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Resilient Communities

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Book of Abstracts

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Beyond Settler Worlds: “Generative Refusal” in the Work of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Wayde Compton

(Prof. Dr. Nicole Waller)

This paper addresses the question of “resilient communities” in Canada via the notion of “generative refusal,” a concept articulated in Indigenous studies that also reverberates with related conversations taking place in Black studies. I read Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s *A Short History of the Blockade* (2021) and Wayde Compton’s “The Lost Island” (2014) as part of a larger conversation between Indigenous and Black studies around the question of moving beyond settler worlds. Simpson’s work addresses the blockades erected by Indigenous land protectors and their allies as “generative refusal” via a pondering of “the brilliance of [her] relative, the beaver” (12), whose work creates entire ecosystems behind blockades. Compton’s short story features a fictional, recently-risen volcanic island off the coast of Vancouver that becomes the site of protest against Canadian settler colonialism. The story offers a specific vision of Black diaspora in relation to Indigenous land and other-than-human life via both the “generative” and “refusal.”

Nicole Waller is Professor of American Studies at the University of Potsdam, Germany. She has worked and published in the fields of Atlantic studies, Caribbean studies, and decolonial/postcolonial studies. Her recent research and publications center on land relations in North America, with a focus on Indigenous sovereignty and Black geographies. She is a member of the Research Unit *Collaborations* (<https://www.uni-potsdam.de/en/research-unit-collaborations>) funded by the German Research Foundation.

Durable Archives: Black Cowboys and Multi-Species Communities in the Canadian Nineteenth Century

(Prof. Dr. Karina Vernon)

What happens to our inherited ideas about what community is and what sustainable relationships look like if we take into account recent Black feminist considerations of animal life (e.g., Sharon Patricia Holland, Alexander G. Weheliye)? This recent criticism turns to the category of Blackness to disrupt the neat distinction between the human and non-human, a distinction, they argue, that has not marked the limits of Black social worlds. In this paper, I think about the relation of human and animal communities in the Canadian nineteenth century by focusing specifically on what the figure of the Black cowboy might teach us about human-animal worlds, their living cultural forms, and their durable archives.

Karina Vernon is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada, and a member of the Royal Society of Canada College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists. She publishes and teaches in the fields of Black Canadian literature, regionalism and diaspora theory, and archives. Her recent publications investigate prairie writing and contextualize archives as collections of history beyond text.

Canadian Muslims: Accepted or Rejected? Cultural, Political, and Literary Responses.

(Dr. Matthias Dickert)

Canada's history has seen various groups of migrants forming it along with the First Nations into the multicultural nation of today. First came the French and the English, then other Europeans and later various Asian groups. During the last five decades, it was Muslim immigrants who developed into the fastest growing population group of present-day Canada. One result is that by now Islam in fact has turned into the second largest religion.

In 2021 1.8 million Canadians were Muslims thus making up almost 5 % of Canada's total population. Most Muslim communities can be found in urban cities such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. A small Muslim community already existed around 1900 consisting of mostly Syrian and Lebanese Muslims originating from the Ottoman Empire. Larger migration waves followed in the 1960s when Canada's immigration laws turned more liberal making credit points its basis. Between 1960 and 1980, Muslims came from almost all countries from the Muslim world. This turned out to be a push factor for building new mosques and Islamic centers all over the country. At first most Muslim immigrants came for economic reasons but from the 1990s onward, many newcomers immigrated because of the war-struck background of their home countries. Today, Muslims have become visible in politics, the media or Canada's economy and they have turned into a solid component of Canada's multicultural background.

Down the years, many academics and writers with a Muslim background like Zarqa Nawaz, Tarek Fatah, Ausma Zehanat Khan or Omar El Akkad have enriched the literary scene of Canada. They have integrated their perspective of topics like migration, border crossing, exile, diaspora, racism, religion, hybrid existence, belonging or matters of war into their novels. Until today, their work often reflects the attempt to be accepted, which became extremely difficult after the terror attacks of 9/11. Since then, many Muslims are still considered to correspond to the postcolonial concept of being "other," which can place them into a position of being accepted or rejected. The resulting dilemma of belonging or refusal is also typical of Lebanese-born writers like Rawi Hage or Dimitri Nasrallah. Both will be looked at in more detail since they are two typical representatives of the extremely resilient Canadian Muslim community.

Matthias Dickert is a former teacher of the Grimmelshausen Gymnasium in Gelnhausen, where he taught English, Religious Education, and Sports. He studied at Marburg University and Durham University (GB). Here he is still linked with the Department of Theology in forms of online seminars and lectures. Mr. Dickert finished his PhD on the incorporation of Islam within the contemporary English-speaking novel. Most of his publications deal with that topic as well. At present he is working on authors with an Islamic background and their influence on the development of the post-9/11 novel since 2001. He here looks at the perspective of framing 9/11 from a Muslim perspective.

Mr. Dickert has been a member of the Marburger Center for Canadian Studies since 2012. Here he cooperated with Professor Dr. Martin Kuester on various Canadian studies projects at the crossroads between school and university.

Fostering Resilience – Norma Dunning’s Textual Mediation of Inuit Experience and Traditional Values

(Prof. Dr. Brigitte Johanna Glaser)

Over the last decade, Inuk writer Norma Dunning published several books of short fiction and poetry on Inuit experience and, more recently, a non-fiction work on the infamous “Eskimo disc system” imposed on Inuit people. All of her texts, so my main argument, are informed by the author’s wish to educate fellow Inuit about their own history and raise awareness about the situation they are in, the objective being to promote resilience among them and to encourage them to reconnect with their traditions in order to face both the present and the future in a communal and self-assertive way. This presentation will focus on the author’s two poetry collections, *Eskimo Pie: A Poetics of Inuit Identity* (2020) and *Akia: The Other Side* (2024), in which Dunning uses different strategies to convey her concerns: while in some poems, she highlights personal experiences and thus reveals the long-term emotional impact discrimination may have on an individual, in most pieces she uses the somewhat detached two-step procedure of, first, drawing attention to a historical moment of Inuit oppression and, second, turning its negative impact into a lesson that will hopefully lead to a better life for Inuit people. This lesson seems to be intended for all readers, Inuit and non-Inuit alike, as all are, in different ways, affected by it. After all, Dunning describes her project in the following way: “The author wants to imagine a world free of colonialism, a world without interference in Inuit life” (book cover of *Akia: The Other Side*).

Brigitte Johanna Glaser is Professor of English at the University of Göttingen, Germany. She has published two monographs on 18th-century English fiction and 17th-century autobiographical writing respectively. During the last few decades her research focus and publications have been on contemporary British and on postcolonial literature as well as transcultural writing. Her publications include articles on modernism, the First World War, contemporary Canadian fiction, and transnational writing. Among several co-

edited volumes of essays, two have a focus on Canada: *The Canadian Mosaic in the Age of Transnationalism* (2010) and *Shifting Grounds: Cultural Tectonics along the Pacific Rim* (2020). Her most recent article explores Margaret Atwood's graphic narratives (2025).

**“I had no story”: Survivance and Life Writing
in *Stolen Life* by Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson (1998)**

(Dr. Anca-Raluca Radu)

Yvonne Johnson, a Cree woman sentenced to a life in prison for her part in the killing of a white man, Charles Skwarok, whom she and her accomplices suspected of being a child abuser, contacted Rudy Wiebe from the Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston, Ontario, in mid-November 1992, asking him for his help to have her story told. She had read *The Temptations of Big Bear* and was impressed by Wiebe's knowledge and understanding of Cree culture in general and of her great-great-grandfather on her mother's side, Mistahi Muskwa, Big Bear, in particular. While her own initial misgivings about his white, male identity had been dispelled by his sensitivity and respect demonstrated in describing her ancestor, Wiebe himself harboured doubts about his eligibility as the collaborative writer of the story of trauma and (sexual) abuse of a Native woman. He did choose to collaborate with Yvonne Johnson after all, and a five-year, intense exchange began between them, until they finally published the book which incorporates materials from numerous resources: seventeen notebooks written by Johnson, numerous tapes recorded by her, interviews, including with her abusive, white father, newspaper reports and court testimonies. The result is a combination of Wiebe's voice, providing information and meta-commentary on the generation of the text, and Johnson's voice giving horrendous testimony of her abuse and suffering, but also of her healing process, redacted by Wiebe “in a manner believed by the two authors to be accurate” (Wiebe xii).

In this paper, I would like to discuss some of the reservations regarding voice and agency in the writing of *Stolen Life*, arguing in favour of Yvonne Johnson's choice to collaborate with Wiebe. I would like to read the book as an instance of survivance which, according to Gerald Vizenor, does not focus on victimhood, but “creates a sense of narrative presence over absence, nihility, and victimry” instead (1). As Johnson herself tells Wiebe, she wishes to assume agency and a voice: “Everyone in my family is suffering, but we've never been responsible, no, never us – somebody else did something horrible, okay, but never us,” in order to overcome “denial, shame, fear” (Wiebe and Johnson 23). Repeatedly, she asserts her wish to tell her own story, correcting the lack invoked by the quotation included in the title of his paper, “I had no story” (Wiebe and Johnson 337). Even more, highlighting the community theme of this conference, Johnson's story gives a voice to numerous other female inmates, as the Native counsellor who approaches Wiebe insists: “There's never been such a story out of P4W; dozens of women have died going in there, and it's closing soon. A kind of memorial, it needs a book” (Wiebe and Johnson 41).

Vizenor, Gerald. "Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice." *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2008. 1-24.

Wiebe, Rudy, and Yvonne Johnson. *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman*. 1998. Athens: Swallow Press / Ohio UP, 2000.

Anca-Raluca Radu is Senior Lecturer in Anglophone Literature and Cultural Studies at the English Department of Göttingen University. Before joining the department, she was employed at the University of Marburg where she received her PhD in English Literature under Martin Kuester's supervision. Her research and publications concentrate on contemporary fiction, especially Canadian and postcolonial, and 18th-century British women's writing.

Canadian Queer Communities on the Global Stage: *Canada's Drag Race as a Site of Identity Making*

(Marie Zarda)

Historically, queer communities have been the victim of marginalization and discrimination across many different cultural and social spheres. As a result, queer identities have oftentimes been hidden, both through institutional suppression as well as a means of self-preservation. Queer subcultures, such as drag as a (performance based) artform, have long been underground phenomena but are beginning to step more and more into the light of public awareness and media coverage. The reality TV franchise *Rupaul's Drag Race* and its spin-offs, namely *Canada's Drag Race*, are one of the more recent examples of this shift.

On the reality TV-stage, queer contestants engage in a competition for the title of "drag superstar" and a cash prize, but engage in community and identity creation along the way. By publicly acknowledging their identities, their journeys and their role as representatives of their generally under-represented communities, they create social and cultural structures in which audiences and fellow cast members can identify with and live out their 'true' selves. The show addresses queer history and the hardships of Canadian queer existences openly - and subsequently comes under fire for highlighting identities and communities that not all cultural spaces are accepting of. As such, *Drag Race* as a franchise is faced with conservative media outrage for platforming 'liberal ideology', as well as criticisms from within queer communities for providing conservatives with ammunition for attacking queer performers. This illustrates one of the core issues of visibility in the face of discrimination: Vulnerable communities are required to be more resilient because their very survival depends on it.

Marie Zarda is a researcher in the fields of North American Studies and Media. By investigating intersections of cultural, literary, and media studies, her research aims to investigate popular media within the complex fabric of the field of North American studies. A point of interest are the roles of community, identity, and ideology in the context of practices of meaning making as well as their reciprocal relationships. She completed her B.A.s in Media Studies and Anglophone Studies as well as her M.A. in North American Studies at Philipps-Universität Marburg and now works there as a researcher.

Our Planet, a Model of Resilience

(Shani Mootoo)

"Our Planet, a Model of Resilience" questions the idea of a pinnacle of existence (following John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids*). Through a range of examples taken both from nature and from literature, I argue that constant change is a function of life itself, and inevitably change both requires and manifests various kinds of resiliencies. As Indigenous teachings stress the recognition of collective responsibility over individual rights, resilience can be most successful when underpinned by communal actions and understandings.

Shani Mootoo was born in Ireland and raised in Trinidad, relocating to Canada in her early twenties. She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Western Ontario (now Western University) in 1980 and a Master of Arts in English and Theatre from the University of Guelph in 2010. She practiced initially as a video maker and visual artist, and for the last thirty years Mootoo has concentrated on novel writing, poetry, and photo-based work.

Her novels include *Starry Starry Night*, *Polar Vortex*, and *Cereus Blooms at Night*. A four-time nominee for the Giller Prize, her work has been longlisted for the Booker Prize and the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and shortlisted for the Lambda Literary Prize. Her poetry books include *Oh Witness Dey!*, *Cane | Fire*, and *The Predicament of Or*. Mootoo has served as writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta, the University of Guelph, the University of Toronto, The University of the West Indies, Trinidad, and Mills College, Oakland, California. She was awarded the degree of Doctor of Letters honoris causa from Western, is a recipient of Lambda Literary's James Duggins Outstanding Mid-Career Novelist Prize, the Writers' Trust Engel Findley Award, The National Library's Library and Archives Scholar Award, and has just been awarded the 2026 Blue Metropolis Violet Literary Prize.