

GAAS 2026, Münster

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

Alisa Preusser (Potsdam) and Stefanie Schäfer (Mannheim)

alisa.preusser@uni-potsdam.de; stefanie.schaefer@uni-mannheim.de

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 propose 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:

Bacon, J. M. "Settler Colonialism as Eco-Social Structure and the Production of Colonial Ecological Violence." *Environmental Sociology*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2018, pp. 59-69.

Belcourt, Billy-Ray. "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought." *Societies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2015, pp. 1-11.

Borgards, Roland. "Cultural Animal Studies zwischen neuer Tiertheorie und New Ethology." *Menschen und Tiere: Grundlagen und Herausforderungen der Human-Animal Studies*, edited by Friedrich Jäger, J. B. Metzler, 2020, pp. 41-55.

Carroll, Clint. "Fauna and Flux on the Plains' Edge: Animal Kinship, Place Making, and Cherokee Relational Continuity." *The Greater Plains: Rethinking a Region's Environmental Histories*, edited by Kathleen A. Brosnan, and Brian Frehner, U of Nebraska P, 2021, pp. 114-37.

Davis, Heather, and Zoe Todd. "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene." *ACME*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2017, pp. 761-80.

Hubbard, Tasha. "Buffalo Genocide in Nineteenth-Century North America: 'Kill, Skin, and Sell.'" *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, edited by Andrew Woolford, et al., Duke UP, 2014, pp. 292-305.

---. "'The Buffaloes Are Gone' or 'Return Buffalo'? The Relationship of the Buffalo to Indigenous Creative Expression." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 29, no 1&2, 2009, pp. 65-85.

Murphy, Michelle. *The Economization of Life*. Duke UP, 2017.

Salmón, Enrique. "Kincentric Ecology: Indigenous Perceptions on the Human-Nature Relationship." *Ecological Applications*, vol. 10, no. 5, 2000, pp. 1327-332.

St-Onge, Nicole, and Brenda MacDougall. "Kinscapes and the Buffalo Chase: The Genesis of Nineteenth-Century Plains Métis Hunting Brigades." *The Greater Plains: Rethinking a Region's Environmental Histories*, edited by Kathleen A. Brosnan, and Brian Frehner, U of Nebraska P, 2021, pp. 89-113.

Tallbear, Kim. "Failed Settler Kinship, Truth and Reconciliation, and Science." *Indigenous Science, Technology, Society*, University of Alberta, 16 Mar. 2016, <https://indigenoussts.com/failed-settler-kinship-truth-and-reconciliation-and-science/>. Accessed 28 June 2021.

Todd, Zoe. "Commentary: The Environmental Anthropology of Settler Colonialism, Part 1." *Engagement*, 11 April 2017. <https://aesengagement.wordpress.com/2017/04/11/commentary-the-environmental-anthropology-of-settler-colonialism-part-i/>. Accessed 1 Sept. 2025.

Tsosie, Rebecca. "Indigenous Peoples and the Ethics of Remediation: Redressing the Legacy of Radioactive Contamination for Native Peoples and Native Lands." *Santa Clara Journal of International Law*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2015, pp. 203-72.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40.