

DIVERSITY  
ROUNDTABLE  
2025 SYMPOSIUM

# CARE AND NEGLECT IN (GERMAN) AMERICAN STUDIES

DGfA/GAAS

The 2025 Diversity Roundtable digital symposium aims to explore the many roles and functions of care and neglect in academia.

This symposium is an invitation to engage with our ways of relating to one another, as academics and as peers.

Most importantly, it raises the question of how academic structures can be re-oriented toward caring collaborations rather than neoliberal practices of individualized professionalism.

## WHEN?

February 7-8, 2025

## WHERE?

Online (Zoom)

## HOW?

To register, follow the link:

<https://forms.gle/2DfCcDgSjTZpgw8L6>

## ANY QUESTIONS?

Feel free to email us:  
[diversity\\_roundtable@dgfa.de](mailto:diversity_roundtable@dgfa.de)

## PROGRAM:

### FRIDAY FEBRUARY 7, 2025

13.30- OPENING  
13.40

13.40- ON RELATIONSHIPS Pt.1  
14.40 **Structures of Neglect in the  
Neoliberal University**  
*Shayan Rahmanian Koushkaki,  
B.A.*

**Epistemic Violence and  
Relational Ethics: Rethinking  
the Role of the Researcher in  
(German) Academia**  
*Elisabeth Scharnhorst, M.A.*

14.40- BREAK  
15.00

15.00- **WORKSHOP ON MENTAL  
HEALTH**  
16.30 *Dr. Anna-Lena Oldehus*

16.30- BREAK  
16.50

16.50- **KEYNOTE: Rethinking  
academic value and values**  
18.20 *Dr. Melissa Schuh*

### SATURDAY FEBRUARY 8, 2025

9.30- STARTING THE DAY  
9.35

9.35- ON RELATIONSHIPS, Pt.2  
10.35 **Towards Community Care**  
*Nathalie Rennhack, M.A.*

**Prioritizing Redress in  
Discussions of University  
Reform**  
*Dr. Abigail Fagan*

10.35- BREAK  
10.55

10.55- INTRODUCTION:  
11.15 **PROSPECTIVE NEXT DR CO-  
SPEAKERS**

11.15 SHORT BREAK

11.20- **OPEN ROUNDTABLE**  
12.20 with Jiann-Chyng Tu, M.A.

12.20 SHORT BREAK

12.25- **DIVERSITY IN THE**  
13.25 **DGFA/GAAS**

13.25- CLOSING WORDS  
13.30

### DETAILS ON THE VARIOUS EVENTS BELOW

#### ORGANIZERS:

Dr. Maxi Albrecht  
Julia Machtenberg, M.A.  
Miaïna Razakamanantsoa, M.A.

*We would like to thank the  
DGfA/GAAS for their support!*

## DETAILS:

### ON RELATIONSHIPS

Institutions, like the university, are ultimately a formalized set of and setting for interpersonal relationships. They are built and maintained by people. Perhaps the greatest irony of our age is that these human constructs so often function inhumanely. This panel seeks to foreground relationships and relationality in its exploration of care and neglect in (German) academia. Our thinking is informed by numerous critical frameworks: For instance, Bagele Chilisa (Bantu) and Margaret Kovach (Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux) write that Indigenous modes of knowing and research are inherently relational: knowledge occurs through relationships, including the relationship between people and the land and its nonhuman inhabitants. In order to be ethical, research must serve these relationships. These frameworks predate Marxist impulses to understand the relationships among capital, material, and labor, as well as feminist impulses to understand the relationship between the movement of material and our intimate lives. Although Marxist and feminist impulses are interested in relationships—and the ethics of those relationships—they often fail to foreground the imperative that we care for our relations as we do our work. This panel asks: What happens to our work as academics when we prioritize care for our relationships with other people in and beyond the university?

## PART 1

### 1) Structures of Neglect in the Neoliberal University

Shayan Rahmanian Koushkaki, B.A.

If “thinking needs care” (Sharpe) then what does it mean for us as academics to be working in structures “designed for our infinite lack” (Gumbs)? Through its investment in and constant (re)enactment of neoliberalism, the German university as a predominantly white institution perpetually neglects all agents within academia, specifically BIPOC, in order to preserve an il/logics of academic labor as one that must be constantly ‘reinvented’ by means of competitive, precarious, and temporary employment. The critique of an epistemological hegemony that denigrates indigenous and decolonial knowledge systems or even the mere presence of non-white academics often serves as an institutional injury that causes institutional retaliation through neglect on multiple levels. So, this paper inquires: in what ways does the structural organization of the neoliberal university inherently facilitate a politics of neglect in the university space and scholarship in general? In utilizing a critical archive consisting of poetry, prose, story, and autotheory on top of academically ‘accepted’ knowledge formats, this paper highlights how the things we teach and research and the institutional spaces we posit our minds and bodies within fundamentally neglect to foster safety, community, solidarity, and care.

**Shayan Rahmanian Koushkaki** (he/him) is a master student in two separate degrees, North American Studies and New German Literary Studies, at the Leibniz University Hannover (Germany). In his studies, he particularly focuses on postmigration, literary antisemitism, settler colonial studies, and Black feminist critique of popular culture. In addition to his work as a teaching assistant for both German and American studies, Shayan is an organizational member of the Decolonial Feminisms Reading Group and was a founding and associate editor for Hannover's new graduate journal, *In Progress*.

## 2) Epistemic Violence and Relational Ethics: Rethinking the Role of the Researcher in (German) Academia

Elisabeth Scharnhorst, M.A.

In (German) academic disciplines, knowledge production is often framed as an objective and impartial endeavor. However, the interpretation of data into meaning follows theoretical frameworks that are "only one possible explanation of a narrative that has been established as the normative one" (Spivak). (German) academia has always foregrounded knowledge production instead of relationships, and through its historical ties to colonial and Eurocentric standards and frameworks, the relational aspects of knowledge production have been largely overlooked.

This paper explores how the researcher's role can be reimagined through the lens of ethical relationality. In order to resist epistemic injustice, we must actively engage in practices of care and responsibility—both within knowledge production and in interpersonal relationships. By rethinking the role of the researcher, we can challenge the standards that uphold epistemic violence and transform (German) academia into a more inclusive and responsible place.

**Elisabeth Scharnhorst** (she/her) is a teaching assistant and PhD candidate in German Studies at the University of Connecticut (USA). Her research focuses on critical Indigenous studies, critical university studies, and the connections between (neo-)colonialism and academia in both Germany and North America. She is a member of the Decolonial Feminisms Reading Group.



## PART 2

### 3) Towards Community Care

Nathalie Rennhack, M.A.

Disability scholar Margaret Price opens her presentations with what she calls an “access invocation” that foregrounds (differing) personal needs, presence, and limitations within an academic space of exchange and learning. Price’s practice exemplifies community care, but the necessity of her words simultaneously draws attention to the fact that the majority of spaces within (German) academia obliterate personhood and centralize output, extractive learning, and progress. While working on projects that we care about deeply, academic communities frequently forget to care beyond output. In the context of this problem, this paper asks how (German) academia might be able to move towards community work that cares for its members equally as much as about its research and results. Hence, this paper seeks to imagine how spaces like panels, research colloquiums, or discussions with supervisors might function in this context.

**Nathalie Rennhack** is a research associate and phd candidate at Freie Universität Berlin where she is affiliated with the Graduate School of North American Studies and the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School.

In the context of the *EXC 2020: Temporal Communities*, her doctoral project explores medialities and strategies of early American women’s writing in periodical and book form. Her work has been published in the journal *In Progress: A Graduate Journal of North American Studies*.

### 4) Prioritizing Redress in Discussions of University Reform

Dr. Abigail Fagan

Critics of the neoliberal university routinely point to the ways in which institutions appropriate rhetorics originally coined to create widespread material change. In both the US and Germany, as elsewhere, universities disingenuously use the language of intersectionality, diversity, allyship, equity, etc. Institutional enthusiasm for these terms routinely confounds their origins and their meanings. As Jennifer Nash has written, what does “intersectionality” even mean at this point? This paper asks: how might prioritizing redress help us specify our demands for institutional change?



In asking this question, this paper follows numerous impulses, including but not limited to: conversation about Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins" in a recent advanced American Studies seminar; Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman's discussion of the impossibility of redress in "Fugitive Justice"; Glen Sean Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's separate and collaborative discussions of Indigenous "grounded normativity"; Max Liboiron's discussion of good and bad Land relations in *Pollution is Colonialism*; and ongoing conversations about these and other texts with the Decolonial Feminisms Reading Group.

**Dr. Abigail Fagan** is a postdoctoral researcher and instructor at the Leibniz University in Hannover. She is of settler North American descent and was raised primarily on Niitsitapi and Pikuni land. She is a member of the GAAS, the Margaret Fuller Society, the National Women's Studies Association, and the Grenzmuseum Verein Böckwitz-Zicherie.

## WORKSHOP ON MENTAL HEALTH

Dr. Anna-Lena Oldehus

This workshop is designed to offer space to share and exchange experiences and strategies to live-well through long working phases of academic writing. Whether you are working on a PhD thesis, an article, or a proposal – feelings of anxiety, loneliness, overwhelm, or alienation often accompany our thinking, reading, and writing journeys, leading to quite 'effective' avoidance strategies such as procrastination, perfectionism, or other mild forms of escapism. Rather than reiterating tenets of neoliberal hyper-productivity or of a toxic mindfulness, this workshop takes a hands-on approach to fostering conversations about how to care well-enough for us, our projects, our great ideas, and the things we value.

**Dr. Anna-Lena Oldehus** holds a postdoctoral position in North American Studies in the English Department at Freiburg University in Germany. She completed her doctoral studies at Leibniz University of Hannover, Germany, with her dissertation “Weird! Affect and Whiteness in Contemporary Immigrant Literature” in April 2024. Two of her publications on contemporary literature and critical whiteness are forthcoming in the scholarly journals *Amerikastudien/ American Studies* and *Literary Geography* in 2025. In addition to teaching as an instructor in American Studies at the English Department in Hannover, she used to be co-speaker of the Diversity Roundtable of the German Association of American Studies. She has also been a visiting scholar at the University of California at Berkeley, and a visiting instructor at the University of Warsaw and the University of Wrocław.

## KEYNOTE

Dr. Melissa Schuh

### **Rethinking academic value and values: towards structures of (self-)care, solidarity, and community in German academia**

As recent movements against precarious working conditions in German academia have shown, current employment structures, labour conditions, and hierarchies are rife with systemic neglect towards all members of the academy, be they students, administrative or technical staff, early career researchers, (otherwise) precariously employed academics, or professors, but especially towards those across all these groups who are already marginalised due to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, disability and chronic illness, care responsibilities, and age. This neglect takes many forms, some of them more obvious, such as the existential crisis of continuous precarious fixed term employment or abuse of power and position due to the hierarchical chair system for professorships. Others are more implicit, obscure, or insidious, such as missing provisions for compassionate leave in case of bereavement or a lack of safety and accessibility measures for the immunocompromised.

Drawing on my knowledge as a precariously employed early career researcher and as elected faculty diversity officer at Kiel University alongside my experiences as a woman of colour in German academia and as a full-time worker with caring responsibilities, this keynote will take an autotheoretical approach to questions of care and neglect in academia, blending the theoretical and practical with the personal. I will argue that being neglected by the structures and institutions of the university and its academy suspends us in a perpetual state of grief and mourning. This grief is due to the loss of hope for existential security and a stable career, the loss of colleagues and friends who have been left behind or pushed out of academia, the loss of projects and scholarship that are not trendy and competitive enough to be funded, the loss of community due to conditions of competition and the constant drive for mobility on the job market. These losses stem from academic systems and institutions that value competition over collaboration, innovative projects over foundational scholarship, individual brilliance over collective knowledge, research over teaching, supposed meritocracy over diversity.

By rethinking existing notions of value and values in academia, this keynote will explore ways in which we can practice care and selfcare to nurture structures of solidarity and community in the face of systemic neglect.

In doing so, I will comment on practical examples of offering and receiving care within the limits and confines of our institutions, be they individual and informal, such as my personal rule to only invite ECRs for guest lectures, or collective and structural, such as the antiracist teaching guide that was passed by my faculty due to a team-driven diversity initiative.

**Dr. Melissa Schuh** completed her PhD titled 'The (Un-)Making of the Novelist's Identity' in the English department at Queen Mary University of London in 2019 and is a lecturer in English Literature at Kiel University. She's deputy editor for C21 Literature: Journal of 21st Century Writings. Her research interests include Anglophone contemporary fiction, autobiography and life writing, Brexit in literature as well as seriality and Modernism. Recent publications include a book chapter on 'Serial Aesthetics and Autofictional Experiments in Rachel Cusk's OUTLINE Trilogy' in *Critical Perspectives on Rachel Cusk*, edited by Roberta Garret and Liam Harrison (London: Bloomsbury, 2024) and an article on 'Exploring the Dark Side of Dark Academia: Postcolonial Criticism and Genre Hybridity in R.F. Kuang's *Babel*', *LWU-Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, Issue 2 (2024), co-authored with Anneke Schewe. She is diversity officer for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and DEI officer for the English department of Kiel University.



## PROSPECTIVE NEXT DR CO-SPEAKERS

1) "As co-speaker of the Diversity Roundtable, I would like to raise awareness about the challenges and imbalances faced by first-generation and working-class academics, whose experiences are shaped by the intersection of marginalized identities and power structures along lines of class, gender, and other hierarchies. Queer representation and visibility within the GAAS are also very important to me, and I hope to contribute by representing nonbinary identity in these conversations."

**Phillip James Grider** (they/them) is a lecturer and Ph.D. candidate in North American Studies at the University of Göttingen. Their research focuses on the ideological violence in settler representations of the more-than-human world in early American texts, contrasted with Indigenous perspectives on kinship and agency.

2) "Dear Members of the Diversity Roundtable,

I would like to nominate myself as DR co-speaker for the next two years. I have regularly attended Diversity Roundtable meetings and town halls and am committed to furthering conversations and practical approaches to supporting diversity within our organization.

As co-speaker, I would like to put a focus on the experience and support of first-generation/working class academics and how other markers of diversity, such as gender, race, or sexual/romantic orientation intersect with questions of class. These conversations cannot be decoupled from necessary and already existing conversations around the precarious working conditions in German academia and questions of care and the unequal distribution of care work within our organizations but also in universities more generally."

**Mareike Spychala** is a post-doctoral researcher and lecturer at the University of Bamberg's American Studies section. Her award-winning dissertation focused on autobiographies by female veterans of the Iraq War and on the intersections of gender and imperialism in these narratives. Her post-doctoral research focuses on the way 19th-century poetry by women uses the Gothic mode to criticize societal power relations along the lines of race, class, and gender. Her most recent publication is an essay titled "What's in a life? Grappling with Genre, Gender, and Liberal Humanism in The Autobiography of Kathryn Janeway" (2024).



## OPEN ROUDTABLE

Jiann-Chyng Tu, M.A.

In this open roundtable discussion, Jiann-Chyng Tu invites symposium attendees to share their thoughts on diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the context of German American Studies.

Some of the questions that can be discussed are: how do we define the terms diversity, inclusion, and belonging? What do these distinctions matter? How can these concepts be put into praxis instead of simply remaining as buzzwords? What plausible short-term and long-term actions are needed to sustain momentum? How can constructive, meaningful, and practical discussions be maintained and sustained?

And, for PoCs only (there will be an extra break out room): What are some of your experiences in navigating the “structurally, culturally, and epistemologically ‘white space’ that is German Humanist academy” (Arghavan, Hirschfelder and Motyl 11)?

**Jiann-Chyng Tu** is currently a lecturer and research associate (wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter) at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. He is also a doctoral candidate in North American literature and culture at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, where he also received his MA in American Studies. He has previously worked and taught at universities in Berlin, Münster, Bamberg, Regensburg, and Augsburg. Additionally, Jiann-Chyng is also currently one of the two postgraduate representatives to the advisory board of the German Association for American Studies (GAAS/DGfA).

## **DIVERSITY IN THE DGFA/GAAS**

*Representing the working group:* Fritz Bommas, M.A.; Lea Espinoza Garrido, M.A.; Dr. Linda Hess, Dr. Jens Temmen

As discussed during the DR meeting at the DGfA/GAAS annual conference in Oldenburg last year, there is an evident urgency to explore options for implementing formal structures to promote diversity within the DGfA/GAAS. Given the complexity and time investment required for this initiative, a dedicated working group has been established to continue these discussions in between DGfA and DR meetings.

The program slot will include a short presentation of ca. three different options of how to implement a DEI officer into the bylaws of the DGfA, which the DEI officer working group has come up with. The slot will also offer the chance to discuss with the participants of the symposium these specific options as well as very generally discuss the merits of a DEI office in the DGfA. Since time is always at a premium, we will of course offer avenues to continue the discussion beyond the symposium itself.

**WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE  
DGFA/GAAS FOR SUPPORTING THIS  
SYMPOSIUM. WE COULD NOT HAVE  
DONE IT WITHOUT THEM!**

## **ORGANIZERS:**

Dr. Maxi Albrecht (she/her)  
Julia Machtenberg, M.A. (they/them)  
Miaina Razakamanantsoa, M.A (she/her)