

"DISTANCE  
AND DIVERSITY  
IN TIMES  
OF CRISIS:  
LITERARY  
EXPRESSIONS  
AND ARTISTIC  
RESPONSES"

October 15 - 17, 2020  
on-line & on-site  
Please register here:  
[www.amerikanistik.uni-saarland.de/uds-asgf2020](http://www.amerikanistik.uni-saarland.de/uds-asgf2020)

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Susanne Hamscha  
(Fulbright | Diversity)

Phillip Ayoub  
(Occidental College)

Takeo Rivera  
(Boston University)

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# UDS AMERICAN STUDIES GRADUATE FORUM

**ASGF2020**

***Distance and Diversity in  
Times of Crisis:  
Literary Expressions and  
Artistic Responses***

15-17 October 2020

#ASGF2020

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# The UdS American Studies Graduate Forum

In cooperation with the German-American Institute Saarland, the Chair of North American Literary and Cultural Studies at Saarland University (NamLitCult at UdS) organizes the annual AMERICAN STUDIES GRADUATE FORUM that invites doctoral and advanced Master students from Saarland University, the partner universities of the University of the Greater Region, and beyond to present their current projects-in-progress in a workshop-style setting. The forum aims at offering participants a chance to discuss their research with peers as well as experienced and senior scholars.

## Partners

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## **Distance and Diversity in Times of Crisis: Literary Expressions and Artistic Responses**

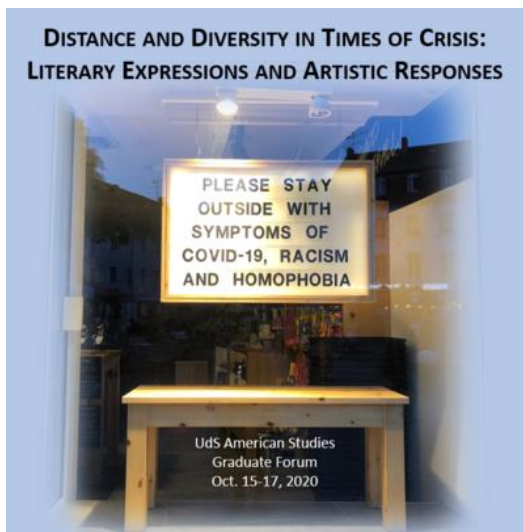
In cooperation with the German-American Institute Saarland, the Chair of North American Literary and Cultural Studies at Saarland University (UdS) will hold a 3-day American Studies Graduate Forum that invites advanced Master students, doctoral students, as well as advanced scholars to present their current projects-in-progress in a workshop-style setting. The forum will offer participants a chance to discuss their research with peers as well as with experienced scholars. This year, we invite submissions dealing with issues of diversity, distance, and crisis.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion have become catchwords in the past years, but the current pandemic has put these issues in stark relief, as it has become clear that the Covid-19 pandemic is disproportionately impacting disadvantaged groups. New perspectives are emerging as this health crisis has aggravated disparities, shining a light on more subtle forms of diversity, such as issues surrounding child-care and caregivers. The current pandemic has exposed deep social divisions in our societies, drawing the attention to the many challenges of marginalized communities.

The imposed actions to prevent the spread of the virus, summarized under the catchphrase ‘social distancing,’ have aimed at ensuring a minimum physical interpersonal distance, often engendering a side effect of increased onerous and stressful situations, leading, in turn, to affective, emotive, and

emotional distance and re-orientations. At the same time, as people all over the world are struggling with the very perceptible and experienceable force of this ‘social distancing,’ global distances have been dismantled and the world has moved more closely together in the virtual world, as the offer of online events increased considerably.

The Uds American Studies Graduate Forum 2020 offers a setting in which a decidedly humanities-driven, cultural studies and literature studies approach to issues of distance and diversity in times of crisis will be discussed. Focusing on literary and artistic expressions of and reactions to various forms of crises, ecological crises as well as health crises, this workshop seeks to highlight cultural representations that call for gender and racial equity, and a commitment to LGBTIQ issues.





## Program

*Thursday, October 15 – Live on Zoom*

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12:30 pm *Conference Opening and Welcome Address*

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*Panel I: Discourses of Distance and Diversity*

*Chair: Daniel Riesco*

**Distance and Diversity: Corona Art in the U.S.**

Astrid M. Fellner (Saarland U)

01:00 pm **Linguistic Othering and Scapegoating in  
Pandemic Times: Blame Games in the U.S. and  
Europe**

Eva Nossem (Saarland U)

**Another Layer of Pain; Exclusion of  
Immigrants in Times of a Pandemic; A  
Comparison between the United States and  
Germany.**

Somayeh Amin (Saarland U)

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02:30 pm *Virtual Coffee Break*

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*Panel II: Distance & Diversity & Identity*

*Chair: Renée Touschong*

**Where Diversity Ends: U.S. Comedian Kevin Hart, Joanne Rowling and a Ukrainian Boy**

Oksana Starshova (Petro Mohyla Black Sea National U)

03:00 pm

**“Perimeters of our lives”:** Exploring the Relationship Between Space and Body in Times of Crises in L. Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God* and M. Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale*

Svitlana Kot (Petro Mohyla Black Sea National U)

**Distance in the American University Discourse in the Times of COVID-19 Pandemic**

Yuliya Stodolinska (Petro Mohyla Black Sea National U)

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04:30 pm

*Virtual Coffee Break*

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*Keynote*

*Chair: Astrid M. Fellner*

05:00 pm

**The Raced Interface: Tao Lin, Tan Lin, and the Racialization of Affective Distance**

Takeo Rivera (Boston U)

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**Friday, October 16 – Live on Zoom**

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10:45 am     *Virtual Warm-Up*

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*Panel 3: Distance & Diversity in Artistic Productions*

*Chair:*

**‘[...] A Good Way to Reach the Movement’:  
The Sonic Community of the *Dial-A-Poem*  
Project**

Ulla Stackmann (Catholic U of Eichstätt):

**Music and Covid-19: The Potential of  
American and European Popular Music’s  
Articulation in Times of Crisis**

11:00 am     Alina Mozolevska (Petro Mohyla Black Sea  
National U)

**‘Social Distancing’ as a Chance to Revise the  
Paradoxes of Humanistic Philosophy:  
Personality vs. Identity in On-Line Artistic  
Practices of the Pandemic**

Natalya Dorfmann (Petro Mohyla Black Sea  
National U)

**Space, Distance, and Loneliness in Recent  
American Cultural Productions in the Light of  
the Current Covid-19 Crisis**

Bärbel Schlimbach (Saarland U)

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01:00 pm     *Virtual Break*

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***Friday, October 16 – Uni Campus, bldg. C5 3, room 3.26***

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*Keynote*

*Chair: Eva Nossem*

03:00 pm     **When States Come Out: Movements & the  
Diffusion of LGBTI Rights in Europe and North  
America**

Phillip M. Ayoub (Occidental College)

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04:30 pm     *Closing Remarks*

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04:45 pm     *Covid Break*

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*Award Ceremony*

05:30 pm     **Prizes for Best Final Theses in American  
Studies**

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*Saturday, October 17 – Live on Zoom*

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09:45 am     *Virtual Warm-Up*

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*Panel 4: Gendered Distancing*

*Chair: Shahrzad Tajeddini*

**Aestheticizing the Pandemic: Quarantine  
'Fashion' by Tatiana and Vladimir Bakhtov**

Oleksandra Filonenko (Petro Mohyla Black Sea  
National U)

**Transnational Jamaican Grannies in the  
United States: Keeping a Distance in Times of  
Covid-19**

10:00 am

Lisa Johnson (U of Trier, Saarland U)

**Vibes of Art in Times of Covid-19: The Case of  
Neon in the U.S.**

Tetyana Ostapchuk (Petro Mohyla Black Sea  
National U)

**Dismantling Distance or Commodifying Crisis?  
Women Depicting Diversity and Social Issues  
in VR Experiences from the U.S.**

Atalie Gerhard (Saarland U)

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12:00 pm     *Virtual Coffee Break*

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*Keynote*

*Chair: Bärbel Schlimbach*

01:00 pm

**From A Distance: Feminist and Disability  
Reflections on the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Susanne Hamscha (Fulbright Europe)

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02:30 pm

*Closing Remarks*

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## Abstracts

Thursday, October 15, 01:00 pm – 01:30 pm

Astrid M. Fellner (Saarland U)

***Distance and Diversity: Corona Art in the U.S.***

The current pandemic has exposed deep social divisions in our societies, drawing attention to the many challenges of marginalized communities. Not only has it created new borders between home and outside, between inside and outside, but it has also reinforced the borders between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ between the healthy and the sick, the rich and the poor. It has also reinforced the digital divide, widening the gap between those who have access to the now necessary means of communication and those who are isolated and left behind. As the effects of Covid-19 on social inequality, gender divisions, and core-periphery relations are becoming visible, it has become clear that the current pandemic is disproportionately impacting disadvantaged groups of people, especially BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) women.

Approaching the nexus of gender, diversity, and Covid-19 from a literary and cultural studies perspective, my contribution will focus on a series of creative responses to the current crisis, which give voice to many challenges currently faced by women. As I will show, a series of artists have highlighted the rise of racism and social inequalities during the Covid-19 crisis, focusing on the themes of isolation, domestic abuse, and problematic meanings of home. These cultural responses to the pandemic, which draw attention to gendered

and racial exclusions, play an important role in our personal and collective responses to the current crisis.

Thursday, October 15, 01:30 – 02:00 pm

Eva Nossem (Saarland U)

***Linguistic Othering and Scapegoating in Pandemic Times: Blame Games in the U.S. and Europe***

In spite of having developed into a global pandemic, COVID-19 is oftentimes met with local national(ist) reactions. Nationalist/nationally-oriented rebordering politics often go hand in hand with attempts to construct the disease as something foreign-grown and by apportioning the blame to ‘the other.’

While, as many state, the coronavirus does not make any difference between nationalities, race/ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexuality, and, even less so, political convictions, we can, however, observe that marginalized communities are hit much harder by the current pandemic. The discursive construction of the disease as a foreign-grown threat to the nation is one of the strategies to apportion the blame for the (spread of the) virus to the ‘other,’ the foreigner, the migrant, the refugee, the racialized other. A few months into the pandemic, we have furthermore witnessed an increase in gender-based violence and both physical as well as discursive attacks on SOGIE people (e.g. Moore 2020, OHCHR 2020, Hugendubel 2020).

While the anti-corona protests, as claimed by the organizers, have led to the formation of unlikely alliances e.g.



between far-right extremists, environmentalists, post-hippies, etc. (e.g. Heidtmann 2020), their demonstrations have offered, however, a prolific environment for discursive attacks on marginalized groups and hate speech. The appropriation of discourses of discrimination and oppression by anti-maskers culminated in homotransphobic rants and outbursts, such as the one during the anti-corona demonstration in Vienna, Austria, on September 5, 2020, when protesters tore up a rainbow flag on stage.

In my talk, I will outline some strategies of nationalist and homotransphobic discourse which have emerged in the context of Covid-19 and analyze them according to Reisigl and Wodak's (2001: 93-95) Discourse Historical Approach (DHA); the main focus will be placed on nomination, predication, and argumentation. The historical contextualization of the analyzed statements and the highlighting of their interdiscursive relationships will help lay bare their embeddedness in larger right-wing nationalist/racist and homotransphobic discourses of othering and scapegoating in pandemic times.

Thursday, October 15, 02:00 – 02:30 pm
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Somayeh Amin (Saarland U)

***Another Layer of Pain; Exclusion of Immigrants in Times of a Pandemic; A Comparison between the United States and Germany.***

The Covid-19 pandemic which has altered many aspects of human life, has highlighted the wide range of disadvantages of

marginalized groups all around the world. As the changes in everyday lives has hit almost everybody, the situation is harder for those already at risk of exclusion.

The situation has intensified the social exclusion of immigrants, one of those already disadvantaged groups, and has pushed them further towards the margins, making borders, which were already bolder for immigrant populations, even more fortified. Moreover, changes in the political and economic systems of the countries of residence, will definitely affect their living condition in the years to come.

Defining exclusion as “a process that obstructs the improvement of material, social and cultural living conditions, or that even brings about a worsening of these conditions (Vitiello et.al, 2003), I will delve into the pandemic addresses by some world leaders; the President of the United States, Prime Minister of Canada, and the German Chancellor, highlighting the way they addressed their “citizens” leaving out millions of residents of their countries. Moreover I will have a brief look into pandemic-induced changes in immigration policies in the United States, and argue that exclusion and inequality which started at the word level, were further reflected in being deprived of protective measures, financial aids, and even loss of some rights for immigrants.

Thursday, October 15, 03:00 – 03:30 pm

Oksana Starshova (Petro Mohyla Black Sea National U)

***Where Diversity Ends: U.S. Comedian Kevin Hart, Joanne Rowling and a Ukrainian Boy***

What do Joanne Rowling, Kevin Hart and the Ukrainian boy, Maxym Tkachuk, have in common? In the proposed paper I am going to look into some cases of cancel culture. Although these people exist in different dimensions – of a famous writer, an icon for several generations of young people, a comedian actor and a Ukrainian boy, half-orphan, until recently unknown, but they all in their own ways dropped out of common beliefs and became the targets for blame and criticism to the extent of exclusion and cancelling of their public identities. I am going to discuss how much cancel culture admits diversity, what lies at the background, what strategies are used against, and what is the response of the victim. How it operates on the levels of celebrities and simple people. Which patterns instruct the behavior of both sides – those who criticize and the criticized. And finally, I will try to trace the correlation between diversity and cancelling in the modern-day world.

Thursday, October 15, 03:30 – 04:00 pm

Svitlana Kot (Petro Mohyla Black Sea National U)

***“Perimeters of our lives”: exploring the relationship between space and body in times of crises in L. Erdrich’s Future Home of the Living God and M. Atwood’s Handmaid’s Tale***

Times of crises shift fundamental paradigms of human existence and worldviews. Very often, if not always geography and space undergo crucial transformation either adjusting to the new “game rules” or being the main instrument in the game. In light of recent health crises, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the reconfiguration of spatial routine which often leads to changing behavioral and life patterns of individuals. Thus the issue of the impact that space has on individuals and their bodies through various spatio-corporal practices as well as issues of biopolitics has grown in importance.

Warning about potential futures and aesthetically rethinking the themes of ecology, power, and human rights Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* and Louise Erdrich in her *Future Home of the Living God* focus on gender oppression. Depicting the times of ecological crises, the two feministic dystopias demonstrate that the construction of space is one of the most powerful mechanisms for the control of individuals and their bodies. This paper aims to explore the relationship between body and space in the two novels. The paper examines the way in which body manifests itself in space and determines the extent to which spatial configuration influences bodily practices. Moreover, it describes the design and implementation of the power mechanisms which shape, subjugate and use individual bodies in the novels through various spatial techniques and tactics such as relocation, isolation and limitation of mobility, fragmentation and clustering of space, preferential access to space, surveillance, and distancing among many others.

Thursday, October 15, 04:00 – 04:30 pm
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Yuliya Stodolinska (Petro Mohyla Black Sea National U)

***Distance in the American University Discourse in the Times of COVID-19 Pandemic***

All the participants of American University Discourse have been greatly impacted during the coronavirus pandemic. The administration of universities had to come up with alternatives that would work in the time of COVID-19 and, at the same time, would preserve the rights for equality and inclusion of all the University Discourse participants (students, staff, their families, etc.). They attempted to keep everybody up-to-date with the constantly changing information through different channels of communication by creating visual materials, social media posts, etc. Multimodal texts which combine verbal and nonverbal images proved to be one of the most popular and suitable forms for the participants of the American University Discourse.

In this research the term Discourse is used in the meaning of not just language-in-use, but a combination of language with other social practices (based on the works of J.P. Gee). The aim of this study is to examine the notion of distance and its portrayal in multimodal texts published by American Universities on their websites and social media accounts during the coronavirus pandemic. An attempt to analyze and classify the structure and content of such multimodal texts has been made.

Overall, it is assumed that in the course of time the content of the analyzed texts gradually changes as active propaganda of complete isolation at home evolves into rather cautious

promotion of reconnecting in a secure surrounding on campus. The Universities' visual materials strive to encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion while recreating and maintaining a safe and healthy environment in the "new normal" reality.

Thursday, October 15, 05:00 – 06:30 pm
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Takeo Rivera (Boston U)

***The Raced Interface: Tao Lin, Tan Lin, and the Racialization of Affective Distance***

In this contemporary period of COVID-19 quarantines, the computer screen has swiftly become the "new normal" medium of social relations. But if, as Marshall McLuhan famously provoked, the medium is the message, how has the computer or televisual screen impacted our very constructions of social subjectivity? In this talk, Takeo Rivera explores the role of the screen in the production of certain racial subject positions, namely masculine Asian Americans, through his reading of the works of authors Tao Lin and Tan Lin. In Tao Lin's Taipei, the computer screen mediates a racial phenomenology in which the narrator locates his Asianness precisely in the inscrutability and affective distance that the screen enables. Meanwhile, Tan Lin's *Insomnia* and the Aunt operates as a metafictional meditation recounting the narrator's childhood evenings with his deceased immigrant Chinese aunt, wherein their only interaction was watching television late into the night, configuring the entry into Asian Americanness as a mode of feeling itself, paradoxically marked by the absence of visible feeling. Through the hazy blur of the computer or television screen, both Taipei and *Insomnia* situate Asian Americanness

as a form of affective distance, wherein the figure of the Asian American starts to become indissociable from inanimate objects and hyperreal media images.

Friday, October 16, 11:00 – 11:30 am
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Ulla Stackmann (Catholic University of Eichstätt)

***'[...] A Good Way to Reach the Movement': The Sonic Community of the Dial-A-Poem Project***

In 1969, poet John Giorno set up a 24-hour poetry hotline under the name Dial-A-Poem in New York City. The service played a poem to each caller randomly selecting one from a number of poems, e.g. by Allen Ginsberg, Bernadette Mayer or Frank O'Hara. In the first five months over a million called. However, after a parent complained about kids calling the line and listening to pornographic content (an excerpt from *Basketball Diaries*), the service was temporarily shut down but eventually re-installed until c. 1972. The poets appropriated the public structure of the telephone to share texts on topics that were otherwise not represented in the mainstream media, e.g. sex between men, female sexuality, drug use and anarchism. Thereby, they found a way to connect with their audience from a distance during a political crisis that saw the assassination of Martin Luther King, an increasingly desolate U.S. economy and the failure of the Vietnam War. Later the poets commented on the project: "At this point, with the war and the repression and everything, we thought this was a good way for the Movement to reach people." In my presentation, I would like to discuss how Dial-A-Poem used the telephone to create a virtual community space whose set-up was a unique

opportunity for callers to engage with the counterculture. After all, they were anonymous and, comparable to contemporary streaming formats, they could access the poetry anytime and anywhere, provided a telephone was available. In this way, poets and callers could build a network working against the repressive climate of Cold War America.

Friday, October 16, 11:30 am – 12:00 pm

Alina Mozolevska (Petro Mohyla Black Sea National U)

***Music and Covid-19: The Potential of American and European Popular Music's Articulation in Times of Crisis***

It is not surprising that popular culture plays an important role in our lives. It's composed of varied everyday cultural practices that are closely connected to self-expression, collective identity and memory, territorial belonging, ethnicity, nationality, gender and authenticity. As a part of these practices, music is central to significant cultural and social transformations in the world communities. In recent years, thanks to Internet and globalized world, the phenomenon of commercially successful and widely received popular music promoting the values of a certain community, political party, ethnic group or cultural\*commercial trends has exploded. However, researchers know very little about how audience receive the popular music, in which way it impacts the collective memory and identity of people and how the pop music responds to different political and social issues.

In this paper we would like to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic affected musicians and artists and to analyze



possible interactions between popular music and pandemic. Nowadays, with new rules of social behavior and limits on public gatherings and travel artist have not only modified the way they communicate with the audience but also the content of their popular songs. We can see an explosion of music videos distributed on the Internet (amateur and professional) in different countries dedicated to coronavirus issue. Our corpus consists from more than 30 video clips of the artists from United States, France, Spain, Ukraine and Russia. This paper uses these videos as a case study to examine the limits and potential of popular music's articulation of popular fears, hopes and of reflection of the new social reality in times of crisis.

Friday, October 16, 12:00 – 12:30 pm
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Natalya Dorfmann (Petro Mohyla Black Sea National U)

***'Social Distancing' as a Chance to Revise the Paradoxes of Humanistic Philosophy: Personality vs. Identity in On-Line Artistic Practices of the Pandemic***

Postmodernism has highlighted corporeality, asserting the transition from interpretation to a "culture of presence." It is thus natural that the body becomes the objective and the target of the power. Consequently, there is a temptation to view "social-distancing" and self-isolation through the prism of M. Foucault's ideas ("Discipline and Punish").

Instead, we offer to view "social-distancing" as an opportunity to find a new form of the combination of "personality" and "identity." It seems to us that what we can

observe at the beginning of the twenty-first century naturally continues the line of thought that began in the Modern Age. Individualization (brought largely by the developing economies in European countries) and the ever-increasing personal freedom has led to the fact that by the end of the Middle Ages one is increasingly becoming aware of oneself as an individual, and not just as a part of a group. This outlook shift has entailed anthropocentrism in philosophy and sciences. Thus, humanism is naturally connected with the idea of freedom and liberation, which, from our point of view, reaches its climax by the end of the twentieth century, finding a certain limit in the idea of “incredulity towards metanarratives”. But, paradoxically, the desire for liberation always entails a person's need to associate themselves with a certain group. In this way, the idea of freedom is reduced to the freedom of groups, but not to individual freedom (which was noted by M. Stirner in 1844).

From this point of view, the politics of “social distance” and self-isolation provides an opportunity to revise the long-standing situation. For the first time since the Modern Age, a person is not limited by the “physical” boundaries of race, nationality, education, social status, etc. Instead, with certain restrictions imposed on mobility, one becomes freer to find oneself as a person.

To illustrate this point we analyze the on-line artistic practices created during the pandemic, in which people were able to unite based on their individual preferences, not being limited by their country of residence, economic situation, education, skin color or political beliefs. Those for whom, for economic or political reasons, a joint performance had always been impossible (because their personal aspirations and interests were limited by the “identity”: national, social, etc.),

received a chance to dance together or sing in a virtual choir, thereby gaining the opportunity to search for a new form of a combination of “personality” and “identity.”

Friday, October 16, 12:30 – 01:00 pm
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Bärbel Schlimbach (Saarland U)

***Space, Distance and Loneliness in Recent American Cultural Productions in the Light of the Current Covid-19 Crisis***

The current Covid-19 epidemic and its effects on societies pose new challenges. On one side, the current crisis increased existing inequalities and emphasized injustices in participation, e.g. disparate financial means or access to technologies. On the other side, the crisis can also provide possibilities for new forms of participation, e.g. free online content from universities or museums available to audiences world-wide. Social distancing and diverse forms of isolation / loneliness are challenges many people experienced in the last months which will probably influence our future behavior once the crisis is overcome. Artists and writers immediately started to react to the pandemic, with respect to writers mainly in shorter forms like essays or poems, it is probably too early for a direct reaction in a novel. Therefore, I suggest to re-read American novels which emerged shortly before the pandemic to trace narratives of distance, loneliness and belonging / participation and connect these to the current situation. I will investigate novels like Téa Obreht’s *Inland* (2019) or C. Pam Zhang’s *How Much of these Hills is Gold* (2020) for their depiction of space, distance, loneliness and belonging and investigate possible influences of such depictions on our interpretation of the

current situation. By investigating (re-)interpretations of stereotypical tropes of Americanness like self-reliance or personal freedom in my corpus, my paper tries to show how they influence our understanding of the current situation.

Friday, October 16, 03:00 – 04:30 pm

Phillip M. Ayoub (Occidental College)

***When States Come Out: Movements & the Diffusion of LGBTI Rights in Europe and North America***

In the last two decades, the LGBTI movement has gained momentum that is arguably unprecedented in speed and suddenness when compared to other human rights movements. This talk investigates the recent history of this transnational movement in Europe, as well as backlashes to it (with influences also from the United States), focusing on the diffusion of the norms it champions and the overarching question of why the trajectories of socio-legal recognition for LGBT minorities are so different across states. The talk makes the case that a politics of visibility has engendered the interactions between movements and states that empower marginalized people - mobilizing actors to demand change, influencing the spread of new legal standards, and weaving new ideas into the fabrics of societies. It documents how this double-edged process of 'coming out' empowers some marginalized social groups by moving them to the center of political debate and public recognition and making it possible for them to obtain rights to which they have due claim.

Saturday, October 17, 10:00 – 10:30 am

Oleksandra Filonenko (Petro Mohyla Black Sea National U)

***Aestheticizing the Pandemic: Quarantine ‘Fashion’ by Tatiana and Vladimir Bakhtov***

Vladimir and Tatiana Bakhtov are a family of artists from Mykolaiv, Ukraine, who as all the people in the world were forced to go to self-isolation. Unlike many others, they have a perfect refuge for it: their art residence with a large garden called The Bakhtovs' House in the village of Parutino in the Black Sea region of the Southern Ukraine. The artists compared their flight from “plague” to that in Boccaccio’s The Decameron. One of their art students, Alina Yakushova, also came to stay with them.

During the first stage of the quarantine in Ukraine which began in mid-March 2020, they created two videos, Prêt-a-porter and Podium, with Alina as a model. The idea was to create a special female outfit for the quarantine situation, which would combine elements of Eastern and Western dress codes. It was an ironic game with strongly gendered and highly criticized elements of the eastern and western female costume: burka and crinoline. In the quarantine situation, both elements seemed particularly handy as burka could be much more effective than a simple mask, and crinoline would help to keep the social distance. Added by gloves, they constituted an eclectic yet feminine outfit that would allow women to feel protected and look beautiful and mysterious in times when it seems impossible. These videos ironically show how easily things deemed inappropriate in stable times may become

relevant in the times of crisis and how fragile are our notions about the normal.

Saturday, October 17, 10:30 – 11:00 am

Lisa Johnson (U of Trier, Saarland U)

***Transnational Jamaican Grannies in the United States: Keeping a Distance in Times of Covid-19***

This paper explores the challenges of grandmothers and their Afro-Jamaican families' resident in North America due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The phase of ongoing border closures and state regulatory practices since the beginning of March had far-reaching consequences on transnational, familial care networks and their socio-economic livelihoods. Usually, mobile grandmothers spend part of their retirement travelling between family, kin and fictive kin in the Diaspora (New York, Toronto, Miami, and Jamaica). For many of these active women the visits they make are socio-culturally important care agreements and acts of communication between their diasporic families'. Grandmothers providing temporary foster care or child-minding services for their family often leave Jamaica for short (1–6 months periods) and moving to the United States or Canada. The “seasonal grannies” are part of a coping strategy that help with child-rearing responsibilities, especially in the summer months. Due to Covid-19 these care agreements could not have been fulfilled. Thus, many women could not rely on the support of their mothers, left feeling helpless, frustrated, and overworked in the light of simultaneous child rearing and work responsibilities. Grandmothers left feeling isolated and depressed because

they would no longer be able to engage in their seasonal grandchildren visits. The paper responds to the socio-cultural, political and economic dynamics and effects of the crisis on the child-fostering agreements between diasporic Jamaican family networks and situates their experiences in a context of hindered mobility between the island and North America. The paper will give empirical insight into three family households.

Saturday, October 17, 11:00 – 11:30 am
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Tetyana Ostapchuk (Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University):

***Vibes of Art in Times of Covid-19: the Case of Neon in the U.S.***

The starting point for this presentation is discussions about “toxic positivity” sparkled during the lockdown. The idea that we should only concentrate on positive aspects of life and ignore negative emotions has been imposed on the public through different media since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. In reality, such distancing from problems may become quite detrimental and many artists speak against oversimplifications as results of positive vibes only. Among them are the members of She Bends which aims are to diversify the voices of neon, to re-think the way neon is used, and to build an inclusive community of womxn benders through education. So, distancing will be analyzed from different perspectives: as psychological distancing from reality; as a chance to re-think the past due to historical distancing from it; as physical and social distancing in times of segregation vs. COVID times; as professional distancing between genders; etc. One of the founders of She Bends Meryl Pataky comments

on the role of neon in times of COVID-19, 'We are creating light. So how do we want to use that light? Especially in times like these, there should be an inherent responsibility that messages, especially those in bright lights, be important messages or calls to action. Talking about things that are uncomfortable, shedding light on them, should be the role of neon art.' All in all, the story of neon in the U.S. is a good example of distancing and one of the many ways of artists' expressions.

Saturday, October 17, 11:30 am – 12:00 pm
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Atalie Gerhard (Saarland U):

***Dismantling Distance or Commodifying Crisis? Women Depicting Diversity and Social Issues in VR Experiences from the U.S.***

This paper analyzes the opportunities and limits that virtual reality practices of storytelling provide for creative producers documenting social issues faced by diverse women in the 21st century, as shown in the exemplary experiences *Girl Icon* (2019; Malala Fund), *Still Here* (2020; Al Jazeera Contrast), and *Meeting a Monster* (2018; Life After Hate). While the production of these VR narratives by non-profit organizations and news outlets began before the Covid-19 pandemic, the fact that so-called VR "experiences" are mostly consumed by privileged audiences during quarantine, begs the question to what extent even thus labelled "VR for good"-applications can resist the social distances to "othered" communities that define Anglophone First World cultures. In other words, how can the narratives I mentioned respectively depict the



struggles of structurally disenfranchised Indian girls, black women incarcerated en masse, and ex-incarcerated white supremacist terrorist women in the U.S. without enforcing the ongoing marginalization that these subjects lament? On the one hand, VR experiences seem to realize postmodern notions of petits récits receiving increasing acknowledgment (François Lyotard) and challenging boundaries between media simulations and (extra-) diegetic realities (Jean Baudrillard) by staging corporeal immersion through 360° views for audiences. On the other hand, representational politics determining how far viewers can immerse in the suffering of depicted women or facilitating commodifying gazes at them, risk obstructing feminist appeals for community-building (Seyla Benhabib) with the effect that implied protest by the narratives' racially, sexually, and/or politically diverse subjects against their containment evades intelligible translation for mainstream audiences (Judith Butler).

Saturday, October 17, 01:00 – 02:30 pm
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Susanne Hamscha (Fulbright Europe)

***From A Distance: Feminist and Disability Reflections on the COVID-19 Pandemic***

Since the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s, diversity management has become a popular tool to ensure that companies comply with equal opportunity objectives and anti-discrimination laws. In a US context, affirmative action comes to mind as a set of policies preventing discrimination against structurally disadvantaged groups, while in Germany and other European countries, quotas were introduced in certain areas

to bolster equal representation. The underlying narrative has been one of progress: we like to believe that the not only the labor market has become more accessible for structurally disadvantaged groups, but that society at large has become more inclusive and equitable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has quite unsparingly uncovered social divisions, imbalances, and injustice, however, which force us to reevaluate and redefine diversity work. In my lecture, I will draw on feminist and disability theory as well as my experience in diversity management, to propose a response to this current crisis which is embedded in an intersectional framework and which accounts for the manifold needs and perspectives of structurally disadvantaged populations. I will argue that diversity work is more important than ever if we want to create a world that is fair and accessible to all, but we need to radically reimagine how we organize society and spaces of human interaction.

## Speakers

### ***Somayeh Amin***

Somayeh Amin is a PhD candidate in American Studies at the Chair of North American Literary and Cultural Studies at Saarland University. In her project, she is working on Iranian American women's literature.

### ***Phillip M. Ayoub***

Phillip M. Ayoub is Associate Professor of Diplomacy and World Affairs at Occidental College. He is the author of *When States Come Out: Europe's Sexual Minorities and the Politics of Visibility* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) and his articles have appeared in *Comparative Political Studies*, the *European Journal of International Relations*, *European Journal of Political Research*, *Political Research Quarterly*, the *European Journal of Political Research*, *Mobilization*, the *European Political Science Review*, the *Journal of Human Rights*, *Social Politics* and *Social Movement Studies*, among others.

### ***Natalya Dorfmann***

Natalia Dorfman is a Senior Lecturer at the English Philology Department, Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University, Mykolaiv, Ukraine. In 2013 she defended her PhD thesis on "The Concept of Carnival in Slavic Postmodern Prose." Her current research interests focus on contemporary culture studies, comparative literary studies, identity and freedom concepts in literature.

***Astrid M. Fellner***

Astrid M. Fellner is Chair of North American Literary and Cultural Studies at Saarland University (Germany). Her monographs include *Articulating Selves: Contemporary Chicana Self-Representation* (2002) and *Bodily Sensations: The Female Body in Late-Eighteenth-Century American Culture* (forthcoming). Her research areas include Border Studies, Gender/Queer Studies, Early American, U.S. Latino/a, and Canadian literatures.

***Oleksandra Filonenko***

In 2000, Oleksandra Filonenko graduated from the National Academy of Visual Arts and Architecture (Kyiv), Theory and History of Art department and had worked as an art curator until she entered Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University (Mykolaiv, Ukraine), English Philology Department in 2007 from which she graduated in 2011 having received a Master's degree in English Language and Literature. In 2017 she was awarded a PhD in Theory of Literature at the same university. Her research interests include Theory of Fantastic Literature, the influence of Western esotericism on fiction, Fantasy Studies, Border Studies and History and Theory of Visual Arts. Currently, she holds the position of the Senior Lecturer at English Philology Department at Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University (Mykolaiv, Ukraine) while doing her postdoctoral research on the magical discourse in British literature at the same university. She teaches English (Speaking and Writing), Creative Writing, and English for Journalists.

***Atalie Gerhard***

Atalie Gerhard is a doctoral researcher in the International Research Training Group “Diversity: Mediations of Difference in Transcultural Spaces” at Saarland University. Her project is titled “Diversity and Resistance in North American Women’s Containment Narratives from the 21st Century” and her research interests include cultural minority resistance and identity negotiation. She holds an M.A. in North American Studies as well as a B.A. degree in English and American and French Studies from the Friedrich-Alexander-University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. In Bavaria, her volunteer work in a refugee shelter has received state recognition and been featured in the press.

***Susanne Hamscha***

Dr. Susanne Hamscha is the Regional Diversity Coordinator for the Fulbright Program in Europe and Eurasia. In this capacity, she offers diversity trainings, workshops, and seminars for Fulbright commissions, grantees, and partner institutions, with the aim of making Fulbright more accessible, more equitable, and more inclusive. She also guides Fulbright commissions through the development of diversity strategies and action plans, and creates online and offline spaces to engage with - and learn from - grantees and alumni. Her academic background is in North American Studies, with a research focus on the intersections between gender studies, disability studies, and queer theory. She is currently based in Berlin.

***Lisa Johnson***

Lisa Johnson is an Associated Postdoc researcher in the field of Anthropology at the DFG-funded research-training group IRTG Diversity: Mediating Differences in Transcultural Spaces at the University of Trier, Germany. She is also a lecturer in North American Literary and Cultural Studies at Saarland University.

***Svitlana Kot***

Svitlana Kot is a PhD student at the English Philology Department, Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University, Mykolaiv, Ukraine. Her primary area of expertise is Native American literature and Space Theories. Her current research focuses on the Poetics of Space in the novels by Louise Erdrich, a Native American writer.

***Alina Mozolevska***

Alina Mozolevska, Associate Professor of Institute of Philology at Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University in Mykolaiv, Ukraine. She has a PhD in Linguistics with a major in Romance Languages from Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv, Ukraine (2014). She is a member of the Association des professeurs de Français d'Ukraine and La Asociación de Hispanistas de Ucrania. Her research interests include Media Studies, Border studies, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Text Linguistics.

***Eva Nossem***

Eva Nossem is a graduate translator for German, English and Italian. She is the scientific coordinator of the INTERREG V A project “UniGR-Center for Border Studies” at Saarland University. She is an instructor in English linguistics at Saarland University and is currently working on her PhD project in Italian linguistics: “Un dizionario Queer – il lessico italiano della noneteronormatività.” Her research interests include Cultural and Linguistic Border Studies, Italian and English Linguistics, Gender and Queer Studies, and Translation Studies. [www.nossem.de](http://www.nossem.de)

***Tetyana Ostapchuk***

Tetiana Ostapchuk is an Associate Professor at Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University (Mykolaiv, Ukraine). She earned her PhD in Comparative Literature from Shevchenko Institute of Literature, National Academy of Sciences in 2005. In 2007/08, she was the Fulbright Scholar at Pennsylvania State University; in 2017 she presented lectures “The image of Ukraine in American Popular Culture” in the frame of Erasmus Mobility Program in Cadiz University, Spain. In June 2019 she was the holder of an International Research Training Group Guest Professorship at Saarland University. Her publications include articles in the fields of Ukrainian American literature, Diaspora Studies, and Memory Studies. She is the co-editor with Astrid M. Fellner and Bärbel Schlimbach of the book (*Pop Cultures on the Move: Transnational Identifications and Cultural Exchange Between East and West* (Saarland, 2018).

***Takeo Rivera***

Dr. Takeo Rivera is assistant professor of English at Boston University, where he is also core faculty in Women's, Gender, Sexuality Studies and affiliated faculty in African American Studies. He is currently completing his manuscript, tentatively titled *Model Minority Masochism*, under contract with Oxford University Press. Rivera is also a playwright whose work has been staged bicoastally in the United States.

***Bärbel Schlimbach***

Bärbel Schlimbach, M.A., is a PhD candidate in North American Literary and Cultural Studies at Saarland University. Her PhD-Project utilizes theoretical approaches from Critical Regional Studies, Post-Western Studies, Gender Studies and Border Studies to analyze literature and films from the Post-Western genre to investigate their innovative potential with respect to identity constructions, imaginary Wests as well as constructions of national narratives. Her research and teaching interests include (Cultural) Border Studies, Gender Studies, 20th and 21st century American literatures on and from the American West, Western and Post-Western film and fiction as well as Gothic and Crime Fiction.



***Ulla Stackmann***

Ulla Stackmann is a Ph.D. student at the department for American Studies at the University of Eichstätt and a doctoral fellow of the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes. Her Ph.D. projects investigates the history and aesthetics of audio poetry in postwar America, comparing the practices of commercial spoken word labels and avantgarde recording projects. She holds a B.A. in English Studies from the University of Munich and a M.A. in Aesthetic Theory from the University of Eichstätt.

***Oksana Starshova***

Oksana Starshova, PhD, Associate Professor at English Philology Department, Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University, Mykolaiv.

***Yuliya Stodolinska***

Yuliya Stodolinska – PhD in Cognitive Linguistics, Associate Professor of the Department of English Philology at Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University. Scientific interests: Cognitive Linguistics, Discourse Studies, Cultural Studies.

## Award Ceremony

### Prizes for Best Final Theses in American Studies

We are happy and proud to award the prizes for Best Final Theses in

- American Studies & Literature,
- American Studies & Culture, and
- American Studies & Linguistics.

This year's recipients are:

- **Alexandra Laier** "Toronto in Ethnic Canadian Fiction: The Immigrant City as Central Location of Multiculturalism"
- **Anna-Selina Kuhn** "The Emily Dickinson of the 21st Century: Apple TV+'s *Dickinson*"
- **Charline Käufer** "Spanglish on Twitter as an expression of Latino identity – a discourse analysis"

C O N G R A T U L A T I O N S !

A heartfelt thank you to ASKO EUROPA-STIFTUNG for this prize. Thanks also to the Deutsch-Amerikanisches Institut Saarland.

## NamLitCult at Saarland University

# NAMLITCULT

*North American Literary & Cultural Studies*

North American Literary and Cultural Studies (NamLitCult) is a section of the Department of British, North American, and Anglophone Literatures and Cultures at Saarland University.

Dedicated to the study of the literatures and cultures of North America, our research and teaching engages North American literatures and cultures from early colonial encounters to postmodern cultural practices. While we study the literary and visual cultures from the colonial period up to the 21st century, there is a strong focus on border literatures, U.S. Latino/a literature, Indigenous Studies, early American literatures, feminist literatures, Canadian literature, and the global dimensions of North American literatures and cultures. In general, our research projects take transdisciplinary, transhemispheric, and comparative approaches and include the theories and methods of Cultural Studies, Border Studies, Body Studies and Gender Studies.

Apart from a BA-program and an English Teaching Certificate program NamLitCult also offers an MA in American Studies (see description below) and is involved in the tri-national and tri-lingual MA program in Border Studies (see below). In addition, we also organize and coordinate two certificate programs: Gender Studies and Applied Pop Studies (see below).

URL: [www.amerikanistik.uni-saarland.de](http://www.amerikanistik.uni-saarland.de)

Email: [amerikanistik@mx.uni-saarland.de](mailto:amerikanistik@mx.uni-saarland.de)

## MA-Program American Studies/British Studies/English Linguistics



Students can choose to study one of the subject areas 'British Literary and Cultural Studies', 'English Linguistics' or 'North American Literary and Cultural Studies' for their single-subject Master's degree or as their main (major) subject if they are enrolled for a dual-subject degree program. Further specialization within any of the main three subject areas is expressly encouraged. The program offers students a wide variety of options for planning study abroad periods that are tailored to their individual preferences or career goals and the department assists students in establishing contacts to foreign universities and research groups.

Students not only gain a detailed understanding of their chosen specialist discipline based on current research activity in the field, they also acquire the skills needed in order to be able to produce sound and reasoned analyses of the linguistic, literary and cultural relationships of a topic through application of the relevant theoretical and methodological tools. They also acquire a high level of proficiency in analyzing and interpreting a diverse range of text types drawn from English-speaking cultures, including film and digital texts.

In addition to working in academia, employment opportunities for graduates include public relations and cultural work in globally active companies or international institutions, as well as career paths in the media.

Other employment areas include software companies, private agencies, political parties, professional associations, museums, libraries, archives and adult education.

URL: [www.uni-saarland.de/fachrichtung/anglistik.html](http://www.uni-saarland.de/fachrichtung/anglistik.html)

Email: [english\\_department@uni-saarland.de](mailto:english_department@uni-saarland.de)

## Gender Studies Certificate Program

### Forum GESCHLECHTERFORSCHUNG

The Gender Studies Certificate Program aims at conveying the historical and current impact and influence of the social category of gender on academia/science and on society. Students will acquire gender competences that allow them to:

- shed light on and question gender relations as power structures.
- develop a sensibility for discriminatory structures and their mutual interdependence on factors of identity formation and diversity such as race/ethnicity, religion, social class, etc.
- to acquire skills to deal with social inequalities and to develop concrete problem solutions and alternatives.

This Gender Studies certificate program consists of 4 modules:

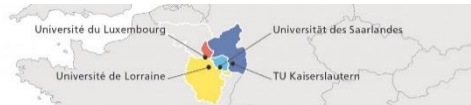
- basic module: Introduction to Gender Studies
- advanced module 1: Gender from a historical perspective
- advanced module 2: Current issues in Gender research
- Gender applied – project work

URL: [www.uni-saarland.de/gender.html](http://www.uni-saarland.de/gender.html)

Email: [amerikanistik@mx.uni-saarland.de](mailto:amerikanistik@mx.uni-saarland.de)

## Master in Border Studies: Addressing the challenges of the 21st century

That's  
Das ist  
Voici les  
**BORDER STUDIES**



The Master in Border Studies provides students with the major concepts and analytical tools to understand the social, cultural, political and economic challenges of border regions and cross-border cooperations. Students gain theoretical knowledge of border problems, border cultures, border literatures and constructions of “otherness.” Students acquire the skills to play a crucial part in the discussions on national and European identities, worldwide mobilities, migration, cultural diversity, citizenship and cooperation – especially in the Greater Region.

***Figures: 2 years, 3 countries, 3 languages, 4 universities***

The Master in Border Studies is a 2-year joint international study program, designed for students with different disciplinary backgrounds who wish to develop the necessary skills and competencies to work in intercultural and cross-border settings. The multilingual study program is located in three countries at four different universities: University of Luxembourg (LUX), University of Lorraine (FR), Saarland University (DE), and University of Kaiserslautern (DE).

Courses are taught in German, French, and English.

URL: [http://www.uni-gr.eu/en/Master\\_Border\\_Studies](http://www.uni-gr.eu/en/Master_Border_Studies)

Email: [ma\\_border\\_studies@uni-saarland.de](mailto:ma_border_studies@uni-saarland.de)

## Partners:

### Deutsch-Amerikanisches Institut Saarland



Das Deutsch-Amerikanische Institut Saarland e. V. ist eine binationale Einrichtung, die durch Bildungs- und Informationsarbeit der Förderung der deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen dient.

Das DAI organisiert und bündelt Veranstaltungen mit amerikanischem Hintergrund:

- Einzelvorträge, Podiumsdiskussionen und Seminare zu den gesellschaftlichen, politischen und kulturellen Ereignissen und Problemen in den USA und in Deutschland
- English-Discussion Evenings
- Luncheon- und Dinner-Discussions
- Filmabende
- Informationsfahrten
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## ASKO Europa Stiftung



Die ASKO Europa-Stiftung verknüpft die Zukunftsthemen Europa und Nachhaltigkeit, um die Zivilgesellschaft für deren Bedeutung zu sensibilisieren und sie zu mobilisieren, sich aktiv damit auseinanderzusetzen. Sie initiiert regionale, europäische und internationale Projekte und begleitet diese. Dabei steht die interkulturelle Vernetzung, insbesondere der jungen Generation im Vordergrund.

Der Zweck der ASKO Europa-Stiftung ist gemäß der überarbeiteten Satzung die Förderung von Wissenschaft und Forschung, Volks- und Berufsbildung.

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## Thank you

We are very grateful for the financial, material, and emotional support we received by our numerous partners who allowed us to organize this Uds American Graduate Forum and to bring all these fantastic speakers to Saarbrücken – no matter if virtually or in person. Thank you for providing funding and for advertising our event, for bringing in your ideas, – and for dedicating your time and effort to this workshop.

A heartfelt THANK YOU VERY MUCH goes out to all of you!

