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Intersectional Thinking in Guest-Edited Issues of *Fireweed*¹

Abstract

Drawing links between two special issues of the Toronto feminist magazine Fireweed, "Women of Colour" (1983) and "Native Women" (1986), this essay details the resistance of their guest editors to the discourses and practices of the host magazine. Although the two special issues—and the writing communities they help build—are distinct, their respective editorials reveal a common struggle for editorial autonomy and a shared frustration with the supposed race, class, and settler neutrality of feminist aesthetics. These special issues were crucial for giving Indigenous women, Black women, and Women of Colour access to publication and for analyzing the workings of intersectionality, years before the term itself was in circulation. In this essay, intersectionality is less a methodology 'applied' to the editorials than a mode of analysis undertaken by the guest editors themselves to understand and convey the complexity of their positioning.

Résumé

Tissant / Tirant des liens entre deux numéros spéciaux de la revue torontoise Fireweed – "Women of Colour" (1983) et "Native Women" (1986) –, cet essai se penche sur la résistance de leurs rédactrices invitées face aux discours et pratiques qui sous-tendent la revue. Bien que soient distincts ces deux numéros et les communautés d'écrivaines qu'ils aident à bâtir, chacun de leurs éditoriaux révèle à la fois une lutte commune pour l'autonomie éditoriale et une frustration face à la prétendue neutralité de l'esthétique féministe vis-à-vis des questions de race, de classe et de colonialisme. Ils étaient par ailleurs essentiels pour donner aux femmes autochtones, aux femmes noires et aux femmes de couleur un accès à la publication, mais aussi pour analyser le fonctionnement de l'intersectionnalité avant même que le terme ne circule au sein de l'institution. Dans cet essai, l'intersectionnalité est donc moins une méthodologie « appliquée » aux éditoriaux qu'un mode d'analyse entrepris par les éditrices invitées pour tenter de comprendre et de transmettre la complexité de leur positionnement.

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Introduction

At a time when ‘intersectionality’ is used widely in scholarly and non-scholarly contexts, it is helpful to return to the period of the 1980s, the years just before the term gained currency. This return to the 1980s is not intended to arrive at the ‘truth’ or ‘origins’ of intersectionality. After all, the analysis that underpins the term could be traced back to much earlier interventions such as Sojourner Truth’s 1851 speech “Ain’t I a Woman,” which highlighted both her relationship as a Black woman to the whiteness of the suffrage movement and the masculine bias of the abolitionist movement (2006, 177–179).² Rather, the return to the 1980s is a way of situating an increasingly mobile term by reading it through a particular moment and a particular set of texts. In the twentieth century, the theorization of intersectionality emerged in the field of Law (Crenshaw 1989; 1991) where, in the words of Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall in their introduction to the 2013 special issue of *Signs*, “it exposed how single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice” (787). Over the past thirty years, the term has found purchase in many disciplines and, in what follows, I approach it from perspectives in Literature, Feminist, and Queer studies, Indigenous studies, and Black Women’s studies. My reading is shaped by what the guest editors of the 2013 special issue of the *Du Bois Review* call a “work-in-progress understanding of intersectionality,” an understanding that recognizes the activist dimensions of this theory, the work it is able to do (Carbado et al. 2013, 304-305). Revisiting the 1980s, in the context of my essay, becomes a way of grounding intersectionality in the specific conflicts and solidarities that animated the production of small magazines such as *Fireweed*.

Fireweed was a Toronto-based feminist journal which played a key role in negotiating the politics of race in the Canadian women’s movement of the 1980s and 1990s.³ Active from 1978 to 2002, *Fireweed* characterized itself first as “A Women’s Cultural and Literary Journal” and then, from 1980 onwards, as “A Feminist Quarterly of Writing, Politics, Art and Culture.” *Fireweed* came to be known for inviting guest collectives to edit special issues of the magazine. As the short history which appears on the Canadian Women’s Archives website explains, “Beginning in 1982, *Fireweed* invited guest collectives to edit issues of the journal. This was an opportunity for under-represented groups to define their own issues” (“History” 2016). However, relations between guest editors and editorial collectives were far from easy, especially in the early to mid-1980s, and the terms of difficulty are worth pausing over.

2 See also bell hooks’ *Ain’t I a Woman* (1981); and Akasha Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith’s *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (1982).

3 Among the literary landmarks in this history of negotiation are the 1988 “Telling It” conference (Andrea Beverley 2012), the 1988 conflicts at The Women’s Press (Marlene Nourbese Philip 1992, 211-231) and The Third International Feminist Book Fair (Lise Weil and Linda Nelson 1990), and the 1994 “Writing Thru Race” conference (Larissa Lai 2014, 211-227; Monika Kin Gagnon 2000, 66-68).

After all, guest editors, by taking charge of the production of knowledge in the field of feminism, were in the process of transforming that field. This essay, in highlighting the intersectional analysis carried out by the guest editors themselves, explicitly values the work of activist writers and demonstrates that ground-breaking thinking often takes place in small magazines before it is articulated in scholarship.

The research for the present essay began with my reading of the 1986 Native Women issue of *Fireweed*. Guest-edited by Ivy Chaske (Dakota) and Connie Fife (Cree),⁴ this special issue brings Indigenous women's perspectives to bear on a journal that defined itself as feminist and, at the same time, brings the desire and the resistance of Indigenous women into dialogue with Indigenous sovereignty. As well as articulating these intersectional dynamics, the editorials of the issue speak to the guest editors' struggle with the *Fireweed* collective for autonomy in their editorial process. By insisting on decolonial editorial practices, Chaske and Fife effectively weave the problem of colonialism into their intersectional analysis.⁵ In reading "Native Women," I noticed a number of connections to the Women of Colour issue published three years earlier.⁶ One of the most obvious was the figure of writer, activist, and editor Makeda Silvera. Having been co-managing editor of "Women of Colour," Silvera understood what was at stake for the Indigenous guest editors and supported them in working through conflicts with *Fireweed*. Indeed, the Acknowledgements which close the Native Women issue thank "the *Fireweed* Collective for their patience and support" and give "special thanks to Makeda Silvera (*Fireweed* Collective member) for her understanding support" (Chaske/Fife 1986, 129).⁷

Another striking connection between the two special issues is the preoccupation in their editorials with the question of why the editors agreed to guest edit an issue of the magazine. Chaske and Fife open their editorial: "Our decision to accept the responsibility of being a guest collective of *Fireweed* came from our belief that our words as Native Women have been unheard, silenced and invalidated too often" (1986, 5). And Nila Gupta and Silvera explain: "Despite our doubts, we decided [...]"

4 Chaske and Fife are listed as managing editors of special issue 22 of *Fireweed*, and Jan Champagne, Edna King, and Midnight Sun (Anishinaabe/Métis) as co-editors. The issue has two editorials, one signed by Chaske and Fife, and the other by Midnight Sun.

5 In her work on Métis/Salish writer Lee Maracle, Janey Lew argues that "By positing colonialism (and, more recently, ongoing settler colonialism) as an axis of oppression, Indigenous intellectuals intervene significantly in the theorization of intersectionality" (2017, 250n3).

6 Special issue 16 of *Fireweed* appeared in 1983 under the title "Women of Colour" and was re-published in 1989 in book form as *The Issue is 'Ism: Women of Colour Speak Out, Fireweed's Issue 16* with Toronto's Sister Vision Press. Throughout this essay, I cite the 1989 book version. The book title *The Issue is 'Ism* finds important intertexts in Arun Mukherjee's introduction to *Oppositional Aesthetics* with its reference to "colonialism, racism and classism" as "isms" that need to be part of the feminist conversation about literature (1994, x), and in Roy Miki and Fred Wah's play on the word "issue" in the title of their 1994 special issue of *West Coast Line*: "Colour: An Issue."

7 Silvera was part of the eight-women collective which took over in 1982 (prior to the publication of the Women of Colour issue which she helped guest edit).

to guest edit this issue. We decided to use this medium, first to reach out to women of colour and second, to educate white feminists" (1989, 6). In both cases, the guest editors make explicit that their willingness to act as guest editors of special issues cannot be taken for granted. If they accept, it is to build a network among Indigenous women, among Women of Colour. Intersectionality, in this context, articulates the complexity of their positioning: their experience, for instance, of not being heard either by white middle-class feminists or by the men in their own communities; and their solidarity with those men at the same time that they resist the colonial, heteropatriarchal gender apparatus at work in their communities. The links between these two special issues afford an example of how an understanding of intersectionality—indeed, how intersectional understanding—can build productive alliances among women and, at the same time, account for the very real differences in their relationships, as Indigenous women, Black women, and Women of Colour, to feminism.⁸

Contemporary Connections

Before pursuing this discussion of the special issues, I would like to turn briefly to the contemporary moment and consider its links to the 1980s. The kinds of connections I foreground above have become pressing questions in the contemporary moment as Indigenous activists and Black/of Colour activists grapple with questions of allyship. Consider, for example, the analysis offered by contemporary Nishnaabeg thinker, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson:

We have to create material bases for the nationhoods we want. We can't rely on the culture that capitalism creates. [...] We can't achieve Indigenous nationhoods while replicating antiblackness. We can't have resurgence without centering gender and queerness, and creating alternative systems of accountability for sexual and gender violence. Therefore, we need to create constellations of connections with other radical thinkers and doers and makers. We need to build mass movements with radical labor, with Black communities, with radical communities of colour. We need to stop providing space for the "What can white allies do" questions and set up spaces where we can connect with other social movements and create constellations of mutual support and co-resistance. (2016, 30-31)

If I cite Simpson at length, it is because she analyses the imbrication of capitalism, colonialism, racism, nationalism, and heteropatriarchy, and responds with the agency of solidarity and coalition-building. She registers how resistance movements can

8 The word "feminism," in fact, occurs rarely in the editorial of "Women of Colour" and even less in that of "Native Women."

themselves produce sexual and gender violence, how they can themselves racialize and erase. Simpson also explores how linkages might be made across communities in ways that honour and mobilize differences. The “nationhoods” she evokes are built on “mutual support and co-resistance” (2016, 31). Importantly, Simpson does not use the term ‘intersectionality’; her discourse is rooted elsewhere, in Indigenous understandings of resistance and resurgence. But nor does she have to use the term, mortgaged as it is by some of its feminist academic appropriations.⁹ As my readings of the *Fireweed* guest editorials demonstrate, it is possible to engage the critical lens of intersectionality without using the term itself.

In *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson writes further about listening to and learning from the Black Lives Matter network based in Toronto (2017, 10; 66; 252n13). Her words lend contemporary relevance to links forged in the early to mid-1980s between the editorials of the Native Women and Women of Colour issues. They also remind us that decolonial anti-racist struggles and alliance-building have been ongoing throughout the 1990s and 2000s. I am thinking, for example, of the crisis at Kanehsatake, the Writing Thru Race conference, the Idle No More protests, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Indeed, such events and actions suggest that the institutionalization of intersectionality and its legitimacy within the academy have not produced significant social change.

This is not to say that the academy has been inactive. In 2017, at the Mikinaakomnis/TransCanadas conference, scholar and activist Rinaldo Walcott publicly “quit” Canadian Literature on the grounds that the latter field has consistently failed to recognize how integral Black writers are to it (Barrett et al. 2017). And in 2018, the Indigenous Literary Studies Association (ILSA) organized, jointly with the Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (CACLALS), a roundtable titled “Sovereign Solidarities: Autonomy and Accountability in BIPOC Alliances.” In framing the challenge of such alliances, the ILSA conference program foregrounded the words of Phaniel Antwi and David Chariandy from their introduction to a special issue of *Transition* on “Writing Black Canadas”:

[...] the foundational and still profoundly visceral colonizing practices directed towards Indigenous peoples [in Canada] frequently intersect with the long legacies of anti-Black and also anti-Asian prejudice. As a result, many Black Canadian writers and critics have concertedly sought to understand and engage with Indigenous decolonization movements and coalitional anti-racist initiatives, while also confronting a white and multicultural elite occasionally prepared to entertain token gestures of

9 See Sirma Bilge’s analysis of academic discourses and practices in which ‘intersectionality’ is “systematically depoliticized” to serve white settler-colonial interests (2013, 405).

‘diversity’ but unwilling to attend critically to the cultural and political specificity of blackness. (2017, 34)

Again I cite at length in order to underline the gesture of solidarity in response to histories of colonial violence. Whereas Simpson avoids the term ‘intersectionality,’ Antwi and Chariandy make oblique reference to it through the verb ‘intersect.’ It is significant, however, that in building a syntax of solidarity, they use the *verb* rather than the noun, the action word rather than the established entity. Their words, too, offer a contemporary context for reading the limits and possibilities for Indigenous Women and Women of Colour of collaborating with the host collective at *Fireweed*.

The citations from Simpson, and from Antwi and Chariandy, pose an important challenge to the white woman settler scholar that I am. Instead of “danc[ing] for whiteness” (2016, 31) and telling me what, as a “white ally,” I might do, Simpson leaves me with the question, and in this way obliges me to rethink the terms of my feminism. The present essay is one possible response: a reading of activist editorial and publishing practices on the part of Women of Colour and Indigenous Women, a reading that looks for links between their special issues, addresses their intersectional dynamics, and attends to the specificity of the guest editors’ conflicts with the predominantly white host collective.¹⁰ Rather than presume allyship with Women of Colour and with Indigenous women, I try instead to bear witness to the complex forms of allyship between them—as well as between them and the *Fireweed* collective.

“Reaching Women outside the So-called Feminist Network”¹¹

In the editorial to issue 16, “Women of Colour,” managing guest editors Gupta and Silvera ask why the *Fireweed* collective had not welcomed the offer made in 1981 by Dionne Brand and Silvera to guest edit a special issue, yet had turned around in 1982 and invited them to do precisely that. Among their questions: “Why now?”; “Would this issue be seen as ‘taking care of’ the matter?”; and “Having been ‘discovered’ by white feminists would women of colour then see the repetition of a [...] pattern within the feminist movement which has consistently dealt with our concerns in a token fashion at best and most often not at all?” (Gupta/Silvera 1989, 6). Given that they had asked from the beginning for “full editorial control over the production of an issue which would explore [their] lives” (1989, 6), Gupta and Silvera wanted to know on whose terms they were being invited to serve as guest editors. When their special issue appeared in print, it provoked another set of questions from the women’s literary scene: “Why are they angry? What have we done? Why don’t they direct their anger at men?” (Silvera 1986, 10). Reading the Women of

10 It would be beyond the scope of this paper to closely analyse the content of the special issues; the focus is rather on the terms of production and, specifically, the editors’ accounts of their process and their relationship to *Fireweed*.

11 Gupta/Silvera 1989, 7.

Colour issue and its history, I am reminded of a comment by Arun Mukherjee in her analysis of oversights in feminism: “how wide the gulf of misunderstanding is between those who find racism and colonialism in women’s writing objectionable and those who do not notice it” (1994, xi). Also relevant is Janey Lew’s account of “a shared sense of alienation [among Indigenous, Third World, and Women of Colour feminists] from middle-class white feminists, who at once fetishize difference and in the same breath willfully repress and marginalize difference” (2017, 228).

The Women of Colour issue was something of a first for *Fireweed* because it required the regular collective “to hand over the reins of editorial control to a non-white guest collective!” (Silvera 1986, 11).¹² In this sense, the special issue raised all the problems of the guest/host relation at work within the settler-state, that is, the state’s built-in hostility toward writers it considers ‘guests’ and its measures of control over how ‘guests’ become ‘hosts.’¹³ The regular collective had difficulty allowing the guest collective to take up the role of host for the duration of production. That the regular collective preferred to be the ones inviting the guest collective, rather than accepting the initiative of Brand and Silvera, is significant: it is symptomatic of a Canadian cultural field organized around “whiteness” (Brand 1998, 187–190) and the ‘guesting’ of racialized and ethnic minority writers who are in fact “at the forefront [...] of rethinking and reformulating the meaning of Canada as a nation state” (Mukherjee 1994, xiii-xiv). What is key to this special issue of *Fireweed*, is the gesture of Women of Colour extending to other Women of Colour an opportunity to publish which they might not have had otherwise—either at *Fireweed* or in the broader field. The title of the introduction to issue 16, “We Were Never Lost,” is an answer to excuses on the part of feminist presses and organizations that “they cannot find women of colour” (Gupta/Silvera 1989, 6). Finding contributors, the introduction explains, involves “reaching women outside the so-called feminist network” (1989, 7) and, in some cases, publishing texts unsigned. Although the reasons for anonymity vary (domestic violence, fear of coming out to family and community), the act of publishing these texts in the Women of Colour issue provides a much-needed sense of community and foregrounds the intersectional tangle of racism, homophobia, and sexism, that is, the way each compounds the effects of the others.

Although Silvera and Gupta regret that the guest collective was not able to meet more often, the issue does open with the transcript of a conversation from a meeting¹⁴ among guest editors Himani Bannerji, Brand, Gupta, Prabha Khosla, and Sil-

12 “Women of Colour” was not the first guest-edited issue at *Fireweed*: that was “Lesbianics” in 1982. In her introduction to *Fireworks*, Silvera celebrates “Lesbianics” but wonders “Where are the dykes of colour in this anthology? Where are the experiences of rural lesbian women?” (1986, 10).

13 For further discussion of the conditions of “hospitality,” see Gillian Roberts’ engagement with Brand’s *Bread Out of Stone* and Nourbese Philip’s *Frontiers* in *Prizing Literature* (2011, 25-28).

14 See Lew on the significance of meetings: “Meetings are a common trope across many genres of feminist writing, and have been important sites for representing the ambivalent politics of col-

vera. This conversation, in its attention to class and race, sexuality, and nation, shifts the subject of feminism. There is discussion, for example, of women workers involved in collective organizing; women who are already working in “non-traditional” occupations (Gupta/Silvera 1989, 28); women who work in their own homes as well as in the homes of others; women who place considerable importance on taking care of their children; and women who feel solidarity with men who are also fighting for their rights (Gupta/Silvera 1989, 9-29). In Brand’s words,

Any immigrant woman / woman of colour analyzing her situation in the world has to analyze it beyond the point of being a woman, because there are other people who are in the same condition and some of them are men. We cannot analyze the world as though men of colour are not oppressed too, because that way of analyzing the world gives us no way out of it. (Gupta/Silvera 1989, 13)

This exchange among guest editors anticipates the theorization of intersectionality in its refusal of “single-axis” analysis (Cho et al. 2013, 787).

At the time of the meeting among the guest editors of “Women of Colour,” a meeting transcribed and published as “We Appear Silent To People Who Are Deaf To What We Say,” there was considerable internal struggle at *Fireweed*, not only between guest and host collectives but also within the newly-formed host collective.¹⁵ Silvera, who was a member of both the guest and the host collective, remembers: “There were heated arguments over content, over definitions of aesthetics. Did aesthetics include race and class? Or was it colourless and classless (meaning white and middle-class)?” (1986, 10). In the introduction to *Fireworks: The Best of Fireweed*, Silvera was nonetheless able to assert that “Since [the publication of “Women of Colour”], *Fireweed* has had strong multi-racial and international representation and continues to make the links between race, class and sex—that multi-layered oppression of women not represented in the dominant culture” (1986, 11). Similarly, when Gupta and Silvera sign the 1989 book version of their special issue, they underline the range of contributions from “Black women, Asian women, Native women[,] [s]isters from the Philippines and Central America” who speak of issues such as “racism, sexism, classism, imperialism and other ‘isms” (Gupta/Silvera 1989, 5). This emphasis on interlocking relations among “axes of power and inequality” (Cho et al. 2013, 795) is a further instance of intersectional thinking at work in the pages of *Fireweed* throughout the 1980s.

lectivity, especially for queer, Indigenous, Third World Women and women of colour who have actively contested feminist assumptions about subjectivity, collectivity, and solidarity” (2017, 225).

- 15 In 1982, after the departure of most of the founding collective, a new collective was formed of eight women, two of whom were women of colour. The eight women had no prior experience of working together and, for the most part, different political views (Silvera 1986, 10).

Recognition among Indigenous Women Writers: Beyond the Nation-State

The struggles at *Fireweed* over the process of editing the Women of Colour issue had a definite impact, including opening a space for Indigenous women to guest edit issue 22 on Native Women. More specifically, the struggles opened rifts in the discourse and editorial practice of the magazine that are evident not only in the hesitation of the guest editors to accept the invitation of the magazine but also in debates over editorial control, selection criteria, and literary and cultural value. Indeed, just as the guest editors of "Women of Colour" reject "white male literary standards that have been used to still the voices of peoples of colour of both sexes" (1989, 7), the guest editors of "Native Women" refuse judgements of their words "based on non-Native literary standards" (1986, 5). Perhaps the most practical evidence of a newfound opening comes in the range of material the Native Women issue is able to include. The Women of Colour issue features a personal essay by Karen Pheasant (Odawa/Ojibway), the Executive Director of the Toronto Native Friendship Centre, and an unsigned text prepared by the Ontario Native Women's Association and presented in January 1983 to the Sub-Committee on Sex Discrimination Against Indian Women.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the Native Women issue makes available a far wider range of material: poems, short stories and essays, as well as accounts of events such as the 1985 Indigenous Women's Gathering in Yelm, Washington. Arriving at such a range involved reaching out to women beyond the usual circuits of the magazine, and fostering and gathering new writing. In their introduction to *Editing as Cultural Practice in Canada*, Dean Irvine and Smaro Kamboureli discuss small press editing as "the ability to imagine a manuscript when none yet exists" and as "acts of mentoring that foster the creation of a work" (2016, 7). The same could be said of guest editing small magazines; in effect, guest editors create a space of publication where none seemed previously to exist. Their ability to imagine relates not only to the object they are putting together, the special issue, but also to the links created through the process of contacting potential contributors.¹⁷

Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk), in her editorial to the 1983 special issue of *Sinister Wisdom*,¹⁸ the issue that would become *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*, is explicit about the way her work as editor secures

16 A committee which reported to the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Donna Phillip, an Oneida activist involved with the Native Women's Association is listed in the Contributor's Notes and is possibly the source of this unsigned text (Chaske/Fife 1986, 189).

17 Antwi and Chariandy argue that "the most necessary and radical work for the articulation of Black writing in Canada has been the work of anthologies and special issues" (2017, 35).

18 This special issue 22/23 of *Sinister Wisdom* first appeared in 1983 under the title "A Gathering of Spirit: North American Indian Women's Issue" and was republished in 1988 in book form as *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women* with Toronto's The Women's Press. Throughout this essay, I cite the 1988 book version.

much-needed resources for a project that challenges and transforms feminist ways of knowing:

I buy another roll of stamps. Send out the flyer to Indian newspapers, journals, associations, organizations, for I know what I am looking for will not be gotten from feminist or lesbian/feminist sources. I write personal letters requesting support and help in this important project. I buy yet another roll of stamps, more envelopes, have to get more flyers printed. And the fact is, if *Sinister Wisdom* were not paying for these endless stamps, Xeroxing, printing, etc., this would be impossible for me to do. (1988, 9)

In reading Brant, I am reminded of observations made by Kate Eichhorn and Heather Milne about editing as a “labour of love” (2016, 189), a form of affective work “integral to the building of communities, both political and aesthetic” (2016, 190). For Indigenous women, editing a special issue of a feminist magazine such as *Fireweed* involves taking over the means of literary production and, in this way, finding the resources needed to form networks and publish their writing.

Whereas Brant had a good relationship with editors Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich of *Sinister Wisdom*, the guest editors of the Native Women’s issue encountered resistance from the *Fireweed* editorial collective. As Chaske and Fife explain,

Initially we were asked to focus on Native Women in Canada. After opening to submissions from all Native Women on the continent, we went back to *Fireweed* to educate them on the issue of imposed boundaries. We informed them that as Women of sovereign nations we would not recognise these infringements on the submissions of Native Women. (1986, 6)

Or, in the terms of Midnight Sun, “The women in this book are a diverse group representing over twenty nations. We wanted to include work by American women, in a journal usually featuring Canadians, to acknowledge the fact that we do not recognise the border that separates us” (Chaske/Fife 1986, 6). The guest editors refuse to fit “Native Women” into the existing parameters of *Fireweed*, into a logic of belonging on the model of the nation-state. They do not feel the imperative to ‘publish Canadian’; they are not working against an American other; and the Canada-US border is not part of their imaginary. What is at stake for them is building a sense of community among Indigenous women, a community across nations. Their vision,

like Brant's, is continental. Indeed, if one compares the two special issues—of *Sinister Wisdom* and of *Fireweed*—, one finds contributors in common.¹⁹

This episode in the production of the Native Women issue, which nearly placed the issue in jeopardy,²⁰ helps illustrate what is at stake for Indigenous women in feminism, and why some do not identify as feminist. As Kate Shanley explains in an essay published in Brant's *A Gathering of Spirit*, although the issues key to the women's movement are also key to Indigenous women, there are important gaps and incompatibilities:

equality *per se* may have a different meaning for Indian women and Indian people. That difference begins with personal and tribal sovereignty—the right to be legally recognized as peoples empowered to determine our own destinies. Thus, the Indian women's movement seeks equality in two ways that do not concern mainstream women: 1) on the individual level, the Indian woman struggles to promote the survival of a social structure whose organizational principles represent notions of family different from those of the mainstream; and 2) on the societal level, the People seek sovereignty as a people in order to maintain a vital legal and spiritual connection to the land, in order to survive as a people. (1988, 214)

Shanley's emphasis upon personal and tribal sovereignty is echoed in the editorial comments of Chaske and Fife. As well as educating the feminist collective at *Fireweed*, the guest editors contest the latter's practices and refuse to reproduce white settler-colonial relations. When Chaske and Fife refer to themselves as "Women of sovereign nations" who will "not recognise these infringements on the submissions of Native Women," they are asserting their survival as Peoples with distinctive social structures and connections to the land (1986, 6). They are also demonstrating, in intersectional terms, how discourses of cultural nationalism which aim to foster Canadian literature can have the effect of limiting networks of literary production among women.

The very fact that the guest editors have to argue for the inclusion of Indigenous women writing beyond the boundaries of Canada is significant. It suggests that *Fireweed* functions within a Canadian context of publication funding and tends to

19 For example, Chrystos, Karen Cooper, Linda Hogan, Lenore Keeshig-Tobius, Midnight Sun, Marcie Rendon, A. Sadongei, Kateri Sardella, Joan Shaddox Isom. It is worth noting that the guest collective of the Native Women issue does work to include more Indigenous writers from the lands known as Canada than does Brant. Of the sixty writers published in *A Gathering of Spirit*, approximately four are from Canada, whereas approximately eleven of the thirty writers published in the Native Women issue are from Canada.

20 Midnight Sun's section of the editorial suggests that there was a moment "when it seemed the issue would never see print" (Chaske/Fife 1986, 7).

serve the broad interests of the nation-state, even as it reimagines space and subjectivity in feminist terms. *Fireweed* was funded both by the Canada Council for the Arts and by the Ontario Arts Council, and the collective felt bound to work within their guidelines.²¹ As far as I can determine from my experience of writing grant applications for the feminist bilingual magazine *Tessera* and from exchanges with Frank Davey about *Open Letter: A Canadian Journal of Writing and Theory*, it was not stipulated by either arts council that contributors should be living in Canada (Davey 2018). However, among editors of magazines receiving funds from these two councils in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a sense that the money should be going to publish Canadians. More specifically, there was a sense that juries would tolerate 15%, perhaps 20%, 'foreign' content but that they could raise questions and penalize magazines that published too many writers living outside Canada (Davey 2018). Publisher and scholar Greg Younging, of the Opsakwayak Cree nation, explained to me that Theytus Books was expected to use its Canada Council block grant toward the publication of writers living in Canada but that the Council did not raise questions about the annual anthology *Gatherings: The En'owkin Journal of First North American Peoples* which was able to publish writers from across the Americas (2018b). And, in fact, *Fireweed* was able to publish a special issue composed of more Indigenous women living in the United States than living in Canada without losing its funding.

In contrast to *Fireweed*, the Native Women issue is not in the business of reimagining Canada, and moves beyond such designations toward decolonizing the space of the Americas. To borrow the terms of feminist scholar Andrea Smith, drawing on the work of Dené political theorist Glen Coulthard, this special issue is not looking for recognition from the nation-state but rather is working to generate forms of recognition among women writers (2011, 57).²² What strikes me most about the editorials to the Native Women issue is the way they honour the words of the contributors. Whereas editorials often dwell on the views of editors and the expectations of the magazine's readership, these editorials give priority to Indigenous women contributors who in many cases have only just begun to write: "We celebrate with those of our sisters who are being published for the first time. Their courage has opened doors not only for themselves but for us, our daughters and granddaughters" (Chaske/Fife 1986, 6). The pronoun "we" refers not only to members of the guest collective but also to the community of writers and readers created by the issue. In other words, the issue is not so much about native women as constituted by them. Similarly, in the Acknowledgements, published in the final pages, the editors ad-

21 In the editorial to *Fireweed's* issue 24 the collective speaks of "drumming our collective fingers on the table and worrying about funding, 'if we don't get this issue out soon...'" (Block et al. 1986, 6).

22 For Smith, "Native activists often articulate Indigenous forms of nationhood organized around a logic of citizenship based less on rights within a nation and more on a system of interrelatedness and mutual responsibility" (2011, 58).

dress the contributors directly, in the second person, and in this way centre Indigenous ways of seeing: “Your words are not simply ink on paper rather they have carried us through those times when it seemed this issue would never be published. Your vision made this project a reality long before we were approached by *Fireweed*” (Chaske/Fife 1986, 129). By attributing the special issue to a shared vision that existed well before the editors became the ‘guests’ of *Fireweed*, the editors move beyond a logic of linear time and give precedence to the writing of Indigenous women. And importantly, the latter writing is not something *Fireweed* has discovered or given rise to, but something that was already underway.

The practices of the Indigenous guest editors of the 1986 Native Women issue anticipate many of the practices that have been formalized more recently in Younging’s *Elements of Indigenous Style* (2018a) and in Anishinaabe writer and publisher Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm’s essay, “We think differently. We have a different understanding” (2016). For Akiwenzie-Damm, it is crucial that Indigenous writers working with her “feel respected, empowered, validated as artists, treated as equals and heard” (2016, 34). In her terms, “success cannot be defined except in terms of the collective goals and aspirations of the group or community” (35). Reaching out and opening a piece of work to as large a circle of Indigenous collaborators as possible, Younging writes, is key to Indigenous editorial practice—and takes time (31). When Chaske and Fife, in their editorial, address the slow initial response to their call for contributions, they attribute it to the lived realities of Indigenous women writer-activists: “just how busy each of us is and how carefully we choose our words” (1986, 5).²³ Their editorial offers an intersectional gendered approach to collaboration, whereby Indigenous women “hear each other” even if they are not always heard by their people, and whereby they “ensur[e] that despite racist attitudes the voice of our sisters will be heard” (5). In this sense, the editorial practices of the Native Women issue take into account colonial gender bias in Indigenous contexts as well as racism in feminist and other publishing contexts.

Forms of Solidarity: Dis-articulating the Incommensurable

What becomes clear in reading the editorials of the Women of Colour and Native Women issues of *Fireweed* is the close link between intersectional thinking, social justice activism, and the building of alliances. In the 1980s, before the term ‘intersectionality’ became current, activist writers and editors were clearly looking for terms that would allow them to discuss what it means to live and write at the juncture of overlapping and interlocking positionalities. The proceedings of the 1983 “Women and Words” conference, for example, includes a section titled “Writing Against Double Colonization” (Dybikowski 1985, 51), which addresses such positionalities.

23 The slow initial response also has to do with Akiwenzie-Damm’s point that prior to the 1980s, “few writers found opportunities for getting published” (2016, 30), and that Indigenous publishing was, and continues to be, isolated and underfunded (31).

Brant's contribution to this section explains how much it meant for her to come out as a lesbian alongside eleven other Indigenous women writers from across North America, through the publication of her collection *A Gathering of Spirit* (1985, 58-59). Also in this section, Silvera addresses the way her community belittles "thinking women writers" (1985, 69) and the way white women "remain blind to racism—to white skin privilege" (1985, 72). If Brant's essay brings sexuality and class into conjunction with the feminist anti-colonial analysis of the section title, Silvera's exposes the "internal contradictions" (1985, 72) that structure collaboration among women.

Introduced at the end of the 1980s, the term 'intersectionality' allows for a systematic capture of the imbricated structures of injustice as well as the oversights of specific social justice movements. But the term cannot, in itself, bring about social transformation. It needs to be situated and 'particularized' (Carbado et al. 2013, 304); it needs to be activated in the form of grounded, in situ practices rather than allowed to settle into a static concept; and it must not solidify into something feminism 'has going for it.' For all of these reasons, I have found it productive in this essay to return to a moment in the 1980s in which activist practices of writing, editing, and publishing were integral to the way women conceptualized and worked toward social change. It is not that this moment has been lost but rather that it needs to be remembered in all its complexity; and it needs to be connected to the ongoing work of contemporary activist writers and scholars.

In 1986, in the editorial to issue 24, an open issue published at the same time as Silvera's *Fireworks*, the *Fireweed* collective itself reflected on their relationship with guest collectives:

Essential to *Fireweed's* development has been the contribution of guest collectives. Opening the magazine to guest collectives was instrumental in shaping the journal and its various perspectives. This process of turning editorial control of the magazine over to a guest collective was often tumultuous and full of strife. And yet, these were exhilarating and productive times for *Fireweed*. We have done this on four occasions—Issue 13, Lesbianatics; 16, Women of Colour; 22, Native Women; 23, Canadian Women Poets. Each time surrendering was a little easier. We owe a great deal to the guest collectives: it is largely through their efforts that we have succeeded in broadening our audience and pool of writers as well as drawing out new perspectives and concerns for *Fireweed*. (Block et al. 1986, 6)

This retrospective is worth foregrounding insofar as it illustrates a danger in feminist discourses of celebration: the tendency to smooth over voices of dissent and the rougher points of struggle, the moments, for example, in which a special issue was refused or placed in jeopardy. In their retrospective, the *Fireweed* collective does acknowledge the conflicts that came with "opening the magazine to guest

collectives” and the need to move over and “surrender” the space of the journal. Yet they downplay the points of contention—so clearly present for readers of the editorials to issues 16 and 22—by reframing them as the magazine’s own growing pains. They also instrumentalize the work of guest collectives through the reference to “broadening our audience and pool of writers.” Although questions of sales, subscriptions, and submissions are important, issues 16 and 22 are about *access to publication* for those who historically have had little access²⁴ more than about access to a (white) feminist audience. Ultimately, the excerpt cited above reminds us of the need to read the editorials written by the guest editors themselves alongside any retrospective account written by the host collective, and in this way—through a reading attuned to their intersectional thinking—to retain the history of difficult collaboration.

Questions of collaboration surface on almost every page of this essay: collaboration in the sustained form of coalition-building as well as in the strategic form of short-term cooperation. Such questions are integral to a discussion of intersectionality. Without offering solutions or reconciling differences, intersectional thinking helps account for the ambivalence expressed both by the guest collectives and by the host collective at *Fireweed*. For guest editors, entering into a working relation with *Fireweed* and establishing a temporary alliance means registering the difference of their editorial practices, exposing the oversights of the host collective, and setting out the limited terms on which they are willing to collaborate. Increasingly, in the 2010s, activist writers and scholars sideline the (white) gatekeepers—of feminism, of the publishing industry, of the academy—and focus on building “non-oppressive” coalitions (Bilge 2013, 407) among Black communities, Indigenous communities, and “radical communities of colour” (Simpson 2016, 31). Working both within and without the academy, they call for consideration of how diverse experiences of settler colonialism “urge forms of solidarity while complicating the parameters of alliance” (Indigenous Literary Studies Association 2018). As well as taking apart and analyzing enmeshed mechanisms of injustice, intersectional thinking facilitates alliance. By ‘dis-articulating’ the incommensurable elements within social movements, it helps explain why collaboration is difficult, even precarious, and, in doing so, makes collaboration more possible.

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