on as part of contemporary discussions, but at the same time secured in cultural memory and made accessible to a large transnational audience.

**Bio:** Jana Rosebrock is currently a PhD student at the Europa-Universität Flensburg. Her studies are concerned with cultural memory in contemporary African American film and address questions of historiography, cultural memory, and identity. Her PhD project,

supervised by Prof. Dr. Birgit Däwes, focusses on the impact of trauma and power relations on cultural memory as well as on African American memories and identities. Since there is a lack of research in the field of (African American) cultural memory in film, she is interested in the analysis of contemporary African American cinematic productions and attempts to expand the research done within the field of African American cultural memory. In her master thesis, Jana Rosebrock studied the representation of cultural memory in the Netflix series *Black Earth Rising* (2018) and *Unorthodox* (2020). She currently lives in Flensburg together with her husband and their two children.

### **Cinematic Memories of Columbine**

Johannes Vith (Universität Innsbruck)

**Abstract:** On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold attacked Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. The shooting left 15 people dead, including the two shooters. The media intensely covered the shooting, which resulted in widespread public interest, mass hysteria, and a communal trauma of school shootings. Over time, the Columbine High School shooting has become a cultural icon indicative of the problem of gun violence at schools in the United States: a cultural anchor for the trauma of school shootings. This paper is concerned with *how* and *why* the Columbine High School shooting is still so avidly remembered. More so, it is also interested in the transnational dimension of Columbine and its memory.

Columbine was highly televised, and the footage of it was repeated and framed extensively. The event has also formed the basis for several films, all of which respond to and differ from news reporting and the narratives and imagery it promoted. In this sense, this paper will address how movies impact the culture of remembering Columbine. It seeks to show that the Columbine High School shooting is still a transnational memory marker for collective trauma because of these cinematic mediations. Moreover, films about Columbine use different strategies to mediate the trauma of the shooting and thereby actively contribute to the memory culture surrounding school shootings. In addition, as traumatic events such as Columbine often exceed the potential of rational sense-making, this paper will show that the medium 'film' is very productive in mediating and ultimately processing trauma and thus significantly contributes to memory culture.

**Bio:** Johannes Vith is a Ph.D. student and university assistant in the Department of American Studies at the University of Innsbruck. His research interests are rooted in film studies, science fiction, mountain film, ecocriticism, and trauma studies. His dissertation project, *Mining for Trauma* (working title), focuses on the intersection of these fields and explores the changing conceptions of mines as traumatic spaces. His first article, "Remaking Columbine," was published in the *Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies*.

## **Memories as Identity in Janelle Monáe's *Dirty Computer***

Katharina Röder (Universität Regensburg)

**Abstract:** In the first half of the 20th century, dystopian novels like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or George Orwell's *1984* have established a narrative around future societies in which people are controlled by a totalitarian government that uses technology to regulate the people living within the respective societies. More recently, contemporary texts like Janelle Monáe's "emotion picture" *Dirty Computer* see queer artists using similar motifs to explore dystopian futures that specifically impact and regulate the lives of queer people, focusing on their sexuality, identity, and the ideas on family connected with a queer identity.

*Dirty Computer* introduces the audience to a society, in which it is possible for the government to access and delete the memories of those who do not fit into the society they created. In doing so, they take away their victim's sense of identity and therefore the threat they pose to the powers that are in place. Besides the importance of the main characters queerness, this text mainly focuses on questions surrounding the importance of race, especially the eradication of joyful memories of Black people as those are the memories they appear to target the most.

Using ideas from the fields of Afrofuturism as well as memory studies I want to investigate how *Dirty Computer* creates the sense of a queer Black identity through the memories of its main character Jane. In a second step, I will then analyze how the threat of the eradication of her memories influences her sense of identity and how this relates back to the experiences of African American people, both in the past and the present.

**Bio:** Katharina Röder (she/her) is currently working as a research assistant at the University of Regensburg. She graduated with a Master's degree in Applied Literary and Cultural Studies from TU Dortmund in 2021 after exploring depictions of queerness in contemporary music videos by LGBTQ artists in her master's thesis. Her research is focused on gender and queer studies, with a special interest in contemporary texts and popular culture.

### **Thursday, November 10, 2022**

*Großer Sitzungssaal des Philosophikums (PT 3.0.79) and Zoom*

19:00 - 20:30

#### **Conference Keynote and Q&A:**

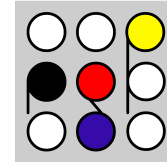
Chairs: Verena Baier (Universität Regensburg) and  
Efthalia Prokopiu ("Europe and America in the Modern World",  
Leibniz ScienceCampus Regensburg)

### **The Politics of Regret Revisited**

Prof. Dr. Jeffrey Olick (University of Virginia)



Universität Regensburg



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**Abstract:** In the talk, Jeffrey Olick will review the trajectories of what he has called the politics of regret – acknowledging and apologizing for difficult pasts – from its heyday in the 1990s through the last two decades, with particular attention to transformations in the last five years. He will give particular attention to debates over postcolonial memory in Europe (with particular attention to recent German debates) and to the end of what he has called American exceptionalism in memory politics following the murder of George Floyd and the rise of BLM (showing how the discourses are intertwined).

**Bio:** Jeffrey Olick is William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Sociology and History at the University of Virginia. He is Co-President of the Memory Studies Association and an elected member of the Sociological Research Association.

Olick received a B.A. with High Honors from Swarthmore College (1986) and an M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. in Sociology from Yale (1993). Before joining the faculty at UVA, Olick was a member of the sociology department faculty at Columbia University in New York City for eleven years.

Olick is a cultural and historical sociologist whose work has focused on collective memory and commemoration, critical theory, transitional justice, postwar Germany, and sociological theory more generally. He is author of *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943-1949* (U of Chicago Press, 2005) and *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (Routledge, 2007).

Recent and forthcoming books include a six-volume collection, *A Cultural History of Memory*, edited with Stefan Berger (Bochum), as well as new translations and critical editions of two books by Maurice Halbwachs in collaboration with Sarah Daynes (UNC-Greensboro). Further work, together with Christina Simko (Williams College), includes developing the outlines of what they call “tragic sociology,” an approach with origins in Nietzsche’s writings on suffering and Weber’s sociological approach to theodicy.

### **Saturday November 12, 2022**

*Großer Sitzungssaal des Philosophikums (PT 3.0.79) and Zoom*

9:00 - 10:30

#### **Panel 3: Transnational Memory Cultures**

Chair: Jiann-Chyng Tu (Universität Regensburg/HU Berlin)

#### **The Transatlantic Debate on Cultural Memory: Beyond the Americanization vs. Germanization of Remembrance and the Need for a Global Frame of Connected Histories (virtual)**

Nancy Alhachem (Max-Weber-Kollege für kultur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Studien, Universität Erfurt)

**Abstract:** Since its translation into German language (and context) Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009) ignited a series of polemics and debates across the continents, the discourse that followed, was surprising on many levels. The book that has been in circulation for more than 12 years now, and essential in memory studies as well as in the postcolonial and literature theories, received some harsh and sometimes misleading critic from part of the



German media and academia. The discussion that followed situated Rothberg along the lines of what is now known as the 'Mbembe Affair' without stretching the details, it's worth mentioning the anxieties that stimulated some defensive responses. Once again the question of the 'Holocaust Uniqueness' and genocide comparisons rose to stage.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the accusations from part of the German academic persona saw in Rothberg's (and Moses) model a threat to the established German frame of remembrance. For example in a talk on 'Antisemitism and Racism' at Bielefeld in February 2022,<sup>2</sup> the historian Ulrich Herbert stated that "to transfer the methods by which the Holocaust overshadowed in the US the history of slavery, and the discrimination of African-Americans onto the German context is "*Hoch Problematisch*". Subsequently, a melting pot of complaints on relativizing, Americanizing, and minimizing the remembrance of the Holocaust formed around scholars like Mbembe, Rothberg, and Moses. In this short paper, I intend to sketch the discourse on remembrance that formed around Michael Rothberg and A. Dirk Moses as well as examining the following questions: Is Multidirectional Memory an American model? Are the frames offered for the remembrance of Slavery and Holocaust restricted to a certain geography? how can Germany and the US benefit from this exchange to transcend the dichotomy between fighting Antisemitism and Racism in postmigrant societies? In order to show that despite the particularities that are attached to each nation's history,<sup>3</sup> a transatlantic and transnational lens on remembrance are essential in a postcolonial and interconnected world.

**Bio:** tba

## **Transnational Performances and Negotiations of Native American and African American Cultures in the Former German-American Institute Regensburg**

Christian Knittl (Universität Regensburg)

**Abstract:** The German - American Institute (GAI) Regensburg was established in 1955 by the City of Regensburg and the American government with the intention of fostering a positive image of the USA among the German population. In my paper, I argue that this institute was a contact zone where transnational cultural performances and negotiations took place whose outcome were transnationally circulated memory(ies) and knowledge formed, and influenced by such processes as, for example, appropriation and transculturation

In order to be able to make these processes legible, I examine both textual and visual archival sources produced by the GAI itself as well as articles from local

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<sup>1</sup> See among others: Klävers, Steffen: *Decolonizing Auschwitz? Komparativ-postkoloniale Ansätze in der Holocaustforschung*. Oldenburg, 2019. And: A. Dirk Moses, *The Problems of Genocide. Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression*. Cambridge, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> The event description:

<https://aktuell.uni-bielefeld.de/event/bielefelder-debatten-zur-zeitgeschichte-ii-antisemitismus-und-rassismus-konjunkturen-und-kontroversen-seit-1945/>

<sup>3</sup> Also: Sznajder, Natan. *Fluchtpunkte der Erinnerung. Über die Gegenwart von Holocaust und Kolonialismus*. München, 2022.

newspapers on the GAI and its events. In doing so, I apply insights from the fields of Transnational American Studies as well as Performance Studies. Thus, I examine both the mere presence of the GAI in Regensburg as well as its cultural events as transnational performances with special attention to its sourcers, producers, performers, and partakers, i.e. the United States Information Agency, the GAI directors, its staff, and the Regensburg public.

To exemplify the processes of transnational knowledge formation in the GAI Regensburg, I refer to two of its cultural events. These are namely an art exhibition in 1961 called "Indianische Traditionen - Kunsthandwerk und neue Malerei" and an "American Culture Week" in 1965 comprised of different events such as lectures and poetry readings highlighting the "influence" of African Americans on "the American culture".<sup>1</sup> In examining these two events, I'm able to show how cultural memory(ies) about and of supposed uniform cultural groups outside a perceived homogenous white American culture were circulated transnationally in the contact zone that was the GAI Regensburg. It also allows me to portray how the aforementioned processes in some cases result in stereotypical and appropriated depictions of these groups whereas, in other cases, they lead to diversified and problematized views on the transnational discourses on them.

**Bio:** Christian Knittl holds two state exams in English, History, Sociology, and Political Studies and has been a doctoral candidate in American Studies at the University of Regensburg since 2021. He was a graduate student and teaching assistant at the Department of English at the University of North Dakota in 2013/14 and has taught Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the University of Regensburg from 2020-21 (*wiss. Mitarbeiter*). Knittl's research interests include Transnational American Studies, the American presence in Germany, Performance Studies and Transcultural Approaches to TEFL. Since 2021 he has been a tenured teacher (*Studienrat*), teaching English, History, and Civics first at Luitpold-Gymnasium Munich and, since September 2022, at Gymnasium Parsberg.

### **Remembering U.S. Wars: Memorializing the Afghanistan War (and the Global War on Terrorism in General)**

Kristina Seefeldt (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg)

**Abstract:** In August 2021, after 20 years, the longest war in American history ended. U.S. troops left Afghanistan and the Taliban took over, which led to chaotic scenes and worldwide media coverage. The hurried end to such a long-lasting conflict left soldiers, veterans, and civilians at a loss. Quickly overshadowed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine a mere six months later, the global media quickly changed its focus, and the U.S. military could be once again seen as a rescuer and supporter. Struggling to remember a controversial war was a prominent theme in the late 70s and early 80s, however, the U.S. is now facing an even bigger challenge: to remember its longest war, its abrupt end, its victims, survivors, and its controversies during a global pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and a growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. How does a nation remember such a colossal event? How do they honor and memorialize those who served

and how do they address the conflict's shortcomings? The war in Afghanistan and the Global War on Terrorism in general are essential parts of U.S. cultural and collective memory, but their significance will fade with time. In my talk, I aim to show that memorializing recent wars and remembering them, including their controversies, is essential, both in physical memorials, as well as academic research and education. I will analyze the ways the U.S. War in Afghanistan, as well as the Global War on Terrorism in general are already being remembered by small communities and what future plans to memorialize the wars in a nation-wide context look like, which elements are highlighted, and which are omitted.

**Bio:** Kristina Seefeldt holds an MA degree in British and North American Cultural Studies from the University of Freiburg, Germany. Currently, she is a doctoral student in English and American Studies at the University of Freiburg. Her PhD project is focused on rescue heroes in the U.S. Armed Forces and their depiction in movies. She analyzes films such as *Forest Gump* (1994) by Robert Zemeckis, *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016) by Mel Gibson or *The Last Full Measure* (2019) by Todd Robinson. She is a research assistant and school project coordinator at the Research Center 948 "Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms" in Freiburg focusing on "Heroes in Education. School Settings and Transfer of Academic Knowledge". Her research interests include heroes and heroisms, masculinity studies, military and war studies, as well as film and audience studies.

14:00 - 15:30

**Panel 4: Identities and (Counter-)Pedagogies**

Chair: Bettina Huber (Universität Passau)

**The Ancestral Female Self: Mythology and the Reconstruction of Identity in the Poetry of Audre Lorde**

Julia Machtenberg (Ruhr-Universität-Bochum)

**Abstract:** In *We Heal From Memory. Sexton, Lorde, Anzaldúa, and the Poetry of Witness* (2000), Cassie Premo Steele draws from trauma studies to show "how Lorde's poetry moves beyond the intra- psychic realm to enter into the intersubjective space of witnessing," thereby, "making it possible for readers to remember, reconstruct, and bear witness to our [US] culture's history of violence toward women and African Americans" (10). These poetic acts of witnessing and rewriting the historically oppressed body are important aspects of Lorde's poetry; yet Steele's approach partially neglects the ambiguity and complexity of Lorde's multifaceted identity constructions. In my dissertation project, I argue that reading Lorde's poetry in light of vulnerability studies allows for more extensive insights into her dynamic reconstruction of identity formation.

By examining the function of African mythology in Lorde's collection *The Black Unicorn* (1978), I aim to show how Lorde's work with West African mythology allows the poet to rearticulate the vulnerable positions of her speakers' selves in contemporary US culture. As Meredith F. Coleman-Tobias explains,

During 1974, Audre Lorde traveled to Dahomey (now Benin), Ghana, and Togo, searching for 'an ancestral female self' and, upon return, developed a robust, West African-inspired spirituality. As a post-Catholic with Buddhist leanings, Lorde began

to connect with 'what she believed was the religion of her foremothers.' For Lorde, this included a pantheon of several West African divinities, including Dahomean Seboulisa and Ayida-Weddo; Yoruba Oshumare and Yemoja-Oboto; Ewe-Fon Avrekete; and Fon Mawu- Lisa. (68)

The lyrical reconstruction of Lorde's search for "an ancestral female self" shapes the poet's representation of vulnerable selves and states in her poetry. By examining Lorde's use of African mythology, I will show how the poet reconstructs her speakers' vulnerable positions as states of potentiality from which new understandings of socio-cultural processes of self-formation may emerge.

#### Works Cited:

Coleman-Tobias, Meredith F. "Audre and Africa: Reconsidering Lorde's Rites/Rights." *The Journal of Interreligious Studies*, no. 23, 2018, pp. 68-74.

Steele, Cassie Premo. *We Heal from Memory. Sexton, Lorde, Anzaldúa, and the Poetry of Witness*. Palgrave, 2000.

**Bio:** Julia Machtenberg is a PhD student at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (RUB). Julia received their BA in German and Anglophone Studies from the Universität Duisburg-Essen in 2017 and their MA in English and American Studies from the RUB in 2020. Currently, Julia is working on their PhD project with the working title "Vulnerability in US-American Poetry." Next to vulnerability and trauma studies, Julia's research interests include in gender and queer studies.

### **Dana's Narcissistic Fight for Existence: The Positive Narcissism in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (virtual)**

Midia Mohammadi (University College Dublin)

**Abstract:** The emergence of neo-slave narratives in the twentieth century was a call for delving deeper into the less scrutinized aspects of racial issues in antebellum America, whose lingering impact was still contributing to racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. Neo-slave narratives delved deep into the psychological status of all antebellum individuals regardless of race and class and showed the dilemmas created by slavery. *Kindred*, one of the most prominent neo-slave narratives, strongly reminds the readers that by attempting to forget history and ignoring the roots, the marks of history cannot be effaced. Octavia Butler sends Dana, her protagonist, to antebellum Maryland to realize the dark reality of slavery. The most brutal uncanny experience of Dana's intermittent journey to the past is realizing that her residency in the present time can only be guaranteed by Rufus's death after Grandmother Hagar's birth. Deprived of her sense of stability and selfhood, Dana's desire to preserve her sense of cohesive self and existence requires her to wear an armor of narcissism. Her tie to the past compels her to constantly save Rufus's life, making sure that Grandmother Hagar is conceived, even though she gradually realizes that her birth would result from Alice getting raped by Rufus. While female narcissism was once interpreted as "selfishness," a negative strategy, the impact of social hegemonies on women's identity formation and lack of

empathetic response toward them was dismissed in that interpretation. This paper discusses how Dana, as a biracial woman, is narcissistically injured not only in antebellum Maryland but also in her twentieth-century life. It will also discuss how Dana's narcissistic fight for her existence and life is impacted by marital status, social class, and racial background and their intersections with a synthesized approach using feminism and psychoanalysis.

**Bio:** Midia Mohammadi is a PhD student and published literary researcher at University College Dublin. Her project proposes an interdisciplinary inspection of the figure of the narcissistic woman in modern American fiction. Revisiting and revising psychoanalytic insights, the project engages contemporary work in affect theory and feminist theory. An intersectional project that reinvigorates textual portraits of the narcissistic woman, the work breaks new ground in thinking about "selfish" racialized women in American literature. She also conducts extensive research in drama and comparative literature. Midia has been a member of the Irish Association for American Studies since 2021. She has also interned for #DouglassWeek, a collaborative event series organized by prominent scholars and activists in the US and Ireland that celebrates the arrival of Frederick Douglass in different countries around the world.

### **Counterpedagogy in Sarah Piatt's 19th-Century Magazine Poetry**

Mareike Spychala (Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg)

**Abstract:** Sarah Piatt, a widely read 19<sup>th</sup>-century poet recovered in the late 1990s and early 2000s has often been treated as an author critical of sentimental politics and especially the ideals of sentimental motherhood that dominated 19<sup>th</sup>-century women's poetry (Bennett 139-152; Wearn 165). Consequently, Piatt's dialogue poems, which often feature mothers in conversations with children, have been read as exploring female subjectivity and subversive forms of motherhood (Wearn 115). In this paper, I argue that some of her poems also present a counter-pedagogy. In these poems, the dialogue does not lead to the mother-speaker reflecting on her own position in society, instead she is presented as teaching her children lessons that run counter to established 19<sup>th</sup> century gender roles. I read this counter-pedagogy as an attempt to make her children break with those roles. To make this case, this paper will focus mostly on the poems "A Hint from Homer" (1878) and "A Lesson in a Picture" (1880). As Piatt's poems originally engaged in this counter-pedagogy on the pages of magazines, I will further try to show that her poems are shaped by, but also react to and stand in tension with 19<sup>th</sup>-century print and magazine culture, and especially the practice of illustration in newspapers and magazines.

**Bio:** Mareike Spychala is a research assistant and lecturer at the University of Bamberg's American Studies section. Her award-winning dissertation focused on the intersections of gender and imperialism in autobiographies by female U.S.-American veterans of the Iraq War. Her post-doc project will focus on Transatlantic Women's Poetry in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. She has published several essays and edited collections, most recently, an essay on "War and Conflict in *Star Trek*" for the *Handbook on Star Trek* (Routledge, 2022) and the

collection *Fighting for the Future: Essays on Star Trek: Discovery* (Liverpool UP, 2020), co-edited with Dr. Sabrina Mittermeier.

16:00 - 17:30

**Panel 5: Representations**

Chair: Markus Diepold (DFG-Funded Project "Entangled Objects?", Universität Regensburg)

**Beyond the Haunted Burial Ground: Memories and the Indigenous Undead (Bey)on(d) Reservation Spaces**

Bethany Webster-Parmentier (Europa-Universität Flensburg)

**Abstract:** In recent years, reservations have frequently served as the setting of horror and speculative fiction written by Indigenous authors, including but not limited to Nathan Niigan Noodin Adler's *Wrist*, Morgan Talty's *Night of the Living Rez*, and Stephen Graham Jones's *Mapping the Interior* and *The Only Good Indians*.

This is perhaps unsurprising considering David Treuer's observation that reservations have "become the condensations of multiple contradictions: places outside of civilization but also the last hope for it; savage yet saturated with poetic depth [...] absolutely and irreducibly real [...], yet the only place left where magic happens" (360). These paradoxes and tensions would lend themselves to genres such as horror. Following Treuer's, it seems only logical that walking (or floating) contradictions populate reservations in Indigenous fiction: as the spirits of once-living bodies, ghosts are liminal beings neither entirely alive nor dead just as reservations, by the very nature of their artificially drawn boundaries, are neither entirely Indigenous nor U.S.-American spaces.

Eric Anderson has recently put forward the concept of the "Indigenous Undead," a wide-ranging term encompassing "Indian ghosts, spirits, hauntings" as well as figures such as zombies. Anderson asserts that

undeadness affords one way of *acknowledging and honoring Indigenous history* and an Indigenous presence that often manifests as confusing, ambiguous, and unsettling to Native characters but that often grows more legible as a paradigm, perhaps a *methodology*, a way of thinking about forms of Indigenous power that very much include world-building that is *pointedly not colonial*. (437; emphases added)

This paper explores manifestations of undeadness on reservations in two works recent Indigenous horror, *Night of the Living Rez* and *The Only Good Indians*, arguing that the undead in these narratives operate as repositories of knowledge and memories that refuse to be erased or contained within artificial reservation boundaries.

**Bio:** Bethany Webster-Parmentier moved to Germany as a US-American Fulbright Teaching Assistant after completing her bachelor's degree in German and music at the University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire. She completed her MA degree in Kultur-Sprache-Medien (Culture- Language-Media) with an MA thesis entitled "Hearing Otherness: Aural Expressions of Alterity in American Gothic Fiction and Film" at Europa-Universität

Flensburg, where she is currently working as a doctoral researcher and instructor in the English and American Studies Department. She has previously published articles on *True Detective* and Linda Hogan's novel *Power*. The working title of her dissertation is "Twenty-First Century Indigenous North American Gothic."

## **The Representation of African American and Afro-Caribbean Cultural Memory in Imaginations about the Future**

Sarah Crooms (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

**Abstract:** Cultural memory makes up a large part of mass and popular media today, in a way, memory is woven into our daily life so that sometimes, we do not even recognize it as a memory. This paper aims to deconstruct imaginations of the future in African American and Afro-Caribbean Science fiction writing, in search of practices of cultural memory. For this endeavor, there are two novels, which will be examined closely, the first one, "An Unkindness of Ghosts" by Rives Solomon, which is the story of Aster, who was born into slavery and tries to escape from her captors on a spaceship. The novel reflects on the practices of slavery and captivity but also on the longing for a sense of home. The second novel which will be looked at, "Brown Girl in the Ring" by Nalo Hopkinson, situates Caribbean culture within Science Fiction and Fantasy writing.

In both cases, aspects of the past and the future are combined within novels, as products of mass consumption, while at the same time being literary places of remembrance. It will be interesting to see, how certain aspects of cultural heritage are being transformed into a different environment, while at the same time referring to a past that has been passed on through generations. These two cases of imaginations of the future, can be used as examples of how cultural memory is translated and therefore "renewed" and made accessible for wider audiences. Furthermore, they can therefore be taken as tools to educate a wider range of people on practices of cultural memory, combining the past and the future in the present. Following this thought, not only educating its audiences but possibly also pushing for a change in perspective on current issues and new possibilities for the future.

**Bio:** Sarah Crooms was born the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1995 in Nuremberg, Germany. She attended elementary school and high school in Stein, Bavaria, graduating in July 2014 with the Allgemeine Hochschulreife. Right after, she started studying Economics at the Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. Shortly after beginning her studies, she changed her subject and transferred to the Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nürnberg. In October 2016 she started her Bachelor of Arts in History and English and American Studies, completing her Bachelor of Arts in 2020, with a bachelor's thesis on notions of slavery in dystopian literature. In November 2020, she began the master's program "North American Studies: Culture and Literature" also at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg. Since February 2021, she is a research assistant to Dr. Peter Maurits for his research in African Science Fiction. Currently Sarah Crooms, is in the process of selecting a topic for her master's thesis, before finishing her degree next year.

## Literary Awards Archives as Sites of Cultural Memory and the Cultural Capital of Diversity

Lisa Seuberth (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

**Abstract:** Awarding a book is not only an act of aesthetic judgment or honoring an author for their outstanding work. Awarding a book means reminding the public of its core values and norms. It means participating in canon formation, acknowledging what counts as valuable to discuss, to reflect upon, to read in a society at a certain point in time. In the case of the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, it is the United States' values that are presented to the public. As two of the most influential literary prizes in the English-speaking world, both institutions are dedicated to specifically capturing the "best literature in America" (NBA) and distinguished "American achievements" (Pulitzer) in their literary selections. The national focus makes their archives sites of the United States' cultural memory, saving the nation's values in selected cultural productions and tracing their development since the prizes' founding years. This paper analyzes the changes in cultural values that these archives reflect from a postcolonial lens and positions the two prestigious awards within the United States' cultural industry to show how they have helped establishing the current anti-colonial value system of the public sphere in the United States. The paper discusses whether the increased ethnic diversity among award winners indicates a growing appreciation of the heterogeneity and multiplicity of voices within the United States, or whether it points to the prizes' participation in the commercialization of postcolonialism for reasons of national identity politics.

**Bio:** Lisa Seuberth is a doctoral candidate in American Literary Studies at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU). After completing her teacher training in English and French in 2020, she worked as research associate at the Chair of American Literary Studies (Prof. Kley, FAU) and at the Chair of Modern German Literature (Prof. Niefanger, FAU). Her research interests focus on contemporary US-American literature, African American Studies, and Critical Whiteness Studies. The current working title of her dissertation is "Whiteness as Usual? American Africanism in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Novel." It investigates the current position of Whiteness and Anti-Blackness in the US-American public sphere and how its award-winning literatures generate the respective value system in which those racial concepts develop. Beginning October 2022, she will work as research associate in the newly established research training group "Literature and the Public Sphere in Differentiated Contemporary Cultures." Her last publications include articles on George Saunders's award-winning novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* and its strategies to deconstruct anti-Black and White supremacist discourses.