

INTERSECTIONALITY: THEORIES, POLICIES, PRACTICES – INTRODUCTION

In February 2019, the Association for Canadian Studies in German-speaking Countries (GKS) celebrated its 40th anniversary with a four-day conference that brought together established and emerging scholars, artists, teachers, professionals, and diplomats from Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and North America, thus allowing for a stimulating academic exchange among society members and guests. With “Intersectionality: Theories, Policies, Practices,” the theme proposed by the Association’s “Women and Gender Studies” section, the conference was dedicated to a topic which, for Canada, has dramatically increased in relevance over the past decades, impacting decision-making on local, regional, and national levels, leaving its traces in the country’s literature and art – but also impinging on Canadian Studies in a variety of disciplinary approaches. In fact, intersectionality might be considered the organizing principle of the GKS, with its seven disciplinary sections (on “Language, Literature, and Culture in Anglophone Canada,” “Language, Literature, and Culture in Francophone Canada,” “Women and Gender Studies,” “Geography and Economics,” “History,” “Political Science and Sociology,” and “Indigenous and Cultural Studies”), one forum (for emerging scholars of all disciplines), and one caucus (for teachers in secondary education) crossing, overlapping, and enriching each other, hence offering multifaceted perspectives on Canada and Canadians. The program of the anniversary conference clearly testified to this, giving rise to the idea of reserving a special section in the next *ZKS* number to a selection of papers presented at the 2019 Grainau meeting in order to commemorate this special event and to document its results. As guest editors of this special section, we would like to thank the current editors of the *ZKS*, Katja Sarkowsky, Martin Thunert, and Doris G. Eibl, as well as the publishing house Wissner for this opportunity. Before providing an overview of the articles to follow, however, a brief introduction to the concept of ‘intersectionality’ seems in order.

As Ange-Marie Hancock specifies, intersectionality is “both an analytical framework and a complex of social practices” (6). Intersectionality’s roots lie in U.S. Black feminism, where, since the late 1980s, it has been used to address issues of inequality such as disparate access to social resources. The term ‘intersectionality’ was coined by law expert Kimberlé Crenshaw in order to draw attention to the fact that common practices of identity ascription systematically neglect and discriminate against specific groups of people, e.g. women of color. In her influential article “Mapping the Margins,” published in July 1991 in the *Stanford Law Review*, Crenshaw writes: “Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they

seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling" (1242).

Despite the relative newness of the term, the idea or concept of intersectionality is by no means a recent phenomenon in U.S. Black feminist circles (Hancock 24). Rather, it can be traced as far back as the 19th century, when female African-American abolitionists such as Harriet A. Jacobs and Sojourner Truth tried to achieve greater visibility for their peers. In her 1861 autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, for instance, Jacobs notes: "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, *they* have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own" (Brent 119). Why this is the case becomes obvious in Jacobs' depiction of her master's behavior: sexual harassment was a common form of violence, used to exercise control over female slaves, their bodies and psyches.

Applicable to both individuals and groups, then, intersectionality focuses on interlocking categories of difference and their impact on a plethora of decision-making processes. Apart from race, gender, and class, the following, mutually constitutive categories have been proposed in intersectionally oriented scholarship and activism: ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, bodily ability, religion, education, culture, nationality/citizenship status, language use as well as geographical and environmental location. Next to the relationship between categories, internal differences within categories have been considered, with scholars trying to assess power relations, for example in terms of voice and agency, and thus identifying advantaged and disadvantaged social positions.

Following its origins in U.S. Black feminism, intersectionality has not only developed into a key concept of women's and gender studies, but has left its mark on many other disciplines, including history, political science, geography, sociology, psychology, philosophy, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies. Moreover, intersectionality has been adopted to describe situations beyond the U.S. and with reference to other racial or ethnic groups. Given this extension, historicizing and contextualizing have been perceived as important steps in intersectional analyses, with some scholars proposing different levels of investigation such as agents and their interactive practices of identity formation, societal structures and the role of institutions, and discourses and symbolic representations (Lutz 10; Degele/Winker 2).

In Canada, the experience of discrimination shaped by multiple identities has been recorded in volumes such as Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973), Makeda Silvera's *Silenced: Makeda Silvera Talks with Working Class West Indian Women about Their Lives and Struggles as Domestic Workers in Canada* (1983), Monique Proulx's *Le sexe des étoiles* (1987), Dionne Brand's *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario, 1920s–1950s* (1990), or Orville Lloyd Douglas' *Under My Skin* (2014). During the time span covered by these publications, Canada also witnessed an increasing institutionalization of intersectionality, with, for instance, the Ontario

Human Rights Commission now calling “an intersectional approach to a multiple grounds complaint [...] the preferred one.” Even though the Government of Canada has adopted a different term, speaking of “Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+),” it nevertheless uses the concept of ‘intersectionality’ as an “analytical tool [...] to optimize the impact and effectiveness of all federal initiatives.” Scholarly analyses of Canadian society through an intersectional lens no doubt contributed to this development. Thus, Olena Hankivsky and Renée Cormier pointed to health inequities which, for instance, deny Aboriginal women in nonurban environments vital health care services (16), and Rita Dhamoon underlined the importance of intersectionality for Canadian solidarity politics.

Recent trends in intersectionality research include, first, a more dynamic view on processes of marginalization and privileging, acknowledging that a particular group or person might be disadvantaged in one social context but advantaged in another, and, second, a more nuanced perspective on visibility, which is no longer seen as an asset in its own right: depending on the circumstances, invisibility might lead to beneficial societal positions and might thus be an individual's or group's choice. The strategic and creative use of multiply encoded identities at a particular time in a specific social location calls for a more flexible concept of intersectionality, one that allows including transectional and transnational experiences. The contributions in this special section will, hopefully, add to these revisions, broadening our views on theories, policies, and practices of intersectionality.

We open our special section with a group of three articles that take an intersectional approach to medial depictions of, cultural artefacts by, and experiences of Canada's First Nations – as well as, in some articles, of Native Americans. Indeed, the field of Indigenous Studies, with its complex relationship towards the modern nation state, seems to make a particularly pertinent case for a flexible concept of intersectionality, one that may also override and cut across the established boundaries of academic disciplines such as American and Canadian Studies. In his contribution on contemporary Indigenous North American cinema, Christoph Straub thus analyzes movies released in both Canada – Mi'gmaq director Jeff Barnaby's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013) – and the United States – Navajo director Sydney Freeland's *Drunktown's Finest* (2014). Both movies invite a reading through an intersectional analytical lens because, Straub argues, as narrative feature films produced by Indigenous directors and actors and starring Indigenous women and Two-Spirited persons as their main protagonists, they already themselves follow the logics of intersectionality on both the level of narration and production. However, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *Drunktown's Finest* not only address the problem of “representational intersectionality” by challenging the colonial cinematic gaze and transcending stereotypical depictions of Indigenous women on the screen, they also offer “decolonizing perspectives that emerge from and emphasize Indigenous conceptions of gender.” This particularly applies to *Drunktown's Finest*, which focuses on

Felixia, a *nádleehí* or Two-Spirited person, and thus also revisits the forced restructuring of traditional, non-binary Indigenous systems of gender as an important aspect of European colonization.

Geneviève Susemihl's contribution, entitled "Intersectionality and the Construction of Cultural Heritage," takes us from cinematic to museal depictions of Indigenous people in general and of Indigenous women in particular. Discussing four Indigenous heritage sites in Canada – two exhibitions on the Iroquois in Ontario and two exhibitions on the Blackfoot in Alberta –, Susemihl applies an intersectional analysis to the representational practices of educational murals and dioramas in order to show that not all sites have progressed beyond the colonialist exoticization, passivization, or even complete silencing of Indigenous women in multimedial heritage discourses. Like Straub, however, Susemihl simultaneously considers the level of production as well as the level of representation, finding that while issues of class and socio-economic status may restrict the engagement of Indigenous women in the administration and operation of these heritage sites, their participation is important not only for overcoming representational stereotypes, but also for giving them agency and a voice. Straub thus confirms that "heritage construction and protection processes have a real and distinct impact upon the lives of people."

In the final contribution from the field of Indigenous Studies in our special section, Sonja John links an intersectional approach with Critical Race Studies and Critical Prison Studies to address the over-representation of First Nations women in North American and specifically Canadian prisons. Drawing on Foucault's fundamental prison critique in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975/1991) as well as on Canadian incarceration reports for the years 2016 to 2018, John makes a passionate argument for the consideration of incarceration as an "extended form of Indigenous femicide and elimination of Indigenous willfulness for the completion of the settler project." Multiply othered, Indigenous women are also multiply exposed to what the article describes as a "murderous system." John thus also contrasts the Western prison system and its re-colonizing effects on Native North American populations with alternative, pre-colonial Indigenous responses to conflicts that do not involve either containment or killing, relying on restoring community relationships instead.

The issue of Native North Americans' complex relationship to the modern nation state comes up again in Lianne Moyes' contribution on the Toronto-based feminist journal *Fireweed* (1978–2002), which was particularly known for inviting guest collectives to edit special issues of the magazine. For the 1986 special issue on and by "Native Women," guest editors Ivy Chaske (Dakota) and Connie Fife (Cree) refused to comply with the existing editorial parameters of *Fireweed*, printing contributions from Indigenous women from both Canada and the U.S. and thus seeking to build a community across nations. Conflicts between the magazine's regular editors and guest editorial collectives had already erupted over the 1983 "Women of Colour" special issue, and Moyes' essay detects several parallels in the production processes.

Perhaps most importantly, Moyes argues, the editorials to the special issues reveal “a common struggle for editorial autonomy and a shared frustration with the supposed race, class, and settler neutrality of feminist aesthetics.”

While the guest editorial collectives of *Fireweed* practised intersectional thinking *avant la lettre*, the feminist scholars and activists featured in Chantal Maillé’s contribution discuss the reception of the concept, specifically within Francophone feminisms. Drawing on fieldwork conducted among Francophone feminists between 2014 and 2018, Maillé discovers a deep skepticism towards intersectional theory and practice – a skepticism that stems from both a belief in the difference between the French universalist tradition and the specific Anglo-Saxon cultural milieu from which intersectionality emerged as well as from a lack of confidence in the actual practicability of intersectional analysis and activist work. At the same time, she also detects several points of contact or openings for intersectional theory within Francophone feminist thinking. Ultimately, however, Maillé points out that it is through actual fieldwork projects that a specifically Francophone intersectional feminist approach may take shape – projects such as the ones by Quebec women’s groups that Maillé examines towards the end of her essay and that have developed strategies to address both the theoretical and methodological challenges related to intersectionality.

Focusing on artistic and, more specifically, performative renderings of intersectionality in Quebec, Jane Koustas’ “Carole Fréchette on the Global Stage: Quebec Theatre Performs Intersectionality” primarily focuses on the Quebec playwrights’ *Le collier d’Hélène* (2002) and *Je pense à Yu* (2012), but also revisits her earlier career as part of the feminist theatre collective Théâtre des Cuisines, which produced such classics as *Nous aurons les enfants que nous voulons* and *Môman travaille pas, a trop d’ouvrage* (both 1975). In her own plays, Koustas argues, Fréchette affirms her “deep roots in her home environment of Quebec and in history with a small h” while simultaneously taking the audience “beyond the confines of national identity and beyond geopolitical, linguistic boundaries and their commensurate link to national identity, thus participating in an active reorientation of a traditionally nationalist theatre.” In short, through staging intersectionality, Fréchette stages global theatre.

In the final essay of this special section, René Schallegger investigates the virtual intersectional spaces of Canadian videogame developer BioWare. Previously known for its inclusive game designs particularly among “players favouring a diversity of representations and complex, critical discourses,” the Edmonton-based company alienated much of its core audience with *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (2017), a rather hegemonic game that depicts “privileged positions in an unreflected manner” while “reducing marginal groups to undifferentiated images.” Drawing on theoretical reflections about the interrelationships between postcolonialism and videogames as well as on quantitative (sales figures) and qualitative (player comments on the BioWare Social Network) responses to the game, Schallegger concludes that the designers of the rumored sequel to *Mass Effect: Andromeda* may wish to take their

inspiration from the kaleidoscope with its complex, ever-changing intersections of various shapes and colours – i.e., from the very dynamic, flexible notion of intersectionality that also already constituted the starting point for this special section.

Before we leave the reader to the individual essays, however, the guest editors would like to warmly thank the copy editors for their diligence, the peer reviewers for sharing their expertise, and the contributors for their inspiring scholarship – and their willingness to meet our deadlines. Merci!

Jutta Ernst

Florian Freitag

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