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Workshop Proposal: Narratives of Human/Animal Kinship Relations on Turtle Island

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This workshop aims to discuss different—and often conflicting—histories of human/animal relations on Turtle Island, North America, vis-à-vis narratives of kinship. Kinship narratives oscillate between multiple desires and within complex power relations as well as affective structures. For the ongoing project of settler colonialism, human/animal relations have been instrumentalized to advance eco-genocidal violence by imposing settler-colonial relations and denying Indigenous sovereignty and kin relations (e.g., Bacon; Davis and Todd; Hubbard; TallBear). As Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree Nation) writes, “animal domestication, speciesism, and other modern human-animal interactions in North America are possible because of and through the erasure of Indigenous bodies and the emptying of Indigenous lands for settler-colonial expansion” (1). Furthermore, animality has been weaponized to dehumanize Black, Indigenous and diasporic communities in specific yet interconnected ways (Belcourt 5), while celebrating white masculinities and settler violence, such as in Jack London’s work.

This workshop invites critical engagement with the ways in which human/animal kinship narratives are written into the ongoing history of settlement and its conceptual tropes of wilderness, domestication, population control and invasion (Murphy), and how animals are violently made into sites of bio- and geopolitical regulation (Tuck and Yang 4-5). Conversely, we also want to attend to narratives that proposes what Belcourt calls a decolonial animal and land ethic, i.e., storied relations between humans and animals that predate, continually resist and exceed the settler-colonial grammar (3-5). We welcome case studies that show how different narrative practices—(audio-) visual, literary, cultural, material, or policy-related—have shaped the representation of kinship relations between animals and humans, and how they negotiate concepts such as (post-) humanity, place-making and kinscapes (e.g., Carroll; St-Onge and MacDougall; Salmón), and material cultures. Regarding knowledge production around human/animal kinship relations, we are interested in contributions that put into conversation Critical Animal Studies (e.g., Borgards) and the Environmental Humanities with Settler-Colonial Studies, Indigenous Studies and Decolonial Studies.

Questions and topics may include but are not limited to:

- Narratives that discuss animals as subjects and political agents (Todd), who shape kinship relations and (hi)stories thereof;
- Narratives that articulate a decolonial animal and land ethic that (re-) thinks animality in relation to decolonization as the repatriation of land, “accounts for animal bodies as resurgent bodies” and “disrupts anthropocentrism as a settler-colonial logic” (Belcourt 3-5);
- Case studies of kinship (hi)stories and literary representations specifically relevant to American studies, such as human/bison relations, human/beaver relations, human/fish relations and human/horse relations; racing cultures and Western spectacles;
- Discourse analysis of Eurowestern practices of zoology, agriculture, ‘livestock farming’ and conservation (e.g., the national park movement or the Buffalo Commons);
- Conceptual implications of narratives of repair and care vis-à-vis kinship narratives and such concepts as “reparative justice” (Tsosie), species restoration, rematriation and restorification (Hubbard)

Confirmed Speaker for this Workshop:

Prof. Dr. Nicole Waller: "Thinking Politics with Human-Animal Relations: Pluriverse, Blockade, Diaspora"

Works Cited:

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