Resident Fellow Research Summaries

Adina Balint, University of Winnipeg

This interdisciplinary research project focuses on contemporary cultural productions (literature and visual arts) about Canada and its relationship to the border with the United States and thus draws much-needed attention to a symbolic geography that in 2018 still remains under-examined in hemispheric American and border studies. Whereas hemispheric American studies has by now been established in the United States academy as an approach and a field of study, much less discussed is the question of Canada’s place and participation within such research and perspectives. Canadian culture and criticism are frequently marginalized in hemispheric comparative work, in borderlands criticism, and even in North American studies, partially because of institutionalized pathways and habits that continue to impede scholarly access to this rich material, thus reinforcing traditional disciplinary boundaries. With this project, I seek to make an intervention into comparative American Studies by suggesting several possible access routes, such as: (a.) rethinking ‘the nation’ as a category of literary analysis; (b.) acknowledging the Indigenous peoples heritage; (c.) expanding knowledge on immigrant cultures; and (d.) creating plurilingual projects and connections: Anglophone, Francophone, immigrant – into a hemispheric contextualization of Canadian literature. The explorations of these access routes or pathways illustrate not only the benefits that Canadianists stand to gain from a greater openness to hemispheric approaches but also the reciprocal value that a Canadian decentring of US-based models holds for the field of inter-American studies as a whole.

Pipelines and Borders
Paul Bowles, University of Northern British Columbia Traditional Territory of the Lheidli T’enneh

Canada’s quest to find ways of getting land-locked Alberta’s oil sands bitumen to salt water has resulted in a plethora of pipeline proposals. These efforts include: the Northern Gateway pipeline; the expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline; the Energy East proposal; and the TransCanada’s Keystone XL pipeline. A fifth proposal involves transporting bitumen from Alberta to ports in Alaska. All of these proposals have met with concerted opposition from indigenous groups, environmental organizations and local communities along the proposed routes. I am currently engaged, with Dr. Fiona MacPhail (University of Northern British Columbia), in theorising opposition to fossil fuel projects using a commodity chain approach (following Bridge 2008) which traces sites of resistance to particular nodes of the commodity chain. The resistance is viewed through three axes, termed the productivist/distributional axis, the procedural axis and the environmental and recognition axis. We are currently engaged in mapping the opposition to fossil fuel extraction in Canada using this framework. However, with pipelines which cross national borders, the commodity chain is spatially separated into different national political jurisdictions. This raises the question of how opposition to the pipeline is viewed, constructed, and organised across national jurisdictions. The oil may potentially flow freely across the border in a pipeline, but what of the social forces of opposition? Questions which arise are whether the same issues are relevant in each of the national jurisdictions and framed in the same way. This will determine the extent to which cross-border opposition may be capable of providing a coherent and organised voice. If such a voice is possible, this raises the further question of how such cross-border alliances can be operationalised and organised, the forms of cooperation that are possible and the role that the border plays in inhibiting such cooperation. Furthermore, the role that governments and corporations play in using the border to divide cross-national opposition is a further area for investigation.
My project “Alterna(rra)tives in the Canada-US borderlands” deals with the “other” border in North America and aims at retracing the function of this border in the formation and consolidation of the two North-American nations. Taking Frederick Jackson Turner’s Frontier Thesis and Harold Adam Innis’ Staples Thesis as starting points, this project will show how borders and frontiers are constitutive not only of nation-states, but also of nation-based cultural, somatic and libidinal corpo-realities. It will insist that the formation of territories and bodies are inherently interwoven, thus making “the” border a texture whose analysis necessarily requires a theorization of socioeconomic structures, institutions and flows. In the conceptual imaginary that I want to develop, the geo-political border itself stops being a suture sowing together two different and distinct national fabrics, and becomes a texture: a complex and multi-dimensional trope and topos woven of numerous threads, such as politics, economy, cultural practices, racial, sexual and other discourses, which combine and intersect to create a trans-national continuum.

“My research relates to the influence of the United States and its border with Canada in relation to security and the perception of threats, including in the form of terrorism. Specifically, I wish to examine the impact of these factors on the Liberal government of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and its chief security agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Security Service, in the early 1970s. This present focus is part of a much broader project on a history of terrorism and counter-terrorism in Canada from 1867 to the present. My research looks at how the United States played a central role in Canadian domestic security worries in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These concerns included perceived threats posed by cross border connections between the Black Panther Party and the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ), the latter dedicated to achieving the independence of Quebec through violence, and to “Black nationalists” more broadly in Canada. It also involved connections between second-wave feminist groups in the United States in Canada and among members of the “Red Power” movement in the United States and Indigenous Canadians. All of these perceived threats, in an atmosphere of fear fueled by sexism, racism, and ethnic prejudice, coalesced in the early 1970s and generated considerable concern in the corridors of power in Ottawa and the RCMP. This project—which examines the significance of U.S. factors in determining Canadian domestic security perceptions and strategies in the early 1970s—has additional relevance to a present where many of these factors remain pertinent to concerns around transnational terrorism and perceptions of threats, including a far-right backlash against Canadian Muslims that saw an attack on a mosque in Quebec City in January 2017 in which six worshippers were shot and killed.
Black Resistance and Abolitionist Utopias across the US-Canadian Border in Mid-19th Century North America
Heike Paul, Friedrich-Alexander-University

At the end of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s sentimental reform novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), still the world’s most popular anti-slavery narrative, the surviving African American protagonists have left the United States. They have relocated to Canada and are setting out to Africa on a ‘civilizing mission.’ One of them, George Harris, exclaims: “It is with the oppressed, enslaved African race that I cast in my lot” (374). The partially happy ending of the novel identifies the space of freedom for black people, i.e. former slaves having escaped slavery, not in the United States but elsewhere: in Canada and “[o]n the shores of Africa” (374). The ending of the novel has been harshly criticized because of the narrative’s literal ‘evacuation’ of its emancipated African American characters from the United States. What Stowe’s ending also alludes to, however, are the abolitionist utopias of her day that often did not focus on black futures in the United States but that sought to either leave this nation behind or to violently re-make it. Against the backdrop of a history of enforced and voluntary black mobilities and immobilities in the Americas, this project unfolds one trajectory of the spatialization and border-crossing of 19th century protest and abolitionist thought that identifies Canada—or what was then Lower Canada and today is Southern Ontario—as a central site of such endeavors. I examine configurations and narratives that render Canada a place black people (i.e. fugitive slaves) escaped to and lived in, and Canada itself a site of enunciation of utopian futures that could also lead elsewhere.

Refugee Aspects of the American Civil War and the U.S.-Canadian Cross-Border Region
Éva Eszter Szabó, Eötvös Loránd University

The research project explores the role of the cross-border region in the Civil War refugee movements and addresses how they were used for military and political purposes by the belligerents. From Maine/New Brunswick to Minnesota/Canada West, in addition to the slave refugees who had long targeted the area for safety, the cross-border region became a safe haven for Confederate escapees from federal POW camps, Confederate refugees and their families, and also Union deserters and draft dodgers. Following the turning point of the war in 1863, the Confederate government sent commissioners on secret missions in an attempt to make use of the Confederate refugees by fighting the war from Canada and possibly instigating an uprising in the anti-war Old Northwest in favor of secession. Union agents and detectives aimed to win over the refugees and support the Union cause by preventing Confederate designs. That is, both parties in the war took advantage of the refugees for their respective political and strategic purposes and the fluidity of the border highly facilitated that, while the breach of Canadian neutrality was alarming enough to bring about the birth of the Dominion by 1867. The arrival of former Confederates and their families in self-imposed political exile right after the war also contributed to Canadian fears of potential Union annexation. Even though the majority of the Civil War refugees did return to the U.S. following the issuance of general amnesty in 1868, significant communities remained and the impact of the Civil War refugee movements on the cross-border region reinforced and expanded the existing American diaspora rooted there since colonial times.