

28th Annual UG Conference Program (2025)

TWENTY EIGHTH ANNUAL UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCE  
ON SLAVIC AND EAST/CENTRAL EUROPEAN STUDIES  
**Saturday, April 26, 2025**  
**Royce Hall 314**

**8:00-8:45 am** Check-in. Coffee and pastries

**8:45-9:00 am** *Opening Remarks by Igor Pilshchikov, Chair of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Languages and Literatures and Tanya Ivanova-Sullivan (UCLA)*

**Panel 1: 9:00-9:55 am**

**Internal and External Political Issues in the Balkans**

Chair: Milo Gazivoda (UCLA)

**Kenan Cackovic (UCLA)**

“Foreign Powers Influence on Bosnia and Herzegovina”

Following the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina was treated as a political playground for foreign powers to experiment with ideologies including democracy and a market economy. Various external organizations worked to rebuild and form Bosnia and Herzegovina into the country it presently is. Beyond political influence, foreign businesses have made direct investments into various industries within Bosnia and Herzegovina. These foreign direct investments (FDI) include the energy, banking and trade sectors. These investments have had a direct impact on Bosnia and Herzegovina's relationship with other countries including western and eastern powers. Foreign influence has directly impacted Bosnia and Herzegovina efforts of joining the European Union, a process that started over 9 years ago. Russian political and economic influence through local proxies within Bosnia and Herzegovina have hindered positive improvements to align with EU's requirements and policies. Foreign governments and businesses recognize that Bosnia and Herzegovina is still a rebuilding country and have been exerting their influence since 1995, the foundation of the country, to the present day. This influence has not gone unnoticed as it affects the daily lives of citizens within the country and brings uncertainty to the Balkan region, increasing concerns of Bosnia and Herzegovina's political and economical instability.

**Alexandra Jankov (UCLA), Virtual**

“Hidden Economies, Visible Consequences: Informality in the Balkan Economy”

This presentation explores the ebbs and flows of the informal economy, commonly known as the shadow economy, in the Balkan region. This research is essential as the shadow economy can constitute even more than 30% of GDP in countries and can even

stunt economic growth and stability. Adopting a past, present, to future lens, the analysis traces how the prior socialist governments, and the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the breadth of the informal economy's presence, identifies the most common sectors affected in the present day, and analyzes the effectiveness of implemented governmental policies in order to minimize its presence. Particular attention is focused on possible drivers such as citizen's tax burden as well as the government's corruption level in sustaining this informal economy, contrasting European Union member states such as Croatia and Slovenia with countries who are still candidates such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. By contrasting these countries, one is able to see how integration into the EU serves as a motivational driver in formalizing the economy as well as a benchmark of where the economy currently stands. All in all, this research serves as a call to action that in order to reduce the informal economy in the Balkan region, economic, governmental, and social transformations need to be made.

**Aliyah McCoy (UCLA)**

"Post-Conflict Public Health: Systemic Challenges in the Former Yugoslavia"

More than two decades following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the region remains under the mercy of the same polarizing forces that defined the pre-war and wartime periods. These forces have had continued profound effects on the region's governments, extending into numerous sectors of life. In my paper, I will primarily focus on the healthcare sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) but will also be discussing other ex-Yugoslavian countries. I intend to dissect the structure of these countries' complex healthcare systems and analyze the influences the war played in shaping the current system. These convoluted systems have also had radical implications on the relationship between the government and its people, resulting in deep rooted distrust and a decrease in the number of individuals who seek medical attention. This has ultimately led to an increased prevalence of mental and behavior related disorders as well as cardiovascular diseases, infectious diseases, and more that I will cover in my paper. On the other side, medical providers have also been impacted by the system. From corruption and weak infrastructure to a lack of funding and poor educational institutions leading to a brain drain, doctors within BiH and the rest of ex-Yugoslavia struggle to keep up with the advancements seen in other similar countries. Outside of government related influences other systemic issues have led to further exacerbation of the region's health burden. I will be discussing these influences as well as introducing some recent initiatives that have been implemented to help remedy these shortcomings.

**Panel 2: 10:00-10:40 am**

**Current Social Movements in the Balkans**

Chair: Konstantin Pejakovic (UCLA)

**Doris Butković (UCLA)**

"Masculinity, Nationalism, and Identity in Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Contexts"

This study aims to explain the intersection of nationalism and masculinity in the former Yugoslavia, focusing primarily on the ways in which gendered ideals have been constructed and, as a result, become embedded within post-Yugoslav nationalist discourse. It is through an interdisciplinary approach, including an analysis of cultural, sociological, and political theory, that this research examines the way in which masculinity has and continues to function as a tool in the shaping of post-Yugoslav nationalist ideology. Further, this research explores both the war-time and post-war contexts in order to explain how gendered narratives have contributed to the violence that occurred during the Yugoslav Wars, as well as how these narratives have contributed to ongoing nationalist sentiment in post-Yugoslav nations. The case studies analyzed as part of this research examine gendered roles during the wars, the glorification of militarized masculinity, and the enduring consequences of the conflict. The theoretical framework used in this research builds upon the concept of nationalism as a constructed identity and highlights the importance of understanding masculinity as an important aspect of nationalist sentiment throughout the Western Balkans.

**Katarina Čeprić (UCLA)**

“Nobelovci: The Nobel-Peace Prize Nominated Students in Serbia”

On November 1, 2024, a railway station canopy collapsed in Novi Sad, Serbia, leaving 15 people dead and two severely injured. What may appear to be a freak accident is, in reality, a symptom of a deeply rooted issue in the nation's political landscape: systemic corruption. Aleksandar Vučić, the current president of Serbia, along with numerous other public officials, has spent the better part of a decade cutting corners and enriching themselves at the public's expense. Their negligence and greed ultimately cost innocent lives that tragic day. In response, students across the country have said enough is enough and taken a stand for a better, more just Serbia. Since November, university students have organized mass blockades—refusing to attend lectures or participate in exams until their demands for accountability and reform are met. The movement has grown rapidly, uniting hundreds of thousands of students, families, and advocates for democracy both within Serbia and around the globe. Recently nominated for the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize, this powerful student-led uprising marks a turning point in Serbian civil resistance. This presentation explores the origins of the movement, the goals it hopes to achieve, and the pivotal events that sparked this nationwide revolution.

COFFEE BREAK 10:40-10:50 am

**Panel 3: 10:50-11:30 am**

**The Scopes of the Novel in 19th to Early 20th Century Literature**

Chair: Gabriella Carlson (UCLA)

**Vanessa Liu (USC)**

"Modes of Faith: An Investigation into the Beliefs in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*"

This paper investigates Alyosha and Ivan Karamazov's movement through the tests of faith—the test of miracle and the test of reason. It first establishes three distinct modes of faith, each embodied by a different character in Dostoevsky's oeuvre. Prince Myshkin represents faith untested by miracle or reason. Ippolit Terentyev exemplifies faith strangled with doubt. Elder Zosima embodies faith transcending the test of reason and miracle through active love. The paper begins by illustrating Alyosha's movement across all three modes of faith. He begins in Myshkin's mode—"beautiful" but untested; he undergoes the test of miracle in "The Critical Moment" and of reason in "The Grand Inquisitor." Traversing through these modes, Alyosha seems to be stuck in the mode of doubt. However, this paper will show how, in "An Onion," Alyosha ascends from the tests of miracle and reason and enters Father Zosima's mode of faith through Grushenka's accidental gift of active love. Finally, the paper examines the inverted structural parallel between Alyosha's encounter with Grushenka and Ivan's meeting with Smerdyakov. Alyosha sees the spiritual beauty of Grushenka and rises beyond the tests of reason and miracle. Ivan recognizes the spiritual depravity of Smerdyakov, born of Ivan's reasoning, and takes responsibility by confessing on behalf of Mitya. Yet, following the pivotal chapter, "The Devil," Ivan embodies both active love and intellectual revulsion towards his own act of faith. This paper concludes by examining the insolubility of the test of reason revealed through Ivan's divide between faith enacted and faith affirmed.

**Alexandra Pimentelli (UCLA)**

"The Symbolism of Water in Andrei Platonov's *Chevengur* and Its Reflection of Revolutionary Disillusionment"

In Andrei Platonov's novel *Chevengur*, water is a complex symbol and is widely used to shape the novel's exploration of life, death, unity, and socialism. The place in the novel, *Chevengur*, presents a utopian version of an ideal communist town where the characters strive for a collective, harmonious society based on socialist principles. The novel also exposes the tensions and contradictions within this vision, particularly through the symbolism of water. This paper examines the multiple roles water plays in the novel, arguing that it serves as a life-giving force, a representation of death's cyclical nature, a foundation for socialist ideals, and a medium for reflection. Different types of water—such as irrigation, rain, rivers, and lakes—carry distinct thematic meanings, emphasizing water's essential role in both survival and ideology.

LUNCH 11:30-12:30 pm

**Panel 4: 12:30-1:10 pm**

## **The Mysteries of Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *Master and Margarita***

Chair: Sophia Pacheco (UCLA)

### **Kysten Harrold (University of Wisconsin-Madison) - Virtual**

"Facts Are the Most Stubborn Thing in the World: Framing Catchphrases in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* Through the Lens of Contemporary Russia"

Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* contains multiple famous phrases, many of which are still quoted and used to this day. Some of these catchphrases include "Manuscripts do not burn" («Рукописи не горят»), "No document, no person" («Нет документа, нет и человека»), and "A fact is the most stubborn thing in the world," («Факт – самая упрямая в мире вещь»). The catchphrases are applicable to contemporary Russia, and as such, it is instructive to analyze and compare them to the current Russian government's actions, behaviors, and narratives it chooses to uphold and spread. The core ideas behind these phrases, such as perseverance of human ideas, documentation, and truth, from *The Master and Margarita* are heavily challenged with the introduction of the "foreign agents" law and harsh repression of independent journalism but will not be suppressed entirely.

### **Katarina Leek (University of Wisconsin-Madison) - Virtual**

"Power and Authority in *Master and Margarita*"

In *The Master and Margarita*, Mikhail Bulgakov explores the complex dynamics of power and authority through a multi-layered narrative that intertwines the lives of its characters with various supernatural and political forces. The novel examines how power manifests in various forms – whether through the repressive government similar to the 1930's Soviet Union, the supernatural influence of Woland and his retinue, or the political power of Pontius Pilate. Through these three representations, Bulgakov subtly satirizes the Soviet government. Furthermore, Bulgakov compares political power with supernatural power, highlighting the fragility of authority and calling into question the right of a government to power. This presentation will analyze how the characters' interactions with power and authority reflect both the social struggles of the era and the universal themes of control, freedom, and justice.

## **Panel 5: 1:15-2:25 pm**

### **20th-century Cross-cultural Communications in Poetry and Prose**

Chair: Galiia Sadykova (UCLA)

### **Lucille Lorenz (UC Berkeley)**

"Psycholinguistic Cartographies: Taking a Walk Through the Streets of Bruno Schulz"

In 1934, Bruno Schulz began his short story "The Street of Crocodiles" by reflecting on an aerial view of a fictional map of Poland. In 1980, Michelle de Certeau began his

essay “Walking in the City” from a similar perspective, reflecting on an aerial view of Manhattan, New York. Though they were writing more than forty years apart and from different continents, the Polish writer Bruno Schulz and French psychoanalyst Michelle de Certeau have strikingly similar reflections on observing the cityscape. In this comparative presentation, I read de Certeau’s essay, “Walking in the City” alongside Schulz’s two short stories “Cinnamon Shops” and “The Street of Crocodiles”. I reflect on the role of urban wandering and map-making as corollaries to linguistic and mental constructions of the city. I focus specifically on the image of cartography as a mediator between the observation of a landscape, and the paper reconstruction of it. What barriers do we face in our understanding of the cityscape? What are the similarities between a pedestrian and a rhetorician? Can language create an entirely new world? In this presentation, I place Bruno Schulz and Michelle de Certeau in conversation on these topics, hoping to elucidate their views on the relationship between a landscape and the linguistic reconstruction of it.

**Alina Garmash (UCLA)**

“Lost in Translation: The Preservation of Poetry Across Cultures in Boris Pasternak’s poems”

While translation allows poetry and literature to cross linguistic and cultural barriers, it inevitably alters the original work in subtle but significant ways. This paper examines the challenges of translating Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* poems, specifically “Wedding” and “White Night”, from Russian into English. Focusing on the ways in which meaning, tone, and structure are compromised, a point is made about how translations are not ideal in terms of preservation and delivery. Through close analysis, this paper highlights how shifts in meter, such as the loss of Russian poetry’s signature trochaic rhythm, distorts the poems’ original flow and emotional resonance. Likewise, word choice often fails to preserve the original intended tone, with translations struggling to maintain genuity. The drastic linguistic and grammatical differences between the Russian and English languages further contribute to the restrictions of translation due to the inherent inability to replicate nuanced poetic devices. Differences such as fluidity in syntax structure and grammatical genders lead to reordered lines, weakened metaphors, and altered emphasis, ultimately shifting interpretation. Additionally, cultural references are often overlooked or misrepresented in translation, reducing their intended emotional and cultural impact. The process of translating poetry is rooted in good intentions, yet faces the inability to accurately capture the original work due to the fragmentation of its essential elements. Despite the subtle shifts, translations are unquestionably crucial for the spread of culture and knowledge, yet it is important to remember it can never be perfect.

**Allyson Dahl (UC Santa Barbara) - Virtual**

“The Yakut Dog Breed in *Kolyma Tales*: A Symbol for the Lost”

Animals have been used as a literary device that allows authors to provoke symbolic and metaphorical meanings that provide commentary on complex ideas such as power

dynamics and survival. By utilizing the image of animals, authors create an emotional distance through an 'us vs. them' mentality that separates the human from the nonhuman. In *Kolyma Tales*, Varlam Shalamov describes the Gulag system and the prisoners forced into "bare life" – a state that systematically strips them of their humanity. Through the introduction of animals, particularly the Yakut dog breed, Shalamov establishes a parallel between prisoners and these indigenous creatures that reveals underlying tensions in human nature. By analyzing this literary work through an animal studies framework that allows for a deconstruction of anthropomorphism techniques, this paper highlights how the exploitation and cruelty done to animals in literature due to an anthropocentric viewpoint enables the metaphor for human suffering to the detriment of the animal. The Yakut dog breed specifically functions as a symbol of resilience and adaptation under extreme conditions, as they were bred for hard labor such as herding, hunting and transportation for people living in the Siberia region; while simultaneously representing the brutal exploitation and violence inflicted upon marginalized native communities of the Kolyma region. This dual symbolism reveals the colonial power dynamics at play in the Soviet labor camps system and within human society at large.

**Frances Hall (UC Riverside)**

**"You Can't Have My Soul": Varlam Shalamov's 'Prosthetic Appliances' Through the Lens of Descartes' *The Discourse on Method*"**

The goal of this paper is to analyze the essence of protest against dehumanization through Varlam Shalamov's soul in "Prosthetic Appliances" in tandem with the idea of what a soul is in Descartes' *The Discourse on Method*. In order to think, one must be and in order to be, one must think, going by Descartes' claim, this claim being the key conclusion of a process the prison guards in Shalamov's story are aiming to prevent. I make the claim that the destruction of the senses and thus the soul are done with the goal of dehumanization and to remove them from existence completely, an action described in Marcin Kępiński's publication as "being sentenced to be forgotten". I was able to reach this conclusion by analyzing the requirements of Descartes' method, the soul and prosthetics in Shalamov's short story, and through the writings of Kępiński, Max Oppenheimer, Sergei Chuprinin, and Ingvald Siversten, all on the subject of the soul in Soviet society, in Shalamov's work, and/or in works similar to his. The importance of this analysis, to me, is to understand the philosophy that began to form during an Enlightenment-esque period of the Soviet Union known as the Thaw, short lived though it may have been, and to reinforce the claim in Shalamov's story and Descartes' work of the necessity of a soul for expression and thought and any attempts to take either away are meant to destroy the keystone of that person.

COFFEE BREAK 2:30-2:50 pm

**Panel 6: 2:50-3:30 pm**

## **Oppression and Confrontation in 20th-Century Russian and Soviet Art**

Chair: Elena Makarova (UCLA)

### **Presley Brennan (UCLA)**

“Confined and Confused: Characters Navigating Existing and Coping within Systems of Oppression in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Invitation to a Beheading* and Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*”

This presentation parallels and contrasts Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* (1935) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979). Nabokov's novel follows imprisoned Cincinnatus C. as he awaits execution while his jailers, a fellow prisoner, and relatives urge him to conform to society's standards. Conversely, Tarkovsky's film revolves around the Stalker as he illegally guides the Professor and Writer through the forbidden Zone, searching for the Room, rumored to grant enterers' truest desires. Although the works differ in content, medium, and time of release, this presentation unravels their correspondences alongside the differences between each work in their respective characters grappling with their involvement in their oppressive systems. Each limits the extent of their audience's knowledge to that of the protagonists to emphasize how withholding information induces ambiguity, which further reinforces the control of the oppressive entity. Additionally, both works incorporate characters contrasting the protagonists to accentuate their experiences further and provide a comprehensive account of how oppression affects individuals depending on their roles; Nabokov's novel includes characters as accessories to Cincinnatus' oppression, while Tarkovsky's film features other oppressed characters. Lastly, the works exhibit two realms in which each protagonist exists to demonstrate the utilization of escapism to cope with their oppressive realities: Cincinnatus in his cell and his imagined, written world and the Stalker inside and outside of the Zone. This presentation ultimately reveals that *Invitation to a Beheading* and *Stalker*'s restricted narrations, allegorical foil characters, and juxtaposing realities convey the impacts on individuals' manner of existing and coping within an oppressive system.

### **Angelina Jeyko (UCLA)**

“The Effect of Rock Music in the Soviet Union on the Youth During Perestroika”

This presentation analyzes the impact of rock on Soviet youth during Perestroika and glasnost (1985-1991), a period of political and cultural liberalization under Mikhail Gorbachev. As censorship started to loosen, there was more openness for self-expression and rebellion against Soviet ideology. Underground bands such as Kino, Aquarium, and Nautilus Pompilius started to gain popularity and played a key role in changing the music landscape. Their music created a shift in youth identity. The effect of rock caused increased vandalism, a change in fashion, and inspiration for the youth to create their own instruments and music. The bands used alternative distribution channels for their music, starting from magnitizdat, a process of distributing smuggled tapes, moving on to apartment performances known as “kvartirniki,” where fans would



gather to listen to their music, and eventually performing at the Leningrad Rock Club that opened in 1981 and was a place for fans would come to listen to the bands. Joanna Stingray, an American musician, played an important role in spreading Soviet rock by releasing an album called *Red Wave: 4 Underground Bands from The USSR in America*. This album helped boost recognition and contributed to censorship ending in the Kremlin. The Soviet youth saw this music as a form of rebellion, freedom, and a catalyst for change in the music industry. Glasnost gave a chance for bands such as Aquarium, Kino, and Nautilus Pompilius to express their creativity, and it had a significant effect on cultural liberation and changes in the artistic scene through lyrics, concerts, and the inclusion of their songs in films.

**Panel 7: 3:35-4:15 pm**

**International relationships in the History of the Soviet Union**

Chair: Logan Shobe (UCLA)

**Lauren Kirkwood (UCLA)**

“Seeking Refuge and Solidarity: African Americans in the Soviet Union”

This paper explores the journeys of African Americans who traveled to the Soviet Union in the early 20th century, focusing on their motivations for this journey as well as the political significance of their experiences. During an era when racism, economic inequality, and segregation drastically constrained opportunities for African Americans, the USSR emerged as a site of ideological refuge and solidarity. Many African Americans were drawn by the promise of racial equality and the Soviet Union’s vocal critique of the racism occurring in the United States. Through a comprehensive assessment of figures such as Loren Miller and Langston Hughes — two individuals whose travels and work illuminate the complexities of African American engagement with the internationalism of the Soviet Union — this paper highlights how African Americans navigated questions of belonging, identity, and justice on a global scale. Utilizing archival sources, memoirs, and historical research, this paper demonstrates that these cross-cultural encounters were not merely expressions of political curiosity but also embodied a profound yearning among African Americans to envision alternative futures outside the structural constraints of Jim Crow segregation. Ultimately, this research displays how the Soviet Union became both a mirror and a contrast to American racial politics, offering a unique perspective for those seeking to understand the global dimensions of the African American freedom struggle. This research is informed by a familial connection to the history it explores, offering a unique perspective on how these journeys shaped not only personal but also collective narratives of resistance.

**Nathan Ayala (UC Riverside)**

“Soviet Cultural Exchange in Mexico: An Early Cold War Perspective”

The relationship between the Soviet Union and Mexico evolved at various points during

the 20th century. Despite pressure against it, Mexico was the first country in the Americas to recognize the Soviet state. However, these initially somewhat warm feelings came into conflict when Soviet internationalism clashed with Mexican nationalism and American imperialism. Relations were severed in 1930, and they were not re-established until 1943. This project examines the evolution of relations between 1943 and 1959. The Cold War was a series of military, political, and geostrategic struggles, as well as a conflict between two fundamentally different cultures and ideologies. This project seeks to analyze Soviet cultural exchange in Mexico during the 1940s and 1950s. Through publications and other forms of cultural exchange, Soviet internationalist policy gained notable support among prominent political and cultural figures in Mexico. While this era of Soviet international relations is often dismissed in favor of the idea of Stalinist isolationism, this study argues that many of the changes in the Khrushchev era had their foundations in the late Stalin period. Ultimately, this study aims to examine the Cold War from a multipolar perspective, focusing on the agency of both Mexico and the Soviet Union. It also seeks to answer the question: What role could a country like Mexico, belonging to the sphere of middle powers, play within the framework of the global strategies of the great powers?

**Panel 8: 4:20-5:30 pm**

**Current Global Geopolitical Conflicts: Resistance and Solutions**

Chair: Oliver Seifert (UCLA)

**Shayna Hawk (UC Santa Barbara)**

“Feminist Translocalities & Digital Resistance: Intersectional Organizing in Post-Soviet Spaces, 2014-2023”

From a decolonial feminist perspective, digital communication has emerged as a crucial tool for resisting contemporary Russian imperialism and fostering cross-border solidarity among marginalized groups in post-Soviet states. This research examines how digital platforms enable resistance strategies particularly for queer women and ethnic minorities in Russia, Ukraine, and Central Asian republics. The Soviet Union's legacy regarding civil rights remains paradoxical—initially granting women's suffrage and legalizing abortion while simultaneously reinforcing hierarchical structures of ethnicity, class, and gender. Contemporary post-Soviet regimes continue weaponizing borders through territorial expansion and maintaining hegemonic influence while reinforcing patriarchal norms that position women primarily as wives and mothers. Additionally, systemic discrimination disproportionately impacts ethnic minorities, particularly through military recruitment practices that target rural communities and undermine economic mobility. This study employs digital ethnography and discourse analysis of online communities from 2014-2023, examining content in Russian, Ukrainian, and local languages to document resistance practices. Intersectional activists utilize digital platforms—Telegram channels, encrypted group chats, and subscription-based communities—to create alternative spaces that challenge state narratives through art and counter-messaging.

The Instagram account Feminist Translocalities exemplifies this approach, championing cultural resistance and grassroots governance through digital engagement that transcends borders along with similar networks such as FemAgora, spanning across Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This research demonstrates how these platforms enable intersectional activists to organize protests, coordinate mutual aid networks, and advocate against militarism through a multicultural feminist lens.

**Mallory Klucken (Portland State University) - Virtual**

“The Role of Environment in Conflict Discourse: Analyzing the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict”

This paper explores the role of ecological narratives in the long-standing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region in the South Caucasus. This research answers the question: What role have environmental narratives played in this conflict? This paper argues that environmental narratives do not only reflect but also shape the conflict's trajectory—most notably in relation to Azerbaijan's 2023 territorial gains and their aftermath. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on the territorial, ethnic, and political dimensions of the conflict, however this study examines how environmental discourse has been employed by both sides to frame grievances and influence domestic and international opinion. Historical analysis reveals the existing environmental dimensions of the conflict. Through discourse examination and recent case studies—including the 2022 environmental protests in Lachin, post-conflict redevelopment efforts, and trials with the International Court of Justice — this research highlights how the environment has functioned as more than just a passive backdrop. The environment has become a politicized object within a broader narrative struggle, one that continues to influence both countries' perceptions of justice and security in the region.

**Elise Keller (UC Santa Barbara) - Virtual**

“Diversity in the Russian Military: The Growing Presence of Women in the Russian Armed Forces”

As violence stemming from the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 lingers on, the need for Russian military personnel has rapidly and urgently increased. With the need to fulfill ever-growing military recruitment numbers, the Russian Federation has turned to members of society that have been largely excluded from recruitment audiences – women. This comes in contrast with current ideology, which stresses women's critical role as a mother and wife figure in Russian society. Balancing practical military needs and political messages in the critical moment of war has necessitated strategic and careful strategy to maneuver through this precarious military situation. With this in mind, this presentation will observe and analyze three aspects of Russian military politics: the military's current recruitment tactics, the roles that women are allowed/encouraged to take, and the cohesion issues that women in the military pose in military life and civilian life. This is achieved by analyzing qualitative information from sources including interviews of current female soldiers, Putin and high ranking officials,

media statements, and recruitment ads as well as quantitative information reported by the state and some third party sources. Findings from these references will uncover how dissonance between current political messages and the practical needs of the State's military has led to atypical and inconsistent recruitment practices, yielding broader cohesion issues in and outside military life.

**Ivana Prokopenko (UCLA)**

**"Ceding Land for NATO Membership: Ukraine's Path to Peace or a Risky Gamble?"**

This presentation examines the contentious proposal of Ukraine ceding territory to Russia in exchange for NATO membership, evaluating its potential to bring stability or exacerbate the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war. The analysis explores NATO's historical expansion, Ukraine's evolving relationship with the alliance, and the broader geopolitical implications of such an agreement. A key consideration is whether NATO membership would serve as a deterrent to further Russian aggression or escalate tensions into a wider conflict. Concerns regarding the possibility of direct NATO-Russia confrontation, the economic and military costs of Ukraine's accession, and the broader impact on international alliances, particularly U.S.-China relations, are explored. Various security models, including those of West Germany, Norway, and Israel, are examined to assess potential frameworks for Ukraine's NATO integration without provoking an expanded war. Additionally, the strategic motivations of both Ukrainian and Russian leadership are analyzed, weighing the potential benefits of NATO membership—such as enhanced military support, economic investment, and long-term security—against the significant challenge of relinquishing sovereign territory. Any territorial concession, it is argued, must be accompanied by robust security guarantees to prevent further Russian expansion. Ultimately, Ukraine's NATO accession, whether through territorial concessions or alternative security arrangements, carries profound consequences for European stability and the global geopolitical landscape.

*5:30-5:45 pm Closing Remarks & Presentation of Certificates: Sasha Razor (UCSB) and Tanya Ivanova-Sullivan (UCLA)*