

Participant Abstracts

Tanja Aho (University of Leipzig, Germany)

Women and Migration: Gendered Constructions of the Female Migratory Experience in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

In the past decades, the themes of migration and mobility have come to the fore in much of academic scholarship. Within this field, gendered analyses of the migratory experience have only received minor attention, even though female migrants constitute a major section of international migratory flows. In an interdisciplinary approach I will apply Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar's sociological framework of gendered geographies of power to Julia Alvarez's novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* as an example of diaspora literature, which will produce new insights into the gendered experience of migration. Their framework investigates geographic scales, social locations, power geometries, individual agency, and cognitive processes such as the imagination in relation to transnational gendered experiences.

The Dominican-American novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is filled with numerous transnational encounters of hybridity and transcultural experiences which open up new analytical moments of transnational occurrences in a gendered framework. It also offers a unique opportunity to not only draw attention to the gendered experience of migration, but also to analyze the effect migration has on gender ideologies. To engage Bhabha, this approach from the margin provides a deeper insight into the hybrid interaction of cultures that have become a defining characteristic of the migrant experience in the Americas.

Ilgın Aktener (Ege University Izmir, Turkey)

A Dystopic Global Dump: Effects of Capitalism and Television on America as Seen in the Movie *Idiocracy*

This study will, initially, focus on the transition from a "global village" to a "global dump" by referring to the effects of capitalism and mass medium television on America as can be viewed in Mike Judge's satirical science-fiction comedy *Idiocracy*, a movie in which we can see extreme cases such as the crops being irrigated with Brawndo, a sports drink brand which dominates the economy and even the state, and people watching and enjoying television programs of very poor quality.

I will start by examining the concepts of "global village" by referring to Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Later on I will elaborate on capitalism and television as a mass medium and the movie *Idiocracy* as a primary subject matter. Then, going through various scenes and sequences from the movie, we will find out what capitalism and television have to do with the transition to "global dump" by using Chris Barker's *Global Television: An Introduction* as a reference point. During the analysis of the movie, I will also concentrate on real life examples of such and these above mentioned cases and effects.

Overall, this study will be concerned with a possible transition of America from a "global village" to a "global dump." Consequently, this study plans to suggest that globalization through television and the effects of a capitalistic world order on the people do not necessarily result in a well-ordered and highly-communicative world, in which there is a utopian flow of information, knowledge, and intelligence.

Franziska Böhme (University of Leipzig, Germany)

Human Trafficking in Popular Culture: *Trade* and the Perpetuation of the Dominant Sex Trafficking Discourse

A plethora of texts by activists, scholars, and policy makers has been concerned with human trafficking since the late 1980s. Especially sex trafficking and the perceived dichotomy between the views of abolitionist and critical feminists have received attention. However, almost no research has so far been conducted on how popular culture engages in and adds to this discourse. Building on critical feminist scholarship, which has accused the dominant abolitionist discourse for being based on cultural myths, my presentation attempts to assess the myth-supporting value of the movie *Trade*. Therein director Marco Kreuzpaintner approaches sex trafficking through the two-pronged fictional story of, on the one hand, two trafficked females, and, on the other hand, the quest of two men to rescue them in New Jersey. To reach conclusions about the film's discursive value, I will take a close look at its depiction of the trafficking process, the characters themselves, as well as their agency.

Throughout the paper, the movie's possible adherence to the victimization discourse will be thematized and, using the concept of gendered agency, its assumptions about female passiveness and male agency. My paper presents an analysis of popular culture's treatment of the topic and thus contributes to understanding the continuing predominance of sex trafficking within the public realm as opposed to other forms of human trafficking.

Felix Brinker (University of Hannover, Germany)

Androids with Suicide Belts: Political Allegory in *Battlestar Galactica*

A traumatized, pluralistic democracy at war after a surprise terrorist attack by religiously motivated alien forces—the allegoric alignments of 2004's re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* seem to be clear. At first glance, the US TV series about the surviving members of an extraterrestrial human civilization who escape their destroyed homeworlds after an attack by a race of servant-robots-turned-genocidal-killing-machines can easily be read as a science fiction re-enactment of the USA's response to the events of 9/11, the "War on Terror" and its consequences—complete with robotic suicide bombers, "terrorist sleeper cells," a society in a state of constant alarm, and the torture of captured "enemy combatants" in the name of a greater good. As the series progresses, however, ambivalent characterizations, as well as a number of plot twists make it difficult to maintain such a straightforward interpretation, as the dividing line between the warring cultures is repeatedly blurred, and the show's heroes commit ethically questionable acts while their enemies appear to become more and more human.

In my paper, I will situate the series in the context of post-9/11 America and try to make sense of its often complex allegories and themes of cultural conflict, and an (American) nation in search of a new home.

Susan Büttner (University of Leipzig, Germany)

The Merida Initiative: Its Weaknesses and Why They Challenge US-Mexican Relations Once Again

The relationship between the US and its next-door neighbor Mexico has never been an easy one. Especially the issue of drug trafficking and the resulting war on drugs burdens the relationship of these two countries. The latest effort taken by both governments to end the war on drugs is the Merida Initiative, a program which began in 2008 to fight the trafficking of narcotics to the US, as well as the flow of US money and weapons to Mexico, by increasing border security and sending more personnel and equipment to both sides of the border.

However, already shortly after the beginning of Merida, critics have started to predict a failure of the latest US-Mexican efforts. They claim that Merida is not just unable to stop the war on drugs, for the initiative does not include an effective plan to reduce US demand for Mexican drugs and stop the smuggling of US weapons across the border, but that the measures taken in order to bring order into chaos pose a great threat to human rights.

In my presentation, I now want to look at these problematic issues challenging the success of Merida, and what structural weaknesses exist in US and Mexican policy that further hinder transnational cooperation, and thus threaten to turn Merida into another dark chapter in US-Mexican relations.

Jakub Goralski (University of Wroclaw, Poland)

The Image of the European Union in the United States of America

Europeans always have a lot to say about the United States, their politics, and lifestyle. Not very often though people from Europe realize what the public in other places of the world has to say about them. How, for example, Americans see Europe, the European Union, and the people living here. Even though many US citizens can trace their ancestry back to Europe they do not have the best opinion about our political views or style in which we govern our union.

To understand that better I would like to take a look at American mainstream media, how they shape the transatlantic relations and also what is being done on both sides to help better the societal relations and opinions in terms of education and representation of the EU. I would like to concentrate on the information readily available to a statistical American about current events and the history of the European Union. I think it is important to understand the point of view of the side we tend to criticize a lot, not to just make the same mistake and avoid the reverse criticism. I think that it is important for our cooperation and also for our further development to have acceptance and approval of our closest allies not only on the government level but also on the societal one.

Serban D. Ionescu (University of Bucharest, Romania)

CyberScavengers: Googling through Darwin's Junkyard

This paper proposes to look at how the Internet, standing on principles of equality and cultural and ethnic diversity, changes the worldview of people participating in the online community, promoting skill sets and abilities particular to this new social environment, and developing its own type of social hierarchy and class stratification.

Why do Internet "dwellers" get accustomed to sifting through mountains of irrelevant data to find the relevant bits quickly while procrastinating more? How does an equally data and distraction-rich environment end up giving birth to a paradoxically efficient, yet disinterested, enthusiastic, yet blasé society?

How does the ease of instant communication render actual human interaction rare and how does an overdose of virtual reality trigger a need for actual reality? Why do geeks differentiate between "newbs" and "n00bs," and how do the semantic nuances of the two end up defining very different groups?

How does a society of the body become a society of the mind to become a society of the spirit?

Stephen Koetzing (University of Erlangen, Germany)

Twisting the Space-Time Continuum: *Atomik Aztex* as a Critique of US-American Hegemony in a Global World

In my presentation I will argue that Sesshu Foster's postmodern novel *Atomik Aztex* (2005) offers a critique of US-American hegemony in a global(ized) world and urges us to renegotiate teleological notions of progress and advancement. The text proposes an understanding of history as cyclical repetition (with a difference) which does not follow any causal and/or chronological order: "The Wurlitzer of the Universe is packed with 78 rpm realities side by side" (5). The novel crosscuts between two parallel sets of reality: one a scenario of alternate history, in which an "Aztec Socialist Empire" colonizes Europe and allies with Russia in World War II, and the other set in a more or less contemporary L.A., where Chicanos try to unionize a meatpacking plant. I will analyze this juxtaposition between socialist Aztecs and the capitalist USA as a way of challenging the hegemonic status of US-America in the western world and also renegotiating the different statuses of Chicanos and white US-Americans.

My (close) reading of the text will address the following questions: How does *Atomik Aztex* interrogate definitions of civilization and/versus savagery? How are the two cultures portrayed individually and in relation to each other? In how far do power structures affect or threaten cultural identities in both fictional realities? Thereby I will point out the critical potential of the novel's plot and form and read it as questioning global hierarchies and the historical narrations supporting them.

Terence Kumpf (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany)

Credit Card Death and the American Dream

Combining the rigor of academic discourse with spoken word performance, "Credit Card Death and the American Dream" poses a laundry list of national concerns whose reach deep within global paradigms can no longer be denied. Addressing some of the most pressing issues facing the United States today (class, race, consumerism, environment, militarism), this spoken word/media presentation draws upon the multidimensional potential of poetry to explore some of the fundamental paradoxes within the American socio-political landscape today. The work takes on pressing, real time issues such as the ongoing financial crisis, but also attempts to cast contemporary dilemmas within the historical continuum, i.e. political empowerment, activism, civil rights, etc. Relying on a lush palette of cultural references as well as variously syncopated modes of rhetorical address, many of which are presented visually and aurally during the reading, the aim is to provoke and entertain while striving for a constellation of meaning.

The extension of an experimental seminar paper submitted to the Sociology and Cultural Studies departments at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies of the Free University of Berlin, Germany, "Credit Card Death and the American Dream" operates within liberating interdisciplinary frameworks and strives to challenge the parameters of academic address while causing spontaneous outbursts of laughter. The overall aim is to spark more penetrative lines of inquiry that seek to foster a creative space for the interchange of ideas and information by which promising new solutions to nagging, persistent dilemmas may emerge.

Kerri Mullen (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany)

Touring Afghanistan

"All natives are natives in one place, and tourists in another. All natives would like a tour, a chance to escape." (Jamaica Kincaid, "A Small Place")

What is it like to go to Afghanistan as a tourist? What do you expect to see?

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Afghanistan was an important stop on the "Hippie Trail," a tongue-in-cheek nickname for the route usually taken by Westerners aiming for Nepal or India. Kabul, the Bamiyan Valley, the Hindu Kush mountains: A quick glance at the *New York Times* today and all one will see is either references to the current US war in Afghanistan or comparisons with the Soviet-Afghanistan war of 1979-1989. Afghanistan is (or has been) a failed state, one which harbors terrorist organizations. One would not expect Afghanistan to retain any tourism after thirty years of war and instability.

And yet the Afghan Embassy of Tourism still exists, and obtaining a tourist visa for a North American is not as difficult as one would expect. Greg Salamone, a graphic designer from Syracuse, New York, visited Afghanistan in August 2009.

Tourism changes the tourist, changes the native, and changes the land. Tourism demands an openness to visitors: Does this openness protect the country and its people? A country and people become more familiar, become harder to dehumanize, perhaps, become harder to exploit. Or is tourism an invitation to invasion? A country and people performing for the tourist, selling themselves to the tourist: Tourism itself is violent.

How does tourism change once a country has become a war zone? It is perhaps a ridiculous question, but I would like to explore this doubled violence of the tourist and the invader. How does the tourist see the native? How does the tourist see the invader? How does the native see the tourist? How does the native see the invader? Are they different? What are the dangers of tourism in a dangerous place?

My first step in exploring this question will be interviewing Mr. Salamone to find out how one becomes a tourist in Afghanistan. I also plan to use fictional, journalistic, and historical texts to inform my research.

Isabel M. J. Simão (University of Leipzig, Germany)

Brazil's Agrarian Reform and Environment: The Case of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*

In my presentation, by using the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) ("Landless Rural Workers Movement") as a case study, I want to address the idea that the actions of social movements in society can be seen as an attempt to convert a "global dump" into a "global village." Built on a set of opinions and beliefs of its participants, the Brazilian social movement has fought for its adherents' better living conditions. In order to conduct my research I will look at the MST by analyzing their homepage as well as various online newspaper articles while drawing on scholarly articles for contextualization.

With more than twenty-five years, the MST is very dynamic: It has a long history of adaptations in their set of target goals so as to keep up with adherents' demands. Even if motivations such as access to health care and education have become part of their platform, the most important goal remains the defense of a just agrarian reform of Brazil's lands. However, in recent years, arguing that they are defending the interest of their adherents, the MST has made some debatable connections within the political arena. This change has given strength to critical voices both inside and outside the movement, accusations that they do not pursue questions of social justice anymore, but instead focus on myriad political connections and interests. The present question is whether this crisis is strong enough to endanger a social movement of twenty-five years or whether it will be used as an engine of adaptation for its twentieth-century goals.

Madalina Stalniceanu (University of Nottingham, Great Britain)

What Does Home Mean to a Jewish Cuban-American?

Ruth Behar is a representative of the second generation of Jewish Cuban-Americans who feel the need to reconnect with their homeland. Although she believes that the US is the place where she wants to be, she manages to travel back to Cuba several times as a professional anthropologist in an attempt to discover her roots.

In this paper I will argue that the home Behar has been looking for is neither the US nor Cuba. On the one hand, despite all the privileges offered to Cuban exiles, the US forces them to stick to a single identity. On the other hand, even if the trips to Cuba allow her to strengthen her Jewish heritage, she realizes that she cannot recapture the island of her childhood, which she sees as a lost home. In her opinion, home is not necessarily a country but a collection of all the people, things, sights, and places she cherishes.

I believe that her notion of home should be further looked into because Behar avoids making a painful choice between her homeland and her adoptive country. Instead, she puts forward an all-encompassing vision which combines the positive elements associated with the two countries.

As for the sources, I intend to use the interview she gave to Marjorie Agosin, her articles "Juban America" and "Queer Times in Cuba" and two of the books she wrote: *An Island Called Home* and *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*.

Hacer Velioglu (Ege University Izmir, Turkey)

Going to the Moon or Going Lunatic: Effects of Global Village on the Individual in Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*

While the world is remade, remodeled, displaced, and replaced at a breathless speed every day, the individual in it turns into a whirling being who wants to vomit after an amusing ride. As the boundaries between countries are washed away, the limits of time and space are enslaved into the machine, and the individual turns into "a poor bird not knowing which way to fly."

This study will comment on how Jewish-American author Saul Bellow in his book *Mr. Sammler's Planet* points to the effects of global village on the individual by dealing with the themes of fragmentation of identity, the quest of man for a new home, and the confusion and chaos caused by a wide range of languages of communication. Firstly, this study will try to analyze Bellow's lost character who lives in three different time spans and spaces. Then the study will focus on Bellow's attitude in giving words and sentences in French, Latin, German, Russian, Hebrew, and Italian in his book to create the impression of communicative chaos.

Most importantly and finally through the eyes of Saul Bellow, an artist and social critic, this study will look at the whole world which has first become smaller and turned into a village, then into a kingdom of garbage, and finally into a prison. Secondly, the study will try to deal with Mr. Sammler's strategy to run out of this prison of garbage. Going to the moon or going lunatic? I will emphasize the character Mr. Sammler who is haunted by moon visions and his search for new, untouched, undiscovered planets. And finally I will come to two dramatic questions: Where to find that untouched planet and what if we cannot find the moon?

Jasper Verlinden (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany)

Through the Looking Glass: Transatlantic Emotional Culture and the Problem of Mimesis

Twentieth-century emotional culture, on both sides of the Atlantic, has been marked by a growing demand for affect control. In order to adequately function in professional as well as personal relationships, it is important to be proficient in emotional management. Being emotional is often seen both as a weakness and as an imposition on others. At the same time, as sociologist Eva Illouz argues, there has been an enormous increase in the discourses surrounding emotions. Seemingly contradictorily, emotional excess is on display everywhere. The ubiquity of therapy culture, for example, is a case in point.

Television especially seems to play an important role in the mediation of emotional culture. The function of television shows in this respect would seem to be two-fold. They are on the one hand cathartic by providing a socially acceptable frame for the outlet of emotional excess. On the other hand, as a mimetic medium, television offers a point of identification and thus perhaps also a code of conduct. This last element is possibly problematic as European sitting rooms (and I dare say sitting rooms all over the world) are flooded with American television shows and thus American codes of conduct.

What I want to explore in this paper is: 1) the discontinuity between (the image of) American emotional culture as represented through the mass medium of television, and the codes of conduct and/or emotional identity of the European spectator; and 2) European responses to American emotional culture.

Janna Wanagas (University of Hannover, Germany)

The Quest for a Home in a Transnational World: Spaces in Jhumpa Lahiri's "Hema and Kaushik"

Kaushik's mother had "always drawn strength from her things, her walls. But Kaushik never fully trusted the places he'd lived, never turned to them for refuge" (Lahiri 309).

Spaces are seen as constructed settings of social relationships: They are expressions of social standing, of class, and of ethnicity. Thus, they embody a person's place of belonging. In applying these concepts of spatial relations to a story of migration and (un)belonging, I argue for the prominence of spaces in contemporary ethnic literature. As migrants move in-between spaces—truly living in a transnational world—, they face particular struggles concerning their place of belonging. Throughout Jhumpa Lahiri's novella "Hema and Kaushik," spaces are made: They are constructed, designed, and valued because of a certain meaning that is attached to them. The characters constantly (re)negotiate the spaces in which they live and, thus, emphasize the chances as well as the challenges of a transnational existence.

In applying Aleida Assmann's concept of *Erinnerungsräume* as well as Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" to this novella, I argue that while Hema and Kaushik, as well as their migrant families, strive for containment (of memories) in the spaces in which they live, they simultaneously look for new spaces to which they can finally belong. Their struggle to make sense of their (transnational) world is highly pronounced: For example, Kaushik wants to protect his deceased mother's spaces from the intrusion of his (Indian) stepmother. Moreover, his search for a new space of belonging takes him to public as well as private spaces at home and abroad, only to come to the conclusion that a space of belonging involves attachment to people for "without [Hema] he was lost" (326).

Jasmin Welter (University of Bonn, Germany)

Selling Hope, or: The Commodification of the Presidency

In my presentation I will focus on the commodification of the US presidency, focusing on the example of Barack Obama. I want to research the development from the politician as a communicator to the celebrity politician, culminating in the commodified president. I want to explore the rise of politics first to spectacle and then to commodity as well as the impact of this process on the following dimensions of American—and global—life: society, politics, and industry.

After having examined the celebrification of politicians, I will look at the creation of the brand Obama and the resulting Obamamania. In the 2008 election campaign, traditional campaigning merged with branding and franchising—strategies we usually encounter in the for-profit sector. As I will show, this does not only impact the future of political campaigning, but will also function as a subversion of the conventional relation between politics, society, and culture industries.

I will then examine the ambiguities of the commodification of the presidency: Does the commodification serve socio-political objectives by increasing political participation—thus being a socio-political necessity—or does it rather lead to political disenchantment? Does the convergence of pop culture and politics end up as being interpreted as a loss of political seriousness? Eventually I want to analyze the impact of a purely capitalist approach of the media and pop culture industries to politics: Does this tendency undermine democracy by emphasizing sales over content?

As Obamamania has not been limited to the national boundaries of the United States, I also want to study the ambiguities of this internationalization. Is there a new “cultural imperialism with a political message?” And if so, what does this mean for international socio-political relations?

Natalie Wiertz (University of Münster, Germany)

The Golden State as the Golden Gate: California in the Perception of Yesterday and Tomorrow

The idea of “moving West” is as much an integral part of the American self-conception as is the American Dream, Manifest Destiny, or the hope of ascending “from rags to riches.” Yet no American state has in the past and still epitomizes today the ideals and values of the American conscience as truly as California. The perception of the Golden State as a utopian “Promised Land” has always been a central theme in the depiction of Californian everyday life, its purpose as a hub of immigration and a “melting pot” of cultures is as important as it was yesterday.

The idea behind this presentation is to analyze California’s place in the transnational context of a globalized world, taking note of its distinct history and role as a figurehead of the American Dream, from a literal, cultural, and historic perspective. This outer image has lured many immigrants to travel to the United States, yet this very same image is influenced by the immigrants each and every day.

Yet the question remains if California can really be classified as a “global village.” Up until today, California has been a focal point of immigration waves, bringing with it not only diversity but also problematic aspects like racial and cultural conflicts. How will this American self-conception evolve in the future? What will be California’s role in the process of re-shaping the American image and, most important of all, what will be the impact of this newly shaped image on immigration in the future?

Note: Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation have been adjusted to the newest MLA style for all abstracts (excepting quotes and titles of works given). Certain words may have been altered, added, or deleted for clarification purposes.